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# Kierkegaard's Method: Does He Have One?

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Does Kierkegaard use a »method« by which he seeks the truth and by which he produces and controls the ideas of his voluminous and diverse writings? This is a question with which every interpreter of Kierkegaard must come to terms. For those who answer this question in the affirmative a common position has been to assert that Kierkegaard employs a »dialectical method«. This view has been extensively and expertly explored by Herman Diem and Gregor Malantschuk.<sup>1</sup> I wish first to give a general response to their expositions, and then to put forward an alternative proposal of my own. But this issue of Kierkegaard's method is so complex that it demands a major and extensive treatment, and therefore both my response to the idea of a dialectical method, and my own alternative proposal must be accepted as tentative and sketchy at best, and are meant only to invite discussion and exchange of views. First, however, I wish to make some preliminary remarks.

The »dialectic« that Kierkegaard is committed to does not inhere in a process of thought as such, but in human existence. One cannot escape from thinking or reflecting about the dialectical character of human existence, and that dialectic will be reflected in the way one thinks. But, for Kierkegaard, »dialectic« does not describe a mode of thought which, by abstraction, deduction and speculation, one uses as a method for finding and capturing a unity that overcomes the bewildering contradictions or »antitheses« of human existence. Rather, »dialectic« refers to the dynamics of »movement« (*kinesis*) between or among the »factors« (*Moment*) or »determinants« (*Bestemmelse*) that are operative in human existence, not conceived as a general universal but in the life of a particular, unique individual (*Den Enkelte*). Kierkegaard spells this out in detail in *Postscript* where he gives an elaborate treatment of the distinction between »objective thinking« and »subjective thinking«. His reference to dialectics in this context is relevant here.

Kierkegaard says: »There is required for a subjective thinker imagination, feeling, dialectics in existence-inwardness with passion. But passion first and last, for it is impossible while existing to think about existence without coming (at it) with passion, because this matter of existing is an immense contradiction, in which the subjective thinker has . . . to remain. . . . The subjective thinker is a dialectician as regards the

existential (*Existentielle*); he has the passion of thought for holding fast the qualitative disjunction . . . All problems of existence are passionate ones, for existence, when one becomes conscious of it, generates passion. To think about them in such a way that one leaves out passion is simply not to think about them; it is to forget the point that oneself is an existing one.«<sup>2</sup> Every actual or existing individual is also a thinking individual. All thinking is a mode or medium of abstraction from actuality. It is a way of exploring possibility. But it remains aware of the »qualitative disjunction« between possibility and the actuality from which thinking started. »All abstraction relates to actuality only as possibility, not to an actuality (contained) within abstraction and possibility. Actuality or existence is the dialectical factor in the trilogy [actuality, abstraction, their unification], whose beginning and whose end cannot be for an existing one, who *qua* existing one is in the dialectical factor. Abstraction merges the trilogy . . . But the abstracting one is an existing one, and as existing one is thus in the dialectical factor, which he cannot mediate or merge, least of all absolutely, as long as he is existing.«<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, in these passages Kierkegaard is rejecting any »dialectical method« that seeks to resolve the contradictions inherent in human existence as a self by means of a unity achieved by and within a process of thought merely. For him the resolution of the »immense contradiction« of human existence will be achieved only as thinking ends with a passionate act, a willfull leap, within and not outside of the realm of stubborn irreducible actuality or existence. It is little wonder that shortly after publishing *Postscript* he made this entry in the journal: »Everything turns upon making the distinction absolute between quantitative and qualitative dialectic. All logic is quantitative dialectic or modal dialectic, for everything is, and the whole is the one and the same. Qualitative dialectic belongs in (dwells in) existence (*Tilvaerelsen*).«<sup>4</sup> And the sparse but significant use of »dialectical« in *Sickness* supports and intensifies this interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, in each of these passages in *Sickness*, Kierkegaard is pointing to a »qualitative« dialectic that is at work between and among the various factors that make up the human existence of the individual self. »Dialectical« is a characteristic of the ineffable mysteries of freedom, sin and being both like and unlike every other human being. In each of these concrete experiences, the unique person is caught in immense contradictions and qualitative disjunctions which it is her/his life's work to resolve. There is indeed a »quantitative« dialectic which humans find helpful when they attack the problems of life with objective thinking. But in so doing they leave behind and out of consideration the characteristic of being a subject, a person, a self. Yet it is this characteristic that is definitive of being »human«.

