

Hints of Apuleius in *The Sickness Unto Death*

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Introduction

In this article, I will draw upon and elucidate the myth of Cupid and Psyche in order to show its importance as an overarching metaphor for *The Sickness Unto Death*. This particular myth plays a role in philosophy and literature rather like that of the *Songs of Songs* in theology: it is an allegory. As Solomon's song is considered an allegory of Christ's relationship to the church, so the myth of Psyche and Cupid represents Love and its relationship to the soul. That Kierkegaard was familiar with this myth before the publication of *The Sickness Unto Death* in 1849 can be inferred from his citing, in three different places in 1843, Cupid's injunction to Psyche about remaining silent: *Either/Or* (Part I), *Fear and Trembling*, and his journal (IV A 28, n.d. 1842-43).¹ However, the exclusive nature of this reference could imply, in its narrowness, that Kierkegaard was only familiar with this particular passage of the story. On the other hand, it could also mean that this particular passage was especially important to him *at that time* regarding salient themes in his life and work. I think this second possibility somewhat more likely as he states in a journal entry in 1852 (X⁴ A 462) that he was 'reading the story [of Amor and Psyche] in Apuleius *again* this very day'.² However, such an 'again' does seem rather timeless.

But, as I stated above, it is not a one-to-one correlation between the two works that I wish to establish; rather, I would like to explore the idea of the myth as the fertile soil from which the seeds of Kierkegaard's ideas of self and despair spring forth. That this is a plausible hypothesis can be supported by an almost – but not quite – contemporary journal entry (X2 A 614, n.d. 1850):³ 'Psyche would not be satisfied with faith; it was, to be sure, possible that the invisible being who visited her was a

monster – so she looked, and saw what she lost'. In other words, if she had only had faith, Psyche would have stayed with Regi –, I mean Cupid. Furthermore, as we all know, the opposite of faith is sin (see *Romans* 14:23), and sin is despair, and despair is the sickness unto death.⁴ Being unsatisfied with faith, Psyche embraced this sickness unto death – rather like Cleopatra her asp, and became the prototype of despair. But she also became the immortal soul. In the myth of her transformation lies, I think, the lyrical power of poetry that even Kierkegaard himself claims is missing from *The Sickness Unto Death* – due to the book's dialectical, all too dialectical, nature (VIII¹ A 651-2).⁵

This myth itself, from the second century A.D., is Roman and recorded only by Apuleius in his book *The Golden Ass*.⁶ It consists of four major sections which might be ironically entitled: (1) Psyche's Pre-Marital Despair, (2) Psyche's Marital Despair, (3) Psyche's Post-Marital Despair, and (4) Psyche's Entrance into Immortality. Because of the pagan nature of the myth, it should be readily apparent that this metaphor for despair pertains almost exclusively to the first part of *The Sickness Unto Death* wherein the sickness is described. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is a metaphor for diagnosis, not necessarily for cure. Nor is the myth to be considered a detailed reckoning or algebra (see VIII¹ A 652);⁷ rather, like all myths, it is evocative. Its aim is to educate, not the mind but rather the very thing whose creation it also seeks to explain: namely, the soul, which, as a term in the story's exegesis, should be considered the mythical analogue to Kierkegaard's self.

The Spirit and the Self

According to Kierkegaard: *The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating 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 terms. Looked at in this way a human being is not yet a self.*⁸

With those rather mesmerizing – if not mystifying – words, Kierkegaard begins Part One of *The Sickness Unto Death*. He continues by stating that in a relation between two things the relation is the third term in the form of a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation, and in the relation to that re-

lation; this is what it is from the point of view of soul for soul and body to be in relation. If, on the other hand, the relation relates to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.⁹

If the above paragraphs hold true, they quite deftly reveal the fundamental error of American semiotician C.S. Peirce's object-oriented phenomenology.¹⁰ In order to explain this Kierkegaard stronger conception of self, let me begin with a description of the Kierkegaard's weaker conception of self as it appears in *The Sickness Unto Death*, set forth, as it is, in almost Peircean semiotic fashion.¹¹ To wit, there are three distinct terms in relationship to one another. The primary dyadic relation is that of synthesis; namely, a synthesis between the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal, the free and the necessary. Such a synthesis is called a human being, the synthesis of possibility and necessity; however, it is not yet called a self (the third term). In virtue of its not yet being a self, neither can the human being be considered a spirit, for spirit is the self.

And why is it not yet a self? Because the relation, the synthesis, does not actually relate back upon itself or, and perhaps more importantly, there is nothing in the relation, the synthesis, which is relating to the synthesis itself. To speak metaphorically, and no doubt quite accurately, this synthesis is spatial, maybe even 'static'. This non-dynamic relation Kierkegaard dubs a 'third term in the form of a negative unity'. To illustrate his point, he presents the example of the soul's relation to the body, an example which readily lends itself to Peircean analysis. Inasmuch as the body might be considered an object (i.e., unaware of its participation in the relation), the soul could be considered the perceiver of the soul-body relation. When Kierkegaard says that the 'two relate to the relation' he simply means that the soul can be viewed as embodied and the body as ensouled. Moreover, that they can relate 'in relation to that relation' simply means that there is some sort of given soul-body relation. But it is negative, fundamentally unproductive; it is an aggregate of two units (body, soul) mediated conceptually, but not existentially, by the thought 'soul-body relation'. In some way, it is, in fact, an imperfect synthesis; nonetheless, in Peircean terms, this thought, this Third, this 'body-soul relation' can be used to confront and explain future objects and events. Thus, for Peirce, mediation can occur conceptually, even though it does not take place existentially. For this reason, Peircean Thirdness is Kierkegaard's 'negative third' term, and, as such, genuinely fails to broach the existential.

