"A Sad Demoralization" Aspects of Kierkegaard's Diagnosis of his Time

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In the following I will describe some aspects of Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the modern. As it will appear, Kierkegaard is both a thinker of modernity and a critic of modernity, which presumably can be said to be fairly typical of thinking about modernity from Hegel up to those philosophers who have, somewhat misleadingly, been described as postmodern. These aspects of Kierkegaard's authorship I will put in relation to what is and will always be the pivot of his thinking, namely the religious.

It is of no importance whether the themes, motifs and figures of thought which Kierkegaard makes use of when he deals with the modern are formulated in Kierkegaard's own name or whether he attributes them to one of his many pseudonyms. The following does not have so much to do with finding out what Kierkegaard really thinks about the modern, or what his attitude is to the phenomenon, as it does with uncovering the *consciousness of problems* concerning modernity which is at work in Kierkegaard's thinking.

The History of the Idea of Representation

It is Kierkegaard's view that the superior world of symbols, the fundamental semantic – "World-consciousness", as he himself writes – has gone through two radical changes, two paradigm shifts, since the time of antiquity. This one can read about in several places, for instance in *Either-Or*, where Kierkegaard lets A sketch the difference between Greek antiquity's and Christianity's idea of God in relation to an ac-

count of the development of eroticism and sensuality in the afore-mentioned "world-consciousness" (Søren Kierkegaard *Samlede Værker* [The Collected Works of Søren Kierkegaard], A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg, and H.O. Lange eds., 3d ed. P.P. Rohde ed., 20 vols., Copenhagen 1962-64, vol. 2, pp. 61 ff., translator's translation, hereafter *SV3* 2, 61 ff.).

Greek antiquity is characterised by the fact that all the strength and all the power which individuals possess are thought to come from a God who himself is powerless and impotent, precisely because this God empties himself into the individual.

In contrast to this stands *the idea of representation*. According to this the force is collected and concentrates everything in one single point, namely God. Any individual is able to contemplate the power and the force when God reveals them but he himself does not have it. The individual human is, in him or her self, powerless and impotent.

The interesting thing is that the last mentioned conception, the idea of representation, only comes into the world, according to A, with Christianity and the thought of incarnation, and that it had its hey-day in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages are simply the idea of representation realised.

The idea of representation comprises a specific idea of God, and a special social order and the individual self-knowledge attached to this. This notion of God, social structure and perception of the individual belong together in a complex. As Kierkegaard describes it in his papers: "Once upon a time to be a man meant something like this: the generation made every effort to raise up and support a few eminent individuals. In these the rest of the people envisioned themselves. By way of these eminent individuals (to whom they were all related) the concept of the infinite elevation of what it meant to be man was maintained – that it really meant to be in kinship with God." (Hong & Hong, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, 4227; hereafter *JP*).

In antiquity there was not really any principle that produced social cohesion. The community was not an organism. Citizens in the community were free men or slaves, but these two groups were not integrated into an harmonic whole. The situation was completely different in the Middle Ages, the epoch of representation, where each human being mirrored himself in the other and higher-ranking human being, the superior, the authority figure, the privileged, who, from his quarter, has a responsibility for the less fortunate. The mirroring depends on a certain likeness across and in spite of the difference between the implicated

parties, a rudimentary recognition and possibility of identification, a basal kinship, which did not exist in antiquity. The idea of representation does, however, subsequently lose its power of organisation, namely with the rise of the modern, which, therefore, in many ways resembles antiquity: "Antiquity is dialectical in the direction of brilliance (the great individual – and the masses, one free – and the rest slaves): Christianity is *so far* dialectical in the direction of representation (the majority views themselves in the representative, are freed in the consciousness of the fact that it is them he represents, in a kind of self-knowledge); the present time is dialectical in the direction of equality and its mistaken and most consistent accomplishment is leveling, which is the negative unity of the individual's negative reciprocity" (*SV3* 14, 78 – my italics).

The antagonistic relations that pertained in antiquity between the two groups – the free men and the slaves – have with the modern become generalised such that they are valid for all interpersonal relations. The modern is the war of all against all. The leveling out of any difference between people means a setting free of envy and rivalry and thereby the old organic order is superseded. The political system which is the result of the idea of representation, namely the monarchy, which according to Kierkegaard is the Christian method of governing and form of state *par excellence*, is heading for disaster as the thought of equality is introduced.

