

THE AESTHETIC SELF IN KIERKEGAARD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.

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Phenomenology as the descriptive study of the episodes of our consciousness with interest in their essential structures has been at odds with modern behavioristic psychology. The latter, whether logical or psychological, suspended or eliminated subjective experience in the interest of making psychology a natural science. The behavioristic perspective stressed that the variables determining behavior lie outside the "self" in its immediate environment and in its environmental history. The human being is considered to be completely at the mercy of previous learning and environmental conditions.

Freedom of choice and self determination are viewed as illusions. Such an approach to behavior has had a tremendous impact on our modern views of human nature.

On the other hand, inspired by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and by Kierkegaard's subtle description of various dimensions and modifications of human inwardness and his vehement stress on the uniqueness of the individual, phenomenological psychology or humanistic psychology emerged as a reaction to the depersonalizing

effects and to the mechanistic conception of man which modern behaviorism has projected. Husserl considered egology to be the essence of the study of the immanent structures of subjectivity, and that the Ego, in a Kantian sense, is the uniting principle of our conscious modifications or cogitations. Whereas Kierkegaard considered the self to be "The immediate man" whose essential structure is an internal dynamic activity with intensity of feeling and thought. It is passion Kierkegaard maintains that is the final yardstick by which the uniqueness of the self is measured. The self, contra the behaviorists, organizes its passions or inward life and affirms itself against the environment and personal history. The core of the self is then a vital structure whose essence is freedom which allows man to strive for values and meaning, self-direction and self-fulfillment. Truth exists, writes Kierkegaard, "only as the self produces it in action". Rollo May state that it was Kierkegaard's description of the multifarious dynamics of the self, though not exclusively, that inspired the rise of humanistic psychology¹. In describing the aesthetic self, Kierkegaard discerns almost and endless multiplicity of subjective variables whose revolving point is the inward geography of the human emotions and the conditions that are causally connected by which the self announces its existence concretely. Kierkegaard's writings on the self, consequently, have basic significance for descriptive or humanistic psychology. However, due to the extensiveness and the many - levelled manner in which Kierkegaard expresses himself on the subject, I shall confine myself to describing a) nature of the self, b) reason and existential alternatives, c) the self: actualities and protensions of aesthetic existence d) the aesthetic self and despair, e) choics and the aesthetic self. I shall also show that James Collins, one of the influential writers on Kierkegaard, in his

interpretation of the aesthetic life is at least implausible.

(a) **Nature of the self:**

Kierkegaard does not seem to involve himself with the investigation of the epistemological grounds and conditions for the existence of the self. He does not even describe or argue his position, he simply presents it. For him, the proposition "Man has a self" is self evident or assumed. In other words, Kierkegaard does not bother to offer either empirical, rational or intuitive proof for the existence of the self. Furthermore, when Kierkegaard writes about the self, he is usually not concerned with the traditional question about personal identity, a question which was of substantial significance for philosophers such as Avicenna, Berkeley and Hume. For the first two, the self is known intuitively as opposed to demonstratively, namely, it is known without inference. Whereas the latter considered the self to be empirically, speaking, fictitious or non-existent.

Kierkegaard makes extensive use of the term "Self", both in his aesthetic and ethico-religious writings. However, he does not seem to be very clear on the issue and his interpreters seem to follow him literally without succeeding in providing us with a distinct and exact meaning that Kierkegaard attaches to the concept. His and their explanations are saturated with Hegelian Jargon and woven rhetoric which is neither adequately comprehensible nor is it functional for the goals of the present undertaking. For instance, witness his definition of man:

"Man is spirit, but what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a

relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that the relation relates itself to its own self: The self in not the relation but (consists in the fact) that the relation relates itself to its own self."²

In this passage, Kierkegaard is declaring that man is spirit which of course means that he does not totally belong to the animal modality nor is man simply a material entity. Then he adds "spirit is the self"; now if this is true what happens to the body in this Kierkegaardian formula? Is the self then a "ghost in a machine" as Ryle had categorized Cartesian dualism? what role does the body play in this conception of the self? It is not really clear whether there is an interaction between the spirit and the body, or the body is just simply inert. If the body is inert, then the self as a relation cannot be to the body but must mean self consciousness or reflexivity. However, further analysis of the quoted passage could be of significance in other contexts but not in the context of the present study; it is hardly profitable.

Now, a sensitive reading of Kierkegaard's literature dealing with the aesthetic mode of living can phenomenologically announce two meanings of the self that underlie most of his pronouncements about subjective experiences and psychic states stemming from the individual's concrete choices of being in the world. These I shall call respectively the dynamic conception of the self and the ontological conception of the self.

Descriptively speaking the first definition of the self presents itself as character. When Kierkegaard talks about the self of the aesthete in Either/Or and the alternatives which he prefers, he is talking about the character of the

agent who performs multiplicity of choices. Williams James, in his Principles of Psychology states that character is a transformed will. This means that what one does makes him what he is. Therefore in this sense, the self of the aesthete is initially a sheer potentiality, which in essence does not exist. The aesthete makes himself, creates himself in the dramatic act of choices and actions which he initiates to enhance his interests. This of course means that actions are necessary conditions for the phenomenological constitution of the self of the aesthete which is his character. Hence, when we ask "What can I do for myself?", "What can I do for others?", "What can I do before God?", we are effectively talking about the aesthetic self, the ethical self and the religious self. These three categories describe different selves or characters. However, such selves are different actualities of the same entity which gets transformed essentially by its focus and the activities it performs.

Along with the dynamic concept of the self, if we explore further horizons in Kierkegaard's writings, the self emerges as a vital entity in the individual, an entity which is energetic and productive. therefore, at the heart of Kierkegaard's conception of the self is a definite element of vitalism. Such a vitalism renders the self an internal dynamic activity with intensity of volition, feeling and thought.

