

Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety: a philosophical – psychological investigation

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FOREWORD

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1. INTRODUCTION

The writings of the Danish philosopher and self-styled writer, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) have been of cardinal significance to, and thereby frequently associated with the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and theology. One has only to render a reading of any one of Kierkegaard's numerous texts to see that an association with any one of these disciplines is indeed entirely prudent. Unfortunately, this has often resulted in repeated attempts to categorize the work of this important thinker and indeed, the man himself.

The relatively brief history of Kierkegaard scholarship has been characterized by the fact that the works of the Danish writer have only relatively recently been successfully translated into German and even later into English. The primary obstacle, of course, was that Kierkegaard wrote in Danish, and as such his works remained inaccessible to many throughout the academic world. Soon after Kierkegaard was "discovered", his works were published on a much larger scale in his mother tongue and extensive translations in French and German were soon to follow. In English however, despite a few pioneering efforts in the 1930s and 1940s, the greater part of Kierkegaard's corpus was to remain largely inaccessible until the sixties. The early scholarship pertaining to his works, tended largely to characterize Kierkegaard as the melancholy, bourgeois Christian writer. In some cases, he was even interpreted as a curious pathological case, a religious fundamentalist and dandified moralist who, at the same time, was clearly something of a ladies' man.* Unfortunately, this misconceived idea of Kierkegaard the individual and his body of work, was quite persistent.

In the 1920s and 1930s the Dane became the unwitting forerunner of the philosophical "movement" known as existentialism. Kierkegaard was soon to be commonly known as "the father of existentialism" and the forebear of work by intellectuals such as Sartre, de Beauvoir, Heidegger, Camus and Jaspers in their revolt against the self-satisfied complacencies of idealist rationalism. However, the categorization of Kierkegaard as "existentialist" brought with it numerous difficulties. The first, and most obvious, was the

* This vastly distorted impression was reinforced by publishers who produced cheap editions of Kierkegaard's work comprised of isolated and incomplete sections, utterly removed from their context, for example, *The Seducer's Diary* published in isolation from *Either/Or*.

fact that Kierkegaard was undeniably Christian, and the idea of a “Christian existentialist” is fraught with conceptual incongruity. How can one be in the process of striving for a God-relationship based on faith, while at the same time endeavouring to reinvent oneself out of nothingness? Strange as it may seem, it was precisely this paradox itself, which according to some, made Kierkegaard’s work interesting. According to Theodor Adorno(1989), in his work *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, Kierkegaard had “absolutized” the spiritually isolated individual in his writings, much in the same manner as capital had “absolutized” the economically isolated individual in the bourgeois social order.

“As an opponent of Hegel’s doctrine of objective spirit, Kierkegaard developed no philosophy of history. He wanted to use the category of the “person” and the person’s inner history to exclude external history from the context of his thought. But the inner history of the person is bound anthropologically to external history through the unity of the race... Kierkegaard takes the “person” to be the point of indifferenciation between them[the individual and the race]. This point of indifferenciation must both maintain the exclusive unity of the subjective dialectic and assign it an appropriate position in reality. The indifferenciation however, cannot be stabilized... This can be shown concisely in *The Concept of Anxiety*, whose definition of hereditary sin as an anthropological and equally as a historical constraint is supposed to illuminate the essence of historicity itself.”¹

Here it is clear that Adorno places Kierkegaard at a very specific historical point, and that he considers the Dane to be of interest precisely in terms of this historicity, and not in terms of a thinker who provides a source of philosophical inspiration. The perception of Kierkegaard as someone of a vocation other than philosopher was evident among the English readers of his work also. According to W.H. Auden, Kierkegaard was neither a poet, nor a philosopher, but a preacher and expounder of Christian doctrine and conduct.² Whether or not this characterization of Kierkegaard sounds alien now, it was the dominant perception of the Dane and his work for many years.

What these earlier scholars of Kierkegaard’s work obviously failed to take heed of was *what* the greater part of his books concerned themselves with. Although it is quite accurate to say that, to a greater or lesser extent, all of Kierkegaard’s works focus themselves in some measure upon issues of a theological nature, this most certainly does not constitute the sum and substance of his work. One has only to browse over the titles of his various works – *The Concept of Irony* in 1841; *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* in 1843; *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concept of Anxiety* in 1844 to mention but a few - to see that the issues that concerned Kierkegaard in his work went far beyond the exclusively theological. In this respect

¹ Adorno, T.W. *Kierkegaard: Construction of The Aesthetic*. 1989. p. 32-33

² Rée, J & Chamberlain, J. (Eds.). *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. 1998. p. 3

therefore, I believe that Kierkegaard personally identified much more with the figure of Socrates, than with the figure of Christ. Here it must be noted that I am certainly not claiming that Kierkegaard saw religion as being subordinate to the endeavours of philosophy – the question itself is quite misplaced – but rather that a very substantial part of Kierkegaard’s thought directly involved itself with a tradition of irony and overcoming of illusion by means of indirect communication, that found its origin in Socrates. Indeed, throughout the length and breadth of his pseudonymous works, it is clear that Kierkegaard is striving to educate his readers in much the same manner as Socrates educated those with which he entered into dialogue. He refuses to be prescriptive in any sense, he never instructs his readers, he never expresses opinions indeed, goes as far as to deny harbouring any opinion at all.

“From the standpoint of Socratic thought every point of departure in time is *eo ipso* accidental, an occasion, a vanishing moment. The teacher himself is no more than this; and if he offers himself and his instruction on any other basis, he does not give but takes away, and is not even the other’s friend, much less his teacher. Herein lies the profundity of the Socratic thought, and the noble humanity he so thoroughly expressed, which refused to enter into a false and vain fellowship with clever heads, but felt an equal kinship with a tanner; whence he soon came to the conclusion that the study of Physics was not man’s proper business, and therefore began to philosophize about moral matters in the workshops and in the market-place.”³

One possible point of correlation that Kierkegaard did find between the figures of Christ and Socrates, was that he felt that had both been victims of betrayal. The latter, by professional philosophy in the form of the Academia, and the former by theological Christendom in the form of the Church.

Kierkegaard certainly did not share a sense of kinship with the prominent philosophical schools of thought of his time. He harboured a strong dislike of Kant’s goal of “Religion within the limits of reason alone” and saw it both as complacent and wholly presumptuous. However, his censure of Kant paled in comparison to his unbridled loathing of Hegel’s overpowering speculative idealism, which found its embodiment in the creation of “the System”. Upon considering this general animadversion of the predominant philosophies of his time, as well as his bitter dispute with *The Corsair* and, of course, his infamous assault upon the Danish Lutheran Church, it is not difficult to see why Kierkegaard is sometimes perceived as being somewhat reactionary. While this is perhaps understandable, it is, in my opinion, certainly not accurate. While there is not the time with which to thoroughly explore all aforementioned points of criticism here, suffice it to say that, throughout his adult life, the two major battles that Kierkegaard waged, were against the objective idealist philosophy of Hegel, and what he perceived

³ Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 13

as the blatant hypocrisy and dogmatism of the Church. While it is undeniable that Kierkegaard was unrelenting in his scathing critique of Hegel's philosophy, it is just as unarguable that he harboured a great respect and (perhaps reluctant) admiration of the great German thinker. As a construct, Hegel's System was indeed as impressive as it was intricate. However, it was also, to Kierkegaard's mind, the apex of intellectual hubris. The consistent emphasis on reason and objectivity was not only serving to contradict the so-called rationale upon which it was founded, but more importantly, Hegel's System left no room for faith, and relegated both the individual and human subjectivity to a realm outside of the objective arena of so-called knowledge.

What was lacking in Hegelian philosophy was an acceptance of the paradox. Indeed, the Hegelians saw paradox as a distinct failure in their scientific search for truth. It constituted a dialectical dead-end, producing nothing but intellectual blindness and sterility. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, the individual's capacity for paradox is directly concomitant to his/her capacity for passionate inwardness. Indeed, in order for an individual to be capable of any degree of wisdom, he/she has to be possessed of some capacity for the paradoxical.

"However, one should not think slightingly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing."⁴

Instead of perceiving paradox as the rationalists did, namely as a flaw in the human conception of the world, and furthermore, instead of, like the Hegelians, viewing it as a flaw which would soon be remedied thanks to the progress made in philosophical technique with the appearance of the System, Kierkegaard saw paradoxes as essential "truths" of the world.

"For it is a task for human cognition to understand that there is something, and what it is, that it cannot understand. Human cognition is generally busily concerned to understand and understand, but if it would also take the trouble to understand itself it must straightaway posit the paradox. The paradox is not a concession, but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth. (47 VIII I A II)"⁵

⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 46

⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. 1996. p. 255

Kierkegaard's category of "the paradoxical" is, to my mind, an essential ingredient in the proper understanding of Vigilius Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*, as this work provides many instances, which typify the paradoxes inherent to human existence. It is also significantly ironical that, precisely because of its demonstratively paradoxical nature, *The Concept of Anxiety* has also been criticized and is commonly regarded as Kierkegaard's most inaccessible work.

Kierkegaard's application and understanding of the concept of the *category* certainly constitutes one of the more enigmatic elements of his work. In typical fashion, he very seldom deals with it directly in his writings, and when doing so, his descriptions are necessarily ambiguous. In his thirteenth work, *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard writes:

"My life-view is a different one, and I force myself to the best of my ability to hold my life to the category. I know that one can die; I know that one can be slowly tortured – but one can hold to the category and hold it firmly. This is what I will; this is what I ask of anyone I am to admire, of anyone I am really to approve – that during the day he think only of the category of his life and dream about it at night."⁶

Essentially, Kierkegaard saw the individual as existing within the freedom of possibility, however, this freedom, characterized by possibility, also brought with it the experience of anxiety. It was this aspect of Kierkegaard's philosophy that was seized upon by the various individuals who affiliated themselves with the existentialist movement, and most probably it was the reason why Kierkegaard was soon to be hailed as "the father" of that particular movement. Certainly, another facet of Kierkegaard's philosophy that largely appealed to the existentialists, was his emphasis, in contrast to the comparatively communitarian nature of Hegel's philosophy, on the individual. Hegel saw the concept of the individual as an abstraction, a fabrication. The individual was nothing more than the human being removed from the social context and given false significance and independence. The vision examined by Hegel is the development of a unified, self-reflective spiritual community. In his philosophy, the individual is also striving for freedom, however, according to Hegel, freedom for the individual can only ever be truly achieved within the context of a free and meaningful society.

While the categories certainly are not to be seen as being reminiscent of Hegel's ideal of "positive freedom", they do serve the purpose of providing a mode of consciousness along which individuals can make the journey of their actions, decisions and thoughts. The categories cannot, by their very nature, be posited externally. Furthermore, it is impossible to render a qualitative judgment upon the concept of the

⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Stages on Life's Way*. 1988. p. 304

category. The questions of good or evil cannot enter into discussion. On the contrary, says Kierkegaard, a person who has found his/her categories and who understands their individual nature will not attempt to judge another. Such an individual is so ensconced in the practice of judging that he/she neglects commitment to his/her own categories in the process. Categories only serve an authentic purpose if they are realized. This realization is, in fact, a process of inward discovery, and can only be the consequence of an introspective and earnest confrontation with the self. The individual seeks that which can give meaning and purpose to his/her existence. Needless to say, in dealing with the concept of categories, it is indeed crucial that they *not* be perceived in a positivistic light. Categories are not bound by an underlying reason or logic, which steers them. Neither need they have anything to do with the laws of nature at all. Categories are ‘motivated’, one may say, by an individual’s wish to remain true to him/herself. Indeed, Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the acknowledgement of and striving for the categories of existence can be understood in much the same manner Socrates’ famous dictum: “Know thyself”.

Like so many other great oeuvres throughout history, the various works of Søren Kierkegaard, have been subjected to constant misinterpretation. All too often, these acts of intellectual misapprehension have been perpetrated by individuals who have been or are, in their own right, great and influential thinkers themselves, or ironically, individuals who have committed themselves to scholarship of Kierkegaard’s work. In so doing, these individuals have promoted or perpetuated an erroneous interpretation. In this regard and out of all of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works, Vigilius Haufniensis’ *The Concept of Anxiety*, stands out. It is widely recognized as being Kierkegaard’s most inaccessible work, with scholars even debating the exact rendering of the Danish term *Angest*. To those unfamiliar with Kierkegaard’s work, and most significantly, his style, an initial reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* must be perplexing, to say the least. In fact, even those familiar with Kierkegaard’s corpus have admitted to being left somewhat in the dark by Haufniensis’ work, and have subsequently proffered a variety of theories as to what exactly the author was attempting in this small, yet complex book.

Therefore, by focussing on this basic problem, it is my principal intention in this thesis, to provide what, to my mind, constitutes a fair and appropriate reading of Kierkegaard’s conception of anxiety, both in terms of Haufniensis’ *The Concept of Anxiety*, and in terms of the influence this conception had over the works and thoughts of prominent minds that were to follow Kierkegaard. In this regard, I also intend to demonstrate that the so-called “question of Kierkegaard” is certainly not satisfactorily encapsulated by the label “existentialist” and that, although the existentialist movement did constitute a significant period reflecting Kierkegaardian influence, it most certainly did not with finality explore the length and breadth of the importance of Kierkegaard’s work.

An appropriate rendering of Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety entails firstly, providing an overview of exactly where anxiety situates itself within Kierkegaard's philosophy. To this end therefore, I begin with the second chapter entitled "The Domain of Subjectivity" in which I explore Kierkegaard's understanding and emphasis on the issue of subjectivity. The latter is a major and constantly recurring theme within virtually all of his works, and indeed, in order to acquire any appreciation for Kierkegaard's work at all, I believe it absolutely necessary to first come to grips with his emphasis on subjectivity. The Dane's ambivalent feelings towards Hegel and his intense acrimony towards the great German's idealistic speculative philosophy are no secret, and hence in no small measure played a part in the formation of the afore-mentioned theory. Throughout the greater part of Kierkegaard's life, his existence (and particularly his work) was driven by a sense of calling – to rescue both Christianity and the individual from inexorable appropriation by the grand, all-embracing Hegelian System. To Kierkegaard, Hegel's entire philosophy was built upon abstract categories and concepts, which although intricate and complex, bore no relevance to any aspect of the individual existence. These belonged exclusively to the category of thought and could not be lived in or experienced. Inherent to this there was also, according to Kierkegaard, an active exclusion of the inward passions. This comportment toward life, and toward religion (which Hegelian philosophy sought to assimilate within the greater scheme of the System) was to Kierkegaard's mind, utterly contradictory. What was important in matters of religion and indeed, in matters of existence itself, was passionate inwardness, not as Hegel purported, logic and reason. According to Kierkegaard, what was significant was one's own choices, not the choices of others, and furthermore, *what* one chooses is not as important as *how* one chooses, namely, with passion and inwardness. In choices of cardinal significance – for example the choice of an entire way of life – there exist no principal rules, no authoritative laws or principles, no categorical imperatives and no objective truths. Here, there are only opinions, emotions and passions, i.e. subjective truths, for which there may be no rational or objective justification.

In short, with the theory of subjectivity, Kierkegaard is indeed attacking Hegelianism and the dangers intrinsic to it, but he is also repeatedly emphasizing his claim that his main concern is ethical. Kierkegaard does not attempt an outright denial of the scientific mind-set, but rejects it as an appropriate comportment to the existence of the individual human being. Despite also attacking Kant on the very foundation of his philosophy, namely the transcendental self of knowledge, Kierkegaard retained the Kantian schism that separated questions of fact and knowledge from questions of value. As far as the Dane was concerned, ethics not only lay beyond the realm of knowledge, but also that of reason. As with other matters of significance in life, ethics comes down to the making of a choice, a choice which cannot

rely on rational justification. For Kierkegaard, the “true” self is constituted by the isolated individual human being, alone with his/her emotions and opinions, who, at the same time, is faced with the awesome responsibility of making choices that cannot be guided or indeed justified, by reason. Hence, the necessity of acknowledging the significance of subjectivity in human existence.

Another important facet of Kierkegaard’s philosophy dealt with in Chapter Two, is his concept of repetition. Here, I attempt to deal with “repetition” as a means for addressing the problem of selfhood. Repetition is juxtaposed to the comparatively basic practice of recollection, and I expound on Kierkegaard’s argument that the latter is incapable of providing the same measure of inwardness of the former, and is therefore somewhat ineffectual. Following this, the aspects of repetition as resignation and repetition as faith are successively discussed. In this case it is demonstrated how these forms of repetition take a distinctively more religious perspective.

Chapter Three, in keeping with the general aim of appropriately situating Kierkegaard’s conception of anxiety, deals with the aesthetic sphere of existence. The latter can quite safely, I think, be considered an essential part of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, since it constitutes the only stage of existence that every human being experiences, with all individuals being born into it and only some moving on to the higher stages of the ethical and the religious. To a large extent, the spiritual growth of the individual, and correspondingly, that individual’s progression on to the spheres of the ethical and religious, is determined by his/her treatment of the experience of anxiety. The aesthetic sphere is characterized by an existence centred on the experience and enjoyment of pleasure, in its veritable myriad of guises, as well as the concomitant avoidance of pain. Pleasure, in this sense, refers to an entire spectrum, ranging from that which is purely corporeal and material, to that which is wholly cognitive and cerebral. In this regard, the aesthete can include the reflective and calculating Johannes the Seducer, or the utterly immediate and hedonistic Don Juan. Both are equally “aesthetic” in terms of having the will to pleasure as their single most significant motivating factor. Other significant constructs of the aesthetic sphere, such as “The Rotation Method”, are also examined.

In the fourth chapter, the issue of Kierkegaard’s conception of anxiety is dealt with directly. Anxiety, as has already been mentioned, is endowed with characteristics which are theological, psychological and philosophical. To neglect any particular aspect of anxiety is tantamount to misappropriation. Consequently, in Chapter Four, I endeavour to explore anxiety from all three perspectives. For the greater part, emphasis is placed on the description of anxiety as rendered in Vigilius Haufniensis’ *The Concept of Anxiety*. Here I attempt a thorough description of the subject under investigation. Thus, the question of

anxiety, as stemming from the issue of original sin, and the loss of innocence in the consciousness of good and evil, is brought under discussion. Furthermore, the subsequent existence of anxiety, on some level, as the individual's awareness of him/herself as being in sin, is also examined. The anxiety-inducing ramifications of sexuality as stemming from guilt are discussed, both from the point of view of anxiety as psycho-sexual, as well as briefly looked at from a biographical perspective. Throughout Chapter Four, the point that anxiety is to be seen as a positive, enabling experience, if approached with the appropriate comportment, is repeatedly emphasized. However, the consequences of the improper attitude can be dire indeed. The flight from anxiety, in the form of anxiety for the evil, anxiety for the good, the state of spiritlessness, and their ultimate culmination in the demoniacal, make up the latter part of the chapter. Haufniensis himself demonstrated the significance of the problem of fleeing from anxiety by the amount of space he devoted to his description and discussion of this issue, and in a manner befitting, I have attempted to also place appropriate emphasis on this important facet of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

Chapter five is primarily devoted to a discussion of the reception and, to a lesser extent, the influence of Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*. The discussion is conducted chronologically, starting with the first readers of Kierkegaard's work on the Continent, such as Franz Kafka, and then proceeds to examine the early and mid-twentieth century reception of Kierkegaard, focussing particularly on German and French intelligentsia. Here it is important to note that in no way has it been my intention to provide a comprehensive account of Haufniensis' influence on the work of twentieth-century philosophy. On its own, this task is substantial enough to comprise an entire thesis. Subsequently, I have been highly selective and rather concise in this part of the chapter. The second major section of chapter five is committed to a much more detailed examination of the contemporary receptions of Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*. Here, I have concentrated on the responses proffered by three eminent Kierkegaard scholars, namely, Roger Poole, Alastair Hannay and Peter Fenves. My aim was to basically explore the different reactions to Haufniensis' work and in so doing, to demonstrate the fact that Kierkegaard scholarship is certainly a long way from being stagnant. Of particular interest of these three intellectuals is Roger Poole, whose deconstructive interpretation of *The Concept of Anxiety* offered many important insights, but at the same time, to my mind, remains highly controversial. My examination of the interpretation of Alastair Hannay deals primarily with some of the paradoxes inherent to the psychology of *The Concept of Anxiety*. This is a point also explored by Poole, however the interpretation offered by Hannay differs significantly and provides a profound insight into the "Hegelian" quality of Haufniensis' psychology. Finally, the interpretation of *The Concept of Anxiety* as submitted by Peter Fenves, focuses on the linguistic aspect of the work. To my mind, this comprises a vital aspect of Haufniensis' work, and one that has all too often been overlooked in the history of Kierkegaard scholarship. It is virtually only in

the more contemporary secondary literature on Kierkegaard that this important facet of his work has received the attention it deserves.

If one were to describe Vigilius Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety* as dense, it would constitute a cursory description, yet an accurate one nonetheless. Certainly by the standards of philosophical texts produced during that time, Haufniensis' book was small, yet the content of the text is anything but. It carries within its pages a scathing parody of the Hegelians, an intricate philosophical and religious argument, a profound psychological elucidation of the human condition and a particularly in-depth examination of surely one of the most elusive experiences in the existence of humankind. In addition, *The Concept of Anxiety* is a masterpiece of irony, and Kierkegaard's use of the pseudonymous Vigilius Haufniensis as well as the pervasive application of his famous and brilliant technique of indirect communication makes the work as profound and relevant today as it was in 1844.

2. THE DOMAIN OF SUBJECTIVITY

2.1 Introduction

The topic of subjectivity constitutes a substantial and consistent theme in virtually all of Kierkegaard's work and thus, no comprehensive reading of Kierkegaard is possible without addressing this issue. Needless to say therefore, it constitutes a vital aspect in the proper understanding of his concept of anxiety. The theory of subjectivity, and more particularly, subjective truth, is brought to light in his book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, which itself is generally regarded as one of the most important existentialist works ever written. In this work, written under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard draws a distinction between objective and subjective thinking and offers an argument against the former, which he refers to as "objectivity", "objective thinking" and the "objective point of view".

Upon considering Kierkegaard's relentless censure against the extraordinarily objective systematic philosophy of Hegel, it becomes somewhat feasible that the Dane's conception and advocacy of the concept of subjectivity can perhaps be perceived as being reactionary. However, this line of argument is not valid. Not only does it constitute a highly reductionist view of Kierkegaard's treatment of Hegel, but it also betrays a limited understanding of that very relation. There is no doubt that Kierkegaard was scathingly critical of Hegel's philosophy, and devoted much of his time and energies to arguing against it. By this very token therefore, two factors are immediately apparent: firstly, that Kierkegaard thought very highly of the German philosopher and secondly, was keenly aware of the pervasive influence of his philosophy.

Hegel advocated a highly objective, and indeed, highly idealistic philosophy. His theories were vast, abstract and exceeding complex and the claims that he made upon them, grandiose, to say the least. According to the German, the answers to the questions posed by philosophy lay in the reason and logic contained within a scientific system. Johannes Climacus' *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* was Kierkegaard's pseudonymous answer to Hegel's pretentious claims. It is, to a large extent, a sustained satire against the idea that philosophy can be thought of a systematic science in respect of the search for truth. Climacus' first response is a direct objection.

“Existence itself is a system – for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing [*existerende*] spirit.”⁷

This rather curt objection is nonetheless quite significant. The reason being that, while Kierkegaard opposed Hegel on many issues, his chief concern was theological. The issue of the gap between humanity and the Divine is fundamental, not only for Johannes Climacus, but in almost all of Kierkegaard’s work. It is precisely this gap that the Hegelian System requires to be compromised or preferably, collapsed altogether.

2.2 The Concept of Subjectivity

Before we venture any further, perhaps it is important that we first ascertain what Kierkegaard understood by the term “subjectivity”. In explaining the concept, he consistently contrasts it to its opposite, that is, “objectivity”. As Louis Pojman (1984), quite correctly points out, subjectivity for Kierkegaard, signifies not one simple concept, but rather an assemblage of concepts, all of which are related to one another but none of which are identical. Generally, the term refers to inwardness, passionate striving for some object (or subject), the emotions, the action of the will, the acquiring of a belief, the act of faith, the voice of conscience, the process of imitating an ideal and naturally, the process of introspection and intuition.⁸

The essence of subjectivity for Kierkegaard is that the motivators for action and the sources of self-knowledge lie deep within an individual, within the transcendental or essential self. As Arbaugh(1968) points out, if the individual fails to get in touch with that self, the chances that he/she will ever follow his/her true destiny are slight. One must not make the mistake of assuming that Kierkegaard equates subjectivity with passivity (such as is implied by the use of terms like “experience”, “seeing” and “perspective”). Most commonly, Kierkegaard uses the term while simultaneously emphasizing the role of the will as vital in the confrontation with anxiety, and by implication therefore in the process of spiritual development.⁹

Subjectivity is practically synonymous with choice and the act of decision-making. The will is ubiquitous with every instance of decision, whether it involves the reduplication of an ideal, believing a proposition or the process of introspection. Naturally the individual must also realize that within the process of

⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 118

⁸ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 55

⁹ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 317-319

decision one nearly always takes a risk. Kierkegaard called this “absolute decision”.¹⁰ He also sees subjectivity as more of a subcategory of the will’s activities. This relates to his argument that while every case of subjectivity involves the will, not every act of the will involves subjectivity. Subjectivity, says Kierkegaard, has more to do with those activities pertaining to the spiritual life. Indeed, it is those choices vital to the spiritual life which necessitate subjectivity.¹¹

“No, I simply want to bring you to the point where that choice truly acquires meaning for you... My either/or does not denote in the first instance the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil or excludes them. The question here is, under what categories one wants to contemplate the entire world and would oneself live.”¹²

It is quite apparent from this reading of Kierkegaard that the emotional and conative aspects of subjectivity are dominant, but this is not to say that the notion is lacking of all cognitive aspects. There are instances of subjectivity which have a proposition as their object. Prime examples of this are Kierkegaard’s religious overtures, such as “God exists”, “the soul is immortal” and “God became man”. These are viewed as objects of belief which affect one’s inner being. Notably subjectivity is intentional; it always takes some object, however this need not always be proposition, it may also be, for example, an ideal. Having said this it has also been argued by scholars such as Mackey(1975) that every ideal already implies a propositional aspect. Although this is true, there is a difference between appropriating an ideal and claiming to know that a proposition is true. The issue of importance here is bringing a possibility to actuality. This is a practical task. In short, it requires doing. Here we already see Kierkegaard’s lifelong emphasis on a philosophy that is relevant to life emerging. Knowing, requires no action. It is a simple matter to know the good, but not to do it or be motivated to do it. However, sometimes the exercise of the will is necessary to believe a proposition, particularly when referring to those propositions which will not reveal their validity by use of reason alone. In other words, subjectivity is necessary at this point, for the decision to believe what rationality by itself would not warrant.¹³

There are two aspects to the concept of subjectivity. The first focuses on the appropriation of an ideal and the second on the believing of a proposition. These are reflected by the following two quotations respectively.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 488

¹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 485-486

¹² *Ibid.* p. 486

¹³ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 145

“The only fundamental basis for understanding is that one understands only in proportion to becoming himself that which he understands.” (Papers, V B 40)¹⁴

“Here is such a definition of truth: holding fast to an objective uncertainty in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth available for an existing individual.”¹⁵

It is worth noting, as Mackey(1971) does, that the language of the above passage resembles that of a practical type of subjectivity. The context elucidates the fact that a proposition is involved, that God’s existence is the content which must be believed, and that truly believing goes hand-in-hand with objective uncertainty. It requires a stern resolution of the will to accept the proposition and an even more passionate resolution to let the implications of that proposition dominate one’s life at every moment.¹⁶

The Christian Faith is perhaps the finest example of this. Christian subjectivity involves firstly, having this “insane” belief; and secondly, living according to an otherworldly pattern. This comprises a complete offense to, as well as a rejection of, the standards of secularity. In other words, according to Pojman(1984) for Kierkegaard, subjectivity is a process of volitional appreciation in either or both of two ways, namely the “reduplication way” or the “cognitive way”. In the former, the stress falls on the ideal or the pattern to be instantiated. In the latter, the emphasis is on the proposition that is to be struggled with until one believes it. Reduplication involves the transit from proposition or ideal to life, while cognitive subjectivity represents the movement from my life as cognitive subject to the ideal or proposition. In the first case, something external is brought inwards so that it may be reflected, while in the second case, one moves outside of oneself to regard the world in one way or another.¹⁷

2.3 The Attack on Objectivity

Kierkegaard’s emphatic involvement with subjectivity is in no mean way a reaction to the highly objectified philosophy of Hegel. In truth, he makes no pretences about the fact that it is an attack on the Hegelian speculative philosophical system. Kierkegaard states unequivocally that the speculative point of

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals*. 1996. p.184

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 203

¹⁶ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 145

¹⁷ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 66-67

view is objective and therefore cannot accommodate the subjective. Objectivity according to Kierkegaard, stands for a composite of attitudes, among them lack of emotionality, disinterested evaluation, neutrality, impartial judgment which leaves the subject out of the scene, and consensus based on the public's assessment of a situation. In this conglomeration of attitudes, the individual's personal and deepest evaluations and motivations are set aside as secondary. Kierkegaard's primary motivation against objectivity is to counter this generalized and indeed, objectified view of humankind.¹⁸

"Alas, while the speculating, honorable Herr Professor is explaining all existence, he has in sheer absentmindedness forgotten what he himself is called, namely, that he is a human being, a human being pure and simple, and not a fantastical three-eighths of a paragraph."¹⁹

Whereas subjectivity stresses the absolute necessity for inwardness, the objective thinker lives outside of himself or herself. The speculative thinker's task is to distance himself or herself from their own self and from others in order gain a sense of "objectivity" necessary for the practice of speculative thought.

"But for the speculating thinker the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot come up at all, precisely because his task consists in going away from himself more and more and becoming objective and in that way disappearing from himself and becoming the gazing power of speculative thought."²⁰

This is in total contrast to the subjective thinker who will focus on him/herself and learns how to live by striving to understand him/herself. Inward deepening is focussed upon as the goal in life.

"For the spirit is inwardness and inwardness is subjectivity".²¹

Kierkegaard's critique of objectivity chiefly targets the accounts of rationality as they stem from the afore-mentioned Hegelian system and to some extent the Kantian system as well. As was his practice, Kierkegaard is ruthless. He criticizes an objective account of ethics, an objective account of Christianity, an objective account of truth, and last, but not least, an objective account of rationality. The fundamental problem with objective thinking, according to Kierkegaard, is that it bears no relation to the existing subjectivity. In other words, the speculative philosophy of Hegel, with all of its grand abstract systems of

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 145

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 145

²⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 56

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 33

thought and dialectical development of knowledge, does not address the life situation of any individual at a personal level.

2.3.1 The Critique of Hegel

However, before expounding on Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel, I will first make some general comments on Hegel's philosophy as it appeared to Kierkegaard. This is necessitated by the fact that although he expended a great deal of time and effort in criticizing the works of the great German intellectual, Hegel's theories did exert a great influence on Kierkegaard's own work. I am certainly in agreement with Westphal(1998) who perceptively describes the Hegel-Kierkegaard relation as an *Aufhebung*. By *Aufhebung* Westphal refers to a type of aftermath. Just as Hegel can be considered part of the *Aufhebung* of the philosophy of Kant, so Kierkegaard, along with certain other intellectuals such as Feuerbach and Marx can be distinguished as the *Aufhebung* of Hegel. Moreover, according to Westphal, an *Aufhebung* implies a process of simultaneous critique, implying cancellation, incorporated with appropriation, thereby implying preservation. On this basis therefore, it is pointedly erroneous to describe Kierkegaard as merely anti-Hegelian.²²

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770 – 1831) was regarded in his day as a post-Renaissance Aristotle. His influence in the spheres of theology, science, politics, history, and, of course, philosophy was enormous. He was hailed as the man who had given the world a new encyclopedia of wisdom and logic, chiefly by means of his unified and systematized philosophy of the spirit. Intellectuals throughout Europe seized upon Hegel's thought with unbridled vivacity. His following soon became substantial, so much so that it divided into two camps, namely the right-wing Hegelians and the left-wing Hegelians. Hegel saw his task to be nothing less than the attainment of absolute knowledge. To a large extent, his work was influenced by that of Kant, however Hegel wished to free philosophy from the limitations of Kant's critical philosophy. Kant alleged to have shown that humankind could only have knowledge of things as they appear to each individual, not as they are in themselves. Following from this knowledge is subjective, not objective, and limited rather than absolute. In this sense, Kant remains one of the most ardent anti-Hegelians. Hegel endeavoured to prove otherwise and to restore our claim to knowledge of things as they are. He took this a step further however, with his coherence theory of knowledge, and claimed that not only does man have knowledge of things as they are, but he also possesses the potential,

²² Westphal, M. **Kierkegaard and Hegel**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 101

ultimately, for absolute knowledge. As Pojman(1984) astutely states, knowledge of the truth, the infinite truth, to be exact, was according to Hegel, the goal of philosophy, and moreover, it had always been.²³

Another point of contention between Kant and Hegel, again noted by Pojman, was the distinction between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*). “Understanding” concerned the proper application of the categories to experience, and “reason” involved the transcendental application beyond experience.²⁴ Kant emphasized understanding as an invaluable aspect of human experience, while reason, however, he denied in order to make room for faith. However, as Westphal(1998) argues, Hegel did not negate reason, on the contrary, he associated it with metaphysical speculation and claimed that not only through it can we have absolute knowledge as our goal. Kant’s law of noncontradiction states that two opposed concepts cannot be professed of any object at the same time. Hegel, however argues that this law seems to be contradicted by the thinking of the understanding in that it produces antinomies, for by using the understanding we can consistently reason to opposite conclusions about metaphysical issues. Hegel then saw the antinomies as evidence that the law of noncontradiction did not apply to metaphysical reasoning. No object of metaphysics is exclusively characterized by only one category of a pair of commonly accepted contradictory concepts, but, according to Hegel, each is one as well as the other, and therefore neither one nor the other. In isolation, such determinations are valid. If this is a valid argument, that one as well as the other two opposed categories can be predicted of each object of metaphysics, it follows from there that in metaphysical speculation the law of noncontradiction breaks down, as well as Kant’s law of the excluded middle.²⁵

Hegel’s argument therefore is that the finiteness of a concept consists in being excluded from an object by being limited by an opposing concept. The removal of the mutually exclusive character of concepts by means of his dialectics is precisely the removal of their finiteness. By means of his ingenious dialectical logic, Hegel manages to present a series of progressively more refined characterizations of the absolute. Hegel termed the absolute:

“The account of God, as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and any finite spirit”.²⁶

²³ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 26-27

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.27

²⁵ Westphal, M. **Kierkegaard and Hegel**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 111-112

²⁶ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 27

Naturally, he is using “God” as a metaphor for absolute metaphysical reality, but one can only guess at Kierkegaard’s reaction to this casual usage.

However, this was merely one of numerous thoughts in the philosophy of Hegel that completely outraged Kierkegaard. These were: the retrospective role of philosophy with its correlative disinterest in the “edifying”; the view of the State as the embodiment of the Absolute Spirit; the demeaning of Kantian individual ethics (*Moralität*) in favour of the social ethic (*Sittlichkeit*), bound up in objective structures, customs and institutions. There worst of all, for Kierkegaard, was the apparent subsumption of Christianity to “the System”. “The System” was the aspect of Hegel’s philosophy which he found most intolerable, labelling it a fraud. Idealism, in its claim to be all-encompassing, subsumed the truths of experience in Hegel’s System. As if this were not already bold enough, it went on to declare the content of Christianity and philosophy identical. While this assertion was undisturbing and even encouraging to some theologians awed by the progress of philosophy and in search of fashionable intellectual support, it deeply disturbed the young Kierkegaard. In direct contrast, as McCarthy(1978) states, Kierkegaard saw in Christianity a truth of experience which could not be subsumed by thought, a truth which was, in fact, scandalous to thought (the theme of *Training in Christianity*), and a truth of history which could never be reduced to merely one more event in the unfolding of Spirit (this point is engaged in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*).²⁷

The System remained for the Dane, an archexample of hubris. At one point, Kierkegaard states that if only Hegel had approached the theory of a System with circumspection, as an experiment in thought, he would have proven himself a truly great thinker. Instead, the German philosopher posited his theory not only as fact, but also as the passage to the attainment of absolute knowledge, no less.

Having said all of this, it must be borne in mind that Kierkegaard learned much from Hegel and even quietly admired him. The following is evidence of the ambivalence of his attitude towards Hegel.

“But willing as I am (in the capacity of a poor reader who by no means presumes to be a judge) to admire Hegel’s logic, willing as I am to admit that there can be much for me to learn when I turn to it again, I shall be just as proud, just as defiant, just as obstinately assertive, just as intrepid in my assertion that Hegelian philosophy confuses existence by not defining its relation to an existing person, by disregarding the ethical.”²⁸

²⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 139-140

²⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 310

2.4 The Critique of Reason

It is worth noting that Kierkegaard was not completely anti-rationalism either. In *Postscript* Kierkegaard states that even objective thinking has its time and place:

“But wherever objective thinking is within its rights, its direct communication is also in order, precisely because it is not supposed to deal with subjectivity.”²⁹

And yet, on the whole, Kierkegaard maintains what can be considered a generally ambivalent relationship with rationality. At one point, Johannes Climacus states that he is addressing what is his own argument to rational beings.

“Consequently, it is an existing spirit who asks about truth, presumably because he wants to exist in it, but in any case the questioner is conscious of being an existing individual human being. In this way I believe I am able to make myself understandable to every Greek and to every rational human being.”³⁰

Thinking is also not excluded from the alternative life suggested by Climacus, on the contrary, it is very much part of it, since a meaningful existence cannot be thoughtless. Climacus even goes as far as to admit that he had been aided by reason on occasion:

“... in strong passions and the like, I have material enough, and therefore pain enough in forming something good out of it with the aid of reason.”³¹

With regard to reason therefore, according to Climacus, there are good and bad kinds, as well as applications. However, Hegel’s claim that reason, in conjunction with the System, will be our medium to the final, or absolute truth is the root of Kierkegaard’s animadversion. Pojman(1984) points out that Kierkegaard vehemently condemns the making of what he calls “a preposterous claim” and states that by doing so, Hegel is actually equating himself with a fourth member of the Trinity.³²

²⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p.76 note

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 191

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 161

³² Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 28

He does not deny the possibility of a System as such, existing, but what Kierkegaard does deny is that humankind has the intellect, wisdom or faculties with which to comprehend such a system. Furthermore, not only is man intellectually and spiritually incapable, but, Kierkegaard states, a system cannot be understood by an existing spirit. The reason for this is that System and finality correspond to one another. Existence however, is the complete opposite of finality. Existence is a becoming in perpetual motion. Thus, as Pojman(1984) correctly states, from a purely abstract point of view, system and existence are incapable of being united, because in order to conceive of existence at all, systematic thought must think it abolished, and hence as not existing. The paradox lies therein that existence separates and holds the various moments of existence discretely apart, while the systematic thought consists of the finality which brings them together.³³

“A system of existence [*Tilværelsens System*] cannot be given. Is there, then, not such a system? That is not at all the case. Neither is this implied in what has been said. Existence itself is a system – for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing [*existerende*] spirit. System and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite. Abstractly viewed, system and existence cannot be thought conjointly, because in order to think existence, systematic thought must think it as annulled and consequently not as existing. Existence is the spacing that holds apart, the systematic is the conclusiveness that combines.”³⁴

It has been ascertained that objectivity certainly has its proper realm and is a valid and necessary part of existence. However, to over-emphasize the role of reason in our daily lives, and particularly in the spiritual dimension of our life is nothing short of catastrophic. To allow this would mean the suppression of an individual's deepest instincts with regard to the imagination, the realm of values and the contemplation of the supernatural or the possibility thereof. Moreover it is emphatically inappropriate to approach the spirit of man as an object for scientific and external scrutiny. Not only is it a category mistake, it is also an act that Kierkegaard considers morally evil. I am in full agreement with Westphal(1998) who claims that nothing could be more contrary than to treat the inner mystery of a unique individual with the cold disassociation akin to almost all objectifying examination.³⁵

³³ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 29

³⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 118

³⁵ Westphal, M. **Kierkegaard and Hegel**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 113

Kierkegaard's criticism of objectivity is multifaceted. As Maybee(1996) points out, he offers epistemological, sociological and psychological critiques of objectivity. Epistemologically, Kierkegaard argues that the individual is a finite being, both temporally and in terms of his/her cognitive ability. This fact must therefore be brought into consideration when dealing with any theory of rationality.

Kierkegaard stresses on numerous occasions in his writing the fact that human beings, contrary to the claims of Hegel and other idealists, by nature possess a temporally finite and calculatingly imperfect reasoning capability. If reason or objective thinking is employed by the temporally and intellectually finite human being then the answers arrived at must, at best, also be finite or approximate in nature. Objective thinking, according to Kierkegaard, can therefore yield only approximate truths and uncertain conclusions for any individual who questions or is faced with a decision.³⁶

In addition, Kierkegaard suggests that human reason is tainted by sin. "Sin" in this sense, refers not to the flaw of finiteness, but rather to an ethical flaw in human beings. In other words, the concept at issue here is the ethical judgment employed by individuals in the process of reasoning. Human beings fail to do, think or believe what they presume is the right thing to do, think or believe, not accidentally, but deliberately. Humans exempt themselves from the ethical for no other reason than the plain fact than they make the conscious choice to do so.³⁷

"The dreadful exemption from doing the ethical, the individual's heterogeneity with the ethical, this suspension from the ethical, is sin as a state in a human being."³⁸

Kierkegaard's headlong attack on objectivity and theories of reason also carries with it a further implication. Here again, the finiteness of the individual and of his/her cognitive abilities comes to bear. Throughout the history of philosophy, for example, philosophers have developed conceptions of reason that have been approximate in nature, not simply because of the temporally finite nature of the philosopher as human being, but also because of his/her personal motivations. In a sentiment that would be echoed some fifty years later by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Kierkegaard claims that these motivations are the foundation for the biases that shape the conceptions and thereby irreparably taint the speculative thinker's sacred notion of immaculate objective thought. The notion of "sin" here again, plays

³⁶ Maybee, J. 1996. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. Vol. 29, p. 389-390

³⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 267

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a central role. Taking his argument a step further, Kierkegaard states that “sin” is the reason for a more general skepticism about reason’s ability to aid individuals in overcoming their problems at all.³⁹

“(Thus there is a sin in thought.)”⁴⁰

Lastly, I concur with Maybee(1996) who argues that Kierkegaard clearly associates the practice of so-called “pure” objective thinking with a kind of psychological unhealthiness. He compares the taking up of the Hegelian objective point of view, to a kind of dying. In order to prepare oneself for the practice of logical, objective thinking, a dying or closure of part of the human being is necessary. This is because, as was mentioned before, objective thinking demands that one distance oneself from oneself. Whereas subjective thinking requires an inwardness, objective thinking requires by nature, an outwardness, a divorcing of oneself, in order to regard oneself.⁴¹

“In order to shed light on logic, it might be desirable to become oriented psychologically in the state of mind of someone who thinks the logical – what kind of dying to oneself is required for that purpose, and to what extent the imagination plays a part in it.”⁴²

The “dying” that Kierkegaard refers to, is the dying of “inwardness” in the individual, of passionate involvement, emotions and belief. It also by implication refers to the dying of subjectivity in the individual subject. Climacus emphasizes his point with the rhetorical question:

“Is the absence of inwardness also lunacy?”⁴³

Climacus uses the issue of insanity or “lunacy” to better illustrate his point. If, for example, a man suffered from vivid hallucinations which he believed to be real. Then he would suffer from an insanity brought on by a delirium of inwardness. This is because the detail which is so significant a part of his life, namely, his hallucinations, pertain infinitely to him and to no one else. However, if insanity were to be an absence of inwardness, then the unfortunate individual might very well be in possession of a fact, or truth,

³⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 338-339

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 339

⁴¹ Maybee, J. 1996. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. Vol. 29, p. 391

⁴² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 117

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.194

for example, that the earth is round.⁴⁴ However, the tragic element would be that the truth in this particular instance, would indeed pertain to the world, as a fact, but would not pertain to this specific individual in the least. “This kind of insanity”, writes Climacus, “is more inhuman than the other.”⁴⁵

“[The objective person’s] insanity is the absence of inwardness.”⁴⁶

As has been mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard’s chief criticism about the objective thinking of the Hegelian logical system is that it is “disinterested” in the existing individual. It is Hegel’s use of the language of abstraction that makes logical thinking “disinterested”, because abstract thinking is too far removed to satisfy an existing individual’s interest in his/her own existence. This is not to imply that objective does not provide any answers or any results that are worthwhile whatsoever, but for Kierkegaard, it does not provide any answers to the right questions, the questions that inevitably arise in the course of an individual’s life. As Maybee(1996) states, existing individuals have purposes or meanings, and they need to have answers to questions about those purposes, for example, which, out of all the possible purposes, will they commit to, and why?⁴⁷

“Therefore, the existing person continually has a *telos* [τελος].”⁴⁸

2.4.1 Pure Thinking and Abstract Thinking

Maybee(1996) points out that Kierkegaard distinguishes between two kinds of objective thinking, namely “abstract thinking” and “pure thinking”. Both forms involve a level of logical, objective thought, but

⁴⁴ Climacus himself uses the example of an escaped patient of a mental hospital, who, upon having escaped realizes that he risks being caught and sent back. While pondering this matter and looking for some way in which he might convince the authorities that he is, in actual fact, sane, he finds a skittle ball lying in the road. He immediately places this in the tail of his coat and continues walking. With each step, the ball bumps into the man’s rear, and with every bump the man exclaims, “Boom! The earth is round.” The exclamation was indeed a universally accepted truth, yet did that make him sane? Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 195

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 196

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Maybee, J. 1996. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. Vol. 29, p. 392

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 313

“pure thinking” is of less relevance to the individual life than “abstract thinking”. “Abstract thinking”, according to Kierkegaard, does, to a certain extent, disregard existence, but still maintains a relation to it, while “pure thinking” is in total suspension and has no relation to an existing person. It also explains everything within its own realm and thereby makes decisive explanation regarding relevant questions impossible.⁴⁹

Kierkegaard uses the concept of motion to justify his argument why pure thinking fails to answer questions concerning meaning in an individual’s life. In his *Postscript Climacus* distinguishes between true or real motion and false or meaningless motion. The latter pertains to the supposed logical motion or movement through the Hegelian dialectical system involving the discord between a thesis and its antithesis and the resulting union of the two opposites in a higher synthesis. The former contradiction has now been overcome by a new concept. This is the movement of pure thinking, and is false and meaningless to the individual person. True or real motion to an individual consists of decision and repetition. By decision and repetition, Climacus means that the person has to be and do. An individual has to decide what to be and what to do, in other words, he has to take on some kind of self-identity.⁵⁰

2.5 The Concept of Repetition

For the purposes not only of furthering the discussion on subjectivity, but also of placing Kierkegaard’s work within a more understandable context, it is necessary to briefly expound upon Kierkegaard’s concept of “repetition”. The term “repetition” is of singular importance, not only with regards to Kierkegaard’s discussion of subjectivity, but in virtually all of his work. Within the categories of existence, Kierkegaard emphasizes two major categories. The first is the category of possibility, the nature of which will be further discussed in Chapter 4, and the second is the category of repetition.

“Repetition” necessitates careful discussion for the very reason that it has often been misunderstood. Professor J.L. Heiberg, one time professor of Kierkegaard’s and editor of the *Flying Post*, incurred a rather embarrassing spectacle when, upon reviewing Kierkegaard’s work, he explained the concept of repetition as having essentially a different significance in the natural and the spiritual sphere. He stated that the author must have had in mind the natural categories (e.g. natural law, etc.) in which the phenomenon of repetition is always recurring, and must have, without being aware of it, stretched the

⁴⁹ Maybee, J. 1996. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. Vol. 29, p. 392

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 312-313

applicability of the concept beyond its proper limits.⁵¹ However, as is explained later (cf. Chapter 5), Heiberg's erroneous interpretation of *Repetition* was most likely a deliberate course of action, undertaken in the course of the ongoing feud between the devout Hegelian (Heiberg) and the dedicated Hegel-critic (Kierkegaard).

Subjectivity, as has already been discussed, is truth. However, Climacus tells us, this is only a valid statement if we base it on its contradiction.

“So, then, subjectivity, inwardness, is truth. Is there *a more inward* expression for it? Yes, if the discussion about ‘Subjectivity, inwardness, is truth’ begins in this way: ‘Subjectivity is untruth’... Here, on the other hand, in wanting to begin to become truth by becoming subjective, subjectivity is in the predicament of being untruth.”⁵²

Here, the subject, as the first act of self, has surrendered his/her subjectivity. As Cole(1971) correctly points out this is not a problem of ignorance, but rather one of sin. Christianity has identified this as the essence of the problem. We remain in untruth, not as a result of not knowing what selfhood is, but rather because we refuse to risk subjectivity.⁵³

2.5.1 Repetition and Recollection

According to Kierkegaard, it is necessary for us to address the problem of selfhood by means of repetition, rather than recollection. Rather than simply recollect a forgotten essence, we need to repeat a lost existence. So long as people are under the impression that they are able to recover selfhood through recollection, they cut themselves off from the profound inwardness of subjectivity.

“But the more difficult it is made for him, recollecting, to take himself out of existence, the more inward his existing can become in existence; and when it is made impossible, when he is lodged in existence in such a way that the back door of recollection is forever closed, then the inwardness becomes the deepest.”⁵⁴

According to Climacus, it then becomes necessary to enter eternity “forwards”, since it is no longer possible to relate to it “backwards.”⁵⁵ Socrates proclaimed the dubiety of extracting oneself from

⁵¹ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard's Authorship*. 1968. p. 172-173

⁵² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. P. 207

⁵³ Cole, J. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 151

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. P. 208

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

existence into the eternal by means of speculation, and Christianity unequivocally declared it impossible. This contrast between the Greek quest for selfhood by means of recollection, and the Christian way of repetition is brought to attention in Vigilius Haufniensis' discussion of the Greek and Christian understanding of time and eternity in *The Concept of Anxiety*. For the Greek, the eternal belongs to the past. The way in which the individual can relate him/herself to this is by way of recollection. The eternal, lying in the past, bears essentially no relation to the present moment. Time simply constitutes a progression, the present moment being nothing more than an infinitesimal instant dividing the past from the future.

"However, precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future."⁵⁶

For the Christian, on the other hand, the eternal always refers to the future, to which the individual constantly relates the present, and thereby determines his present. The present moment therefore, is of fundamental significance as the juncture at which time and eternity meet. In contrast, Haufniensis summarizes the Greek viewpoint as the following:

"For the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the past that can only be entered backwards."⁵⁷

In other words, eternity is entered into backwards, by means of recollection. The Christian eternity, on the other hand, lies ahead, as a future, which can only be entered into forwards, that is, by repetition. Both recollection and repetition are forms of determinism. However the determinism of the past, by way of recollection, is rigid and constrictive, whereas the determinism of the future, by way of repetition offers the freedom of possibility.

"Repetition" as a concept was briefly developed in "Johannes Climacus" a section of another work, *Three Edifying Discourses*, but the term was further expanded, in a short work, by that very title. *Repetition* by Constantine Constantius was published in 1843. It gives the initial impression of being a charming book, abounding with humour and satire, but, as Arbaugh(1968) comments, on closer inspection it also reveals a somewhat darker side of Kierkegaard's personality. In it he proceeds to blame Regine for being the

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*, 1980. p. 85

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 90

direct cause of so much personal suffering by her very faithfulness and devotion to him.⁵⁸ Aside from this, Constantius pays particular attention to various concepts, particularly that of repetition itself.

In *Repetition* Constantius explores the interrelatedness of repetition and recollection.

“Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards. Therefore repetition, if it is possible, makes a man happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy.”⁵⁹

Recollection can therefore be viewed as a backward-oriented repetition of life, and repetition as a forward-oriented recollection, a recollection of existence in continual relation to the future. These two movements are therefore, while seeming different, the same movement. They only differ by way of orientation. Nevertheless, Cole(1971) correctly argues that this reveals itself to be the crucial difference between the despondency of bondage and the exultation of freedom.⁶⁰

The use of recollection lies in the fact that it serves as a reminder that we are the products of our own histories, and that we are able to more vividly understand who we now are by recalling who we have been. It is, in short, the intellectual process of delving into our nominal relation to the past. Repetition on the other hand, affirms that our present is determined by the future, and as such, our existence is open. In contrast to the cognitive action of recollection, repetition is a deed. It is clear therefore, as Cole(1971) states, that both categories of recollection and repetition are of utmost import. Without *both* categories, life is vacuous and without meaning, for the former provides the substance or necessity of our existence and the latter provides possibility and freedom thereof.⁶¹

“Men are divided into two great classes: Those who predominantly live in hope, and those who predominantly live in recollection. Both have a wrong relation to time. The healthy individual lives at once both in hope and

⁵⁸ It is important to bear in mind that this seemingly unjust action, was spurred by yet another attempt on Kierkegaard’s side of making himself repulsive to Regine Olsen. He was painfully aware of the distress that he had caused by refusing to marry her and of the fact that she still loved him. He hoped therefore, that these half-hearted attempts at boorishness would anger her and that she would distance herself from him emotionally. Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 94-95

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Repetition. An Essay in Experimental Psychology*. 1941. p. 3-4

⁶⁰ Cole, J. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 154

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

recollection, and only thereby does his life acquire true and substantial continuity. So, then, he has hope and does not wish, like those who live off recollection, to return backwards in time.”⁶²

Kierkegaard was acutely aware of the fact that the individual finds him/herself in an environment characterized by a constant state of flux, and that this could cause an undermining of the essential unity of personhood. By means of repetition, Kierkegaard endeavoured to provide us with a construct by which the instability of momentary existence could be escaped and be replaced by a more consistent, enduring reality. By repetition, Kierkegaard meant the continuous re-application of the commitments of the former self to the personal life of the new self. I agree with Arbaugh(1968) when he claims that without the renewal of these resolutions the past would indeed be dead and the future empty. The recovery of commitments constitutes the unification of an individual’s past and future selves to a present reality, in a single personhood. Instead of the incessant contravention of the self with itself, the individual is capable, by means of repetition, to secure some mode of coherence.⁶³

“He does not run after butterflies like a boy; nor does he stand on tiptoe to peer at the glories of the world, for he knows them. Neither does he sit like an old woman at the spinning wheel of recollection ... Indeed, if there were no repetition, what then would life be? Who would wish to be a tablet upon which time writes every instant a new inscription? ... If God Himself had not willed repetition, the world would never have come into existence. He would either have followed the light plans of hope, or He would have ... recalled it all and conserved it in recollection ...”⁶⁴

2.5.2 Repetition within The Three Spheres of Existence

In complete contrast to the misinterpretation of Heiberg, it is precisely, and most significantly, the spiritual sphere in which Kierkegaard meant the term repetition to be used and understood. Repetition is not a contemplation of the laws of nature, but an exercise in the possibility of spirit. Although the emphasis does lie on the spiritual, Kierkegaard characterizes three attitudes towards repetition, each one becoming progressively more profound. Firstly, there is aesthetic repetition, which is experienced as boredom (this is dealt with in Chapter 3). The aesthetic individual realizes the inevitable boredom underlying his/her existence and attempts vainly, by means of the “Rotation Method” (cf. Chapter 3.9) to introduce some sense of novelty into the waning pleasures of his/her life. This inevitable failure, coupled

⁶² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. P. 508

⁶³ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 95-96

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Repetition. An Essay in Experimental Psychology*. 1941. p.34

with further desperate attempts to escape boredom by way of the “Rotation Method” leads the wretched aesthete into a state of despair, and perhaps even suicide.

“As everyone knows, there are insects which die at the moment of fertilization. Thus it is with all joy, life’s supreme and most voluptuous moment of pleasure is attended by death.”⁶⁵

In the context of repetition, as with most concepts, there exists a sharp distinction between the aesthetic sphere and the spheres of the ethical and religious. While the temporal and momentary mark the realm of the aesthetic, the abiding and consistent mark the spheres of the ethical and religious. The aesthetic sphere imparts an important detail, that is, that pleasures are simply for the moment, and soon fleet away. Only to be juxtaposed by pains that always endure too long. As Arbaugh(1968) notes, time certainly holds the promise of good things to come, but it simultaneously carries the individual inexorably toward a state of want, old age and finally, death. There is no hope of enduring value in duration. Only by means of repetition is the individual able to defy time and thereby gain salvation. A successful repetition of this magnitude constitutes an introduction of the quality of the eternal.⁶⁶

It should be apparent that repetition goes infinitely beyond the simple theme of recollection and reflection. The concept is not only a blatant contradiction of any and all speculation concerning absolutes or enduring truths of any kind, it also raises questions of profound philosophical concern, most notably is the question of individual identity. Arbaugh quite correctly poses the question of whether repetition, while maintaining a sense of personal self-identity, is possible?⁶⁷

Kierkegaard seems to suggest that it is possible, but only if the conditions of authentic repetition are adhered to. Repetition, if it is to be practiced with any success, must come inwardly, and with free commitment. Its emphasis should be religious, rather than circumstantial, a kind of God-given peace acquired upon one’s subjectivity. Moreover, such achievement of inner constancy and meaning, must be obtained by means of a risk, an existential leap. This is, as opposed to a natural unfolding, by necessary dialectic, as with Hegel. On the contrary, Arbaugh states, becoming is never logically necessary, for if it were, then it would already have been.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 43

⁶⁶ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 97-98

⁶⁷ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 98

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 98-99

Repetition opens with a rather capricious and ironic interpretation of the concept. However, the work ends in a discussion of repetition as moral, and ultimately, religious responsibility. Despite the fact that the beginning of the discussion of repetition concerns itself with repetition in the aesthetic sphere, and is marked by humour, it raises its own incisive problems. Becoming, according to Constantius, is not simple or absolute change, but instead is repetition. It is being-within-becoming, or repeated identity through change. McCarthy(1978) astutely points out that the essential distinguishing factor between repetition and recollection lies in the fact that while recollection is always a passive act, repetition is necessarily active. In repetition, reflection is used in conjunction with a situation of the present and with thought to possible situations for the future. In other words, if an individual encounters a situation which he has, in principle, encountered before, such as a conflict situation, for example, he will reflect upon past perceptions of conflict situations and compare them and their outcomes to the present one. By doing this he might form an entirely new perception of conflict situations, one which will necessarily change his past as well as his future outlook on conflict. In repetition therefore, we have an amalgamation of past, present and future, and not just a mere recall of the past. At the moment of repetition, therefore the individual will also experience an instant of freedom, one in which he has the space to choose himself without having necessarily to consider the restraints of societal or institutional norms or laws. It is exclusively the choice of the self that has any bearing whatsoever. As well as an act of freedom, repetition is also a religious act. This is because the individual has not taken ethical laws as his highest consideration, but has instead opted for faith in making his decision. It is only in faith that he can fully accept his own law in the presence of God.⁶⁹

2.5.3 Repetition as resignation

Let us, for the sake of argument, consider a situation where loss of selfhood has occurred due to an attempt to find security in the finite and temporal. To counter this, it is necessary for the individual to restore a proper priority of ends (*telos*). What movements of spirit are needed to bring about a repetition of the selfhood which has been lost? Kierkegaard gives us our answer in what is considered to be one of his greatest works, *Fear and Trembling*. Here the author, Johannes de Silentio, suggests the use of a double movement, that is, a movement involving resignation and faith. Before an intimate relation to the absolute can be brought about, the anguished individual must renounce his commitments to the temporal and finite, which have become determinative of his existence. The purpose of this is not to create a state

⁶⁹McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 72-74

of blissful oblivion, where the individual lightly dismisses the self that he/she has become. On the contrary, de Silentio notes:

“It is a contradiction to forget the whole of one’s life’s content and still remain the same man.”⁷⁰

Resignation involves a recollection, which by implication, involves a reflection upon the whole historical self that one has become. The aspect which serves as distinguishing factor here from mere reflection is that it is a recollection oriented, not toward the past, but the future. However, as Cole(1971) notes, the process is necessarily painful, as it requires first of all, the critical assessment of the present self, and the recognition of the need for re-evaluation, and secondly, the subsequent dissociation of the present self with itself, in orientation toward a future self. At the same time the process is joyful, because of the liberation that the self experiences in becoming a new self. In short, it is a dying of self in order to find oneself anew.⁷²

2.5.4 Repetition as Faith

However, Cole(1971) states that this constitutes only the first movement. The dying of self does not automatically equate into the finding of selfhood, nor does resignation automatically equate to faith. In this particular instance, resignation is simply the prerequisite of faith.⁷³

“Faith is therefore no aesthetic emotion, but something far higher, exactly because it presupposes resignation;”⁷⁴

The stage of resignation, leading towards faith, is elaborated by de Silentio in the following passage:

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 72

[°] It is important to note here that to “find oneself anew” does not refer to an utter rejection of self in order to take on the characteristics of a completely different self. The individual self remains, in essence, itself. Resignation simply refers to the current self, transcending itself, by means of renewal of commitments of the past self in conjunction with the possibilities of the future self.