However, 'if, on the other hand, the relation relates to itself, then

this relation is the positive third, and this is the self? But what does it mean for a relation to relate to itself? Well, I think a rather earthly (and earthy) example would be that of a marriage. A marriage is neither the man nor the woman alone; it is made up of a husband and a wife. If one exists without the other, it is no longer a marriage. Yet, in this sense, a marriage is, in effect, a negative third, a static relation. It is merely 'two relate[d] to the relation'. The man relates to the woman qua wife through marriage and the woman relates to the man qua husband through marriage. They are related 'in the relation to that relation'. Marriage is the Peircean Thirdness that mediates the man and the woman. But, then, something amazing happens. Children! The relation has related to itself and produced a child. It is by virtue of their union, their relation, that the children have arrived. Now, the woman must relate to the man as both a husband and as the father of children, and the man to the woman as a wife and as the mother of children. The relation has changed. It is now one of a family. This is the positive Third for Kierkegaard. Or what, in other words, might be called a 'Peircean' Fourth'¹² the idea that certain Thirds have lives of their own beyond their inherent Thirdness or subsequent Firstness; they have, in and of themselves, existential ramifications.¹³

Another example of a positive Kierkegaardian Third, and perhaps the prototypical one, is that of the Trinity. According to the Scottish theologian George MacDonald, what fundamentally distinguishes Christ (God the Obedient or God the Son) from Jehovah (God the Commanding or God the Father) is merely the objects of their loves. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. The spirit which unites or mediates this complete reciprocal surrender of love(s) is the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ The nature of that relation or mediation is so complete, so active in its relation to itself, as to warrant a relation of mutual personhood among the three participants: Father, Son, and their Mediator. This relationship created a new and distinct entity: the Trinity – which, as a unity, is, in fact, a Fourth.¹⁵

As with the Trinity, so with the self. A human being (a Peircean Third or negative Kierkegaardian third) is a synthesis of conflicting traits, X's and Y's, which will not become a self (a 'Peircean' Fourth or positive Kierkegaardian third) despite embodiment or creation because the active element, spirit, is missing. That there may, in fact, be a difference between spirit and self at some level is, I think, reflected in the fact that Kierkegaard states that the self 'is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself? In other words, self is a

noun (relation) which verbs (relates) or is its verbing (relating). It is active. It is spirit – which is a verbal construct. Case in point, it is the Spirit of God (not God himself) which moves out upon the waters (*Genesis* 1:2) and the Spirit which, like the wind, moves where it wills (*John* 3:8). Spirit is internal movement that has external signs. This is precisely Christ's point, according to *John* 3:8, 'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.'

It is precisely at this juncture that Peirce's project fails. For Peirce, everything is a sign; thus, there always exists a static moment of comprehension in which the sign's mystery, its movement, its spirit, if you will, is apprehended (in both senses of the word), and consequently results in a moment when everything, being apprehended, is understood and thus rendered static. Moreover, because everything is a sign and, fundamentally, the sign of another sign, indeterminacy (or mystery) is a linear phenomenon moving parallel with time through time. Thus, it is, in a sense, a mere illusion of temporality. Because indeterminacy does not lie within time, existence then, for Peirce, has no depth. It cannot be transcended; nor is it transcendent. To quote Christ again, this time from the *Gospel of Matthew* (16:3), 'You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A Peirce, too, could (and did) develop a semiotic that explained how and why we interpret the signs for forecasting weather – a phenomenon which is really nothing more than a succession of signs through time; but he could not and would not interpret the signs of the times. For Kierkegaard, by contrast, the signs of his times, of his present age 'an age of despair'¹⁶ were of the utmost interest, and they were the phenomena that precipitated his writing *The Sickness Unto Death*.

To return to Kierkegaard's discussion of the self, he points out that such a relation, which relates to itself, a self, must either have established itself or been established by something else.¹⁷ To begin with a contrast, in the case of the Trinity, I think it safe to observe that this is probably the unique example of a 'self-established self' if, in fact, any of these words can realistically be applied to the Trinity in a theo/logical sense. But the example of marriage illustrates a synthesizing relation that has to be established by something else, something from outside the relation. Otherwise it is not a mediating relation, a valid marriage, a positive third.

In many religious traditions, a marriage is validated by the mediating activity of God. God, and perhaps the State, establishes the couple as

husband and wife, as something different from that day forward than what they were even a few moments before the ceremony. That some sort of 'objective' mediating other is necessary to establish a relation of positive thirds can be seen in the American slave tradition of 'jumping the broom' to solemnize a marriage – which nonetheless required the impersonal mediating and establishing activity of the broom!