On the other hand, when one looks with neutral attentiveness, namely, by exercising objective distancing in describing man's dispositions, one can discern the givenness of two elements which ontologically constitute the self, namely the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite³. These are two actuated tendencies in the self that cannot be obliterated. They are the basic "residue" which is obtained by a radical reduction of the different

modifications of human nature. The human self (by the language of description and appearance and not by logical arguments) is a synthesis or a composite of two behaviorally (existentially) opposing tendencies in man. Phenomenologically man's nature seems to dynamically gravitate towards the worldly, the finite, and towards the eternal, the infinite. Such a synthesis, according to Kierkegaard, harbours in itself open possibilities for the individual, and hence the possibility of choice. Therefore, at the heart of human nature, freedom appears to be the final seat of man's personality and consequently, this ontological conception of the self construes man as the only place where the possibilities of the eternal resides. Such conception of the self, along with the dynamic conception, leaves for man the open and varied possibilities of living the metamorphosis of aesthetic life. In his almost endless and multiple ways of describing the aesthetic mode of life and the emotional accompaniment of this life, such as anxiety, dread, despair, Kierkegaard considered himself and experimental psychologist. Again, it is necessary to state here that the two conceptions of the self are actually the same self looked at phenomenologically by what Husserl calls imaginative variation.

(b) Reason, Passion and Existential Alternatives:

It was remarked earlier that the self or the individual has three possible ways of living, namely the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. These are usually known as the three spheres of existence or stages. However, when reading Kierkegaard's Either/or⁴ and the Stages⁵, one cannot help getting the impression that what Kierkegaard was unfolding in this theory of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres were his own experiences and giving them

theoretical expression. These spheres are actually modes of existence in one and the same personality. They are independent modalities of consciousness of one's own ontological being which differ qualitatively from each other, and yet can hardly have isolated existence in the individual. Such a theory of the spheres must according to Kierkegaard allow for alternatives.

Again, within the dichotomy of the opposing elements of the self lies the fountainhead of human freedom. The aesthetic self, therefore, can pursue a plurality of qualitatively varied actions to satisfy and whim or desire. However, the one basic formula to bear in mind here, is whatever the actions or choices the self may project, these cannot be obtained or accomplished without two basic components of subjectivity, namely reason and the passions. As it is for Nietzsche and Bergson, it is for Kierkegaard, reason is an instrument for the motive powers of the self. Reason itself is destitute of the ability to lead to actions or to change the essential structure of the personality. For this change, the passions and the will ought to be creatively involved. Here the passions and the will are not two separate orders of our psychic phenomena. The will is defined and understood in terms of passions desires and interests. If it were possible for passionateless, desireless, interestless self to exist at all, such a self would necessarily be a willess one. Consequently, reason shall always be a "salve" of passion in any mode or form of existence. both are like hunter and a hunting dog. The latter points out the prey and the former executes the shooting.

While emphasizing the presence of alternatives for his theory of the spheres, Kierkegaard states that his theory does not possess any legitimate claims to conceptual truth than other theories⁶. This is by and large due to the fact

that reason and actual existence belong to two different modalities. The theory of the spheres cannot, consequently, be more valid than other theories because: (1) rationally all views, or alternatives, are "logically" defensible. Reason flings these alternatives to the world of possibles; (2) to know, Kierkegaard says, is to translate reals into possibles, this is the direction in which any and all knowledge moves;⁷ (3) it is only when we come to the exigencies of existence, to the actualities of real life, that opposition and conflicts in the behavioral sense, come into play.

Points (1), (2) and (3) are illustrated by Kierkegaard in presenting two traditional views. The first preaches that the highest good is pleasure (aesthetic), and the other that the highest good is duty (ethical). Here, when one observes the concrete existential implications of these two doctrines, one encounters unresolvable behavioral oppositions, namely, the dilemma of universally pursuing pleasure⁸ and duty⁹ at the same time. For it is not infrequent that they behaviorally differ, in fact contradict each other. This existential opposition between the two views, according to Kierkegaard, remains unresolved and places the existential ego in an unconquered existential uncertainty.

Now, what does reason do with the two opposing alternatives? Kierkegaard contends that reason abolishes the difficulty by asking which one of the possibilities is valid. But this will conceivably yield no conclusion. For on the basis of points (1) and (2) the opposition is absorbed and transferred from the existential to the rational realm, and consequently it is emptied of all existential importance.

Kierkegaard would say ironically, that reason resolves the opposition between the alternatives in very much the same way as a physician's medicine removes the patient's

fever by removing the patient's life as well¹⁰. Furthermore, reason at its best may function in delineating alternatives for a possible choice. But reason lacks the singular character of existence;

" What is reasoning? it is the result of doing away with the vital distinction which separates subjectivity and objectivity. As a form of abstract thought reasoning is not profoundly dialectical enough; as an opinion and a conviction it lacks fullblooded individuality. But where mere scope is concerned, reasoning has all the apparent advantage; for a thinker can encompass his science, a man can have an opinion upon a particular subject and a conviction as a result of a certain view of life, but one can reason about anything."¹¹

Therefore, if one can reason about anything, then, according to Kierkegaard, to ask which of the alternatives is true is to ask a question which is irrelevant in connection with existential choices. Choices are neither true nor false, they are either production in a positive vein or non-instrumental for the needs of the self. Now, if reason as mentioned earlier, "lacks fullblooded individuality", it is then the passions that are most essential for the enhancement of the capabilities and vitality of the individual. Passion is what really determines the quality and the breach between existential alternatives. The spheres as alternative modes of existence are determined and distinguished from one another by a specific passion. The more the self has passion in each sphere the more it belongs to that sphere. Besides, if the spheres differ in their qualitative modes of living, they are necessarily more so in

the qualitative difference of their passions¹².

The aesthetic passion is essentially a zest for pleasure, however, not in strictly hedonistic terms, but in a more general fashion. The ethical passion is a zest to abide by the moral law, and the religious passion is suffering on whose grounds religious faith emerges.

In any stage, therefore, if the "Single one" loses his passion or allows it to recede, then his singularity starts receding too; for what makes the self what it is, is the intensity and kind of passion it possesses. Passion, Kierkegaard holds, is, in the last analysis, what is essential¹³. Whether in one stage or the other, the individual can only realize himself fully by living very intensively, a way which is a vital condition for the personality: "Passion is the real measure of man's power. And the age in which we live is wretched, because it is without passion¹⁴". This point is emphasized in order to remark the movement which Kierkegaard is going to take later on. Humanity is defined by sensibility, and not by reason. The authentically human is passion, Kierkegaard says¹⁵. If humanity is feeling and passion, human perfection is constituted in the greatest possible energy, that is passion, the most perfect expression of existence.