It is this process of disintegration, which is not just about the political and social order but also about mentality, to which Kierkegaard aims to find a religious countermove. In a note marked "NB" and dated May 14, 1847 Kierkegaard prophesies the following, which quite clearly and unambiguously illustrates the connection he sees between the contemporary social "bread-riots" and his own project, namely that of emphasising the individual as the *topos* of the religious: "The world situation will change also in this respect, that every future effort at reformation, if the person involved is a true reformer, will be directed against "the crowd," not against the government. Government (royal power) is really representation and to that extent Christian (monarchy). The dialectic of monarchy is in the world-historical sense both practiced and established. Now we are in the process of beginning somewhere else, that is, with the intensive internal growth of the state. Then comes the category "the single individual"; this category is so linked to my name that I would like "that single individual" to be placed on my grave.

With this in mind, I must attach great significance to the bread riots around Europe this year; they indicate that the European constitu-

tion (as a physician speaks of a man's constitution) has completely altered; in the future we will have internal disturbances, *secessio in montem sacrum* etc.

It all fits my theory perfectly, and I dare say it will come to be seen how *exactly* I have understood the age..." (*JP* 4, 4116)

The Loss of Lucidity

The reason that the loss of the idea of representation and the organic order which goes with it is so disastrous for the religious, is partly because the autocratic king, the monarch, functions as a kind of worldly analogy to God. The sovereignty of the king illustrates God's omnipotence and claim to unconditional obedience. Anyone who lives in a monarchy of the kind that Kierkegaard has in mind, knows as a matter of course what obedience is, what authority is, what the unconditional is and what humility is. The king is of course not divine, he is not an incarnation, but he is a king by the grace of God. The authority and power of the king is absolute and must be unconditionally obeyed. There is nothing to cast dice for and nothing to discuss.

But all this changes in 1848, when "The state fell over and ended up on its head..." (*Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* [The Papers of Søren Kierkegaard], P.A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr og E. Torsting, eds., 2nd enlarged edition by N. Thulstrup, index by N.J. Cappelørn, 16 vols. in 22 tomes (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-1978), X 4 A 551, p. 368 translator's translation – hereafter *Pap.* X 4 A 551, 368). Instead of the good, old, unambiguous and indisputable political order, where the power is with those born to it, first and foremost the king, a political system is now introduced, a system which, so it seems to Kierkegaard, is built on an arbitrary distinction, namely the difference between government and opposition. Who will be governing and who will be in opposition is hereafter an arbitrary matter. This is determined by something as prosaic as a relation of numbers. While the old order professed necessity and unconditionality, the most conspicuous fact about the new order is first and foremost its contingent nature.

The Inauthentic Individual

According to Kierkegaard, the loss of an analogy which will serve to illustrate the sovereignty of God and the demand for unconditional obedience is just one of the consequences of modernity. Modernity also has far-reaching consequences for the individual and his self-knowledge. In short, the individual is torn out of the social context of which he previously understood himself to be an integrated part and is thrown back on himself. This subjectivity is reflected, as Kierkegaard describes it. One of his more basic questions is stated thus: "What is the self that remains when a man has lost the whole world and still has not lost himself" (*JP* 4, 3893).

In *Either-Or* one can find a particularly good example of Kierkegaard's reflections on what is happening to the individual's self-knowledge with the transition to modernity. He here claims that once upon a time the individual was enclosed by a series of "substantial determinations": "Even if the individual moved freely, he still rested in substantial determinations, in the state, family, in destiny" (*SV3* 2, 133). In the old world human life was, therefore, connected to cosmic influence, with determination and definitiveness, which came from outside.

The case of the modern individual is completely different, as he no longer sees himself as a part of an extensive and integrated whole, as part of an organism, a cosmos, but rather as an isolated and lonely subject, a subject that is no longer enveloped in a stable order, in which his task is to live in accordance with those demands which his calling and standing make on him. Rather, he swims around in a sea of possibilities in which he must find his own bearings and make his own choices.

Identity is also something which is created by the individual. This is not unproblematic, however, for how can the self, which is not yet a self, choose at all, not to mention choose *itself* as a self? This is naturally an impossible project, and this is why the individual is forced to copy his identity. He makes another self his own self: "... But nowadays there is none at all: there is nothing but mimicry, one mimicking the other" (*JP* 1, 468).