Diem and Malantschuk know very well that all this is what Kierkegaard thinks. Yet they are inclined to define his »dialectical method« in other terms. Diem, for example, says, »Kierkegaard seeks to master his

life by thought« (*sein Leben dekend zu beherrschen*).<sup>6</sup> This is one of Diem's favorite phrases which he assumes is Kierkegaard's own, but -- as we shall see -- he distorts Kierkegaard's meaning and applies it in a way that clearly contradicts Kierkegaard's view of the role of thinking.

At the beginning of his book, Diem has a section on »The Categories« in which he attempts to show that Kierkegaard adopts Trendelenburg's thesis that from the point and perspective of the movement (*kinesis*) between thinking and being, between possibility and actuality, thought produces categories for the explanation of the whole of human existence, and thus life can be »mastered by thought«. He does note Kierkegaard's distinction between »quantitative dialectic« as the realm of logic, and »qualitative dialectic« as being »at home in existence,« and concludes that Kierkegaard's categories are »existential categories . . . in which one not only thinks, . . . but within which one is contained -- in which one exists (*innerhalb derer man sich halt -- in denem man existeriert*),«<sup>7</sup> As clinching proof that this is Kierkegaard's own position, Diem then quotes this passage as something Kierkegaard himself »says«: »To the utmost of my capacity, I compel my self (*mig selv*) to keep my life in (or at: *paa*) the categories. One can die, that I know; one can be tormented, that I know. But one can hold to the categories and hold them fast. This is what I *will*, what I require also of everyone I admire, of everyone I am in any real sense to recognize, that by day one thinks only on the categories of one's life, and dreams of them in the night.«<sup>8</sup> So, at the end of his book, Diem again asserts that everyone must, like Kierkegaard, learn to »rule one's life by thinking,« and that »in order to do this one must work out the categories for this human existence and contain oneself in these categories. This determination of universally valid categories is the first prerequisite in order to understand oneself rightly.« This kind of thinking is what Diem understands Kierkegaard's »qualitative dialectic« to be; and it produces the »existential categories« by which one is to »rule one's life«; and the whole process is Kierkegaard's »dialectical method«. And since the categories are »conceptual abbreviations not of being but of existence, in principle they will cover the whole area of this existence in its intellectual, social, political, aesthetic, ethical and religious aspects.«<sup>9</sup>

There are severe difficulties with this characterization of Kierkegaard's method. First of all, there is the problem of his use of certain passages from Kierkegaard. Most critical is his assertion that »Kierkegaard seeks to rule his life (by) thinking.« Here he uses a phrase that occurs in the context of Kierkegaard's discussion of what it means to be a »subjective thinker« or an »existential (*existentielt*) thinker« (already summarized from *Postscript* above on p. 7). Kierkegaard says that the subjective thinker always keeps the »absolute disjunction« (between actuality and possibility) ready at hand »by passionate thinking«. But in order to avoid its becoming an abstraction, »the subjective thinker has at the same time aesthetic passion and ethical passion, and thereby is given concretion.«

So, Kierkegaard concludes, »The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough to give aesthetic content to his life, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough -- while thinking -- to rule [master, control] it.«<sup>10</sup> It is perfectly clear from the contextual material that »dialectical« does not refer to a way of thinking but to the fact that the thinker remains an existing-one who exists in the dialectic of the »enormous contradiction« or »qualitative disjunction« between actuality and possibility, between one's finitude/necessity and one's infinitude/possibility, and ultimately between one's temporality and the presence of eternity. It is this existential dialectic which »rules« one's life, not a set of conceptual categories.