⁷² Cole, J. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 159-160

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 76

“Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith; for only in infinite resignation does my eternal validity become transparent to me, and only then can there be talk of grasping existence on the strength of faith.”⁷⁵

The act of resignation is that which affirms the eternal validity of the self. By renouncing hi/her commitments to the finite and temporal, which acted deterministically upon the his/her life, the individual veritably demonstrates his/her transcendence over the finite. Thus, Cole(1971) correctly points out that while the eternal significance of the self is affirmed by the act of resignation, the second movement, as required for affirmation of the eternal significance of the temporal existence, is faith.⁷⁶

Although resignation requires the renunciation of commitments to the finite ends of existence, it must be borne in mind that for Kierkegaard, existence is existence-in-the-world. This, by implication, means that selfhood necessarily entails a relation to both the eternal and the temporal. This requires the engagement of a paradoxical movement, namely, the return back into the worldliness of the world. It is clear that both Kierkegaard and de Silentio share the same insistence upon a philosophy bearing relevance and applicability to the everyday life of humankind. As human beings our existence is, to a fair extent, characterized by the finite and temporal. To therefore suggest an existence without making any reference whatsoever to the afore-mentioned realms, would constitute gross neglect. Having said that, the individual now faces the dilemma of dealing with the following paradox: after going through the anguished procedure of resignation whereby he/she renounces his/her commitment to the finite and temporal ends of the world, the same individual has to now willingly return to an existence largely characterized by finitude and temporality. According to de Silentio, what is required in order to confront the paradox is the dialectic of existing in a context of finite ends, while still renouncing their absolute claim. In other words, the individual exists in a world surrounded by temporality, but at no time does he/she succumb to the allure of these as absolutes, but instead maintains a commitment to the eternal. I am in agreement with Cole(1971) who argues that it is the process of existing in the temporal by virtue of the eternal. An existence of this kind is complex and painful, to say the least, and requires a special kind of courage.⁷⁷

“It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole of temporality in order to win eternity, but I do indeed win it and cannot in al eternity renounce that, for that would be a self-contradiction; but it takes a paradoxical and

⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 75

⁷⁶ Cole, J. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 160

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

humble courage then to grasp the whole of temporality on the strength of the absurd, and that courage is the courage of faith.”⁷⁸

Repetition, at this stage then, requires the double movement of resignation and faith. De Silentio makes an important distinction between the two.

“Resignation does not require faith, for what I win in resignation is my eternal consciousness, and that is a purely philosophical movement, which I venture upon when necessary, and which I can discipline myself into doing... Through faith I don’t renounce anything, on the contrary in faith I receive everything, exactly in the way it is said that one whose faith is like a mustard seed can move mountains.”⁷⁹

Basically therefore, the first movement of resignation requires of the individual a kind of heroic courage and remains, in essence, a philosophical movement. The second movement of faith requires a humble courage, a trust, and is religious movement.

Finally, it is important to note that repetition occurs in conjunction with experiences of inwardness or seriousness. Movements which the individual experiences deeply within the self are those which are relevant to the process of repetition. Kierkegaard also uses the term ‘repetition’ because he states that on point of principle certain situations are repeatedly presented to us throughout our lives. It is by repetition that our perceptions of these principles change, throughout our lives, and it is only by faith that we can continue to believe in them.

It was mentioned before that one would be mistaken in regarding “inwardness” as purely passive. Kierkegaard’s argument against this perception is based on his concept of repetition. This suggests that an individual’s possession of knowledge and identity involves not only passive reception of knowledge, but also active creation. A good example of this is ethical knowledge. Maybee(1996) states correctly that this knowledge does not exist independently, only to be taken in and applied by an individual. For Kierkegaard, human beings create the ethical insofar as the ethical reveals itself in their thoughts and deeds. That which is ethical cannot merely be known, it has to be done.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 77

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Maybee, J. *Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason*, in *Man and World*. 1996. Vol. 29, p. 393-394

“But the ethical is not only a knowing; it is also a doing that is related to a knowing, and a doing of such a nature that the repetition of it can at times and in more ways than one become more difficult than the first doing.”⁸¹

Repetition therefore expresses the idea that two apparently different aspects, the creating and having of ethical knowledge for example, in actuality amount to one and the same thing.

“Repetition is basically the expression for immanence; thus one finishes despairing and has oneself; one finishes doubting and has the truth.”⁸²

In typical Kierkegaardian fashion, Climacus provides us with concrete examples and illustrates the relevance of repetition in this context. The individual who “despairs” is, according to Climacus, in a state of mourning over his/her imperfection and, more specifically, guilt. In another work, *Purity of Heart is to Will one thing*, written under the name of Søren Kierkegaard, we find this passage:

“Here are met the cowardly timorous ill-temper of self-love, and the proud defiant presumption of the mind – here they are met in equal impotence.”⁸³

However, Maybee(1996) points out that in spite of this state of imperfection and guilt, the individual still chooses him/herself, and by doing so gains the personal identity of a being that is imperfect and guilty. Climacus sees this as an example of repetition, for the individual firstly recognizes his/her personal imperfection and guilt over which he/she despairs, and secondly, chooses his/her imperfect and guilty self anyway. Thus what the individual is and does, become one and the same thing, they are immanent.⁸⁴

2.6 Objectivity and appropriation

Kierkegaard’s claim that objectivity is indifferent to the individual, has a more radical meaning. There is always some sort of interim between the result of objective, logical erudition and the existence of an individual. This gap exists because no amount of objective evidence can force a person to believe in the objective truth or to even take an interest in it.

⁸¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 160

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 263

⁸³ Kierkegaard, S. *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*. 1956. p. 61

⁸⁴ Maybee, J. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. 1996. Vol. 29, p. 394

“The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and while the subject and subjectivity become indifferent [*ligegyldig*], the truth also becomes indifferent, and that is precisely its objective validity [*Gyldighed*], because the interest, just like the decision, is subjectivity.”⁸⁵

Looked at another way, the objective truth, becomes subjective because the decision to believe or not to believe can only be based on opinion, on subjectivity. This subjectivity in turn, affects what Kierkegaard termed the “appropriation”, or process of internalization of a truth or belief, and appropriation is the determining factor of whether the objective result or subjective opinion will be accepted by an individual.

“To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation, inwardness, subjectivity, and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.”⁸⁶

The emphasis here falls on the point that an individual can only have a truth if he/she embraces or accepts it. This, in turn, can only occur when the individual ceases to doubt. In *Either/Or*, Judge Wilhelm levels criticism at marriages that are impelled by acts of reflective doubt rather than by the immediacy of love and commitment. It is quite reasonable to equate the individual’s state of doubt with a similar lacking of the required measure of inwardness necessary for appropriation. To do away with doubt would mean therefore to begin possessing the essential state of inwardness or seriousness. It is important to acknowledge, in the context of appropriation, that there does not, nor can there exist any sense of neutrality or indeterminacy. For an individual either possesses the state of inwardness needed for appropriation, or he/she in doubt*.

2.6.1 Subjective and Existential understanding

This brings us to another distinction implicit in Kierkegaard’s work: the difference between subjective understanding and existential understanding. An individual may look within him/herself and attain a measure of subjective understanding, but there is no guarantee that he/she will act on the newly acquired

⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 193

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p.192

* The Biblical nature of this argument is no coincidence, and is derived from Kierkegaard’s reading of the book of Revelations, Chapter 3, verse 15 and 16: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” The assertion is of paramount significance in Kierkegaard’s work, starting, as it does, in a general theorem about appropriation, and ultimately leading to the question of religious faith in the individual’s God-relationship.

knowledge. Pojman(1984) points out that existential understanding is that understanding received in becoming a particular kind of person or in deciding to act in a certain way. For example, an individual can possess an understanding of what Christianity is all about by reflecting on it passionately as a possibility, but said individual can only understand what it is to be a Christian by becoming one through an act of will.⁸⁷

Decision and repetition, or the choosing and subsequent being, that an individual experiences in his/her existence, constitute the purpose for an individual's "motion". If we simply accept, for the time being, that human existence is characterized by motion, then we must also concede that there must also exist some form of continuity which acts as a cohesive, holding motion together. If motion lacked this continuity, we would be hard-pressed to positively identify any form of motion at all. Climacus demonstrates this by recalling the notion that if everything is deemed to be true, it also means nothing is true. In the same fashion, if everything is said to be in motion, then there exists no motion. The "motion" of a human being's life consists of two kinds of changes: changes that individuals choose for themselves (e.g. the choice to marry or not to marry), and changes that are inevitable (e.g. growing old). These changes suggest that true or real motion has two sorts of goals: a goal as an end (choice) and a goal as a standard or criterion.⁸⁸

"The motionless belongs to motion as motion's goal [*Maal*], both in the sense of *τελος* [end, goal] and *μετρου* [measure, criterion]; otherwise the statement that everything is in motion – if one also takes away time and says that everything is in motion – is *eo ipso* stagnation."⁸⁹

I am in agreement with Maybee(1996) who claims that motion as standard or criterion suggests that the development of an individual follows a kind of inevitable continuum, one that is used as a measure as one passes through certain stages.⁹⁰

2.7 The Critique of Pure and Abstract Thinking

⁸⁷ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 56-57

⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 311-312

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Maybee, J. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. 1996. Vol. 29, p. 395

According to Climacus, these two changes (chosen and inevitable) are precisely the kind of motion that the logical thought of Hegel cannot accommodate. Pure thinking simply fails to address the concepts of decision and repetition, because it abstracts from time and space. There exists a crucial difference between true or real motion and false or meaningless motion. The former situates itself wholly within the realms of time and space, and by implication therefore involves individuals choosing and changing, as they find themselves situated in particular places, and at specific times. The latter, on the other hand, has no exigency to follow suit, since it does not even involve space or time, let alone concern itself with human individuals. Maybee(1996) states that the motion of logic or objectivity is conceptual motion, not existence motion. In a sense, the term “conceptual motion” contradicts itself.⁹¹

“To think existence *sub specie aeterni*[from the point of view of eternity] and in abstraction is essentially to annul it, and the merit of it resembles the much-heralded merit of cancelling the principle of contradiction. Existence without motion is unthinkable, and motion is unthinkable *sub specie aeterni*.”⁹²

In other words, Climacus states that the conception of existence from the point of view of eternity and in abstraction essentially constitutes its annulment. Existence without motion is not only impossible, but the attempt at rendering existence in terms of logic and “conceptual motion” results in nothing more than flagrant bewilderment.

Maybee(1996) points out that the second kind of objective thinking Kierkegaard calls “abstract thinking”. Abstract thinking differs from pure thinking in that while the former abstracts from all time and space, the latter abstracts only from particular times and places.⁹³ Climacus however, characterizes all thought as being eternal, which by implication means that abstract thinking, like pure thinking, must be cut off from the dimensions of space and time. The difference is essentially one of degree. Pure thinking is purported to be absolutely non-temporal and non-spatial, while abstract thinking is only partially non-temporal and partially non-spatial. Abstract thinking does, in terms of possibility, relate to the existence and actuality of an individual. The problem arises in the fact that abstract thinking, by its very nature, is composed of mandates that will remain mere possibilities, or alternatives, which the individual may not be able to, or even want to, actualize.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Maybee, J. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. 1996. Vol. 29, p. 395-396

⁹² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 308

⁹³ Maybee. 1996. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. Vol. 29, p. 396

⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 314-315

“Within abstraction, everything that is said about actuality in the language of abstraction is said within possibility. That is, in the language of actuality all abstraction is related to actuality as a possibility, not to an actuality within abstraction and possibility.”⁹⁵

In view of this, Climacus maintains that abstract thinking is insufficient for the needs of an existing individual. By abstract thinking, the pseudonymous author seems to have envisioned a kind of practical reason, as in a conceptual analysis of political or ethical issues. This certainly is, in the eyes of Climacus, an improvement from the completely removed realm of pure thinking, but abstract thinking still neglects to address particularities of human existence. It does not concern itself with the particular purposes, actuality or interests of an individual. Of even greater concern is the fact that, like pure thinking, abstract thinking also entreats the human being to remove him/herself from their particular circumstances.⁹⁶

“Only by annulling actuality can abstraction grasp it,”⁹⁷

Thus, as Maybee(1996) comments, this prerequisite of abstract thought, causes an abstraction from the particular individual, to persons in general. By dissociating the individual from his/herself, abstract thought at once removes the actuality, the concreteness from the situation under scrutiny.⁹⁸

One of the major flaws of abstract thinking is therefore the disposition towards indifference, or more accurately, “disinterestedness”. Its treatment of actuality or existence is indifferent “disinterest”. Climacus, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, suggests that, on the contrary, thinking and existing must be united. For this purpose, he suggests two alternative methods.

“Just as existence has joined thinking and existing, inasmuch as an existing person is a thinking person, so are there two media: the medium of abstraction and the medium of actuality.”⁹⁹

For Climacus, the former constitutes an authentic manner by which to combine thought and existence. The latter however, fails to achieve this unification due to the fact that by its very nature it is limited to

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 314-315

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 313

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 314

⁹⁸ Maybee, J. **Kierkegaard and the Madness of Reason**, in *Man and World*. 1996. Vol. 29, p. 396

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 314

the realm of possibility, and thus continually falls short of relevance to actuality. Actuality for an individual, issues forth from his/her interest in his/her own existence. It is important to note that “interest” in the context which Climacus uses it here, refers not only to the regard the individual has for his/her existence and his/her engrossment in it, but also to the individual’s perception of his/her existence as an asset.

“For the existing person, existing is for him his highest interest, and his interestedness in existing is his actuality.”¹⁰⁰

Abstraction is incapable of rendering this actuality, because abstract thought demands of the individual to become “disinterested”, and thereby to dissociate themselves from their actuality. It is here that Climacus uncovers the absurdity contained in abstract thought.

“The demand of abstraction upon him is that he become disinterested in order to obtain something to know; the requirement of the ethical upon him is to be infinitely interested in existing.”¹⁰¹

According to the author, abstract thought instructs us to separate ourselves from our actuality, and thereby distance the self from itself, in order that we may gain knowledge. In addition to identifying the process itself as a failure, Climacus demonstrates that the very nature of the knowledge that the individual supposedly acquires is already in question.

“The trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception. Greek skepticism has already adequately shown this, and modern idealism likewise. The trustworthiness claimed by knowledge about the historical is also only a deception insofar as it claims to be the trustworthiness of actuality, since the knower cannot know about a historical actuality until he has dissolved it into possibility.”¹⁰²

In a fashion somewhat reminiscent of the dialectic, Climacus continues his onslaught on abstract thought by striking a contrast between it and concrete thought.

“What is abstract thinking? It is thinking where there is no thinker. It ignores everything but thought, and in its own medium only thought is. Existence is not thoughtless, but in existence thought is in an alien medium.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 314

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 316

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 332

Here Johannes Climacus distinctly demonstrates to us the incompatible nature inherent to abstract thought and existence. Abstract thinking concerns itself exclusively with the domain of thought, and by doing so, dissociates itself from everything else. This dissociation is achieved by blind disdain for, in particular, the thinking subject, which abstract thought completely lacks. Climacus states that existence is certainly not devoid of thought, but nevertheless, that in an existence largely characterized by the temporal and spatial, the conception of thought as non-temporal and non-spatial, finds itself in foreign territory. On the other hand, “concrete thought” necessarily involves not only a thinking subject, but also a subject situated in a particular circumstance, faced with particular choices.¹⁰⁴

“What is concrete thinking? It is thinking where there are a thinker and a specific something (in the sense of a particularity) that is being thought, where existence gives the existing thinker thought, time and space.”¹⁰⁵

In order to emphasize the inanity of abstract thought in a realm abundant with existing thinkers, Climacus considers the possibility of the existence of an abstract thinker. His conclusion is that the very existence of this individual is satirical. To show evidence of his existence as an abstract thinker is a contradiction, because his thinking, as an abstract thinker, is directly proportional to his abstraction, and his abstraction, in turn, is indirectly proportional to his existing. By this line of argument, the abstract thinker would cease to exist, should he be entirely successful at thinking.¹⁰⁶

It is clear that, at very best, we can regard abstract thought as a kind of practical reason, which at least pretends to address our circumstances. Pure thinking however, which claims for itself the eternal point of view, is to us finite beings, of no personal relevance at all.

“Abstraction is possibility, either the preceding or the subsequent possibility. Pure thinking is a phantom.”¹⁰⁷

In order to elucidate his conception of subjectivity, Climacus contrasted it with a critique of objectivity, hence the reason why a large portion of this essay has been presented in a similar fashion. Since both objective and subjective understanding are arrived at through the process of reflection, it is that facet of both terms that will be concentrated upon. Juxtaposing subjective reflection with objective reflection can

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 316-318

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 332

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 316

be summarized as follows: subjective reflection, according to Pojman(1984), consists of deep introspection which produces self-knowledge, whereas objective reflection consists of using methods of rationality such as deductive and empirical induction, and at its best, the result is a conscious possession of true propositions. The process of subjective reflection involves passionate inwardness. It is appropriate for most facets of human life, but even more so for existential and ethical-religious thinking.¹⁰⁸

“All existence-issues are passionate, because existence, if one becomes conscious of it, involves passion. To think about them so as to leave out passion is not to think about them at all, is to forget the point that one indeed is oneself an existing person.”¹⁰⁹

In stark contrast, objective reflection regards the emotions and passions as a fog which clouds the deliberation process. Although it may initially seem contrary to his entire philosophy, Climacus does not deny the existence of the absolute truth, the apex of Hegel’s System, which he boastfully claimed to be capable of reaching by means of reason. Climacus calls this essential knowledge or eternal truth. However, as Pojman(1984) astutely points out, this complete, comprehensive knowledge of existence is possessed only by God and can never be obtained by any human being since humans, existing as they do in the temporal dimension, cannot find a vantage point from which to survey the whole view of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*].¹¹⁰

From the point of view of objective and eternal knowledge, subjective truth is seen precisely as untruth. This is so because objective truth sees it as defying the standards of reason and the possibility of subjective truth attaching itself to a false belief. Collins(1983) claims that, as for the possibility of attaining eternal knowledge, from the vantage point of objectivity, subjective truth is also untruth because it is infinitely removed from the realm of the eternal. Having said that, subjective truth is a dialectical denial of the sufficiency of objective truth, and is in that sense, an advancement of truth.¹¹¹

Although Kierkegaard stated quite overtly that an individual can never attain eternal knowledge, he later conceded that a person is capable, if only very rarely, of transcending him/herself and his/her situatedness

¹⁰⁸ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 55-56

¹⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 350-351

¹¹⁰ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 57

¹¹¹ Collins, J. *The Mind of Kierkegaard*. 1983. p. 154-155

and thereby of attaining eternal truth in some measure. This temporary attainment of eternal truth can only come to an individual, according to Kierkegaard, in a “moment of passion”.¹¹²

“Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in a unity of the infinite and the finite that transcends existing. This instant is the moment of passion.”¹¹³

Kierkegaard never criticized Hegel’s striving for truth, on the contrary, he admired it. What he did criticize however, was the manner in which he did so, namely that of making objective reflection predominant and holding passion and the emotions as subordinate and inferior.

“In passion, the existing subject is infinitized in the eternity of imagination and yet is also most definitely himself.”¹¹⁴

2.8 Subjectivity as truth

A topic which has through the years, been the target of repeated philosophical scrutiny is subjectivity’s relation to truth. It is a contentious issue, to say the least. One major criticism levelled at Kierkegaard in this respect, is that his theory of subjectivity is direly deficient as a foundation for epistemology, and almost just as insufficient as a special epistemology for religion and ethics. Louis Mackey, in a paper he delivered at a meeting of the American Philosophical Association, stated quite plainly that Kierkegaard’s subjectivity bore no relation to objective truth.

“[The way is the truth, and the truth is ... a life. (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 204)] – like everything else in Climacus’ text, is a piece of rhetorical exhortation masquerading as discursive presentation. It is a solemn admonition: whatever you believe, remember that your creed has no objective warrant, no *fundamentum in re* save the reality it has in your life. [And the passion of the infinite is the very truth. (*CUP*, p. 203)]. There is no objective state of affairs by conformity to which our thoughts and words are authenticated. Truth is precisely the venture – the awful risk and the awesome responsibility – that translates objective uncertainty into the decisiveness of infinite passion. Appropriately, Climacus’ definition of truth does not direct us to an object, but recalls us to ourselves. [“Subjectivity is Something or Other”]¹¹⁵

¹¹² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 197

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 63

It is the opinion of this author that any critic of Kierkegaard whom chooses to sweepingly criticize Climacus' writing as being "a piece of rhetorical exhortation masquerading..." immediately places the validity of his very criticism in question. I believe that by virtue of Mackey's consistent pleas for an object for subjective appropriation, that he has failed to understand the complexity of this theory. Furthermore, he has neglected to see that there are three versions of subjectivity with regard to truth that can be attributed to the works of Kierkegaard.

The first view, as described by Pojman(1984) the reduplicative model of subjectivity or Socratic subjectivity, states that subjectivity has no special epistemological relevance. The emphasis in this model is against speculating philosophy. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that subjectivity is truth, then the definition of truth must include some antithesis of objectivity.¹¹⁶ That definition of truth is to be found in the Climacus' proclamation of the highest form of subjectivity:

"Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person."¹¹⁷

Objectively speaking, an individual embracing subjectivity according to the above definition, has only uncertainty, but this can only serve to intensify the infinite passion of his inwardness, that which is his subjectivity. And according to Climacus, truth is precisely this undertaking, to choose the objectively uncertain with the passion of the infinite.¹¹⁸

This Kierkegaardian-Socratic position is that man is incapable of formulating or even recognizing an existential system, the reasons for which have already been dealt with. The existentialist position does not deny the value of objective reflection or objective truth, in the sense that there is a metaphysical explanation to all our questions. What it does deny however, is man's capability of ever knowing or comprehending that truth. Because we are finite beings in both the temporal and intellectual sense, Climacus suggests that we forsake futile speculation and, like Socrates, devote ourselves to the problems and issues of existence, particularly ethics and religion. The conception of truth itself then, becomes redefined for existing subjects in terms of the way in which it is appropriated. The focus is on the relationship, not the specific content.

¹¹⁶ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 65

¹¹⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 203

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 203-204

Kierkegaard is quite clear about the fact that if the mode of the relationship is in truth, then the individual him/herself is true, even if what he/she is related to happens to be untrue. This he illustrates with a parable of two worshippers: a believer in the Christian God prays insincerely in church, while a pagan worships with the entire passion of the infinite. The former, even though he happens to be praying to the true God, praying falsely, and therefore, he, as a religious being, is false. The latter, even though he is praying to a false god, is worshipping in truth the true God. The point is that there is no guarantee that the worshipper will ever realize that he is worshipping falsely, nor that the pagan will ever realize that he is worshipping a false god. Nobody can claim to have any knowledge about religious belief, and this is where faith comes into play. I agree here with Pojman(1984) who claims that we can only be maximally sincere about our belief, by worshipping with passionate inwardness and uncertainty has always got to be a part of our predicament.¹¹⁹

“The passion of the infinite, not its content, is the deciding factor, for its content is precisely itself. In this way the subjective ‘how’ and subjectivity are the truth.”¹²⁰

2.8.1 The act of appropriation

Kierkegaard emphasizes that all belief and acquisition of knowledge requires appropriation. In order to learn anything we must first come to a decision to focus our interests. Subjective understanding gives rise to existential decision. The most important facets of subjectivity are decision and choice, and the latter always involves a measure of risk. Absolute decision, such as the act of faith, can never be ventured without running a risk. Eventually the real action is not seen in terms of the external act, but rather in the internal decision. By coming to this internal decision the individual puts to an end the process of mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to become it and live it. One incarnates the idea, one’s life becomes the exemplification of the idea and one becomes “himself that which he understands”¹²¹. Pojman(1984) calls this the correspondence theory of subjective truth. Whereas the correspondence theory of objective truth states that truth consists in the correspondence of a proposition with a state of affairs, the correspondence theory of subjective truth states that truth is a correspondence of a state of affairs (the life of the individual) with an idea which it aims to reduplicate. It

¹¹⁹ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 66

¹²⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 203

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 77

is worth noting that the word true, in this instance, takes on the meaning of faithful (*Sandhed* in Danish can be used to refer to either truth or faithfulness).¹²²

Throughout history, and especially in our contemporary world, the skeptic's mundane, yet pervasive argument against religion and the existence of God has been exemplified by the question "Where is God?" By reading Kierkegaard however, we can immediately see that this is misplaced. The very fabric of our lives is one of uncertainty. Despite the claims of science and religion, every aspect of our existence is pervaded by incertitude. There simply are no objective guarantees for anything. This expectation, says Kierkegaard, is also completely incongruous. The very idea of a guarantee goes against the process of personal development, which is only achieved through risk and uncertainty, where the overcoming of doubt is needed when evidence is pitted against one's intuitions. Where one finds oneself surrounded by ample tangible evidence, the need for faith disappears. Subjectivity is in such a situation usurped by objectivity.

In the Socratic model of subjectivity, we never can know whether what we believe is true or not. In fact, the definition of "truth" is sincere faith and the passionate conformation of oneself to the object of one's faith. In the Platonic or metaphysical model of subjectivity, subjectivity is the means for arriving at the objective, metaphysical truth, and not the end in itself. The contention here is that no one who is suitably subjective over an appropriate proposition will fail to achieve knowledge or true belief concerning the proposition. This conception of subjectivity's relation to the truth is clearly implicit in Kierkegaard's concept of "immanent truth", where an individual can recollect or introspect and come to an apprehension of the truth.¹²³

In the *Postscript* and in Kierkegaard's private papers there is some measure of discussion as to what he means by "indirect communication". His comments clearly state that Kierkegaard adopts the maieutic method as the proper way to elicit truth from people, for everyone deep within themselves knows the ethical. For example, in *Either/Or* he makes sustained use of this method. It was his conviction that a direct onslaught about Christianity would have little, if any, positive effect. The use of the pseudonyms too, are a reflection of indirect communication. Kierkegaard remains adamant that it is futile to seek

¹²² Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 67

¹²³ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 205-206

objectively for that which is only available subjectively. The practice of “indirect communication” is further discussed in Chapter 5.

“The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think. This passion is at bottom present in all thinking, even in the thinking of the individual, insofar as in thinking he participates in something transcending himself.”¹²⁴

Therefore to seek belief in the existence of God by any other means apart from introspection and recollection is in vain.

“From this there would seem to follow the further consequence, that if man is to receive any true knowledge about the Unknown (the God) he must be made to know that it is unlike him, absolutely unlike him. This knowledge Reason cannot possibly obtain of itself; we have already seen that this would be a self-contradiction.”¹²⁵

Kierkegaard emphasizes that knowledge concerning that which is ethical, the existence of God and immortality is within each individual already. Those who call themselves atheists have simply never willed or allowed this knowledge to attain power over their minds. One can do what is ethically true by following one’s deepest conscience. Therefore, his argument for recollection is a valid one.

The question which might be posed here is, if an individual should choose, with the passionate intensity of inwardness, and by means of deep introspection and recollection, can he still not choose to do what is ethically wrong? Kierkegaard would grant that this is indeed a possibility, but if the said individual were to choose with energy, earnestness and passion, he would, by mere virtue of the inwardness with which the choice was made, discover that he had chosen wrongly.

“A person who wants to determine himself ethically in his life’s task has usually an insignificant selection to choose from; on the other hand, the act of choice itself signifies far more for him. If you will understand me aright, I could quite well say that in choice it is less a matter of choosing correctly than of the energy, earnest and feeling with which one chooses. The personality thereby proclaims itself in its inner finitude, and the personality is thereby consolidated in turn. So even if a person chose what was wrong, he could still, because of the energy with which he chose it, discover that what he had chosen was wrong. For inasmuch as the choice is undertaken with all the personality’s inwardness, his nature is purified and he himself is brought into immediate relation to the eternal

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 46

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 57

power whose omnipresence interpenetrates the whole of existence. This transfiguration, this higher initiation, is never discovered by someone who chooses merely aesthetically.”¹²⁶

This process whereby false goals and actions are rescinded until only good goals and actions remain, is reminiscent of Socrates’ daimon, who spoke only negatively, thereby leaving the good to remain by elimination of the bad. In the *Postscript* Climacus uses the character of Pontius Pilate to illustrate the process of discovering the ethically right through subjectivity. According to him, Pilate would not have condemned Christ to crucifixion had he chosen subjectively instead of objectively. If he had chosen subjectively, the very dynamism underlying his act of choice, his inwardness, would have thwarted his wrongful decision.¹²⁷

“If Pilate had not asked objectively what truth is, he would never have let Christ be crucified. If he had asked the question subjectively, then the passion of inwardness regarding *what he in truth had to do* about the decision facing him would have prevented him from doing an injustice.”¹²⁸

There is a discrepancy between Kierkegaard and Socrates when it concerns the relation of knowledge and virtue. For Socrates, virtue is knowledge, whereas for Kierkegaard the exact opposite is correct, knowledge is virtue. The implication for the latter, is that if an individual wills to do the good, he will come to know it. Some scholars of Kierkegaard, such as Pojman(1984) have also suggested that he was influenced by a verse from the Gospel of John:

“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own (The Book of John: Chapter 7, verse 17).”

The inference here is that the choice to do God’s will is of the same essence as the choice to believe, or to have faith. Both instances refer to a matter of maximal subjectivity, which Kierkegaard deems sufficient to find truth. Therefore, passionate examination of the self, in regard to a specific situation will not only result in the right action, but also true belief. Truth, according to Kierkegaard, will manifest itself in precisely those individuals who strive after it.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. P. 485-486

¹²⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 229-230

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 67

In the Platonic or Metaphysical model of subjectivity it would seem ultimately, that if an individual is maximally subjective over a proposition, he can be assured that the proposition is true. Kierkegaard seems to suggest that maximal subjectivity is sufficient not only for immanent truth, but eventually also for revelatory truth. Revelatory knowledge will come in the form of the individual realizing that the absolute paradox is the truth. In any event, Kierkegaard assures us that unless an individual is searching for it, he will not recognize it when it appears to him. But if he is properly searching, sooner or later God will reveal it to him.¹³⁰

It is at this point however, that the Metaphysical Model of subjectivity becomes somewhat enigmatic. This arises due to the variance in Kierkegaard's understanding and subsequent application of the terms "knowledge" and "conviction". To the author, the former refers to something that is self-evident or axiomatic, in short, something which does not require much contemplation for its comprehension. The latter, on the other hand, refers to that which is self-authenticating. For example, Kierkegaard tells us, in order to acquire the conviction that one is free, the individual need only imbue the possibility with sufficient introspection (the implication being that, if an individual does not have this conviction, it follows that he/she has not introspected sufficiently). It is precisely here that the question poses itself, namely how do we distinguish between these two states of mind? How do I know when I know, as opposed to simply being in a state of absolute belief? Is it not perhaps conceivable that self-authentication is possible for both cases? At this point, it may be ventured that Kierkegaard suggests that both types of propositions, namely immanent and revelatory, can be known through subjectivity to be true. The only difference being, that revelatory propositions necessitate both a higher degree of subjectivity and grace for their acquisition. We find evidence for this proposal in a passage written in his *Papers* some years after the completion of the *Postscript*.

"In all of what people commonly say about Johannes Climacus being mere subjectivity, etc., it is quite overlooked that, besides all that testifies in any case to his being real-life figure, in one of the last sections he points out that the remarkable thing is that there is a 'how' with the characteristic that when it is precisely stated, the 'what' is also given, that this is the 'how' of faith. Here inwardness, at its very maximum, proves to be objectivity again, after all. And that is a twist to the subjectivity principle which to my knowledge has never been performed or accomplished in this way before.(49 X 2 A 299)"¹³¹

¹³⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 566-568

¹³¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. 1996. p. 449-450

The third model, the “necessary-condition model”, as elucidated by Pojman(1984), withholds judgement on the proposition that subjective passion is sufficient for eternal truth. It also states however, that if the truth is attainable, it is only attainable through subjectivity and not objectivity. There is, according to this model, a possibility of reaching some truths such as that of God’s existence and that of immortality through the practice of subjectivity, but there are no guarantees of this. The problem lies in the notion of sin. If this is taken seriously, and all mortals do indeed exist in a state of sin, then it follows from this that we are all infinitely far from eternal truth. There are two main consequences to this point. The first is that it is possible that, through the practice of subjectivity, an individual is able catch a glimpse of some metaphysical truth such as the knowledge of the existence of God, but that the attainment of absolute, eternal truth is unlikely. Another facet of the first point is that, the practice of subjectivity may lead the subject to a metaphysical truth, it will not necessarily be so. The second consequence is quite devastating, namely the implication that perhaps Kierkegaard does not believe that we are, as mortals, ever meant to reach eternal truth. The attainment of that final, eternal truth is not that important, however what is important is one’s quality of life, the living within one’s light. Therefore, according to this model, Kierkegaard does not consider the acquisition of eternal truth a vital goal for the individual. Rather it is the striving, the pursuit, the way of life that is important, not the result. He/she who strives, the sensitive, respectful soul is incidentally more likely to hold more true beliefs, and perhaps even knowledge in matters of significance than the uninvolved objectivist.¹³²

The emphasis here is clearly not on knowledge, particularly not knowledge of an eternal nature, but rather on subjectivity. Having said that, we return to Kierkegaard’s parable of the pagan worshipper, who, being in a state of maximal subjectivity, is “in truth”, but who is also worshipping a false god. Apparently, by this parable, Kierkegaard wants to say that subjectivity by itself is not sufficient for knowledge or true belief.

The issue is however, far from decided. In other passages and works Kierkegaard seems to suggest otherwise. He often states elsewhere that there may only be a time lag between maximal subjectivity and the comprehension of true belief or knowledge. In *Fragments* Kierkegaard suggests that those who lived within their lights during their lifetime will be given the good news after death and allowed to make a choice.¹³³

¹³² Pojman, L. *The Logic of Subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion*. 1984. p. 70-71

¹³³ Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 57-58

Thus, the third model of subjectivity's relation to truth, where subjectivity is deemed necessary, but not sufficient for the acquisition of truth, seems to be contested. The general impression one gets from reading Kierkegaard, particularly in *Fragments*, is that his claimed connection between subjectivity and the truth runs much deeper than is suggested by the above model.

The problem we are faced with concerning these three models is that they are incompatible. Subjectivity is, or is not, a necessary condition for eternal truth; it is, or is not, a sufficient condition for such truth. This seems contrary to the usually rigorous logic of which Kierkegaard is a master. The only viable explanation is that he wasn't particularly interested in the logical connections. If confronted, Kierkegaard might have replied that all three models were mere possibilities and that he was not positing any specific model as his hypothesis. Kierkegaard's real concern it seems, was to emphasize the value and importance of subjectivity.

This was done in the face of the dominant speculative philosophies of the time, the rationalism of Kant and particularly the idealism of Hegel. Both suggested to a greater or lesser extent that the truly rational person has in some sense got to ignore his/her personal interests and emotions. For Kant, ethical duties are free because they exist as laws which the individual person issues to him/herself as a rational being. Therefore, the individual increases his/her freedom insofar as what he/she reduplicates or internalizes is that which is universally human, and to some extent ignores his/her particularity. Hegel's philosophy follows a similar line. According to him, the will of the individual with its desires and propensities does not achieve its fullest freedom until it "invests this material with abstract universality". Since the absolutely universal is the rational, the universalized will is the more rational will. For Hegel then, a truly autonomous or free individual must subject the desires and inclinations to a process of rationalization, a process which will determine whether they are approved from a universally human standpoint. This process naturally requires that the individual human being distance him/herself from those particularities which only estrange him/her from that which is rational and universal.

Kierkegaard saw the message conveyed by these two great intellectuals (but with particular emphasis on Hegel, Kant did after all, endeavour to deny knowledge in order to create room for faith) as nothing short of an abomination of the individual spirit. Kant and Hegel's bold statement that the individual must sacrifice all inwardness, passions, inclinations and opinions in order to attain approval by measure of that which is rational, universal and by necessity, devoid of all particularities, is to Kierkegaard, absurd. Hegel's exhortation in particular, disturbed Kierkegaard, because of its stress on conformity. For an individual to distance him/herself from all inwardness, for the sole purpose of conforming to that which is

“universally human”, was to Kierkegaard’s mind, the utter loss of individuality and nothing short of outright slavery.

“One would suppose that such a misrelation would be an impossibility in thinking; one would suppose that it would belong only to the wretchedness of the external world, where one human being slaves for the other, so that one cannot admire the lace without tears if one thinks of the lacemaker. One would believe that a thinker would lead the richest human life.”¹³⁴

2.9 Conclusion

The slavery of which Kierkegaard speaks here is not simply a reference to the concept of the thoughts of one individual controlling that of another. He also uses it as connotation to an internal slavery to universalistic rationality. I am of the opinion that not only was Kierkegaard fully justified in expressing concern for this issue but, his fear is perhaps even more relevant today than it was when he expressed it. Science, reason and rationality are the new “eternal” standards by which Western culture measures virtually all facets of life. Science, which has its foundation in the principles of reason, is indeed to many, the new god. The sanctity of human life itself has yielded to Reason’s disintegrating, objectifying gaze. For example, an individual can justifiably be labelled “insane” and imprisoned against his/her will, for an indiscriminate period of time, if his/her behaviour does not conform to the mandates of reason. The judiciary system and the laws pertaining thereto, also have as their basis, reason. If a court of law can prove that an individual has not acted in accordance with the law, which itself is deemed reasonable and just, that individual will be justifiably punished by society. I do not hereby wish to negate the existence of all psychiatric and legal systems, nor claim that all mentally ill patients are wrongly diagnosed or that all criminals are unfairly punished. Nor do I profess that reason is a wholly undesirable and useless conception, without which the world would be a better place.

This brings us to an important point. When Johannes Climacus wrote the famous phrase “Truth is subjectivity”, he did not do so in an attempt to deny the role of scientific objectivity within the realm created by knowledge of the natural world. Instead, he wished to emphasize the point that it is incapable of providing answers to the endless human search for meaning and value. Moreover, “Truth is subjectivity” was never intended to exclusively justify life in terms of sheer feeling or extravagant romanticism. For Kierkegaard, true subjectivity, or if you will, authentic selfhood, is established by decisions and commitments, by the chosen existence of the authentic self. In this respect, the truth or

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 303

authenticity of the self is dependant on the extent to which that which is chosen can be lived and is lived with infinite consideration and without self-deception. As Berry(1995) argues, this radical self-choice of oneself as the existing individual locates the chooser in a subject-positionality which Climacus calls truth.¹³⁵ This truth in subjectivity does not constitute a flight to the quixotic, but rather refers to a venture into the uncertainty of what Climacus calls the “chasmic abyss”¹³⁶. All I wish to illustrate, like Kierkegaard, is reason’s overpowering dominance in many spheres of our life, and how, because of this fact, too many people, to their detriment, uphold science as “truth” and thereby relegate subjectivity to a position of secondary importance.

Anxiety cannot be objectified or appropriated by reason. Certainly the practice of latter-day psychology attempts to do so, but all that it can really achieve is a description of the numerous symptoms associated with the experience of anxiety. Of anxiety itself, psychology can provide only a prosaic explanation.

“The concept of anxiety is almost never treated in psychology. Therefore, I must point out that it is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility.”¹³⁷

In this chapter I have attempted to show that although anxiety certainly does have its place in the spheres of psychology and theology, it is in actuality only appropriately rendered through an understanding of subjectivity. Just as anxiety can be described as a limit case of fear, to my mind it is also an extreme form of inwardness, of subjectivity. In simple terms, we can say that anxiety is an exercise in isolation. No one can experience our anxiety with or for us, and there is no such thing as anxiety *en masse*. When perceived in this manner it would be absurd to attempt to objectify or conceptualise the individual’s experience of anxiety. It is exclusively experienced through inwardness and therefore can only be properly understood through subjectivity. Hence, the appropriate comportment towards Kierkegaard’s portrayal of anxiety first requires an understanding of subjectivity and an appreciation of its significance.

¹³⁵ Berry, W.W. **Kierkegaard and Feminism. Apologetic, Repetition and Dialogue.** In Matušík, M. & Westphal, M. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. 1995. p. 118-119

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 423

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 42

3. THE AESTHETIC SPHERE OF EXISTENCE

3.1 Introduction

Upon first glance, it may not immediately be clear exactly what relevance Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence has with Vigilius Haufniensis' conception of anxiety. Moreover, Kierkegaard himself never suggested that any one facet of his philosophy, particularly that written under pseudonymous authorship, had any bearing whatsoever upon any other facet. To an extent, this predilection is valid, especially when considering Kierkegaard's theory of the aesthetic sphere of existence and his conception of anxiety. Both are, in effect, complete theories in their own right and by implication therefore, independent of the other. However, in another important sense, I believe that the aesthetic sphere is enormously consequential to the proper understanding of the concept of anxiety.

In various parts, *The Concept of Anxiety*, with its myriad of convoluted, and sometimes even perplexing theories and descriptions, could be accused of being somewhat hypothetical, or perhaps even abstract. It is in Kierkegaard's various discussions of the aesthetic sphere, particularly in works such as *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*, that the reader is likely to find a more applied, and to my mind, more illuminating description of the various effects of, and responses to, anxiety. The lengthy and ornate psychological descriptions of the various archetypes of the aesthetic sphere, while primarily delineating the specific characteristics of that aspect of human existence, not only provide numerous examples of the ceaseless human struggle with the experience of anxiety, but also the crucial significance of the appropriate understanding of it.

3.2 The Concept of the Aesthetic

In terms of contemporary language, aesthetics generally refers to an academic discipline, or field of study involving the appreciation, criticism and philosophy of art and/or beauty. Hence, the term "aesthetic" is a conceptual adjective, used most commonly in conjunction with the afore-mentioned art and beauty, but also sometimes even with that which is positively non-beautiful.

This however, is a relatively recent linguistic development. The term "aesthetic" was not used in this fashion until midway through the eighteenth century by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten. Prior to this evolution, the word "aesthetic" was used in accordance with its original Greek meaning (aisthetikos), signifying sense-perception and feeling. It is the claim of certain scholars, such as

Liehu(1990), with which I am in agreement, that this linguistic development came about chiefly through the work of three highly influential intellectuals, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Throughout the nineteenth century, each of these figures set about criticizing the domain of aesthetics, the concept of the aesthetic and aesthetic reflection on art, and all three utilized the term in its original guise. Hegel claimed that “aesthetic” consideration of art was based on an error, due to the presupposition that art was limited to objects of sense perception. Nietzsche’s criticism is based on his emphasis of the active role of the artist and the passive role of the spectator. With this in mind, he considered the consideration of art from the standpoint of the passive observer to be deficient. However, it was Kierkegaard, who brought about the most radical change to the concept of the aesthetic. Undoubtedly one of the most famous and influential facets of his work, in this respect, is his theory of stages. In this, he grapples and attempts to come to terms with the seemingly infinite realm of human experience. Much of Kierkegaard’s philosophy stemmed from careful and surprisingly precise self-reflection, and nowhere is this more apparent than in his theory of stages. By a process of reliving and re-experiencing different (although certainly not all) facets of human life, Kierkegaard tried by way of logical and consistent reasoning to find coherence in what seemed random at best, and utterly chaotic at worst. According to Kierkegaard, the goal of the individual, in respect of the theory of stages, is the becoming of an authentic self. The three different stages; the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious, are descriptions of the different attitudes taken towards this task. In addition, they describe the different stages in the development of consciousness or growth of spirit, and the accompanying different levels of authenticity. It is important that one not view the evolution of spirit as an unambiguous “ladder-like” progression. It would perhaps be more accurate to speak metaphorically of a steady curve-like ascension, however, even this is not altogether satisfactory since the transition from one stage to another, always requires “a leap of faith” and there never exists a direct “link” between one stage and any other. Kierkegaard’s theory of stages is an ideal though-experiment, and expressly not a theory of evolution like that of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. The three different stages merely represent different spheres of possibilities of viewing existence. There exists no causal relationship between any of them.¹³⁸

Therefore, it is worth noting here, that at no time did Kierkegaard strive to impute a set of rules or laws governing human existence. Considering his ceaseless criticism of Hegel’s lofty creation of the System, it would be contradictory in the extreme to envision Kierkegaard as attempt something even vaguely similar. This opinion is not shared by all scholars of Kierkegaard, as is evidenced by the writings of Gregor Malantschuk. In his work, *Kierkegaard’s Way to the Truth*, Malantschuk writes:

¹³⁸ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 63

“He finally comes to believe that he has succeeded in finding the laws and directions along which man’s existence moves. He encompasses this total view of human life in his theory of the stages.”¹³⁹

It is the opinion of the author that Kierkegaard carefully avoided the postulation of laws and encompassing views of any kind, not to speak of those regarding human behaviour, throughout the entire corpus of his work. Instead of trying to determine the laws governing human behaviour or circumventing the scope of human experience, I believe that Kierkegaard was more interested in exploring the different movements of spirit. Malantschuk is entirely correct when alluding to the richness of psychological insights in Kierkegaard’s work, however, I do not believe that he was attempting by way of these to formulate any assemblage of codes that would constitute a so-called “total view of human life”.

This matter notwithstanding, the theory of stages is exemplary due to the original and incisive manner in which in which it presents the problem of the individual as existential being. The theory of stages serves both as an historical cloak for the view of the individual as a synthesis, and a confirmation of its validity. It incorporates a reflection on the different possibilities open to the individual based entirely upon his/her choosing. Briefly put, the theory of stages postulates the following positions as being open to the choice of the individual. In accordance with the aesthetic sphere, he/she may choose to live exclusively in the material, temporal world. The individual may seek the Eternal, or may accept the Eternal upon encountering it, and in either event he/she may attempt to relate the two components of the synthesis. This constitutes the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage. In the final stage, the religious sphere, there always exists the dangerous possibility that the individual will know about the Eternal, but that this knowledge holds no subsequent significance for his/her existence. The said individual will then live in despair over the disrelationship between the two components of the synthesis.¹⁴⁰

It is here that we find Kierkegaard’s treatment of the term “aesthetic”. The theory of stages deals basically with three hierarchical stages. The lowest stage earns itself the appellative “aesthetic”, in reference to “sensation” or “sensual”. This stage of existence represents a perpetual search for exciting and, by implication, novel sensory experiences, an immersion in passions and calenture.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth*. 1963. p. 19

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 21-22

¹⁴¹ Collins, J. *The Mind of Kierkegaard*. 1983. p. 44

The aesthetic stage represents one of three of Kierkegaard's major targets for criticism during his lifetime. The other two being Idealism and later, Christendom. His thorough and highly critical treatment of what he calls the aesthetic existence can justifiably be aligned with a criticism of Romanticism as a whole. Kierkegaard, like Hegel, condemned the superficial intellectuality and aestheticism (in reference to the emphasis on that which is sensual or sensation) of Romanticism. As contraposition to the frivolity of Romanticism Kierkegaard posited a sentiment of seriousness, but this aspect will be discussed more thoroughly later. It is ironic, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, that although he shared this criticism of Romanticism with Hegel, Kierkegaard's critique of Romanticism later turned into a more vehement remonstrance of Hegel's system itself. Finally, as Liehu reminds us, it is worth bearing in mind, that although Kierkegaard regarded the term "aesthetic" in conjunction with art, he, like Nietzsche and Hegel, used it in its original Greek meaning. This is particularly pertinent when considering the immediateness, momentariness and hedonism of the aesthetic sphere of existence.¹⁴²

3.3 The Three Spheres of Existence

The stages of existence form an ascending scale, and as befits the enormity of their purpose, each stage can be divided into different possible sub-levels. As representation for these different sub-levels and in accordance with the principles behind his use of pseudonyms, Kierkegaard introduces quite remarkable characters into his writing. The reader encounters philistines, pagans, seducers, genuises, speculants and even demoniacs. The resplendent nature of the different archetypes, which are mostly to be found within the pages of *Either/Or* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, constitute a fine example of Kierkegaard's own manner of examining human nature from a myriad of perspectives. The use of the varied personae also allows him the freedom to work from all-important psychological, theological and philosophical perspectives, without his examination being restricted by exclusivity. The classification of these different aesthetic persons follows the same basic principle as that of Kierkegaard's corpus, which in its own right can broadly be divided into the aesthetic, theological and psychological works.

In general, in Kierkegaard scholarship, the aesthetic sphere of existence is perceived and subsequently examined as one totality. Those who adhere to this way of thinking usually choose one aesthetic personality such as Don Juan or Johannes the Seducer as representative of the aesthetic sphere as a whole, and consequently, base much of the ensuing discussion on an examination of that particular character. Although this practice cannot be considered flawed, it does, to my mind, limit the discussion of the

¹⁴² Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 63

aesthetic sphere as a whole. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be following the same procedure of investigation as put forth by Liehu, in that the analysis of the aesthetic sphere will be divided into two parts. This particular course of action was followed in order to achieve two things: firstly, to emphasize Kierkegaard's view of man as a synthesis, which in my opinion is an essential component to the discussion; and secondly, to illuminate Kierkegaard's view of the aesthetic person from as many varied angles as possible.¹⁴³

Before we investigate the different guises under which the aesthetic person might reveal him/herself, let us examine the basic disposition of the aesthete. According to Kierkegaard, the aesthetic individual chooses not to endeavour in the objective of becoming an authentic self. The aesthete neither recognizes nor chooses him/herself as a synthesis, and particularly not as a synthesis constituted by God. According to Taylor(1975), he/she denies his/her being a "theological self" and flees the whole question by immersion in a world of superficial pleasure and hedonic indulgence. If, however, the issue at hand forces itself upon his/her consciousness, the aesthete will attempt to smother it by means of irony or melancholy, which is a course of action easily enough undertaken.¹⁴⁴

"Such things cause little stir in the world; for in the world a self is what one least asks after, and the thing it is most dangerous of all to show signs of having. The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. is bound to be noticed."¹⁴⁵

As has already been established, Kierkegaard considers the purpose of each of the different stages to be the achievement of authenticity in selfhood. The becoming of an authentic self therefore entails achieving a poised relation between the opposing components of the synthesis. Kierkegaard derived his understanding of man as a synthesis from Christianity. It is highly unlikely that this view of humankind is limited to Christianity exclusively, but Christianity was one of the first systems of belief to clearly express the conviction that man is both flesh and spirit, the temporal and eternal, which are two antithetical qualities.

Here we come to a point of vital significance in Kierkegaard's view of humankind as a synthesis, as pointed out by Malantschuk One of the elements of the synthesis is of greater import than the other.

¹⁴³ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 64

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p.131-133

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 62-63

Briefly stated, the eternal is of greater value than the temporal.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, for the attainment of a correct relation between the two elements, it follows that the eternal must be dominant, and the temporal, subordinate. The eternal categories must be in dominance at the expense of the limiting ones. Hence, we can summarize that the onus for the achievement of this correct relation rests solely upon the shoulders of the individual, since it is only the individual who is in a position to choose him/herself.

3.4 The Aesthete

This brings into question the nature of selfhood in the aesthetic man, a question which can best be answered by examining the differences between the aesthetic state of mind and that of the individual in the ethical and finally, religious sphere. The religious individual, whom Kierkegaard considers the most authentic type of individual, not only chooses him/herself as a synthesis before God, but also, upon becoming conscious of the category of the eternal in him/her, gives the expanding categories the dominant position in the synthesis which is him/herself. Like the religious human being, the ethical individual also chooses him/herself, but not yet “before God”. Here we see the distinction: the ethical self is a human self, not a theological self as is the case with the religious individual. The aesthetic self, on the other hand, fails to even recognize that he/she is a synthesis. It follows therefore, that the said individual is unable to choose him/herself as a synthesis. There exists no consciousness in the aesthetic person of him/herself as spirit. Nowhere is the incongruence of the aesthetic individual’s position more apparent than when it becomes clear that one of the components of the synthesis is being in such an inordinate position that the aesthete fails to see his/her own nature as a synthesis. As a direct result of this failing, the aesthetic self is excessively dominated by one of two categories, finitude or infinitude, necessity or possibility and body or soul. The aesthetic self is therefore a disproportionate synthesis and it is upon this basis that this discussion of the aesthetic stage can be divided into two major sub-categories. As pointed out by Taylor(1975), if the case is that the individual is dominated by the “limiting” categories like finitude and necessity, we shall speak of “immediate aestheticism”, the most base form of aesthetic awareness. On the other hand, if the “expanding” categories, such as possibility and infinitude find dominance, then we are dealing with “reflective aestheticism”.¹⁴⁷

While to speak of an aesthetic consciousness that is dominated by the limiting categories sounds altogether logical, the idea of an aesthetic consciousness that is excessively dominated by the expanding

¹⁴⁶ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth*. 1963. p.21

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 130

categories is a more complicated issue. Earlier it was established that, as Kierkegaard himself stressed, the expanding categories should dominate in the synthesis in order for the individual to become an authentic self. How then does this equate to an individual who, in his synthesis, allows for dominance of the expanding categories, and yet remains an aesthete?