*If the relation which relates to itself has been established by something else, then of course the relation is the third term, but then this relation, the third term, is a relation which relates in turn to that which has established the whole relation.*¹⁸ Given that 'the relation which relates to itself' is, in fact, a self, we see that if *the [self] has been established by something else, then of course the [self] is the third term, but then this [self], the third term, is a [self] which relates in turn to that which has established the whole [self]*. By this, I take Kierkegaard to mean that if the self has been established or created by an other, then this self is a positive third which not only relates to itself but also relates to that which created it not merely as an active relation but which also established the various parts of it which were brought together and mediated by the self (*the whole relation*). If this is the case, then the only possibility for the 'something else' is God. To return to the example of marriage, we can say God mediates a marriage in a much profounder manner than we can say that the State does, for God can also be said to have established (created) the various parts of the marriage relation that are being mediated, namely the husband and the wife qua human beings. The state can make no such claims, at least not in the strong sense. If these 'arguments' hold for marriage, then they hold qua analogies for the self.

Obviously, such 'arguments' as these have little discursive value. Analogy is the weakest form of argument, and this weakness often denotes a text whose purpose is other than a scholarly one. Its main purpose is, perhaps, to be somewhat edifying, and in the realm of the edifying and existential, both analogy and allegory have great strength. To that end, inasmuch as myths are allegories, I would like to take up the story of Cupid and Psyche, Love and the Soul, as illustrative of *The Sickness Unto Death*.

The Myth Of Love and the Soul

Such a derived, established relation is the human self, a relation which relates to it-self, and in relating to itself relates to something else. That is why there

*can be two forms of authentic despair. If the human self were self-established, there would only be a question of one form: not wanting to be itself, wanting to be rid of itself.*¹⁹

In the first section, Psyche, the most beautiful of mortals, has incurred the wrath of Venus who has become jealous of the young girl. Apparently, Psyche's many suitors – in their devotion to a mere mortal – have neglected the goddess and her temples. In revenge, Venus calls upon her son, Cupid, to pierce Psyche with one of his arrows and cause the girl to fall in love with a most vile and unworthy suitor. A well-thought punishment as far as irony is concerned since Psyche's beauty, while it caused many to admire and even worship her, caused no man to love her.

So Cupid descends to perform his mother's errand, and – just as if one of his own arrows had struck his heart – he falls hopelessly in love with Psyche. This event coincides with Psyche's father – desperate to marry the girl off – seeking the advice of an oracle of the god Apollo which tells him that Psyche, dressed in deepest mourning, must be placed on a mountaintop and there receive her husband, a winged-serpent. Upon hearing this, Psyche resigns herself to her fate and is gladdened that her end has come. But the oracle, of course, is Apollo speaking upon behalf of the lovestruck Cupid. In fear and trembling over their daughter's fate, Psyche's parents send her, per the oracle's instructions, to the mountaintop where she is carried away, not by a winged-serpent, but by the gentle breeze Zephyr, who places her to sleep in a pleasant meadow.

Thus ends Psyche's single life. Yet in her single life we see the despair of not wanting to be herself; of her wanting, in fact, to be rid of herself. She welcomes the death that Apollo has (apparently) predicted for her. She is sick of being Psyche the beautiful, Psyche the unloved. She is, fundamentally, sick of herself. But she is not really Psyche the unloved. Cupid does love her. But regardless of that love's existence, Psyche despairs. Because, at this juncture, the existence of divine love has no bearing on the beloved's state of despair, it matters not whether or not there is, in fact, a god, or – in other words – whether the self is posited by a third or by itself. For this reason, we see that this despair would have existed even if Psyche had no Olympian lover or (in Kierkegaardian terms) had her self, her soul, been established by herself (itself) and no other.

There could be no question of wanting in despair to be oneself. For this latter formula is the expression of the relation's (the self's) total dependence, the expression of the fact that the self cannot by itself arrive at or remain in equilibrium and

*rest, but only, in relating to itself, by relating to that which has established the whole relation. Indeed, so far from its being simply the case that this second form of despair (wanting in despair to be oneself) amounts to a special form on its own, all despair can in the end be resolved into or reduced to it.*²⁰

Upon awakening, she finds herself in a beautiful palace in which she is taken care of by magical 'voices', much like Beauty in the fairytale 'Beauty and the Beast'. And, at night, she meets her lover. But they can meet only at night. She must not see him. And, at first, she is content with this. She knows he is no monster. However, during the day, she begins to miss human companionship, and she asks her husband if her sisters might visit her. He discourages her, tells her that she is seeking her own destruction. Heedless, she persists. Finally, her husband relents, cautioning her that she should not be persuaded of trying to see him, otherwise she would lose him forever. The sisters visit and become convinced, because of Psyche's evasive replies, that she has never seen her husband. Upon their departure, Psyche plies them with gold and jewels, and thus they leave envious, plotting her downfall.

That night her husband warns Psyche that it is unwise to see her sisters, but she replies that since she cannot see him, can she not then be permitted to see others? He again yields, repeating his warning that she is promoting her own destruction. Despite this, the sisters return saying that they have proof that the oracle of Apollo is correct and that Psyche's husband is a fearful winged-serpent. They badger her endlessly about this, until, finally, Psyche comes to the conclusion that 'once and for all' she must know.