Identity becomes something external, something which is put on and superficial, not something deeply rooted and substantial. The identity of the individual loses the necessity because of modernity; it becomes allocated or "hypothetical", as Kierkegaard also describes it.

The Illusion of Autonomy

With the lapse of substantial decisions, the identity of the individual is not only threatened by inauthenticity, but also by disruption. That which has only become *common sense* with modern sociology and social psychology, Kierkegaard had already realised, namely that modern society breaks the individual's homogenous life and work into heterogenous areas of functioning, which makes it necessary for the individual to master different systems of values, forms of discourse, and behavioral patterns. The social surroundings are differentiated, and this differentiation effects the individual in the form of a fragmentation or a "parcelling out", as Kierkegaard says: "Be silly, have one opinion today, and another one tomorrow, then again the one you had the day before yesterday, and then again a new one on Friday; be silly, make yourself into more than one, or parcel yourself out, have one opinion anonymously, lend another one your name, one orally another one written, one as an official, another one as a private person, one as the husband of your wife, another one in the club..."(*SV3* 19, 300).

According to Kierkegaard, inauthenticity and division are the situation of the modern individual. He does not have confidence in Kant's conception of man as an autonomous being capable of making his own law on the basis of his sensibility. Humans cannot seriously bind themselves to anything: "Real self-doubling [*Selvfordoblelse*] without a constraining third factor outside of oneself is an impossibility and makes any such existing [*Existeren*] into an illusion or an experiment. Kant was of the opinion that man is his own law (autonomy) – that is, he binds himself under the law which he himself gives himself. Actually, in a profounder sense, this is how lawlessness or experimentation are established. This is not being rigorously earnest'any more that Sancho Panza's self-administered blows to his own bottom were vigorous... Constraint there must be if it is going to be in earnest. If I am bound by nothing higher than myself and I am to bind myself, where would I get the rigorousness as A, the binder, which I do not have as B, who is supposed to be bound, when A and B are the same self... Providence is no friend of this effeminate coddling, this wanting to play at being autodidactic when at the same time there lives such a remarkable tutor and teacher as our Lord, to whom we can turn." (*JP* 1, 188).

The self cannot create [sætte] itself. If the self is, it has been created [sat] by something which differs from itself; if it has not been cre-

ated [sat] by such an eternal power it is not a self: "... He who does not have a God, has no self either" (*SV3* 15, 97).

Kierkegaard's starting point and that which he reflects about is thus modern man's self-knowledge: man who does not acknowledge anything unconditionally but who wants to be the absolute himself, who wants to be his own creator. Kierkegaard does this for polemical reasons: he wants to show, that this self-knowledge is an illusion, and that modern man, therefore, must necessarily be in despair. Despair is the modern correlate of that religious function which in the old world was attached to doubt: "With respect to this I think that our time will make progress... The time is not far off, when man, expensively enough maybe, will realise, that the true starting point when looking for the absolute is not doubt, but despair" (*SV3* 3, 198). Doubt is a category of knowledge, and as such points towards something objective and common, while despair is a subjective and personal category. Despair is attached to the individual. In modernity religion becomes an affair for the individual. Kierkegaard, in other words, claims that after the disintegration of the idea of representation, the unconditional can no longer be said to be valid on a collective social plane, but only on an individual plane:

> If – to stay with my subject, the religious – if the human race or a great many individuals in the race have outgrown the childish notion that another human being can represent the unconditional for them, nonetheless the unconditional cannot be dispensed with. On the contrary, it is all the more indispensable. So "the individual" himself must relate himself to the unconditional. With the abilities granted me and with the uttermost effort and much sacrifice, this is what I have fought for, fighting against any tyranny, also that of the numerical (*SV3* 18, 77).

So it is not because the isolated individual simply is the religious *topos*, that Kierkegaard emphasises it. At a number of points it appears that he would actually prefer a return to the old order of representation, the absolute monarchy, if that could happen at all, but he doesn't believe it could. The point of no return has been passed. The unconditional has once and for all disappeared from political and social relations. If it is to survive, it can only do so by the individual's relating to it. I will return to this point.

The Press

The radical changes in the social structure which manifested themselves explicitly in Kierkegaard's time in 1848-49, create, in his opinion, a radical change of mentality. The common consciousness has been demoralised, as he puts it, and the press has not been slow to reinforce this tendency.