To answer this we must turn once again to Kierkegaard's perception of the human individual as a synthesis. It is precisely the word "synthesis" upon which we must focus our attention. By "synthesis", it is indicated that there are at least two or more opposing elements, which have been consolidated. With the human being, we already know that this entails the elements of the temporal and those of the eternal. If however, the individual immerses him/herself in one of these elements *exclusively*, then one can no longer speak of a synthesis at all. It is true that for an individual to achieve authenticity in selfhood he/she must choose the expanding categories to have dominance over those that are limiting, but this does not suggest that the individual should expel the limiting categories altogether. At the religious stage, for example, the dominance of the expanding categories does not translate into their exclusive existence. Rather, it is the individual's consciousness of him/herself as an infinite and eternal selfhood precisely because of his/her nature as a synthesis. It is essential for the achievement of an authentic self that the individual always remain a synthesis. In the case of the reflective aesthete, this is not the case, and hence, the label of "aesthete".¹⁴⁸

3.5 Sensual Immediacy

We shall take as our starting-point what Kierkegaard considers to be the lowest stage of aesthetic existence, where there is the least developed form of human consciousness, namely the stage of sensual immediacy. The overriding characteristic of the aesthetic sphere of existence is an existence dedicated solely to the perpetual search and enjoyment of pleasure. The reflective aesthete seeks pleasure with conscious formulation aforethought. In contrast, the life of the immediate aesthete is driven in the absence of any reflection or introspection. Due to his/her utter lack of consciousness of him/herself as an individual, outward conditions or circumstance become the governing factors in the life of the immediate aesthete. He/she surrenders him/herself wholly to his/her natural needs or desires, or to the imposition of social mores, and is unable of acquiring any semblance of responsibility for his/her own life. This is

¹⁴⁸ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p.66

carried to such an extent that eventually the immediate aesthete is incapable of distinguishing him/herself from the objects of his/her enjoyment (in the case of the erotic aesthete), or from the “crowd”.¹⁴⁹

3.5.1 The Concept of Immediacy

For Kierkegaard, immediacy’s primary meaning was in reference to close contact or involvement with the environment, i.e. the surroundings or social world.¹⁵⁰ This much is evident from the following passage:

“The *immediate* person (insofar as immediacy can occur entirely without reflection) is specifiable only as soul, his self and he himself a something included in the scope of the temporal and the worldly, in immediate continuity to ετερου [to *heteron* – the Other], and it presents only an illusory appearance of having something eternal in it. Thus the self coheres immediately with the Other – desiring, craving, enjoying, etc., yet passively; even in its craving this self is in the dative case, as the child’s ‘me’”.¹⁵¹

In addition, the concept of immediacy has significance for Kierkegaard’s exposition of the individual. Whereas for Hegel, the subject only effects authenticity when achieving unity with its environment and community and reflecting itself from it, for Kierkegaard the human being becomes authentic by distinguishing him/herself from his/her surroundings and his/her community as an individual human being. It is this individual who, isolated in his inwardness by him/herself, makes the decisions that affect his/her life. In opposition to Hegel’s postulation that a concrete identity of consciousness arises from the individual’s internal relation with otherness, for Kierkegaard, it arises from a difference from and opposition to otherness.¹⁵²

As already mentioned, I shall begin my investigation of the aesthetic sphere of existence at what Kierkegaard considered to be the lowest form of human consciousness: the sensuous version of immediate aestheticism. The aesthete falling into the category of immediate sensuousness is an erotic feral creature, animated entirely by his desires and lusts, whose life is dedicated to the perpetual hunt for “bodily” enjoyments and sensual pleasures, as well as a variety thereof. Here, as with most of the characters, Kierkegaard’s choice of the paradigm case provides the reader with a good sounding board for

¹⁴⁹ Collins, J. *The Mind of Kierkegaard*. 1983. p. 55

¹⁵⁰ Cross, A. **Neither either nor or: The perils of reflexive irony**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 136

¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 81-82

¹⁵² Taylor, M.C. *Journeys to Selfhood. Hegel & Kierkegaard*. 1980. p. 57

a description of this stage of consciousness. The protagonist of the sensuous immediate aesthete is the mythical Don Juan who, according to myth, seduced one thousand and three women in Spain alone. Kierkegaard's description of him places him squarely in the sensuous category of the immediate aesthete.¹⁵³

“So Don Juan is, dare I say, flesh incarnate, or the inspiration of the flesh by the flesh's own spirit.”¹⁵⁴

Don Juan exists in what basically amounts to a permanent state of inquietude. He builds his life on his love-affairs, a procedure whereby he converts love into statistics. He is a seducer, although according to Kierkegaard he does not even possess enough consciousness to be deserving of that title. Kierkegaard prefers to label Don Juan a “deceiver”, an individual who through his blind and destructive commitment to own his drives and complete lack of commitment to any one of the thousands of women with whom he comes into contact, not only deceives the latter, but also deceives himself.¹⁵⁵

“I would therefore rather call him a deceiver, since there is always a greater ambiguity in that word. Being a seducer requires always a certain reflection and consciousness, and once this is present one may talk of cunning and intrigues, and of wily measures. This consciousness is something Don Giovanni lacks. So he does not seduce. He desires, and this desire acts seductively. To that extent he seduces. He savours the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has savoured it he seeks a new object, and so on endlessly. So he does indeed deceive, though not in such a way that he plans his deception in advance; it is the power of sensuality itself that deceives the seduced, and it is more of a kind of Nemesis.”¹⁵⁶

Like all aesthetes, the pivotal point around which the erotic tends to center his life is pleasure. Life for the sensuous version of the immediate aesthete is fuelled by the search for, and experience of “enjoyment”. In keeping with the two separate types of aesthete, Kierkegaard distinguishes between two kinds of enjoyment. For the reflective aesthete, enjoyment is derived from the pleasure of possibilities and prior contemplation, whereas for the immediate Don Juan enjoyment is regarded as practical reality.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A kind of Poet*. 1971. p.5

¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 96

¹⁵⁵ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 69

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 104-105

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 143

3.6 The Erotic

As an illustration of the concept of erotic enjoyment in the aesthetic stage, we shall discuss an essay included in *Either/Or* entitled “The Immediate Erotic Stages”. In this piece of writing, Kierkegaard takes as his paradigm cases three characters, all three of which are found in Mozart’s operas. The essay is thus divided into three stages. The first stage is epitomized by the page in *Figaro*, the second stage by Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, and the third and final stage, by Don Juan himself. This essay sees Kierkegaard analyzing immediate aestheticism in terms of subject/object distinction.¹⁵⁸

The first stage of the erotic, that depicted by the page, begins with a description of the paradigm case. The page’s sensual desire is dreamy and romantic longing, to such an extent that every woman becomes the object of his longing, regardless of personality. The page loses himself in the intoxication of sensuality, and consequently, the subject fails to distinguish itself from its own desire, and even desire is identical with the object, too. Subject, desire and object are all caught up in the same Epicurean delirium, with the consequence that the subject is not aware of itself as separate subject and subsequently does not see the object as a distinct entity either. At this point we are reminded of Kierkegaard’s definition of immediacy in *The Sickness unto Death* discussed earlier.* For when the object of desire is everyone as a whole, it is in actuality no one, since infinitude can never serve as the object of desire since it is itself infinite.¹⁵⁹

“Although desire is at this stage not specified as such, although this presentiment of desire, as far as its object goes, is entirely undetermined, still it has one specification, that is, it is infinitely deep. Like Thor, it sucks through a horn whose other end is in the ocean, yet the reason why it cannot suck its object up into itself is not that the latter is infinite, but that this infinitude cannot be an object for it.”¹⁶⁰

The second stage of the immediate erotic is portrayed by Papageno of *The Magic Flute*. His sensual desire, Kierkegaard refers to as a seeking desire. This is distinguished from the dreamworld of the page in that the subject discovers itself as distinct from the object of desire. According to Kierkegaard, the sensual

¹⁵⁸ Dunning, S.N. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 37-38

* See page 11

¹⁵⁹ Dunning, S.N. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 38

¹⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 86

desire of Papageno can be labeled as being real desire, because now there exists a relationship between desire and its object.¹⁶¹

“... only when the object exists does the desire exist; desire and its object are twins neither of which enters the world a fraction of an instant before the other. Yet though they enter it at exactly the same moment, and not even with the time interval that can separate other twins, the importance of their coming into existence in this way is not that they are united but, on the contrary, that they are separated.”¹⁶²

For Papageno, there is more clarity between his actual desire and the object of that desire, namely the woman, than there could be for the page. Although he perceives the object of his desire as an individual woman, he does not attach any significance to her personality. As Liehu points out, here lies the incongruity inherent to Papageno’s position. His seeking desire does not have any specified object, but is still looking for it.¹⁶³

However, by far the most audacious and most disturbing representative of the sensuous version of the immediate aesthetic is Don Juan. Don Juan is the “synthesis” of the dreaming desire of the page and the seeking desire of Papageno, and Kierkegaard calls this desire “desiring desire”.¹⁶⁴ In the case of the page, the dreaming desire never finds any particular object, with Don Juan on the other hand, there are literally thousands of objects. The seeking desire of Papageno, while distinguishing between desire and object, does not find any real object among the numerous objects that captivate him, for Don Juan however, every new object is as real as the one prior to it. He lusts with the same intensity for each object. Therefore, at this point I am in agreement with Liehu, who claims that the desire of Don Juan is a synthesis of the desire of the page and that of Papageno. The page’s desire which attempts to reach infinity and the latter’s desire that seeks a specified object are united in a desire that has an infinite amount of particular objects. Don Juan’s desire is absolute, inexhaustible and above all, demonic.¹⁶⁵

Some Kierkegaardian scholars, such as Stephen N. Dunning(1985), see “The Immediate Erotic Stages” as a series of progressions toward the opposition between subject and object characteristic of the aesthetic stage. The first dialectical moment, according to Dunning, is represented by the page as an *an sich* –

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 86

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p. 89

¹⁶³ Liehu, H. *Soren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p.71

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p.105

¹⁶⁵ Liehu, H. *Soren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p.71

movement, in which desire fails to procure an object for itself. The seeking desire of Papageno on the other hand, represents the *für sich* – moment within this *an sich* – movement: desire has become volatile in the presence of so many objects. For Dunning, the dialectical *aufhebung* of these two moments is the *an-und-für-sich* – moment represented by Don Juan. The consequential finding of infinitely many particular objects, but subject remains unaware of the other as “other”. The page is filled with desire and yet desires any and every woman indifferently and interchangeably, for his desire is only a dreaming. Papageno flits from one woman to another in what is supposedly a passionate state of desire, but remains completely indifferent to the idiosyncrasies that might attract him to one woman more than another. As for Don Juan, his desire for women remains completely unrelated to them as persons. He is unable to come out of his inwardness of indifference and cannot establish an objective relation or one that can be expressed in language, but more about that later.¹⁶⁶

Don Juan is for Kierkegaard the ultimate embodiment of sensuousness. As a direct result of this fact, it precludes his engagement in “psychical love”. Don Juan is absolutely sensuous and his eroticity so steeped in immediacy that his pleasure has no time to achieve distance. For him, seeing a woman and loving her, are one and the same.

“His love is not of the soul but sensual, and sensual love is not according to its own lights faithful but absolutely faithless; it loves not one but all, that is to say, it seduces all. For it exists only in the moment, but the moment, in terms of its concept, is the sum of moments, and so we have the seducer.”¹⁶⁷

Immediate sensuality of this kind can be manifested only in continuous and repeated seduction and momentary relationships, hence, for Kierkegaard, the principle of sensuousness entails the idea of seduction.¹⁶⁸

The idea of a long – term commitment in love and Don Juan’s sensuousness constitute a ridiculous contradiction in Kierkegaard’s mind. Don Juan is absolutely sensuous and absolutely faithless. The very idea of enjoyment is based on the condition of variety, and by implication this necessitates faithlessness. As can be seen, enjoyment, by its very nature precludes the possibility of “psychical” love. Don Juan is an immediate erotic to such an extent, and his desire is so immediate and furious that, according to

¹⁶⁶ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 35-39

¹⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 100

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Kierkegaard, he is only half-human, a “force of nature”.¹⁶⁹ Made quite explicit here is Kierkegaard’s view of Don Juan as the most base of creatures. He is consumed by his desires and passions, and at the same time completely bereft of a consciousness.

3.6.1 Music as medium for the Erotic

In terms of character it is by now quite clear exactly why Don Juan was Kierkegaard’s persona of choice for representation of the sensuous version of the immediate erotic. This however, was not Kierkegaard’s sole consideration in choosing him. As has already been mentioned all three personas serving as depictions of the three different stages of the immediate erotic were taken from the operas of Mozart. The reason for this, and particularly in the case of Don Juan, is that the latter’s sensuous immediacy is, according to Kierkegaard, so immediate, that words do not have the time to express it. Language and words always imply a modicum of reflection and distance. This is not a suitable communication for the existence of Don Juan, whose immediate existence can only be adequately rendered through the immediacy of music and musical movement.¹⁷⁰

“These considerations bring us back to the main topic of this inquiry, that Don Giovanni is absolutely musical. He desires sensually, seduces with the demonic power of sensuality, he seduces all. The spoken word is no part of him, for that would straightaway make him a reflective individual. He has no substance of this kind but hurries on in perpetual vanishing, just like music, of which it is true that it is over as soon as it stops playing and only comes back into existence when it starts again.”¹⁷¹

Other forms of artistic expression such as poetry or painting are either too “mediate” or concrete for expression of Don Juan’s immediacy. Music, according to Kierkegaard, is the only suitable medium since its element is time, and therefore only by means of music will concepts central to the existence of Don Juan such as faithlessness, momentariness and immediate change find their proper expression. The existence of the immediate erotic is one steeped in temporality, and manifested only by a perpetual series of ever-newer seductions, as a line of blind moments. Here we are reminded of Kierkegaard’s description of the process of Don Juan’s desire for a woman:

¹⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 102

¹⁷⁰ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 35-37

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 107-108

“He has no time for this, for him everything is merely a matter of the moment. To catch sight of her and love her, that was one and the same.”¹⁷²

It is evident from this passage that indeed, there is no “process” of desire to speak of with Don Juan. There exist only moments. Love, or more appropriately desire, appears in the same moment that he catches sight of a woman. Kierkegaard realized the futility of attempting to express this being through language.

“Hear how he plunges into life’s diversity, how he dashes himself against its solid dam, hear these light, dancing tones of the violin, hear the beckoning of joy, hear the exultation of desire, hear the festive bliss of enjoyment; hear his wild flight; he hurries past even himself, ever faster, ever more impetuously; hear the murmur of love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the swirl of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment – hear, hear, hear, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.”¹⁷³

In addition to the reasons discussed above, Kierkegaard also chose Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* because it constituted what he considered to be a proper work of classical art. This, according to Kierkegaard, is created when the material of some specific art form is given such a shape that it can perfectly express its own idea.¹⁷⁴ A fitting example of this would be Mozart’s *Don Juan*. On the other hand, as Liehu(1990) points out, Kierkegaard claimed that a work of art of poor quality is created when an attempt is made to depict some specific idea with the use of inappropriate materials. Here, he cites Byron and Molière, who Kierkegaard claims, have failed in attempting to give the idea of the immediate erotic shape through the use of language.¹⁷⁵

3.6.2 The Mind of Don Juan

Initially, this subtitle may give the impression of being contrary to an argument offered earlier, that of Don Juan acting as a being devoid of consciousness. This, however, is not the case. Don Juan is bereft of a consciousness of himself as synthesis, in fact, he lacks the consciousness to be aware of himself as a seducer. In Kierkegaard’s own words:

¹⁷² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 101

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 108-109

¹⁷⁴ Pattison, G. **Art in an age of reflection**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 82-83

¹⁷⁵ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 77

“To be a seducer he lacks the time ahead in which to lay his plans, and the time behind in which to become conscious of his act.”¹⁷⁶

Don Juan’s immediacy is such that he has neither the time to reflect upon himself as self or on his seduced subjects as individual human beings. Furthermore, as Pattison(1998) argues, as much as Don Juan has honed his immediate existence to the status of an art, he has also become grossly incompetent at any form of inwardness. There is no manner for Don Juan to validate himself as existing being other than from mere superficialities or ecstatic moments associated with sensory pleasures.¹⁷⁷

In the existence of the immediate aesthete, the tragedy lies in the fact that necessity has gained commanding possession of the synthesis and, as a result, possibility is ousted. Sensuousness no longer manifests itself as a chosen course of action, instead it appears as inevitability, for the moment Don Juan sees a woman, his movement and her subsequent legacy in joining the ranks of the seduced, are already determined. It is clear that the immediate aesthete, by his/her very nature, does not reflect, and since reflection implies possibilities (e.g. how, whom, when to seduce?), it serves as further argument for the dominance of necessity at the expense of possibility.

Although it is true that Don Juan loves an infinite amount of women, he himself does not regard his activity as a seducer as being connected to the category of the finite, and instead concentrates on every one of his seductions as particular, momentary points.

“The only way in which Don Giovanni can become epic is by constantly finishing and constantly starting over again, for his life is the sum of mutually repellent moments that lack any coherence; his life is as moment the sum of moments, as sum of moments the moment.”¹⁷⁸

Don Juan’s actuality is the very characterization of finitude. He is capable and has talents, and uses them with such skill that, as Kierkegaard admits, he might even be called a genius, but he is devoid of self.

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 105

¹⁷⁷ Pattison, G. **Art in an age of reflection**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 83-84

¹⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 102

“Yes, what we call worldliness simply consists of such people who, if one may so express it, pawn themselves to the world. They use their abilities, amass wealth, carry out worldly enterprises, make prudent calculations, etc., and perhaps are mentioned in history, but they are not themselves. In a spiritual sense they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self for God – however selfish they are otherwise.”¹⁷⁹

We have already discussed the point that music is the only artistic medium suitable for the expression of immediacy, its fundamental element being time, which in turn provides the sensuous momentariness in the shape of sounds. Kierkegaard himself even remarks that Mozart was fortunate to have found a subject for his opera that was so absolutely musical. Indeed, Kierkegaard, who had great admiration for the music of Mozart, goes as far as to express his conviction that any other composer who wished to compete with the opera of Don Giovanni, he would be left with no other choice than using exactly the same subject, namely Don Juan.¹⁸⁰

“ ... it is a piece of good fortune that what in a deeper sense is perhaps the only true musical subject was granted – to Mozart.”¹⁸¹

Just like its medium, music, the immediate aesthete exists in a succession of instants, and not in “historical” time, and again like music, which cannot express the “historical” within time. Although he never makes it explicit, it is the opinion of some Kierkegaard scholars, such as Liehu(1990), with which I am in agreement, that the category of temporality does not equate, but roughly corresponds to that of finitude. Kierkegaard himself admits that an individual ruled by the category of finitude is fully capable of functioning in temporal society, in fact, he may very well thrive in it.¹⁸²

Yet there remains one facet of Don Juan, which has not been discussed. This aspect is his corporeality as opposed to the category of soul in Kierkegaard’s dualistic view of man. As is already known, according to Kierkegaard, the category of soul is of higher value than the category of the body in the synthesis, which constitutes the human individual. The category of the soul should therefore dominate the dualistic relation. The synthesis of soul and body is what Kierkegaard calls “spirit”. “Spirit” can be deemed the opposite of sensuality, since sensuality is an aspect in the less valuable component of the synthesis,

¹⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 65

¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 135

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 62

¹⁸² Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 79

namely the body. Sensuality is clearly associated with the physiological and corporeal in Kierkegaard. It is evident therefore, that this is yet another dominant aspect in the life of Don Juan. For an individual who steep himself solely in the realm of sensuality, the body acts not only as the vehicle by which he experiences pleasure, but also as the gauge by which he judges the degree of that pleasure. In short, there is no Don Juan without the corporeal. This is an important point, for it illustrates the extent to which Don Juan is finitude, and the corresponding paucity of infinitude in this character.¹⁸³

3.7 Other Aesthetic Paradigms

In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus illustrates the different states of disequilibrium in the individual's structure as a synthesis, by presenting six rather colourful paradigms as examples of the dominance of the limiting categories. These figures he calls the "genius", "philistine", "fatalist", "worldly man", and "speculant". None of these paradigm cases are intended to be viewed as specific psychological profiles on different personality types, rather they represent ideal figures which represent some characteristic traits of aestheticism. In keeping with this fact, they all have some common characteristics. For the purposes of a more thorough investigation of the qualities of the aesthetic stage of existence, these archetypes warrant further examination.

3.7.1 The Philistine

At first glance the existence of the character that Anti-Climacus labels as the philistine appears to be in total opposition to that of the character of Don Juan. This however, proves to be a false assumption. The philistine is portrayed as a bourgeois citizen who outwardly leads a life of rigidity and formality, which is seemingly in contrast to that of the disorderly Don Juan. His existence is fixed into a social matrix and ruled by the accompanying social mores and protocol. In reality however, the philistine is just as much a prisoner of necessity and finitude as the mythical Don Juan. His life is utterly pallid and devoid of vivacity and imagination. The existence he leads is one of mechanical monotony, a perpetual drudgery of predetermined movements and actions all of which signify nothing, and whose only purpose is to numb the philistine to the onslaught of possibility and the imagination. Kierkegaard considers the philistine to be the embodiment of spiritlessness (cf. Chapter 4.10).¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 140-141

¹⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 71-72

“Philistinism tranquilizes itself in the trivial, in despair as much when things go well as when things go badly... For the Philistine thinks he is in control of possibility, has lured this tremendous elasticity into the snare, or madhouse, of probabilities, thinks he holds it prisoner. He carries possibility about captive in the cage of probability, shows it off, fancies himself to be the master, does not see that in the very act of doing so he has made himself captive as a slave to spiritlessness and is the meanest of all.”¹⁸⁵

For all of this, the philistine does represent a slightly higher level of consciousness than Don Juan. Unlike the latter, the former acknowledges the actuality of possibility. This however, is as far as the philistine’s consciousness of possibility goes. In actual fact, possibility terrifies him, it threatens his safe haven of necessity, and for this reason he wishes to “imprison” it in “the cage of the probable”, and thereby control it and relegate that which is possible to that which is merely probable. Both the philistine and Don Juan therefore, although outwardly divergent, are in fact trapped in the realm of finitude.¹⁸⁶

3.7.2 The Worldly Man

The worldly man has been likened to the bourgeois stage of aestheticism. Like the afore-mentioned Don Juan and the philistine, the worldly man’s existence is also characterized by entrapment in finitude. Not only is his existence characterized by finitude, but the worldly man’s life is dictated by finitude. This, according to Kierkegaard, is one the easiest ways to live, because the worldly man is just what society deems fit for him to be. He constantly busies himself in mundane affairs, is typically cunning in the ways of the world, he is keenly aware of other people (since he is constantly measuring himself up against others), and at the same time only comfortable within the confines of the crowd. The worldly man is deficient in views that are his own. He no longer has knowledge of himself as self and now identifies himself entirely with other worldly people, from whom he constantly strives to attain praise and a sense of conditional esteem.¹⁸⁷

“But while one kind of despair steers blindly in the infinite and loses itself, another kind of despair allows itself to be, so to speak, cheated of its self by ‘the others’. By seeing the multitude of people around it, by being wise to the ways of the world, such a person forgets himself, in a divine sense forgets his own name, dares not believe in

¹⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. 1989. p. 72

¹⁸⁶ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 172

¹⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 63-64

himself, finds being himself too risky, finds it much easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, along with the crowd.”¹⁸⁸

3.7.3 The Fatalist

Whereas the philistine and the worldly man are both narrow-minded and cursory people seeking some form of validation in the crowd, the fatalist deviates from them by occupying a slightly higher level of consciousness. As has already been emphasized, the category so desperately lacking in the lives of the philistine and the worldly man, is that of possibility. In the life of the fatalist however, some determinants of spirit lie dormant, for he is slightly more conscious of his self than is the worldly man. Unlike the philistine and the worldly man, the fatalist is aware of the presence of both the categories of necessity and possibility in his life, even though he considers the possible impossible. The reason for his notion of possibility’s impossibility is that the fatalist perceives his world is being tightly bound up in finitude by necessity. Unlike the philistine who immerses himself in triviality, the fatalist sees everything as absolute necessity. As has already been discussed the synthesis can only exist as such, in other words, there must always be the two polar components for the being of a synthesis. The total dominance of one component at the expense of the other signifies the non-being of the synthesis. Even though the fatalist is conscious of the category of the possible, he feels incapable of any further engagement of possibility due to what he considers to be the all-encompassing nature of necessity. The flaw of the fatalist is therefore that of submission, submission before the dominance of necessity, even in the consciousness of possibility.¹⁸⁹

3.7.4 The Pagan

The pagan and the genius are, as paradigms, closer to the fatalist than either of the two preceding paradigm cases. Both the pagan and genius are, like the fatalist, characterized by a staunch conviction in fate, in the absolutely necessary. The pagan and, to some extent, the genius are dealt with by Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety* (cf. Chapter 4). Although Kierkegaard acknowledges that the pagan is possessed of a consciousness, he considers it to be the lowest form of consciousness. He is utterly ignorant of himself as selfhood as is illustrated by the following passage.

“He lacked the perspective for suicide, he lacked the God-relationship and the self. Suicide is inconsequential in purely pagan terms, something anyone can do if he pleases since it is nobody else’s business. If suicide were to be

¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 63-64

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 70-71

cautioned against from the pagan point of view, it would have to be in a long roundabout way that showed how it involved a breach of one's duties to others. The point about suicide, that it is a crime against God Himself, altogether escapes the pagan."¹⁹⁰

This indicates the thoughtlessness with which the pagan approached the issue of self-destruction. As with all aesthetes, the pagan is characterized by superficiality and sensuousness. He has no self before God and attempts to compensate for this lack by a blind faith in fate. Haufniensis speaks of "inexplicable tragicness of paganism".¹⁹¹ This is due to the pagan's disastrous relation to fate. He cannot come into relation with fate, because of its ambivalent nature, for one moment fate represents necessity and the next possibility. Thus, fate becomes for the pagan, his object of anxiety, his fearful attraction, his attractive fear. In order to forge a closer relation to fate, it is necessary for the pagan to become just as ambivalent in attitude towards fate, as fate is in nature. However, this does not actualize. The pagan remains convinced that his credence in fate signifies a faith in something. In truth, it represents a misplaced faith in an object of anxiety, in other words, nothing. Furthermore, the tragedy is exacerbated by the pagan's notion that his devotion to fate is akin to a spiritual devotion, in spirit, when in fact, his only relation to fate is one of anxiety.¹⁹²

This misplaced relation to fate and the ensuing tragic faith in fate precludes from the pagan consciousness the notions of sin and guilt.

"The concepts of guilt and sin in their deepest sense do not emerge in paganism. If they had emerged, paganism would have perished upon the contradiction that one became guilty by fate."¹⁹³

Kierkegaard argued that it is precisely consciousness of guilt and sin that delineates a person as a single individual. Since it has already been ascertained that the pagan has no knowledge of the concept of guilt and sin, we can thus conclude that paganism is characterized by the category of finitude. The pagan does not perceive himself as an individual, but instead, like the philistine and worldly man, sees himself as one among many, a face whose only identity is within the faceless multitudes.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. 1989. p. 77

¹⁹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 97

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p. 96-98

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 97

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 75-77

Despite its blind faith in fate and its aspect of sensuousness, the pagan is not considered as base a level of existence as, for example, the philistine. It is true that both are forms of spiritlessness, but in different manners. The difference being that while philistinism is directed away from spirit, paganism is directed towards it. It must be borne in mind that for Kierkegaard, the more conscious spiritlessness is, the more reprehensible. This idea is consistently reflected throughout the entire corpus of his work, and gains particular significance when applied to his theory of stages; the higher the level of consciousness, the greater the crime in remaining at a lower level of existence becomes. In other words, the higher the level of consciousness, the more evident the awareness of a still higher level of existence that can be attained. This results in an intensification in the experience of despair at one's present state of being and heightened anxiety at the prospect of ascending to a higher level of consciousness. To refrain from making a choice, and thereby to remain in despair according to one's own free will is "sin". Hence, the reason why Kierkegaard considers philistinism and worldliness more condemnable than paganism. Thus, as Liehu(1990) argues, the pagan, as has already been noted, exists at the lowest level of consciousness, he is not conscious enough to realize that he is spirit. The philistine and worldly man, on the other hand, are cognizant of themselves as spirit, but take conscious steps to deny the spiritual in themselves.¹⁹⁵

3.7.5 The Genius

In terms of an examination of anxiety, Kierkegaard's archetype of the genius, is certainly one of the most significant. It has been ascertained that a pagan has no knowledge of the concept of guilt, the genius, on the other hand, already knows how to feel guilty. Kierkegaard distinguishes between two kinds of genius: the immediate and the religious. Due to the fact that the genius has knowledge of the concept of guilt, he exists on a slightly higher level of consciousness than the pagan. The immediate genius is a modern illustration of the advent of anxiety in the aesthetic life. Kierkegaard defines the genius as a person in whom everything, which characterizes the ordinary man, is most vividly present. In addition to this, the genius, as opposed to the ordinary man, can see with exceptionally clear insight the most essential aspects of the historical development of mankind.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 83

¹⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 98-103

“Every time a genius is born, existence is, as it were, put to a test, because he traverses and experiences all that is past, until he catches up with himself. Therefore the knowledge the genius has of the past is entirely different from that offered in world-historical surveys.”¹⁹⁷

There is no denying therefore of the genius’ inherent talent, hence the label. However, like the worldly man, the genius applies his exceptional ability to the ends of achieving material successes and attaining the esteem of the populace. According to Kierkegaard however, the genius is incapable of achieving greatness. His argument is that all the actions of the genius are directed towards some or other purpose existing as external to himself as human being. He excels at these, as has already been established, however, at the expense of inwardness, of which he is consequentially completely lacking.¹⁹⁸

For Kierkegaard, a fitting example of the genius is Napoleon Bonaparte. While being the very embodiment of brilliance in terms of aspects such as military strategy and exemplary leadership, he was obsessed with the concepts of “fate” and “destiny” and held them up as ideas of paramount importance. The genius draws his strength from his belief in fate and is staunch in his conviction that he himself is acting by the will of fate. Therefore whether he succeeds or fails, he remains great by virtue of his faith in fate. Nevertheless, care must be taken not to overlook the fact that in this case, fate remains just as ambiguous as it was in the instance of the pagan. The genius is possessed of great talents and aptitudes, “he will accomplish astonishing things”¹⁹⁹, yet he is utterly subservient to the whims of fate as he interprets them. If he perceives fate as smiling upon him, he can conquer the world, if however, fate should turn her back on him, the genius collapses in impotence. It is evident therefore that, like the pagan, the genius’ relation to fate, is one of anxiety. At the same time that he veritably reveres these notions, he fears them also.²⁰⁰

Like the pagan, the genius has no knowledge of sin, but, as has already been mentioned, the genius already feels guilty. Ironically, the genius is afraid of “becoming guilty”, while not contemplating the possibility that he might already be guilty. The genius therefore has knowledge of the concept of guilt, but because of his lack of consciousness of himself as self, he fails to acknowledge himself as a guilty being.

¹⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 104-105

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 101

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 99

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 99-103

Therefore, even though the genius knows how to feel guilty, he has no guilt, and is therefore incapable of ascending toward a higher sphere of existence.²⁰¹

3.7.6 The Speculant

One of the most fundamental arguments of Kierkegaard's philosophy is the premise that one cannot rise to a higher level of consciousness by means of limited thought or speculation. What is required is an active decision, the making of a qualitative choice, which affects the very nature of the existence of the respective individual. The speculant is characterized by the very absence of choice. This final sub-category of the immediate aesthetic stage is the most complex of all six paradigm cases. With the archetypes prior to this, a unifying characteristic was the fact that they could all be categorized as belonging to the stage of the immediate aesthete. With the category of speculation, on the other hand, it is not possible to conclusively include it within either the category of the immediate or the reflective stage of the aesthetic sphere. Speculative elements can be found in both categories. The reason for this, as Liehu(1990) quite correctly points out, is that speculation can be seen to be at once immediate and reflective. It is undoubtedly immediate in the sense that categories such as necessity and finitude find application, and it is also reflective in the sense that infinitude is applicable too. It must be noted however, that "infinitude" as comprehended from the speculative perspective, constitutes, according to Kierkegaard, a misunderstanding. The category of speculation is therefore an irregular ensemble of both the immediate and reflective stages, for the speculant represents a dominance of the limiting categories precisely through and by means of a dominance of misconstrued expanding categories.²⁰²

"Every human being is the psycho-physical synthesis planned as spirit; this is the building, but he prefers living in the basement, that is, in the categories of sensation. Moreover, he not only prefers living in the basement – no, he loves it so much that he is indignant if anyone suggests he occupy the fine suite lying vacant for him; after all he *is* living in his own house! No, being in error is, quite un-Socratically, what people are least afraid of. One sees amazing examples of this which illustrate it on a stupendous scale. A thinker erects a huge building, a system, one that encompasses the whole of life and world history, etc. – and if one then turns attention to his personal life one discovers to one's astonishment the appalling and ludicrous fact that he himself does not live in this huge, high-vaulted palace, but in a store-house next door, or a kennel, or at most in the janitor's quarters. If one took it upon

²⁰¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 99-103

²⁰² Liehu, H. *Soren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 85

oneself to draw attention with but a single word to this contradiction, he would be insulted. For as long as he can complete the system – with the help of his error – being in error is not what he is afraid of.”²⁰³

This lengthy criticism is generally directed at the speculant as paradigm case, but it is more specifically aimed at Hegel and his rather esoteric brand of speculative philosophy. Furthermore, this passage is Kierkegaard’s reaction to a more extensive problem. Kierkegaard was highly critical of romanticism, and according to Westphal(1998), this critique was deeply influenced by Hegel. However, Kierkegaard was also opposed to Hegel’s speculative philosophy, particularly “the System”. Westphal astutely points out therefore, that Kierkegaard endeavoured to find a manner in which he could criticize both romanticism, which stressed the immediacy of emotions, as well as Hegelianism with its over-emphasis of rationality, simultaneously. All of this despite the fact that he did procure crucial inspiration from both. It is worth remembering though, that Kierkegaard’s work is only post-Romantic, in the same sense that it is post-Hegelian, in other words, both were used as objects of irony. The motivation for Kierkegaard’s scathing attack on these, seemingly contrary, intellectual movements, was that both had contributed to a distortion of the nature of Christianity. Hegelianism, by forcing it to conform to the characteristics of a logical construction, and romanticism, by transforming it into an aesthetic beautification.²⁰⁴

Kierkegaard’s weapon of choice for his concurrent attack on the superficial emotionality of romanticism and the overstated rationalism of Hegelianism, is passionate faith. Passion, at its most extreme, is contra reason because at its apex, it leads to the absurd leap into paradoxical religiousness. In the case of romanticism, passion is also in opposition, since, contrary to the emphasis on aesthetic and sensitive moods evident in romanticism, passion leads to a decision comprising the whole of man’s existence. It is interesting to note, as Westphal does, that both Hegel and Kierkegaard saw romanticism as a kind of superficial intellectuality and vacuous sentimentality, which twisted religion into a game of fantastical experiences. However, in his reaction to romanticism, Hegel goes astray, according to Kierkegaard, in that he immerses himself into abstractions at the complete expense of concrete experience. The romantic Kierkegaard, on the other hand, still views his emotive capacities with seriousness, and even endows them with special significance.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 74

²⁰⁴ Westphal, M. **Kierkegaard and Hegel**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 104-105

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

From Kierkegaard's point of view, the downfall of the romantic is much the same as that of the speculant, namely both forms of existence are, at bottom, characterized by abstraction. Both take steps to eschew making that crucial decision that will qualitatively affect their existence. The speculant does so by concealing himself in his world of abstraction, the romantic by his whimsical vacillation between moods, by means of which he hopes to elude the crucial moment of choice. The existential choice must be so passionate as to concern man with all there is to his life, it must therefore leave him neither the choice of escaping from one mood to another, nor with the choice of flight to one sole human domain as with the case of the speculant. It is absolutely vital that thought, feeling and will be in balance in man's existence. Only in this way will it possible for the existential choice to pertain in equal measure to all these domains in the individual human being. Kierkegaard states this quite unequivocally in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

"The task is not to elevate the one at the expense of the other, but the task is equality, contemporaneity, and the medium in which they are united is *existing*. By the positing of the scientific-scholarly process rather than existential contemporaneity (as task), havoc is wrought with life... And just as it is a mediocre existence when the adult cuts away all communication with childhood and is a fragmentary adult, so it is a poor existence when a thinker, who is indeed also an existing person, has given up imagination and feeling, which is just as lunatic as giving up the understanding. And yet this is what people seem to want. They oust and dismiss poetry as a surmounted element because poetry corresponds most closely to imagination. In a scientific-scholarly process, it may be all right to classify it as surmounted element, but in existence it holds true that as long as there is a human being who wants to claim a human existence, he must preserve poetry, and all his thinking must not disturb him from the enchantment of poetry but rather enhance it. It is the same with religion. Religion is not something for the childlike soul, in the sense that with the years it should be laid aside; on the other hand, wanting to do that is a childish, superstitious belief in thinking. The true is not superior to the good and the beautiful, but the true and the good and the beautiful belong essentially to every human existence and are united for an existing person not in thinking them but in existing."²⁰⁶

According to Hegel, the stage of art, which Kierkegaard alludes to by "they oust and dismiss poetry...", represents the first phase of the self-consciousness of *Geist*. For Hegel, the stage of art is a passing one, a necessary step in the attainment of absolute knowledge by the cosmic spirit.²⁰⁷ Kierkegaard opposes this view, pointing this practice out as one of speculation's specific shortcomings. According to Kierkegaard, the "higher" levels of speculation ignore the "lower" levels, forgetting the process that the latter nonetheless retain their specific roles in human existence. This practice therefore precisely neglects to

²⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 348

²⁰⁷ Westphal, M. **Kierkegaard and Hegel**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 108-109

achieve what is the very essence of the moment of Kierkegaardian choice, namely, that in order to achieve authenticity, the individual must become aware of all of his/her human aspects and accordingly make a passionate decision pertaining to all of them. This choice however, is not passionate if it only concerns itself with the level of cognition. It is within the realm of thought that the speculant immerses himself and which, ironically, instead of providing him with insight, serves as his delusion. The speculant beguiles himself with his system, and venerates it, while at the same time forgetting his concrete self. However, it is the implication that speculation carries with it that is of greatest concern to Kierkegaard. The speculant, as has already been ascertained, consigns himself to thought at the exclusion of himself as concrete self. The speculant is not a *doing* being, but rather a being relegated merely to thinking. Speculating about ideas such as goodness, beauty and truth, therefore never occurs in conjunction with the practice thereof. This is not enough, says Kierkegaard, for an individual cannot become good by mere contemplation of the abstract idea of good.²⁰⁸

*“Every movement of infinity occurs with passion, and no reflection can bring about a movement. That’s the perpetual leap in life which explains the movement, while mediation is a chimera which in Hegel is supposed to explain and besides is the only thing he has never tried to explain.”*²⁰⁹

Here is evidence of Kierkegaard’s conviction that one cannot speak of ethics in Hegel’s system, for deliberation on the ethical does not constitute an ethical existence. The individual has to make a choice concerning his existence, and this choice must be made in passion – not on the level of the ideal; for this choice has to pertain to man in his entirety, not merely to his cognition. The speculant however, does not make this choice, for he lacks the passion of which Kierkegaard speaks. For this human being is concerned only with ideas, abstractions and above all, objectivity. This, in actual fact, constitutes the death of passion, for passion can only exist within the notions of choice and subjectivity.²¹⁰

In terms of the human being as synthesis, it is clear that the synthesis of the speculant finds itself in a state of chronic disequilibrium. As pointedly stated by Liehu(1990), the speculant shares characteristics with several other aesthetic paradigms. Like the philistine, the speculant is characterized by the category of necessity; like the fatalist, the speculant places his faith in that very necessity, at the expense of possibility and individual freedom, and finally, like the pagan, the speculant fails to understand the value of the

²⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 145-150

²⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 71

²¹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 137-143

single individual.²¹¹ In contrast to Hegel, whose philosophy repeatedly lays emphasis on the sovereignty of the collective over the individual, Kierkegaard claims that, because the human being is created in the image of God, it precisely has the remarkable character that the “single individual” is higher than the “crowd” or “race”.

It has already been discussed that it is necessity that dictates the life of the speculant, but there is another category which orders his existence, namely, possibility.

“The section is titled *Actuality*; actuality is explained, but it has been forgotten that in pure thinking the whole thing is within the sphere of possibility. If someone has begun a parenthesis, but it has become so long that he himself has forgotten it, it still does not help – as soon as one reads it aloud, it becomes meaningless to have the parenthetical clause change into the principal clause.”²¹²

This passage serves as a fitting simile for the life of the speculant. In Taylor(1975) we see that while the speculant may continuously claim to be concerning himself with actuality, he forgets that indeed, he is concerning himself only with a conceptual actuality. Possibility is left in the system to substitute necessity, hence the reason why the speculant remains within the power of the limiting categories by reason of the expanding categories. As a direct result of misusing the category of possibility, the speculant remains subjugated under necessity.²¹³ Further evidence of the speculant’s bondage within the confines of necessity is in the manner in which he confuses the concepts of eternity and time. A speculative mediation of eternity and temporality results in the relegation of eternity to temporality.²¹⁴

“Since a human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the speculative happiness that a speculator can enjoy will be an illusion, because he wants to be exclusively eternal within time. Therein lies the speculator’s untruth. Higher, therefore, than that happiness is the impassioned, infinite interest in one’s personal eternal happiness. It is higher precisely because it is truer, because it definitely expresses the synthesis.”²¹⁵

According to Kierkegaard, the speculator is in error in his attempt to mediate time and eternity. Eternity and time are characterized as separate concepts and must remain distinct, as components within man’s

²¹¹ Liehu, H. *Soren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 89

²¹² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 334 - 335

²¹³ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. P. 178-180

²¹⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 53-57

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 56

synthesis, as well as the qualitative difference between temporal man and the eternal God. Therefore not only is it inherently contradictory to endeavor to reconcile the concepts of time and eternity, it also serves to undermine the very foundation of the view of man a synthesis. The speculant however, fails to heed this folly, for in the realm of concepts, the existential either/or is incomprehensible, and mediation between concepts is therefore very much conceivable.²¹⁶

“Just as the giant who wrestled with Hercules lost his strength as soon as he was lifted from the earth, so the *aut/aut* of contradiction is *eo ipso* canceled when it is lifted out of existence and taken into the eternity of abstraction.”²¹⁷

It is therefore by his ceaseless speculation that the speculant is left bound by temporality. Even if the concepts about which he speculates fall under the expanding categories, their very nature as such is degenerated under a perpetual over-emphasis of the limiting categories. This holds true for all expanding categories. For example, the speculative becoming infinite still remains piteously bound by the shackles of finitude, since the speculant is not here concerning himself with the infinite in his existence, but rather with the concept of the infinite. Mackey(1971), points out that the infinitude, which he is supposedly becoming, therefore remains forever within the distant realm of abstraction and pure thought, and bears no relevance whatsoever to the specificity of his own existence. It is in his very attempt to mediate these polar concepts that the speculant situates himself within the limiting categories.²¹⁸

“Precisely because abstract thinking is *sub specie aeterni*, it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person because of his being composed of the eternal and the temporal situated in existence.”²¹⁹

The unfortunate summation is that even if the speculant were to become aware of the nature of man as a synthesis, he would understand only in terms of concepts and not on the level of concretion, which for Kierkegaard, is where it is most essential. Here is also manifest why the speculant can be placed on the level of reflective aesthete, for he is aware of the expanding categories, even though he fails to comprehend their significance. It is this aspect of the speculant that sets him apart from all the aforementioned paradigm cases. Whereas the philistine, worldly man, fatalist, pagan and genius all found themselves firmly established within the limiting categories of necessity, temporality, finitude and

²¹⁶ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 178-183

²¹⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 305

²¹⁸ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 190-194

²¹⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 301

corporality, the speculant is not so readily classifiable. As already discussed, he can exist as either immediate or reflective aesthete. Liehu(1990) correctly states that it is specifically for this reason that the speculant is particularly horrifying to Kierkegaard. As reflective aesthete, the speculant is conscious, both of himself as synthesis, and of the possibility inherent in the expanding categories. Despite this consciousness however, he fails to understand the nature of the expanding categories, and situates himself within the limiting categories even while absorbing himself within a misconstrued idea of possibility. The danger of the speculant, according to Kierkegaard, is that he is inclined to attempt to alter Christianity or any existential truth, for that matter, itself into a form of speculation. In doing so, a truth, being removed from the level to concretion to that of abstraction, will cease to be existential.²²⁰

3.8 The Reflective Aesthete

3.8.1 The Reflective Aesthete and the Immediate Aesthete

The reflective aesthete represents a higher stage of aesthetic existence, due chiefly, to an increased level of consciousness. For this and other reasons, the reflective aesthete is not only a more complex individual, but also presents a situation of more grave concern than that of the immediate aesthete. The existence of the reflective aesthete is in many aspects the complete opposite of that of the immediate aesthete. Frequently, the former is characterized by precisely those Kierkegaardian qualities that are either lacking totally or in part from the life of the latter. Contrary to the immediate aesthete, whose existence is distinguished by a dominance of limiting categories such as finitude, necessity and temporality, the life of the reflective aesthete is found to dominated by the expanding categories such as infinitude, possibility and eternity. In the case of the latter, the limiting categories that characterize the immediate aesthete, are reduced to a minimum.²²¹

Nevertheless, both the reflective and immediate aesthete are classified as aesthetes and occupy the aesthetic sphere of existence. They must of necessity therefore share some communal characteristics. They are both syntheses in a state of severe disequilibrium, as has already been discussed. Both are inauthentic and spiritless human beings, being unable to strive towards either spirit or authenticity, due to their incapacity at choosing themselves as syntheses before God. However, the reflective aesthete is

²²⁰ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 91-92

²²¹ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 162-163

considered by Kierkegaard to exist on a higher level of consciousness than his immediate sibling since he distinguishes himself as separate from his surroundings and, more importantly, from the crowd.²²²

“There being some degree of reflection, there is also some degree of heed paid to one’s self. With this certain degree of reflection begins that act of separation in which the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and the external world and their effect upon it.”²²³

The crucial difference between the immediate and reflective aesthete therefore, is that the latter distinguishes between the possible and the necessary, the finite and the infinite, and the temporal and the eternal. This signifies the degree of progress the reflective aesthete has made in contrast to the immediate, for the achievement of authenticity can only come about through the choosing of oneself as a synthesis before God, a choice which is only possible after differentiating between oneself, other persons and the environment. This differentiation is itself indicative of the individual’s ability to separate the different components of the synthesis. The human being must acknowledge both the temporal aspect of his nature, such as is evident in his historical situatedness, as well as see the possibility of his transcending that situatedness by way of becoming eternal, by relating himself to that which is eternal, namely God. However, the shortcoming of the reflective aesthete is that while he is conscious of two components namely, the temporal and the eternal, he fails to combine these two opposing components of his essential nature in a unifying third. This inability reveals itself in the subsequent dominance of the categories of possibility and infinitude, and the accompanying subservience of the categories of necessity and finitude. The existence of the reflective aesthete, as in the case of the immediate, constitutes the absence of a synthesis and is what ultimately immures him within the confines of the aesthetic sphere.

Kierkegaard lays emphasis once again upon the quintessential importance of a synthesis by revealing how the expanding categories, when existing completely unhindered by the limiting, can mark the downfall of the individual human being. This is particularly well demonstrated within the life of the reflective aesthete, who not only establishes these categories as his preeminent principals but, is so captivated by the promise held by their possibility, that he unintentionally succumbs to them entirely.

“Thus possibility seems greater and greater to the self; more and more becomes possible because nothing becomes actual. In the end it seems as though everything were possible, but that is the very moment that the self is swallowed up in the abyss. Even a small possibility needs some time to become actual. But eventually the time that should be

²²² Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 84-85

²²³ *Ibid.* p. 85

spent on actuality gets shorter and shorter, everything becomes more and more momentary. Although possibility becomes more and more intensive, it is in possibility's sense, not actuality's; for in actuality's sense what is intensive is that at least something of what is possible becomes actual. Just when one thing seems possible some new possibility arises, and finally these phantasms succeed one another with such speed that it seems as though everything were possible, and that is the very moment the individual himself has finally become nothing but an atmospheric illusion."²²⁴

This passage is a rather dismal, yet utterly lucid portrayal of the doomed existence of the reflective aesthete. This individual eludes the task of becoming an authentic self, by flight into the realm of possibility. There he immerses himself in what he experiences as the intoxicating domain of promise. The very nature of this existence is characterized by the flighty and continuous pledge of consolation, the guarantee of that which might be, for after all, everything is possible, and should present possibilities prove unsatisfactory, it is of no consequence, for they are virtually instantaneously replaced by new possibilities. What the reflective aesthete fails to realize however, is the blatant contradiction inherent to this situation. His existence is one characterized by, and directed towards sheer possibility. However, in an existence where everything is possible, nothing becomes possible, and nowhere is this illustrated more vividly than in the evanescent existence of the reflective aesthete, where possibility expropriates actuality by its overpowering dominance. The reflective aesthete is caught up in a vicious circle of possibility superseding possibility, a process which gains momentum and before long is proceeding with such blinding swiftness that actuality becomes an impossibility, and the existence of the reflective aesthete is nothing more than a phantasm. This being perceives himself only as possibility, but possibility of the self does not constitute a self. According to Kierkegaard, the failing of the reflective aesthete is not his total deficit of actuality, it is instead, his oversight, in his preoccupation with possibility, of his self as self.²²⁵

"Nor therefore is it the misfortune of such a self not to have become anything in the world; no, the misfortune is that he did not become aware of himself, that the self he is is a quite definite something, and thus the necessary. Instead, through this self's fantastically reflecting itself in possibility, he lost himself. Even to see oneself in a mirror one must recognize oneself, for unless one does that, one does not see oneself, only a human being."²²⁶

The authenticity of selfhood cannot be achieved by mere possibility. That the self can be conceived of achieving a certain sense of being in possibility only amounts to transcendence and transcendence by

²²⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 66

²²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 66-67

²²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 67

itself is untenable, for there has to be some form temporality to transcend. The essential nature of possibility as component within the synthesis has already been emphasized, but without the counteraction of necessity, possibility becomes frivolous.

“But the mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with the utmost caution. For in this case the mirror is, in the highest sense, a false one. The fact that in the possibility of itself a self appears in such and such a guise is only a half-truth; for in the possibility of itself the self is still far from, or only half of, itself. So the question is what further specification is provided by this self’s necessity.”²²⁷

3.8.2 The forms of reflective aestheticism

Unlike his description of the immediate aesthete by way of vivid paradigm cases, Kierkegaard, or in this case Anti-Climacus, in *The Sickness unto Death*, provides the reader with no explicit forms. He does however, outline two different ways in going astray in terms of the possible. He calls these the “yearning, wishful” and the “melancholy” man. These basically describe two kinds of attitudes that may be adopted by an individual whose existence is dominated by the expanding categories.²²⁸

As illustration for the yearning or wishful type, Kierkegaard recalls the legend of the knight who catches sight of a rare and beautiful bird, barely a hand’s breadth away. He immediately sets off in pursuit of this find, but no matter how far he rides, he never catches it. Eventually, the bird, which initially seemed so close, flies off and the knight loses sight of it completely. Night falls and only then does he realize that he is separated from his companions and utterly lost in the wilderness.²²⁹

Like the knight, the wishful man is captivated by the promise of possibility. He immerses himself in possibility completely and pays no heed to his aspect of necessity as set forth by his historical facticity. Ignoring this he commits himself wholly to his hopes and possibilities and blindly sets about striving toward them. However, he never actualizes any of his possibilities, and single-mindedly entertains one possibility after another. Eventually, he not only estranges himself from his situatedness and necessity as a whole, but also loses his self from himself.

²²⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 67

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

The melancholic man, like the wishful man, is also lost from himself, in his particular case however, this has occurred for different reasons. In many ways the melancholic man resembles the wishful man, except that in the case of the former the process transpires in the opposite direction. Instead of blindly chasing after his own hopes and possibilities, the melancholiac traces his personal anguish and fears and relates to them in a state of anxiety. His is also a pursuit therefore, with the exception that it is a pursuit of the possibilities bequeathed by anxiety. In this way, the melancholiac becomes anxiety's victim. Kierkegaard states that he loves these possibilities with a "melancholy love", until he is lost to himself and has perished in exactly the manner over which he experienced anxiety.²³⁰

3.8.3 The Speculant

Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that Kierkegaard's paradigm case of the speculant was unique in that it could not exclusively be classified either within the category of immediate or the reflective aesthete. In actual fact, the speculant belongs to neither category completely and so must be discussed in terms of both. In the portion of this chapter dedicated to the examination of immediate aestheticism (cf. Chapter 3.6.6), it was ascertained that the speculant is characterized by a dominance of the expanding categories of possibility, infinitude and eternity. However, the speculant misconstrues the category of possibility, and cannot therefore use it to achieve a higher level of consciousness or spiritual growth. Thus, contrary to what one might expect, it is the speculant's utter dominance of these misunderstood expanding categories that confines him to the sphere of aestheticism. Instead of perceiving the realm of possibility in terms of individual freedom, the speculant perceives it as universal necessity, and this is precisely the manner in which he loses himself. Kierkegaard is very fond of citing the example of the speculant who erects a vast system, according to which something as immense as the great event of world history can be scrupulously explicated and examined. The system has one drawback though. In its concern for events of such eminence it shows a total disregard for all individuals, even for the creator of the system itself.

"Therefore a Hegelian cannot possibly understand himself with the aid of his philosophy; he can understand only what is past, is finished, but a person who is still living is not dead and gone. Presumably he consoles himself with the thought that if one can understand China and Persia and six thousand years of world history, then never mind a single individual, even if it is oneself."²³¹

²³⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 67

²³¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 307. note

The use of the Hegelian System as an example of the speculative existence is common in Kierkegaard's work. The system, as illustrated in the passage above, presents possibility in a form that is virtually infinite in its application. However, the defect here is a double-edged sword. Firstly, the primary effect of this "possibility" is that it is leading the speculant away from himself, in that the main assertion is being left unactualized and merely followed by endless parentheses presenting more "possibility". Secondly, the very concept of possibility as portrayed here represents nothing more than necessity itself and betrays the gross misunderstanding of the category on the part of the speculant.

Having said that however, it is the fact that the speculant is aware of the category of possibility at all that allows him the potential of ascending to the level of reflective aesthete. Here it is perhaps necessary to point out the difference between the "possibility" that distinguishes the immediate speculant from the reflective. The possibility envisaged by the former is that of a system-builder, whereas the possibility of the latter is that belonging to individual existence. In spite of the fact that the existence of the speculant is dominated by the category of possibility, this very possibility is reflected in his life as necessity. Thus, I am in agreement with Liehu(1990), who points out that while the speculant initially perceives his life as one distinguished by possibility, this endless succession of possibility eventually has the effect of displacing the self from itself, and what the speculant originally perceived as possibility is now experienced as necessity.²³²

This brings us to one of Kierkegaard's most fundamental criticisms of Hegel. Kierkegaard often referred to aspects of his own philosophy (e.g. his theory of stages) as "thought-experiments" for the purpose of maintaining that facet of his philosophy within the category of the possible. As soon as an intellectual, be he a speculant or otherwise, forces his "thought-experiment" into his own reality, he not only inundates himself within the category of the possible, but also necessarily transforms what was once possibility into limiting necessity. It is my opinion that this practice transforms philosophy into a kind of dogmatics, where the rupture of the self due to the overpowering dominance of possibility has limited the freedom of philosophy into the dictate of a decree. Kierkegaard himself said of Hegel that if he had written in the preface of his work on logic that it was all an experiment in thought, he would, according to Kierkegaard, been hailed as the greatest thinker that had ever lived.²³³

²³² Liehu, H. *Soren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 94-96

²³³ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals. A Selection*. 1996. p. 181-182

To Kierkegaard's mind, what the speculant fails to see, is that in order to be a genuinely speculative thinker an individual has to abstract him/herself from all particularity and temporality and be altered into a creature *sub specie aeterni* [vanishing of the existing subject]. The speculant however, *is* an existing subject, even though he does not see himself as such. So steeped in speculating over the expanding categories is he that he had forgotten his own facticity. As a consequence the real meaning of the expanding categories remains hidden from himself and he ironically loses himself precisely where he might have found himself.²³⁴

3.8.4 The Fantastical Man

A component of the expanding category, which can also constitute a danger if it gains dominance in the life of an individual, is infinitude. The human being whose existence is characterized by a predominance of infinitude is, according to Kierkegaard, "fantastical" and abounding in imagination.

"What feelings, understanding and will a person has depends in the last resort upon what imagination he has – how he represents himself to himself – that is, upon imagination. Imagination is the infinitizing reflection... The self is reflection and the imagination is reflection, the self's representation of itself in the form of the self's possibility. The imagination is the whole of reflection's possibility, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the self's intensity."²³⁵

The more bounteous the imagination, the greater the ease with which the fantastical individual loses himself within the fantasy world of dreams and reverie, and entertains his myriad possibilities, instead of concerning himself with the reality of his existence. As with all constituents of the synthesis, too much imagination in accordance with too much infinitude is perilous, for this causes the individual to lose contiguity with his concrete reality, eventually resulting in a breach between the individual and his self. It is difficult to lay too much emphasis on the fact that *all* human capacities, from reason to the erotic, must be utilized accordingly within the complex framework of human nature. It is expressly not held that all should exist in a state of equivalent harmony, but rather that the appropriate accentuation be placed on each. One thing however, is certain, over-emphasis of one capacity incapacitates all strivings at achieving an authentic selfhood.²³⁶

²³⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 67

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 60-61

²³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 59-60

One of the first aspects of reality that the fantastical man loses touch with is that concerned with his emotional life. As infinitude gains a greater and greater predominance over the existence of this individual, a gap begins to develop between the self and the emotions. This division becomes ever wider, until the fantastical individual all but loses all sovereignty over his emotions. As a result, the emotions become completely capricious, attaching themselves not to either the individual or any particular human being at all. The only manner in which they manifest themselves is abstractly.

“When emotion becomes fantastic in this way, the self is simply more and more volatilized and eventually becomes a kind of abstract sensitivity which inhumanly belongs to no human, but which inhumanly participates sensitively, so to speak, in the fate of some abstraction, for example, humanity *in abstracto*.”²³⁷

Another aspect in which the fantastical manifests itself is that of knowledge. This has the paradoxical effect in that the fantastical individual loses touch with reality regardless of how much knowledge he assimilates. The category of infinitude takes possession, as it were, of knowledge and alters the nature of it so that, by its abstract nature, it becomes more and more removed from the individual as self, and also serves to estrange the individual from his/herself, the more it, as knowledge, increases.