Passion, however, is not like emotion or sentiment. It is more ardent than sentiment, and not as short lived as emotions.

Passion is a tendency which exaggerates itself, which takes hold of us, which makes itself the center of everything.

As a matter of fact, one can deduce from

Kierkegaard's Either/or, Postscript, and Fear and Trembling that passion is a more total phenomenon of our subjective modifications. It is a transformation of the whole personality.

But passion, Kierkegaard maintains, is not just an immediate outbreak or emotions that is not guided or purified by reason. An unguided, uncontrolled passion means the dissolution of the personality. Therefore, in order to be creative, and in order to be conducive to perfection, passion should be purified by reflection (reason). consequently, passion in every stage of existence does not break away from reason, but it is channelled and more focused by reason to an object. Kierkegaard says: "Let no one misunderstand all my talk about passion and pathos to mean that I am proclaiming any and every uncircumcised immediacy, all manner of unshaven passion.¹⁶ A passion without a definite object is a useless enthusiasm that consumes the energies of the individual, and forsakes him to an existential blunder which spells his own annihilation.

It follows, that the individual in each sphere of existence, whether in the aesthetic, ethical, or religious, should very dynamically converge his passions on the contents of every stage. But, whether consciously or unconsciously, passion in every stage labours in a double movement. On the one hand, it seeks satisfaction and realization in the sphere it belongs to; on the other hand, it strives to go beyond itself and to become transfigured to another sphere. On this basis, Kierkegaard finds an escape for the individual from being imprisoned and stifled in one of the spheres. Passion in every stage, therefore, implies an "upward" flight to a higher stage, and it is never tranquilized until it reaches Him who is the source of its inspiration. In fact, it is Him who offers a motivation for the

transition from one sphere to the other. but this transition is described by Kierkegaard as always a crisis, as a breach of continuity.

The breach of continuity between the stages means three things for Kierkegaard: (1) The values in each stage are determined by specific passion or enthusiasm, qualitatively different. (2) A person whose life is in the one sphere cannot by a mere process of reflection transport himself into the other; for this a passionate resolution of the will is necessary. (3) The change from one sphere to the other is never necessary, but always contingent; if it presents itself as possible, it also presents as possible of non-realization. It is this breach, between the stages, and even in the acts of choice in the same sphere that the aesthetic self constitutes its character and personality.

By now, it is amply clear that Kierkegaard considers the passions to be of paramount importance in his phenomenological constitution of the human self. Passion makes up the very life of the individual. The exaggerated role he assigns to the passions is not a common theme in the intellectual history of Western culture. Ever since Socrates, philosophy has sought an answer to man's dynamic problems through the arrogance of reason and in its role to control, subvert and emaciate the passions. It was Plato who strongly insisted that the rational faculties in man must always control, direct and even restrain the passionate faculties. Reason was, and still is considered the gifted spark which directs and enlightens the human self. Such a pervasive intellectualism (rationalism) in Western civilization Kierkegaard forcefully deplores. "Why is reason baptized and the passions considered to be the pagans of the human soul?" he cried. Inspired by Kierkegaard, Rs. Salomon states that nowadays we should "... return to the

passions the central and defining role in our lives that they have so long and persistently being denied, to limit the pretensions of "objectivity" and self-demeaning reason which have exclusively ruled Western philosophy, religion, and science since the days of Socrates. Our passions have too long been relegated to mere footnotes in philosophy and parentheses in psychology, as if they were intrusions and interruptions but more usually embarrassing if not treacherous subversion of lives ... " 17. Amen, Kierkegaard would say.

(c) **The Self: Actualities and Protensions of Aesthetic Existence:**

Aesthetic existence means for Kierkegaard living in the immediate, and the aesthetic self is that by which the self is immediately what it is. The term "aesthetic" is derived from the Greek term "aesthetikos" which means perceptive and appreciative or responsive to the artistic. Such a meaning seems to have a direct relevance to what Kierkegaard means by the "aesthetic". For that which is perceived is usually immediate; also the aesthetic self is an entity which by virtue of living in the immediate, is basically romantic and is appreciative of different kinds of artistic creation.

Kierkegaard investigates the aesthetic view of life with subtlety and wit, yet in Either / or he is endlessly repetitious, viewing over the same theme again from different perspectives. This method of "imaginative variation" as Husserl puts it is employed by Kierkegaard in order to identify with his characters; such an identification is executed by him in a phenomenological manner to "look into", inspect, discern, record, describe and perhaps even objectify and then subjectify the inward life of the self being

scrutinized from the point of view of neutral psychological description. Through empathy and sympathetic penetration of the field of consciousness of his different characters, Kierkegaard is able to describe the moods and emotional states which the life of the aesthete presents to him in the "first person", non polluted and purified from the fantastic and the illusory. In a Husserlian language, Kierkegaard's ego is "split" to become at once both his ego and the ego of the person whose emotional life he is describing. Hence, using this method, Kierkegaard declares in Either / or that the aesthetic sphere is a possible form of individual existence which advocates variety of pleasures as the ultimate goal to which the self is attracted. However, this variety of pleasures, Kierkegaard does not reduce to pure sensualism. Rather it includes any attitude whose sole aim is pleasure, even if it is refined and merely intellectual. In short, the aesthetic life culminates in a general form of Epicureanism which tries to banish meaninglessness and despair by emphasizing the pleasures of the moment. By doing so, it falls back on, or gets arrested by, the same existential state it attempted to escape from, and that is despair. The aesthetic self in a primary sense, is one who determines to live for the luxury of pleasurable moments.