Kierkegaard's critique of the press is massive and monomaniacal. The liberal, critical press undermines any kind of authority and stultifies authority of any kind – and does so without referring to other authorities. It is, in other words, not revolutionary as it lets the existing exist, but sucks it dry of seriousness and makes it into a simulacrum.

It is here worth noting that it is not the liberal and critical press as such from which that Kierkegaard distances himself. His critique mainly centres on the fact that journalists were publishing their articles anonymously:

> So much is obvious: that quite formally and regardless of whether or not what it says is true, the press (and in particular the daily press), as the representative of abstract, impersonal communication, contributes enormously to demoralization, because everything impersonal – and which futhermore is more or less devoid of responsibility or repentance – is demoralizing; that anonymity – which is the highest expression of abstraction, impersonality, the absence of repentance, and irresponsibility – is a fundamental source of modern demoralization... . All this would be very important to take note of for a person who wanted to make a study of the demoralization of the modern states... (*SV3* 18, 107f.).

And this is just what Kierkegaard wanted. He eagerly studied the demoralisation of the modern states, and this is why he, from the start, was intensively occupied with the press and its effect on society. His public debut is actually a lecture about the effect of the liberal press on contemporary politics in Denmark. The liberal press has not had any effect, he concluded in 1835. The changes which have taken placed are a result of the government's initiatives. He subsequently corrected himself and gave the press a good deal of the blame for modern misery.

So it is anonymity, and not the liberal and critical press in itself, which Kierkegaard is turning against. Kierkegaard was very interested in a

discussion about the press legislation in France. In connection with reports saying that journalists there were forced to give up anonymity and acknowledge their writings, he remarks that with that a lot is already won (cf. *Pap.* X 3 A 275, p. 204). Because then one can actually reply. The evaporation of responsibility which Kierkegaard saw as being linked to all forms of anonymity is hereby rendered impossible. The critic is no longer an impersonal nameless power, but can be identified and held responsible.

Kierkegaard's critique of the press is like his critique of democracy. He does not oppose the phenomenon in itself, but rather the change in mentality which follows in the wake of the press and of democracy because it is fatal to the relation to God. In *Works of Love* he deals with, amongst other things, the need of the time for disengagement in secular relations. This need is, in a way, legitimate. The problem is that disengagement in secular relations has consequences which reach further than the purely secular. Disengagement in secular relations has fatal consequences for the relationship with the divine. In this relation the need for disengagement also sneaks in, and here it is for him illegitimate:

> The abominable era of serfdom is past, so people think they can go futher – by means of the abomination of abolishing man's serfdom in relation to God. Not by birth, but by having been created from nothing, every human being belongs to God as a serf. ... People find that this serfdom is a burdensome encumbrance and therefore have more or less openly decided to depose God and to enthrone man – in the rights of man? No, there is no need of that, God has already done it – to enthrone man in God's rights. Indeed, the place does become vacant when God is dismissed. Then, the wages of this sort of presumption are that we progress further and further down the road to transforming the whole of existence into doubt, or into a maelstrom. What is law, after all? What does the law require of a person? Yes, that is something for people to decide. Which people? Here doubt begins. Since no person is essentially superior to another, it is entirely up to me to decide with whom I will associate myself in determing what is highest... . But what does the confused situation described above resemble, if not a mutiny? ... a mutiny against God? (*SV3* 12, 115ff.).

Modern Literature

Another element of Kierkegaard's critique of his times is his attack on modern literature, which is first and foremost characterised by the novel as a genre. People not only read newspapers and magazines, they also read novels. Kierkegaard lives, as he puts it, in a society, which consists of an "... enormous quantity of Christians all of them novel readers and readeresses..." (*SV3* 18, 138f.). Kierkegaard sees the modern novel in opposition to classical poetry. He is ambivalent when it comes to classical poetry: It has its good as it has its bad sides. On the one hand, from the human point of view, poetry is a sort of boundary of the religious, as it has its reason and its source in that despairing pain, which as mentioned has also become the point of contact with the religious. The young passionate man in *Repetition*, who has the Old Testament figure Job as his ideal, is an example of how close the poetical and the religious are to each other. On the other hand, considered from a Christian perspective: "... any Poet-existence's sin, the sin: is to poetize instead of to be, to relate to the good and true through fantasy, instead of being it, to existentially strive to be it" (*SV3* 15, 131).