“When this does not happen, the more understanding increases, the more it becomes a kind of inhuman knowledge in the production of which man’s self is squandered, much as men were squandered in the building of the pyramids, or as men were squandered in Russian brass bands on playing just one note, neither more nor less.”²³⁸

The fantastical can also manifest itself in the will, and here the results are much the same as demonstrated in the aspects of emotion and knowledge. The more the will is dictated to by the fantastical, the less propinquity it shares with reality. Infinitization of the will represents a volatilization of the will as grounded in actuality. When the will becomes infinitized in intentions and decisions, these intentions and decisions are never actualized or made concrete. Indeed, due to their volatilization, it becomes an impossible task to carry them out in their entirety at all. The only option available to the will is to concentrate on, and actualize that small part of the decision or intention that can be executed immediately. Kierkegaard mentions that, due to the infinitization of the will, the closest the fantastical individual can come to realizing his decisions and intentions is only by actualizing that insignificantly minor aspect of them which can be actualized. This is ironic since it signifies that the closest the fantastical individual can come to the realization of his decisions is by touching upon the aspect of them that lies the furthest from

²³⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. 1989. p. 61

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

his self. Finally, if the fantastical manages to manifest itself in any of the three aspects, namely emotions, knowledge and will, the self in its entirety can be lost in fantasy.²³⁹

“And when feeling or understanding or will has become fantastic, then in the end the whole self can become that, whether in a more active form, where the person plunges headlong into the fantastic, or in a more passive form and he is carried off into it, though he is responsible in both cases. The self then leads a fantastic existence in abstract infinitization or in abstract isolation, constantly lacking its self, from which it simply gets further and further away.”²⁴⁰

As was mentioned earlier, another distinguishing characteristic of the fantastical man is an abundant imagination. Imagination, in this sense, refers not only to a capacity for conjuring up dreams and fantasy, but also to the possibility, or process of reflection. In his rigorous criticism of “pure thought” and “abstract thinking” Kierkegaard often refers to exactly this type of reflection. Reflective thought is a hazardous process for it is fuelled by its own strength, and so has the capability to continue infinitely.²⁴¹

“Reflection has the notable quality of being infinite. But being infinite must in any case mean that it cannot stop of its own accord, because in stopping itself it indeed uses itself and can be stopped only in the same way as a sickness is cured if it is itself allowed to prescribe the remedy, that is, the sickness is promoted.”²⁴²

It is precisely by way of concentrating on thought and reflecting upon existence that the imagination distances the fantastical man from his self. His thinking loses its concrete relevance and dissolves into abstractions. As Liehu(1990) quite correctly states, the fantastical man may give the impression of growth in the sense that he continuously acquires more and more knowledge, as well as improving upon his powers of logic. However, none of this knowledge constitutes self-knowledge, and in acquiring all of this, the fantastical man merely becomes a repository of knowledge, for none of his acquired knowledge bears pertinence to him as a single individual. Once again, Kierkegaard cites Hegel as an example, for while his “Method” certainly constitutes an impressive ensemble of both knowledge and logic, existentially, it accomplishes nothing of value.²⁴³

²³⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. 1989. p. 62

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 62

* See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

²⁴¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 112

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 98

“Hegel himself has staked his whole reputation on the point of the method. But a method possesses the peculiar quality that, viewed abstractly, it is nothing at all; it is a method precisely in the process of being carried out; in being carried out it is a method, and where it is not carried out, it is not a method, and if there is no other method, there is no method at all.”²⁴⁴

It is important to note the manner in which the word “infinite” is used in association with the fantastical individual. Infinite here refers not to human infinite, but rather to the infinite as allied with the system. As Kierkegaard so vividly puts it, the fantastical individual builds the palace as infinite, even though he himself resides within the dog’s kennel. Neither this kind of infinite, nor the individual’s awareness of possibility as possibility, within the confines of the system represent genuine consciousness of the components of infinite and possibility in the synthesis. In his preoccupation with the system, the fantastical man forgets his own personal possibility of becoming infinite. Ironically, neither his infinite reflection nor his powers of deduction and logic serve to touch upon his own existence, but instead only distance him from his self more and more.²⁴⁵

3.9 The Rotation Method

It has already been amply demonstrated that the reflective aesthete is more intellectual and conscious than his/her immediate confrere, and where the immediate aesthete pursues pleasures that are by nature momentary and concrete, the reflective aesthete concentrates upon possibilities, i.e. his/her enjoyment is “fantastical”. Interest is cultivated as an escape from ennui. However, due to the nature of the pleasure that the reflective aesthete pursues, he/she exposes him/herself to a danger. This hazard is boredom. The conception of boredom is discussed in the essay named “Crop Rotation” by one of Kierkegaard’s anonymous aesthetes in *Either/Or*. It is a short, seemingly light-hearted piece of writing, yet the message contained in it is grim. *Either/Or* is considered to be Kierkegaard’s major aesthetic work, as such it deals chiefly with the lives of several aesthetes as existences that center around pleasures, both base and refined. However, the inevitable problem faced by an aesthete who constantly indulges in a life of rich pleasures is that it tends to grow wearisome. The question posed in “Crop Rotation” is “Is it possible by means of shrewdness to preserve one’s joy in life?”

²⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 109. note

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 112-114

“Boredom is demonic pantheism. If we remain in it as such it becomes evil; on the other hand, as soon as it is annulled it is true. But one annuls it only by amusing oneself – *ergo* one ought to amuse oneself.”²⁴⁶

Therefore, boredom is only true for someone once it is opposed by a viewpoint that favours industry or idleness. Here, the Hegelian nature of Kierkegaard’s argument is quite clear, since to denote a concept means not only to say that each concept contains its opposite, but also in the sense that, to identify a case of boredom is somehow to simultaneously have the opposite concept of industry, or in this case, pleasure, in mind. The author of “Crop Rotation” suggests that boredom is no less than a root of all evil. He traces the state of boredom back to the very beginning of time. The proposal is that the creation of man was a result of the boredom of the gods’. Adam’s boredom brought about the creation of Eve. Then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*; then the population of the world increased and the people were bored *en masse*. Thus, boredom entered the world and increased in direct proportion to the population of the world. To distract themselves, the masses then set about building a tower high enough to reach the heavens, an idea both boring and futile. The anonymous author is here seeking to show the reader the inevitability of boredom, despite attempts to satiate it. The Rotation Method however, according to the author, offers a method by which the aesthete may continue to indulge him/herself in pleasures and still succeed in avoiding boredom. Put less tritely, by means of the Rotation Method the aesthete hopes to gain a life that is both artistic and satisfying. The goal is to ingeniously create a world of novel pleasures for oneself, or in other words, to surreptitiously alter familiar pleasures into seemingly novel ones, thereby evading the tediousness that accompanies monotony. As was evident in the case of the immediate aesthete, constant enjoyment implies by necessity, constant change. According to the reflective aesthete, the greatest possible enjoyment is not to be attained by means of changing “the soil”, that is, by desperately seeking ever novel and surprising phenomena. This method would inevitably result in boredom, for eventually, even the most spectacular sources of pleasure are bound to prove insufficient to excite the apathetic aesthete.* Since the changing of the soil is obviously not a viable option, the principle of rotation demands that the aesthete changes the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops. In other words, instead of travelling the world in search of that, as yet, unexperienced pleasure, the aesthete must take an intensive, pleasurable approach to even modest things.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 231

* The only instance for whom this would not hold true would be for Don Juan – the mythical figure and ideal embodiment of immediacy and sensuousness. We can accept that for this figure the allure of the flesh would unceasingly prove exciting.

²⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 227-229

“A prisoner in solitary confinement for life is most resourceful, a spider can cause him much amusement.”²⁴⁸

The foundation of all enjoyment, for the reflective aesthete, is self-control. It is clear that the human being is unable to control his environment, the stimuli derived therefrom, or the events, which take place within it, why, he/she is not even in control of his/her own moods. Yet, where the individual is able to exercise some modicum of control, is over the meanings of these events and moods. Correctly interpreted, each situation can produce some pleasurable significance. The alternating preservation and reanimation of the pleasurable meaning of phenomena presupposes however, that the aesthete has the ability to impel any or all of his desires to dormancy at any one time, with the notion that the following crop will yield novel and original interpretations. However, there is a price to be paid for this kind of attitude to life, one more immediate than the long-term consequences of an existence expended in the aesthetic sphere. The life of the reflective aesthete who applies the rotation method, becomes characterized by brokenness, randomness and lack of commitment. The latter aspect, in particular, becomes definitive of an aesthetic existence maintained by means of the rotation method. Whereas the immediate aesthete was incapable of long-term relationships on account of his/her own immediacy, the reflective aesthete, in accordance with the conditions of the rotation method, consciously avoids commitments of any kind. This is because, to the mind of this aesthete, commitment, with its duties, responsibilities and inevitable disappointments, only signifies a potential decrease in pleasure. In *Either/Or* the aesthetic epicurean issues especial warning against marriage, friendship and official titles; all of these representing nothing but weighty responsibility and the concurrent loss of freedom. The loss of freedom is directly due to the relegation, in the mind of the reflective aesthete, of the afore-mentioned commitments to the status of limiting categories. Since the reflective aesthete pursues an existence strictly within the realm of the expanding categories, anything that is perceived as lying within the boundaries of the limiting is deemed undesirable. In the process, the reflective aesthete completely neglects to consider that what he/she perceives purely as loss of freedom could, in actuality, be newly attained freedom. Instead, the hedonist goes to great lengths to create for him/herself an existence distinguished by contingency and arbitrariness.²⁴⁹

“The whole secret lies in arbitrariness. People think it requires no skill to be arbitrary, yet it requires deep study to succeed in being arbitrary without losing oneself in it, to derive satisfaction from it oneself. One’s enjoyment is not immediate but is something quite different which one arbitrarily injects. You see the middle of a play, read the third

²⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 233

²⁴⁹ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 9-11

part of a book. In this way one derives a quite different enjoyment from the one the author has been so good as to intend for you. One enjoys something entirely accidental, one regards the whole of existence from this standpoint, lets its reality run aground on it.”²⁵⁰

When the pleasures inevitably grow boring the aesthete clings to the pleasure principle, but can only successfully manage this by heightening and refining his appetite. Accordingly, if satisfaction is redefined as the interesting, even that which is ugly or painful may satisfy.²⁵¹ Hence the anonymous author’s suggestion to avoid both intense pleasures and pains in the Rotation Method.

If, for example, a man falls in love, he should, according to the Rotation Method, fall in love, not with a woman, but rather with the idea of a woman. Therefore, if the woman were to die, the man would be left unaffected. This example illustrates the very essence of the Rotation Method namely, that one is to remain outside of life, a spectator and manipulator. This is achieved by the aesthete’s consistent refusal to involve him/herself in life by making choices. In this manner the individual hopes to rescue freedom from necessity and fill his/her life with little surprises that will prevent him/her from being overcome by life’s tedium. Ultimately however, this is to no avail. The aesthete’s life is now composed of a veritably endless array of dazzling possibilities, however, it is completely devoid of any concrete reality.

3.10 Johannes the Seducer

As has been demonstrated, Kierkegaard makes use of numerous paradigm cases with which to allegorize the different facets of what constitutes immediate aestheticism. The same practice, albeit to a much lesser extent, is made use of in the realm of the reflective aesthete. Whereas the immediate aesthete finds its ultimate representation in the mythical figure of Don Juan, the emblem of Johannes the Seducer exemplifies the apex of reflective aestheticism.

Johannes the Seducer arises from the most famous chapter of *Either/Or*, namely that of the *Diary of the Seducer*. As the title suggests, this segment describes the life and thoughts of a predatory erotic, namely Johannes, conveyed in the form of a diary and letters. The *Diary of the Seducer* has often been regarded as one of Kierkegaard’s most significant literary achievements. Johannes the Seducer is often called “the reflective Don Juan”, because he is an intellectual version of the immediate erotic. He is a dedicated seducer, yet he knows himself to be such. For him, seduction is in the process of seducing, and not in the

²⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 239

²⁵¹ Arbaugh, G & Arbaugh, G. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 71

achievement of an end. Thus, as soon as the goal is achieved, namely the end of the seduction, the relationship is over and the process has lost its meaning. It is a mistake therefore, to presume that Johannes is a seducer of the usual kind. In actual fact, this figure represents the very idea of seduction, as he himself so boldly asserts in his speech in *In Vino Veritas*:

“I perceive that my life, too, expresses an idea, even if you do not understand me. I, too, have spied out the secret of life; I, too, serve something divine, and certainly I do not serve for nothing.”²⁵²

This short passage serves as a very incisive confession, in which Johannes not only reveals his devout commitment to who and what he is, but also his acute understanding or consciousness of the process to which he dedicates and which altogether characterizes his existence. As Mackey(1971) comments, Johannes is not *a* seducer, but rather *the* Seducer. Unlike Don Juan, there is not merely one facet (namely the actual) to the process of his seduction but two (the actual and the idea). It is this latter aspect of seduction with which Johannes primarily concerns himself. Seduction is continuously reduced to the level of possibility, where it belongs as “idea”, and emphasizes the non-existence of a state of actual love. It is important here to note the parallels which this figure shares with the speculant (cf. Chapter 3.7.3).²⁵³

The Diary of the Seducer is a graphic depiction of one process of seduction. As his object, Johannes selects a girl who happens, by chance, to be passing by. What follows is the long execution of the process of seduction. Initially, it is the girl’s green gown that attracts his attention, and from that moment, the matter is settled. Then follows a period of approximately six months featuring “accidental” meetings or passings-by in the street, an organized acquaintance of the girl’s – Cordelia’s – guardian, of a gradual infiltration, leading eventually to Cordelia’s acquaintance. Johannes even goes so far as to organize a suitor for Cordelia, for the sole purpose, as Dunning(1985) reminds us, of demonstrating to her his sensuality in juxtaposition to the relative demureness of the admirer. Eventually, amidst monotonous triviality, Johannes proposes to Cordelia and she happily accepts. Later, as the culmination of complicated dialectics, he incites her to break off the languid engagement of her own free will and at the same time offer herself up to a free love affair with him as her partner. This, of course, signifies the achievement of his goal and as such, the conclusion of the relationship and the subsequent abandonment of Cordelia.²⁵⁴

3.10.1 *The Diary of the Seducer* as autobiography

²⁵² Kierkegaard, S. *Stages on Life’s Way*. 1988. p. 78

²⁵³ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 24

²⁵⁴ Dunning, S.N. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 53-55

The Diary of the Seducer warrants particular scrutiny since it closely parallels an event in Kierkegaard's own life, that is, his courtship of Regine Olsen. He first met Regine when he was twenty-one and she only fourteen at a party given by the Rørdams'. He arrived unexpectedly, as was his custom, and was immediately captivated by Regine, to whom he spoke incessantly. There is no mention of Regine in his journal after this visit, and it is, in fact, only in *The Diary of the Seducer*, where Johannes impulsively decides to visit a family he knows, that we catch some glimpse, from Kierkegaard's perspective, of how the meeting was experienced.²⁵⁵

"It was very early spring. The sun sent a few scattered rays to herald its arrival. In the room itself everything was wintry, and the scattered rays so annunciative for that very reason. From the table came the aroma of coffee – and then there were the girls themselves, happy, healthy, blooming, and exuberant too, for their anxiety had soon been allayed, and in any case what was there to fear? They were in a way manpower enough. – I managed to draw their attention and the talk to the question of when an engagement should be broken off. While my eye diverted itself by flitting from one flower to the other in this garland of girls, entertaining itself by resting now on one beauty, now on another, my outer ear revelled in the pleasant music of the voices, and the inner ear in listening observantly to what was said. A single word was often enough for me to form a deep insight into the heart of a particular girl, and its history. How seductive, after all, is the road of love! How interesting to find out how far down it the individual has come! I continually fanned the conversation; cleverness, wit, aesthetic objectivity all helped to make the relationship between us more free, yet everything remained within the bounds of strictest decorum. As we thus joked in the free-and-easy atmosphere of conversation, there lay dormant the possibility of a single word of mine causing the good children an unfortunate embarrassment. This possibility was in my power."²⁵⁶

This rather extensive passage is highly significant, not only autobiographically, but also prophetically. The tone very acutely reflects the demeanor with which Kierkegaard began, and to a certain extent, dealt with the entire affair. From the very beginning he, like Johannes, assumed the deportment of the distant observer, the manipulator, the ironist. While her actions revealed nothing but an honesty borne out of youthful innocence, Kierkegaard, who himself had experienced direly little of youthfulness, was calculating and often beguiling. The elements of Regina's innocence, the attenuated eroticism absorbed into wit and language and parodying itself as intellectual discourse, all disclosed themselves as major ambient factors within the process of courtship. As Johannes' description might imply, Kierkegaard's initial treatment of the relationship was not so much as a courtship, but rather as a game or experiment. At

²⁵⁵ Thompson, J. *Kierkegaard. A critical biography of the philosopher who has been called the father of existentialism*. 1973. p. 101

²⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 356

the time of their meeting, Regine already had a potential suitor, Friedrich Schlegel. Kierkegaard soon befriended him and used his position of confidence to undermine him. By the time that Regine turned seventeen, Kierkegaard asked for her hand in marriage and got it. For approximately a year Kierkegaard and Regine lived the happy life of two people well on their way to becoming another bourgeois couple. After a year however, for reasons that he could never completely elucidate, he broke off the engagement. As can be expected, this distressed Regine and her family greatly, both of whom literally begged him to reconsider, yet Kierkegaard remained cold and intractable.²⁵⁷

However, even though it is clear that there are distinct parallels between the activities of Johannes the Seducer in *The Diary of the Seducer* and the courtship practices of the young Kierkegaard, we must exercise caution and not to take the correlation any further than necessary. The very day following his break-up with Regine, and throughout the remainder of his life, Kierkegaard looked upon these actions, and particularly his final decision, with much regret.

“What I have lost, alas, how could you know or understand? This is a subject on which you had better stay silent – indeed how could anyone know better than I, who had made my whole extremely reflective soul into as tasteful a frame as possible for her pure, deep – and my dark – thoughts, my melancholy dreams, my scintillating hopes – and above all, all my instability; in short, all the brilliancy alongside her depth – and when I grew dizzy gazing down into her infinite affection – for nothing is as infinite as love – or when her emotions did not descend so deep but danced over the depths in the light play of love – what have I lost? In people’s eyes my word as a gentleman. What have I lost? That in which I have always placed my honour, my joy, my pride, and always will – being faithful...”(41 III A 147)²⁵⁸

This despairing tone of this passage is unmistakable, yet the reason for this “blunder”²⁵⁹ remains an enigma. As a whole however, his journal entries do not provide much insight. The few entries which do exist concerning the issue, are highly rhetorical and erudite in nature, and the accuracy of their dating is to be doubted. In an entry the following year (1841) Kierkegaard writes:

“How strange, I’ve never really thought of being married, but I never thought it would turn out like this and leave so deep a wound.”(41 III A 166)²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Thompson, J. *Kierkegaard*. 1973. p. 102-103

²⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Søren Kierkegaard. Papers and Journals*. 1996. p. 140

²⁵⁹ Thompson, J. *Kierkegaard*. 1973. p. 107

²⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Søren Kierkegaard. Papers and Journals*. 1996. p. 144

This statement is one of few that reveal Kierkegaard's state of mind at the time. It should not be read to mean that Kierkegaard never contemplated marriage, on the contrary, he pondered the idea of marriage a great deal in his life, and very seriously entertained the idea after the decease of his father. After all, he had made a conscious decision and deliberately courted the girl, after which he had made a proposal. However, in this passage, we see by his own acknowledgement that the flaw in his thinking was precisely that his reflection was dominated by the *idea* of marriage. In the process, he very much neglected the essential actual component of the concept, so that when the idea actualized *de facto*, he found himself unable to cope with it in its reality.

3.10.2 The category of “the interesting” and “the soul”

As seducer, Johannes' movements center around a few basic categories. One of these is the romantic category of the “interesting”.

“The strategic principle then, the law of all motion in this campaign, is always to involve her in an interesting situation. The interesting is the field on which this conflict must constantly be waged, the potentialities of the interesting are to be exhausted.”²⁶¹

The category of the interesting refers not only to scenarios, but is also a category that Johannes associated with Cordelia herself.

“A man should never be that [isolated], not even a young one, for since reflection is essential to his development he must have come into contact with others. But for that reason a girl should rather not be interesting, for the interesting always contains a reflection upon itself, just as the interesting in art always gives you the artist too. A young girl of this kind really only becomes interesting through her relationship to men.”²⁶²

Much of Johannes' perception of womankind is contained in this passage. His classification of “interesting” and “not-interesting”, the emphasis of the subordination and secondary status of women, all culminate to constitute what can only be described as unmitigated objectification. Furthermore, Liehu(1990) states that this objectification is of women as prey, as enemies upon which “conflict must constantly be waged”. Whereas Don Juan lived an existence characterized by pure immediacy, Johannes the Seducer combines immediacy with reflection. The immediacy of desire is always omnipresent for

²⁶¹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 286

²⁶² *Ibid*. p. 280

Johannes, however it is also always mediated by recollection or reflection. It finds expressed in the form of writing and anticipation in the form of planning.²⁶³

Unlike Don Juan, whose first and foremost objective is to conquer his mark as a sexual being, Johannes is not as interested in Cordelia as a sexual being than as a spirit. What he primarily seeks to annex is her mind, her body, although important, remains subsidiary. Unlike the relatively base enticement offered by Don Juan, Mackey(1971) claims that seduction for Johannes is commensurate to capturing a girl's soul, and to his mind, is only bona fide if the result appears that as if the girl has seduced him, not vice-versa. Thus, the actual end here is subjectification, the insidious attainment of control over the mind and emotions of his object.²⁶⁴

“This momentary pleasure is a case of rape, if not in an outward sense at least spiritually, and in rape there is only an imaginary pleasure; it is like a stolen kiss, something with no substance behind it. No, when one brings matters to the point where a girl has just one task to accomplish for her freedom , to surrender herself, when she feels her whole bliss depends on that, when she almost begs to submit and yet is free, then for the first time there is enjoyment, but it always depends on a spiritual influence.”²⁶⁵

It is quite clear that Johannes derives his enjoyment in a manner far more complex than that of his immediate counterpart. So it should be, since it is precisely the category of soul that dominates Johannes' synthesis. The corporeal is made completely subservient, as all his efforts are concentrated upon the spiritual. Johannes seeks to conquer Cordelia spiritually, but to do he first has to bend her mind to the edict of his will.²⁶⁶

“She must become stronger in herself before I can let her find repose in me... She herself must be developed inwardly; she must feel her soul's resilience, she must test the world's weight... For although I intend her to fall into my arms through, as it were, natural necessity, and am striving to bring things to the point where she gravitates towards me, it is nevertheless also important that she does not fall as a heavy body, but gravitates as spirit towards spirit.”²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 106

²⁶⁴ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 24-25

²⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 282

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 298-299

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 299

Whereas Don Juan had reduced the status of his seduction to mere numbers, Johannes is a collector of souls, and to aggravate matters even further, he saw his actions as beneficial to his objects. According to him, every woman needs a seducer, and thus to be seduced. It is directly because of his association with these women in his particular manner that they acquire the label of “interesting”, and following this, become desirable.

It is entirely towards the soulish aspect of woman that Johannes looks. He too, goes to great lengths to depict this perception of himself to his victims, for Cordelia too, perceives him as more of a soulish than a corporeal being. However, in her case, Johannes achieves this to such an extent that after breaking up with her, Cordelia begins wonder whether or not this was not a mere trick of imagination.²⁶⁸ In the preface to Johannes’ diary, the pseudonymous author (Kierkegaard) describes him thus:

“Many people who appear bodily in the real world do not belong there but to this other world. Yet the fact that someone fades away in this manner, indeed almost disappears from reality, can be due to either health or sickness. The latter was the case with this person... He did not belong to reality yet had much to do with it. He was constantly running around in it, yet even when he devoted himself to it most, he was already beyond it... and then, since the relationship would only have been actual in a figurative sense, she would constantly have to contend with the doubt that the whole thing might only have been imagination.”²⁶⁹

Johannes’ entire existence is therefore characterized by the category of soul at the expense of body. Kierkegaard calls his existence *Phantasie-Existent* (imagination-existence), rather than real existence.²⁷⁰ His life is “interesting”, in other words, it exhibits the dialectics of simultaneous engagement and withdrawal. Even when he seems thoroughly involved in the matters of actual existence, he is, in reality, far away, completely immersed in his own realm of reflection and contemplation. As Dunning(1985) so astutely observes, Johannes is “too strong for reality”. Furthermore, Johannes is distinguished not only by the category of soul but also of infinitude, thus further distancing himself from authentic selfhood by losing himself in a realm of mere dream and fantasy. As a being characterized by infinitude, Johannes is not a fantastical man, but rather *the* fantastical man. He is the ultimate embodiment of infinitude, steeping himself ever deeper in it until near the end of his diary he seems poised on the brink of losing himself to infinitude altogether.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 249

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 250-251

²⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 226

²⁷¹ Dunning, S.N. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 55

“I do not see what has been, but what shall be, from the bosom of the lake, from the kiss of the dew, from the mist that spreads over the earth and hides its fruitful embrace. Everything is image; I myself am a myth about myself, for is it not rather as a myth that I hasten to this meeting? Who I am has nothing to do with it. Everything finite and temporal is forgotten, only the eternal remains, the power of love, its longing, its bliss.”²⁷²

Consequently, along with his ever-widening breach with the finite is an accompanying breach with his self. Infinity has vanquished the self and steered it towards its own realm, that of dreams and fantasy. This is evident in the manner in which Johannes leads his life. His existence is consumed by a myriad of dreams, fantasies and possibilities, none of which disclose the slightest relation to his self. Kierkegaard scholar Adi Shmüeli notes that the finite as such holds no interest for Johannes, and that he only concerns himself with experiencing the infinite in his imagination. This is evinced in that when he professes his love for Cordelia, he is in fact declaring his infatuation with the idea of love, and not his deep affection for a single woman. Similarly, when Johannes is melancholy, he is solely aware of his melancholia in itself, and no more. Clearly, what is absent in his moods is the aspect of transitive relations. There is no relating of a mood “to”, “of” and “for” this individual or situation. In fact, Johannes expressly desires that everything in his existence to be intransitive. He can be described as either living in his dreams or reconstructing them into his reality.²⁷³

3.10.3 The category of the eternal and the possible

In addition to the categories of infinity and soul, another two dominant categories featuring in Johannes’ existence are possibility and eternity. In the synthesis of the seducer, the eternal factor is as over-emphasized as that of infinity. Johannes causes Cordelia much perplexity by the capriciousness of his moods, and when in his company, she often gets the impression of being with a specter rather than a human being.²⁷⁴ In the preface to *The Diary of the Seducer*, the pseudonymous author writes:

“I can imagine nothing more agonizing than an intriguing mind which has lost the thread and then turns all its wits upon itself, as conscience awakens and the question is one of extricating oneself from this confusion.”²⁷⁵

²⁷² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 375-376

²⁷³ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 106

²⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 250-251

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 252

Johannes hurtles onward, with no recourse to reality and time, and the point at which his process of seduction begins, marks the end of history and the beginning of myth.²⁷⁶ In the first part of *Stages on Life's Way*, Johannes the Seducer gives a speech at a banquet, the theme of which is “erotic love or the relationship between man and woman”. This serves as further evidence of his preoccupation with the eternal.

“She dies, but she does not die in the same sense as the man dies, she evaporates and dissolves into that indefinable something from which the gods formed her; she vanishes like a dream, like a temporary character whose time is up. For what else is woman but a dream, and yet the highest reality. This is how the devotee of erotic love sees her and in the moment of seduction leads her and is led by her outside of time, where as an illusion she belongs.”²⁷⁷

The category of the eternal provides a vividly clear contrast between the immediate and the reflective aesthete. The former lives a momentary life with regards to time, it is each particular moment which is immediately followed by another, and then another, in an endless succession of moments, that is significant. The latter however, has no interest in the present except for its function as link between the past and the future. With regards to time, it is in either the past or the future where the concern of the reflective aesthete is to be found. The present is irrelevant to the reflective aesthete, because the particular moments serve as nothing more than a medium by which move toward possibility.

It is precisely the category of the possible than has gained the most significant dominance over the existence of Johannes the Seducer. The life of the reflective aesthete is essentially devoid of passion, yet there is one aspect about which he/she certainly is passionate, and that is thought. Yet, like the speculant, the seducer's passion for thinking serves only to distance himself from reality and, in so doing, to alienate himself further from authentic selfhood.

“...[Johannes the Seducer] holds existence at bay by the most subtle of all deceptions, by thinking. He has thought everything possible, and yet he has not existed at all.”²⁷⁸

It is possibility that becomes, in fact, Johannes' reality. Consequently, he invests all energies into the accidental, allowing it governance over his “fortuitous” meetings with Cordelia.

²⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 369-370

²⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Stages of Life's Way*. 1988. p. 79-80

²⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 253

“Damned chance! You, my only confidant, the only being I consider worthy to be my ally and my enemy, always the same and however different, always fathomable, always a riddle! You, whom I love with all the sympathy in my soul, in whose image I form myself, why do you not appear?... Take me by surprise, I am ready, no stakes, let us fight for honour. Show me her, show me a possibility that looks like an impossibility; show me her in the shadows of the underworld, I shall fetch her up.”²⁷⁹

It is evident in the above passage that the synthesis of the Seducer is grossly outweighed by the elements of chance and possibility. The category of possibility particularly, is accentuated by the quantity of women the Seducer will seduce in his life, for as Johannes bolds states in his speech at the banquet, “so also is the truth of this, that the devotee of erotic love wants to love as many as possible.”²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the categories of both possibility and infinitude dominate the synthesis so completely, that they even serve to distort Johannes’ conception of woman.

“This is why woman cannot be exhausted in any formula but is an infinitude of finitudes. Trying to conceive the idea of woman is like gazing into a sea of misty shapes continually forming and reforming, or like becoming unhinged by looking at the waves and the foam maidens who continually play tricks, because the idea of woman is only a workshop of possibilities, and once again for the devotee of erotic love this possibility is the eternal source of infatuation.”²⁸¹

All the afore-mentioned categories of soul, eternity, possibility and chance exercise an unwavering dominance over the synthesis of Johannes the Seducer. This occurs to such an extent that Johannes begins to confuse his existence with that of myth and completely loses his self within the omnipotence of his fantasies. In his insatiable drive after possibilities Johannes is further and further estranged from both himself and reality.

3.10.4 The Practice of Deception

Strictly speaking, Johannes does not perceive himself as a seducer, but rather insists that he is an aesthete and eroticist who knows how “... to poeticize his way into the girl that it is from her that everything issues...”²⁸² in the exact fashion that he desires it. According to Dunning(1985) dialectically, the role of the Seducer is that of utter deception. Throughout the duration of their relationship, his every direct and

²⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 269

²⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Stages of Life's Way*. 1988. p. 79

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 76-77

²⁸² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 306

indirect action towards her is calculated, both to expressly deceive her as well as to influence her personal perceptions and make her perceive appearances as being themselves deceptive in relation to reality. Moreover, Johannes does not view this practice as some sort of necessary evil, but instead believes relations of an aesthetic nature necessarily entail the exercise of deception. When he asks himself whether he loves Cordelia, his answer is a conditional affirmative, the condition being that of faithful love, aesthetically speaking, requiring something more than honesty, namely duplicity. In ascertaining the exact nature of Johannes' deception of Cordelia, it can perhaps briefly be compared to Faust's deception of Margaret, mentioned by A in *Either/Or*. In juxtaposing these two separate acts we can immediately see that although their natures are both utterly deceptive, the absoluteness of Faust's deception of Margaret is dependant on something external, namely Faust, whom she loves completely. In comparison, Johannes' deception of Cordelia is not, in the same sense, derived. Instead, it is a transformation of the passivity of deception-in-itself and the activity of deception-for-itself into deception-in-and-for-itself. This transformation occurs in both Cordelia and Johannes. Although she is initially the passive victim of deception by way of Johannes' calculated behaviour, she later begins to experience her own deception actively, for she believes that she has broken off their engagement by her will and against his. Johannes' thinking and actions are almost paradoxical, in that while he is completely committed to manipulating both her and all circumstances surrounding their relationship completely, he still views as his ultimate goal the passive receiving of her love as a gift "given freely".²⁸³ Thus, in both parties deception overcomes the contraposition of the passive and the active, in which it is respectively determined either subjectively or objectively. Contrary to the deceptive relationship of Faust and Margaret, the element of otherness is internalized by both Johannes and Cordelia, thereby resulting in deception-in-and-for-itself.²⁸⁴

Having said this however, the fact remains that Johannes and Cordelia are to a large extent related to one another as deceiver and deceived. From the aesthetic (Johannes') point of view this is not a problem, but rather a dialectical presupposition, for he sees deception as a necessary ingredient to a relation. This however, is not an opinion shared by the pseudonymous author of the preface to Johannes' diary, namely A. A finds it very difficult to accept Johannes' deception indeed, as is evinced early in the introduction (which A claims to have transcribed from Johannes' diary) when he remarks:

²⁸³ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 306

²⁸⁴ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 54-55

“...having seen through the designing mind of this depraved person...”²⁸⁵

Stephen Dunning points out that, albeit it brief, this indictment by A is highly significant. It is never retracted, and as such, remains the first real criticism of the aesthetic sphere to be found in the first volume of *Either/Or*. Furthermore, the editor of this work, Victor Eremita goes as far as to suggest that A’s criticism of Johannes is really directed at himself, A, and that it is indeed A who is the author of *The Diary of the Seducer*. Eremita claims that the reason A wrote it under a pseudonym is because he was aghast at his own exhibition.²⁸⁶

“I shall only note that the dominant mood of A’s preface in a way betrays the writer. It is really as if A himself had become afraid of his work which, like a restless dream, still continued to frighten him while it was being told.”²⁸⁷

There is little doubt that Johannes the Seducer embodies the darkest and most odious aspects of human nature in general and of the aesthetic stage in particular. As Dunning correctly notes, the essential fiendishness of Johannes is his attempt to internalize everything external. This is evident in his stubborn refusal to acknowledge anything at all as being beyond his powers of manipulation. External reality is to Johannes (and lamentably, also later to Cordelia) only an element of self-consciousness. Everything is appropriated. For him, there exists no polar dualism between the internal and external as everything is internalized within the all-consuming consciousness with no recourse to otherness. Engagements, by implication have an ethical dimension and as such, should provide their relationship with some degree of externality. With the Seducer however, this proves fruitless. The ethical aspect of an engagement is considered by Johannes to be merely “boring”²⁸⁸, and he internalized both this dimension of the engagement and employed the process of engagement itself, purely as a means to preserve the interesting, for the sake of aesthetics.²⁸⁹

“The engagement itself was interesting precisely in not offering what is ordinarily understood by the interesting. It preserved the interesting through the outward appearance contradicting the inner life.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 247

²⁸⁶ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 55

²⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 32

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 305

²⁸⁹ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 55-56

²⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 369

Thus, for the Seducer, inwardness no longer lies in opposition to the external. On the contrary, inwardness is now in control of the external, by means of deception. I am agreement with Dunning when he claims that it is precisely the point at which Johannes deceives himself. This very sense of control which he wields like a conductor's baton is, in itself, an illusion. Since Johannes is incapable of accepting the otherness of externality, he falls victim to his own self-deception. Johannes' act of deception is total. Not only is he deception incarnate when it comes to his practice of seduction upon his female victims, but absolute deception is also revealed in himself as the truth of absolute aesthetic inwardness.²⁹¹

3.10.5 The Seducer as language

According to Dunning, it is precisely at this apex of deception that the poetic can be understood as the language of deception. Throughout the duration of the first volume of *Either/Or* we are witness to the gradual development of the poetic. In "The First Love", the poetic is initially disclosed as a form of dialogue that is merely the passive expression of external deception. In "Crop Rotation" poeticizing becomes memory's active distortion of external reality. This development sees its final culmination in "The Seducer's Diary" in which Johannes actually uses the poetic to alter reality itself. His deception is manifold, for he not only deceives Cordelia about the truth of their relationship, but also distorts her perception of reality in order to make her more "interesting" to himself. The pseudonymous editor A describes the poeticizing as follows"

"The poetic was the extra he himself brought with him. This extra was the poetical element he enjoyed in the poetic situation provided by reality; this element he took back in again in the form of poetic reflection."²⁹²

Johannes' deception of Cordelia constitutes a veritable intrusion upon her consciousness in which he attempts nothing less than to alter her. In order to make her more "interesting" to himself, he actively poetizes her, and is satisfied only when he sees her as the fruit of poetic production with which he can dabble, and upon which he can reflect, in other words, Cordelia as his own creation. His deception by poeticizing is both active and passive, and can therefore be considered absolute. Thus poetry, as the language of aesthetic inwardness, can be said to have its own dialectic and can also be considered absolute. Johannes' language or self-communication is therefore absolute poetry, for it constitutes a production by the self and of the self, utilizing the other only as material for its own creative activity.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 56

²⁹² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 249

²⁹³ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 56-57

It is for this reason that the diary, and the implicit use of language, is the perfect medium of expression of Johannes' consciousness. The diary is by tradition a literary medium, making strict use of the written word in its process of contemplation of things external to the author. Yet by way of this inward reflection, the author internalizes them all. Since it is language directed at the self by the self, at no point is it necessary to submit oneself to the dialogical constraints of social communication. A diary is entirely singular, since there is no one to oppose or even respond to the writer. The language of the diary could be called a private language, which in a sense means that there is no language at all. If we turn our thoughts back to the character of Don Juan, we will recall that it was ascertained that Mozart indeed chose the perfect medium (i.e. music) with which to express the immediate consciousness of this mythical figure (cf. Chapter 3.5.1). Music is the best medium with which to express inwardness, but does so precisely because it remains indifferent to its own external expressions. On this basis, music can serve as an agent for the erotic only as long as the erotic does not become conscious of itself and its being in the world. In grief, language again proves itself inappropriate an expression of the inner lives of the subjects, since their disclosure only comes about via gestures and involuntary responses. The opportune medium here is drama, but it is a drama in which acts are employed to conceal rather than reveal inner truth. Dunning claims that in terms of poeticizing as a dialectic of aesthetic inwardness, it may be suggested that the resulting tension between a relation of indifference, as exemplified by music as medium of the erotic, and negation, as designated by drama as expression of grief, is consolidated only by poetry which constitutes a more subtle form of indifference and a more successful negation of the otherness of the other. Johannes, as poet, neither ignores the external, nor submits himself to a lifelong struggle against it. Instead, he "conquers" the external by internalizing it as completely as possible and making it bend to his will. For the Seducer therefore, poetic language is utilized as an instrument of internalization, the instrument which Johannes wields in order to fashion an external world of his own making.²⁹⁴

This dialectic of aesthetic inwardness, which finds its apex in *The Diary of the Seducer*, has its foundation and culmination in the idea of contradiction. Deception constitutes the final aesthetic movement in which the opposition between grief and desire finds its amalgamation. This is a complex union, to say the least. Desire is characterized by a lack of consciousness of the inner/outer contradiction, while grief amounts to a hyper-consciousness of that same contradiction. These two opposing ideas find their synthesis in the characters of Johannes and Cordelia, in the sense that their self-contradiction is mutual and their opposition reciprocal. In this case, the *Aufhebung* is a unity based on absolute contradiction, for not only

²⁹⁴ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 57

is their relationship based on a deception of one another, but also of themselves. Deception here becomes aesthetic contradiction in-and-for-itself. Needless to say, it represents an inherently unstable and decidedly baneful side of the aesthetic sphere of existence.²⁹⁵

3.10.6 Johannes and The Demonic

It would be a grave error to succumb to the temptation of rendering an ethical judgment upon the Seducer, and Kierkegaard himself can never be cited as outwardly condemning Johannes as being evil or amoral. Nevertheless, as was briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, Johannes the Seducer represents one of the greatest potential perils that lie within the aesthetic stage. Hence, the concept of “the demonic”. Kierkegaard makes liberal use of this term, as it is found not only with reference to the aesthetic sphere, but also continues into the ethical. However, it is largely accepted that the category of the demonic plays its most significant role on the level of aesthetic existence. Vigilius Haufniensis analyzes the demonic at length in *The Concept of Anxiety*, and this is discussed in Chapter 4.6.4, hence the reason why in this chapter the deliberation of the concept of the demoniacal itself will be somewhat concise.

The demoniac is largely distinguished by misunderstanding and subsequent distortion of ideas such as freedom and eternity – both of which are characteristics of reflective aestheticism. In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus closely affiliates the demonic with the category of what, in the aesthetic sphere of existence, is considered reflective aestheticism. Indeed, some scholars, such as Liehu, consider the demonic to be the exact opposite of “innocence” or pagan immediacy, and for that reason believe that it cannot be associated with immediate aestheticism. Kierkegaard has several definitions for the demonic as “inclosing reserve” (*des Insluttende*), “the unfreely disclosed” and as “muteness”.²⁹⁶ As indicated, the demoniac severs him/herself from all communication concerning his/her own inner condition and communicates only with him/herself in a language of privacy. Thus, there is no communication at all. Haufniensis also calls the demonic “the sudden”²⁹⁷, due to the abruptness of his contingent expressions. The demoniac is characterized by unpredictability, variance and momentariness to such an extent that the only modicum of continuity in his existence is in relation to him/herself.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 30-31

²⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 123

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 132

²⁹⁸ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 111

“Thus, while the life of an individuality goes on to a certain degree in continuity with the rest of human life, inclosing reserve maintains itself in the person as an abracadabra of continuity that communicates only with itself and therefore is always the sudden.”²⁹⁹

The demoniac fears and dreads all communication because, as Haufniensis puts it, “he is in the evil”³⁰⁰. Being “in the evil” aggregates a fear of communication or contact in general, with the good in particular. With Kierkegaard, silence is generally associated with inwardness, however meaningless chatter and garrulousness is not considered to be far from the demonic muteness. Kierkegaard claims that trivial prattling attempts to escape the moment of silence, which would, in fact, demonstrate the underlying vacuum or emptiness within. However, as Hall(1985) states, the demonic silence is more frightening. For this silence masks a twisted and false inwardness wrapped up in itself with the evil. It is for this reason that the demoniac so intensely dreads contact with the good, for this communication would utterly reveal its unfree relationship to the good. Although the demoniac cannot comprehend why, he/she experiences intense anxiety in the presence of the good. The reason is simple. According to Kierkegaard, man achieves freedom by way of becoming a genuine synthesis, namely spirit. In contrast to this state, the demonic is totally unbalanced, is incapable of achieving a synthesis, and therefore is unfree. For freedom always distinguishes itself as a peaceful continuity, and the opposing unfreedom manifests itself as “the sudden”.³⁰¹

To conclude this brief description, the demonic is characterized by contentlessness, emptiness and boredom. Although these terms do not immediately strike us as having any specific relation to the demonic, there is a definite Kierkegaardian logic at work. The demonic state is contentless and boring, for as Kierkegaard puts it:

“When I now include the determinations “contentless” and “boring”, these reflect upon the content, and inclosing reserve reflects upon the form that corresponds to the content.”³⁰²

The demonic is boring and vacuous because its discontinuity is distinguished by a “continuity is nothingness”³⁰³. As an example of this boring and contentless aspect of the demonic, Kierkegaard

²⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 130

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 119

³⁰¹ Hall, R.L. **Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard’s Analysis of the Demoniac in *The Concept of Anxiety***. In Perkins, R.L. (Ed.). *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 162-164

³⁰² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 133

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

employs the legend which relates how the devil sat for three thousand years and contemplated the means with which to destroy man – until he found it. Liehu pointed states that the significance of the legend lies not in what he discovered, but rather in the image that the legend provides. Namely, that of the brooding, inclosing reserve of the devil.³⁰⁴

It is with this description in mind, that we turn our thoughts back to Johannes the Seducer. On the basis of the above description, we can quite clearly discern why Johannes can be labeled a demoniac. He has completely divorced himself from the external and withdrawn into the isolated world of his own dreams. The only evidence of continuity in his life is that which exists in exclusive relation to himself. His existence is characterized by an utter indifference to the outside world with which he has absolutely no relation. The Seducer admires freedom from afar, but his reality is one totally unfree to himself, as he relegates himself to a slave of chance and his own whimsical desires.

One of Kierkegaard's most comprehensive descriptions of the demonic is "a lack of inwardness"³⁰⁵ When an individual chooses him/herself as a synthesis before God, he/she is at his/her most inward. The demoniac not only fails to do this, but is in actual fact unaware of the eternal within him/her, and if he/she is aware of it, then he/she misunderstands it. This misinterpretation can occur in four separate ways. Firstly, the demoniac can deny the eternal, fearing that it has the potential of changing the present into something other than it is; secondly, he/she can interpret the eternal too abstractly, thus distancing it to such an extent that it cannot possibly bear any modicum of relevance to his/her daily life.

"Like the blue mountains, the eternal is the boundary of the temporal, but he who lives energetically in temporality never reaches the boundary."³⁰⁶

Thirdly, the demoniac, in the custom of the speculant, comprehends the eternal too metaphysically, as part of the "System". Finally, he/she can confuse the eternal with the temporal, thereby fusing the two categories by way of the imagination as part of some kind of elaborate dream or fantasy. The latter approach in particular, is highly characteristic of a demoniac like the Seducer. Johannes deals with a concept such as eternity, for example, by internalizing it. In the process of internalization, he distorts the concept of the eternal in order to render as a kind of artistic medium which he can use in the composition of his poetic dreams and other forms of cloistered self-expression. The failure inherent in these

³⁰⁴ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard's Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 113

³⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 151

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 153

endeavours is inevitable, for poetry and art cannot amount to a genuine understanding of the eternal. According to Kierkegaard, this movement amounts to nothing more than a desperate attempt at compensation.

“Thought of the eternal becomes a fanciful pottering around, and the mood is always the same: Am I dreaming, or is it eternity that is dreaming of me?... This conception has found definite expression in the statement: Art is an anticipation of eternal life, because poetry and art are the reconciliation only of the imagination, and they may well have the *Sinnigkeit* [thoughtfulness] of intuition but by no means the *Imigkeit* [inwardness] of earnestness.”³⁰⁷

Now we arrive at the crux of the matter. The demonic is precisely that because it is already aware of the concepts of eternity and freedom, but misconstrues their meaning. The result is the demoniac. An individual already amply aware of the concepts of eternity and freedom, but also one who misconstrues the meaning and significance of these categories, even as he/she is aware of them. The consequences of this misinterpretation are an acute withdrawnness accompanied at the same time, by an utter lack of inwardness, and an unfree existence fraught with anxiety about the good. The Seducer claims freedom as his own possession, but by that very action consigns himself to the unfreedom of a prisoner of “chance”. One of the numerous contradictions that abound in the existence of the demoniac is that he/she attempts to sustain a life replete with freedom and inwardness but, without the good, which is, in fact, the central sustaining element of those categories.³⁰⁸ I certainly share the opinion of Mackey who claims that demoniac’s existence is not informed by eternity, but is rather abandoned by it, thus rendering it false. In a similar vein, the freedom of the demoniac never commits itself, and as such it too, is false. To summarize therefore, the demoniac has no self.³⁰⁹

Other scholars, such as Liehu, suggest that Johannes does not embody the zenith of the demonic. He rather represents an example of the unapparent demoniac. Liehu argues that the fact that Johannes kept a diary is evidence of this, since an individual steeped in the demonic will refuse any kind of self-expression at all. To my mind however, this point remains questionable, for Johannes’ mode of self-expression is completely private, and as such it is dubious as to whether this mode of expression, which has no witnesses can justify itself as self-expression at all.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 152-153

³⁰⁸ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 59

³⁰⁹ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 45

³¹⁰ Liehu, H. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Theory of Stages and its relation to Hegel*. 1990. p. 114

Be that as it may, the seriousness of the category of the demonic cannot be over-emphasized. It represents the most perilous of all dangers intrinsic to the category of reflective aestheticism. Outwardly, the demonic exhibits the characteristics of immoral, hedonistic, selfish and pleasure-loving aestheticism, while inwardly, the demoniac is beset by restlessness, boredom, withdrawnness, despair, anxiety and melancholy.

3.11 Conclusion

The aesthetic sphere of existence constitutes a complex, intricate and indeed, substantial part of Kierkegaard's corpus. Needless to say therefore, there was neither the space nor the time to effect a thorough examination of this important facet of Kierkegaard's aesthetic works. What was attempted in this chapter however, was to demonstrate exactly how pertinent the aesthetic sphere is with regard to the experience of anxiety in the life of the individual. Kierkegaard states that all individuals begin their existence in the aesthetic sphere, following which, we either grow spiritually and move on to higher spheres of existence, pursuing the ultimate goal of attaining a God-relationship through faith, or else we simply remain aesthetes until the day we die. To my mind there are basically two factors, which play pivotal roles in this process, namely time and anxiety. As Mackey(1971) states, time is considered the enemy of both the immediate and the reflective aesthete. For the former, the inexorable flow of time signals the necessary negation of momentary pleasures, and the imperative quest for novel ones, for the latter, time signifies the transition from the world of imaginative idealities to the harsh reality of historical drudgery in which the inevitable disappointment follows in the partial realization of these ideals.³¹¹

More often than not, the experience of anxiety is a direct result of the effect of time on the existence of the aesthete. Anxiety then, is what the aesthete, either immediate or reflective, finds him/herself faced with at each juncture that the passing of time, and by implication, momentary pleasure, has afforded. Once the pleasure has passed, only to be replaced by the blackness of boredom, the aesthete is confronted by the nothingness underlying his/her existence. If the said individual should face this anxiety, accept it and attempt to will him/herself through it, the result would be a progression to a higher level of existence. Unfortunately, this process is both difficult and painful, and needless to say therefore, is rarely chosen. Instead, the aesthete will often choose to frantically search for a new pleasure with which to maintain his/her enjoyment and to escape the fearful anxiety and the accompanying terror of confrontation with the self.

³¹¹ Mackey, L. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. 1971. p. 183

However, the difficulty that inevitably rises out of a reading of Kierkegaard's caustic treatment of aestheticism as found within the aesthetic sphere, is that it seems to invite miscomprehension. The problem is due largely to the fact that Kierkegaard consistently refers to "the aesthetic sphere". Is this an indication that Kierkegaard generally views the lifestyles of artists and art-lovers with disdain, or that he considers the creation of a work of art or art form, or for that matter, the appreciation thereof, to be mutually exclusive to the pursuit of an ethical or religious existence? Kierkegaard's answer to this is an emphatic and, to my mind, conclusive denial. As Pattison (1998) quite correctly points out, in an article written in 1847, in which he paid esteemed tribute to Madame Heiberg's performance as Juliet some nineteen years after she had made her *début* on the stage playing the very same role, Kierkegaard put his views on the aesthetic and the religious in unequivocal terms. The article was entitled *The Crisis [and a Crisis] in the Life of an Actress*, and the significance of it, according to its author, was that it decisively refuted the idea that religion and Christianity merely fall into the category of that to which one only has recourse later in one's life.³¹² The religious does not (and indeed, ought not) act as a replacement for the aesthetic, on the contrary, the appropriate engagement with the aesthetic should coexist with the religious.

This "little article", as Kierkegaard sometimes referred to it, is crucial to the proper understanding of the Dane's comportment toward the relation between art and the religious, for the issue itself is precarious, to say the least. This is compounded by the fact that Kierkegaard preferred to see himself primarily not as philosopher or Christian, but rather, as a poet or, less frequently, as a writer. Furthermore, an issue that plagued Kierkegaard for most of his adult life was that he was all too aware of the imminent danger of lapsing into the state of reflective aestheticism himself. While I would not advocate the use of such biographical details in order to support this argument, it is evident nonetheless, that in his corpus, Kierkegaard himself frequently strives for an aesthetic, rather than a rigorously deductive style through which to convey his ideas in his writing.

Anxiety is omnipresent. It manifests itself, with varying degrees of intensity, throughout the duration of an individual's life, as well as in all three spheres of existence. However, it is in the aesthetic sphere that the experience of anxiety plays out its most telling role, for it is here that the individual is first confronted by anxiety, and subsequently where the individual's coping or failure to cope with anxiety, will determine his/her progression towards higher states of being and ultimately, spiritual growth.

³¹² Pattison, G. **Art in an age of reflection.** In Hannay, A. & Marino, G.D. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 76-77

4. THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY

4.1 Introduction

On the 17 June 1844, Kierkegaard published *Begrebet Angest* (The Concept of Anxiety) under the obscure pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis (lit. “the Watchman of Copenhagen). Although it was initially poorly received, it was later to prove itself one of the most controversial, and indeed, influential works ever produced by the Danish author. The controversy originated chiefly from the difficulty with which the work was read and comprehended. While interpretations of *The Concept of Anxiety* abound, virtually all who have endeavoured in a serious reading of the work are unanimous in their agreement of the arduousness of its assimilation. This has occurred to such an extent that some have even complained that *The Concept of Anxiety* has placed itself beyond the limits of comprehension because of the perplexing manner in which it is written as well as the numerous and taxing complexities of the text. This issue is examined more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Be that as it may, *The Concept of Anxiety* remains an enormously important book. The result of Kierkegaard’s efforts was a work that has proven to be quite deeply influential. In the field of psychology, particularly in psychoanalysis, it lay the groundwork for the investigation of anxiety as a key factor in the dynamics of neuroticism. There, anxiety is identified as the ambivalent dizziness of being lured and simultaneously repulsed by a possibility, which is actually unknown, because it has not yet been willed into being. Indeed, if a single text needed to be chosen as the source book for existential psychology and psychoanalysis, it would most certainly be *The Concept of Anxiety*.³¹³

In philosophy the effect was no less spectacular. Here, the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger in particular, reflect this. It is interesting to note that even though Heidegger’s works run many a parallel to the works of Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* is the only philosophical work to which Heidegger admits a (albeit begrudging) debt. His elaborate treatment of the concept of *Angst* highlights this indebtedness. Anxiety or *Angst*, according to Heidegger differs from fear in that fear is always determined. It is experienced as a fear-of-something. Anxiety on the other hand, is always undetermined. It is not directed toward any specific object, on the contrary, anxiety by its very nature is an anxiety of

³¹³ Cole, J.P. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 131-140

nothing. In *Angst*, he states, “one has an *uncanny*”³¹⁴. Sartre, in the same vein, argues “...it is in anguish or *angoisse* that man becomes conscious of his freedom or, if we prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself.”³¹⁵ Sartre understands anxiety as the response with which the individual greets the abyss of possibility. The anxiety of what *may* be. It is clear therefore that his debt to Kierkegaard is just as pronounced as that of his German contemporary.

4.2 Dread and Anxiety

Before venturing further it is necessary to clarify an important point. This concerns the use of the terms “anxiety” and “dread”. It basically all comes down to a problem of translation. Kierkegaard loved his mother tongue and went to some lengths to enrich it. In his writing he added innumerable German and French terminology which makes an accurate translation of his texts all the more troublesome, since the Danish lexicographers never included his inventions. Walter Lowrie, the pioneer translator of *The Concept of Dread*, admits that he is at a loss for the appropriate translation of some words, such as *Bestemmelse*.³¹⁶ In addition, although Kierkegaard renounced Hegel, he frequently made use of Hegelian terminology, such as the word *aufgehoben*, another term for which English has no direct translation. As with the German, the English language is not always diverse enough to adequately render the Danish, and an excellent, and unfortunate, example in this case, is the Danish term, *Angest*. In the first translations of Kierkegaard’s work by Professor Hollander in 1924, he made use of the word “dread”, and after a desperate, but seemingly futile, search for something better, it was decided to keep it.³¹⁷ However, this decision proved inconsistent, and where Kierkegaard merely wrote of *Angest*, the English has read “anguish”, “dread” and “anxiety”. More recent translations, such as that by Reidar Thomte³¹⁸, have made exclusive use of the latter, justifying this by arguing that the word “anxiety” is both less misleading and a more consistent translation for the Danish *Angest* or the German *Angst*.

In truth, the debate still rages on, with some Kierkegaardian scholars maintaining that “anxiety” only constitutes one specific form of dread, thereby making the latter the more appropriate term, whilst others uphold that “anxiety” is the most accurate term for describing the state under discussion in Haufniensis’

³¹⁴ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. 1996. p. 176

³¹⁵ Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness*. 1956. p. 29

³¹⁶ Lowrie, W. *Translator’s Preface to The Concept of Dread*. 1966. p. viii

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. viii-x

³¹⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept Of Anxiety*. 1980.

work. The somewhat unfortunate fact remains however, that there exists no “direct” English correlative for the Danish *Angest*. It is the opinion of the author that while there certainly is merit to both sides of the debate, the term “anxiety”, possibly due to the greater distribution of Thomte’s more recent translation, generally seems to be preferential at the present time. Whilst “dread” remains a decidedly astute term describing the state of experiencing the “nothingness” about which Haufniensis’ writes, it is very much associated with Lowrie’s translation, and by implication therefore with the older interpretation of Kierkegaard. For this reason, and the more pragmatic purpose of maintaining clarity, I will, in the course of this writing, be making exclusive use of Thomte’s translation, namely the term “anxiety”, except of course, in cases where I am referring specifically to the translation by Walter Lowrie.

4.3 The relation of sin and anxiety

The Concept of Anxiety is more than just a mere psychological study, but as Arbaugh et al.(1968) argue, it is also an intense and somewhat controversial study of the concept of sin.³¹⁹ It was initially intended as a supplement to *Fragments*, since both aim to show the distinctive characteristics of a Christian, although the latter does so largely from a theological standpoint while the former, to a large extent, includes a standpoint of psychology. Uncharacteristically, the book was written in a textbook style, done no doubt as an act of ironic mockery, directed specifically at the myriad of Hegelian scholars of the time. The book also distinguishes itself in terms of abstractness, the perplexity of its mode of expression and profundity.³²⁰

Broadly speaking, Kierkegaard deals with four main issues in this work. Firstly, he takes up the dogmatic issue of original sin; secondly, the more significant problem of sin itself and the individual’s responsibility therefore, and thirdly, a psychological examination of anxiety. The fourth issue veritably permeates the work in its entirety, and that is his continuous polemic against, and his ceaseless, scathingly ironic parody of the Hegelian System, its philosophers and theologians. Hence, the earlier description of the work as dense, for it is a relatively small book, and even so comments on and deals with a vast scope of topics.

The complete title of the work warrants closer inspection: *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin by Vigilius*

³¹⁹ Arbaugh, G.B., Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard’s Authorship*. 1968. p. 158

³²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 158 (footnote)

Haufniensis.³²¹ It is clear that anxiety forms the core of the discussion, but it is viewed from all sides in terms of its relation to sin. The discussion itself begins with the problem of original sin and attempts to psychologically approach the state just prior to the qualitative leap to original sin. On the surface, this may be perceived as a problem of psychology, but it is just as much a problem of theology. *Haufniensis* denounces the idea of “original sin” or, “hereditary sin” as denoted by Thomte, being a unique and unrepeatably state of humankind whereby Adam is mythologized and banished to a realm outside that of humanity. A qualitative explanation of sin is not *Haufniensis*’ aim. Instead, he concerns himself with the leap which is made to sin, a leap for which every individual is personally responsible, and the causes of actions of which lie exclusively on the shoulders of said individual. Instead of being different to the sin of Adam, it is exactly the same in nature. There is no external cause for sin. Sin comes solely into the world by sin. The Danish term, *Arversynden* literally means “the sin of inheritance” or “inherited sin” and finds its English equivalent in “original sin”³²². This epithet, says *Haufniensis*, is misleading, for Adam is not responsible for all the sins of humanity, he is responsible only for his own.³²³

The psychological constituent of *The Concept of Anxiety* concerns the fact that the individual experiences anxiety before the leap into sin. Exactly why the individual leaps however, is beyond the reach of psychology to explain. The anxiety before the leap into the first sin obviously enjoys a certain degree of attention, but it is not as important as the anxiety experienced after committing the first sin. This is evident by the titles of the first and second chapters of *The Concept of Anxiety*, namely *Anxiety as the Presupposition of Hereditary Sin* and *Anxiety as Explaining Hereditary Sin Progressively*, respectively.³²⁴ Even though the essence of the anxiety experienced preceding sin is not qualitatively different from that experienced after sin, the state of the individual is significantly changed by sin as are said individual’s possibilities. This is important considering that possibility lies at the very essence of anxiety.³²⁵ The fundamental possibilities, once one is in a state of sin, essentially come down to either remaining in sin or overcoming it. This, it must be added, is dependent on the individual actually being conscious of the anxiety that he/she is experiencing. Thus, the discussion is one of the individual, existing in a state of sin,

³²¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980.