Accordingly, every man, says Kierkegaard, no matter how inferior his talents are, feels by natural tendency the necessity of forming a view of life and a conception of its purpose. The aesthete also forms a view of life, but this view is based on enjoyment. In this view, the self of the aesthete does not differ from other people, for most people through the ages agree that one must enjoy life. However, the important thing here is that people differ in their conceptions of enjoyment¹⁸. They differ because enjoyment is not one thing but a multiplicity of things. The aesthetic self then which emphasizes enjoyment in life, is itself

ruptured or diffused into a boundless multiplicity¹⁹; the multiplicity of the pleasures of the moment. But since the aesthete lives in the greed for the moment, then he lives a prey for external events because "...he who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition which either lies outside the individual or is in the individual in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself."²⁰ And "we encounter views of life which teach that one must enjoy life but which place the condition for it outside the individual. This is the case with every view of life where wealth, glory, high station ... are accounted life's task and its content."²¹ Consequently, if man has to seek enjoyment outside himself, he cannot bear existence in the present²¹. Therefore, the aesthete is driven to plunge into violent exciting works and amusements in order to escape from the possibility of boredom. This escape, which is an escape from himself, becomes his cause of bewilderment and despair.

The aesthete, accordingly, is man who does not possess himself; he is engaged with the things outside him and therefore lacks full-blooded individuality, stability, and is diffused in the flux of momentary immediate pleasure. Nothing gives him temporary relief from his boredom except the freshness of immediacy. The aesthetic self, says Kierkegaard, cannot will one thing:

" ... When what one thing which he wills is not in itself one: is in itself a multitude of things, a dispersion, the toy of changeableness, and the prey of corruption! In the time of pleasure see how he longed for one gratification after another. Variety was his watchword. Is variety, then, to will one thing that shall ever remain the

same? On the contrary, it is to will one thing that must never be the same. It is to will a multitude of things. And a person who wills in this fashion is not only double minded but is at odds with himself. For such a man wills first one thing and then immediately wills the opposite, because the oneness of pleasure is a snare and a delusion. It is the diversity of pleasure that he wills. So when the man of whom we are speaking had gratified himself up to the point of disgust, he became weary and sated... his enfeebled soul raged so that no ingenuity was sufficient to discover something new - Something new! It was change he cried out for as pleasure served him, change! change!"²³.

This quotation, from Purity of Heart, displays almost exactly what sort of being the aesthetic self becomes in its pursuit of pleasure. Boredom creeps into the very veins of the aesthete and turns his life into a whirlpool of dizzying preferences and actions. Boredom becomes the vital impulse behind the "bliss" of enjoyment. But such a bliss is nothing more than a superficial profundity that is void of content. This the individual who thrusts himself into different indulgences reaps loneliness, emptiness, self-hate and would be unwilling to change. Such an aesthetic self can love itself in dreams and the interweavings of the imagination. The culmination of all this is unhappiness: "The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being in some manner outside himself. He is always absent, never present

to himself."²⁴ The aesthetic self then, is essentially separated from the center of its being and ontologically does not dwell in the security and homeliness of its own consciousness. It evaporates into the torturing jaws of endless multiplicity.

A phenomenological glance at the history of philosophy presents us with Aristotle's view of the highest form of life. For him, the highest form is one of contemplation; the contemplation of the prime mover and the separate intelligences. The telos of such a life is not happiness but the fulfillment of one of our natural and higher functions that is contemplation. happiness, Aristotle states, ensues as an outcome of contemplating the Eternal, who is pure act and devoid of potentiality, and is constantly engaged in intellecting Himself or His essence. The contemplative life is superior to other human activities because its basic attribute is self - sufficiency and does not depend on external factors. The two thinkers, bearing basic difference in mind, seem to agree that a life centered on external goals, such as riches, pleasures and other diversions culminate in failure.

Again, when willing enjoyment, the aesthete is not willing one thing but a multiplicity of things. This multiplicity of alternatives is conceived by the aesthete's power of reasoning. It is reason that points to the possibilities of aesthetic life, but reason itself precludes commitment and even action. Consequently, the contemplative or rational aesthete stands outside life and scrutinizes it as a spectator.

Furthermore, rational speculation and non-committed intellectualism, which Kierkegaard calls skepticism, are employed by the refined aesthete to escape dynamic, ethical

or religious decisions. The philosophers or rationalists, who occupy themselves with the luxury of weighing possibilities and analyzing concepts, are all essentially aesthetes in their undertaking. And all of these, says the Danish Socrates, suffer from a lack of self-understanding. Their lack of self-understanding is due to the fact that they are incapable of an inward movement which would involve them in the responsibility of practical connections and decisions. therefore, it is hard for such speculators to relate themselves to a permanent standard, or to the Divine imperatives. For they are aesthetically absorbed in contemplating their own abstract systems that are far from real life. Thus, from these extravagant intellectuals who are bewitched with their "intellectual landscape", come the greedy Don Juan²⁵, the idle doubter, and the egocentric Epicurean. Eventually then, the philosopher's objective detachment and the continuous suspension of judgement until evidence emerges - two qualities closely associated with the Western tradition of philosophy - are rejected by Kierkegaard. In this rejection Kierkegaard presented the primary theme of subsequent existential philosophy, namely, that of the priority of existence over essence.

But what about the faith of the aesthete according to Kierkegaard? when one is engaged in reading Either / or one does not really dwell on passages where Kierkegaard overtly predicates faith of the aesthete. What permeates the being of the aesthete is a sort of conviction about the value of the immediate attachment to life and the fleeting moment. In other words, the aesthetic life is devoid of "faith" in the sense of rational and passionate attachment to the Eternal-God. The aesthete who indulges in the moment, i.e., the temporal, is in sin, for the temporal signifies sinfulness²⁶ according to Kierkegaard. But why does the temporal signify sinfulness? Simply because the

aesthete lives merely in the instant abstracted from the eternal, and embraces finitude which is an embracement of a false self-independence. Living in the temporal is an escape on the part of the aesthete from yielding himself to faith and, consequently, he is caught in sin.

This is why the self of the aesthete is engulfed in suffering and despair. For he waives an essential necessary component of his nature, namely, the eternal²⁷, which is forsaken and remains hungry, or so to speak, crying for satisfaction. This suffering, or inner torment, is the beacon which prompts the aesthete to choose religious faith via the ethical stage. The aesthetic mode, therefore, is a point of departure from which man passes and lays anchor in the eternal, and therewith, reaches the bliss of faith. Yet man is left free to make his own decision, either to choose - existentially - the ethico - religious, or remain suspended in the charm of speculation, losing touch with existence, paralyzing his will and destroying his personality.