Even more questionable is Diem's use of the passage from *Stages on Life's Way* in order to have Kierkegaard say, »I compel my self to keep my life in the categories.« This is a quote from »Quidam's Diary«, and if ever there was a passage requiring interpretation by reference to its pseudonymous authorship, this is one of them.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, it does not yield a portrait of Kierkegaard's knight of faith who, risking all, has the courage of the eternal to act, to venture out over the bottomless deep. Quidam is precisely the self who is in despair because he only *anticipates* »religious subjectivity« because he seeks to »master his life by thought« rather than yielding in faith to the help of the eternal for whom »all things are possible«.

These misuses of a few passages, however, are only symptoms of Diem's basic mistake (cf. p. 8 above) of assuming that the content of Kierkegaard's »qualitative dialectic«, consists of »existential categories . . . in which one exists«. For Kierkegaard, a human self does not *exist* in categories; nor does such a self resolve the problems of all areas of existence (intellectual, social, etc.) through the application of conceptual categories. Even though they may be derived from existence, categories are still »abbreviations« (or »abstractions«, in the language of *Postscript*); in other words, something *essential* to existence has been left out precisely because it cannot be caught and contained in thought and its concepts. Kierkegaard's »qualitative dialectic« occurs *in* human existence as that existence is lived and takes shape in the sphere of religiousness, and decisively in the sphere of religion B (Christian faith), (as, of course, one continues to live in the spheres of the aesthetic and the ethical as modified by the religious).

This character of the »qualitative dialectic« is stated with great clarity in the conclusion of *Postscript*. There Kierkegaard says: an individual achieves eternal happiness by »holding fast the qualitative dialectic of the absolute paradox.«<sup>12</sup> And this »holding fast« is not accomplished by a process of thought. Rather, »it is an existence-problem, and the real dialectical difficulty vanishes by being explained in the medium of abstraction which ignores existence.« On the contrary, the existence-problem is attacked dialectically in religiousness (both A and B), and especially in religiousness B (Christian Faith) which »posits conditions

. . . which defines more closely the eternal happiness, though not as a task for thinking, but paradoxically as [something] forbidding for the sake of a new pathos.« So, »The specific thing in Christianity is the dialectical in the second case [i.e., beyond religiousness A], only not, be it noted, as a task for thinking (as though Christianity were a doctrine, not an existence-communication) but relating to the pathetic as incitement to a new pathos.«<sup>13</sup> For the human »subject«, the »dialectical« consists of the contradictions (and their interplay) that inhere in the structures and conditions of human existence, contradictions that cannot be resolved by a process of thought alone. Beyond the end of all thinking there must be passionate, inward, interested decision and act, with the help of the eternal.

Malantschuk gives us a much more complicated and a subtler analysis of what he calls Kierkegaard's »dialectical method«. But he does not use the categories as the key. Rather, he says, »The central and determining concept for Kierkegaard in the structuring of this method becomes the concept of *consistency*.«<sup>14</sup> He gives the following account of its use by Kierkegaard. It basically means consistent thinking as found in logic and mathematics. The first way Kierkegaard finds it to be helpful is in the explication or deduction of the implications of »great thoughts« and »inner intuitions«. This consists of »deductively deriving from a higher concept the links contained therein.« Then Kierkegaard uses the method to move in the opposite direction, namely, »to collect the elements into an organic whole«. So »organic coherence« becomes »the goal for his dialectical work«. <sup>15</sup> He next turns to the central concern of his life, »a thoroughly concrete characterization of the mental-spiritual structure of the individual«. Again the method comes into play: »Consistency plays an essentially positive role for Kierkegaard in the propounding of new points a view and in the structuring of new theories, since the scholarly tenability of these theories depends upon a painstaking extraction of all their implications. This deductive way of arriving at conclusions gradually acquires great significance for Kierkegaard.«<sup>16</sup>