³²² *Ibid.* p. 221

³²³ *Ibid.* p. 28-29

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 156

and the ways in which this can be overcome. (This is a discussion carried further by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*.)³²⁶

The Concept of Anxiety moves back and forth, discussing the various alternations between phases of anxiety and sin. Although the phases are not essentially qualitatively different, they do contain some important quantitative differences. “The dogmatic issue of hereditary sin” as expressed in the title could, in some sense, be considered to be the starting point of the discussion. If taken in this vein, the problem is basically theological, and although a fair portion of the work takes the form of a theological treatise, an equally significant part of *The Concept of Anxiety* is devoted to what would commonly be called the “existential” problem of anxiety and sin. The reason for this is that Haufniensis, in stark contrast to the prevailing philosophies of the time, consistently refuses to philosophize in a manner that is general, abstract and removed from the individual. *The Concept of Anxiety* conveys thoughts that are both relevant and personal to the reader.

The Concept of Anxiety also remains one of Kierkegaard’s definitive works on the problem of human nature. The reader is confronted by a work that gives the impression of being theological in nature, while it claims to proceed with psychological deliberation. However, as McCarthy(1978) argues, in a work that is full of highly abstract metaphysical vernacular it is often difficult to determine exactly whether it is the psychologist or the dialectician who is speaking.³²⁷ Nevertheless, on closer inspection one sees that this is rightly so, because while anxiety’s roots are in spirit confronting its own possibilities in freedom, it manifests itself on the mental-emotional plane, which is where psychology can observe the symptoms. On the other hand, the cause of the symptoms is provided by metaphysics which states that the eternal is present only potentially, that spirit is not yet actively integrated and that it is precisely active integration of spirit which is the essential revelation of this mood.

The very title of the book has attracted a multitude of readers by the simple suggestion that Haufniensis is kindred to all the souls who struggle to overcome feelings of anxiety on a daily basis. One of the central themes that pervades virtually all of Kierkegaard’s work is the struggle to lead a good and authentic life in the ever-present face of anxiety. The very foundation of this, and evidence of Haufniensis’ psychological genius, was the link he made between anxiety and sin. A link that Freud would come to appreciate some fifty years later. Anxiety allows for the possibility of sin, but does not cause sin, since that is an act on the

³²⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. 1989.

³²⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 38

part of the individual, for which one has to take responsibility. The issue of sin, or more precisely, original sin, is a much dealt-with topic in this book. In the opinion of some, such as Walter Lowrie, the book contained “too much about Adam” and “original sin.”³²⁸ Others such as Arbaugh et al. however, contest this statement, claiming that it and others in a similar vein are basically in error. That Haufniensis deals extensively with “the Adam issue” is true, but his motivation for doing so is precisely to diminish “the Adam element”, or more specifically the use of original sin as a kind of Christian scapegoat. In the text Haufniensis uses Adam as a metaphor for the Christian’s notion of original sin, the notion that we are all born into, or to use a later Heideggerian term, “thrown into” a state of sin. By implication the individual is effectively suggesting that one is not responsible for sin, that it simply is the legacy with which one is born. Haufniensis contests this by using Adam as his example. Just as Adam sinned by means of a “leap” or “act of freedom”, so every individual commits sin. In this sense every sin is an original. It is the consequence of an act of choice, and choice, as we already know, is constitutive of, and can only be exercised in freedom. Sin is never caused or determined, by its very nature it has to be chosen. Therefore, Haufniensis is conveying to his reader that one has to accept personal responsibility for one’s own sin. It is a choice made in freedom and such a choice, be it good or bad, always carries with it the burden of responsibility.

The question then begs: How does Haufniensis view the story of Adam? This is a complex question, since Haufniensis never provides us with something resembling a direct answer. One possibility is as a Platonic type of “myth”, i.e. “a pictorial representation of a truth not otherwise comprehensible.”³²⁹ Before the advent of sin, or the so-called fall into sin, which Haufniensis represents as “the fall of Adam”, the individual was human but had no knowledge of good or evil. This left one without the ability to choose between the two, as well as the lack of any significant goals. With the advent of sin, the individual lost innocence, but gained a knowledge of good and evil. Now one could look towards the future in a state of anxiety and uncertainty, but also with hope.³³⁰

This discussion of the relation between sin and anxiety broaches two interesting points. Firstly, Haufniensis makes the clear suggestion of a causal relationship between the first sin of an individual and the awakening of spirit. As has already been discussed, the dreaming state of spirit precedes the state of sin and the consequent manifestation of the nothingness that is anxiety. In short therefore, sin initiates the wakening of spirit. If we take this line of argument further, it could be suggested that Haufniensis implies

³²⁸ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard's Authorship*. 1968. p. 159

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 38-41

with this theory that indeed, it is because of sin that a higher state in the evolution of spirit has come about. Without the awakening of spirit, which led to the first sin, Adam would have languished in a limbo-like state of innocence and ignorance. This notion however, is not new. The Eastern Church's ceremony of Latin Easter Liturgy, speaks of the *felix culpa* or the "blessed fault" of Adam. Here it is said that the fall of Adam ultimately led to the happening of Christ, which not only brought God among men, but also allowed for a new relationship of "sonship to the Father and of brotherhood with his Christ."³³¹ The message that, because of sin man is ultimately enabled to reach a higher state is quite apparent here, and despite the difference in expression, is entirely in accord with Vigilius' theory of spirit.

Sin can so appropriately be used in conjunction with the concept of anxiety, because in anxiety, the freedom to choose and the possibility therefore, to rise or fall, is agonizingly experienced. Herein lies the potential for the evolution of spirit. In the state of ambiguous dizziness, the individual comes to see him/herself as being in sin. However, it is in that same ambiguous dizziness that the sinner realizes his/her higher possibility. The requisite for this however, is two-fold. Firstly, instead of attempting to flee the experience of anxiety, the individual must persevere, or wills him/herself through it. To attain a higher state of consciousness requires firstly, a guilt-consciousness, which is the acknowledgement that one has fallen into sin, and that one carries the sole responsibility for this fall. Secondly, a sin-consciousness is requisite, which is the realization that one is a sinner without justification standing before the judgement of God. The decisive phase of spirit's evolution takes place by an act of grace, which one cannot be entitled to, nor presuppose. This constitutes the overcoming of sin and initiates the relationship of faith, in which the core problems of the integration of the elements, which compose the human synthesis, are surmounted. It is essential to note that the evolution of spirit is never complete, and continues as long as the synthesis endures, in other words, as long as an individual is alive. According to McCarthy(1978), the evolution must thus always be perceived as being one of degrees, but with critical stages being attained at discernible junctures.³³²

4.4 Anxiety as Freedom

Kierkegaard has famously been called "the Father of Existentialism", and to a large extent this is due to his singular influence upon prominent existential philosophers such as Sartre and Camus, who actively integrated much of his thoughts concerning freedom and the individual into their respective works. This is

³³¹ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 39 (footnote)

³³² *Ibid.* p. 40

a contentious issue, for although a great deal of the principal tenets of the existentialist movement found their origin in the works of Kierkegaard, it remains a highly dubious practice to attempt any form of categorization with regards to the Danish writer, including that of an “existentialism”.

Having said that however, Haufniensis’ concept of anxiety has proven itself a pivotal element in existentialist philosophy. Not only has Haufniensis’ exposition of anxiety provided the sum and substance for later conceptions of *Angst* or *l’angoisse*, in the works of Heidegger and Sartre respectively, but it is also a principal element in the understanding of freedom. After the individual’s fall into sin, and the subsequent experience of anxiety, ignorance and innocence are lost, and are replaced by an awareness of good and evil. The knowledge of good and evil, places one in a position to exercise choice, which also allows the individual to be historical instead of merely eternal. Paradoxically, choice also tends to carry the individual beyond the temporal and into the eternal. The making of a choice is as much an act of freedom as the necessity of the presence of freedom in order to employ the act of choice. By “freedom” it is not intended to convey that the finite individual has now in some way achieved infinite freedom, but the freedom that the individual does achieve is true freedom and in its own manner, it is absolute, e.g. an individual has certain parameters within which he/she can exercise choice, but within those limitations he/she is infinitely free to choose. Another way of putting anxiety of possibility, would be to call it anxiety of freedom. The self stands on the threshold of a qualitative break with its former state, and it is precisely this that reveals one’s freedom and, by implication, one’s anxiety. Freedom mentioned in this context is somewhat of a contentious issue. As Taylor(1975) correctly argues, ultimately freedom is inexplicable because it does not arise out of anything, if anything, it results from the practice of inwardness.³³³ It is important to note that the issue of freedom is central, not only to *The Concept of Anxiety*, but to Kierkegaard’s corpus as a whole, as the following two quotations demonstrate.

“The self is made up of infinitude and finitude. But this synthesis is a relation, and a relation which, though derived, relates to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the categories of possibility and necessity.”³³⁴

“But what, then, is this self of mine? If it is to be a matter of a first glance, a first shot at a definition, my answer is: it is the most abstract thing of all which yet, at the same time, is the most concrete thing of all – it is freedom.”³³⁵

³³³ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 115

³³⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. 1989. p. 59

³³⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 516

There are only very rare occasions in the text of *The Concept of Anxiety* where Vigilius Haufniensis addresses his reader directly. However, one such direct point concerns the relation between anxiety and possibility, or more specifically, the possibility of freedom.

“Anxiety is freedom’s possibility,”³³⁶

Again, in his journal, Kierkegaard writes:

“... [as] freedom’s possibility, expressed in the individual’s anxiety, so the future is now the eternal’s possibility and is expressed in the individuality as anxiety.”(V B 55:9)³³⁷

However, early in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis also brings this to the reader’s attention, that “freedom is never possible, as soon as it is, it is actual”³³⁸. Anxiety is therefore freedom’s disclosure to itself in possibility. However, in the manner of God, this freedom is never possible, it simply is. At this point, the reader will doubtless be struck by the seemingly contradictory nature of the afore-mentioned argument: anxiety is the possibility of freedom, which itself is never possible, but “arises out of nothing”? The instinctive response to this quandary is the question of what to make of this paradox? As usual Haufniensis makes no effort to dictate the reading of his argument, and accordingly furnishes one with no clue of how to approach the problem. However, perhaps the question should not be: how do we go about solving this riddle Haufniensis has set before us, but rather: should we attempt any unravelling of the problem at all? Although the latter may give the impression of being facetious, it actually constitutes a valid point. As Marino(1998) argues, if we are to take our cues from Haufniensis himself, his own myriad of abstractions notwithstanding, there are three issues about which he does not seem to encourage further theorizing namely, self-consciousness, freedom and sin. Further conjecture on these topics serves only to detract from the central issue at hand, namely that of anxiety.³³⁹

³³⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 155

³³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 197

³³⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 22

³³⁹ Marino, G.D. **Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 318

Be that as it may, the problem at hand certainly warrants at least a few comments. One possible argument is that although anxiety is broadly elucidated as the experience of the possibility of freedom, it is in fact, the disclosure of freedom actualized in a rudimentary form, that is, as freedom “entangled in itself”.³⁴⁰

“Anxiety is neither a category of necessity nor a category of freedom; it is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself.”³⁴¹

In the experience of anxiety, it is precisely our freedom, which elicits the feeling of powerlessness and paradoxically, unfreedom. Moreover, Haufniensis demonstrates that in order for freedom to become entangled in itself it must become actual. Another possible argument, is that because anxiety is the “possibility of freedom”, or “the possibility of the possibility of freedom”³⁴², it is exclusively with the renunciation of anxiety that freedom itself can be actualized. Freedom can only properly manifest itself when the individual is emancipated from the bondage of sin and the anxiety which issues forth from it. From this point of view, it could be argued that, according to Haufniensis, we sin out of anxiety. However, as Marino(1998) correctly comments, this argument proves to be quite un-Kierkegaardian, because if freedom is only actualized after the subdual of anxiety, then we can conclude that we do not sin freely, since, according to this line of thought, anxiety will signify that for the sinner, freedom has not been actualized. How would it be possible then, for an individual to sin freely, if the requisite freedom, which he/she has or is, is not yet actual? To be sure, it is in the experience of anxiety itself that we come to understand that we are free. Finally, if we look at anxiety in terms of the cognition/affect dichotomy so firmly established in Western tradition, we can state that for Haufniensis, anxiety constitutes an affect with cognitive content.³⁴³

4.5 Anxiety as Mood

According to Marino(1998), in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis places great emphasis on the importance of moods. He begins in the introduction by complaining of the sloppiness of contemporary

³⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 49

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.* p. 44

³⁴³ Marino, G.D. **Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 318-319

thinking. Referring obliquely to Hegel and his contemporaries, Haufniensis claims that the thinkers of his time are forever committing acts of intellectual hubris and as a result are inadvertently crossing the boundaries of their particular disciplines.³⁴⁴ This, according to Haufniensis, is a problem in virtually all spheres of thought, but the sphere upon which he concentrates is, quite naturally, sin. This idea had been and is being approached from metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic points of view.

“If sin is dealt with in metaphysics, the mood becomes that of dialectical uniformity and disinterestedness, which ponder sin as something that cannot withstand the scrutiny of thought. The concept of sin is also altered, for sin is indeed to be overcome, yet not as something to which thought is unable to give life, but as that which is, and as such concerns every man.”³⁴⁵

In every case, Haufniensis claims, the confusion that results is of the most dangerous kind.

“Yet every error gives birth to its own enemy.”³⁴⁶

In other words, every time an idea, such as that of sin is approached in the inappropriate mood, a situation of misinterpretation is created which is all the more distorting due to the fact that those within the situation are rarely aware of its distorting effects. Haufniensis drives home his point with yet another indirect reference to Hegel and the other intellectuals of the time.

“That science, just as much as poetry and art, presupposes a mood both in the creator as well as in the observer, and that an error in the modulation is just as disturbing as an error in the development of thought, has been entirely forgotten in our time, when inwardness has been completely forgotten, and also the category of appropriation, because of the joy over all the glory men thought they possessed or in their greed have given up as did the dog that preferred the shadow.”³⁴⁷

It is clear therefore that Haufniensis has no scruples in announcing that for every idea or object of thought, there is an appropriate mood. With the mood of anxiety, the individual existence enters a greater level of seriousness, and indeed, of crisis within the aesthetic sphere. However, it is important to note that

³⁴⁴ Marino, G.D. **Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 310-311

³⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p.15

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.14 (footnote)

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.13 (footnote)

the mood of anxiety is not relevant exclusively to the life of the aesthetic, but is an enduring structure both within the aesthetic sphere and those that follow. Indeed, this is the case with all four prevalent moods in Kierkegaard's work. As McCarthy (1978) pointedly states, they are permanent aspects of the individual life. In each sphere of existence a crisis point is experienced within each mood, however, even after a successful resolution of the said crisis, the structure endures, and is re-experienced, albeit in a markedly different manner.³⁴⁸

It is difficult to deal with the mood of anxiety in isolation from the other principal moods in Kierkegaard's work, since each mood is viewed as a necessary and progressive step within the evolution of the individual self. Here it is important to note that it is very difficult, if indeed at all possible, to speak of a sequence of "preceding" and "succeeding" moods, since no order is ever alluded to. Hence the use of the word "spheres", an image which more readily lends itself to the concept of overlapping which is a preferred manner of understanding the placement of the moods within the individual's development. In addition, even though the four cardinal moods are quite distinctly different, no clear line of demarcation exists between them. The following observation that Kierkegaard makes about Plato's *Symposium* may perhaps be applied to his view of the different spheres of existence also:

"Thus all these speeches are like a sliding telescope; the one representation ingeniously merges into the other..."³⁴⁹

Therefore, when addressing the mood of anxiety, I will refrain from placing it before or after any other mood, and will, to an extent, make mention of the other moods insofar as is necessary.

4.6 The Concept of Anxiety

The traditional conception of anxiety is by and large colloquial. All too often however, this is confused with the conception of fear. Haufniensis anticipated this and therefore addressed this problem directly in *The Concept of Anxiety*. The confusion itself is actually quite understandable were it not for one important facet of anxiety, namely, its ambiguity. Fear is not cerebral, but intuitive. It is the instinctive reaction, a vital part of man's corporeal composition and is manifested through the individual's recoil before threat. Admittedly, there are degrees of fear, but even when fear is only dimly apprehended or not apprehended at all, the direct response still obeys a powerful psychological law which is ultimately dependent on the presence of a specific object or upon some tangible psychic factor active within the human mind. In short,

³⁴⁸ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 125-126

³⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Irony*. 1989. p. 42

fear is fear of a specified object. Anxiety, on the other hand, is ultimately an anxiety of nothing. In anticipation of the modern psychiatric conception of anxiety, Haufniensis asserts that anxiety is almost always about nothing. The “almost” in this assertion is significant, because in his circumscription of the various forms that anxiety can take he makes, with regard to anxiety about sin, the following statement:

“Yet this time the object of anxiety is a determinate something and its nothing is an actual something, because the distinction between good and evil is posited *in concreto* – and anxiety therefore loses its dialectical ambiguity.”³⁵⁰

Be that as it may, Marino(1998) points out that, whereas other intellectuals such as Kant and Hegel had classified anxiety as a kind of fear, Kierkegaard was the first to observe that anxiety differs from fear in that the object of anxiety is usually indeterminate.³⁵¹

“In innocence, man is not qualified as spirit but is psychically qualified in immediate unity with his natural condition. The spirit in man is dreaming... In this state there is peace and repose, but there is simultaneously something else that is not contention and strife, for there is indeed nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety.”³⁵²

The first aspect to bear in mind is that anxiety is essentially a future-oriented, anticipatory phenomenon, the object of concern ultimately being the future possibilities of the self. The reason that this point is emphasized is because anxiety is at its base, an anxiety of possibility. The initial state at which anxiety is experienced is the state of innocence. The self is ignorant of good and evil, but is disturbed by a vague anticipation of future development, the occurrence of a personal transformation. “Possibility” in this sense, alludes to a future state in which specifically religious categories of “sin”, “guilt” and “repentance” will receive acknowledgement. As Taylor(1975) notes, it is here we see the inklings of the progressive nature of the mood of anxiety. Anxiety is intimately related to the self’s possibilities and the self’s freedom. The individual in a state of innocence now stands upon the threshold of a spiritual crisis. Anxiety is therefore, the medium through which the individual approaches his/her future.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 111-112

³⁵¹ Marino, G.D. **Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Marino, G.D. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 319

³⁵² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 41

³⁵³ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 219

“Dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality, but this actuality is nothing, and innocence always sees this nothing outside itself.”³⁵⁴

It is therefore spirit, the vehicle of consciousness, which prior to the first sin, resides in a dreaming state.

4.6.1 The Theory of Spirit

As was mentioned earlier, spirit plays a pivotal role in the individual’s experience of anxiety. It is also the most important constituent of Kierkegaard’s theory of the human being as synthesis, for without spirit, there would be no synthesis. It is of paramount importance therefore, that this theory, which is consistent throughout virtually all of Kierkegaard’s works in which it appears, even those written under pseudonyms, be properly understood.

In *The Concept of Anxiety* there are basically two planes in the history of spirit, that of the race and that of the individual. The genius, claims Haufniensis, lives out the experience of the race in its fullness. The theory of the individual plane roughly resembles the theory of biological evolution, wherein the human foetus, in the course of its physical development, will repeat certain basic stages which the race underwent, in the process of developing the present human form. In the theory of spirit, the basic phases are pinpointed as the major phases of human religious history. According to this theory, the three principal religious phases are paganism, Judaism and Christianity. These are representative of the basic planes of development of spirit. In the phase of paganism, the eternal reveals itself only in an initial, imperfect form, and the temporal itself has little significance. According to Haufniensis, this constitutes “non-being.”³⁵⁵ The closest paganism can come with regard to a conception of eternity, is to conceive of the latter as an abstraction. In Judaism, Haufniensis introduces a new level where temporality is delineated by the identification of a transcendence lying above and beyond the temporal. However, Judaism for Haufniensis, still constitutes a partially abstract perception of eternity, and as such, does not succeed in exercising a demonstrative influence upon an emphasis of the significance of time. According to Haufniensis, it is only in Christianity that the aspect of time and decisions made within time acquire infinite significance for the individual. Thus, as Malantschuk(1971) points out, it is only this conception of the relation of temporal and the eternal, where there is an infinite accentuation on the past as well as the future, that makes allowance for Christianity’s important dogmatic qualifications, such as conversion, reconciliation, resurrection and judgement. To briefly categorize, paganism represents an essentially

³⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 41.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 82-83 (footnote)

dreaming state of spirit, Judaism an awakening, and Christianity the fully awakened. Within Christianity, according to Haufniensis, there are “devolutionary” tendencies, specifically symbolized by Romanticism and its intellectual derivative Idealism.³⁵⁶

According to McCarthy(1978), the three phases are not exclusively representations of religious phases, but also of historical epochs. Historically speaking, we currently find ourselves within the Christian epoch, and the highest phase of the race’s spiritual development. However, this does not indicate completion, and even the genius who has gone through the previous two phases is still evolving. Kierkegaard never saw Christianity as a fulfilment or achievement, he instead viewed it as a constant process of development. Since the process of evolution continues to take place within the Christian epoch on the individual level, the potential of “devolution”, as well as “non-evolution”, is forever present. This pertains to all three planes of development of spirit. The animation of evolution in the spirit is in relation to the body-mind-spirit synthesis. This is because genuine synthesis cannot be achieved while spirit remains in a dreaming state.³⁵⁷ The use of the word “genuine” in describing spirit is highly significant, because, even when spirit is dreaming, it is still present, and the individual is therefore, in this sense, always a synthesis. However, when spirit awakens, the synthesis becomes active, and there is movement toward the interaction of the synthesis that is the individual, and the development of spirit. Malantschuk(1971) correctly notes that the individual must first move dialectically and existentially, through the stages of paganism and Judaism, in order to finally reach the stage of Christianity.³⁵⁸

4.6.2 Human Being as a Synthesis

It is important to note that the entire conception of anxiety is based upon Kierkegaard’s view of the individual as a synthesis. On first consideration, the human being is the synthesis of the physical and the psychological. However, as he points out, the synthesis would not be possible if these two factors were not united by a third. This third factor is the spirit. Here, Haufniensis claims, is that element which separates us from animals. An animal regularly experiences fear, it is part of its instinctual disposition which aids survival. However, an animal does not, and cannot, experience anxiety. The reason being that it is not qualified by spirit to enable it to do so. Therefore, it is the power of spirit, which evokes anxiety in the human being. Spirit is highly ambiguous. In the sense that, as Haufniensis states, spirit can even be perceived as a hostile force which, even though it serves as the necessary factor for the synthesis of the

³⁵⁶ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard’s Thought*. 1971. p. 265-266

³⁵⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 39

³⁵⁸ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard’s Thought*. 1971. p. 266

human individual, it also constantly disrupts the relation between the physical and the psychological. This disruption of equilibrium is experienced as anxiety. However, because the spirit is still only dreaming the reality that it projects is, as yet, only possibility.³⁵⁹

4.6.3 The “Dizziness” of Anxiety

In order to achieve inwardness, an individual has to distance him/herself from the familiar security of the everyday world. As this is done, the individual will suddenly find him/herself profoundly and radically alone, faced with possibility posited by freedom. Haufniensis compares this experience of anxiety to dizziness.

“Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down? Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom then succumbs in this dizziness.”³⁶⁰

In essence therefore, anxiety is a deeply dialectical experience. If any one phrase can serve as Haufniensis’ definition of anxiety, it is the following:

“Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy*.”³⁶¹

Simply put, anxiety can be described as a feeling of attraction towards that which, at the same time, one feels repelled. It is a paradoxical form of desire, or if you will, a paradoxical form of fear.

“Anxiety is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy, anxiety is an alien power which grips the individual, and yet one cannot tear himself free from it and does not want to, for one fears, but what he fears he desires. Anxiety makes the individual powerless.”³⁶² (*JP* I 39; *Pap.* III A 233)

³⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 42-43

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 61

³⁶¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 42

³⁶² Kierkegaard, S. *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*. 1951. p. 235

Whatever situation or phenomenon be the focus of our attention, the other always intrudes and consequently develops an inner tension. The Watchman of Copenhagen sees confirmation of his argument in the realm of child psychology. Children, states Haufniensis, are fascinated and enticed by the allure of adventure, the mysterious and the extraordinary. Yet simultaneously, this pursuit of the mysterious, for example, is alarming and perhaps even frightening to a child. It does not however, have the effect of dampening the child's eagerness for the endeavour. Grimsley(1967) shows that, in adults too, Haufniensis finds evidence for his claim. Certain spiritually undeveloped individuals, in whom the spiritual impulse is somewhat obscure, display a curious combination of melancholy and self-assertion.³⁶³

It is the extreme cases of anxiety, which may quite literally cause the "dizziness" of which Haufniensis talks and induce feelings of helplessness and impotence. Grimsley(1967) draws our attention to the fact that, in these cases, the powers of fascination and accompanying repulsion may be so powerful that they paralyse the power of action. This experience is often preceded by the practice of inwardness. However, in this case the inwardness may have as consequence, a desperate sense of isolation, which is so pervasive and inhibiting that it has the force of a tormenting, almost alien, power.³⁶⁴ However this particular scenario, like most cases of extremity, is experienced by much fewer individuals. It is mentioned simply to illustrate that the qualitative experience of anxiety, like all other moods, is essentially subjective and to a large extent dependant on certain temperamental factors. It is not possible therefore, to speak of a universal experience of anxiety. The actual experience of anxiety will differ, qualitatively speaking, from individual to individual.

The sum and substance of the conception of anxiety is not an issue over which Haufniensis expends much time during the formal discussion. This however, was not due to neglect, but was actually a deliberate step in congruity with the ambiguity and nothingness of the concept under discussion. Much of the work concerns itself with the secondary characteristics of anxiety, and more significantly, with anxiety's role in awakening an individual's consciousness of sin, and ultimately, the journey towards faith. What Haufniensis emphasizes about anxiety is that it is a state, which points beyond itself, with the ensuing possibilities. An individual may experience anxiety and, through this, move to a higher level of consciousness, or on the other hand, may attempt to flee the experience. It is important to bear in mind however, that anxiety-in-itself is an exceedingly enigmatic and perplexing subject, perhaps even impossible to delineate or quantify in its entirety, hence the supreme irony of the title of Haufniensis'

³⁶³ Grimsley, R. *Existentialist Thought*. 1967. p. 97-98

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 98

work. Thus, in order to properly describe anxiety, Haufniensis made more allusions to its manifestations or symptoms, than to the ontological experience of anxiety.

4.6.4 Objective and Subjective Anxiety

When taking into account Kierkegaard's constant emphasis of the significance of subjectivity (cf. Chapter 2), it stands to reason that subjective anxiety and the individual's relationship to it play a central role in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Furthermore, this impression is reinforced simply by the abundance of references to subjective anxiety, as well as the amount of time and space Haufniensis devotes to the topic, particularly when compared to the relatively sparse attention paid to its antipode, objective anxiety. In this respect, it has been intimated by some Kierkegaard scholars that Haufniensis gave the issue attention only for the sake of form, and as a prelude to the more important consideration of subjective anxiety. While there is a degree of merit to these claims, it is my opinion that Haufniensis certainly did not relegate the topic of objective anxiety to a lesser stature than that of subjective anxiety. Both are, in my opinion, equally important to a proper understanding of anxiety. Having said that however, the individual's experience of anxiety is always utterly personal and in isolation from others. It would seem therefore, that the issue of subjective anxiety, while not more significant than its antipode, does warrant more lengthy discussion within the context of Haufniensis' work as a whole.

Vigilius makes a distinction between anxiety prior to and following sin. However, this distinction is made only in theory, not in terminology. McCarthy(1978) therefore suggests the use of the term "primal anxiety", in reference to the state of anxiety before the first sin. As has already been mentioned, this anxiety emanates when spirit is in a dream-like state. "Primal Anxiety" is therefore the dizziness of freedom before sin and the state out of which one emerges after having discovered that one has fallen into sin. This is therefore a pre-conscious form of anxiety, as opposed to the later forms, which are conscious. The most significant characteristic of this so-called "primal anxiety" is that it confronts the individual, whom is still in a state of innocence, and presents said individual with the possibility of either remaining in a state of ignorance and innocence, or else sinning.³⁶⁵ After the fall, anxiety includes two types, objective and subjective anxiety.

³⁶⁵ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 40

The issue of objective anxiety is somewhat peculiar. According to some scholars, such as McCarthy(1978), Haufniensis' treatment of the concept of objective anxiety is the weakest part of the entire work.

“...for it is a section which is seemingly taken up out of necessity, handled briefly and ended abruptly,”³⁶⁶

At the start of the concise chapter dealing with the topic, the reader can be forgiven for being under the impression that Haufniensis is using the term more for the purposes of elucidating the topic of subjective anxiety, than for the prospect of a discussion on objective anxiety itself. The distinction, Haufniensis tells us, between objective and subjective anxiety lies in “the contemplation of the world and the subsequent individual’s state of innocence.”³⁶⁷ He states that objective anxiety, which made its quantitative entrance into the world through the sin of Adam, and is therefore quantitatively different from that of the individual, is the reflection of sinfulness of a generation throughout the whole world. According to Haufniensis, objective anxiety is the “effect of sin in nonhuman existence {*Tilværelse*}.”³⁶⁸ By this, it is not meant that inanimate objects are to be regarded as sinful, but instead that “creation is placed in an entirely different light because of Adam’s sin,” for now “sensuousness is constantly degraded to mean sinfulness.”³⁶⁹ In actual fact, the issue really at stake here is the perception of creation by sinful humanity. As Dunning(1985) emphasizes, due to the actuality of sin, the distinction between sensuousness (sinless bodily existence) and sinfulness (the psychological result of sin) is blurred. In other words, sinfulness is projected onto sensuousness. In a similar manner, the external created world seems to manifest an objective anxiety. The distinguishing factor of this anxiety, by virtue of its innocence or lack of self-consciousness, is that it is analogous to (although less than) that of Adam.³⁷⁰

Paradoxically, it appears that Haufniensis does attribute to Adam some degree of responsibility for sin of the race after all. However, there is a tangible difference between Haufniensis’ understanding of this theory and that of the Church. Sin, according to Vigilius, is far too substantial a construct to be ascribed to so abstract a category as the race. This is because sin is posited precisely in the individual, by the individual, him/herself. For this line of argument not to become contradictory, the sinfulness of the race must therefore be viewed as the quantitative equivalent of that of the individual. The difference between

³⁶⁶ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 41

³⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 56

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 57

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 58

³⁷⁰ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 147-148

the sinfulness of the individual and that of the race is then one of quality and quantity, the first positing the quality. Therefore, Haufniensis argues, sinfulness, quantitatively speaking, did indeed enter creation with the fall of Adam. This does not equate however, to sinfulness having entered as the quality of sin, that is, as an individual falling into sin, by the sin of said individual, but rather as the category of sin acquiring significance for the race, by the sin of Adam. Objective anxiety is thus the effect of sinfulness in the race.³⁷¹

The categorical claim is that creation descended into the quagmire of corruption as a direct result of Adam's sin, and that freedom was posited precisely by its misuse, which in turn cast a shadow over creation. In addition, man is a synthesis of two extremes, and that by sin one extreme became all the more radical. This cannot be incorporated under a psychological deliberation, says Haufniensis, but rather belongs to the domain of dogmatics. In fact, objective anxiety, or the anxiety in creation, is not brought forth by creation itself, but rather by the fact that the fall of Adam placed it in an entirely different light.³⁷²

In short, as McCarthy(1978) correctly states, objective anxiety gives Adam some degree of historic-metaphysical responsibility concerning sinfulness of the race, while at the same time, it safeguards the vital fact of his position within the race. By the first sin, Adam is responsible for objective anxiety in the world, a state upon which each individual enumerates by their sin. In terms of subjectivity, Adam is personally responsible for his sin, exclusively. The only difference between Adam and any other individual therefore, is one of chronology.³⁷³

Haufniensis' treatment of the topic of subjective anxiety is, in contrast to that of objective anxiety, focussed and substantial. Indeed, the sustained discussion of this issue and the plethora of insights revealed therein, form the central concern of *The Concept of Anxiety*. Anxiety is a radically private experience, and as such, is wholly subjective. Whereas the exact meaning of objective anxiety required a fair amount of deliberation, the definition of subjective anxiety is far more lucid. Anxiety experienced before sin, which McCarthy(1978) refers to as "primal anxiety" is subjective anxiety, as is any anxiety that pertains to the individual existence. The experience of anxiety is virtually always, essentially and qualitatively, the same, preceding and following sin. That which is totally altered by sin however, is the individual's position in the universe, and as a result, so is his/her possibilities. Consequently, the role of anxiety in relation to the individual is also radically altered. A valid example of this would be the choice

³⁷¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 56-58

³⁷² *Ibid.* p. 58

³⁷³ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 41

with which Adam was faced when he was confronted by the relatively simple alternative of either remaining in innocence and ignorance, or sinning and gaining a knowledge of good and evil. Here as always, Haufniensis reminds us, sin came into the world via sin. All individuals sin in the same basic fashion as Adam did. The only palpable difference being that with other individuals there always exists the consciousness that this is a choice that “has already been made”³⁷⁴, for all individuals fall into sin. The essential possibility for every individual now concerns the manner in which to respond to this relation to sinfulness, for one can either remain in it, or one can strive to overcome it. This possibility itself brings about further anxiety, and it is in this possibility that the experience of anxiety is vital. The individual can choose either to attempt to flee the anxiety, which would aggregate to the act of trying to negate anxiety. Or the individual could will him/herself through it. The latter would constitute an important step in the attempt to overcome sinfulness, and a further step along the journey of evolution of spirit.³⁷⁵

An individual, qualified by spirit and conscious of him/herself as being in sinfulness, is now confronted with the infinite, ambiguous possibilities afforded to him/her by choice. As Taylor(1975) pointedly states, this ambiguous, endless possibility or the confrontation with the nothingness which one is bound to experience and will oneself through for the purpose of becoming oneself in a fuller and higher sense, constitutes subjective anxiety. This is evident because the endless, undefined and unknown possibilities which the individual, as a spiritually-qualified being, experiences, are the cause of both alarm and fascination. It is important to note that the possibilities are unknown, because in this context, knowledge is based on the experience of the individual subject. Since no other individual has knowledge of the inner experiences of a being qualified by spirit, the said individual cannot perceive the experiences of another as a reliable guide.³⁷⁶

There are two other characteristics of the subjective anxiety experienced by the individual, namely that of fascination and repulsion. As was mentioned earlier, anxiety is, by its very essence, a deeply personal experience. Since the possibility experienced by the individual, is possibility as it pertains to that specific individual, and since one is always interested in oneself, possibility arouses and excites said individual’s entire being and thereby compels attention to the possibility in question. At the same time however, the possibility itself is un-actualized possibility, the destiny of the individual is undecided and as such has the potential of being perilous. The potential of this unknowable quantity therefore effects a sense of alarm in the individual, which permeates the being of the individual as thoroughly as the accompanying sense of

³⁷⁴ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 41

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 41-42

³⁷⁶ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 123-124

fascination. The fascination and repulsion correspond to the “sympathy” and “antipathy” mentioned earlier in Haufniensis’ definition, since, as Taylor(1975) points out, anxiety alerts the individual to the unsettling fact that there is something both attractive and repulsive about one’s nothingness.³⁷⁷

4.7 Anxiety for the evil

The possibility with which the individual is now confronted has two separate outcomes: the individual as a spiritually-qualified being, and the individual as a sinner. The fact of sin modifies one’s spiritual possibilities, the essential possibility now revolves around the one’s status in sin. The core of the individual’s possibility in this case, consists in acquiring the consciousness of already being a sinner before God. This is what Haufniensis refers to when he speaks of a “sin-consciousness”. It is the experience of anxiety, which carries the individual beyond the “guilt-consciousness” experienced in anxiety (responsibility to oneself) into “sin-consciousness” (responsibility before God), and finally into a position to receive grace.³⁷⁸ However, this process of movement is to a great extent dependent on the will of the individual. In the theory of evolution of the personality and consciousness through the evolution of spirit, the act of will on the part of the individual is of singular importance. If the will on the part of the individual is lacking, the process of growth is effectively halted. This particular issue forms the core problem in the aesthetic sphere of existence (cf. Chapter 3).

“The posited sin is indeed an annulled possibility, but it is also an unwarranted actuality, and as such, anxiety can relate itself to it. Since sin is an unwarranted actuality, it is also to be negated. This work anxiety will undertake.”³⁷⁹

It is clear that the individual consciousness would like to address the problem of sin. From the above passage it also seems clear, as Dunning(1985) points out, that the acknowledgement of sin as a fact, appears concomitantly with anxiety and the hope of emancipating oneself from both. Thus, anxiety for evil is ushered in by “the ingenious sophistry of anxiety”, for the presence of sin immediately offers both freedom and what Haufniensis calls “the eloquence of illusion”.³⁸⁰ This is directly followed by phase in which anxiety recognizes the possibility of the continuation of sin and attempts to strike a form of compromise.

³⁷⁷ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 222

³⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 93

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 113

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

“Anxiety wants to have the actuality of sin removed, not entirely but to a certain degree, or to put it more exactly, to a certain degree it wants to have the actuality of sin continue – but note, only to a certain degree.”³⁸¹

This brings us to an important aspect concerning anxiety about evil. The sophistry of anxiety, together with the impotence of compromise, are united in repentance, which optimistically hopes for freedom while simultaneously confessing sin.³⁸²

“Repentance is reduced to a possibility in relation to sin; in other words, repentance cannot cancel sin, it can only sorrow over it. Sin advances in its consequence; repentance follows it step by step, but always a moment too late.”³⁸³

As Dunning(1985) astutely points out, the repentant is impotent, left bereft of any reserves of strength upon which to draw. The result is a conquest by sin, in which the anxiety of the individual “throws itself into the arms of repentance”³⁸⁴ which Haufniensis compares with death.³⁸⁵

“The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety without anxiety, which only faith can do; faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but, itself eternally young, it extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death. Only faith is able to do this, for only in faith is the synthesis eternal and at every moment possible.”³⁸⁶

It is important to realize that although the individual can attempt to flee anxiety, anxiety itself can never be done away with. Even if an individual were to attain the highest spiritual level, the category of possibility would still remain, and wherever there exists possibility, anxiety will be experienced. Therefore, the human being always remains in a state of anxiety, even after having experienced and willed him/herself through a critical anxiety experience. Haufniensis distinguishes between two stances that can be taken up by the individual in terms of moving towards “sin-consciousness” and the overcoming of sin. These are the afore-mentioned anxiety for evil, and the anxiety for good. The former, to a certain extent, refers to the individual who attempts to escape his/her being as a sinner, through an act of false repentance. McCarthy(1978) states that in another sense however, it continues to apply even to

³⁸¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 114

³⁸² Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 156

³⁸³ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 115

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 115

³⁸⁵ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 156

³⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 117

one who has accepted this distinction of being in sin. This would be due to the fact that repentance is a matter of degree, and thus “sin-consciousness” never reaches a point of fulfilment, whereby it cannot be greater than it already is. Therefore, to whatever extent “sin-consciousness” can be said to be able to transcend its present state (which it always necessarily can), one can be said to be in anxiety of evil. Haufniensis’ discussion centres mainly upon the individual who complies with the inner movement of evolution, but who shows reluctance in going through the anxiety experience, the outcome of which will mark him/her as “sinner”.³⁸⁷ According to Malantschuk(1971), anxiety about evil represents one of the extreme experiences of anxiety.³⁸⁸

Haufniensis reminds us however, that although there is always hope, there exists no guarantee of fulfilment since every step in the process of overcoming sin depends on the active co-operation of the individual. In attempting to avoid the assaults of spirit, the individual experiences anxiety for the evil. This is a crucial moment in the overcoming of sin, as Haufniensis himself states:

“The consequence comes closer; the individual trembles like a horse that gasps as it comes to a halt at the place where it once has been frightened. Sin conquers. Anxiety throws itself despairingly into the arms of repentance. Repentance ventures all. It conceives of the consequence of sin as suffering penalty and of perdition as the consequence of sin. It is lost.”³⁸⁹

It is clear that the premonition, or anxiety, of sin and the actual fall into sin, provoke the assault of guilt and the accompanying anxiety. At this stage however, it is the perception of anxiety that is of importance. If the experience of anxiety is not seen as a means by which to overcome the state of sin, but rather as a chastening or punishment, the individual may respond by attempting to flee or cancel the ensuing anxiety. This is often attempted by throwing oneself into a state of wretched repentance. Haufniensis is quick to add that this phenomenon is rarely seen in baser or more immoral individuals, but rather in those who are more virtuous. However, having said that, repentance in this context simply constitutes lamentation, motivated by regret, it does not free this individual from either his anxiety or his state of sin. Repentance, or more accurately remorse in this sense, is therefore ineffectual in moving the individual towards sin-consciousness where a higher form of repentance, accompanied in sorrow, can lead to forgiveness and faith.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 42-43

³⁸⁸ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard's Thought*. 1971. p. 271

³⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 115

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 116-118

“But repentance cannot make him free; in that he is mistaken. The occasion comes; anxiety has already discovered it. Every thought trembles. Anxiety sucks out the strength of repentance and shakes its head.”³⁹¹

It is of vital importance that anxiety for the evil is overcome, for the lack of this overcoming constitutes a failure to move onto the higher form of existence, which lies as potential within the spirit. Haufniensis again makes use of the metaphor of biological evolution in reference to the growth of spirit, and the threat posed to that movement toward a higher life before movement towards it in faith. Faith not only represents the overcoming of anxiety, but also puts to an end the sophistry of so-called repentance, which was mentioned earlier.³⁹²

4.8 Anxiety for the good

A second, and to Haufniensis' mind, much more significant and perilous stance that may be taken up in relation to the evolution of the spirit and the experience of anxiety, is anxiety for the good. The importance of this position is evident in the fact that roughly a quarter of the entire treatise is devoted to its discussion. Here, as with concepts of subjective and objective anxiety, Haufniensis again reveals the relative importance of a topic by the amount of space and time he expends in discussing it. In the case of anxiety for the good, Haufniensis takes the position of a critic of the aesthetic sphere of existence. This is because anxiety for the good represents the stance of those in the aesthetic modality (cf. Chapter 3). The difference between those who experience anxiety for the good and those who experience anxiety for the evil, is that the former attempt their flight from anxiety long before the characterization of sinner becomes imminent. Instead, they flee from anxiety as soon as the eternal stirs with the movement of spirit. Their escape is made into exteriority as soon as the movement of interiority begins; they seek to lose themselves in that which is superficial as soon as that which is serious reveals itself. As an experience or mood, anxiety for the good is both qualitatively and quantitatively the same as other experiences of anxiety. Hall(1985) states that what sets it apart from the other forms of anxiety is the specific set of possibilities made manifest in it and the stance that it represents in relation to these possibilities. In the case of anxiety for the evil, the individual is in sin, and his/her anxiety is over evil. In contrast, in anxiety for the good,

³⁹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 116

³⁹² *Ibid.*

the individual is in evil and his/her anxiety is over the good. The good of which the individual is anxious, refers to the reintegration of freedom, as well as redemption and salvation.³⁹³

The individual has been, and currently lingers in a state of sin, and hence, unfreedom. Therefore, the person will now be confronted with the possibility of recovered freedom and a new integration (cf. Constantine Constantius' concept of Repetition, Chapter 2).

4.8.1 The demonic or demoniacal

Another term which Haufniensis uses in conjunction with anxiety for the good is "the demonic". Before we continue it is perhaps important to first clarify Haufniensis' understanding and use of the term in this context. He is well aware that the primary association made with the term "demoniacal" is that of its biblical usage. The term is often used in describing the perpetration of some or other grotesque or hideous act. It is also used with reference to the dominion or possession of a human being by an evil force.³⁹⁴

"Insofar as the theologians seek to explain them, they generally lose themselves in observations upon one or another unnatural sin, and they find examples where the ascendancy of the bestial over man is such that it almost announces itself by an inarticulate animal sound or by a mimicry of animals and a brutish glance."³⁹⁵

Haufniensis does not contravene these ideas, and even admits that there may be a degree of truth to these beliefs. Furthermore, he distinguishes three general views that can be undertaken with regard to the demonic. The first conception of the demonic is aesthetic-metaphysical. Here the phenomenon is regarded under the categories of fate, fortune, chance, etc. Haufniensis is quick to note that when placed under the nomenclature of fate, the demonic immediately appropriates a sympathetic approach. Here again, it is important to delineate exactly what Haufniensis intends by the word "sympathy". Sympathy for the demonic, in terms of fortune or luck, should not be equated with compassion. Instead, it constitutes nothing more than a base and wholly selfish "wishing". The only solicitude being exhibited here is to oneself, in an unabashed attempt at protecting one's own egotism, for after all, if the demonic is fate, then everyone is at risk.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Hall, R.L. **Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard's Analysis of the Demonic in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Perkins, R.L. (ed.). *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 158

³⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 118-119

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 118

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 119-120

At this point in the discussion, Haufniensis digresses slightly. For not only is he expressing the attitude towards the demonic as fate, thus eliciting this self-serving sympathy, he is also referring to the perceived omnipresence of the demonic. With regards to this point, Haufniensis claims, most tend to react by denial, acquiring the habit of ignoring the “highest spiritual trials” [*Anfægtelser*]³⁹⁷, and instead busy themselves with the relative trivialities of human philanderings. Instead of casting their parsimonious glances towards fate, human beings need to differentiate what occurs by way of fortune, and what transpires by way of guilt.³⁹⁸

A second stance that can be undertaken with regard to the demonic, is the ethical. The ethical outlook upon the demonic has a shameful history. There is no need to elaborate upon the brutal severity with which it was sought out, persecuted and finally punished. In our so-called enlightened age, we tend to look back upon this history and praise ourselves for the relatively civilized manner with which we approach the phenomenon today. According to Haufniensis however, this self-congratulatory demeanour is misplaced. While the barbarous castigation of the past is certainly not laudable, what exactly is it that makes a sympathy borne out of sentiment so much more preferred? That the ethical treatment of the demonic was so much more severe shows, if nothing else, that the sympathy with which it was met was of a better quality than that elicited by the aesthetic-metaphysical approach.³⁹⁹

The most significant aspect of the ethical stance towards the demonic is the emergence of guilt. For, according to the ethical outlook, the individual identifies him/herself in thought with the phenomenon. On the basis of this argument it was believed that the individual, in his/her state of guilt, actually desired the cruelty and severity inflicted upon him/herself. The third and final view of the demonic is the medical-therapeutic. Here the phenomenon is approached as a problem of the body, as Dunning(1985) astutely points out, a problem of body chemistry.⁴⁰⁰ It is an old approach, with even Socrates suggesting that in order to be healed the individual should be cut and cauterized by a physician.⁴⁰¹ Later, to this prescription was added the saying “*mit Pulver und mit Pillen*” [with powder and with pills]. In this case, sympathy would concern itself strictly with his condition, as something separate and distinct to him/her as sufferer. The patient is examined and a report issued, everyone satisfied that the phenomenon is contained within

³⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 120

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 119-120

⁴⁰⁰ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 158

⁴⁰¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 121

the capable hands of the physicians. That three such discordant views exist illustrates the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon. Equally importantly, it shows that in a sense the demonic belongs in all spheres: the somatic, the psychic and the pneumatic. Thus, the demonic is indeed more omnipresent than is commonly assumed, because it reveals itself in all three the major components contained within the synthesis of man as body and psyche, in spirit.⁴⁰²

“When one becomes aware of the breadth of the field of the demonic, then perhaps it will also be clear that many of those who want to deal with the phenomenon of the demonic come under the category of the demonic themselves, and that there are traces of it in every man, as surely as every man is a sinner.”⁴⁰³

Furthermore, as Malantschuk(1971) astutely comments:

“In clarifying the nature of the demonic under these three points of view, Vigilius Haufniensis gives a most penetrating and comprehensive description of man’s attempt to avoid coming into existential contact with Christianity.”⁴⁰⁴

However, his discussion here is philosophical and theological in nature. The demonic, claims Haufniensis, is most vividly manifest, when in juxtaposition to the good. In essence, it shows itself simply as a flight from the good. Indeed, it strives, in its state of unfreedom to avoid the possibility of freedom, which, in itself is impossible, since unfreedom always maintains a relationship to freedom. In the state of innocence, freedom is experienced not as freedom but as anxiety in the individual. In contrast, in the demonic, freedom is regarded as unfreedom, because freedom itself is lost. Here, as in innocence, the possibility of freedom is experienced as anxiety.⁴⁰⁵ The dissimilarity between the two states is complete, whereas in innocence possibility is posited towards freedom, the demoniacal’s possibility is directed towards unfreedom.⁴⁰⁶

As Dunning(1985) points out, there are a number of ways in which the demonic loss of freedom can be expressed. The first is “somatically-psychically” by which Haufniensis is alluding to what are currently known as psychosomatic conditions. Yet again, we find the discussion returning to the human being as

⁴⁰² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 122

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 123

⁴⁰⁴ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard’s Thought*. 1971. p. 271

⁴⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 123

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

synthesis. Using this as foundation, it can be argued that the body is the vehicle or “organ” as Haufniensis puts it, of the psyche. In the same vein, it is also the organ of spirit. Should this subservient relation come to an end in the event of freedom “conspiring with the body against itself”⁴⁰⁷, unfreedom will present itself as the demonic.⁴⁰⁸

The latter phrase of “freedom conspiring with the body against itself” invites further examination. Dunning(1985) states that this notion can be edified by recalling the place of the demonic within the dialectic of anxiety. We shall begin at the point at which the self has already achieved the inwardness of repentance, understood as the freedom that comes from encountering in God the good by which the self realizes its own sinfulness. This was the outcome of the first movement of anxiety in-and-for-itself. Now enter the demonic, which is the negation of that movement, not by means of a return to externality, but rather by a perversion of inwardness, namely, a withdrawnness [*Indesluttethed*] of the self from the good and thus from God. Here the demonic flees the painful freedom of repentance and strives for independence from God. The result is a demonic self that is inwardly at war with itself, pitting its own autonomy against the freedom of the good, and it is precisely this battle that allows freedom to conspire with the body against itself. The inner turmoil resulting from this manifests itself in the somatic-psychic loss of the self’s freedom, by means of some debilitating nervous disorder.⁴⁰⁹ Haufniensis mentions a few examples:

“A hypersensibility and a hyperirritability, neurasthenia, hysteria, hypochondria, etc. – all of these are or could be nuances of it.”⁴¹⁰

Stephen Dunning(1985) calls this inward self-alienation the demonic for-itself, in contrast to the abstract definition of the demonic in-itself.⁴¹¹

The most extreme manifestation of somatic-psychic loss of freedom Haufniensis calls “bestial perdition”. Such an example of the demonic is evident in the New Testament. This demoniac absolutely renounces every contact with the good, whether this contact aggregates a concerted effort at helping it attain

⁴⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 136

⁴⁰⁸ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 159

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 136-137

⁴¹¹ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 159

freedom or whether it is only a momentary and casual encounter. The dismal nature of this predicament is unequivocal.⁴¹²

“Therefore, from such a demoniac is quite commonly heard a reply that expresses all the horror of this state: ‘Leave me alone in my wretchedness’.”⁴¹³

The demoniac’s relation to anxiety is volatile, to say the least. Externally, there is very little that poses a threat to the extent that the demoniac will experience anxiety, since he/she is utterly wrapped up in him/herself, and his/her demeanour is set and determined. Yet just the slightest allusion to the freedom which he/she has enslaved by means of unfreedom ignites his/her anxiety to the extreme. Another particular aspect of this demoniac, Haufniensis points out, which is directly related to their experience of anxiety, is their peculiar relationship to one another. Here, on the basis of their common affliction (anxiety) they often form intensely dependant relationships that far exceed the boundaries of the mutual contingency of friendship.⁴¹⁴

“In this phenomenon, anxiety expresses itself also in another way. Among such demoniacs there is a cohesion in which they cling to one another so inseparably and anxiously that no friendship has an inwardness that can be compared with it.”⁴¹⁵

Haufniensis calls the second way in which the demonic loses its freedom “freedom lost pneumatically”. In this case, the conspiracy of freedom is not with the body, but instead with the mind. The resulting deterioration of relation between the separate components is caused chiefly by a lack of consistency between the beliefs that the self advocates and the behaviour that demonstrates the self’s genuine inwardness.⁴¹⁶

“This self-consciousness, therefore, is action, and this action is in turn inwardness, and whenever inwardness does not correspond to this consciousness, there is a form of the demonic as soon as the absence of inwardness expresses itself as anxiety about its acquisition.”⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 137

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 138

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 143

At this point Haufniensis makes use of several examples to illustrate what he means by this demonic anxiety over inwardness. As Dunning(1985) argues, in each example, the basic conflict within the self is between passivity and activity. Thus, when this demonic inconsistency within the self is one of unbelief versus superstition, the concepts of passivity and activity can be conceived in their dialectical relation to be equally lacking in inwardness.⁴¹⁸ As Haufniensis puts it:

“...both lack inwardness, but unbelief is passive through an activity, and superstition is active through a passivity... Superstition is unbelieving about itself. Unbelief is superstitious about itself. The comfortableness, cowardice, and pusillanimity of superstition find it better to remain in self-reflection than to relinquish it. The defiance, pride, and arrogance of unbelief find it more daring to remain to remain in self-reflection than to relinquish it.”⁴¹⁹

I am in agreement with Dunning(1985) when he points out that the basic contradiction in this formulation is that between self-reflection and the action of inwardness. An individual that advocates unbelief on the grounds of a humanistic philosophy of action, is rendered passive by virtue of a superstitious belief in the autonomy and capacity of the self. Conversely, the superstitious self gives the impression of passivity, but refuses to acknowledge its own active role as interpreter of omens, and thereby constitutes a profound form of unbelief. Another example of an internal struggle between belief and action, is that which exists between hypocrisy and offence. The former finds it beginning through an activity, while the latter through a passivity.⁴²⁰ Initially this may sound strange, since the general belief is that there always exists a receptivity in offence. However, the offence of which Haufniensis here makes mention is indeed passive, and simply allows the consequences of the offence to mount up *ad infinitum*. It is precisely in this passivity of offence that the relation between offence and hypocrisy is brought to light.⁴²¹

“Therefore hypocrisy is offense at oneself, while offense is hypocrisy to oneself. Both lack inwardness and dare not come to themselves.”⁴²²

Therefore, Haufniensis states that all hypocrisy ends in hypocrisy to oneself, since the hypocrite is offended at himself. Offence, on the other hand, if left unresolved, results in hypocrisy towards others, in what Haufniensis considers nothing but a desperate attempt by the individual to mask that which would

⁴¹⁸ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 160

⁴¹⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 144

⁴²⁰ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 160

⁴²¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 144-145

⁴²² *Ibid.* p. 145

have otherwise required the “hypocritical cloak”.⁴²³ The third and final example that Haufniensis employs is that between pride and cowardice. The former finds its origins through an activity, while the latter does so through a passivity. Without this distinction, they remain virtually identical. For Haufniensis, pride constitutes a profound form of cowardice, to such an extent that it even refuses to attempt to understand itself at all. Should pride, by some way, be forced into understanding its own nature, it will, in the manner of true cowardice, disintegrate. Likewise, cowardice represents for Haufniensis a profound form of pride, to such a degree that it too refuses to understand its own nature. This pride is manifested by presenting itself as inconspicuously as possible, while simultaneously congratulating itself on never having suffered a defeat. A more concrete example would be that of a person, steeped in pride, and so cowardly as to never have ventured anything, for the sake of his/her pride, which he/she will later praise him/herself for never having had defeated.⁴²⁴

The demoniacal has several forms of flight by which it avoids being challenged by the good. Each of these forms of flight have a particular relevance to the aesthetic sphere of existence (cf. Chapter 3). The first of these forms of flight is again made problematic by the lack of any distinct English translation. *Indesluttethed*⁴²⁵ or “closed-in-ness” has also been deciphered by McCarthy(1978) as “morbid reserve”⁴²⁶ and “shut-up-ness”⁴²⁷ by some of Haufniensis’ other translators such as Walter Lowrie. Hall(1985) astutely observes that to a greater or lesser degree all of these phrases connote what might be called “caged-upness” or the lack of freedom.⁴²⁸ Despite the lack of any direct English equivalent, the essence of the term is quite discernible. The demoniacal individual strives to envelop him/herself within him/herself and by so doing avoid confrontation with the good which solicits him/her to self-revelation. However, as is exemplified by Johannes the Seducer of *Either/Or*, despite his consolidated effort to close himself up within himself, he unfreely reveals himself. He admits that he is closed-in and yet bursts unfreely out of himself revealing what he has made of himself in his desperate unfreedom and flight from the good (cf. Chapter 3.9).⁴²⁹

⁴²³ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 145

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 145-146

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 123

⁴²⁶ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 44

⁴²⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Dread*. 1966. p. 110

⁴²⁸ Hall, R. **Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard’s Analysis of the Demonic in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Perkins, R. (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. P. 156-157

⁴²⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 247

In order to better understand this process, it must be borne in mind that, as was mentioned earlier, freedom underlies unfreedom. The individual who is wrapped up in him/herself is, in a sense, the mute, for he/she does not desire any communication which could lead to revelation. Therefore, Haufniensis tells us, when communication is entered into, freedom betrays the unfreedom which it underlies. In the individual this has the consequence of one revealing oneself against one's own will.⁴³⁰ Hall(1985) correctly observes how language and freedom are used (albeit negatively) in the process of describing the demonic. Haufniensis perceives freedom as that which is expansive, therefore, inclosing reserve, the antipode of expansive, must precisely be equated with unfreedom.⁴³¹

Another cardinal aspect of the demoniacal is "the sudden", which is a term used in reference to "closed-in-ness" applied to time. Since the demoniacal individual seeks to cut himself off from the freedom of possibility, it stands to reason that he would want to do so by avoiding the future, in which it is assumed, his possibility is oriented. It is for this reason therefore, that the closed-in man endeavours to exclude himself from the natural flow of time, to isolate himself in the moment and to contravene his connection with both past and future. McCarthy(1978) poignantly notes that the individual strives to avoid any continuity, and by implication any communication which may lead to revealing of the self. Note that communication, in this sense, is the precise opposite of closed-in-ness, and as such is an expression of continuity.⁴³²

A very important characteristic of the demonic, which Kierkegaard also discusses in other works, is that it is the empty and the fatuous.