So, knife in one hand, lamp in the other, Psyche approaches the bed upon which her husband is sleeping. Raising the lamp, she is so struck by his beauty and so overcome by her own faithlessness that she drops the knife. Falling to her knees in awe, she spills a drop of hot oil on her husband's shoulder. He awakens and wordlessly flees out into the night. Desperate, Psyche follows him into the darkness; only his voice remains: 'I am the God of Love, and Love cannot live where there is no trust!'²¹

To recapitulate the above section of the myth in more Kierkegaardian terms, we could say that it is Cupid who has established the relation and upon whom Psyche is in total dependence. Technically, he is both a factor of the synthesis and the establisher of the synthetic relation itself and, thus, occupies a position more respective of a Peircean Third. Be that as it may, Psyche is married to...? Whom? What? For Psyche, there is, in effect, no other known factor to the synthesis. She is the wife of an

unknown quantity. In other words, in seeking to know the true aspect, the true identity, of her unseen husband, she has succumbed to the second form of despair: wanting in despair to be oneself which, for Psyche, lies in wanting to be a wife where wife, of course, is defined as one's being related to a husband. To phrase it in mathematical terms, if $Y = f(X)$ and $X = 0$, then it is quite possible that $Y = 0$, too. And it is this, herself in someone else, that Psyche seeks to find with knife and lamp in hand. Of course, she fails.

It will, of course, be noted that Psyche has, ostensibly, done the right thing by turning toward Cupid in her despair. He is, after all, the one who has established the whole relation. But it should be noted that there are two arguments against the rectitude of this position. The first being that Psyche does not know that it is Cupid Himself who is her husband; the second being that she has turned to Cupid qua husband, i.e., the other factor in the synthesis and not to Cupid qua god, the establisher of their union.

*If a person in despair is, as he thinks, aware of his despair and doesn't refer to it mindlessly as something that happens to him (...), and wants now on his own, all on his own, and with all his might to remove the despair, then he is still in despair and through all his seeming effort only works himself all the more deeply into a deeper despair. The imbalance in despair is not a simple imbalance but an imbalance in a relation that relates to itself and which is established by something else. So the lack of balance in that 'for-itself' relationship also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power which established it.*²²

At this point, Psyche' rather like the prodigal son' decides that she will seek to regain her husband, for despite the fact that he might no longer love her, it would be worth the rest of her life to show him that she did, in fact, love him and that she still does. Although she has no idea where to find him or how to reach him, she decides to go straight to Venus – a very good idea, because wounded Cupid, upon exiting the marital bedchamber, made straight for his mother. Already apprised of the situation, Venus laughs scornfully at the girl and sets her a series of impossible, almost Herculean, tasks in a feigned effort at 'aiding' Psyche in re-gaining her husband. The first is to sort by species a large pile of seeds before nightfall. Psyche, of course, is helped by animals – in this case, the ants. The second task is to gather wool from the fierce golden sheep that graze among the razor sharp reeds lining the riverbank. In this case, a reed tells her to wait until the sheep have left the river to rest and gather the wool off the reeds. Of course, she does as instructed. The

third task was to draw a flask of water from the black waterfall that fed the River Styx. Unable to climb the slimy rocks, she is helped by an eagle. You would think, at this point, that both Venus and Psyche would have caught on that this was an endless cycle, but no. Instead, Venus sends Psyche with a box to be filled by Proserpine (Persephone), the Queen of Hades, with her netherworldly beauty, since Venus has become haggard nursing Cupid. And so, Psyche sets off – and meets with no real obstacles. Except, that is, herself. Her curiosity and her vanity. Looking into the box, she sees nothing; instead, she falls into a deep and deathly sleep. Enter the God of Love.

Here we see that Psyche has sought to remove her despair by her own efforts. Just as she defied Cupid's warnings and eventually achieved her own unhappiness, she likewise defies the removal of his love, and seeks if not to reclaim him, at least to show him how much *she* loved *him*. (Would that she had loved him enough *before* his departure to have been obedient to him. All sin is defiance. All defiance leads to despair. But that is another story.) What she is truly seeking, then, is *vindication* of her despair. There are seeds of demonic rage in Psyche's duels of activity with Venus. Without the subsequent intervention of the God of Love, it is quite possible that Psyche's despair in willing herself to be 'her self' might have led her to believe that self to be not Cupid's wife but Venus's nemesis (which, in fact, Cupid *and* Psyche *united* are).

*This then is the formula which describes the state of the self when despair is completely eradicated: in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.*²³

By this time, Cupid is healed of his wound and looking for Psyche. Venus tried locking him in his rooms, but he flew out the window, and there below him, just near the palace, is Psyche. He wipes the sleep from her eyes, pricks her with the tip of one of his arrows, scolds her for her curiosity, and tells her to carry the box into his mother, for all would be well, and all would be well, and all manner of things be well.