Therefore, the life of the aesthete does not bask in the bliss of religious faith. Kierkegaard does not even attempt to employ the terms "aesthetic faith" or "ethical faith" which some interpreters of Kierkegaard are wont to employ. For instance, James Collins, an influential writer on the subject, in his somewhat dogmatically written essay²⁸ on the role of reflection in the three stages, although profitable on certain points, construes the whole problem of reason and faith in a manner which, in as much as it is Collin's own innovation, is literally un -- Kierkegaardian. he talks about "aesthetic reflection and aesthetic faith", "ethical reflection and ethical faith", "religious reflection and religious faith"²⁹. This manner of construing the problem of faith and reason is mistaken and definitely does not belong to the inner compass of Kierkegaard's thought on the

subject. True, there are instances where Kierkegaard talks about aesthetic, ethical, and religious reflection³⁰, but he never mentions or wanted to mention what Collins, in his writing on the subject, is not fully aware of the shifts of meaning of "faith" in each case. Collins sometimes talks about belief and reflection³¹ without making clear to us whether he means by "belief" exactly what he means by "faith", and whether "belief" in the different spheres has different connotations. Therefore he misinterprets Kierkegaard on this issue and is caught by terminological confusion. Let us listen to Kierkegaard:

" For faith is not the first immediacy but a subsequent immediacy. The first immediacy is the aesthetical But faith is not the aesthetical - or else faith has never existed because it has always existed." ³²

It is amply clear from this passage that Kierkegaard does not speak of "aesthetic faith" in the manner which Collins claims him to do. For as Kierkegaard writes in the passage above, faith is not the aesthetical; and most definitely he does not categorize faith as the ethical, for as Kierkegaard indubitably asserts in Fear and Trembling, the ethical is teleologically suspended in the dialectical and passionate act of faith.

(d) The Aesthete and the Moment:

Based on most of the forgoing interpretations of Kierkegaard, one can comfortably and unreservedly state that the primary principle or proposition for the aesthete, is that the moment is everything. But this tantamounts to saying that the moment is nothing; or just as Kierkegaard

puts it in the Postscript, similar to the sophistic proposition that everything is true means that nothing is true³³. For instance, Don Juan, who belongs everywhere and desires in every woman the whole of womanhood, belongs to no woman, and, consequently belongs nowhere. This means that in the moment, for the aesthete, there is only the moment. However, the moment being transient and continuously disappearing, then the aesthete, in a special sense, lives in nothing. If we look at his actual life, we find it anarchical, disorderly, and resulting in failure. Here the aesthetic self is psychologically impoverished almost beyond repair and is caught by the stormy emptiness of its conscious life. The aesthete "... gasps after pleasure ... for only in the instant of pleasure does he find repose, and when that is passed, he gasps with faintness ... The spirit is constantly disappointed and his soul becomes and anguishing dread".³⁴ The aesthete is told that he is like a dying man and that his life has lost its ontological support and his essence as a human self is dissolving in the restless giddiness of his inner turmoil.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard says that the moment is "a glance touched by eternity", or it is the present that has no past or future³⁵. Here it is this eternity in the moment that gives the aesthete stability and self-possession. But this is exactly what the aesthete recklessly neglects and thus, he becomes a vain cry, a speck of dust in the winds of enjoyment. But enjoyment or immediacy is an intoxication that has the taste of death. Consequently, the aesthete is somebody who dies, or who longs for dying by neglecting the eternal and concentrating on the transitory which becomes despair³⁶. He then becomes the "epitome of every possibility"³⁷, and is forced to choose either the temporal, which necessitates nihilism and perdition, or the ethico-religious ensuring in self integration, self

perpetuation and general well being. For according to Kierkegaard, the authentic man is one who lives in the hope for the eternal via the moment, yet retaining touch with the temporal.

(e) The Aesthetic Self and Despair:³⁸

In the preceding sections the factors that precipitate despair have been mentioned. It has been noted that the aesthetic stage is a stage in the existential development of the self, in which man does not yet realize his dual nature of the infinite and the finite, the eternal in time. The aesthetic stage precedes despair and nourishes the seeds of despair in it³⁹.

But what is despair? Despair is a form of loss of one's self due to the inability on the part of the aesthete to effect balance and stability between the two components of his being. It is a form of bewilderment, confusion, and even estrangement from one of the element of his composite being. It is the failure to hold fast both elements in a form of homogeneity before Pure Being⁴⁰ or God. Considered this way, despair becomes a double -- edged weapon which slays and saves at the same time. For the self that remains in despair becomes mortally sick, and the self that suffers it is necessarily driven to choose itself in its eternal validity. The aesthete gets to know that his destruction is the temporal: "Then it appears to him that time, that the temporal, is his ruin; he demands a more perfect form of existence, and at this point there comes to evidence a fatigue, an apathy ... This apathy may rest so broodingly upon a man that suicide appears to him the only way of escape ... He has not chosen himself; like Narcissus he has fallen in love with himself. Such a situation has certainly ended not infrequently in suicide." ⁴¹.

Thus far, it is obvious that in his descriptive analysis of the varied emotional and subjective underpinning of the aesthetic self (which is essentially a humanistic self) Kierkegaard does not argue for his position. He simply presents it. This is done with exceeding attentiveness and intuitive empathy for the dimensions of the self under diagnosis. He appears to be like a person who is reading, with effort and penetrating insight from the pages of an open book placed in his consciousness. This brings forth the principle of identification which was alluded to earlier. Kierkegaard seems to project himself into the consciousness of the self he is describing by objectifying that self and then appropriating the results within the vitality of his inwardness. This is what he intends when he states that occasionally he feels that he had become double-minded, namely his mind and the mind of the person whose consciousness is under scrutiny. In his description of despair and what such description reveals or announces, he appears to be first rate psychologist and outstanding pioneer in the employment of phenomenological description. This phenomenological analysis of despair is found in his Sickness Unto Death and in Either / or, vol. II. In both books, he displays a remarkable insight into the interworkings of the psychic life of the human self. The psychoanalytic strain in his phenomenological description is indubitably apparent. He does anticipate a substantial amount of the principles of depth psychology, or insight - psychology which, as mentioned earlier make him one of the dynamic impulses behind the rise of humanistic psychology. In his analysis of despair, Kierkegaard seems to be advancing a doctrine of human nature which is as profound as it is psychological. However, such a doctrine is woven with a dominant religious intentionality. The troubles and crises in man do not converge on him basically from the

outside in as much as from within the immanence of his conscious or subconscious life.