"The demonic is the contentless, the boring."⁴³³

The aspect of boredom as it pertains to the demonic, is that it is "continuity in nothingness" to which the individual is relegated as a result of flight from the good.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 123

⁴³¹ Hall, R. **Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard's Analysis of the Demonic in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Perkins, R. (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 160

⁴³² McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 44

⁴³³ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 132

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 132-133

It is the demoniacal or “closed-in-ness” which gives rise to the vacuousness in the individual. Even a shrewd invention of creating pleasure such as the Rotation Method (cf. Chapter 3.8) does little else than momentarily disguise the emptiness of the existence that is there unfreely revealed. In essence, “closed-in-ness” becomes the form and vacuousness the content of this escape from self.⁴³⁵ The individual who experiences anxiety for the good is caught up in a state of “closed-in-ness”, in other words, he/she is wrapped up in him/herself. That the individual is not wholly involved with something or someone else is an important point, it is solely him/herself upon whom the demoniacal focuses all of his/her attention. The fatal flaw however, is in that this self is contentless or vacuous. The demoniacal therefore has wrapped him/herself up, cutting off all forms of communication, in a self that is characterized by emptiness. The “continuity in nothingness” of which mentioned was made earlier is an important point, and one later utilized by Heidegger. According to Hall(1985), the demonic individual, in his/her state of anxiety about real continuity, may attempt to avoid it through the deception of the “contentless” and the “boring.” One particular form this may take is empty talk or chatter. This prattle is indeed a “continuity in nothingness”, discourse totally devoid of substance, that is applied in an effort to conceal rather than reveal, to disintegrate instead of integrate. This discourse is also usually incessant, an aspect which is deeply ironical it actually characterizes an affected silence. It is clear that the demonic is here in the process of fleeing from faithful selfhood, integrity and continuity by the very means through which these states find actualization – language itself.⁴³⁶

In effect, the demoniacal is the flight from seriousness which, ultimately, leads to self-destruction. The natural movement of spirit is the stirring of the eternal. This leads to inwardness, a term which Haufniensis associates with earnestness. Earnestness in turn, is a concept that Haufniensis, in a very Kierkegaardian fashion, deliberately leaves without definition, giving as reason that earnestness, or for that matter inwardness, is an existential concept, and therefore is a state which only when experienced is properly understood.

“To the extent of my knowledge, I am not aware that there exists a single definition of earnestness. If this were true, it would please me, not because I love the modern fluent and confluent thinking that has abolished the definition, but because in relation to existential concepts it always indicates a greater discretion to abstain from definitions, because

⁴³⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 133

⁴³⁶ Hall, R. **Language and Freedom: Kierkegaard’s Analysis of the Demonic in The Concept of Anxiety**. In Perkins, R. (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 165

a person can hardly be inclined to apprehend essentially in the form of definition what must be understood differently...”⁴³⁷

Thus, an attempt at a circumscribed definition does nothing to elaborate on the concept and merely distorts it. Inwardness is the means by which the spirit moves towards the eternal, the only means by which the evolution of spirit can take place. The individual who practices inwardness is not shut-up, isolated and closed-in against the world, but instead is in harmony with an inner spiritual dynamism and as such meets the exterior as a spiritually qualified subject. The demoniacal is a flight from inwardness to the external world, it is an escape from the eternal and an attempt to lose oneself in the temporal. The demoniacal deliberately shuns the responsibility of taking oneself, one’s destiny and one’s possibilities seriously. Instead it focuses all of its attention on the exterior, declaring it to be the proper object of seriousness, and as a result, negates that which is inward to the individual person. Ironically, as Cole(1971) points out, Haufniensis declares that the more energy expended by the demoniac in his/her attempt at maintaining the closed reserve, the more certain it is that he/she will reveal his/herself, however unwillingly.⁴³⁸

In his concluding remarks concerning the demonic, Haufniensis concentrates on its dialectical role within anxiety in-and-for-itself. According to the author of *The Concept of Anxiety* the demonic rejection of the good is tantamount to a loss of inwardness, since for Haufniensis,

“Inwardness is therefore eternity or the constituent of the eternal in man.”⁴³⁹

As Dunning(1985) so astutely observes, this statement is a highly significant, for by declaring that an individual who refuses to repent is *ipso facto* demonic, presupposes not only that the self was created by God, but also that that self is fundamentally free. This is evidence of Haufniensis’ very Kierkegaardian insistence that the individual’s relation to God emanates from the heart of the self.⁴⁴⁰

The pneumatic demoniac expends a vast amount of energy in the process of intellectually conceiving of countless evasions of the eternal, while the psychosomatic demoniac instigates a revolt of the body against the soul and spirit, thus rendering consciousness of the eternal impossible, and by this means

⁴³⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 147

⁴³⁸ Cole, J.P. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 93

⁴³⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 151

⁴⁴⁰ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 161

he/she rejects the eternal. In short, the demonic constitutes a negation of the inwardness of repentance, it propagates the blindness of its own self-assertion over and against the inwardness of the good. However, it is important to note that while Haufniensis is consistent in characterizing the demonic as a loss of inwardness, he does not view it as a return to externality of anxiety for-itself, which represents nothing less than a complete lack of consciousness of sin. The demonic is far more deleterious, for the demoniac is indeed conscious of sin, as he/she is of the eternal, yet he/she repudiates sin in a blatant act of rebellion against God. The demonic seeks to assert the self's independence of the good, not by means of an external relation to it, but rather in a position of unyielding opposition to it. According to Dunning(1985), this consciousness of the eternal and sin is a vital characteristic of the demonic, and hence is the reason, why the "loss of inwardness" must not be interpreted as absence of inwardness, but rather as perversion of inwardness.⁴⁴¹ The contradiction inherent in the demonic, is the demoniac's futile attempts at maintaining inwardness and freedom, while simultaneously rejecting the eternal, which is both their point of origin and sustaining power. In this way, the demoniac is the architect of his/her own unfreedom.⁴⁴²

While it is a difficult process to trace the dialectical development of phases within the demonic, the structure, such as it reveals itself, substantiates the claim that the demonic is not absence of inwardness, but rather perversion of inwardness. In the first dialectical phase, which Dunning(1985) names the demonic in-itself, is characterized as "withdrawnness", in which the self fails to acknowledge any relational determinations. Thus, the self enshrouds itself within itself, harbouring the illusion of self-sufficiency. In the second phase, or the demonic for-itself, the notion of unity in abstract "withdrawnness" is alienated, as the self finds itself caught up in a war raging within its own body. The struggle is entirely internal, yet the consequences for the self are violently divisive. Here, the body of the psychosomatic demoniac becomes the outward embodiment of an inner "dis-ease". The pneumatic demoniac, on the other hand, manages to an extent, to reconcile this division, in the sense that the condition of internal incongruity is not identified with an external body, and thereby not reflected by it. Instead, this inward contradiction is reflected by the action of the self, a manifestation of both consciousness and inwardness, that reveals the state of a self demoniacally at war with itself.⁴⁴³

4.9 Sexuality as Anxiety

⁴⁴¹ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness* 1985. p. 161

⁴⁴² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 122-124

⁴⁴³ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 161-162

A facet of Haufniensis' treatment of anxiety, which often goes largely neglected is the inherent relation between anxiety and sexuality. This is particularly relevant when one takes into consideration Kierkegaard's own strong tendencies towards ascetism in his later years. *The Concept of Anxiety* is, as has already been mentioned, an earlier work, however, even at this stage of his writing, the reader can be forgiven for interpreting Haufniensis as harbouring a negative attitude towards the sensuous. Bearing this in mind, one would be tempted to venture a wider generalization that Kierkegaard associates sexuality with sin. This however, is not the case. Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that sin is a spiritual category, which transcends the realm of the senses. It is identified as the disruption of spirit, and as such, occasions the falling into sensuousness and sexuality. Sin enters the world through the individual, and through that individual's participation in the race and in the world, sin acquires a history. However, this does not equate sexuality to evil, and by implication therefore to sin. Ronald Grimsley(1967) puts this quite succinctly:

“The qualitative, spiritual aspect of sin is independent of sexuality but sexuality brings to sin a quantitative modification.”⁴⁴⁴

To understand this properly we must look again towards Kierkegaard's conception of the human being as a synthesis. As Malantschuk(1971) notes, in animals sexuality is posited instinctively, however, since the human is a synthesis, human sexuality cannot be based exclusively on the biological instinct. To speak of a synthesis at all is to speak of spirit, for Haufniensis claims, only once the spirit posits itself does it posit the synthesis. By the very implication of the word “synthesis” one suggests two opposing poles, therefore, for a synthesis to exist at all it must come into being as the union of two opposing elements. What Haufniensis intends to point out is that sensuousness forms the basis for anxiety, because it epitomizes the human enslavement to that which is biological, and by implication therefore, that which is also temporal and finite. Sexuality represents the pinnacle of this enslavement. This is all in contrast to the other in the synthesis, which constitutes the individual. Sexuality, when mentioned by Haufniensis, does not refer to biological sex which man has in common with animals. Human sexuality, when mentioned in the context of anxiety, refers to an evil potential, that of deformation by sin. All of the sensuous capacities (sexuality representing the most intense sensuous experience) of the human being are fraught as much with evil, as they are with their ideal possibilities.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ Grimsley, R. *Existentialist Thought*. 1967. p. 30

⁴⁴⁵ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard's Thought*. 1971. p. 263

Having said that however, Haufniensis is quick to point out that to attempt a life of celibacy on the grounds that the desire for sex can be ignored here since it will not be an actuality in heaven, is both a futility and a blatant disregard of the order of creation. The purpose of spirit is not the denunciation of sex or any of the life forces, but rather to give direction to sexuality in congruity with that of spirit. If this is so, love can exist in harmony with the sexuality that supports, but at the same time threatens it. However, because of the power of sensuousness and sexuality, the danger of improper yielding to these, and by implication therefore, the finite, is ubiquitous. An abandonment of the self to the temporal occurs in conjunction with a disregard for the eternal. Haufniensis states that the bodily life itself is good. The physical impulses however, require mastery by spirit, because only in that fashion can the individual avoid complete enslavement to the temporal and finite and make a commitment to that which is eternal. The basic principles advocated by Haufniensis are those of proper balance, relative commitment to that which is temporal, and absolute commitment to that which is eternal.⁴⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis seems to vacillate from his earlier convictions of the normal and universal duties of an earthly and temporal nature that he extolled in *Fear and Trembling*, moving in the direction of his later ascetism.⁴⁴⁷

Vigilius' analysis of the erotic seems to manifest a dialectical structure. The first issue under discussion is the "sexual as such", which he maintains is not sinful. Only animals can be said to be genuinely ignorant of sexuality, and for this reason, human innocence must be understood in the following manner.

"Innocence is a knowledge that denotes ignorance... With innocence a knowledge begins that has ignorance as its first qualification."⁴⁴⁸

This state Haufniensis denotes as the "concept of modesty"⁴⁴⁹, for it manifests the anxiety of shame, if not yet that of lust as well. The added significance of this is that awareness of the other as other is just beginning to emerge in sexuality as such.

"In modesty, the generic difference is posited, but not in relation to its other. That takes place in the sexual drive."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 79-80

⁴⁴⁷ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard's Authorship*. 1968. p. 170

⁴⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 68

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 69

The sexual drive constitutes not only instinct, but also propagation. As Dunning(1985) correctly points out, this cannot yet be considered love. In fact, from the perspective of paganism, propagation even appears comic.⁴⁵¹

“The anxiety in modesty arose from the spirit’s feeling that it was a foreigner, now spirit has conquered completely and perceives the sexual as the foreign and as the comic.”⁴⁵²

Hence, the erotic is conquered by propagation, by means of its relationship to its other. Modesty, on the other hand, remains both timorous of such a relationship and sexually inhibited by the very lack of such a relationship. Haufniensis’ discloses that it is only religion, or more specifically, in Christianity, that the individual is able to experience a supersedure of the erotic.

“In Christianity, the religious has suspended the erotic, not merely as sinful, through an ethical misunderstanding, but as indifferent, because in spirit there is no difference between man and woman. Here the erotic is not neutralized by irony, but it is suspended because the tendency of Christianity is to bring the spirit further.”⁴⁵³

Put in another way, the distinction between the self and other that is instilled by sexuality, is sublated in spirit. This however, occurs at the expense of the erotic. Furthermore, because, in the ensuing state, the erotic is suspended, and spirit is excluded from it, there still exists anxiety, for anxiety is always present whenever the spirit “feels itself a stranger”.⁴⁵⁴ In the event that the sexual is brought fully under the determination of spirit, the result is a dominion by love.

“The realization of this is the victory of love in a person in whom the spirit is so victorious that the sexual is forgotten, and recollected only in forgetfulness. When this has come about, sensuousness is transfigured in spirit and anxiety is driven out.”⁴⁵⁵

It is not uncommon for certain scholars to take the details of Kierkegaard’s own biographical history into account when considering his theory concerning the relation between anxiety and sexuality. Many of

⁴⁵¹ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 149

⁴⁵² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 69

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 70

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 71

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 80

these scholars consider a large proportion of Kierkegaard's view of anxiety and sexuality to emerge directly from his own anguish about sex, which indeed, is not a wholly unreasonable claim. Having said that however, it is my opinion these scholars place themselves in a precarious position by doing so. *The Concept of Anxiety* was written under a pseudonym, and thus, by Kierkegaard's own entreaty, is not to be affiliated with the Dane in any direct way. In addition, it is a work literally permeated with irony, and certainly in this respect, to be regarded as a prime example of Kierkegaard's practice of indirect communication. In short, Søren Kierkegaard did not attach his person, including his opinions, or details of his personal history, to this work in any direct manner. To attempt a "biographical" exposition of his theories concerning sexuality and anxiety would therefore constitute a grave injustice both to the author, as well as to *The Concept of Anxiety* itself. All too often, particularly with *The Concept of Anxiety*, as well as his other "psychological" work, *The Sickness Unto Death* by Anti-Climacus, readers and scholars alike attempt to orient his entire treatment of psychological precepts and concepts on his own personal history. Although the possibility certainly exists that his conception of anxiety was influenced, in part, by his own sexual experiences, it is important to view this as merely one of several influences and not to give the respective aspect more import than it deserves.

4.10 Dread-lessness or lack of anxiety

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that there is no point at which the individual ceases to experience anxiety. Anxiety is in fact, to a greater and lesser degree, a mood which is encountered in each sphere of existence. However, when the relation of the individual self with spirit becomes precarious, the result could be a self with no experience of anxiety.

In the aesthetic sphere the individual is, broadly speaking, distinguished by a lack of spiritual values (cf. Chapter 3). Here, Haufniensis uses paganism as illustration. Paganism has always been condemned by Orthodox Christianity, which declared it to be in sin. In passing this judgement, Christianity can be said to be both right and wrong. It is invalid in the sense that the consciousness of sin is a state first posited by Christianity itself, since the concept of sin is itself a Christian one, however, if put somewhat more articulately, this judgement by Orthodox Christianity is valid. Speaking quantitatively, paganism never explores the idea of sin in its deepest sense, and this is precisely where the sin of paganism lies. This failure to confront sin directly is due, to a large extent, to the condition of "spiritlessness" that is a component of paganism.⁴⁵⁶ Haufniensis states, quite unequivocally, the gravity of this condition:

⁴⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 93

“If the bliss of this spiritlessness is compared with the state of slaves in paganism, then there is after all some sense in slavery, because it is nothing in itself. On the other hand, the lostness of spirit-lessness is the most terrible of all, because the misfortune is precisely that spiritlessness has a relation to spirit, which is nothing.”⁴⁵⁷

Haufniensis states that in a state of “spiritlessness” the individual becomes empty, devoid of spirit. The human being is, in this state, nothing more than a “talking machine”⁴⁵⁸.

“ Spiritlessness can say exactly the same thing that the richest spirit has said, but it does not say it by virtue of spirit. Man qualified as spiritless has become a talking machine, and there is nothing to prevent him from repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitative.”⁴⁵⁹

“Spiritlessness” will also manifest itself as a consuming obsession with the ambiguous nature of certain finite experiences. The most tragic and, for the purposes of this essay, most important characteristic of “spiritlessness” is that it experiences no anxiety. Here Haufniensis gives as reason that the individual is too steeped in a state of superficial and static complacency to experience anxiety.

“In spiritlessness there is no anxiety, because t is too happy, too content, and too spiritless for that.”⁴⁶⁰

At this point a significant difference between “spiritlessness” and paganism reveals itself. Paganism, as was ascertained earlier, lies in sin, however it is oriented towards spirit. “Spiritlessness” however, is by its very nature, aligned away from spirit. Paganism may therefore be said to be in absence of spirit, whereas “spiritlessness” pertains to the death of spirit within a vacuous parody signifying exemplary actions. Finally, as Cole(1971) notes, since spiritlessness actively excludes spirit, it also excludes any consciousness of anxiety. Anxiety however, does not disappear simply by being occluded. Instead it lies dormant, only to re-appear in one terrifying moment at the time of death.⁴⁶¹

“When death appears in its true form as the lean and dismal reaper, one does not look at it without terror; however, when it appears disguised in order to mock the men who fancy they can mock death, when the observer sees that the

⁴⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 94

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 95

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Cole, J.P. *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*. 1971. p. 95-97

unknown figure who captivates all by his courtesy and causes all to exult in the wild gaiety of desires is death, then he is seized by a profound terror.”⁴⁶²

4.11 Resolution of Anxiety

Anxiety as both an experience and a state has a definite directionality and this is that points beyond itself. In short, it is future-oriented. It is experienced as anguish or dread over infinite, unrealized potentialities as spirit in the face of the “nothingness” which is its current state of being. The colloquial understanding of “anxiety” and its close association with fear has already been discussed, and it is not unreasonable to admit that anxiety, generally speaking, is not considered by most to be a pleasant or comfortable experience. This is true for Haufniensis’ interpretation of the concept as well, although it goes without saying, that it is more complicated than that.

“And no Grand Inquisitor has such dreadful torments in readiness as anxiety has, and no secret agent knows as cunningly as anxiety how to attack his suspect in his weakest moment or to make the alluring trap in which he will be caught, and no discerning judge understands how to interrogate and examine the accused as does anxiety, which never lets the accused escape, neither through amusement, nor by noise, nor during work, neither by day or by night.”⁴⁶³

It is particularly because of the very nature of anxiety that it is vital it be overcome and the perceived direction be followed. Anxiety is experienced due its revelation of the infinite, the ambiguous and the “nothingness”. However in revealing that endless, dizzying magnitude of possibilities, the experience of anxiety, in the state of innocence, gives rise to spirit, which has what may be called its specific and authentic possibility: a relationship in faith to God (although, as McCarthy(1978) correctly points out, this can only be seen in retrospect and through revelation).⁴⁶⁴

What Haufniensis is attempting to bring to light about the experience of anxiety is the invaluable role that it plays in the growth of the self. The significance of anxiety lies in the direction in which it leads the individual namely, the evolution of spirit, the growth of the personality into a substantial relationship with the Absolute Spirit. Anxiety serves as the means by which this development can take place. The ultimate goal of this development? Faith. For it is solely by means of faith, Haufniensis tells us, that the state of

⁴⁶² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 96

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 155-156

⁴⁶⁴ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 46

anxiety can be overcome. The Danish author often distinguishes between “overcoming” and “annihilating” anxiety, and maintains that anxiety can never be annihilated. Indeed, if one were to take a position whereby one attempted, for example, to defy anxiety, the unfortunate result would be that one would simply be subject to that experience of anxiety time and again, until the experience either caused a catastrophic numbing of all senses, or one finally took steps to overcome it.⁴⁶⁵

The individual is a synthesis, however this synthesis is never complete and can therefore never be static. Anxiety remains an integral part of that incomplete structure. The overcoming of anxiety can only be brought about by an act of sheer will. This will, in turn, can only come about once the individual has moved to a higher level of human consciousness by following the stirrings of spirit through the preceding stages.⁴⁶⁶

Some scholars such as McCarthy (1978) suggest by their reading of *Haufniensis* that anxiety is the measure of a man. In a sense, I share their opinion, because an individual's current state to which he experiences anxiety reveals where he is in his spiritual development and also where he has come from. As was mentioned earlier, anxiety is just one of the moods identified by Kierkegaard, and forms only a part of the complex existential structure of the individual subjectivity. The anxiety dealt with by *Haufniensis* is that which constitutes a confrontation with the infinite. The bondage to the infinite was a consequence of a fall after the first confrontation in the state known as primal anxiety. The state of anxiety endures however, changing in accordance with altered possibilities. By following the stirrings of the spirit, a sensitivity and finally a revulsion against finitude develops, in the moods of melancholy and irony respectively. When, after experiencing the fall and the accompanying anxiety, the individual again experiences it, spirit drives towards the infinite in response.⁴⁶⁷

“Whoever does not wish to sink in the wretchedness of the finite is constrained in the most profound sense to struggle with the infinite.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 115-117

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 46

⁴⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 160

In accepting and thereby undergoing the experience of anxiety a second time, the individual makes his first, yet decisive break from that which is temporal and exterior, and begins the long assault upon the eternal.

“Then anxiety enters into his soul and searches out everything and anxiously torments everything finite and petty out of him, and then it leads him where it wants him to go.”⁴⁶⁹

Anxiety, as previously mentioned, is an exigent experience, but for this very reason it must be embraced. The individual, instead of vainly seeking ways in which to escape the daunting challenge with which anxiety greets him/her, must will him/herself through it and overcome anxiety. It is only by these means that one can move in the direction of a God-relationship, in the consciousness of oneself as a being qualified by spirit. This is the sense in which anxiety does indeed serve as the measure of man: of his/her rising to a higher level of consciousness, which by implication also refers to higher relationship to both him/herself and to God.

However, this is only to occur by means of anxiety if that anxiety is properly understood and accepted. Once again, we find ourselves returning to the individual’s understanding of anxiety. Many persons, as Haufniensis himself admits, pride themselves on never having been in a state of anxiety. These individuals obviously misunderstand the term completely, or think it refers to some kind of psychological frailty. Haufniensis responds by unequivocally stating that indeed, one should never be in a state of anxiety over other people or matters or objects that are temporal in nature, for they are not worthy of the experience. In an ideal world, Haufniensis conjectures, only a person who has passed through the trial of anxiety over possibility of spirit is successfully qualified, by evolution of spirit, to exist without anxiety. This life without anxiety is not due to the fact that the individual is, by some miracle, able to evade all the horrors of life, but rather that these pale in comparison with those contained in possibility. If, after comprehending the true meaning of anxiety, an individual still boasts to live without anxiety, there can simply be one reason. It is because that individual is spiritless.⁴⁷⁰

Anxiety serves as a saving experience, delivering the individual from the trappings of finitude, to the passageways of the infinite. Eventually anxiety too will be perceived as a stage by the individual, who will leave it behind as the evolution of spirit continues. It is important to note Haufniensis’ use of terminology here. A “stage” refers to definite aspects of an existence, which can be passed through and

⁴⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 159

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 157

therefore left behind. This is in contrast to spheres, insofar as these have underlying and overlapping structures and facets, which endure and continue. In other words, the individual, having successfully willed him/herself through a particular stage of anxiety, will indeed move on, leaving it behind. However, this does not equate to having shaken off the shackles of anxiety as such. This continues as long as the individual is alive, albeit in many different stages.

As has already been clarified, anxiety is freedom's possibility, and this anxiety through faith allows the individual spiritual growth because it dissipates all finitudes and reveals their inherently deceptive nature. Thus, to be prepared by means of anxiety, is to be prepared by possibility, and to be trained or educated by possibility, in turn, is to be prepared via one's infinitude, as opposed to one's finitude. What conclusion may be drawn from this, is that possibility is a category of unmerciful weight. This stands in direct opposition to another commonly held assumption, namely, that it is actuality or reality that is unbearably heavy and possibility that is unbearably light. Haufniensis scoffs at this conjecture:

“But from whom does one hear such words? From wretched men who never knew what possibility is, and who, when actuality has shown that they were not good for anything and never would be, mendaciously revived a possibility that was very beautiful and very enchanting, while the foundation of this possibility was at the most a little youthful giddiness, of which they ought rather to be ashamed.”⁴⁷¹

What Haufniensis so contemptuously denounces here is the naïve practice whereby individuals attempt an escape from actuality by means of a fantastical exploration of groundless and self-serving wishing, in which they do nothing more than find expression for their desire for bliss, fortune, etc. (as is prevalent in the aesthetic sphere of existence, see Chapter 3). This does not constitute possibility. Instead, it is a blatant lie hatched out of human depravity in order to justify an existence characterized by incessant dissatisfaction and which, in addition, serves as an excuse for vanity. Possibility, says Haufniensis, is that in which all things are equally conceivable, and an individual who has experienced possibility in its true sense, has understood the possibilities of both the sublime and the appalling. Therefore, the crux of the matter is that after an individual has grappled with possibility, and by implication anxiety, he/she will realize full well that it is absurd to expect that life owes him/her something. More importantly is that through true recognition of possibility, the individual will know that the terrible, that annihilation and perdition, are ever imminent. In his *Journal* Kierkegaard wrote:

⁴⁷¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 156

“The whole of existence makes me anxious, from the smallest fly to the mysteries of the Incarnation. It’s all inexplicable, myself most of all. For me all existence is contaminated, myself most of all. Great is my distress, unlimited. No one knows it but God in heaven and he will not comfort me. No one but God in heaven can console me and he will not take pity on me...” (JP II A 420)⁴⁷²

Elsewhere he also writes:

“Deep down in every person there dwells an anxiety that he become alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among this huge household’s millions upon millions. One keeps this anxiety at bay by seeing many people around one who are bound to one as kin and friends. But the anxiety is there all the same. One dare hardly think what it would feel like if all this were taken away.” (JP ’47 VIII A 363)⁴⁷³

It is with this knowledge in hand that the individual will offer a reappraisal of actuality, in fact claims Haufniensis, he/she will gladly accept the circumstances of reality. This is because no matter what the state of affairs, the individual will know with certainty that these are always light, indeed, lighter than those posited in possibility. Haufniensis claims that this is the essence of the manner in which possibility prepares us. This is in contrast to other preparations or education we receive in life, where we are educated essentially, by finiteness and the finite relations therein.⁴⁷⁴

“Only in this way can possibility be educative, because finiteness and the finite relations in which every individual is assigned a place, whether they be small, or everyday, or world-historical, educate only finitely.”⁴⁷⁵

Having said all of that however, the complete comprehension and acceptance of anxiety as a spiritually cathartic experience does not serve as the solution to the extensive problem of the individual as a spiritually qualified being. As Marino(1998) points out, the movement toward a higher spiritual realm and fuller resolution of the individual’s God-relationship are dealt with by another pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, in the work *The Sickness unto Death*.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. 1996. p. 102-103

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 274

⁴⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 156-157

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 156

⁴⁷⁶ Marino, G.D. *Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety*. In Hannay, A & Marino, G.D. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 324

4.12 The treatment of anxiety in other works

One of the distinct difficulties encountered when dealing with Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety is that although it does feature in many of his other writings, and is made mention of quite frequently in the *Journals*, none of these additional writings have anything significant to add to the overall understanding of the issue. Anxiety however, is not to be singled out in this respect. The concept of irony too, has been dealt with in a similar format in Kierkegaard's work. The formal treatise sets out the concept in all its major aspects, and the other writings either add minor insights, or else offer explanations of that which has already been written and published. There exist three main works, among the pseudonymous writings, that deal with the concept of anxiety, all from slightly different angles and with a different concern in mind. The first of these is what is considered by many to be Kierkegaard's most important early work, *Either/Or*, edited by Victor Eremita. If it is not considered to be Kierkegaard's most important early work overall, then it certainly is one of his most significant aesthetic works. In *Either/Or*, possibly the most significant of many caricatures is Johannes the Seducer. In this character, anxiety is revealed as the motivating energy of the aesthete, as the individual, who is in a state of anxiety for the good, attempts to flee finitude with demoniacal energy. In addition to his state of anxiety, the character of *Either/Or* finds himself engrossed in the negativity of irony, as he attempts to flee both the world and his spiritual possibility.⁴⁷⁷

The second of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works that deals with anxiety is *Fear and Trembling*. In this work, the reader is presented with a higher form of anxiety, experienced after the essential choice of moving in a direction towards a God-relationship based upon faith has been made. The anxiety of *Fear and Trembling's* main character, Abraham, is of a higher nature precisely because it is being experienced within the religious sphere and its accompanying higher calling. As Arbaugh et al.(1968) correctly argues, anxiety is no longer being experienced before faith, rather it is anxiety because of the demands of faith. Abraham's anxiety is due to the conflict he experiences between his ethical principles (i.e. thou shalt not murder), and his religious convictions (i.e. a command by God to murder his son Isaac, in sacrifice). This is in utter contrast to the aesthete who remains exclusively under aesthetic categories as he flees the evolutionary movement toward the ethico-religious.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. P. 247-376 (For a more detailed discussion on Johannes the Seducer, see Chapter 3.10).

⁴⁷⁸ Arbaugh, G.B. & Arbaugh, G.E. *Kierkegaard's Authorship*. 1968. p. 107-108

The third and final major pseudonymous work to deal with anxiety is the afore-mentioned *The Sickness unto Death*. Here, the important relations between anxiety, melancholy and despair are highlighted. The mood of most consistent significance however, is despair, as a movement towards the discernment of more specific, authentic possibilities. In relation to anxiety, *The Sickness unto Death* cautions us as to being misled by anxiety and perishing in possibility. Here again, as Hannay(1998) notes, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, there are no guarantees of arrival at one's spiritual destiny, that is, the same destiny as expressed in *The Concept of Anxiety*. *The Sickness unto Death* is Anti-Climacus' treatise on the highest mood attained in the evolution of spirit, directly before the movement of consolidation in the mood of resignation. In addition, this work maintains the psychological perspective and metaphysical theory of spirit which to be found in both *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Either/Or*, as spirit advances ever further along the pathway of spiritual evolution.⁴⁷⁹

4.13 The Experience and Structure of Anxiety

Vigilius Haufniensis distinguishes, with varying degrees of clarity, between the state of anxiety and the anxiety experience itself. Often the fact that he was prone to using nothing but the sole term "anxiety", makes it necessary for the reader to assess the context when attempting to understand exactly in what manner Haufniensis wants the term to be understood. When referring to the transformation of the personality by means of following the stirrings of spirit, and thereby moving beyond the sphere of the aesthetic, he was evidently referring to the experience of anxiety. This is because it is in the actual experience of anxiety that the individual confronts the possibility in freedom. In turn, this experience is always the result of an underlying structure. In this underlying structure, we can safely state that whatever pertains to it, also pertains to the manifestation of the anxiety experience. The difference between the underlying structure and the anxiety experience however, lies in the fact that the latter, because it is concrete, includes variables which are not part of the former. As an example, let us examine McCarthy's(1978) term "primal anxiety" and "anxiety for the good". Both are manifestations in the concrete experience of the underlying state of anxiety in which an individual exists, so long as he/she has possibility and freedom, i.e. so long as he/she is alive. However, "primal anxiety" and "anxiety for the good" refer to differing sets of possibilities because of the underlying structure of their respective states,

⁴⁷⁹ Hannay, A. **Kierkegaard and the variety of despair**. In Hannay, A. & Marino, G.D. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 338-339

namely, that in “primal anxiety” the individual finds him/herself in a state of innocence, while in “anxiety for the good” the individual is in a state of evil.⁴⁸⁰

If we, once again, turn our attention toward the title of Haufniensis’ work, we immediately note that much more is taken into consideration than just the concept of anxiety. This impression is further reinforced by a glance at the chapter headings. It is clear that the author is not attempting to give a mere analysis and exposition on the concept of anxiety. Instead we are faced with a work that is strongly psychological and, as is evident by the constant intertwining of anxiety with sin, theological too. However, as the aforementioned aspects of anxiety have already been dealt with, it is time to turn our attention towards the essence of the structure of anxiety.

Haufniensis emphasizes time and again that anxiety is an anxiety of nothing. In other words, it is an objectless anxiety, without any specific relation to something concrete. The result of this lack of exterior reference is that the anxiety is projected back towards the subject whom experiences it. Without an exterior object of anxiety, there exists no possible exterior resolution. That leaves only one alternative namely, that the resolution of this anxiety must emanate from within the subject him/herself. Juliette Favez-Boutonier, in her work *L’Angoisse*, writes of a “something which anxiety may seem to be related to, but that even in such a case, it is something which cannot justify the anxiety, and thus there is talk of a ‘nothing’.”⁴⁸¹

This “nothing” over which the subject experiences anxiety, is one of the most abstract, and indeed, most difficult aspects of Haufniensis’ understanding of anxiety. What the author seems to be suggesting is that there is “something”, an anticipatory prescience perhaps, which initiates the shudder of anxiety and potentiates its repetition. However, this “something” towards which Haufniensis alludes, is entirely vague and contentless, and as such, can only be justly expressed by the word “nothing”. It has been suggested by later writers who, doubtless under the influence of Heidegger, that “nothing” should be denoted as “no-thing”. “No-thing” suggests that this “something” is the individual in his/her possibility for freedom who confronts him/herself as he/she is, and that an intuition of the potential self is at the base. It is this potential self that is contentless and entirely inside the realm of possibility until the real self moves toward actualization. Stephen Dunning (1985) on the other hand, sees nothing in different terms. Haufniensis states that innocence is striving against nothing, and that it is precisely this nothing that

⁴⁸⁰ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 48

⁴⁸¹ Favez-Boutonier, J. *L’Angoisse*. 1963. p. 47 in McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978.

“begets anxiety”⁴⁸². Furthermore, Haufniensis writes that “innocence always sees this nothing outside itself”⁴⁸³ The ensuing paragraph develops that thought, in which anxiety is described as “a determination of dreaming spirit,”⁴⁸⁴ and dreaming itself is compared with other states of consciousness in terms of how each perceives the other: when awake one is conscious of the other as other; when asleep, the difference between the self and the other is suspended. Finally, in the process of dreaming, the other is an “intimated nothing.”⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, if innocence is the spirit while dreaming, and the dreaming consciousness perceives the other as nothing, then, says Dunning(1985), one can conclude that the “nothing” that begets anxiety is, in fact, the dreaming consciousness of an undetermined other.⁴⁸⁶ This statement is later confirmed when Haufniensis asks, “How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety. Do away with itself, the spirit cannot; lay hold of itself, it cannot, as long as it has itself outside of itself.”⁴⁸⁷

In anxiety, when the individual is confronted by his/her own possibility in freedom, there is a simultaneous experience of attraction-repulsion. This ambiguous nature of anxiety renders the experience all the more distressing, due to the fact that the individual is now left without any emotional stability in the face of this inner turmoil. One likes what one fears, one fears what one likes. As McCarthy(1978) states, the liking has fear in it, just as the fear has a certain liking in it, too. Since it is the religious self, based in the God-relationship, and the God who is the Constituting Power of the synthesis, all of which is the end goal of anxiety, it may not be unreasonable to relate the sympathy-antipathy of anxiety to a vague intuition of the holy, religious dimension of the potential self.⁴⁸⁸

While we have ascertained that anxiety is both objectless and characterized by ambiguity, it nonetheless is possessed of a definite intentionality. Anxiety is experienced over the freedom of possibility, however, it is never an abstract or subjectless possibility. The one aspect of anxiety, which is never in doubt, is the subject, namely the individual human being, as qualified by spirit. As Dunning(1985) astutely notes, lying at the very root of the anxiety experience is the subject’s possibility, or more specifically, the subject’s

⁴⁸² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 41

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 42

⁴⁸⁶ Dunning, S.N. **Kierkegaard’s Systematic Analysis of Anxiety**. In Perkins, R.L.(ed.). *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 13-14

⁴⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 44

⁴⁸⁸ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 49

possibility of freedom in a higher subjectivity. The anxiety experience is aimed at the recovery of freedom through the recovery of authentic possibility. Collectively, this can be described as the evolution of spirit.⁴⁸⁹

It is interesting to note that, in anxiety, the subject or self, is *en cause* or the motivator, both as he/she is at this moment, but also as he/she has the potential of being. Anxiety wrenches the individual away from a self that is static and unfree, and drives said individual in the exciting, yet terrifying, direction of a return to an authentic state of ever-evolving selfhood. The evolving selfhood has, as its end, the goal of elevating the current self to a higher self. However, this higher self is no “object”, because the current self has not yet advanced to that echelon. The higher self therefore remains undefined and unrealized, it is, in short, “nothing”. Here we find the core of the nature of anxiety, namely that it is the self, which is in question, not just as it is, but also as it can be. One is in caught up in an inescapable relationship to oneself, and because of this relationship, one experiences anxiety when called up by the authentic possibility of recovering oneself. It is precisely because of anxiety and the terrifying nature of it that the individual might choose to flee this call. However, this flight may be one into inauthentic possibilities, a failure to pass into freedom by a refusal to choose or else by making the tragic choice of unfreedom. The choice to flee is represented by the very nature of the aesthetic sphere of existence. The degree to which such a flight from freedom can be called demoniacal, is in direct proportion to how conscious the individual is of the choice.

4.14 The Flight from Anxiety

Earlier, it was briefly alluded to that, although through faith the individual is able to overcome anxiety, the reality remains that for virtually all people, anxiety abides as a constant companion. This is not due to the fact that anxiety cannot be overcome; we have already ascertained that it can. Rather, the omnipresence of anxiety is the result of the fact that an individual has the potential for change and development so long as that person lives. The possibility of freedom can therefore be said to be a characteristic of a human being, and, as long as the human being has this possibility, that individual will be in a relationship with anxiety.

⁴⁸⁹ Dunning, S.N. *Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety*. In Perkins, R.L.(ed.). *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*. 1985. p. 29-30

The most crucial aspect of the experience of anxiety is the manner in which the individual chooses to respond to it. Briefly put; should the individual persevere through the experience by sheer act of will, the result will basically be a realization and subsequent acknowledgement of his/her being in a state of sin, and the overcoming of it by way of genuine repentance. This would constitute a step in the direction of the evolution of spirit. However, it is the alternative response, namely the flight, or the attempted flight from anxiety, which I would like to bring under discussion here.

This, regrettably, is the most common response. An individual experiences anxiety and flees from it, thereby refusing to use the opportunity for spiritual transformation. This action is, in effect, impotent and represents defeat, because it certainly does not serve to rid the respective individual of anxiety. For as long as the individual refuses to confront anxiety and thereby overcome it, he/she will experience and re-experience anxiety with the same measure of force and terror as the initial experience. The struggle with anxiety is, in essence, a struggle with oneself. This severe circular process will present itself over and over again until such time as the individual makes the conscious choice to will him/herself through it. A flight from anxiety is therefore, a flight from oneself, an effort that can never be completely successful. For one remains in a relationship with oneself, no matter how externalized this relationship becomes.

Malantschuk(1971) notes that in the concluding sections of *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis points out that not only the person who by personal history or circumstance is thrown into a state of anxiety is afforded the opportunity of movement toward a higher spiritual plain, but also the individual who has led a relatively quiet life and mostly spared these external stimuli.⁴⁹⁰

“Now, if he did not defraud the possibility that wanted to teach him and did not wheedle the anxiety that wanted to save him, then he would also receive everything back, as no one in actuality ever did, even though he received all things tenfold, for the disciple of possibility received infinity, and the soul of the other expired in the finite.”⁴⁹¹

The attempted flight from anxiety, which Haufniensis named “anxiety for the evil” and “anxiety for the good”, is the practice whereby the individual seeks to deny that he/she is qualified by spirit. Going beyond a mere verbal denial, it is an attempt to disdain the presence and movement of spirit on an existential level. But one cannot rid or do away with spirit anymore than one can do away with anxiety. Spirit remains, and the individual finds him/herself back within the storms of anxiety.

⁴⁹⁰ Malantschuk, G. *Kierkegaard's Thought*. 1971. p. 272

⁴⁹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 158

Thus, by attempting to flee anxiety, the individual does nothing more than throw him/herself at the mercy of the tumult that is the anxiety experience. All that is left to distinguish between is whether the individual is experiencing “anxiety for the good” or “anxiety for the evil”. In the former, the person refuses to follow the anxiety experience through and strives to cut it short. He/she does this by substituting remorse for genuine repentance and spurns any further movement. The latter, on the other hand, rejects the entire movement from its inception, with the consequence of an awful numbness or spiritlessness, described earlier. It is vital to bear in mind that anxiety is a force or energy, which can be utilized to overcome sin and to further the movement of spirit. If however, instead of being put to use, the energy is ignored, the results are grave, as is illustrated by the anguished outcries of the aesthete in the “Diapsalmata” of Victor Eremitas’ *Either/Or*.⁴⁹²

“How empty life is and without meaning. – We bury a man, we follow him to the grave, we throw three spades of earth on him, we ride out in a coach, we ride home in a coach, we take comfort in the thought that a long life awaits us. But how long is threescore years and ten? Why not finish it all at once? Why not stay out there and step down into the grave with him, and draw lots for who should have the misfortune to be the last alive to throw the last three spades of earth on the last of the dead?”⁴⁹³

And:

“If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or if you do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret both. Laugh at the world’s follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will also regret it; if you laugh at the world’s follies or if you weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the world’s follies, or you weep over them, you will regret both. Believe a girl, you will regret it; if you do not believe a girl, you will also regret it; if you believe a girl or you do not believe her, you will regret both. If you hang yourself, you will regret it; if you do not hang yourself, you will also regret it; if you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the sum of all practical wisdom.”⁴⁹⁴

Here Kierkegaard presents us with a perceptive individual, a reflective aesthete, who although he senses the stirrings of spirit within, does not move to acknowledge them. He does not however, succeed in ignoring the agonizing consequences of this inaction.

⁴⁹² Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. 1992. p. 48

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 54

4.15 The Transforming Effect of Anxiety

We have ascertained by now that anxiety cannot be annihilated by seeking either to flee or ignore it. In the same manner, it cannot be eradicated by an attempt to pass through it in a detached, uninvolved manner. It remains an inherent structure in the synthesis that is the human being, and therefore, as experience, it will return again and again. The specific experience will be removed only when the individual wills him/herself through it, and thereby overcomes it. The result of this confrontation with anxiety is that the experience of anxiety will transform the psyche.

In going through anxiety, the essential choice of the self is the choice to carry out an act of will. Unlike the decision to flee, the decision to persevere through anxiety by performing an act of will brings about an inner cohesion. Since anxiety is an inwardly-oriented experience, both the decision to make a choice and the choice to carry out an act of will are inwardly directed. This is in contrast to all forms of flight, which are attempts at resolution in an external direction. In pointing inward, the experience of anxiety brings about a confrontation of the individual with him/herself. The current self is problematized and the higher self is posited as the end. This struggle is intensely distressing, for although the individual may be enticed by the end-goal of the higher self or destiny, the confrontation and necessary overcoming of the self evokes feelings of profound anguish. If however, the individual successfully wills him/herself through the experience of anxiety, the result is an immediate movement beyond the aesthetic sphere of existence into the sphere of the ethico-religious. This result is also in part due to the movement of the individual's struggle from the external to the internal, the only domain where resolution is possible. At this point however, it is vital that we heed Theodor Adorno's (1989) statement about the nature of the spheres. He highlights the point that, in Kierkegaard's spheres of existence, the so-called "higher" spheres cannot be arbitrarily depicted in the "lower" spheres, because "the leap" precludes any such projection. Consequently, Kierkegaard's system of spheres presents itself as a totality of fragments. The projection of aspects of the "higher" sphere onto a "lower" sphere would constitute nothing more than falsification. Therefore, Adorno emphasizes, every statement of the religious sphere remains incomprehensible for the aesthetic sphere because it is already falsified by mere depiction.⁴⁹⁵

The seriousness or inwardness that follows this choice leads the individual towards the path of the movement of the eternal, out of which the evolution of spirit can transpire. In addition, anxiety constitutes

⁴⁹⁵ Adorno, T. *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*. 1989. p. 103

one of the initial onslaughts upon the infinite, and this in turn, is the source of authentic positivity. More specifically, anxiety is the first step towards the seriousness and inwardness that is characteristic of the God-relationship. It is vitally important in the understanding of anxiety to note that Haufniensis sees the movement towards the God-relationship as a natural process of growth within the individual. In contrast, the abrupt interruption caused by the refusal to proceed with this process, constitutes an wholly unnatural act which would promote the view that the human being is, *de facto*, a static being who is able to find meaning for his/her existence within the existential boundaries of the finite world, which he/she him/herself has arbitrarily demarcated, all the while refusing to acknowledge the existence that lies beyond. The energy of anxiety, which arises from the movement of spirit, senses the confinement of the random, false boundaries and seeks to break through them in an act of transgression⁴⁹⁶. Through transgression anxiety seeks to restore the individual to the realm of possibility where the structure of his being defines him and into which the dynamism essential to his being propels him.⁴⁹⁷

4.16 Conclusion

By and large, anxiety is perceived as lying within the domain of psychology, or more specifically, it's various pathologies. A customary understanding of anxiety characterizes it as a symptom, a state of psychological fragmentation, or, at very least, a fracture within the psyche itself. Since anxiety is essentially a forward-looking experience, this fissure is the division the individual experiences between his/her present and his/her future, the result of which is anguish. In this chapter however, I have endeavoured to show, quite simply, that there is much more to anxiety than this. As Haufniensis amply demonstrates within the pages of *The Concept of Anxiety*, anxiety is applicable and relevant to each individual, not only because of its psychological, theological and philosophical aspects, but primarily because it is, in essence, purely subjective.

It is precisely this "subjectivity" that makes anxiety such a complex topic for examination. The experience of anxiety is as unique as the individual who experiences it. Haufniensis' *The Concept of*

⁴⁹⁶ The concept of transgression as used in this context is very similar to that which was later elaborated upon in the works of the contemporary French philosopher, Michel Foucault. He defined transgression not as a transcendence of all limits, but rather as a continuous act of revolt against the limits that confine and subjectify the individual. The individual must firstly acknowledge these limits and then proceed to work through them, always being in confrontation with that which would stultify his existence or cease the process of becoming. Rabinow, P. (Ed.) 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. Pantheon Books Ltd.

⁴⁹⁷ McCarthy, V. *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. 1978. p. 51-52

Anxiety is a relatively small, yet profoundly dense work, wherein he examines the relation between anxiety and many different facets of existence, on the level of the psychological, theological and philosophical. In this chapter, I have attempted to discuss, and in some cases admittedly, only touch upon, most of these aspects. The aim of this chapter has basically been to provide as lucid a description of Haufniensis' treatment of anxiety as possible. I have also considered it important to provide, as Haufniensis does, as holistic an account of anxiety as is possible. For this reason I have attempted to expend sufficient time on aspects of anxiety, other than philosophical. Anxiety is important as a theological construct, as is evinced by the manner in which Haufniensis has associated it with the terms of "original sin", "sin", "guilt", "faith", etc. It is also clearly psychological in its association with the idea of mood and other forms of this collective, such as despair.

St. Augustine took one of the earliest steps in the development of our understanding of anxiety by claiming that anxiety evolves out of fear. He claimed it to be a limit case of fear – that of fear, which, having lost its object, finds itself now trapped within itself.⁴⁹⁸ Vigilius Haufniensis however, provides us with an entirely unique and profound view of anxiety. Anxiety, he writes, finds its origin in innocence, and as that innocence opens up into increasingly imaginable possibilities, anxiety correspondingly increases. Hence, the characteristic association with fragmentation. However, to relegate anxiety to just another form of psychopathology is nothing more than reductionism, and wholly foregoes the myriad of rich insights that this experience proffers us. Haufniensis views anxiety as terrifying, but it can also be enlightening. It is, of course, the individual and the inherent freedom of that individual that will determine anxiety's outcome. Anxiety itself can never be escaped, it can only be confronted and thus overcome. This overcoming, in turn, is only possible by the unification of selfhood by means of spiritual growth, which ultimately culminates in a God-relationship based on faith.

⁴⁹⁸ Anz, W. *Kierkegaard on Death and Dying*. In Rée, J & Chamberlain, J. (eds.). *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. 1998. p. 46

5. THE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF *THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY*

5.1 Introduction

The works of Søren Kierkegaard have proven to be immensely influential, not only in the discipline of philosophy, but also in theology and psychology. More importantly however, Kierkegaard like Nietzsche, remains the subject of ever more prolific scholarly studies, which continue to cast fresh light on the work of this important thinker. If nothing else, this should serve as a sign that the work of this philosopher is far from being “mastered”. This is especially significant if we take into consideration the fact that Kierkegaard has long been called “the father of existentialism”, an epithet which, considering current opinion on existentialism, does not carry the philosophical prestige which it might have in the past. Indeed, as Westphal and Matušík (1995) comment, this could even serve as a reason for concluding that Kierkegaard is not *à la mode*. However, one must note that this conclusion could only properly be reached on the basis of two conditions: firstly, that the issues raised in existentialism indeed are “solved” and no longer merit added attention, and secondly, that the texts which, either directly or indirectly, bear the name of Kierkegaard, do not surpass the conceptual space posited by the concept of existentialism.⁴⁹⁹ In respect of the latter condition one can even pose the question of, despite his obvious and pervasive influence in that field, whether Kierkegaard can properly be labelled “the father of existentialism” at all?

The aim of this chapter is not to debate the standing of Kierkegaard as existentialist, and it is certainly not a detailed discussion of the vast scope of Kierkegaard’s influence in the field of philosophy. Instead, I intend an initial brief discussion on the influence of Haufniensis’ work on certain prominent minds, followed by a more thorough examination of more contemporary reactions elicited by *The Concept of Anxiety*. Particular attention will be paid to the interpretations and criticism of three eminent Kierkegaardian scholars, namely Roger Poole, Alastair Hannay and Peter Fennes. In so doing, I hope to show that the work of Kierkegaard, more specifically Vigilius Haufniensis, is still very much a relevant and active influence in philosophy, and as such, is far from being “mastered”. This is particularly significant in an age where most nineteenth-century philosophy seems to find itself neatly relegated to some or other “ism” in the history of philosophy.

⁴⁹⁹ Matušík, M. & Westphal, M. (ed.) *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. 1995. p. vii

5.2 The German and French Reception

Kierkegaard, like so many great intellectuals of his era, received little to no acknowledgement of his status, both as writer and philosopher, during his own lifetime. He paid for the publication of virtually all of his works out of his own pocket, and the general reception of these was dispassionate, to say the least. After a tempestuous life, and amidst much recrimination and odium, Kierkegaard died on 11 November 1855. After his death, the Danish Lutheran Church, Copenhagen media and the Danish public itself, chose to consign the individual and his works to obscurity, probably hoping never to hear his name again. This position was encouraged by his brother, Bishop Peter Christian Kierkegaard, who had gone to some lengths to subvert his younger sibling's cause as much as possible whilst the latter was alive. At Søren's funeral, Peter Kierkegaard regretfully declared that his brother had gone astray in recent years, as was evinced by his attempt "to shake what no power on earth can shake – the church".⁵⁰⁰ As for the gathering at his funeral, Peter Christian had nothing to say, and did not even thank the various guests for coming. He pointed out that the man on the catafalque had a fervent dislike of crowds and that he detested all ostentation. Peter concluded the memorial service with a long prayer in which he asked God's mercy for his brother and prayed for forgiveness for his "bewildered and perplexed soul".⁵⁰¹

This was an end that most certainly signified only the very beginning. For an extended period following his death, Kierkegaard's philosophy failed to take a substantial hold in his native Denmark. However, abroad his work slowly began to prove itself an instrumental influence as it struck a chord with certain significant individuals here and there. The first two notable influences of his work are to be found in the diaries of Franz Kafka, and the work of Karl Jaspers. Kafka, while being acutely aware of the essential differences between himself and Dane, nonetheless felt that he had found something of a kindred spirit.

"Today I got Kierkegaard's *Buch des Richters*. As I suspected, his case, despite essential differences, is very similar to mine, at least he is on the same side of the world. He bears me out like a friend."⁵⁰²

Jaspers based his fundamental concept of *Existenz* on an attentive reading of Kierkegaard, where the concept of existence is ardently discussed in so many works. An eminently important and pervasive influence of Kierkegaard's work was to be on Martin Heidegger. The Dane insisted on dubbing his own

⁵⁰⁰ Thompson, J. *Kierkegaard*. 1974. p. 236

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² Kafka, F. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*. 1999. p. 230

style of writing “indirect communication”, and subsequently, much of his influence has been indirect in its effect. Unfortunately however, his influence has also sometimes only been indirectly alluded to, and nowhere is this more blatant than in the works of both Heidegger and Sartre. Heidegger relentlessly ransacked the works of Kierkegaard in the writing of his magnum opus *Sein und Zeit* (1927). The extent to which the Dane supplied Heidegger with numerous of his central concepts and ideas is hardly reflected by the minimal mandatory footnote acknowledgements provided by the German philosopher. I am in agreement with Poole(1998) who points out that of all the borrowed concepts, anxiety (*Angest*) is the most noticeable.⁵⁰³ In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis writes the following:

“If we ask more particularly what the object of anxiety is, then the answer, here as elsewhere, must be that it is nothing. Anxiety and nothing always correspond to one another.”⁵⁰⁴

The directness Heidegger’s response to this input is quite apparent.

“The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what *Angst* is about. *Angst* “does not know” what it is about which it is anxious... Therefore, what is threatening cannot approach from a definite direction within nearness, it is already “there” – and yet nowhere. It is so near that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath – and yet it is nowhere.”⁵⁰⁵

Many of Heidegger’s linguistic categories too, are derived from Kierkegaard. In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard had referred to “The Public” as “a monstrous Nothing”.⁵⁰⁶ According to Kierkegaard, the linguistic categories of modernity are “talkativeness”, “formlessness”, “superficiality”, “flirtation”, and what is called “reasoning”.⁵⁰⁷ The proximity of Heidegger’s renditions is quite astounding. The German identified his own linguistic categories of modernity as “Idle Talk”, “Curiosity”, “Ambiguity”, “Falling”, and “Thrownness”.⁵⁰⁸ All of these categories are uttered by the abstraction characterized by Heidegger as *Das Man* (the They).⁵⁰⁹ Kierkegaard protested against capricious public speech, likening it to a masterless dog, that is allowed the freedom to roam and bite anyone it comes across, but for whom no one is

⁵⁰³ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions.** In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.* 1988 p. 52

⁵⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety.* 1980. p. 96

⁵⁰⁵ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time.* 1996. p. 174

⁵⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Present Age.* 1962. p. 66

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 76-90

⁵⁰⁸ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time.* 1996. p. 156-168

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 118-122

responsible.⁵¹⁰ Heidegger's category of "Idle Talk" (*Gerede*) is defined as "gossiping and passing the word along"⁵¹¹.

"Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter."⁵¹²

The propinquity of this definition to that of Kierkegaard's is undeniable, and yet any acknowledgement of the German's indebtedness to Kierkegaard is still not forthcoming. Another striking example, as argued by Poole(1998), is that of *Dasein* itself, the principal concept upon which such a large extent of Heideggerian discourse pivots is, particularly with respect to its various expositions of "Care", drawn largely from the Kierkegaardian analysis of anxiety.⁵¹³

"*Dasein*'s being reveals itself as care."*

Certainly there are important differences between the viewpoints of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Like so many philosophers and writers after him, Heidegger's explicit use of the Dane was for his own purposes. Heidegger concerned himself not to existentialize, but rather to phenomenologize and ontologize his concepts. Subsequently, he did not share Kierkegaard's conviction that the individual carried an ethical responsibility in any practical or political sense. This constitutes a significant shift, since one of the principal issues in Kierkegaard's work is the emphasis he places on personal responsibility that accompanies the freedom of choice. In a section of a recent essay entitled "Heidegger's De-Ethicization of Kierkegaard" Patricia J. Huntington discusses the consequences of Heidegger's decision in this respect.

"Heidegger's deliberate efforts to sever psychological matters from epistemology lead him to underplay the role of interiority in how I engage, assume complicity with, or position myself in relation to reigning world-views...

⁵¹⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Present Age*. 1962. p. 73-75

⁵¹¹ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. 1996. p. 158

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions**. In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988 p. 53

* Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. 1996. p. 171. At this point, Heidegger may have felt that his debts to Kierkegaard were becoming too apparent, because on page 405 he leaves the note ("S. Kierkegaard got furthest of all in the analysis of the phenomenon of *Angst*, again in the theological context of a "psychological" exposition of the problem of original sin.")