Classical poetry is thus not without its problems but it has, in spite of everything, certain qualities, also with respect to religion. Modern literature is different. Something fatal has happened during the genre's development from poetry to novel. The modern novel advances a different consciousness in the reader than does classical poetry. It subjectivises in different ways and in different contexts in different parts of Kierkegaard's authorship. Let me just stick to that place in *Either-Or*, which I have already mentioned, in which Kierkegaard deals with the difference between antique and modern drama.

Antique drama operates with destiny as an objective and external power, to which the persons of the drama are subject and by which they are dominated. The persons are suffering, which means that they are passive: they are bargained with and they are acted against. When they act they do not act at their own pleasure, but in accordance with a superior cosmic law. The successful act is that act which occurs in accordance with the given destiny. Conversely, tragedy is an inevitable consequence of resistance to destiny, a lack of acknowledgement of and respect for the given and the natural order.

In modern drama, on the other hand, destiny is introverted and internalised. It is not an objective and externalised power which con-

quers the person and which the person must get on with as best he can, but rather destiny is a subjectivised phenomenon. Destiny does not really exist if the individual does not assume it. In modern drama it is thus the characters themselves who, through their actions, have to give existence the weight and continuity, the determination and definitiveness, which in dramas of the antique came from outside. One chooses destiny, and as chosen, destiny is no longer necessary.

As is clear, the movement from poetry in the classical sense to literature in the modern sense involves a decisive shift in accent from objectivity to subjectivity, from the common to the individual, from the necessary to the accidental: "The lyric poetry of our time is different from that of the Middle Ages in that now the idiosyncratic individual gyrates about in his own idiosyncrasy and therefore the lyrics of one are unintelligible to another. In the Middle Ages, however, lyric poetry was equipped with a complete objectivity – it is not the individual, it is man (Adam, i.e., mankind); every feature is world-historical, this term taken in the ideal sense" (*JP* 1, 35).

Kierkegaard emphasises classical poetry as the only true kind of poetry, in that it creates ideals in which the individual can mirror himself, which he can admire, and live in accordance with. In this way classical poetry supports that kind of consciousness, which in an extension of Kierkegaard I have called the idea of representation. The case is completely different when it comes to modern literature, which cannot arouse admiration and the wish for imitation in the reader, but on the other hand it can provoke reflection. And reflection has the sorry effect of perverting the reader's relationship to the world and reality. To a novel reader there exists no given order which must be respected, no substantial reality, nothing which is unconditionally stable. Through novel-reading the world of reality becomes replaced by the multiplicity of possibilities, contingency replaces necessity. To put it succinctly, the world of the reader of novels is made theatrical, fictional and aesthetical.

Modern literature is just one aspect of the complex which strangles any kind of spontaneity and unconditionality, whether it is in relation to a person of authority such as the king, to the religious, or, for instance, to love: "... the newer literature is, all in all, completely occupied with making love, in the abstract spontaneity which it consisted of in the actual world of novels, ridiculous" (*SV3* 3, 23). The novel is consequently a serious threat, also to the religious. Kierkegaard mentions how in his time short story accounts of old orthodox Jewish family life ap-

pear. This "aestheticisation" is a profanation of the religious. It is made interesting and one reads with "a certain melancholy, as one reads about one's childhood and so on – one finds something pious in that – but we are no longer children." (*Pap.* X 4 A 220, 122; see also *Pap.* XI 1 A 160, 125 f.). Soon the same fate will befall Christianity, Kierkegaard fears. It will also be the subject of novels and short stories, which is a sign that its time is over, that it is an atavism, a curiosity.

Phenomena such as democracy, the liberal press, modern literature, etc., affect the common consciousness, and that is the reason for Kierkegaard's dislike of them. They set free a reflection which undermines and disintegrates everything, a reflection which forces seriousness out of every sort of relationship, and, therefore, Kierkegaard can describe his time as demoralised. Nothing has constancy against the modern consciousness: society, substantial determinations, the individual, authorities, powers, love, etc., – everything is disintegrating. The religious is also being undermined. In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard sums up his fundamental idea: "Any revolt in passion – against discipline, any revolt in social life – against obedience, any revolt in the political – against the secular regime, is connected to and derived from this, the revolt of the race against God with respect to Christianity. This revolt... is reflection's, the sneaking revolt..." (*SV3* 18, 165).