Cupid, meanwhile, flies off to Olympus and gets Jupiter to consent to his marriage with Psyche. So, Psyche is formally married to Cupid; as a wedding present, she is made immortal by the drinking of the divine ambrosia, and they all live happily ever after, etc., etc., *et cetera*.

In this strange interplay of chance and faith, grace and sin, the God of Love has found the Soul. Was it mere chance that Cupid saw Psyche? Or did it reflect the faith represented by all her trials for Venus? Or was it a matter of the grace of Cupid's enduring love? Or was it the blanket-

ing effect of Psyche's sins – disobedience, curiosity, vanity – that gave her immortality? It is a murky interplay. Had Psyche been awake when Cupid found her, might she have rejected his advances in a demonic rage? Then thank goodness that she peered into Persephone's box. But what if she had fallen into that deadly sleep somewhere where Cupid could not see her? Then what would have happened? And what, for goodness sake, suddenly gave Cupid the courage to go public with his love? What if Venus had not tried to send Psyche to hell by asking her to fill the box in the first place? What then?

Faith is: *that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God.*²⁴ What we do know is that Psyche in her deadly sleep was, in effect, dead in her sins. Had she not been defiant, she would not have been working for Venus. Had she not been curious, she would have neither sought to see her husband nor would she have opened Persephone's box. Moreover, we know she was vain, for she wanted Persephone's beauty. Furthermore, she had hubris enough to consider herself capable of being loved by a god and earning that god's affections. Dead in her sins, she lay in vulnerable sleep – that most transparent of human states, in which a person can lie neither to himself nor to another.

And there the God of Love found her. And knowing all this about her, he still chose to awaken her and take her as his bride. Furthermore, he bestowed upon her the gift of immortality. But this should not come as a surprise. For Psyche has, in her relation to Cupid, simply become what she truly is and, thus, what she had truly been all along: immortal. For she could not have been in despair in the first place had she not already been, in some sense, eternal or immortal. Otherwise her despair would have consumed her.

A Concluding Synthesis

It was noted above that Psyche's despair did not kill her. Rather, like Moses' burning bush, despair raged but did not consume. Kierkegaard points out that it is this very aspect of the sickness of despair that led Socrates to posit the immortality of the soul.²⁵ Unlike a disease of the body in which the body is consumed – a consumption of like by like, in a sense – there is something different about some element of the soul which prevents its consumption, and hence removes the possibility of relief from the disease even through death. But, perhaps, I should say the

self and not the soul? For the self is defined as ‘the whole relation’, not merely the negative third between body and soul (Kierkegaard’s term) and the synthesis between infinite and finite, temporal and eternal, freedom and necessity; but also the relation that relates to itself or *that in the relation which is its relating to itself*.

If the self qua noun could be considered as having a verbal aspect, i.e., its *relating*, could it be that the inability of despair to consume its victim is related to the active principle of the self: its *relating*? As such, the self pre-exists the experience of despair for which existence despair is the negative proof. Kierkegaard himself states as much: *Where, then, does this despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates itself to itself.*²⁶ But he then goes on to add that despair results from the fact that *God, who constituted man a relation, releases it [the relation] from his hand, as it were.*²⁷ In other words, by releasing the relation, the synthesis, from his hand, God has removed that which the relation related to qua sustenance. And, inasmuch as spirit can be considered the active principle of this self, spirit is left with nothing to relate to and is, in effect, alienated and displaced. What it needs to relate to is no longer present. Deep calls unto deep, but no one is listening.

In the myth of Psyche, this can be represented by something I failed to recount in the story: namely, that Psyche herself never fell in love. Fundamentally, what she was looking for was not to be found among mortals. Nor, obviously, was what she was as a creature to be appreciated among mortals. Only a god known for his beauty could appreciate her beauty. Thus, she could only be satisfied by the love of a god who was, in a sense, one of her kind. She, of course, could not know that this was the longing of her heart. No one could. Just as she could not know what she had in Love until she chased him away through her faithlessness, so it is that in a similar fashion spirit longs for spirit, preferably *the Spirit*. And it is this spiritual *sehnsucht* which is the root of all despair.

Longing, like despair is an interesting thing. It can be articulated, but it cannot be communicated. Moreover, while it cannot be communicated, it can be understood. For example, if I say that I long for cranberry sauce, I have articulated my longing, but I have not communicated it. However, should someone have actually understood my longing that would be because they do, in fact, somehow *share* my longing, and not because I have somehow communicated that longing to them. In this sense, a longing is rather like a joke (or a physiological need like thirst). One either gets it or one does not. So it is also with the self.

To explain myself (pun intended), I must here go back to the semiotic interpretation of the self as a Fourthness, a positive third, or what can essentially be viewed as a social relation within itself, a fundamental intrasubjectivity where the two subjects are God and the self (and where despair can consequently be viewed as the self talking merely to itself). And to clarify myself, I must return once again to the metaphor of marriage and that annoying tendency of long-married couples to engage in ‘couplespeak’. My brother and his wife do this all the time.

Cheryl: ‘Did you –?’
Matt: ‘Yes.’
Cheryl: ‘But –?’
Matt: ‘I know.’
Cheryl: ‘Saturday?’
Matt: ‘Nope.’
Cheryl: ‘Okay.’