Heidegger's tendency to attribute blame for his participation in National Socialism to destiny seems consistent with his de-ethicization of Kierkegaard's concept of guilt."⁵¹⁴

As has already been verified, every thinker who falls under the influence of Kierkegaard, applies that influence for his/her own purposes. Just as Heidegger made use of Kierkegaard in his projects of phenomenology, so Jean-Paul Sartre applied that same influence to his undertaking in existentialism. Sartre, like Heidegger, made abundant, and largely unacknowledged use of several of the Danish philosopher's works in the compilation of his own. However, being a renowned Marxist, Sartre, like Heidegger, rejected the Christianity of Kierkegaard and subsequently occluded this significant facet in his application of the latter's philosophy. The consequence of this has been that an examination of *l'Être et le Néant (Being and Nothingness, 1943)* is a perplexing experience where the reader finds the influence of Kierkegaard everywhere, and yet the acknowledgement of this remains lacking. A fitting, if general example of this is to be found by a broad examination of the themes of Sartre's magnum opus. The central idea is that of acquiring and maintaining a state of personal authenticity and striving to avoid choices of action which constitute "bad faith" and the loss of authenticity. The concurrent world-view is centred around the individual, where a free and therefore responsible human being, exists in a world of "bourgeois" hypocrisy and mediocrity. As Poole(1998) pointedly demonstrates, these notions are all thoroughly Kierkegaardian, however little they may be acknowledged.⁵¹⁵

Furthermore, the phenomenological descriptions of the body, the discussions of "vertigo" and "anguish" in a section entitled "The Origin of Nothingness", and of course, the idea of freedom laid upon the existing individual as an inescapable fate, all of these notions are derived from Sartre's readings of Kierkegaard's earlier pseudonymous works.⁵¹⁶ The extent of Kierkegaard's influence on Sartre is clearly evident in this passage from *l'Âge de Raison(The Age of Reason, 1945)*:

⁵¹⁴ Huntington, P. **Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited. From Ontological Abstraction to Ethical Concretion.** In Matušík, M. & Westphal, M. (ed.) *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity.* 1995. P. 47,55

⁵¹⁵ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions.** In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.* 1988. p. 54

⁵¹⁶ Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness.* H.E. Barnes (Trans.).1994. p. 21-45

“All around him things were gathered in a circle, expectant, impassive, and indicative of nothing. He was alone, enveloped in this monstrous silence, free and alone, without assistance and without excuse, condemned to decide without support from any quarter, condemned for ever to be free.”⁵¹⁷

This is a virtual replica of human existence as Kierkegaard perceived it. However, despite the pervasiveness of the Dane’s influence, Sartre never desisted in his attempts at evading the issue of his debt to Kierkegaard. Even as late as 1964, when UNESCO held a conference on Kierkegaard in Paris, Sartre continued to blindly deny any debt to the works of the Danish author. However, Poole(1998) argues that the little Frenchman clearly gleaned from Kierkegaard the doctrine that “freedom alone can account for a person in his totality” as a reading of Sartre’s “empathetic” reconstructions of the lived worlds of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Genet evinces. In light of this, his claims to the contrary do not come across as being very credible.⁵¹⁸

Moreover, for Sartre, as for Heidegger, Haufniensis’ *The Concept of Anxiety* was to be an influence of singular import to his own philosophy. More or less a decade ago, extant portions of Sartre’s extensive *War Diaries* were published posthumously. These constitute indisputable evidence of the fact that he was carefully studying and making notes, including several direct line-by-line citations on *The Concept of Anxiety*, during his posting near the front near Morsbronn in December 1939. It is in this part of Sartre’s diaries that he actually acknowledges his debt to Kierkegaard, which is particularly evident in phrases such as “to be in dread of nothing”, that was also employed by Heidegger. McBride(1995) correctly notes that even in an essay written a quarter-century later, it is clear from his references to Adam that *The Concept of Anxiety* remained a principal referent in Sartre’s reading of Kierkegaard.⁵¹⁹

However, Sartre’s appropriation of *The Concept of Anxiety* is ardent only up to point, after which the French philosopher chooses to ignore a substantial aspect Haufniensis’ work, namely the emphasis upon, and concern with issues of religion. The theme of sin is predominant in *The Concept of Anxiety*, and furthermore, Haufniensis considers the highest dialectical conception of sin to be guilt. The evidence of Sartre’s occlusion of this facet of Kierkegaard’s work, both in his academic and personal life, is clear in the fact that Sartre was a fervent atheist who neither accepted the concept of sin nor guilt as its

⁵¹⁷ Sartre, J.P. *The Age of Reason*. E. Sutton (Trans.). 1961. p. 243-244

⁵¹⁸ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions**. In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988. p. 54-55

⁵¹⁹ McBride, W. **Sartre’s Debts to Kierkegaard. A Partial Reckoning**. In Matušík, M. & Westphal, M. (ed.) *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. 1995. p. 25-26

correlative. Moreover, from all available evidence, Sartre very seldom experienced any of the deep feelings of guilt that permeated Kierkegaard's existence, and even if he did, never perceived them as significant enough to merit mention. The answer to this quandary, as put forth by McBride(1995), is that Sartre to a greater or lesser extent disregarded the religious or proto-religious aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy, attributing them, at first nebulously and then later more explicitly, to the author's historical setting. Concurrently, Sartre recognized the value and validity of Kierkegaard's psychology and subsequently chose to focus his attention upon the elaborate descriptions and discussions of anxiety themselves, and the implications that they hold for the ideas of individual, moral responsibility.⁵²⁰

5.3 Contemporary Criticism

Kierkegaard was no stranger to criticism. Whether by his father as a child, by the academia as a young man, by *The Corsair* and eventually even the Copenhagen public itself, as an adult. Verily, there is virtually not a period in his life where he did not find himself the object of scrutiny and the criticism that inevitably followed. In the case of *The Concept of Anxiety*, this was no different. The most common and notorious criticism that has been levelled at Haufniensis' work is for the wholly perplexing style in which the ideas in it are conveyed to the reader. Particularly since the translation of the work into English by the esteemed pioneer translator, Sir Walter Lowrie, in 1944, it has had various responses and been subjected to a plethora of interpretations. Although these are wide-ranging, most of them agree on the difficulty with which the work is read and understood. This perception is so marked that *The Concept of Anxiety* is largely acknowledged to be Kierkegaard's most inaccessible work. The subject matter is extremely dense, and the reader is inclined feel at times that the author attempted to accomplish too much at one time.

"*The Concept of Anxiety* is a maddeningly difficult book. In one of the most lucid commentaries on this short tract, Arne Grøn has suggested that the book is too difficult; in other words, it could have profited from another rewrite."⁵²¹

In the translator's preface of the work's first translation into English, Walter Lowrie, quotes a letter from the translator Alexander Dru;

⁵²⁰ McBride, W. **Sartre's Debts to Kierkegaard. A Partial Reckoning.** In Matušík, M. & Westphal, M. (ed.) *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity.* 1995. p. 26

⁵²¹ Marino, G. **Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety.** In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.* 1988 p. 308

“One of these days I am going say what I think of his vile, slovenly style, his clumsy, unnecessary terminology.”⁵²²

There is certainly a degree of merit to these criticisms. At first reading, and particularly to someone unfamiliar with Kierkegaard in general, the work certainly does not present itself as one given to easy study. However, it must also be borne in mind that, although this work might give the impression of being complex and even vexing at times, Kierkegaard was undertaking a study in a subject only very rarely dealt with prior. In addition to this, the work was written in a style that is all too easily misconstrued. To be fair, no one should expect a book entitled *The Concept of Anxiety* to be easy. Nevertheless, some critics, themselves distinguished scholars of Kierkegaard’s work, have taken their criticism of *The Concept of Anxiety* far beyond a commentary on the inaccessibility of his style and subsequently, the ideas conveyed within. One such critic, whose argument we will make the focal point of our following discussion, is that of Roger Poole.

5.3.1 Indirect Communication

Poole criticises of *The Concept of Anxiety* in the third chapter of his work, *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication* (1993). As suggested by the title of the work, he concerns himself with what Kierkegaard referred to as his practice of “indirect communication”. This construction was Kierkegaard’s preferred medium of communication, gleaned to a large extent from his studies of Socrates and the latter’s practice of irony as a means of communicating ideas. Kierkegaard saw “indirect communication” as the exclusive means by which he would be able to communicate the “subjective truths” which form the staple material of most of his corpus. In order to achieve this, he permeated his works with irony and wrote under the façade of pseudonyms to create an environment of rhetoric in which the purpose is to express the validity of subjective truths. However, Kierkegaard himself was acutely aware of the contradiction inherent in attempting a valid writing on subjective truths and understood that to attempt this by means of direct communication would in itself constitute nothing more than a glaring self-contradiction. This endeavour could solely be achieved by the use of irony, and subsequent “indirect” communication.

In the case of his pseudonymous works and particularly the collection known as his aesthetic works (Kierkegaard’s first literary period, ranging from 1838 – 1856), Kierkegaard did not attempt to communicate knowledge to the reader. On the contrary, considering the predominance of irony in his work, his writing seems to involve itself with anti-knowledge, in the sense that the text, and indeed, the

⁵²² Lowrie, W. *Translator’s Preface to The Concept of Dread*. 1966. p. viii

concepts themselves, can only rarely be used as conceptual reference points. As Jean-Paul Sartre was to understand a century later, Kierkegaard concerned himself with separating language from knowledge, in order that it may be used against knowledge. Sartre commented that Kierkegaard utilizes objective concepts “retrogressively”, in other words, instead of the concepts serving their assumed purpose of referring the reader to something external, the retrogressive use of that concept disintegrates the presumed meaning of it, and in the ensuing confusion, the reference becomes internal. Thus, the amenability to provide meaning is removed from the text itself and displaced upon the reader. The text merely serves the purpose of suggestion, or even perhaps guidance (as is evident in the collection of “edifying discourses” that were written to “accompany” his works), and in this manner, as Taylor(1975) correctly points out, the “subjective” integrity of the text can remain intact.⁵²³

This facet of Kierkegaard’s work was left largely unexplored by the original English translators of the Danish author’s work. These individuals were either theologians or philosophers of religion, and tended to lay their emphasis upon Kierkegaard as the orthodox Christian believer. This was done at the expense of a mindfulness of Kierkegaard as a writer, as a stylist and as a rhetorician. Indeed, as Thompson clearly shows in his biography of the Dane, he saw himself, with no small amount of personal disappointment, one might add, as a poet, an identity which he struggled to transcend.⁵²⁴

“I must apologize, and indict myself, for attempts to elevate myself, in much of what I have noted down previously in this journal, for which God forgive me. I have up until now been a poet, definitely nothing more, and it is a despairing struggle to want to go beyond my boundary.”(*Papers* ’49 X I A 510)⁵²⁵

Nevertheless, this should never eclipse his status as Christian. In addition to his well-earned distinction as a writer, it is also of cardinal import to bear in mind what kind of poet Kierkegaard considered himself to be.

“It stands there so clear before me now, all that I understood last year, about how God has guided me to just this task: to throw light on Christianity, to present the ideal of a Christian... I must step back from wanting myself to be what is presented, and that is my task. I will put pressure on Christendom all the harder. I will be the unhappy lover in relation to *being* the ideal of a Christian; I therefore become its poet.”(*Papers* ’49 X I A 293)⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Taylor, M.C. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*. 1975. p. 51-53

⁵²⁴ Thompson, J. *Kierkegaard*. 1973. p. 197-198

⁵²⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals. A Selection*. 1996. p. 392

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 385

5.4 Critical Appraisal – Roger Poole

Upon completing his translation of Vigilius Haufniensis' *Begrebet Angest* (the concept of dread) the accomplishment of the American translator, Sir Walter Lowrie, was two-fold. Not only was he the first to translate Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread** into English, but he completed the translation within the extraordinarily short period of only one month!⁵²⁷

“Upon receipt of his friendly letter I set to work at once to meet the growing demand for this missing link in the English publication of S.K.'s works, and I labored so diligently that in one month I finished the job - in a month of thirty-one days, working twelve hours a day.”⁵²⁸

Poole begins his critique of *The Concept of Anxiety* by directing his first charge at Lowrie. According to Poole, the enthusiasm and subsequent haste with which Lowrie tackled this particular project shows, in that Lowrie based his entire translation on “premises that falsify Kierkegaard's own practice of writing”.⁵²⁹ This is a serious claim, for Lowrie's translation, being the first and, for a period of nearly four decades, only English translation, has been the basic form in which this particular work has been read, studied and expounded upon since its publication in 1944. The question begs: What is the nature of these false premises?

The first, and perhaps most significant premise, is Lowrie's own statement, made in the Preface of *The Concept of Dread*.

“We need not therefor apply to this book S.K.'s emphatic admonition not to attribute to him anything that is said by his pseudonyms. This was his first completely serious book, and everything we find in it may safely be regarded as his own way of thinking.”⁵³⁰

* Note: This first translation by Lowrie of Haufniensis' *Begrebet Angest* in 1944 was called *The Concept of Dread*. It was only in the later translation by Thomte & Anderson that the word “dread” was replaced by “anxiety”, hence the new title, *The Concept of Anxiety*.

⁵²⁷ Lowrie, W. *Translator's Preface to The Concept of Dread*. 1966. p. vii

⁵²⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵²⁹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 83

⁵³⁰ Lowrie, W. *Translator's Preface to The Concept of Dread*. 1966. p. x

Poole states unequivocally, and quite correctly, that this practice of disregarding Kierkegaard's own "emphatic admonition" with regards to his pseudonyms has had, at best distorting and at worst disastrous, consequences for the forty years in which others have adopted similar attitudes. It was not until 1846, at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, in a section entitled *A First and Last Declaration*, that Kierkegaard finally took responsibility for all the pseudonyms. As well as accepting responsibility, he also begged the readers of his work not to confuse the views of his pseudonyms with each other, and particularly not with his own.⁵³¹

"Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication."⁵³²

The degree to which this entreaty has been completely disregarded is astounding. This is not to imply that Lowrie suggested that this dismissal of pseudonymity should be adopted uniformly with regard to his other aesthetic works. However, it remains no small irony that Lowrie, one of Kierkegaard's most devoted supporters and translators, is one of those most responsible for that request being ignored and the advocateship of what Poole terms a "blunt reading" of Kierkegaard.⁵³³

Blunt reading, according to Poole, is a kind of reading that refuses, as a matter of principle, to endow the text with the decorum of literary status. There is little or no acknowledgement of the implications of the use of irony or the practice of the pseudonymous technique, and similarly, a refusal to ratify that an "indirect communication", is at least partially concerned with the pathos of the lived existence. Blunt reading treats the text as though Kierkegaard is proposing truths or precepts to his readers. In fact, Kierkegaard is not attempting to directly convey something to his reader at all. Instead, he is asking questions. In this sense, a parallel can be drawn between his work and that of Plato. Plato made use of the dialogue form, a technique that he, like the Danish author's use of irony, acquired from Socrates. In this way, Plato too, achieved a modicum of indirect communication in his dialogues in that they prevented the reader from being able to determine what Plato's "own view" was. The end result of these dialogues was

⁵³¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 84

⁵³² Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. 1992. p. 626

⁵³³ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions**. In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988. p. 60

much the same as that of Kierkegaard's work, in that the work never culminated in a final, literal, "Hegelian" conclusion.⁵³⁴

Poole questions the initial impression that Lowrie gives the reader of *The Concept of Dread*. He contradicts Lowrie's conviction that the project was "his first completely serious work", arguing that one cannot make that allusion to a book written under a pseudonym, particularly a work that itself was one of several books appearing under different pseudonyms at the time. Here is the first of many examples where Poole fails to sufficiently consider the nature of *The Concept of Anxiety* as a whole, or to properly define what is meant by "serious work". It is clear that Haufniensis made full use of the technique of irony in this work, it is also clear that Kierkegaard's final decision was to write the work under a pseudonym. In this sense therefore, it would be fair to state that the technique used in the composition of *The Concept of Anxiety* can be said to constitute a prime example of "indirect communication". In this regard therefore, Poole is correct, the work, contrary to Lowrie's belief, cannot be read "seriously", if "seriously" is understood to equate "directly". Furthermore, to allude from this that "everything we find in it may safely be regarded as his own way of thinking" is a highly pertinent example of the degree to which an "earnest" reading can indeed falsify intentions.⁵³⁵

However, there is another aspect in which *The Concept of Anxiety* can be considered to be a very serious work indeed. This would be with regard to its choice of subject matter. This work revolves around two facets of the individual that were of major concern to Kierkegaard throughout his life. These are firstly, the existential problem of the individual, and secondly, the Christian faith. According to Haufniensis, *The Concept of Anxiety* is primarily a psychological study, not a dogmatic treatise. To a large extent, the work does explore the concept of anxiety as an anthropological-psychological phenomenon. However, the concept is never treated apart from the problem of sin and the fundamentally important relation between the individual self and the eternal. This relation undergoes a kind of development that could be analyzed in terms of its dialectical structure. However, as a direct encounter, as a meeting of the temporal and the eternal, the human and the divine, it transcends this sort of analysis. Here the theme moves inexorably from the boundaries of the psychological to the realm of the theological. As Dunning (1985) so astutely points out, the paradox inherent in the postulation of a meeting of the temporal and the eternal, can only be accommodated by the similarly paradoxical concept of faith, which itself also surpasses any

⁵³⁴ Poole, R. **The unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-century receptions.** In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988. p. 60-61

⁵³⁵ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 84

psychological scrutiny.⁵³⁶ The examination of concepts such as sin, guilt, spirit, the eternal, salvation, soul, providence and faith, to mention but a few, constitute a large proportion of the discussion in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Failure to acknowledge the prominence of theological themes in Haufniensis' work, constitutes nothing less than a failure to comprehend the purpose of the work itself.

5.4.1 The problem of translation

Poole claims that the falsification of Kierkegaard's writing, occurred as a direct result of Lowrie who, in the highly influential position as translator, scattered his translations with introductory remarks and footnotes of the same nature as those mentioned earlier (cf. p. 16). This has had the unfortunate result of Kierkegaard's work being received with much more difficulty than otherwise would have been the case. Having said that however, Poole fails to provide any additional examples of so-called distorting "introductory remarks or footnotes".⁵³⁷

It is at this point that Poole discloses his own initial impression of the work.

"To urge that a book written as a gay spoof of the academic textbook requires to be read in a spirit of profound deference and solemnity produces the conditions under which the text cannot help but be misread."⁵³⁸

Once again Poole reiterates his utter denial of the "seriousness" of *The Concept of Anxiety* as a work. He proposes instead that the work is nothing less than a "gay spoof of the academic textbook" which, with its endless jokes, ironies, inversions, subversions and pastiches, has come to exemplify the entire scope and intention of Paul de Man's remark that "the impossibility of reading should not be taken too lightly."⁵³⁹

5.5 The Countenance of Hegelian Psychology – Roger Poole

Despite the caustic tone of this latter observation, its meaning is at least partly sound. *The Concept of Anxiety*, as is evident by its very title, was never intended to be a textbook, on the contrary, Haufniensis worked at length to create a parody of the veritable plethora of Hegelian textbooks of his time. However, as will become evident from the following examination of the insights of Kierkegaardian scholars such as

⁵³⁶ Dunning, S. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*. 1985. p. 164-166

⁵³⁷ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 84

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

Roger Poole and Alastair Hannay, this point has proven itself a contentious issue. Nowhere is this more manifest than with regard to Haufniensis' treatment of psychology, which has been considered by some to be very Hegelian indeed. In our following discussion of this problem of interpretation we will again bear in mind two of the major Kierkegaardian themes discussed earlier. Firstly, that *The Concept of Anxiety* is an ironic work, written under the guise of a pseudonym, and subsequently makes abundant use of the elements of indirect communication. Secondly, that the subject matter therein, when seen in the context his corpus, is of primary import in the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Therefore, while the techniques used in discussion may often to a great extent rely on the practice of indirect communication, such as irony and parody, this most certainly does not signify that the use of those two elements delineates the nature of the text itself in its entirety.

In the process of focussing his scrutiny solely on the text, Poole relegates the significance of the work to mere parody and in so doing neglects to sufficiently take into account the cardinal aspect of content in Haufniensis' work.

5.5.1 The Concept of Vraisemblance

Firstly, we will concentrate on the interpretation of Poole. Unlike Hannay, he views the aspect of ironic parody in Haufniensis' work as a distinct failure on the part of the author and attempts to prove this by employing Jonathan Culler's concept of *vraisemblance*.⁵⁴⁰ *Vraisemblance* is a structuralist concept and is related to the idea of intertextuality. Since there is neither the time nor space with which to more thoroughly delineate this idea, the following discussion will be concise. Basically, this concept refers to the degree to which a new text "fits naturally" into a particular literary convention. Conversely, *vraisemblance* also concerns itself with degrees of "misfit" or "non-fit", the limit of which will signify that the new text indeed is not a new example of a specific literary genre. According to Poole, *The Concept of Anxiety* is a perfect example of the fifth kind of *vraisemblance*, whereby it presents itself both as a parody of previous texts in a certain genre, and as an ironic account of those predecessor texts. Furthermore, says Poole, Kierkegaard adds another dimension to this *vraisemblance*, in that he refuses to admit that his work, as such, is an ironic parody. It is precisely this practice of neglecting to delineate the rules of the game he is playing, that Kierkegaard cultivates the miscomprehension of his text, its genre

⁵⁴⁰ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. P. 86

and the relation between the two. “Everything that can possibly be done to confuse reader expectation is done”⁵⁴¹ states Poole.

According to Poole, Haufniensis goes to great lengths to simultaneously present the book as one of impeccable academic standards and the undoing of those standards. Subject matter that has throughout history been discussed seriously is now presented with an apparent levity of tone and frivolity of approach. Poole claims that the vraisemblance of *The Concept of Anxiety* suggests that it is a textbook indebted to the Hegelian tradition of philosophy and to the dogmatic theology as rendered by the Hegelians at the university. By implication therefore, it creates the impression of being subject to certain rules and criteria. This, it consistently fails to do. Indeed, from a reading of the first pages it soon becomes clear that it is precisely these rules and criteria that are being made the object of ironic critique. This has the result of making the vraisemblance of *The Concept of Anxiety* precarious and uncertain. Indeed, states Poole, the entire work gives the reader an uncomfortable and uncanny feeling, the impression that much more is afoot than appears on the surface.⁵⁴²

Poole outlines four ways in which the work fails in its vraisemblance if it were a textbook, which it supposedly purports to be. The first failure is that the text is provided under a pseudonym, which would hardly be the case in an authentic textbook; the second is that, as has already been established, the text itself is anything but simple; the third and highly significant failure according to Poole, is that it goes “against all received opinion and common sense to call *Angest* (dread, anxiety) a concept”⁵⁴³, an action Poole considers daringly poetical in nature and carried out for the sole purposes of removing the work from the vraisemblance of the theological textbook altogether. The fourth and final failure, is Haufniensis’ use of the terms “dogmatics” and “psychology” as local reference points, appearing, no less, in the very title of the work. This use, according to Poole, signifies a blatant nonchalance and “devil-may-care impertinence”⁵⁴⁴ on the side of Haufniensis. To submit a “dogmatic problem” to a mere “psychological deliberation” is proof, claims Poole, of Haufniensis creating the potential for category mistakes that could only have been intended.⁵⁴⁵ Poole views the fact that the author failed to acknowledge the book upon which *The Concept of Anxiety* was supposedly modelled, namely Rosenkrantz’s *Psychology*, as nothing more than another example of the failure of vraisemblance of Haufniensis’ work.

⁵⁴¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. P. 86

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 88

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Indeed, states Poole, to a certain extent *The Concept of Anxiety* relies upon the systematic, Hegelian layout for its impression of precision. Poole considers it fortunate that the work concerned itself with the traidic, even if the concern amounted to nothing more than flirtation. For even though the process of argument in *The Concept of Anxiety* is vertiginous and eccentric, unsystematic and even at times idiosyncratic, this is all only made feasible by the (albeit ironic) presence of the Systematic textbook.⁵⁴⁶

5.5.2 The Significance of Countertexts

Poole correctly contends that the complex layout, the continual reference to dogmatic and psychological matters, the academic tone and the impression of being a textbook are all facets of literary intention on the part of the author of *The Concept of Anxiety*. In other words, it was Haufniensis' design that the work should give the impression of being a text among other similar texts (i.e. Hegelian texts). More specifically though, Vigilius wanted the work to be seen in the context of other textbooks that were current at the time that *The Concept of Anxiety* was being written. In this regard, it is highly probable that Haufniensis made use of a popular Hegelian textbook on psychology by Karl Rosenkranz. It is well-known that Kierkegaard was reading Rosenkranz's *Psychology* at the time of writing *The Concept of Anxiety* due to the many notations thereof in his working notes, including a parody. In the body of Haufniensis' work there are also references to this work of Rosenkranz, including a footnote that is actually reluctantly appreciative.⁵⁴⁷

“...for it is actually a competent book, and if the author, who otherwise distinguishes himself by his common sense and his humane interest in human life, had been able to renounce his fanatical superstitious belief in an empty schema, he could have avoided being ridiculous at times. What he says in this passage is for the most part very good. The only thing that at times is difficult to understand is the grandiose schema and how the altogether concrete discussion can correspond to it.”⁵⁴⁸

In *Psychology* Rosenkranz consistently represents his material in triads. The work itself is presented in three large parts, each part is divided into three sections which, in turn, are each divided into three chapters. For their part, most of the chapters are further divided into three subdivisions, and there are even further subsections made of these. The impression given is one of inexorable logical progression. It is in

⁵⁴⁶ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 88

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 94

⁵⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 147-148 footnote

this sense that Poole is of the opinion that Rosenkranz's work may have proven to be more directly useful to Kierkegaard. The three major parts into which *Psychology* was divided are anthropology, phenomenology and pneumatology. This choice of division signifies a significant departure from the Hegelian patterns of thought in which "the sciences of the Subjective Spirit" are divided into anthropology, phenomenology and psychology. Exactly what advantage Rosenkranz derived from this shift from the Hegelian pattern is not evident, nevertheless his descriptions and insights were interesting enough to capture the attention of the young Kierkegaard.⁵⁴⁹ Poole makes note of some interesting parallels for example, the third subdivision of the first chapter is laid out in the following manner:

- a) Apathy
- b) Antipathy
- c) Sympathy

The third section of the first part is called *The Symbolic Appearance of the Spirit in Its Bodily Nature*, which was a theme that was to occupy Kierkegaard throughout his life as a writer. Equally significant is the second subdivision of the second chapter of part three, entitled *Imagination*. This consists, in part, of a remarkable assemblage of conjectures involving the various possible permutations between objective and subjective reproduction and between qualitative and quantitative determinations of fantasy. The third part, called *Semiotic Fantasy* begins with a section entitled *ironizing*, continues with a section called *speech* and ends with a section entitled *writing*. Yet another striking characteristic of some of Rosenkranz's passages is that the opposing concepts are used adjectivally. For example, subjective-objective reproduction is followed by objective-subjective reproduction, and so forth.⁵⁵⁰

5.5.3 Assessment of Poole's Critique

This facet of Poole's critique of *The Concept of Anxiety* is only one of several examples where his frequent accusation of Haufniensis being deliberately confusing can be directed toward him also. Are we to understand that, by presenting vraisemblance as a standard, Poole is actually denouncing Haufniensis' work for failing to parody the Hegelian textbook according to the guidelines of vraisemblance? Poole bases his argument to a large extent on the fact that Haufniensis neglects to inform his reader that *The Concept of Anxiety* is a parody. This is nonsensical for, as Poole himself has acknowledged, Kierkegaard presented the work under a pseudonym so as to effectively proffer "a point of view". By informing the

⁵⁴⁹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 94-95

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 95-96

reader at the onset of the parodic nature of the work, he would by that very action be ridding the work of all irony. This would, in fact, defeat one of the principal objects of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

Poole is correct when he claims that it seems senseless to attempt a conceptualization of the state of anxiety. It is just as senseless to attempt a “simple psychologically orienting deliberation on a dogmatic issue”. He elaborately lists these aspects as examples of the work’s so-called “failures of vraisemblance” when this apparent senselessness or inconsistency is precisely what was intended by the author for the purposes of parodying the pretentious, all-encompassing objectification of the Hegelian System. Hegelian philosophy considered anxiety, and other similar experiences to be nothing more than emotional manifestations. This effectively relegated anxiety to the highly subjective category of emotion, and as such, placed it well outside the realm of objective knowledge. By entitling his work *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis was making a deliberate and certainly blatant show of defying the claims of Hegelian philosophy.

While Poole admits that this show of irrationality was intentional, he nevertheless insists that this was for the menial purposes of making the work as incomprehensible as possible. This is a rather banal interpretation, to say the least. Furthermore, Poole’s castigation of Haufniensis for not directly acknowledging Rosenkranz’s text as the model for his work is arbitrary, since the work only served as an influence and not as a primary source from which Haufniensis gleaned information. Moreover, his claim that Haufniensis actually directly benefited from the text of *Psychology* due to its small, yet significant shift from the practices of Hegelian psychology is evidence once again of Poole’s distortive interpretation of the author’s intentions. Haufniensis made use of Rosenkranz’s *Psychology* for a variety of reasons, the remainder of which will be discussed later. In this case however, the principal reason for using that text was because it was a prime example of the prevalent Hegelian textbook, in tone, style and content. It therefore provided Haufniensis with an excellent platform upon which to model an undertaking in parody. Another serious oversight in Poole’s critique of *The Concept of Anxiety* is that, in his sporadic treatment of the content, he concentrates exclusively upon the psychological aspects of the work, at the expense of the theological. The latter is important for a variety of reasons, but particularly in the context of comparing the work to that of Rosenkranz.

On this basis it is reasonable to suggest that while Haufniensis certainly did make use of Rosenkranz’s work to some extent, *The Concept of Anxiety* was not solely directed at this textbook of psychology, but at the larger body of Hegelian textbooks of his time. If, despite his failure to submit to the proper rules and guidelines of vraisemblance, Haufniensis was indeed presenting us with an authentic parody, then

surely a reference to a book which may have had some measure of influence upon certain facets of *The Concept of Anxiety* does not constitute grounds for such criticism? It is also worth bearing in mind that while *The Concept of Anxiety* is renowned as being one of Kierkegaard's psychological works, a substantial amount of the content remains indisputably theological.

5.6 The Countenance of Hegelian Psychology – Alastair Hannay

In contrast to Poole's hypothesis, Alastair Hannay believes that the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety* makes use of direct communication in his detailed descriptions of various conscious states. Indeed, Hannay claims that if we are to apply an established use of the term "psychology" to this particular work, it must be that of Hegel, who regarded psychology as yet another all-embracing science of man as emerging self-conscious spirit. In fact, Hegel classified psychology, as well as anthropology and phenomenology, as a science of "subjective spirit", an issue comprising the dynamics and events of spiritual emergence from the point of view of consciousness. This is in opposition to "objective spirit" by which Hegel signified the public manifestations and historical forms of this emergence, including legal institutions and social morality, as well as the socially significant aspects of the individual conscience. Needless to say, Hegel intended his science of spirit to be literally all-encompassing, in the sense that no aspect of human life, not even individual and social morality, was to be left unexamined. The quandary at this point for Hannay, is that Hegel's conception of a "science of spirit" is to Kierkegaard's mind, an utter absurdity, the inherent impossibility of which he seeks at every given opportunity to expose, not to mention its pretentious claim of being able grasp moral principles and concepts within the realm of science. If this is so then what possible role does Hegelian psychology have to play in Kierkegaard's own philosophy of emergent spirit? The question becomes all the more imperative when one considers that *The Concept of Anxiety* is subtitled *A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Given Kierkegaard's own fervent belief in the autonomy of ethics, how can he subject ethico-spiritual themes of sin and edification to scientific deliberations and expositions?⁵⁵¹

If one takes into account both the facts that a scientific explanation cannot take extend to non-temporal, ethical phenomena, and Kierkegaard's fervent anti-Hegelian assumptions, what part can psychological deliberations play in the individual's choice of and subjection to ethical categories? As stated earlier, Haufniensis' chief concern in *The Concept of Anxiety* is with the category of the spiritual, and subsequently also with sin. In pointing out what psychology cannot explain about sin, he accordingly also

⁵⁵¹ Hannay, A. *Kierkegaard*. 1982. p. 157-158



indicates what it can explain about sin, (and if it is to assume the added responsibility of ethical categories, must) become predisposed to the consciousness of sin. For, Haufniensis claims, psychology can only describe states and since sin is not a state,⁵⁵² but “something in repose that remains in a restless repose, not something restless that always either produces itself or is repressed.”⁵⁵³ Therefore psychology cannot describe sin in itself. However, Haufniensis is quick to add:

“But this abiding something out of which sin constantly arises, not by necessity (for a becoming by necessity is a state, as, for example, the whole history of the plant is a state) but by freedom – this abiding something, this predisposing presupposition, sin’s real possibility, is a subject of interest for psychology.”⁵⁵⁴

Hence, what Haufniensis is saying, is that although psychology cannot explain sin, because sin is an ethical and not natural category, it can explain, as he puts it “the still-life of sin’s possibility.”⁵⁵⁵ This explanation is limiting, and that is precisely the point. Psychology cannot explain why there is such a thing as sin in the first place, but how sin can come into the existence of the individual is something that it can. The argument is that for sin to move from the state of the ideal to that of the actual, it’s “ideal” possibility (in the form of the theological construct of original sin) has to be complimented by a “real” possibility, that is the psychological state of sin occurring in existence. If the latter does not occur, sin remains an abstraction. Thus, as Hannay(1982) points out, Haufniensis’ psychology interests itself in this so-called “predisposing” state of the individual.⁵⁵⁶

“... what psychologically may be called freedom’s psychological attitudes towards sin, or psychologically approximating states. They do not presume to explain sin ethically.”⁵⁵⁷

5.7 Textual Problems and Motivations – Roger Poole

⁵⁵² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 15

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 21

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22

⁵⁵⁶ Hannay, A. *Kierkegaard*. 1982. p. 160

⁵⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 118

According to Poole, the difficulty with which *The Concept of Anxiety* is received signifies much more than a simple instance of convoluted writing style. He states that there is something especially forbidding in the reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*, something, which to his mind, suggests that the author is doing everything in his power to outwit the reader, or at very least to make the task of reading harder than it should be. According to Poole, the text generates a sense of working against the reader rather than with him/her. It seems to labour to refuse even the most elementary elements of courtesy and helpfulness to a reader who is tackling a new book on a difficult subject. Before long, Poole states, the reader acquires the feeling of being manipulated and humiliated by Vigilius Haufniensis, and being forced into a reading position where he is helpless. In accordance with the title of his own work Poole is quick to admit that this text is, by its very nature, of indirect communication, in which the aim is to guide the reader into creating a “scrutable” text. He claims that while there is a veritably endless show of authorial solicitude to clarify and to aid the progression of the reading, there is no implementation of this scheme by the author. The usual textbook format begins from a position where the issue under discussion is about to be clarified, but because Poole does not find this to be the case for *The Concept of Anxiety*, he summarily takes this as evidence that this work is no textbook.⁵⁵⁸

Poole suggests that the relationship between author and reader that is being set up by Vigilius Haufniensis is one in which the reader finds him/herself being examined. He claims that “ ‘the refusal of examination’ that was the basic design of *The Concept of Irony* now comes back raised to a higher power.”⁵⁵⁹

In other words, Poole is suggesting that the initial reason for the work’s intricate complexity is to put the critics of his time, most notably Professors J.L. Heiberg and H.L. Martensen, to the test. The question, directed at these eminent scholars, being: Can you understand your own lectures if they are subverted by infinite ironic abstract negativity? Upon examining the title, it would seem that, if Kierkegaard was indeed writing this book for the purposes mentioned above, that his “test” was directed toward interested members of the faculties of philosophy and theology. Poole considers this a highly ironic joke on the side of the author. Kierkegaard, being all too aware of the conflict between those who read in a mode acceptable to themselves, and those who read undefended by Hegelian recourse to absolute values, wrote a title for a work of interest to both. This would imply therefore, that the reader of *The Concept of Anxiety* would have to occupy two reader positions simultaneously.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 85

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 85

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 85-86

Only two subtitles in Kierkegaard's corpus contain the words "psychology" and "psychologically". The former is to be found in *Repetition*, in the subtitle, *An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, written under the pseudonym of Constantine Constantius, and the latter, naturally, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, in the subtitle, *A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. According to Poole the significance of these two terms is that they were applied as a direct provocation to Professor Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Heiberg was an eminent and highly respected academic during that time and was extraordinarily influential. He was also a dedicated Hegelian. In his various writings, Heiberg had expressly excluded the psychological from the realm of Knowledge. Indeed, in his understanding and application of the Hegelian System, Heiberg seems to have been more rigorously Hegelian than Hegel himself. According to Heiberg, psychology and the realm of emotions constituted a lower, baser form of thought, and were thus to be austere prohibited from the investigations of philosophy. On the basis of this, Poole believes that Haufniensis' insistence upon treating the concept of anxiety as "a simple psychologically orienting deliberation" constituted a wanton provocation of Heiberg. Taking into account Heiberg's strict adherence to the process of Hegelian Systematic thought, any attempt to discuss *Angest* psychologically would have signified a refusal to discuss the issue conceptually at all. Poole states that to Heiberg's mind, a proposal to discuss *Angest* in terms of feelings such as sympathetic antipathy, dizziness and "shut-up-ness" would have constituted a relegation of the concept to the intellectually inferior domain of emotion.⁵⁶¹

Poole states that *The Concept of Anxiety* was not the only work written in order to outrage and alienate Heiberg. *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard's thesis for his Magister Artium, was written to provoke and alienate, both Heiberg and Professor Martensen, another prominent Hegelian. The work elicited two very different reactions from Kierkegaard's two former mentors. Upon reading the thinly-veiled polemic against himself in the work, Professor Martensen excused himself as a degree-committee judge of the work and retreated into a pained, but dignified silence. Heiberg, on the other hand, reacted explosively, and promptly decided to review Kierkegaard's work. His reviews of Kierkegaard's work remained a rather consistent feature in their relationship. The reviews were conducted in an attitude giving the impression of good will, however always calculatingly missing the point in such a manner as he knew would serve to affront his self-appointed adversary. However pedantic and close-minded Heiberg may

⁵⁶¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 97

have been, it is clear that he was no fool. Poole states that *The Concept of Anxiety* was not expected by either its author or publisher to have many readers, and Professor Heiberg, who most certainly would be included amongst the work's select few readers, might have perceived the work as being a quip at his personal expense. It has been noted by another Kierkegaard scholar, Henning Fenger, that one of the reasons why Kierkegaard, throughout his scholarly lifetime, still failed to achieve success in Copenhagen, despite being one of the most brilliant intellects ever produced by Denmark, is that he never flattered Heiberg. Indeed, he often went to some lengths to offend him. Poole claims that the style and content of *The Concept of Anxiety* certainly supports this contention. The subtitle and portion of the text insisting on the psychological; the long diatribe against Heiberg in the Introduction; the acerbic treatment of the Hegelian patterns of thought; the use of Rosenkranz's *Psychology* as a countertext that could be parodied, and the tone of the entire essay, mocking, superior and even condescending – all of this, Poole deduces, aggregates a deliberate attempt to incite Heiberg.⁵⁶²

As was the case in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard's attack was not limited exclusively to Heiberg. In addition to a "psychologically orienting deliberation" it also includes "the dogmatic issue of Hereditary Sin." Of course, it was Professor Martensen who lectured in dogmatics.⁵⁶³

Nevertheless, Poole claims that it was Heiberg who remained Kierkegaard's primary target for incitement. As has already been mentioned, Heiberg was an unyielding Hegelian. His use of Hegelian triads did not leave one detail unaccounted for in the process of their inexorable, logical advance. From his exclusive use of categories, it is clear that Heiberg did not believe that there was anything that could not be integrated into the System. In his view no single element would remain unassimilable to the System. If, with this in mind, we turn our attention to Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* in which the author assumed the stance that irony, due to its nature of infinite, absolute negativity occluded itself from absorption into any System whatsoever. It was this fundamental position that caused the controversy surrounding the acceptance of his thesis.

"As a rule, irony is understood ideally, is assigned its place as a vanishing element in the system, and is therefore treated very briefly. For this reason it is not easy to comprehend how a whole life can be taken up with it, since, after all, the content of this life must be regarded as nothing. But we forget that a position is never as ideal in life as it is

⁵⁶² Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 97-98

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

in the system; we forget that irony, just as any other position in life, has its spiritual trials, its battles, its retreats, its victories.”⁵⁶⁴

Kierkegaard confounded the System by concentrating in his thought on a set of elements that are both unassimilable and, Poole claims, incommensurable. This characteristic of incommensurability was not limited to *The Concept of Irony*, but according to Poole, is also to be found in *Philosophical Fragments* and of course, *The Concept of Anxiety*. Poole states that the text of the latter is scattered with such unassimilable elements from the very beginning. Hereditary Sin; innocence; the Fall; anxiety; the demonic; “shut-upness” and the “unfreely-revealed”; the vacuous and the tedious – all of these concepts, new as they might have been, are according to Poole, indefinable. To a great extent, he claims, these elements are emotional and psychological in nature. The two elements expressly excluded from assimilation by the System due to their so-called baseness. Any elements that can be described as indefinable, emotional and psychological share the aspect of remaining unassimilable to any scheme of interpretation that is triadic and cumulative. Finally, adds Poole, these elements are ironic, and as such hold themselves beyond the reach of any conceivable schema of interpretation. The result is that although *The Concept of Anxiety* proceeds without erecting sets of triads, Poole claims that it makes constant reference to a systematic line of thought that does proceed in triads. Haufniensis then interjects this systematic line of thought with what Poole calls “shock concepts”⁵⁶⁵ in order to bring the flow of logical continuity to a halt. Poole defines these “shock concepts” as “poetic-metaphorical strokes that explicitly deny their own inherence in any system of logical units.”⁵⁶⁶ These shock concepts are also discontinuous, in that they cannot be added or adapted to any formal, chronological account of history, and as such, are unassimilable to a Hegelian speculative description of cultural, historical progress. Thus, even though *The Concept of Anxiety* makes constant references to the System, its means of progression are specifically chosen to provide both an ironic contrast to the System and a wholly obvious independence of it. Up to this point, I am in agreement with Poole. However, he goes on to claim that this is achieved by the constant use of ambiguities, paradoxes, oxymorons, self-contradictions, variations in time and of history, and types and subtypes of explanation and description, all of which serve to produce in the reader an ever-increasing state of bewilderment. Poole states that none of the terms show signs of a logical progression, as each term is given multiple redefinitions. Each time a key term reappears therefore, it is placed within the bounds of a new context, which inevitably alters the meaning of that term.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Irony*. 1989. p. 166

⁵⁶⁵ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 99

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Poole states that whereas the text initially gave the impression of being a textbook, *The Concept of Anxiety* is in fact a parody of a textbook. In a real textbook, the author goes to great lengths in order that every new sentence is a movement towards clarifying or explaining the last. In Haufniensis' work, the reader is struck by the initial impression that the text seems to be approaching all issues of human knowledge, all wisdom, all events, both sacred and profane, and encompassing the meaning of all of these within one huge System of thought. As the work progresses however, the reader is struck by the fact that every new sentence in the text increases the general imprecision and unknown quality of the subject matter it describes. It is not long before the text as a whole generates what Poole calls "an aura of incomprehensibility".⁵⁶⁸

The preceding paragraphs constitute yet more grievous claims by Poole. That Kierkegaard, through the writings of Vigilius Haufniensis, would go to such lengths for the base purpose of provoking the eminent Hegelian academics of his day, parallels in radicalness Poole's previous claim of the essentially contradictory "academic spoof". Both reduce the purpose of *The Concept of Anxiety* to little more than a captious, and exceeding complex, practical joke. And what, one may ask, does Poole base this claim on? There is no direct evidence one way or another in respect to how *The Concept of Anxiety* initially was received. However, based solely on a lack of any reviews upon publication, Poole speculates that the only non-professional reader would have been the "impulse buyer... interested in and probably professionally proficient in theology, and that he would not have immediately supposed that a book on such a subject would be a spoof."⁵⁶⁹ Thus, upon this assumption, Poole concludes that *The Concept of Anxiety* was, for the most part, written exclusively for the benefit of Professors Heiberg and Martensen.

While Kierkegaard's personal relationship with Heiberg, in particular, was often tumultuous, both parties acknowledged and respected each other as intellectuals. Kierkegaard had, for some time, even viewed Heiberg as a model with regard to certain matters such as aesthetics. Heiberg was possibly one of the most eminent intellectuals of Copenhagen in the 1830's and early 1840's. He was also an exceedingly aloof patrician, and despite this fact, Kierkegaard, although twenty-two years younger, remained at least a peripheral member of his select salon circle. In the draft of her memoirs, Johanne Luise Heiberg wrote

⁵⁶⁸ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 100

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 85

that Søren Kierkegaard was among the few, who could come by in the evening without having to be invited.⁵⁷⁰

As Kierkegaard developed as both writer and philosopher his views contrasted more and more with those of Heiberg, however, there is neither the time nor the space to properly explore those here. The single most significant distinction between Kierkegaard and Heiberg was the fact that the latter was a stoical Hegelian. While there is certainly merit to the claim that there often were feelings of dissension between the two, I diametrically oppose Poole's claims that Vigilius Haufniensis wrote *The Concept of Anxiety* as a work specifically aimed at Heiberg. Instead of seeking to prove a point or, as Poole claims, antagonize a few Danish intellectuals, I believe that the actual target of Haufniensis' disapprobation was the Hegelian System. If either Heiberg or Martensen found themselves the occasional object of acerbic criticism, it was because they themselves were representatives of the very System that Kierkegaard was in the process of attacking. Indeed, Kierkegaard was notoriously forthright, particularly in his criticism of Hegel, and this also included eminent Hegelian scholars.

However, I am of the opinion that Poole's postulation in this regard exclusively serves the purposes of his broader critique of *The Concept of Anxiety* as a whole. He has repeatedly emphasized the claim that Haufniensis' work was contrived to be as confusing as possible. According to Poole, we must not attempt to understand the complexities of *The Concept of Anxiety*, because they are simply ends in themselves and serve no higher purpose, nor convey any meaning. In fact, he heaps scorn upon generations of Kierkegaard scholars who have studied Haufniensis' work with an attitude of earnestness and discovered it to constitute a highly significant, if not fundamental part of Kierkegaard's philosophy. According to Poole, this is all naivety. To support this cavalier allegation, he exaggerates the discordant relationship between Heiberg and Kierkegaard, thus providing motivation for the so-called "incomprehensibility" of a text that was supposedly produced for the menial purpose of provoking two eminent academics. This contention not only debases *The Concept of Anxiety* as a work, but considering its significance with respect to Kierkegaard's corpus, reduces his philosophy as a whole.

5.7.2 The Preface

⁵⁷⁰ Kirmmse, B. "Out with it!": The modern breakthrough, Kierkegaard and Denmark, in Marino, G. & Hannay, A. (Ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1998. p. 19-20

Upon opening the book, the reader is immediately subject to two tests, says Poole. The first being the ironic and outright sarcastic epigraph, beginning with the phrase “The age of making distinctions...” The second is the passionate and rhapsodic dedication of the work to Paul Møller, an eminently Socratic individual who was highly opposed the philosophy of Hegel and his followers. Poole claims that the effect of the epigraph and dedication on the already uncertain reader ought to have been sufficient to cancel any remaining illusions about the work being what it only pretended to be. The reader would firstly come to the realization that the work was not an academic textbook, but in fact a poetic essay; secondly, that it was one that was largely, if not completely independent of the expository orthodoxy that it maintains; and thirdly, that the tone and specifically the style of the work was entirely ironical, in that its purpose was precisely not to illuminate existing thought patterns, but rather to disturb them.⁵⁷¹ In the following passage in particular, Poole provides a concise preliminary of his conclusions concerning *The Concept of Anxiety*.

“From the first line of the Preface by Vigilius Haufniensis, the reader would become aware, probably with irritation in some cases, that the whole thing is likely to be a disrespectful ironic joke. Turning from the Preface to the Introduction, the tone so ably set up would surely convince any reader that the book was intended as anything but serious.”⁵⁷²

This is an utter contradiction of Walter Lowrie’s statement concerning *The Concept of Dread*, that he considered it Kierkegaard’s “first completely serious book”. Moreover, Poole comments with complete astonishment that the greater majority of readers of Haufniensis’ work have approached it with the same attitude earnestness and seriousness as displayed by Lowrie. Somehow, Poole conjectures, these readers have managed to completely ignore the barrage of ironic distraction and still hasten headlong into reading this work with the same sense of “naïve simplicity that they would bring to the reading of an encyclopaedia article.”⁵⁷³

To Poole’s mind, the history of the reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* is a fine example of successful forgetting. All the blatant initial ironies inherent in the table of contents, the epigraph, dedication, Preface and Introduction are all swept aside and repressed for sake of attaining what Poole calls a “respectful passiveness”. This “unironic” respect is generated in spite of the contrivances of the text.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 89

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Here, according to Poole, lies the crux of the problem, the problem being the opacity and difficulty of the work. Due to their attitude of resolute impercipient, readers of *The Concept of Anxiety* have succeeded in falsifying expectations of the work, not only for themselves, but for others too. The result has been generations of readers who have, with serious intent and purpose, engaged in the reading of the work, while in the process disregarding most, if not all, of the ironic indicators inherent therein. This, states Poole only serves to prove the adage that Kierkegaard uses in *Stages on Life's Way*: "Such books are mirrors: when an ape peers into them, no apostle can be looking out."^{*}

5.7.3 The Dialectical Layout and Visual Patterns

Another fundamental problem concerning the reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*, according to Poole, is the interrelated complexity of the dialectical layout. As an example, he cites the fact that the first edition contained no table of contents, but that one was added to the second edition, as well as to the two modern English translations.⁵⁷⁵

Translations too, fall under the category of problems associated with Haufniensis' work. In the second English translation, Thomte chooses "Hereditary Sin" as his translation for *Arvesynden*. This is a departure from Walter Lowrie's use of the much more colloquial "Original Sin". The difficulty here is that by concentrating upon the element of *Arv* in *Arvesynden*, Thomte does away with a phrase that has for centuries, and currently still is a part of the English language. The translation of Original Sin is more successful in contrasting the various paradoxes implicit in the layout. However, by far the most significant change initiated by Thomte, was the replacement of time-honoured "dread" with "anxiety" as translation of *Angest*. According to Poole, this was mistake, since anxiety merely constitutes one of many possible forms of dread, making the latter the richer concept by far. Since so much of the text is based on these translations, Poole takes this as evidence that the Thomte translation is twice impoverished when compared to that of Lowrie.⁵⁷⁶

* This is a quote borrowed by Kierkegaard from Lichtenberg, which is used as the motto for the Banquet in "In Vino Veritas" in *Stages on Life's Way*.

⁵⁷⁵ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 89-92

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 92

A second major problem with regards to Haufniensis' work is that the layout is, according to Poole, "a kind of carnival of the signifier."⁵⁷⁷ By making this statement, Poole questions whether the signifiers in Haufniensis' work actually have signifieds. His immediate summation is that they do not, and this constitutes another one of the cardinal problems of the work. In the text, the signifiers only have something of a phantasmal existence in that they are generated by the mere fact of being the opposite half of pairs of conceptions that are themselves, self-defining. Poole adds that it what is also remarkable is the apparent and deliberate play between conceptual opposites and with conceptual time schemes. For example, the first chapter renders anxiety as the presupposition of Hereditary Sin, while chapter three suggests that anxiety is the consequence of Hereditary Sin. Similarly, chapter one proposes to discuss Hereditary Sin retrogressively, while chapter two deliberates Hereditary Sin progressively. Poole claims that it seems contradictory to be able to discuss the same concept "Retrogressively in Terms of Its Origin", and then "progressively" in the very next chapter. To Poole's mind however, these problems still do not constitute the absolute difficulty. This, with regards to *The Concept of Anxiety*, is inherent in how entities such as Hereditary Sin and anxiety can be traced historically at all, not to speak of both "retrogressively" and "progressively".⁵⁷⁸

"There is something in the very nature of anxiety that seems to forbid its having a history that could be recounted forward or backward in terms of some public scheme of representation."⁵⁷⁹

Another aspect of this so-called "absolute difficulty", according to Poole, is that if anxiety is indeed a concept, as is suggested by the title of the work, then there is a distinct difficulty inherent in understanding its involvement in historicity whether sacred or profane. Surely, states Poole, a concept should be completely free of the constraints of history, and, in fact, should not even intersect at all, except at those junctures where it adopts a "physical instantiation".⁵⁸⁰ Expanding his argument, Poole suggests that if anxiety is a concept, then Hereditary Sin must surely also have a historical aspect. In the work, the reader is reminded that Hereditary Sin was something passed down from Eve to her children. Poole takes this as evidence that it inhabits secular time, and poses the question of how a concept could do this? Looked at from a theological perspective, Hereditary Sin, or Original Sin exists more along the lines of a fact. Poole postulates that some historical event, evil in nature, transpired and the baneful consequences

⁵⁷⁷ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 92

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 92-93

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 92

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 93

thereof continue to pursue us throughout the ages. If this is indeed so and Hereditary or Original Sin is an original historical event, then it must be formally distinct from a concept.⁵⁸¹

In *The Concept of Anxiety* however, no such distinction can be found. On the contrary, in the play of chapter headings and sub-divisions of the work, the author seems to strive to create as many category confusions as possible. Indeed, Poole claims, when laid out formally as in The Table of Contents, Haufniensis' work reveals itself as a display of conflicting contradictions and conceptual incompatibilities. Once again, the only reason why readers of *The Concept of Anxiety* have persevered in a serious reading of the work is due to a tradition of obstinacy and thoughtlessness in the face of these marked incompatibilities.⁵⁸²

According to Poole the whole of Haufniensis' work is filled with key terms that are intellectually, philosophically or theologically incompatible with each other at best, and simply outrageous at worst. It is precisely this play of opposing concepts that occludes the reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* as an academic textbook. These various elements, particularly when formally assembled as in the Table of Contents, take on a kind of heterogeneity that Poole claims to serve the purpose of deliberately provoking the intellect.⁵⁸³

“There is just no way in which some of these maneuvers can be understood or made sense of. It throws the burden of correct reading right back onto the reader, with no help offered by the author.”⁵⁸⁴

The preceding criticism, perhaps more vividly than any other, demonstrates what can only be interpreted as Poole's distorted understanding of Haufniensis' conception of anxiety. An aspect of Vigilius' treatment of the concept of anxiety that is emphasized time and again, is its intrinsically, and indeed, profoundly ambiguous nature. Each time Haufniensis associates anxiety with “nothing” and “possibility” he brings under the attention of the reader the point that the concept is, at its very core, infinitely ambiguous. This is to such an extent that, as Fenves(1993) so astutely points out, the essential ambiguity of anxiety is not exhausted by the mere opposition of articulate and inarticulate; even the ambiguity of articulateness itself is constitutive of anxiety. Everything discerned whilst in a state of anxiety, and every threat that it imparts both decries and describes the threat. The latter takes the form of a promise, a promise of, if nothing else,

⁵⁸¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 93

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 94

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

an awakening to knowledge. In typical Kierkegaardian irony, ambiguity constitutes the single defining feature of anxiety, and in so doing, the nature of definition itself is altered as it loses its univocal character. It is clear therefore, that ambiguity, “double-meaning” or *Tvetydigthed*⁵⁸⁵ is not a mere referent to psychological ambivalence. Ambiguity as essence of anxiety is underlined by its very description:

“Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*.”⁵⁸⁶

However, this description soon proves to be far from definitive, as the intrinsic ambiguity of the concept, as well as the text devoted to describing it, begin to unravel all decipherable denotations, and subsequently, the presumed univocality of the discourse.

“... every threatening word promises; every promising word threatens.”⁵⁸⁷

In fact, anxiety is so ambiguous that one gets the impression that Haufniensis is working on the very limits of this concept. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, anxiety itself becomes, like a paradox, almost inconceivable. However, the watchman of Copenhagen does not stumble into that abyss, for unlike a paradox, anxiety does not point beyond itself. It only sporadically points to its resolution, but other than that, it points nowhere, and this “nowhere” to which it directs our attention and of which it is actually a response, is indeed, itself. Anxiety points to “itself” before the self, prior to the mind-body relation evolving into a synthesis; it refers to “itself” when the self to which it would refer is absent. This brings to the fore yet another principal aspect of anxiety, namely that not only is anxiety self-referential, but this self-referentiality deprives language of the very substance that it would require, as subject matter of the sentence, to eradicate all ambiguity, including for that matter, the substantiality and tangibility of an “I” who could refer all sentences to itself. Thus, with neither a substance imparted in the subject matter of the sentence, nor a subject who can refer all sentences to itself, language lacks the power to define, to ascertain concepts, to outline distinctions and subsequently, to establish a specific field of reference. In the practice of referring to itself, anxiety provides “no-thing”, both as a reference point to and from. In so doing, anxiety lays bare the linguistic chasm of the self, and though this chasm represents a potentiality of development in the mind-body relation in terms of spirit, the chasm disclosed by anxiety is solely linguistic. The fall into sin, at the beginning of *The Concept of Anxiety*, represents the accession of the self in the chasm of purely self-referential language. In this space it is concepts and their fields of

⁵⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 43

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 42

⁵⁸⁷ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 79

reference that prosper, not the self. The reducibility of concepts serves not only as the measure of every “new” arrival, and therefore of history itself, but also constitutes the essential disclosure the development of the self.⁵⁸⁸ It is for this very reason that anxiety remains, strictly speaking, an indefinable concept, an unknown quantity. This is, to my mind, made abundantly clear by Haufniensis’ “definition” of anxiety as “a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy”. Anxiety can be equated to a specific form of ambiguousness, and therefore, the experiences associated in and around anxiety are most probably going to contain some measure of ambiguousness themselves. It is Haufniensis description of these, that Poole labels “the carnival of the signifier”. He complains that these conceptions have a “kind of ghostly existence” due to the fact that they exist as opposing halves of self-defining pairs. Far from being a flaw in Haufniensis’ theory, this is, to the mind of the author, precisely the point. Vigilius’ very definitive description of the experience of anxiety is conveyed in the manner of separate concepts that constitute opposing halves joined together as self-defining pairs. The reason being firstly, that anxiety is ambivalent, and secondly as such, it constitutes two opposing, yet intrinsically linked experiences. The rather intricate play between conceptual opposites that Poole criticizes Haufniensis for, is to my mind, the very nature of anxiety, the actual lack of which would constitute an incomplete description of the experience.