Reflection is a levelling power, it equalises all kinds of differences, both socially and symbolically. Reflection undermines the representational way of thinking, which Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, has put into the world and formulated itself in terms of. In so doing the ability to relate to the unconditional is also lost:

> The embarkation of the whole generation, the whole human race, upon reflection has changed everything.
>
> In immediacy one was related to an unconditioned and unconditionally. No wonder, then, that a person risked life and death. – The secret of reflection is: there is no unconditioned;... the unconditioned, the eternal, etc. are really abolished (*JP* 3, 3715).

"Our Time" and the Religious

Kierkegaard is first and foremost a religious thinker. The religious is indisputably the central theme in his authorship. Or more accurately, the

religious is the determining *issue* in the authorship, for it is exactly as such that it appears. The religious is in a crisis, and it is in a crisis because of modernity. When Kierkegaard describes his age it would appear he does not stick to one isolated aspect, but points to a number of widely different factors. Society can no longer be viewed as an organism, but has been "split up into multitudinous fragments", as he puts it. On the semantic plane this means that the religious horizon of understanding, by which other forms of discourse were formerly enclosed and limited, is no longer understood and respected as an overarching, fundamental, and commonly binding horizon of understanding. With modernity these other forms of discourse have separated themselves from the religious. They no longer point to the religious as their base and legitimation, but on the contrary point to themselves as self-validating arrangements. As such, as self-validating or autonomous, they are not only indifferent to the religious, but they expand and threaten also to take possession of that domain which formerly was reserved for the religious.

The problem for Kierkegaard is the same whether it is the aesthetic, the ethical, the political, or the economical area. Modernity means that all of these areas have developed their own logic and their own rules, and exactly this makes them able to occupy the space which was formerly occupied by the religious. Gradually it has become the case, Kierkegaard claims, that God "is practiced outside" (see for instance *Pap.* X 1 A 64, 48 ff.).

God has no longer anything to do with the world. The religious is crowded out from the everyday, from reality, and is at best allowed to lay claim to "a couple of quiet hours" on Sunday morning: "So it is with the quiet hours in Christendom. One lives in completely different categories, howls with the wolves one is with, sees with half an eye, that it would be quite crazy to bring Christianity to bear here. Then in the end one imagines that the Christian is too sublime, that God is too sublime to care about how things happen between us people, here in Copenhagen, for example, and so on. Then we have a distanced form of Christianity, which really is poetry and mythology. He who only worships God in quiet hours, only thinks of God in quiet hours – he puts Christianity at a distance, sneaks away from the fact that the very thing that God wants is for religion to be put right in the centre of reality, everyday, including weekdays (the most trying) and not to be content with the Jewish Sabbath or an hour or half an hour every day. Christianity is exactly religion right in the middle of reality, and on weekdays..." (*Pap.* X 5 A 51, 55 f.).

In modernity the religious has become marginalised, the absolute has become relative, and it is naturally a paradox that the absolute only has relative validity.

The Bright Spot

In the above I have pointed to some of the more prominent aspects of Kierkegaard's diagnosis of his time. He also mentions more tangible things such as railroads and the use of steam-engines, as well as phenomena such as urbanization and not least natural science as factors which take part in the destruction of the old world.

With modernity a general process of abstraction takes place. It no longer takes a great amount of time to cover great distances, for instance, and it no longer entails any trouble worth mentioning. The time and the trouble taken were normally something which gave travelling a vivid impression of distance, greatness, infinity and thereby a natural feeling of humility. With the railway the world becomes smaller, and humans correspondingly larger. Urbanization, the move from country to city, removes humans from nature. Humans no longer have to succumb to the whims of nature, but live a protected existence, at some distance from nature. With that man loses his sense of the numinous, of the superior and awe-inspiring: "Indeed, we need to live more with nature if not for anything else than to better receive the impression of God's majesty. Clustering together in the big cities with their cultural life, we have as far as possible abolished all shocking impressions, a sad demoralization" (*Pap.* X 4 A 483, 303).