The only thing I knew was that this conversation had something to do with their cat.

For me, the above ‘conversation’ – despite all its communicative glances – told me nothing, because I was not inside the marriage, the context, the mediating medium. For this reason, I ‘just didn’t get it’. But in pseudo-Peircean terms, this is a set of signs *that is fundamentally meaningless without Matt, Cheryl, and their marriage*. For this reason it requires Fourthness, the positive Kierkegaardian third. The self is a similar relation inasmuch as it relates concomitantly to itself and God via spirit. Consequently, the self suffers from the same problem that I had with Cheryl and Matt: it is unintelligible, fundamentally, to the outsider. Observable, but incomprehensible, for while I know that Matt and Cheryl are married, are a pair, what this *means* I could not even presume to explain. I can, however, observe that it is something so unique as to occasionally render their speech entirely exclusive, completely (inter)personal, prototypically intrasubjective. Likewise, with the self, any self. To paraphrase Kierkegaard: that a *self* is something different from what it immediately is *underlies the mystification of the [self], for the [self] is only for the one who know that it is a [self] and in the strictest sense only for the one who knows what it means;*²⁸ for everyone else the self is, in fact, a sign like any other sign and is thus no more and no less than that which it immediately is, appears, and seems: namely, just another human being, another simple synthesis.²⁹

As I draw to a conclusion, it should not be surprising that I should, as in the above paraphrased quote, return to Kierkegaard's incipient semiotics as found in *Practice in Christianity*, for Kierkegaard's self is, above all, a communicating and communal self. It is a community, not an aggregate. The sum of the 'parts' creates a new 'whole', a Fourth. But, like any community, its nature can only be known through participation in, and by identification with, that community. In other words, it cannot be known *immediately*. It cannot be instantaneously transformed into a First. It must be savored.

Appendix: A little refresher course on Peirce's phenomenological semiotics

For Peirce, the categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness reflect his semiotic elements (Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds) and consequently form the basis of his phenomenological 'system'.³⁰ As you know, in its phenomenological guise, Firstness is the category of *qualia*. Where such *qualia* or qualities are the 'mere may-be's'³¹ of objects or phenomena or, more fundamentally, of Firsts themselves. In other words, a red ball consists of an object (a First, the ball) which has the *qualia* or Firstness of redness. Such redness or Firstness is dependent on the object and would not exist without the occurrence of an object or First such as the ball which allows for expression of the quality 'red'.

Secondness, the middle category, is the category of struggle and, thus, of interaction with an other, an object. Secondness is therefore also the category of experienced alterity and, as such, establishes a relation between the perceiver (for lack of a better term) and the object. In semiotic terms, such a relation results in a representamen of the object or Second where the representamen (i.e., mental percept of the object) exists in the mind of the perceiver. However, because a perceiver usually approaches an object with some expectation, some prejudice or theory in mind, another role of the object in the relation of Secondness is that of contradicting the perceiver's pre-established notions such that the representamen is often, in fact, '~X?' instead of 'X!'. This being the case, the nature of Secondness as struggle is revealed, and this struggle is mediated by means of the category of Thirdness.

Thirdness, for Peirce, is the category of thought, of law, and of

learning. A Third in semiotic terms is an interpretant (or mental construct) which, when perceived in the mind of an other (again, a Third), explains (i.e., it interprets) the relation between the First and the Second. Thus, Thirdness, as mediating thought, serves the phenomenological function of relating Firstnesses and Secondnesses together in such a way that Thirdnesses can be used as diagnostic tools in future encounters with other Others, for Thirdness is 'that which is what it is by virtue of imparting a quality to reactions in the future'.³² In other words, Thirdness establishes those prejudices, those theories or Firsts, by which we will meet future objects, perceive or mis-perceive them as the case may be, and enter into the conflict of Secondness with the object, and once again require the services of Thirdness. It is a never-ending cycle (circle) of phenomenology.

The most interesting aspect of this cycle of phenomenology is the manner in which it serves to establish the self. According to Peirce, the self is established by negation. In speaking about self-consciousness, Peirce writes that a 'child hears it said that the stove is hot. But it is not, he says (...). But he touches it, and finds the [others'] testimony confirmed in a striking³³ way. Thus, he becomes aware of ignorance, and it is necessary to suppose a *self* in which this ignorance can inhere (...). In short, *error* appears, and it can be explained only by supposing a *self* which is fallible. Ignorance and error are all that distinguish our private selves (...)'.³⁴ We can only (come to) know ourselves by knowing, encountering, our errors and ignorance. In fact, '*cognizability* (in its widest sense) and *being* are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms'.³⁵ In other words, to know is to be; more precisely, to know that you are wrong is to know that you are, and therefore, you *are*. A somewhat inverted Descartes: *Erro ergo sum*. Nevertheless, self-consciousness and the self remain rather dubious. A self is merely supposed. It is the necessary device for explaining the existence of error. Therefore, I suspect that for Peirce qua logician, qua phenomenologist, the self is itself of little fundamental philosophic interest.