The problem of despair seems to focus primarily upon the self's own relationship with itself, namely the reflexiveness of consciousness upon its dual nature and the disruption of dislocation of this relationship. In order to vanquish despair the aesthetic self has to form an authentic or meaningful relationship with itself whereby the finite element in man is enriched with abundance of meaning by the eternal. A humanistic life for the self where the eternal does not at all exist is not susceptible to despair. "To have a self, to be a self, in the greatest concession made to man, but at the same time, it is eternity's demand upon him."⁴² Therefore, to be in despair, according to Kierkegaard is to having the self being constituted in such a vein that it prefers not to fulfill this demand.

Kierkegaard initiates his phenomenological analysis of despair in the following manner: a) despair viewed under the aspects of finitude or infinitude; the despair of infinitude is due to the lack of finitude and the despair of finitude is due to the lack of infinitude. b) despair which is unconscious that it is despair, and the despair which is conscious of being despair⁴³. This is how Kierkegaard schematizes his analysis of despair. Again, despair seems to obtain when the two components of the personality are thrown out of equilibrium, the structure of the self gets warped as it were. On the other hand, unconscious despair takes place because the self does not come into girds with the truth; here the self builds resistance against acknowledging that it is in despair, and hence individuals execute their lives in self deception and illusions. Of course, this is reminiscent of Nietzsche's dictum "man is a great self deceiver"; without deception man cannot bear living in

the world. We create art, we create what we think is best for us lest we perish in truth Nietzsche says. However, Kierkegaard urges that when the self that is in unconscious despair is awakened to its pitiful state of affairs the self retaliates at the source with vehement hostility. This is the case of the aesthete who judges his well-being by the amount of pleasurable or agreeable experiences he can achieve. Eliminating such a deception is done by becoming conscious of one's own despair and by facing the reality that without the eternal man cannot afford living in the present. The resulting consciousness must be one which indwells the world concretely, becoming the concrete individual in a concrete relationship to God.

Again, despair with its two movements towards the temporal or towards the eternal, is the result of the ontological structure of man. Man has to effect a communion with Pure Being without being himself Pure Being. Both of the foregoing movements lead to despair because they are attempts to escape from the genuine self which is neither the one nor the other one, is the cause of despair, yet he cannot escape from either one especially the eternal; it is hard, it generates despair and nothing can destroy it. Consequently, it drives man to continual self-consumption without dying. "But dying the death means to live to experience death If one might die of despair as one dies of sickness, then the eternal in him, the self, must be capable of dying in the same sense that the body dies of sickness. But this is an impossibility The despairing man cannot die; no more than the dagger can slay thoughts can despair consume the eternal thing, the self, whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched." ⁴⁴ The despair that Kierkegaard is delineating in this passage is not like the rational doubt which can be removed easily by rational demonstration.

(f) Reason, Doubt and Despair:

But what is the difference between doubt⁴⁵ and despair? The difference between the two seems to be almost the same difference as that between reason and faith. If the realm of reason is the realm of ideality, and the realm of faith is the realm of real existence, then on parallel grounds doubt belongs to the realm of abstractions and despair belongs to the realm of the inward life of the individual.

Doubt belongs to the realm of reason, but the realm of reason is the realm of necessity. Consequently, doubt cannot move, and if it cannot move it cannot embrace the existing ego. ⁴⁶

Therefore, only despair can seep into the very depth of the personality. Doubt, on the other hand, can only be predicated of intellectual activity, whereas despair grips the individual in his very core. This despair incites the aesthete to leap toward the eternal and relate himself to Pure Being. As a result, rational attempts to reach objective certainty do not preclude despair. On the contrary, the philosopher might rest in his intellectual certainty and still be captured by despair. This point Kierkegaard launches "against certain philosophers of Germany" ⁴⁷, who having conquered their doubt and tranquilized their thought, are still in despair and are distracted from it by objective thinking. The aesthete hardly needs reason in order to despair. For one can despair without reason, and can reason and remain in despair. This means that, for Kierkegaard, the extravagant intellectual does not will despair but thinks it out, and therefore, remains existentially in it.

This last point is not simply significant from a theoretical stance, but is also of exceeding and volatile

interest to clinical psychologists and psychoanalysts in the clinical compass of the concrete psychotherapeutic situation. Both Freud and Peris, among others, emphatically believe that the client must and should learn to be "in touch" with his/her feelings and with the verb intimate plethora of the "deep" subjective amalgam of human emotions. A client is not and cannot be helped by simply getting to know his / her problems. Whether in clinical psychoanalytic theory or in the gestalt theory of Mr. Peris knowing or conceiving of every detail that precipitated the client's symptoms is no guarantee for the elimination of such symptoms. In fact many clients enter therapy with a massive amount of knowledge about their symptoms and their causes. The more they conceptualize or logically analyze these symptoms the more difficult it think out their symptoms and therefore they remain endlessly stuck to them. Witness the following: "Despair is precisely an expression for the whole personality, doubt only an expression of thought." ⁴⁸

However, in order to go beyond despair, one must have the will to will despair. And when one wills despair, he simply goes beyond it⁴⁹. But by going beyond it, his personality is tranquilized, not by logical necessity but rather by an insertion of the will. This will is an essential constituent of the personality, and the more will a person has the more self he possesses. This is why, when talking about the importance of choice, Kierkegaard says: "A man who has no will at all is no self; for the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has also."⁵⁰ Consequently, for Kierkegaard, a richness of personality and its spiritual contents can be achieved by a decisive will which effects choice and vanquishes despair by reaching the Divine.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard seems to be leery of academics or professors talking for instance about

constructing material objects from sense data, and exalting the systematic doubt of Descartes. The doubt which his phenomenological study reveals is the doubt of Socrates, Pascal, Ghazzali and the searing doubt of adventuring Faust⁵¹.