But Kierkegaard's opinion of his time was not exclusively negative and pessimistic. Perhaps he was compelled to, but nonetheless he also saw some bright spots in regard to the religious. Perdition is in Kierkegaard's view the most likely result of the development and will be the result for the majority but a few will save their skins by virtue of fervour, by virtue of the religious. And these individuals singled out and isolated will, mind you, come to a truer and more authentic relation to God than was possible before, because the relationship between God and man will be direct.

This is expressed in a note which splendidly depicts Kierkegaard's perception of modernity:

> ...When the generation, which in fact has itself wanted to level, has wanted to be emancipated and to revolt, has wanted to demolish authority and thereby in the scepticism of association has itself occasioned the hopeless forest fire of abstraction, when through levelling by means of the scepticism of association the generation has eliminated individualities and all the organic concretions and has substituted humanity and numerical equality among men, when the generation momentarily has entertained itself with the broad vista of abstract infinity, which no elevation, none whatsoever, disturbs, and instead there is simply "nothing but air and sea" – that is the time when the work begins – then the individuals have to help themselves, each one individually.
>
> It will no longer be as it once was, that individuals could look to the nearest eminence for orientation when things got somewhat hazy before their eyes. That time is now past. They either must be lost in the dizziness of abstract infinity or be saved infinitely in the essentiality of the religious life. Many may cry out in despair, but it will not help, for now it is too late... For the development is still a forward movement, because all the individuals who are rescued gain the specific gravity of the religious life, gain its essentiality at first hand from God" (*SV3* 14, 98).

Conclusion

In the papers Kierkegaard states that "My task: is to make room... My task is: to make room so that there will be room for God..." (*Pap.* XI 2 A 250, 259). Thus from Kierkegaard's point of view there is no longer any room for God. The religious had previously been something which sprang from the experience of an objective, fixed, and stable world order, which was a bulwark against the forces of chaos, but in the modern era the religious must link itself to the individual person's experiences of life's indeterminacy – changeableness, vanity, death, etc. – which express themselves as vague moods such as despair and anxiety.

Kierkegaard thus takes note of modernity and turns it into the basis for his reformulation of the religious. The times call for a "modern theological military science", he claims, and by this means that the traditional and dogmatic kind of Christianity, the orthodox, is no longer enough. It is not convincing. For the religious to be met with sympathy

it must necessarily take into consideration the level of reflection and the experiential horizon of modern man.

It is not a coincidence when Kierkegaard designates two of his principal works, *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death* as, respectively, "simple reflections pointing to psychology" and a "Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening". The psychological moment, the fervent anxious individual, the subjectivity in despair, is a new point of contact for the religious.

Kierkegaard, in other words, sees it as his job to replace the traditional theological terminology, namely the forensic or juridical, with what one could call a psycho-pathological discourse. Fear and despair are the universal bases of experience, which the religious attaches itself to in the modern era:

> Just as a physician might say that there very likely is not one single living human being who is completely healthy, so anyone who really knows mankind might say that there is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbor an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about an unknown something he does not even dare to try to know, an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself, so that, just as the physician speaks of going around with an illness in the body, he walks around with a sickness, carries around a sickness of the spirit that signals its presence at rare intervals in and through an anxiety he cannot explain. In any case, no human being ever lived and no one lives outside of Christendom, who has not despaired, and no one in Christendom if he is not a true Christian, and insofar as he is not wholly that, he still is to some extent in despair" (*SV3* 15, 81).

But being introverted, being fervent, is, as mentioned, a quite different foundation for the religious than that of former times. A stable and well structured social order gives a clear conception of God's will for his creation, it gives a clear feeling of the necessity of the words. The case of the private experiences of life's uncertainties is quite different. These are diffuse and ambiguous, not pointing in any special direction, neither up nor down. They state nothing about God, but only create a painful consciousness that everything could just as easily be otherwise. Once this is established it is but a short step to asking the question, why that, which

is, is at all. And this is of course a question, which begs for some kind of metaphysical or religious answer. But the answer is no longer implicit in the question and is in any case no longer a collective, obligatory answer, but is a private matter. The realisation of this makes it difficult to keep the unconditional as unconditional and the absolute as absolute. And this is Kierkegaard's fundamental problem.

It is, however, not only Kierkegaard's, it is simply the fundamental problem for any modern theology, but it is to Kierkegaard's credit that he has realised it and formulated it – even if he couldn't solve it.

Translated by Birgitte Bratcher