Malantschuk says that even Kierkegaard's »preoccupation with subjective actuality and with its a priori elements leads him on to a more precise determination of the content of these elements.«<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard arrives at the deduction of these elements »by observing existence and by thinking consistently.«<sup>18</sup> Malantschuk here admits that one does not find in Kierkegaard a precise and consistent listing of these elements nor are they arranged in an »architectonic structure«. One wonders what happened to the powers of deduction and organic construction attributed to »consistent thinking«, if indeed such deduction and construction was the key and the goal of Kierkegaard's dialectical method.

In any case, Kierkegaard does arrive at his variety of pairs (body-soul, finite-infinite, necessity-freedom, temporal-eternal) and at his triad of knowing, feeling and willing. He develops his view of the »stages« or »spheres« and his crucial concept or »theory of the leap«. Malantschuk

draws our attention to Kierkegaard's critical distinction between dialectical transitions or leaps and pathos-filled (*pathetisk*) transitions or leaps. Malantschuk maintains that dialectical leaps occur only in the realm of thought and are only figuratively »leaps« because this dialectical transition occurs as the abstraction of possibilities from actuality, while pathos-filled leaps occur in the realm of existence and are movements from possibility to actuality. Thus he restricts the »dialectical« to the realm of thought.<sup>19</sup> And what he means by »dialectical« is consistent thinking. He says that when Kierkegaard comes to speak of »the consistency of nature [necessity]« and of »the consistency of freedom«, then »the whole range of existence is brought under consistent reflection . . . From this point on he considers all concepts and all conceptual content from the point of view of consistency.« Thus Malantschuk concludes, »Kierkegaard's dialectic is concerned only with the possibilities of actuality . . . Therefore Kierkegaard's dialectical method never presumes to be a movement within actuality itself. For Kierkegaard the dialectical method is an instrument of thought.«<sup>20</sup>

On the positive side it must be noted that Malantschuk gives a very clear and convincing analysis of Kierkegaard's basic distinction between the realm of thought as the possible and the realm of existence as the actual, and of his immovable conviction that one does not move from the possible to the actual by a mere act of thought. But several serious questions must be put to Malantschuk's restriction of the »dialectical« in Kierkegaard to the realm of thought, and its identification with the principle of consistency. Malantschuk deals with Kierkegaard's distinction between quantitative and qualitative dialectic several times, but ends up characterizing even qualitative dialectic as a process of thought. So he says that »a qualitative dialectic poses ever more decisive contrasts, placing a person in the tension of choice and final decision.« This is the function he sees Kierkegaard assigning to it when the latter says in *Postscript*, »For dialectic is in its truth a benevolent helper which discovers and assists in finding where the absolute object of faith and worship is . . . Dialectic does not itself see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual up to it.«<sup>21</sup> But it is not this function of thought that Kierkegaard is alluding to when he talks about a »qualitative dialectic« in *Postscript*. Rather, he is referring to those »decisive contrasts« or absolute disjunctions that lodge in existence itself, the contradictions between the aesthetic and the ethical, between the temporal and the eternal in the paradox of God-in-time. He equates »qualitative dialectic« with »existential dialectic« which is not thought but experienced in the »tremendous contradiction« of becoming, of coming into existence.<sup>22</sup>

Malantschuk is correct that Kierkegaard recognizes a kind of dialectic in the process of thought. But we have seen from the quotes from *The Sickness unto Death* that the »dialectical« that Kierkegaard is concerned about is the whole series of oppositions that are built into the very structure of human existence. In a journal entry already referred to above,

Kierkegaard makes an absolute distinction between the quantitative dialectic found in logical reasoning and the qualitative dialectic which, he says, »dwells in existence«. It is the exploration and exposition of this dialectic of existence that absorb Kierkegaard's interest and energies in the whole of his authorship. The use of logical or consistent thinking intrigues him and is helpful in the shaping of his categories and concepts. But consistency as logical thinking is not his method for the discovery and the depiction of the qualitative dialectic of existence. For this discovery he calls into play a totally different method. Therefore, what Diem and Malantschuk call his »dialectical method« is only a secondary, supportive element in his total methodology and cannot claim exclusive use of the term »dialectical«.