The professor carries to class a sorry figure who spouts off theoretical expressions and a bunch of systematic facts which only glide over his concrete ego and never penetrate the intimate structure of this ego, a structure by virtue of which he is human. The Cartesian form of doubt is an ingenious theoretical or rational exercise which maintains the state of affairs of the personality and keeps the inward geography of the self untouched. A Faust, a Ghazzali knows that academic doubt is a ritual, and in sharp contrast experiences despair as a harrowing experience which penetrates the very substratum of the human self.

Another manner of interpreting the relationship between doubt and despair is explained by Kierkegaard's Phenomenological analysis of consciousness. Briefly stated the phenomenological structure of consciousness is a duality, that is, an opposition of immediacy and mediacy or ideality⁵². The very essence of consciousness is a dichotomy of two elements, that of existence (actuality) and thought. But consciousness is neither the one or the other, it is a relationship of both. Kierkegaard here seems to anticipate Husserl's and Brentano's concept of intentionality of consciousness, namely consciousness is always a "consciousness of something", that is there is the noetic process of experiencing and the appearance of or the noematic or the experienced object. However, Kierkegaard maintains that consciousness is neither the noetic nor the noematic but a combination of the two. Now, rational doubt cannot really arise in either of the two components of

consciousness. For, on the one hand, ideality or conceptional thinking cannot be true or false except when it tries to account for reality (actuality) or existent things. While on the other hand, reality is "present" and it makes no sense to predicate truth or falsity of it. Doubt arises only when there is a relationship between two things, Kierkegaard says. Therefore, when ideality tries to account for reality and is bent on existence, then truth or falsity can be predicated of this relationship and consequently doubt becomes possible. Hence, doubt presupposes both reality and ideality and it cannot be a quality of either one independent of the other. But what determines the possibility of doubt in something dynamic in consciousness, something which involves our interests, desires and passions (immediacy). But this form of doubt is not really the Cartesian, it is existential doubt which the Greek Skeptics were ware of, and Kierkegaard categorizes it genuinely as despair. This despair which involves the whole personality can be conquered by a determination of the will. Therefore, the aesthetic self, when it experiences despair will remain in this condition until it mobilizes its motive energies and acts to be transformed into another mode of existence.

One should emphasize at this point that in the distinction which Kierkegaard makes between rational doubt and despair he does not deny the merits of reason when it functions in its own domain. He is simply drawing the limits of reason when it reflects on existential matters, like despair and choice.

(g) Choice and the Aesthete:

The discussion of despair and doubt leads us to discuss Kierkegaard's concept of choice. Such a concept impells us to dwell again on the duality of the self. According to

Kierkegaard, the consciousness of the self, as a duality of eternity and time, is a form of deepened self - knowledge that introduces to the individual the category of choice. In the aesthetic stage, when the aesthete is not yet in despair, he is not yet himself fully. When he suffers despair, only then does he become aware of his real self as it is. The aesthete, as it were, before despair, was incapable of real choice because he was not aware of the alternatives that constitute his nature. Therefore, this self is what it is, and it does not become. But when the self is realized for what is, then there is open to it the true possibility of choice. This is what Kierkegaard means by saying that one chooses "one's self". The self which is chosen is the dual self, and this new self gives new possibility of choice. The former self, namely, the aesthetic, is necessarily, i.e., the absence of alternatives. Whereas the new self is contingent and hence can exercise freedom.

Apparently, choice seems to be rooted in the structure of the self that is in situation. However, when the category of choice is introduced the self is already in the ethical stage. Consequently, it is the presence of the eternal in the self that brings forth the ethical stage. From this, it follows that what constitutes freedom and makes choice possible is something highly abstract - the eternal - and something highly concrete, namely the temporal. The self is "the most abstract of all things, and yet at the same time it is the most concrete - it is freedom".⁵³ This is freedom par excellence for Kierkegaard. Accordingly, choice is nourished and reaches maturity in a self that is in despair. Here there is cognizance of the unbalanced conflict between eternity and time⁵⁴.

But this conflict, we said, is the means of liberation from the aesthetic life to reach the ethical life by a choice.

However, Kierkegaard maintains that there is one form of choice where the individual chooses himself absolutely. This category of absolute choice requires brief attention: "I return to the importance of choosing. So, then, in choosing absolutely I choose despair, and in despair I choose the absolute, for I myself, I am the absolute"⁵⁵ What Kierkegaard means by the self as the absolute is obscure. Knowing that he wrote in an age where absolutism was very influential, especially Hegel's, would help us to clarify what he meant by the self as the absolute⁵⁶. One might say that choices have an absolute character in the sense that, having been made, they cannot be retracted; the self becomes the absolute in either bringing together, or, in dissociating the multiplicity of the attachments between itself and the universe.

Furthermore, absolute choices have two dialectical movements or aspects, necessity and freedom. Choices are necessary in the sense that the self or inward history which is chosen, was already available qua the individual; and choices are free in the sense that the newly acquired self was precipitated by the choice⁵⁷. This sounds paradoxical, yet one can find it meaningful. For, if what one chooses did not exist, but completely came into existence with the choice, one would not be choosing, but would be creating. But one does not create himself, he chooses himself. Furthermore, if the original self is regarded as the new self, then this new self is not a self of free spirit, because it actually was not chosen, but was there from the beginning. The new self is born out of a choice that transforms the original self to a new one.

However, when choice is performed, the self is transformed to a higher sphere than the aesthetic. The self reaches the ethical and religious spheres or consciousness.

But when the self reaches these spheres, the aesthetic stage, Kierkegaard observes, is not completely eliminated. The self lives in the happy synthesis of the three modes of existence. The three become united in an alliance, and become mutually interdependent, with the religious sphere as the dominating factor.

