

## PIERRE THÉVENAZ AND SØREN KIERKEGAARD ON IMMEDIATE CONSCIOUSNESS

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A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I will, concisely, show what Søren Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard hereafter) means by saying, "A human being is spirit;" how Kierkegaard, in defining what spirit is, lays the groundwork for *The Sickness unto Death*; and take his definition to a wider horizon using the phenomenological perspective of Pierre Thévenaz (Thévenaz hereafter).

For Kierkegaard, the human being is spirit and this spirit is the self. The self is the relation's relating itself to itself; existing within the tensions of the infinite and finite, the temporal and eternal, the free and necessary. Contrary to Hegelianism, this is not a higher synthesis, of a joined thesis and antithesis, which later becomes a thesis. The self is, for Kierkegaard, a harmonious continuous movement towards a balanced consciousness of self and God through faith. It is this very dynamic and non-static nature of the self that enables it to relate to itself, others and, above all, God.<sup>2</sup> To be spiritually healthy, therefore, is to be a consciously balanced self of paradoxes and a spirit resting transparently in God. Any other possibility, for the spirit that is the self, leads to despair which is a spiritual sickness unto death<sup>3</sup>:

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.<sup>4</sup>

Kierkegaard builds upon what has been previously said as the ground for *The Sickness unto Death*. In the first part of the book, he elaborates on the concept of despair, the types of despair and how it is experienced differently by different degrees of consciousness. In the second part, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of sin and how it is related to despair.<sup>5</sup> The idea of continuity of the self relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, however, remains in the background throughout the book as part of the solution to despair.<sup>6</sup> One wonders, here, what does, "the self is a relation which relates itself to its own self..." really mean and what does consciousness have to do with this?

When the self relates itself to itself, it does so as immediate consciousness. It is because of the nature of the self, as has been noted, the self can be immediately conscious of its own self. This, for Sunnie Kidd, is self disclosure of consciousness:

This is self-disclosure of consciousness. The noesis and the noema depend upon the assuring consciousness which discloses itself-to-itself. This allows for a continuity of immediate consciousness and what is already experienced. The noema is the experienced, the noesis is the capacity of experience and the integral consciousness in self-witnessing is the assuring knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

For Thévenaz, immediate consciousness is the assuring continuous becoming as the result of intuition. It is continuous due to the lack of temporal gaps interrupting its immediacy. Mediate consciousness, on the other hand, is the reassuring cognition revealed through time of what has already been assured. This is, unlike Husserlian phenomenology, where intuition is the primordial ground for intentionality and cognition. Inclusive within intuition are intentionality and cognition. Knowledge, as a result of immediate consciousness of the self, is the result of an intuitive act where consciousness coincides with its own self.<sup>8</sup> This is reflexive consciousness of the self. Reflective consciousness; however, is when, through time, one reassures through understanding what one already intuitively knows. Sunnie Kidd, therefore, defines consciousness as:

A centripetal centrifugal dynamism that renders an adequation of itself immediately without a loss of continuity.<sup>9</sup>

When one understands Kierkegaard, one knows that spirit (self) can not be understood apart from God. In fact, the self is spirit and the human being is spirit because of the spirit's nature, as previously mentioned, and in its active relation to God. Anti-Climacus is the ideal Christian, unlike the despairing Christians mentioned in the text, precisely because of his understanding and being conscious of his spiritual nature of the self. The human being is spirit, for Kierkegaard, because of the human awareness; relating; and, almost, yearning toward that which is metaphysical (God).

In addition to the aforementioned, for Kierkegaard, this spiritual self is also existential, especially, due to its capability to make a choice for itself. The self, therefore, despairs in various ways.

There is the self that falls into a deficient mode of consciousness, therefore, in despair is unconscious of its own despair. This is, somewhat, similar to Martin Heidegger's notion of inauthentic being, which is a deficient mode of being.<sup>10</sup> The self, here, is superficial and is, therefore, furthest from being aware of its true spiritual nature. It is living on the surface of life far from its own most possibilities. This despairing self is in critical condition since it's the furthest from realizing its own despair; let alone curing it. One, for example, is existentially like a feather in the wind of life, where one is taken wherever the wind goes without the slightest idea of what is taking place. One, here, is existentially futile.

Then, there is the self that is conscious of its despair, however, it does not will to be its own self. This self can despair over external and/or internal aspects. For instance, it can despair over an aspect of everyday life like failure, or it can have a deeper form of consciousness and despair over its spirit. Despairing over the external is associated with “immediacy” and what is finite. Despairing over the internal aspects of the self is a deeper despair because of the deeper degree of consciousness associated with it. No matter the degree or type of despair here, the self seems to go on avoiding to be itself. One, for example, would indulge in life and reassures oneself that there is nothing more to life to lessen the despair and avoid being oneself. This category is, almost, similar to Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of bad faith where, for example, the waiter tries to persuade others and, above all, himself that he is really a waiter; even though, he is aware of a higher possibility for himself.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, there is the despairing self that is willing to be itself but apart from God. This self despairs in defiance despite the fact that consciousness, here, is in a higher degree than any of the aforementioned. The deeper the consciousness, in fact, the more intense the despair is. One is defiant because one, almost, tries to take God’s role, where one wants to be completely in charge of one’s life. In trying to be the master, one rejects any kind of help or any non-self-established cure for life’s hurdles, especially, for one’s intense despair. This, even, includes God and faith as the solution to such despair. In turning away from God, in such a manner, one becomes demonic.

To conclude this paper is best to, perhaps, use part of Kierkegaard’s last paragraph:

“By relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which constituted it.” And this formula again, as has often been noted, is the definition of faith.<sup>12</sup>

Notes:

- 1) Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004, p. 41).
- 2) Kierkegaard writes from the point of view of Anti-Climacus who’s the religiously ideal Christian.
- 3) For Kierkegaard, anxiety “*angest*” is the result of human freedom of choice and the condition for the possibility of despair, which he discusses in *The Concept of*

*Anxiety*. Despair, on the other hand, is the result of the wrong use of that freedom to not be oneself and transparent in God.

- 4) Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 5) Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death; A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, trans., intro. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).
- 6) The other part of the solution to despair would be faith in God and God's plan for the self.
- 7) Sunnie & James Kidd, *The Structure and Function of Consciousness: Going-with-the-Flow*, *Inbetweenness: Movement and Vibration*, URL = <http://www.inbetweenness.com/Sunnie's%20Publications/THE%20STRUCTURE%20AND%20FUNCTION%20OF%20CONSCIOUSNESS%20GOING%20WITH%20THE%20FLOW.pdf>, p.1.
- 8) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, trans. James M. Edie, Charles Courtney and Paul Brockelman, ed., intro. James M. Edie, preface John Wild (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962).
- 9) Sunnie D. Kidd and James W. Kidd, *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities Using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990, p.92).
- 10) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- 11) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, ed., forward Wade Baskin (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1965, p. 168-169).
- 12) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death; A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, *op. cit.*, p. 216.