This *lacuna* in Peirce's philosophy should, however, be of great interest to those whose work it is to explain Peirce's philosophy, especially his later writings on ethics. For how does one establish an ethics within a philosophy that has no positive construction of that very self which is engaging in said ethical action? That particular discussion, while reserved for another time and another place, usually gives rise to three responses among students of Peirce. The first is to attempt some sort of semiotic

construction of the self. This is all very well and good, but with one small drawback: such a semiotic definition of the self continues on *ad infinitum*. Every Third becomes a First which then encounters a Second and is subsequently mediated by a Third which in its turn becomes a First which then encounters ... *ad nauseum*. A clever argument, but not existentially satisfying. A second option is to follow in Peirce's own Buddhist–Swedenborgian footsteps and view individual humans as venues by which the cosmos comes to know and (in a sense) love itself. This idea is an extension of Peirce's concept of 'evolutionary love'³⁶ (agapasticism) with its pro-creative blend of synechism (continuity) and tychism (chance), a moderated Darwinism in which all things do, in fact, 'work together for good'³⁷ within evolutionary time. Such a view, however, only solves the problem of the self by eliminating the self qua individual. This, of course, is no answer at all, and even less existentially satisfying than the first – unless one really does consider oneself as a mere instantiation of the cosmos and nothing more.

A third option, and perhaps the one most often taken, is to find respite in another author or philosopher. Strangely enough (then again perhaps not) the thinker of choice is quite often Kierkegaard – a man who talks incessantly about the self. Given Kierkegaard's very loquacity on the subject one might perhaps be led to think that Kierkegaard and Peirce fit together like some kind of lock-and-key mechanism in which opposites attract and complement one another. Or, even, that Kierkegaard's view of the self builds upon elements actually found in Peirce and expands upon them. Or, that Kierkegaard's discourse on the self fills Peirce's existential silence. Unfortunately, despite tacit presentation as such, that is not the actual state of affairs.

Peirce holds to the notion that one can only know the self through negation such that there is no positive knowledge of the self via identity. As such 'individual man, since his separate existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation. This is man, 'proud man, / Most ignorant of what he's most assured, / His glassy essence''.³⁸ In other words, individual man is only a negation inasmuch as such reflects him qua error. But this is only inasmuch as he is '*anything apart from his fellows*'. The tacit assumption here is that an individual man is not merely nothing apart from his fellows, but, given that his individuality is based on negation, that an individual man is also *nothing with his fellows*? He is no longer an individual; he has lost his individuality in

agreement with, and in absence of difference and negation from, his fellows. Or, to approach it from another angle, given evolutionary love, which is leading the entire cosmos to 'goodness', the individual who agrees with his fellows in effect agrees with the cosmos and is consequently subsumed by the cosmos. Such an 'individual' is, effectively, a mere instantiation of the cosmos. He is no longer an individual in the strong sense of the word. Again, the individual, the self, has been negated. The self is merely the result of knowledge, of wisdom, and – especially in Peirce's case – 'the scientific method'³⁹, whereby the community of scientific inquirers engages in determining Thirds – including that Third known as the self – such that not even the self can escape the never-ending cycle (circle) of phenomenology which was mentioned above.

Such a never-ending cycle of phenomenology would be incredibly painful if it were a matter of the positive establishing of a self.⁴⁰ However, we know from Peirce that the result of this process is not the creation but the diminution of the self into nothingness. But there is a noteworthy peculiarity in Peirce's concept of Thirdness, and therefore of a Third, in that – as previously stated – a 'Third in semiotic terms is an interpretant which, when perceived in the *mind of an other* (again, a Third), explains the relation between the First and the Second'. 'The mind of an other' nowhere does Peirce take into consideration this other qua Other. While he speaks of the necessity of a group of scientists (i.e., the scientific community) for discovering the truth, it is for the sake of the truth – not the members of the group – that such community is necessary. In other words, Peirce, with his preoccupation that everything is some instantiation of mind, never really observes that those minds are, in fact, embodied and, thus, that all acquisition of knowledge has a social dimension. Subsequently, he does not perceive that a Third and even Thirdness itself has a social aspect, despite the fact, as previously mentioned, that a Third or Thirdness as mediating thought serves the phenomenological function of relating Firstnesses and Secondnesses together in such a way that Thirdnesses can be used as diagnostic tools in future encounters with other Others. Thirdness is 'that which is what it is by virtue of imparting a quality to reactions in the future'.⁴¹ Peirce speaks as if it is only thoughts which encounter other thoughts.

I would like to point out that the above reveals an aspect of Thirdness that distinguishes it drastically from either Firstness or Secondness. Specifically, the fact that Thirdness moves in two different directions. Firstness, for example, exists in the object and moves toward the perceiver

who perceives it qua representamen. Secondness exists in the mind of the perceiver toward the object where the object counters it, resulting in the affirmation or negation of the perceiver's current representamen. Note that the representamen can be either affirmed or negated, resulting in an interpretant. Yet Peirce's fundamental assumption is that it will be negated. Thus, Secondness is not simply a matter of alterity for Peirce, but of the brutality to be found in the struggle of and with alterity. The other oddity is that Peirce requires an other to affirm the interpretant. He draws upon sociality, yet does not directly articulate it or explicitly integrate it into his project, given that an interpretant is quite literally how an object is communicated from one mind to another. In this way, the second mind affirms or negates the object-experience of the first mind. For Peirce, the more minds, the merrier, and, hence, the more accurate, *ergo* the need for the community of scientists. In other words, Peirce's semiotics and phenomenology depend upon intersubjectivity, and yet the most he will do is articulate an interobjectivity. But that intersubjectivity which is nonetheless present, unarticulated, in the Peircean canon may be called Fourthness.