Such were the views of Kierkegaard concerning the ontological structure of the aesthetic self. In the vein of a rigorous descriptive phenomenologist, he "allowed" this self to announce its field of subjective modifications and reveal the essential dynamics of its psychological life. Furthermore, the value of his multi-varied description lies in the richness and penetrating illuminations of the human experience which is not completely accessible to the procedures of natural science. A substantial amount of the determinations of humanistic psychology nowadays must look back with debt to Kierkegaard.

One cannot read Kierkegaard and understand him relatively well without being impacted or seriously influenced by his diagnosis. Is he a psychologist, a poet, a philosopher or a religious thinker? He is all this. He is Kierkegaard.

NOTES

1. Rollo May, Existence A New Dimension in Psychology and Psychiatry, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1958, PP. 10-15.
2. Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, Princeton University Press, 1968, P. 164.
3. Ibid.
4. Soren Kierkegaard, Either / or, 2 Vols. Doubleday and Co. New York, 1984. Henceforth referred to as Either / or.
5. Soren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way, Schocken Books, New York, 1975. Henceforth referred to as Stages.
6. In an early entry to his Journals, called "The difficulty with our age" Kierkegaard says the following: "And so the whole generation is stuck in the mud banks or reason; and no one grieves over it, there is only self satisfaction and conceit, which always follow on reason and the sins of reason. Oh, the sins of passion and of the heart, how much nearer to salvation than the sins of reason. "P. 461. Year 1852, Sec. 1249.
7. Postscript, P. 285 ff.
8. As in the case of Hedonism, Epicureanism and Utilitarianism.
9. Kant's ethical theory is the best instance of that.
10. Postscript, P. 268
11. Soren Kierkegaard, The Present age, trans. Alexander

- Dru, London: Collins Clear-type Press, 1962, P.87. Underlining is mine. Henceforth referred to as The Present Age.
12. I have discussed part of this section on passion in another forthcoming paper on the concept of the leap.
 13. Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, London, Oxford University Press, 1975, P. 201, Year 1847, Sec. 652. Henceforth, referred to as Journals. In the same section, Kierkegaard says that "What the age needs is Pathos The misfortune of the age is understanding and reflection That is why it requires a man who could reflect the renunciation of all reflection-...."
 14. Journals, PP. 102-3, year 1841, Sec. 396.
 15. Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, Walter Lowrie, New Your: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974, P. 130. Referred to hereafter as Fear and Trembling.
 16. Journals, P. 133, Year 1844, Sec. 488.
 17. Robert Salomon, The Passions, Doubleday, New York, 1977, P. xvi.
 18. Either / Or, Vol. II, P. 184.
 19. Ibid., P. 188.
 20. Ibid., P. 184
 21. Ibid., PP. 186 - 187
 22. Ibid., P. 182. "But what is it to live aesthetically What is aesthetical in man? ... To this I would reply the aesthetical in man is that by which he is

immediately what he is He who lives in and by and of and for the aesthetical in him lives aesthetically".

23. Soren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart is to Will one Thing, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956, PP. 56-57.
24. Either / Or, Vol. I, P. 220.
25. See Either / or, Vol. I, PP. 83-102.
26. Dread, P. 83.
27. For Kierkegaard, the human self is a union of the temporal and the eternal; being aware of both is a deepened self knowledge. Cf., Ibid., P. 76 and Pp. 81-83. Cf. also Fear and Trembling, P. 162. "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude ... "
28. James Collins "Faith and Reflection in Kierkegaard", in Kierkegaard Critique, New York, PP. 141 - 154.
29. Ibid. PP. 143 - 145.
30. Either / or, Vol. II, P. 188. Also Postscript, PP. 105-106.
31. Collins, Op. cit., P. 143.
32. Fear and Trembling, P. 92.
33. Postscript, P. 265.
34. Either / or, Vol. II, P. 190
35. Dread, P. 78.
36. Either/or, Vol. II, P. 199. Also Ibid., P. 200, where Judge Williams declares to the aesthete "You are like a dying man, you die daily life has lost its reality

...." See also Ibid., P. 198, "..... the aesthetic view of life has proved itself to be despair."

37. Ibid., P. 17, where the aesthete is told that "you are an epitome of every possibility, and so at one time I can see in you the possibility of perdition, and another of salvation".
38. This section and the subsequent sections can hardly be written without the repetition of certain concepts and themes. For when discussing despair one is led to dwell on choice. And when discussing choice one has to dwell again, to a limited degree, on despair.
39. An elaborate analysis of Despair and Choice is to be found in Sickness Unto Death, PP. 146-200, and Either / or, Vol. II, pp. 198 - 236. "Choice" is stressed on pages 219 - 229 of Either / or, Vol. II.
40. Cf. Sickness unto Death. P. 162. "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God."
41. Either / or Vol. II, P. 236.
42. Sickness Unto Death, P. 154.
43. Ibid., PP. 165-180.
44. Ibid., P. 151
45. For the difference between doubt and despair, see Either / or, Vol. II, PP. 215-217.
46. Ibid., P. 216
47. Ibid., P. 216

48. Idem.
49. Ibid., P. 217
50. Sickness Unto Death, P. 162
51. Journals, section 88, P. 33, and Either / or, Vol. II., PP. 178 - 188.
52. Soren Kierkegaard, De Omnibus Dubitantum Est., London, 1958, PP. 146-149.
53. Either / Or, Vol. II, P. 210.
54. Freedom could also be related to Dread in a similar fashion. The seat of Dread is found in the tension between two open possibilities for the individual: The Possibility of drawing nearer to God, or the possibility of self annihilation.
55. Either / or, Vol. II, P. 217.
56. One cannot but agree here with what Lowrie says about his painful difficulty to understand Kierkegaard on certain points: "Much as I love Kierkegaard, I sometimes hate him for keeping me awake at night. Only between sleeping and waking am I able to unravel some of his most complicated sentences. "Fear and Trembling, P. 81 "n".
57. CF., Either/Or, Vol. II, P. 219. Choices perform "... two dialectical movements: that which is chosen does not exist and come sin to existence with the choice; that which is chosen exists, otherwise, there would not be a choice".