Poole continues his criticism by highlighting the impossibility of tracing entities such as Hereditary Sin historically, and furthermore adds that “if anxiety is indeed a concept, as the book’s title insists that it is”, then it is impossible to understand the concept’s involvement in historicity. There are two problems with this critique: firstly, it has already been amply established that *The Concept of Anxiety* is a work of irony. This is perhaps the most inconsistent aspect of Poole’s argument. One moment he emphasizes the ironic nature of *The Concept of Anxiety* and vehemently protests the so-called “earnest” and “serious” reading of such an obvious example of indirect communication, and the next he claims for evidence that Haufniensis considers anxiety a concept is to be found in a direct reading of the title. In contrast, it is the opinion of the author that the title constitutes one of the most striking examples of ironic parody in the entire work. Nowhere throughout *The Concept of Anxiety* does Haufniensis attempt a conceptualization of anxiety. Therefore, the only one claiming that anxiety is a concept is Poole himself. Secondly, when Haufniensis speaks of anxiety in what Poole calls historical terms, it is my opinion that he is specifically referring to the role of anxiety in the spiritual evolution of the individual human being, and not, as Poole suggests, the secular time of history in general. According to Fenves(1993), a more clearly delineated topic of scientific treatment in *The Concept of Anxiety* is the practice of historicity without history, in other words, historicity without reference to actual occurrences, but instead, only exposure of its field. This is due to

⁵⁸⁸ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 79

the fact that history itself is always new, necessity on the other hand, being governed by rules and captured in secure concepts, as it is, has no inherent novelty as such. Haufniensis' work places little, if any emphasis upon empirical history. Indeed, it tends towards an indifference to it. Despite this, and indeed, for this very reason, *The Concept of Anxiety* remains consistently topical. The element of the "new" is precisely that upon which emphasis is laid. The work does not concern itself with regular historical occurrences, and subsequently these are not part of its scientific treatment, yet it is their very omission which makes the text all the more topical. This topicality is that of the topical *vigilius haufniensis*, the watchman or town-crier. Like all town-criers, Haufniensis lacks the time to reflect upon, or conceive of reasons for, actual and "necessitated" occurrences. The topicality of Vigilius' work exceeds even that of a periodical, and as every periodical testifies, topicality, due to the severe limitations imposed upon it by the dimensions of space and time, is never a matter of causal explanation. The danger to which the topicality of *The Concept of Anxiety* refers, whether it is alluring, fantastical, promised or abhorrent, is already at hand or "present". The word "topical" itself signifies a "unique place".⁵⁸⁹

This uniqueness or the "new" is the peril which *The Concept of Anxiety* forewarns that civilization is at risk of falling victim to. This threat is imminent, and the pathos of this danger, which is discovered in anxiety, is precisely the mood in which Haufniensis' "psychological deliberation" transpires. Fenves(1993) states that it is of principal significance to note that what anxiety reveals is not merely "nothing", but rather a topical "nothing". Anxiety lays bare the *atopos* in which the "new" surges forward, disrupting the rule of conceptuality and thereby making history possible.⁵⁹⁰

At this stage, the question of what constitutes historicity might come to fore. This is a difficult point indeed. The most amended answer to this in terms of the text of *The Concept of Anxiety*, is, as put forward by Fenves(1993), that the constituent moments of history are presented in relation to that which has no constitution, as for the foundation of actual history, this is constituted by freedom. The respective mode of presentation transpires through the construction of various concepts through which one can make sense of a "prior" condition, and not by means of the Hegelian demonstration of the *a priori* conditions whose ultimate basis and justification is a highest principle or axiom. According to Haufniensis, that which lies "prior" to history, whether of the entire human race or a single individual, is the condition of innocence, and this condition abides in ignorance, which the author of *The Concept of Anxiety* equates to "dreaming".⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 77

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 41

In essence, history itself is a matter of knowledge, a knowledge whose origin consists in an awareness or awakening. A town-crier has the responsibility of awakening to knowledge. Haufniensis is the particular town-crier whose self-appointed historical task it is, through *The Concept of Anxiety*, to awaken society to the knowledge of what is discovered in knowledge itself. He does this by anxious crying out to others of threatened boundaries and distinctions, yet his discourse remains entirely private, or one-sided, as he cuts himself off from all possible conversation with anyone else. Therefore his “deliberation” is with no one but himself, as he issues his warning of imminent danger.⁵⁹²

5.7.4 The Theory of the Acoustic Signifier

This is the final section regarding Poole’s critique of *The Concept of Anxiety*. Here Poole claims that an aspect of the work that has gone almost completely overlooked, but that is of singular significance, is its acoustic aspect. According to Poole, one of the main reasons why *The Concept of Anxiety* has provided so many problems in its reading is that it “was meant to be heard”⁵⁹³. The basic ploy of the text is the progressive appearance of what at first seem to be key terms into the narrative or argument, in their order of logical import. However, each time a term makes its reappearance, it does so with a significant modification and/or qualification. The reason why these specific terms were chosen, claims Poole, is for their assonance with one another. The key terms gradually become less well defined, and the text begins to labour for clarity and comprehensibility as a result. As a direct consequence of being continually remodified, the key terms in the text begin to merge. This ever-increasing and cumulative assonance can best be illustrated by looking at the layout of the section headings and certain paragraphs and passages. Poole claims that this provides a fine example of how the movement of the argument parallels the movement of certain interconnected assonant terms. *The Concept of Anxiety* begins with the discussion of Hereditary Sin (*Arvesynd*). In the second section of the first chapter, the first sin (*den første Synd*) is made distinct from Hereditary Sin. In the process of distinguishing first sin from Adam’s Original or Hereditary Sin, the concept of race (*Slægten*) is introduced at this point to produce “a kind of jarring interface between the concepts of first sin and Adam’s sin”.⁵⁹⁴ From here the text immediately merges phonetically into the “race’s sinfulness” (*Slægtens Syndighed*). At this point, Poole claims that the reader suddenly

⁵⁹² Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 78

⁵⁹³ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 102

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

comes to the realization that the concept of “sinfulness” has been generated or extended, at the expense of the previous noun “Sin”. The third section of the first chapter introduces the terms innocence (*Uskyldighed*) and immediacy (*Umiddelbarhed*), which Poole claims Haufniensis soon has “doing a kind of *pas de deux*.”⁵⁹⁵ By quoting Phillip Marheineke, Haufniensis manages to distort Hegel in order to bring the two terms into collision, only to later insist their possible difference. The fourth section of the first chapter initiates the concept of the Fall (*Syndefald*), as one to be distinguished from Hereditary Sin and the first sin. However, Poole claims that this offer of a distinction is made only for the purpose of creating confusion, because *Synd-Syndighed-Syndefald* begin to merge into a sort of confusing central significance that is not outlined by the text, but rather implied by it.⁵⁹⁶

As a matter of fact, Poole claims that this blurred central concept constitutes an accurate reflection of what the text represents, namely, collections of pullulating concepts that cannot be made distinct. This, in connection with all the illicit phonetic liaisons, serves to create an intentional vertigo or dizziness. According to Poole, the mind struggles to successfully separate these endless distinctions, particularly when they share so many assonant qualities.⁵⁹⁷ It is no coincidence therefore, that the text makes the following reference:

“He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy.”⁵⁹⁸

All the phrases that are presented as key terms within *The Concept of Anxiety* play a part in creating, through a process of naïve mimesis, for the reader the experience of the Fall. For the text purports to be of an existential nature, yet the events described in it only have a textual existence. To attempt the same method of reading to this text as one would apply to a Hegelian text is made systematically more impossible, since the concepts do not follow one another. Instead, the reader discovers that sound follows sound.⁵⁹⁹

In the fifth section of the first chapter, Haufniensis presents his conception of anxiety, taking as much care here to make matters as incomprehensible as in all the former sections. The culmination of this is in

⁵⁹⁵ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 104

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 105

⁵⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 61

⁵⁹⁹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 106

the sixth and final section of the first chapter, where everything is amalgamated in an extensive concoction of self-excluding distinctions, *Anxiety as the Presupposition of Hereditary Sin and as explaining Hereditary Sin retrogressively in terms of its Origin*. How, Poole asks, is it first of all possible to retrace the origin of something that is itself original, and the how does one do this, at first “retrogressively”, and then “progressively”? Poole states that it is at this point of utter confusion that Haufniensis introduces his masterstroke:

“There remains the serpent. I am no friend of cleverness and shall, *volente deo* [God willing], resist the temptations of the serpent, who, as at the dawn of time when he tempted Adam and Eve, has in the course of time tempted writers to be clever. Instead, I freely admit my inability to connect any definite thought with the serpent.”⁶⁰⁰

To this Poole reacts, “he who will believe that will believe anything”⁶⁰¹ For what aspect do all of these incongruent terms have in common? *Arvesynd – Første Synd – Uskydighed – Syndefald – Angest – Angest som Arvesyndens Forudsætning – Oprindelse – Slangens Fristels*? The menacing hiss of the serpent, the consistent sibilance of the letter s. The English translation cannot offer the benefits of the original, since the endless emphasis on the sibilants is lost, yet the fact remains that the only aspect of this text, which pretends to offer countless distinctions, but instead renders nothing but a continuous blurring of differentiations, the only aspect of the text which remains constant is the sibilant hiss. In short, Poole concludes the text is about the hiss.⁶⁰²

Haufniensis’ text is about anxiety – the uncertainty or dizzying swoon before pleasure, temptation, sin and the Fall. It is precisely this uncertainty, this dizziness, Poole claims, which the text endeavours to elicit in the reader. Who, asks Poole, knows anything about Original Sin anyway? “Ironically, Vigilius Haufniensis conducts his inquiries into primal guilt with a phonetic Geiger counter. Wherever he encounters an s he centres suspicion.”⁶⁰³

5.7.5 Appraisal of Poole’s Critique

Upon browsing through secondary literature concerning Kierkegaard, one cannot help but be struck by the very significant difference between most of the older books and more recent volumes. The older

⁶⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 48

⁶⁰¹ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 104

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 107

works such as Ronald Grimsley's *Søren Kierkegaard. A Biographical Introduction* and James Collins' *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, tended to view Kierkegaard primarily as a philosopher, albeit an unorthodox one with a poetic style and religious preoccupations. To a large extent, these scholars approached Kierkegaard in the same manner as they did other philosophers, concentrating largely on his views on ethics, epistemology and other standard philosophical issues. As Evans(1998) argues, this was all based on the assumption that Kierkegaard had certain standpoints on these topics, and that his convictions might be, in part or in whole, either valid or invalid, correct or incorrect.⁶⁰⁴

More recent secondary literature however, has revealed a highly significant shift in the perception of Kierkegaard. Here I would be referring to the works of scholars such as Louis Mackey, John D. Caputo, and Stephen N. Dunning. In this respect the work of Roger Poole, specifically in *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* is important for a number of reasons. It is clear, to some extent at least, that Poole has attempted a deconstructive reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*, as is evinced in his repeated endeavours to construct and reconstruct "meanings" in the text. He does this by a circumspect examination of the rhetoric and of the "traces" and "supplements" through which he attempts elucidate the intentions of the author. Not only has Poole brought to light some very relevant problems that have beleaguered the study and understanding of Kierkegaard since the translation of his works into English, but he has also, by means of distancing himself from the traditional philosophical/theological understanding, shown himself to be one of the forerunners in a completely new reading of Kierkegaard.

However, it is the opinion of the author that this otherwise outstanding interpretation and critique of Haufniensis' work is marred by a measure of over-zealousness. The principal criticism around which Poole's entire critique of *The Concept of Anxiety* revolves is the basic incommensurability of the text. According to Poole, Haufniensis wrote *The Concept of Anxiety* in such a manner so as to be as perplexing and contradictory, and subsequently unintelligible, as possible. Every seeming contradiction, ambiguity and paradox is simply an end in itself. The express purpose of all of this contrived perplexity is, according to Poole, the mere elicitation of the "vertigo" or "dizziness" of anxiety. This incompatibility, and even at times ostensible contradiction, is a point well taken. Having said that however, nowhere in his critique is it apparent that Poole gives any indication of understanding the motivation behind what could be interpreted as an apparent show of confusion. Instead, he simply engages in a ceaseless repetition of examples of this, accompanied by his utter incredulity at those who would still venture what he calls a

⁶⁰⁴ Evans, C.S. **Realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript***. In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988. p. 154

“serious” or “blunt” reading of Haufniensis’ work in the face of these pervasive philosophical, intellectual and textual incompatibilities. Poole perseveres with this line of criticism to such an extent, that eventually the reader is left wondering whether or not he has forgotten his own exhortations concerning the primacy of irony and indirect communication in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings. Indeed, one soon gets the impression that at one moment Poole is criticizing the “serious” readers of the book for their naivety, and the next he is scrutinizing the work as if the author intended it to be read with the earnestness one would normally attach to an academic textbook. This has the effect that Poole’s criticism proves to be as perplexing as Poole claims *The Concept of Anxiety* is. The reader finds him/herself asking why, if Poole himself has ascertained that Haufniensis’ is indeed not a textbook, does he persist in subjecting it to criticism that is normally the reserve of the textbook? Poole has amply established the fact that Kierkegaard is not to be viewed primarily as philosopher, but rather as a writer, or even a poet, but then in direct contrast to this verification, proceeds to concentrate on academic inconsistencies in *The Concept of Anxiety*, which he regards as inherent flaws and which constitute failures on the side of its pseudonymous author. This is utterly perplexing, particularly when Poole himself states:

“Kierkegaard writes text after text whose aim is not to state a truth, not to clarify an issue, not to propose a definite doctrine, not to offer some meaning that could be directly appropriated.”⁶⁰⁵

Furthermore, as was evinced in the final subsection entitled *The Acoustic Signifier*, Poole goes on to add that Haufniensis went to extraordinary lengths so as to ensure the prevalence of sibilance in the text. So much so in fact, that finally, Poole claims, because all the terms are selected only on the basis of their shared assonance with one another, they become successively less well-defined and relevant. As a result, comprehensibility and clarity suffer. However, according to his argument, this should not constitute a problem, since *The Concept of Anxiety* is supposedly nothing but an assemblage of perplexities anyway. Poole delivers his *coup de grâce* by flagrantly ignoring Haufniensis declaration concerning “the serpent” and pronouncing that *The Concept of Anxiety* is, in actual fact, concerned only with “the serpent” in the form of the strained sibilance of the *s*.

This facet of Poole’s criticism of *The Concept of Anxiety* reduces and abases Haufniensis’ work to nothing more than an exceedingly complex and “clever” prank, with no regard whatsoever to the philosophical, psychological and theological implications of the work. Finally, Poole’s decision to blatantly defy Haufniensis’ admonition against “cleverness” serves merely to cast his own argument further into doubt, as this passage from Kierkegaard’s *Journals* clearly demonstrates:

⁶⁰⁵ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 7

“But he must not misuse his cleverness to usher in a new cleverness; with the help of the cleverness he must restore simplicity.” (48 IX A 215)⁶⁰⁶

In contrast to Poole’s argument, Fenves(1993) states that Haufniensis rejects theories of the fall into sin which, in their “cleverness”, postulate that the prohibition itself is what instigates the transgression. The simple reason for this is that these theories are too presumptuous; not only do they presume a prior cleverness, but they also presume that someone comprehended this prohibition and, most importantly, understood itself as the subject under prohibition. On the basis of these presumptions, the deictic “thou” so vigorously stressed in the original forewarning “Thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17) would have had to refer to a substantial subject, who somehow eludes reference by means of the self-referentiality of anxiety. In truth, every prohibition has the effect of inhibiting every other prohibition that uses as referent every substantial subject. This prohibition contains in it the, almost inconceivable, threat of “death”, which awakens anxiety. Being incapable both of concepts and their respective fields of reference, anxiety therefore refers to “itself”. Thus, it is language “itself” that speaks, not the language of an already manifested subject or the declaration of a prohibition to an *a priori* posited individual. Therefore the speech of language “itself” constitutes the presupposition of “hereditary sin”, which is the original condition of history in which both the possibility of history and the character of history, as knowledge of constantly altering prohibitions, is established.⁶⁰⁷

5.8 Language and Meaning in *The Concept of Anxiety*

Kierkegaard was outspoken in his skepticism of the validity of objective truth (cf. Chapter 2), he therefore expressly does not offer the reader direct, objective truth in his pseudonymous works. Instead, he was committed to a practice of language and meaning similar to that of Lacan and Derrida. In order for propositions to have fixed truth values (if indeed this in itself is possible) they must refer directly to something. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous texts do not refer in this manner, as Poole himself acknowledges:

“The texts demonstrate to a nicety the Lacanian perception that all we are ever offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers.”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. 1996. p. 324

⁶⁰⁷ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 80

⁶⁰⁸ Poole, R. *Kierkegaard. The Indirect Communication*. 1993. p. 9

One possible way of undertaking these two different approaches is in terms of the contemporary philosophical debate between realism and antirealism. This refers to a debate as to whether there is a mind-dependent reality, a reality that exists independently of human judgements and by virtue of which those judgements can be rendered true or false. To a certain extent, those who adhere to the antirealist approach do accept what we all call “the real world” in one sense. According to Evans(1998) what the antirealist rejects however, is that human language can refer to the world as it is in itself, distinct from our human concepts and categorization, which in turn are themselves nothing but reflections of our human activities and interests.⁶⁰⁹

In essence, this debate amounts to the exact problem I have encountered with Roger Poole’s criticism of *The Concept of Anxiety* namely, a disagreement about the perception of language, a dispute about language and reference, which basically culminates in the problem of truth and the existence of a reality independent of language. It is with respect to this problem that we turn to Peter Fenves’ reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*, more specifically, his interpretation of language in Haufniensis’ work.

5.8.1 Historicity and Topicality

Spinoza once stated that the concept of a dog does not bite⁶¹⁰. As Fenves astutely observes however, the concept of anxiety does. The reason for this is that it does not situate itself in a different ontological register than the phenomena to which it refers. In the same vein as *The Concept of Anxiety* itself, the “object” of anxiety is “nothing”. This one aspect represents a consistent problem of *The Concept of Anxiety*, the collapse of the distinction between concept and phenomenon has the effect that the reduction of conceptuality occurs with a concomitant reduction of empiricity. However, neither reductions serve to effectively annihilate conceptuality nor empiricity, rather their concurrent reduction leaves “nothing” behind, and this “nothing”, as an ineradicable remnant serves to bring “anxiety” to the fore once again. This process repeats itself *ad infinitum*.⁶¹¹

The reader is first made aware of this “problem” as it initially presents itself in “psychological” terms in the form of the mind-body problem. Here, anxiety is presented as a symptom of a misrelation of the mind,

⁶⁰⁹ Evans, C.S. **Realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript***. In Marino, G. & Hannay, A. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. 1988. p. 155

⁶¹⁰ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. P. 75

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

or soul, to the body, which like all symptoms, by their very definition are indications of something else. However, Fenves(1993) argues that the psychological problem is itself a discovery of anxiety. The result is that the “something else” of which anxiety is supposedly a symptom of, turns out, repetitively, to be “nothing”. In this sense, anxiety ceases to be a symptom of anything, including a mind-body misrelation. Instead, it simply is itself. Although, the “nothing” of anxiety does not translate to insignificance, the latter certainly is an aspect of anxiety as evinced by the frequency with which ideas such as “chatter” and “idle talk” intrude upon the exposition of the concept. In addition, the experience of anxiety is also to an extent constituted by the self as it discovers its own inherent insignificance.⁶¹²

Haufniensis is well aware of the fact that psychology does not constitute the proper ontological register of anxiety, since both the body and the mind share equal responsibility for this misrelation. Instead of psychology therefore, the proper register of anxiety is “language as such, language as it distinguishes itself, always unsuccessfully, from “mental” concepts on the one hand and the “bodily” field of referents on the other.”⁶¹³ The failure of language to successfully initiate such a distinction is not only an effect of anxiety itself, but this also situates language in a position where it is unable to rid itself, both of concepts and of their referential dimensions. Thus, the “concept” of anxiety cannot free itself of the historical character of the phenomenon, and subsequently, *The Concept of Anxiety* finds itself obligated to become an exposition of that which makes history, as the primary referential dimension, possible in the first place. It is precisely in the condition of possibility for history, that the “un-ease” of anxiety, as “education by possibility”, makes itself known. According to the rather inappropriate “dogmatic” representation, this condition occurs before the fall into sin. What Haufniensis is striving to communicate therefore, is that knowledge of anxiety, which is never immediate, is not knowledge by way of concepts, or acquired by means of empiricism, but is rather the exposure of, and by, its inner possibility.⁶¹⁴

5.8.2 Language and the Speaker

It has therefore been verified that anxiety initiates the possibility of history, since it is the condition in which every historical event or every appearance of the “new” transpires. In this respect, Fenves(1993) states the problem which *The Concept of Anxiety* concerns itself is the origin of history in the fall into the “atopical” demesne of sin. The more colloquial understanding of historical development on the other hand, does not incorporate anxiety as presupposition and is therefore not, properly speaking, historical.

⁶¹² Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 76.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The Concept of Anxiety does not concentrate upon history as a “whole newer development”, but rather upon the condition prior to history, or more accurately, the condition situated *a priori* to unique events. Here one cannot apply a differentiation in the tradition of Hegel’s distinction between “objective spirit” and “subjective spirit” to mediate between the “psychological” phenomena and “historical” institutions, since that kind of distinction overlooks the one to which *The Concept of Anxiety* devotes its analytic endeavours, namely the distinction between actuality and possibility. It is only towards the possibility of history, of the “new” that Haufniensis’ work renders scientific inquiry, its actuality on the other hand, merits something equally yet incomparably new. If, for example, the “new” is sin, only another sin, or “repetition” will constitute something equally, yet incomparably new in conjunction with the demands of actuality.⁶¹⁵

Fenves postulates that the essential ambiguity of the language of anxiety prevents reference to a particular individual standing under judgement, and as a result, this particular individual is as devoid of unity as “the animals” to which Haufniensis refers.

“On the other hand, there is nothing to prevent him from having acquired a notion of the terrifying, for even animals can understand the mimic expression and movement in the voice of a speaker without understanding the word.”⁶¹⁶

Since the language of anxiety prohibits reference to the one individual, neither the prohibition nor judgement, need a divine source as a reference point of these communications. Left bereft of this source, language turns to the concept personified (i.e. the figure of innocence) as the dominant resource.⁶¹⁷

“Innocence can indeed speak, inasmuch as in language it possesses the expression for everything spiritual. Accordingly, one need merely assume that Adam talked to himself. The imperfection in the story, namely, that another spoke to Adam about what he did not understand, is thus eliminated. From the fact that Adam was able to talk, it does not follow in a deeper sense that he was able to understand what was said.”⁶¹⁸

Fenves(1993) argues that in the act of making Adam self-sufficient, Haufniensis, in a sense, does the same for the concept of anxiety, and thereby clarifies it too. Adam, whilst being only the figure of innocence, nonetheless provides an impeccable personification of that concept. As *the* figure of anxious

⁶¹⁵ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 77.

⁶¹⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 45

⁶¹⁷ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 80

⁶¹⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 45

innocence, Adam converses with “nothing”, and it is precisely this “nothing” which serves as the reference point for all figures. Adam is also “free” in the sense that as a figure, he can participate in conceptuality without ever being conceivable according to any given rule. On the other hand however, Adam’s “figuralness” denies him the freedom to be an unambiguous speaker or participant in a conversation. In this respect, Adam is “no one”, “no one” who speaks to “nothing”. Consequently, it is language “itself” that speaks. Due to the reduction of concepts and their fields of reference in an “original” language, this language is no longer conceivable in a narrative representation of the fall.⁶¹⁹

“The imperfection in the narrative – how it could have occurred to anyone to say to Adam what he essentially could not understand – is eliminated if we bear in mind that the speaker is language and also that it is Adam himself who speaks.”⁶²⁰

The figure of Adam and language “itself” speak both in turns and concurrently, although the latter is conducted in a colloquy that is certainly not a dialogue. On the whole, and unlike the concept of innocence, language does not consist of unambiguously personified concepts, nor of figures, indeed, it has no figural function unless it, “language”, signifies “innocence”, in which case it would be a concept. Fenves (1993) points out that what Haufniensis discloses by “the speaker is language” is that conceptuality as such, does not belong to language. This is because language speaks without concepts, and thus has no significance to anything but “itself”. However, when the speech of language constitutes a prohibition, it cannot function without concepts that specify a field of reference, such as “knowledge of good and evil”, to which, in the case of “hereditary sin”, the prohibition would then apply. Similarly, in this sense, language proves to be just as defective without concepts as it does without figures of speaking. Hence, language is never the unambiguous speaker. As Haufniensis’ text reminds us, Adam, or rather, the figure of innocence, “also speaks”. If it was possible for language to speak in isolation without figures who speak and the respective figures of speech, the essential and radical ambiguity, which is so constitutive of anxiety, would be cancelled, revealing language as a (albeit negative) substance after all. The zenith of ambiguity in anxiety is reached when the speech of language “itself” loses the lucidity of its origin, resulting in a figure speaking as well. Thus, *The Concept of Anxiety* cannot depend upon the simplicity of

⁶¹⁹ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 81

⁶²⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 47

an origin, and subsequently cannot explain the origin of language.⁶²¹ Haufniensis' footnote comment provides an inkling into his profound understanding of this complex issue.

"If one were to say further than that then it becomes a question of how the first man learned to speak, I would answer that this is very true, but also that the question lies beyond the scope of the present investigation. However, this must not be understood in the manner of modern philosophy as though my reply were evasive, suggesting that I could answer the question in another place. But this much is certain, *that it will not do to represent man himself as the inventor of language.* (italics added)"⁶²²

I am in agreement with Fenves(1993) who argues that human subjectivity cannot claim for itself the status of originator of language, since it is language itself that speaks. The discourse that transpires between figures of speaking and language results in the dominance of concepts. The primary purpose of these concepts is the ordering of this intensely confusing discourse. However, Haufniensis is acutely aware of the limitations placed upon his text in respect of subject matter, and is therefore careful to avoid exploration of the obvious question of "How did the first man learn to speak?" Having said that however, one of Haufniensis' drafts almost ventures into a dogmatic discussion of said question and here again, we see the emergence of the serpentine figure of confusion in a very Kierkegaardian self-discourse.⁶²³

"If anyone wishing to instruct me should say, "consistent with the preceding you of course, could say, 'It [the serpent] is language,'" I would reply, "I did not say that,"⁶²⁴

In this case, the "I" who speaks not only did not say that, but could not, for the spectre of the serpentine "it", which could signify anything, occludes the possibility that speech can be laid claim upon by any "I". In the process of speech, both figure and language speak, and this ensuing doublespeak corresponds clearly to the ambiguity of anxiety. As has already been demonstrated, anxiety is so thoroughly ambiguous that it confounds any univocal understanding whatsoever, and hence, no conception of Adam simply as figure or language "itself" simply as self-referential can exist.⁶²⁵

⁶²¹ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard.* 1993. p. 81-82

⁶²² Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety.* 1980. p. 47 (footnote)

⁶²³ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard.* 1993. p. 82

⁶²⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety.* 1980. p. 185

⁶²⁵ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard.* 1993. p. 83

Fenves(1993) refers to the earliest speech, as discourse between figure and language, as the transpiration of a *communicatio idiomatum*.⁶²⁶ In this, language “itself” enters into speech along with a figure of the self. Naturally, “nothing” is communicated in the *communicatio idiomatum*, however this “nothing” is the source of every concept and every respective field of reference. The act of talking with oneself, even though seemingly pointless, has often been thought to secure communication. Be this as it may, “original” speech, presented by Fenves as *communicatio idiomatum*, is communication at cross-purposes. In other words, “original” speech creates such a state of inner opposition, that the “self” and every purpose for which it enlists its speech, even for that of prohibiting itself, is invalidated. Therefore Fenves discerns that, at its core, all talk of anxiety is talk of “nothing”, since there exists no point of reference, and its concept is nil. The question that begs at this point is, if this is the nature of the language of anxiety, does it not constitute nontalk, and is Haufniensis perhaps even signalling the end of language?⁶²⁷

The answer however, is quite the contrary. Nontalk, instead of being the demise of language, is actually its inception, an inception which determines its subsequent character. Although the speech of language “itself” along with the figure of the self does not constitute genuine conversation, since it interrupts everything that would normally be understood as being conversation, the speech does not end there, but still continues. Thus, self-discourse or *communicatio idiomatum*, continues to speak despite the fact that this speech is not assigned to some sort of continuum. As Fenves puts it “it continues to speak *nothingly*.”⁶²⁸ In this sense, “nothingly” does not present itself as a genuine word. Instead, its meaning seems to lose itself into the very idleness of “idle talk” and the emptiness of “empty words”. In other words, “nothingly” represents that state towards which self-colloquy, as well as nullity of “chatter” points, namely the “nothingness” of anxiety.

In contrast, science strives, wherever possible, to suspend such loose talk by circumscribing its language. “Chatter”, within the context of scientific discourse, is intolerable. The inherent problem with this claim however, is that science purports to employ the language of knowledge, yet this language finds its origin in an original discourse, a *communicatio idiomatum* to which every concept and every respective field of reference bears testament, namely, the colloquy of language “itself” along with the figure of the self.⁶²⁹ Science therefore fails in its attempt to thwart “chatter” in its language, for the very concepts, which it

⁶²⁶ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 83

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

employs for the purpose of circumscribing its so-called “language of knowledge”, as well as the conceptually demarcated fields of reference, only condemn language to speak “nothingly” all the more. The language of knowledge is indebted to the language of innocence. Hence, *The Concept of Anxiety* is characterized by a marked ambivalence in content, style and subject matter, Nowhere is this more apparent than in its treatment of science.

More specifically however, Haufniensis was directing his charges of the inherent ambivalence of science toward psychology, which he shows does not grasp the character of things by means of a language of knowledge, but instead, reveals the “nothing” of anxiety. It is, according to Fenves(1993), the irreducibility of concepts in the elucidation of this particular science that discloses its indebtedness to “chatter”. “Chatter” constitutes original language. However, it soon develops beyond its origin and proceeds to corrode the language of knowledge that is resolved to arrest it. The problem therefore manifests itself when a “man of science” is presented with a question which he cannot, truthfully, provide an unambiguous answer to.⁶³⁰

“That the man of science ought to forget himself is entirely true... Or his philosophical enthusiasm will make him so absent-minded that he needs a good-natured, level-headed wife whom he can ask, as Soldin asked Rebecca when in enthusiastic absent-mindedness he also lost himself in the objectivity of the chatter: ‘Rebecca, is it I who is speaking?’”⁶³¹

This is indeed a valid question, and any speech that would presume to answer this by “I speak”, or by the same token, “I think” can never be effective in bringing “chatter” to a halt, since it merely participates in the original discourse at cross-purposes, thus signifying “nothing”. As Haufniensis has already established, this problem can only properly be addressed by employing the language of anxiety.⁶³²

5.9 Conclusion

The issue of the influence of Kierkegaard’s work on that of modern and contemporary intelligentsia is vast indeed, and could quite easily serve as the topic for an entire thesis on its own. This chapter does not

⁶³⁰ Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 84

⁶³¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 51

⁶³² Fenves, P. *Chatter. Language and History in Kierkegaard*. 1993. p. 84

provide a full overview of this issue, as this would have been unfeasible within the space of one chapter. My goal in this chapter was merely to provide a succinct commentary on the work of various philosophers who, since the work of the Dane was first published, have either commented on it directly or who have applied to their own endeavours.

In a somewhat chronologically back-to-front fashion, the term anxiety has, in philosophical circles, been primarily associated with Heidegger's *Angst* and Sartre's *L'Angoisse*, before Kierkegaard's *Angest*. What I attempted to show in the initial sections of this chapter therefore, was that the conceptions of the great German and his famous French counterpart were very strongly led by the work of the Dane written more than fifty years earlier. I am certainly not suggesting that the work of Heidegger or Sartre on the topic of anxiety, is completely plagiaristic, since both respective interpretations of Kierkegaard's work differ quite significantly. However, it must be conceded that a substantial portion of their treatment of this crucial existential experience is not their own. Both men, while great minds in their own right, were undoubtedly standing on the shoulders of a giant.

The second larger portion of this chapter was dedicated to a more detailed examination of the work of three contemporary scholars of Kierkegaard's work. All three are esteemed academics, particularly in the field of the works of Kierkegaard, yet all proffer viewpoints and interpretations that differ quite significantly from one another. In investigating the work of Roger Poole, I delved in detail into a text that bore a rather devastating critique of Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*. Poole's approach to Haufniensis' work is strongly deconstructive. One of the reasons why I chose this particular critique is precisely because, from the viewpoint of deconstructionism, I found it an especially astute piece, and as such, a fine example of a more contemporary interpretation of Kierkegaard's work. Poole's emphasis on Kierkegaard as the pseudonymous practitioner of indirect communication and master of irony, has for too long been a neglected aspect of Kierkegaard scholarship. As Poole correctly intimates, *The Concept of Anxiety* is a work of irony, and as such is an excellent example of the author's practice of indirect communication. However, the inferences that Poole gleaned from this exercise were, to my mind, most disturbing. Ultimately, I saw this as an interpretation of Kierkegaard that served to unjustly reduce his work and attempted to criticize Poole on these grounds.

In my examinations of the sections of work by Alastair Hannay and Peter Fenves, I attempted to expound upon interpretations of *The Concept of Anxiety* that were just as contemporary as that of Poole's, yet thoroughly different in construal. Hannay's chapter on *The Concept of Anxiety*, deals with anxiety primarily as psychological construct, and in his argument, he attempts to show the strongly Hegelian

influence in Kierkegaard's psychology, while the chapter of Fenves approaches anxiety more from the point of semantics, as he explores the cardinal role of language in the efficacy of Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*. Furthermore, In utilizing the work of the latter two writers, I attempted to provide not only a rather stark contrast to the work of Poole, but furthermore, an argument against what was to my mind, the reductionistic viewpoint proffered by Poole.

Ultimately, my motivation for an examination of the modern and particularly, the contemporary influence of Kierkegaard's work, was to show that the questions surrounding the nature and validity of his corpus were far from settled by the French existentialists and the work of Heidegger. By enlisting the writings of more contemporary intellectuals and Kierkegaard scholars, I wanted to show that the work of the Dane still has much to say, even in the face of interrogation by more current schools of thought such as deconstructionism. Indeed, I believe it to be well suited to the task.

6. CONCLUSION

In dealing with Kierkegaard's conception of anxiety, I have constantly striven to impress upon the reader the point that anxiety for Kierkegaard is not and ought not be a concept that is circumscribable. I hope to have demonstrated through the length of this thesis that anxiety is, by its very nature, that which is essentially unquantifiable and perhaps even in some respects, unfathomable. It is the harrowing experience that every individual is confronted with, repeatedly, throughout his/her entire existence. It is *dis-ease*, in the literal sense of the word, and can be terrifying, in some cases even devastating. If the said individual is prepared to persevere and to will him/herself through the experience however, it will prove vastly enlightening. Anxiety is always the anxiety over possibility, and it is precisely this proximity to possibility that enlightens the individual.

It is perhaps characteristic of human beings that we find in ourselves a need for security. Hence, in our everyday lives, we immerse ourselves in environments consisting largely of such "certainties", upon which we expend a great deal of energy and time and which we believe, bring us comfort. We believe our lives to have a concrete significance, and justify this claim by falling back on various facts and data, all the time forgetting that these facts are never pure and simple realities. I would like to refer to this attitude as "positivity". The pain of anxiety stems largely from its dissolution of this positivity. Anxiety reveals our lives as the essentially temporal expanse between possibility and possibility. This lays bare these "securities" of positivity, revealing them as essentially vacuous and wholly insubstantial. The deceptiveness of our ready identification with these various "securities" is exposed by possibility's transformation of everything into a possible "how?" In other words, nothing remains which can be taken as a given, in contrast, everything becomes an experience which demands to be lived through in some form or another in order to acquire some essence. The perceived certainty immediately loses its former supposed objectivity and is rendered, by possibility, fundamentally subjective by the positing of the "how".

This consistent emphasis on possibility may sometimes seem perplexing, however like all other facets of Kierkegaard's corpus, it is in fact, meticulously logical. According to Kierkegaard, our existence can be characterized as a capacity-for-being, in other words, as possibility. The life of any given individual can briefly be summed up as a possibility grasped, not grasped and needing to be grasped again. This is as valid with regard to the futural, as it is to the present and even the past, which is itself, a former possibility. As possibility the past is as accessible as the present and future, for if this were not the case, it would be impossible to experience regret, sorrow or to earnestly engage in the process of repetition. It is

by repetition that the past with which we engage is repeated in our existence. This accessibility is tantamount to freedom, and freedom, as we already know, is concomitant to possibility.

It is precisely the experience of anxiety that awakens the individual to the demand of possibility, namely, that possibility needs to be grasped and acquired. In the process, that which was earlier deemed facticity, is now dissolved into a relationship of possibility. Moreover, possibility itself does not serve as a precursor to certainty, possibility always exists for possibility. If this strikes one as rather barren, the impression is not altogether misplaced, because it is precisely this barrenness, this nothingness, which elicits the experience of anxiety in the individual. The essence of possibility's meaning for anxiety is the possibility not yet grasped. The operative phrase here is "not yet" implying, of course, that it is impending, though not a *fait accompli*. It is this possibility-not-yet-grasped which deprives the individual of his/her present certainties by, as Kierkegaard states, negating all positivity, and places one into a kind of time, which is not the measure of movement. According to Haufniensis, the time disclosed in anxiety is the *inter-esse*, that which lies between possibility and possibility, and is only made manifest in the moment (*Augenblick*)⁶³³.

It is a daunting and precarious task indeed, to attempt to uncover a central theme in the work of Kierkegaard. By this, I do not mean to suggest that Kierkegaard was in any manner inconsistent, but rather that his work covers such an extensive spectrum of topics and deals with each with such deftness and proficiency, that an attempt to isolate his thought to some underlying central theme seems almost reductionistic. Having said that however, I will venture to concentrate on an aspect, which in my opinion, does constitute a central (albeit not *the* central theme) in Kierkegaard's work.

To a greater or lesser extent, Kierkegaard concerned himself with the shattering of illusions. The illusions to which I here refer are numerous, and for the greater part, their scale vast, however I will briefly mention two well-known examples. The first, was the Danish Lutheran Church's absolute identification with the existing social order of the time, the contradiction inherent in this being, that it was impossible for the Church to derive any form of legitimacy through the representation of generality or universality, which, of course, was the existing social order itself. The second illusion, was the notion that history served as the earthly incarnation of the divine, the implication stemming from this being that modern culture is the rightful heir of history since Christ. Kierkegaard's response to these illusions was unequivocal.

⁶³³ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 49-50

“It is a matter of getting rid of 1800 years as if they had never been.” (IX A 72)⁶³⁴

Although, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, this sounds rather vehement, it is simply his manner of emphasizing the point that the foundations for Christian belief cannot lie in the past (perhaps even more so when that past is as ambiguous as the Christian). Instead, what is necessary is an origin, which can always be present as a fundamental aspect of that belief system itself. The afore-mentioned illusions have kept this concealed. Therefore, Kierkegaard admonishes us to immediately do away with these illusions. We must open ourselves anew and revitalize a spontaneous and original experience of belief by means of a process of inwardness. Only by these means may we seek out and acquire this origin that can serve as the foundation for the Christian belief, and can Christianity itself accommodate the kind of truth to which it bears witness. For this reason, amongst others, Kierkegaard became a Socratic thinker for the cause of the Christian faith. In a manner not dissimilar from that of his favourite Greek philosopher, Kierkegaard sought, through dialectic and the practice of discourse, to bring out the conflict between truth and mere opinion and thereby to disclose the hidden truths which themselves, constitute the unspoken origin of the dialectic. This led him to a theme of human existence that wholly defied conceptual definition. This area of the individual’s existence could only be understood in and through the experience of anxiety. Furthermore, anxiety itself is only properly comprehended when approached in an attitude of utter earnestness or seriousness, elicited by the certainty of one’s own death. In other words, Kierkegaard is here laying the suggestion before his reader that in order to grasp that, which by its very nature defies conceptual definition, it has to be approached in an attitude of earnestness, an experience which itself is only achieved once the individual in question embraces the certainty of his/her own death. According to Kierkegaard, it is vital that the individual learn to die, as this constitutes not only the beginning of wisdom, but also the ultimate duty of the individual.

It is my opinion that anxiety is profoundly eschatological. Anxiety was in many ways for Kierkegaard, a highly appropriate and most useful theme. In virtually every aspect it stood inappropiate to “objective knowledge”, thereby putting it in diametrical opposition to the tenets of idealism. Idealism, basically speaking, established itself on a kind of understanding that identified that which is salient in our perceptions and created by that act of identification something objective. This object of knowledge was then measured up against its own principles, in order that it may be set in a context comprising an integrated field of objective knowledge. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, concentrated on another kind of

⁶³⁴ Kierkegaard, S. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. 1996. p. 310

understanding, which for the sake of clarity, will broadly be referred to as “the ethical”. It is at once clear that this term, coined by Kierkegaard himself, is entirely appropriate, since the ethical itself deals primarily with human relationships. Generally speaking, whether it be a profession, a marriage or friendship, the ideal is to be true to that relationship. For Kierkegaard, this mode of “being true” can be equated to disclosure [*Aabenbarelse*].⁶³⁵ The deficiency of this has already been amply dealt with in Chapter 4, but for the purposes here, it suffices to say that it equates to closure or inclosing reserve, one of the most conspicuous characteristics of anxiety for the good. Aside from this much darker aspect of individual existence, inclosing reserve also incorporates an unqualified lack of earnestness, which always will serve to prevent the act of disclosure.

Whenever he speaks of “the ethical” Kierkegaard is here clearly referring to the nature of the relationship itself. The individual has to be true to his/her relationship in order to be ethical, and the only manner to do this is to understand the claim that his/her relationship has upon him/her. To accomplish this the individual has to perceive the relationship as a relationship, and thus understand him/herself in relation to the degree to which he/she conforms to the claims of the relationship. This requires the execution of a movement, which is the response to the invitation implicit in the process of understanding. The understanding of the claim of a relationship requires a form of self-relation. This self-relation starts out as a type of ignorance, and Kierkegaard, in the same manner as Socrates, was attempting to demonstrate to his reader, the significance of this ignorance. For both Kierkegaard and Socrates, this “ignorance” actually pointed to the fact that the dimension of existence, which constituted their field of concern was utterly beyond the grasp of reason and scientific scrutiny. It also contained within it a secret knowledge, namely that of our existence belonging to a realm from which we cannot flee, even if it is to a large extent concealed from us. However, most significantly of all, this ignorance allows the individual to experience the proximity of death, an experience which carries with it the implication of an untranscendable dependence of humanity upon God.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the so-called “Socratic ignorance” when dealing with anxiety. In the epigraph to *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis writes, in a phrase attributed to J.G. Hamann, “Socrates was great in that he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand”⁶³⁶. This was the basis for the method Socrates applied in his endeavours to shatter illusions, by discerning what is available to knowledge and that of which one will always be ignorant. In an

⁶³⁵ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 127

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 3

important sense, ignorance signifies an experience of the limit, the limit being the point at which “objective knowledge” breaks down, and the space is created for faith.

At this stage, we return to Kierkegaard’s point of the necessity of learning to die. Kierkegaard was particularly fond of Epicurus’ famous saying: “Death is not to be feared: when it is, I am not, when I am, it is not.”⁶³⁷ “Learning to die” is precisely the acquisition of an appropriate mind-set with regards to our own death. As Epicurus’ saying quite succinctly demonstrates, death, if nothing else, represents the point at which reason and objective knowledge altogether falter. Therefore, implicit in the process of learning to die is the nature of our faith-relationship to God. In general, the temporality of the individual and the death towards which it points, has been actively concealed. However, in actuality, all that the individual truly succeeds in concealing is the active and untranscendable foundation of the concealment of his/her temporality.

Again, in a fashion true to all of his other writing, Kierkegaard provides us with no clear description of what constitutes the appropriate comportment with regard to death. It is my opinion that the allusion to Epicurus’ saying can often be quite misleading. Kierkegaard perhaps found the saying as quite aptly describing a common perception towards death. Dying becomes an incident, a mere episode, and as such, holds no power over the inner freedom of the spirit. A long-term illness or other examples of prolonged suffering are seen as being far more powerful. In essence, death loses all its terror and thereby all its authority. It is a moment, which can effectively be kept at bay by this very perception of the “idea” of death. Kierkegaard argues that should death lose its authority, then the individual will lose his/her fear of death. The lack of this fear will lead to “the sickness unto death”, or despair.

Here we might well ask what Kierkegaard is attempting to convey. Is he suggesting that we live in perpetual terror of death, lest we sink into despair? My opinion is, not entirely. Once again, it is important to bear in mind that Kierkegaard is certainly not attempting to persuade his readers of anything. He is merely presenting us with a possibility. Exactly what we choose to do with it remains our choice alone. I do think that Kierkegaard is speaking here out of concern for a conceptualization of death, such as may be found in an idealistic approach. For Kierkegaard death, like anxiety, remains inappropriable, out of reach. Any attempt to make an idea of either experience will only result in its severe distortion and reductionism. Death, again like anxiety, needs to be approached in an attitude of earnestness, as the frivolous approach to either leads eventually on the path of despair. Kierkegaard was all too aware of our susceptibility to

⁶³⁷ Johannes Climacus indirectly alludes to this quotation in Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 92

moods, which he often collectively referred to as “contingency”^{*}. This susceptibility destabilizes the self-certainty of the individual’s consciousness and in so doing reveals his/her condition more directly. If we are to “learn to die” we must first learn to use our freedom with regard to our relation to death, and that means gaining control of our moods (e.g. melancholy, anxiety, irony and despair). We are as mortals, essentially finite, and hence the necessity for always remaining conscious of our fate.

At his point, one can be forgiven for thinking that, according to the work of Kierkegaard, the individual’s relation to his/her death is actually the domain of “the sickness unto death”, that is, despair. This is certainly quite accurate, although it is my opinion that this is not exclusively so. There is not the time to adequately render despair’s relation to death, although it is certainly one, if not the most significant experience with regard to death. Let us for the moment therefore, just consider that in Kierkegaard’s work there is evidence of several different forms of despair. That upon which I shall expand here, is the despair that occurs whenever an individual makes any given relationship so central to his/her existence, that the individual quite literally closes him/herself off from the possibility of its loss, a loss which would signify for said individual a descent into emptiness. This constitutes a form of closure or inclosing reserve. The individual may perhaps speculate on the idea of this loss in various forms, but he/she can never seriously entertain it, because this would inevitably point him/her in the direction of his/her own finitude. In our present age, we find that, in order to mask the reality of human finitude, the individual seeks out that which supposedly grants him/her humanity, such as human society, wealth, skills, reputation, etc. This constant desire to possess, this striving for certainty is fuelled by an unremitting fear of loss. Furthermore, to compound this, the possibility always exists that it may even be this particular fear itself that deprives one of that which we believe we cannot exist without, simply by virtue of the fact that these particularities of our existence have been so identified. This fear of possibility is the point at which this particular form of despair becomes anxiety.

In a distinctive sense, anxiety is a fear of fear, an instance where fear begins to work on its own limits. As has already previously been discussed, anxiety is an objectless fear, and as such, it becomes abstract. Fear is experienced, however there is no object of fear against which to measure it. It is an abstract experience of fear wrapped within itself and indeed, feeding off itself. This is also the anxiety characteristic of the individual’s fear of death.

^{*} In this respect it is also important to note that Kierkegaard also spoke of moods as the reflection of the contingency in our emotions.

According to Kierkegaard, death is that which individualizes each of our existences. Despite the fact that death can be defined and described in endlessly different forms of discourse, it does not bring with it enlightenment, mainly because it is impossible to subsume death under any general concept. Therefore there clearly does exist a relation between death and anxiety in the sense that both demand earnestness and the previously mentioned Socratic ignorance, for their correct understanding. Both anxiety and death represent to the human individual certain forms of nothingness, in the sense that death signifies the end (i.e. the confrontation with nothingness) and anxiety is a fear of the possibility of nothingness.

Furthermore, another parallel common to anxiety and death is, paradoxically, a sense of certainty. Both death and anxiety are certainties in that, just as death is imminent to all temporally finite beings, so is the experience of anxiety to all entities possessed of free will. It is important to note that there is more to death than just the obvious fact of the conclusion of an existence. If one were to examine what meaning “death” has to us as persons, one would soon come to the realization that there is more to our understanding of death than the mere actuality of death. As individuals who experience anxiety to some greater or lesser extent from the moment we lose our innocence and become conscious of the difference between good and evil and the possibility of sin, we live our own deaths before we die.

“To insist that a frigid, sterile necessity is necessarily present is to say that no one may experience death before actually dying, which strikes me as crass materialism.”⁶³⁸

As has already been discussed, anxiety is of necessity a future-oriented experience. It concerns itself with what awaits us in possibility. This is no different with regards to anxiety’s treatment of death. When Johannes de Silentio speaks of “living our death before we die it” he is referring to that anxious looking forward which serves to individualize our lives and, more importantly, place us in a vital relationship to ourselves. This requires from the other as well as from oneself a striving towards a “true” relationship with death. Of course, there can be no striving without the risk and implicit in this endeavour, is the risk of failure and loss of the God-relationship in faith as one lapses toward the sickness unto death. The reason for this being, that the “true” relationship with death and by implication ourselves places us in extraordinarily close proximity to our own death. This, in turn, discloses what might be called the dependent power of sympathy, which itself constitutes a radical form of openness in relation to the other. This opinion is aptly put forth in the following passage by Vigilius Haufniensis.

“Only when the sympathetic person in his compassion relates himself to the sufferer in such a way that he in the strictest sense understands that it is his own case that is in question, only when he knows how to identify himself

⁶³⁸ Kierkegaard, S. *Fear and Trembling*. 1985. p. 75

with the sufferer in such a way that when he fights for an explanation he is fighting for himself, renouncing all thoughtlessness, softness and cowardice – only then does the sympathy acquire significance.”⁶³⁹

Death is certain, although the time of its coming is never so. Yet, it is this imminence, which provides the impetus for our consciousness of time, and it is precisely the moment in which time is given that affords us the possibility of freedom.

In summary therefore, death is inappropriable, both in the sense that it is impossible to translate it into a concept and that, for the individual it remains an unknown quantity, essentially signifying nothingness. As such, it announces itself through anxiety and if denied or not approached in an attitude of earnestness and seriousness, will inevitably lead to despair, or the sickness unto death. Anxiety-toward-death opens up for the individual a crucial relationship. The proximity to death affords the opportunity in which the individual can understand him/herself in terms of time, or more appropriately, “precious time” and this, ultimately, leads to the freedom of a God-relationship in faith.

“To have an opinion is both too much and too little for my uses. To have an opinion presupposes a sense of ease and security in life, such as is implied in having a wife and children; it is a privilege not to be enjoyed by one who must keep himself in readiness night and day, or is without assured means of support... I have only my life, and the instant a difficulty offers I put it in play. Then the dance goes merrily, for my partner is the thought of death, and is indeed a nimble dancer; every human being, on the other hand, is too heavy for me.”⁶⁴⁰

This passage is one of the most revealing concerning Kierkegaard’s opinion with regard to the appropriate comportment toward death. It is well established that knowledge itself is only possible within the space of free opinion. However, this does not apply to the self-understanding to which one is summoned by a true relationship to death and, by implication, to oneself. The privilege of having an opinion, as Kierkegaard writes, is both “too much and too little”. There can be no opinions in the face of death. All that one can do is be prepared to be swept up by the movement of anxiety. This is the reason why harbouring an opinion is too much. Objective knowledge is incapable of appropriating and conceptualizing either death or anxiety. Hence, having an opinion is not enough for the Socratic thinker within Christianity, since it is only those who understand the *inter-esse* of finite freedom, those who think and speak from within that freedom, who can give it voice.

⁶³⁹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety*. 1980. p. 120

⁶⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, S. *Philosophical Fragments*. 1974. p. 6-7

Finally, it is only through the experiences of death and dying, revealed through the medium of anxiety, that Kierkegaard's thoughts can come to language. Anxiety leads us to the proper domain of death, namely the moment (*Augenblick*). This is the time at which the self, having become conscious of the limits of its own finite freedom, learns to make the leap of faith.

In this thesis I hope to have established two, what are certainly in my opinion, crucial aspects in the understanding of Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety. Primarily, I endeavoured to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of anxiety. By this I mean to have given a fair and descriptive exposition of anxiety as Kierkegaard understood it, and hence I have looked at anxiety from the perspectives of psychology, theology and, of course, philosophy. Secondly, I attempted to show that, despite the fact that the term "anxiety" has been frequently employed by many other great thinkers in the fields of psychology, theology and philosophy, I believe that Kierkegaard's understanding to be essentially different from those put forward by other thinkers. Here I placed particular emphasis on the discipline of philosophy and made mention of two great intellectuals who gained much from their respective reading of Heidegger's *The Concept of Anxiety*, namely Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. In closing, I have also sought to, in small measure, explore more recent interpretations of Kierkegaard and his understanding of anxiety. This I have done for two reasons, the first, quite clearly, is to explore the current debate concerning Kierkegaard's work and more specifically of course, the concept of anxiety. Here, due largely to the restraints placed upon me by time, I have limited my contemporary discussion to a brief examination of the writings of Alastair Hannay, Robert Poole and Peter Fenves. My second reason for the exposition of contemporary writings on Kierkegaard, was to make plain the fact that scholarship around the work of the Danish writer is a long way from being concluded. It is my opinion that Kierkegaard's work is as relevant and indeed necessary, today as it was in the nineteenth century. Finally, I believe "anxiety" to be a truly Kierkegaardian concept, both in the sense that he was the first prominent Western intellectual to provide us with a comprehensive rendering of it, one that has basically only been used and built on since, and in the sense that by its very nature it defies circumscription, is subjective in the extreme and addresses the very soul of the individual.

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Title of Dissertation: Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety: a philosophical-psychological investigation

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Department: Philosophy

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Summary

In 1844, when Kierkegaard published his work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, it constituted no mean feat for a variety of reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, was the content of the work. At that time, very little work had been done concerning the experience of anxiety and certainly no single academic work had had this issue as its formal topic. Secondly, the book was an incisive and complex theological and philosophical argument. So much so in fact, that no discussion of Haufniensis' concept of anxiety is possible without incorporating its theological implications. Thirdly, and certainly as significant as its religious aspect, is the psychology inherent to *The Concept of Anxiety*. This was as innovative as the philosophical aspect, as is evinced by the pervasive influence it exercised over the development of psychology in the twentieth century. Lastly, but by no means least importantly, is the fact that Haufniensis' work was an ingenious and derisive attack on Hegelianism, as well as a superb example of the practice of irony.

The reason that I make mention of this is to briefly illustrate the depth and complexity of this "little" work. Hence, in this essay, it has been my aim to thoroughly explore all four aspects of the work and to demonstrate how each holds as much significance as the other in considering the work as a whole. In terms of methodology, I have actively refrained from limiting my investigation to one particular approach. Instead, I have endeavoured to explore Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety* from a myriad of different angles, including the analytical, existential, theological, linguistic and deconstructive interpretations. Furthermore, in my opinion, any sound investigation of *The Concept of Anxiety* cannot proceed along the lines of isolating one specific aspect of the work as being of greater significance than any other. This is in contrast to the earlier scholars of Kierkegaard, who tended to categorize him chiefly as a Christian writer, greatly at the expense of all the other facets of his work.

The influence of Kierkegaard's work on the existentialist movement is well known and is encapsulated in his being cast as "the father of existentialism". In my opinion, this constitutes yet one more attempt to categorize both the man and his work, and as such constitutes a reductionism and an untenable approach to the work of this important thinker. My motivation in conducting an investigation into Kierkegaard's conception of anxiety is two-fold. Firstly, I am of the opinion that anxiety is a universal and, at the same time, intensely personal experience. As such, *The Concept of Anxiety* is an indispensable, and often overlooked part of Kierkegaard's philosophy. My second reason is to demonstrate, by simply concentrating on one aspect of Kierkegaard's work, the depth and scope of his corpus.

The Concept of Anxiety is notoriously known as being Kierkegaard's most inaccessible work, due chiefly to the difficulty experienced in its interpretation, and the subsequent plethora of misinterpretation. It is my opinion that the principal cause of this problem is the failure on the part of readers to take heed of the fact that Haufniensis' work is conducted by means of indirect communication and as such is fraught with irony.

Finally, my conclusion after examining the conception of anxiety, as put forth by Haufniensis, as well as the reactions and influences it has elicited in the years since its publication, is that the work of the Danish author is as relevant and as important today, as it was upon being published.

Keywords: Anxiety; subjectivity; aestheticism; spirit; irony; repetition; sin; freedom; possibility; inwardness.

Titel van verhandeling: Kierkegaard se konsep van angs: ‘n filosofiese – sielkundige ondersoeking.

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Opsomming

Toe Kierkegaard se werk, *The concept of anxiety* in 1844 onder die skuilnaam van Vigilius Haufniensis gepubliseer is, was dit om verskeie redes geen geringe prestasie nie. Eerstens, en dalk mees ooglopend was die inhoud van die werk. Op daardie tydstip was daar nog weinig oor die ervaring van angs as sodanig geskryf en was daar beslis geen sprake van ‘n akademiese verhandeling wat in sy totaliteit gewy is aan die formele tema van angs nie. Tweedens, was die teks ‘n deurdringende en komplekse teologiese en filosofiese argument. Dit was inderdaad in só ‘n mate die geval dat geen beredenering van Haufniensis se konsep van angs moontlik is sonder om die teologiese implikasies daarvan in ag te neem nie. Derdens, en gewis so noemenswaardig soos die teks se religieuse aspek, is die wesenlike sielkundige aspek van *The concept of anxiety*. Soos die filosofiese element van die werk, was die sielkundige aspek eweens ‘n nuwe verwikkeling soos blyk uit die verreikende invloed daarvan op die ontwikkeling van die twintigste eeuse Sielkunde. Ten laaste, maar sekerlik nie van minste belang nie, is die feit dat Haufniensis se werk ‘n vernuftige en parodiese aanval op en ironisering van die filosofie van Hegel is.

Aan die hand van bogenoemde uitgangspunte poog ek om aan te dui dat hierdie oënskynlike “geringe” werk in werklikheid ‘n uiterse diepsinnige en komplekse betoog is. Derhalwe, poog ek om al vier genoemde aspekte van hierdie werk deeglik onder die loep te neem ten einde te illustreer dat elke aspek net soveel gewig dra as enige ander. In terme van metodiek, het ek daadwerklik gepoog om nie my ondersoek aan een bepaalde benadering te beperk nie. In plaas daarvan, poog ek om Haufniensis se *The concept of anxiety* van menigde verskillende oogpunte te eksploreer, insluitende die analitiese, eksistensiële, teologiese, linguïstieke en dekonstruktiewe interpretasies. Bowendien, kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking dat geen verantwoordbare ondersoek van *The concept of anxiety* een spesifieke aspek van die werk kan uitsonder sonder om die ander aspekte in ag te neem nie. Hierdie siening druis in teen die

van vroeëre geleerdes wat Kierkegaard grotendeels as Christelike skrywer beskou het, ten koste van al die ander fasette van sy werk.

Die verreikende invloed van Kierkegaard se werk op die eksistensiële beweging blyk duidelik uit sy befaamde titel as “die vader van die Eksistensialisme”. Myns insiens is dit bloot nog ‘n laakbare poging om beide die individu en sy werk te kategoriseer, en as sodanig verteenwoordig dit ‘n onuithoubare enge benadering tot die werk van hierdie belangrike denker. My motivering agter ‘n ondersoek in Kierkegaard se konsep van angs is tweevoudig. Eerstens, is ek van mening dat angs ‘n universele en, terselfdetyd, intense persoonlike ervaring is. As sulks, is *The concept of anxiety* ‘n onmisbare en dikwels miskende deel van Kierkegaard se filosofie. My tweede rede was om eensydig op een aspek van Kierkegaard se werk te konsentreer, en daardeur die diepsinnigheid en bestek van sy korpus te demonstreer.

The concept of anxiety word ongunstiglik beskou as Kierkegaard se mees ontoeganklike teks. Hierdie misvatting berus op die feit dat Haufniensis se eiesoortige werkwyse besonder vatbaar is vir foutiewe vertolking of uitleg. Ek is van mening dat hierdie probleem hoofsaaklik spruit uit interpreteerders se onkunde aangaande Haufniensis se gebruik van “indirekte kommunikasie” wat neerkom op ‘n ironisering van die tema ter sprake.

Na afloop van my kritiese ondersoek na Haufniensis se begrip van angs, kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking dat die werk van die Deense outeur vandag net so toepaslik en belangrik is as wat dit was toe dit vir die eerste keer in druk verskyn het.

Sleutel terme: Angs; subjektiwiteit; estetisisme; gees; ironie; repetisie; sonde; vryheid; moontlikheid; innerlikheid.