But what happens (within the Peircean cosmos) when it is the individual who is the object of this community of scientists? Is a stone altered or affected if it is mistaken for cubic zirconium, even though it is, in all actuality, a diamond? No, it is merely an object beset by erring subjects. (Besides, for Peirce, evolutionary love, by means of the community of scientists, will eventually amend this discrepancy.) But a person, a true subject, who – although a mere instance of the cosmos – attempt to understand itself' may, indeed, *suffer* under such error. He may, in fact, be torn apart by mis-identification, only to be joyfully restored to wholeness by correct identification, a wholeness which is subsequently shattered by an error which is healed by correct recognition which is then ... *et cetera*. This is also an unending cycle. When one's quest for identity, for selfhood, for individuality, is dependent on fickle alterity, the result is an almost infinite flux between not wanting to be whatever it is that is oneself and wanting to be whatever it is that you have been told is yourself. In other words, it is despair. Enter Kierkegaard, *sotto voce*, stage right.

Notes

1. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978), hereafter cited as JP by entry number, 3978.
2. JP 4381; emphasis mine.
3. JP 3709.
4. See, for example, Anti-Climacus (Søren Kierkegaard), *The Sickness Unto Death*, as trans. by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1989) and hereafter cited as SUD by page number, which will be the translation of preference for this paper, pp. 114-115.
5. JP 6136-7.
6. Although this story is found in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass*, the version here used is taken from Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*.
7. JP 6137.
8. SUD 43. Quotes from Kierkegaard's text will be interspersed with the author's text. The quotes from the *Sickness Unto Death*, however, will be in italics.
9. SUD 43.
10. See Appendix.
11. That Kierkegaard no doubt had some rudimentary conception of semiotics can be seen in the section 'The God-Man is a Sign' as found in *Practice in Christianity*. Moreover, the similarities between Kierkegaard and Peirce in this regard are no doubt due to their mutual indebtedness to G.W.F. Hegel.
12. Fourth and Fourthness are not terms actually coined by C.S. Peirce but are rather used to indicate a certain extension of his categorical thinking. Please consult the Appendix for a fuller explanation.
13. Obviously, as humans beings, both the husband and wife are themselves 'selves'. Here the notion of their relation is being used in a metonymic and metaphoric fashion. They are, so to speak, elements of an analogy.
14. For a fuller explanation of this, see George MacDonald's *Creation in Christ*, ed. by Roland Hein (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishing, 1976).
15. And perhaps it is for this very reason that Kierkegaard has posited *positive* and *negative* thirds in lieu of Thirds and Fourths, for, otherwise, the Trinity itself would take on a strong/er personhood. Then again, maybe he simply deems them positive and negative thirds in view of the spirit's activity as both cause and effect, as both means and medium?
16. JP 737.
17. SUD 43.
18. SUD 43.
19. SUD 43.
20. SUD 43-44.
21. This is an addition to the story as found in Hamilton but does not seem to be in the original Apuleius.
22. SUD 44.
23. SUD 44.
24. SUD 114.
25. SUD 50-51.
26. *Kierkegaard's Writings*, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987-1995), hereafter cited KW by volume and page number, XIX 16; see also SUD 46.
27. KW XIX 16; see also SUD 46.

28. KW XX 124. N.B. 'Here the word 'self' has been substituted for Kierkegaard's original word 'sign'.
29. That this same problem of immediacy of knowledge concerning one's own self as well as other selves is, in fact, not simply a human problem is reflected in the offense of understanding the God-man, as found in *Practice in Christianity*, KW XX 123-143.
30. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Vols. I-VIII*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), hereafter cited as CP by volume and paragraph number, 1.23-26.
31. CP 1.304.
32. CP 1.343.
33. Kierkegaard himself uses a term very similar to the English word 'striking' (i.e., *paafaldende*) to explain the particular and exclusive nature of a sign in his later work *Practice in Christianity* which, just like *The Sickness Unto Death*, is also pseudonymously authored by Anti-Climacus.
34. Charles Peirce, *Peirce on Signs*, ed. by James Hoopes (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), hereafter cited as PS by page number, 44-45.
35. PS 50.
36. See the essay of the same title in CP 6.287-317.
37. A reference to the admonition of the Apostle Paul as found in *Romans* 8:28.
38. CP 5.317; the final quote is from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.
39. See CP 5.358-387.
40. Yet as Kierkegaard observes that although they 'say that experience makes a man wise. This is very unreasonable talk. If there were nothing higher than experience, experience would drive a man crazy,' JP 1070. In other words, it is not identity, but insanity, that results from direct, unmediated encounters with brute reality and experience. See also IV A 46, *n.d.* 1843.
41. CP 1.343.