It should also be noted that Malantschuk's source for Kierkegaard's use of the concept of »consistency« is mainly from early entries in the journal over some months in 1835.<sup>23</sup> Reading those entries, I simply cannot find in them the weight that Malantschuk ascribes to Kierkegaard's use of this term, namely, that it »is the primary presupposition for the structuring of his dialectical method«, and that »the concept of consistency is the nerve in Kierkegaard's dialectic.«<sup>24</sup> What is most disturbing about Malantschuk's use of the principle of consistency and Diem's emphasis on the categories as the dominant tools in Kierkegaard's methodology is that they encourage the view of Kierkegaard as a highly conceptual thinker who works out this methodology early in his career and uses it self-consciously to control and to unify all his diverse writings in both the pseudonymous authorship and the discourses.

Kierkegaard, however, did not see his authorship as an »explanation« that »gives unity and meaning to existence« -- which then can be chosen or rejected.<sup>25</sup> It is not simply the mind with its understanding that is grasped and shaken by the Paradox of God's love, but *my self*. Kierkegaard's authorship was, for his self, a *religious* reflection (as Malantschuk notes). And it is not only existence that remains open and unfinished for Kierkegaard, but also his »explanation« of it. So all of his concepts and images are unfinished and incomplete -- only fingers pointing in the direction of the ineffable and incommunicable reality of human temporal existence in relation with the eternal. Therefore, we must look elsewhere than to the categories and the principle of consistency for Kierkegaard's methodology, if it is proper to speak of his having or using a methodology at all.

If Kierkegaard has one basic over-ruling approach or method for the discovery, depiction and explication of his central category of the unique particular self (*Den Enkeltte*), if the production of his many diverse writings has one dominant principle of control, it would have to be called »phenomenological«. Whatever »consistent thinking« he practices, whatever »categories« or concepts it produces, they are always subject to the control and correction of the phenomenological. Nothing in the thinking or writing of Kierkegaard is ever finished or closed, but everything is

always open and running out to unseen horizons because of this phenomenological commitment.

Two things must be noted about this proposal about Kierkegaard's method. First, the term seldom appears in the authorship, especially in a technical sense (although he is clearly aware of technical differences about it between Kant and Hegel). Secondly, by using this term I do not mean to ascribe to Kierkegaard any particular one of the multitude of senses that »phenomenological« has acquired since Husserl.

Consideration of one significant entry in the journals will be helpful. It was made the day after Kierkegaard passed his exam in theology at the university and thus before the beginning of his authorship (July 4, 1840).<sup>26</sup> In it he anticipates several major themes that run throughout his writings. He first rejects the claim that metaphysical thinking can think »historical reality« (*Virkelighed*). By the »historical« he means »existence« (*Tilværelse*), the life of the self-conscious person. As such, it is an unity of two sides which must be distinguished but not separated; nor must one side be allowed to assimilate the other. On the one side there is the metaphysical, the eternal, the divine. On the other side is the phenomenological, the finite, the accidental or fortuitous (*Tilfældige*). The problem with metaphysical thinking (Hegelianism) is its insistence that the phenomenon is real »insofar as it is assimilated into the idea«. And it does not acknowledge any limits to its ability to do so. This is so because »it sees the phenomenon from the bird's-eye view of metaphysics, and does not perceive metaphysics from the phenomenon within the phenomenon.« This latter side must not be ignored because »the true life of the individual is its apotheosis«. Without it you are left with »an empty contentless I«. Without the metaphysical and the eternal tie, »the phenomenological will fall apart«. In the individual's self-consciousness there is the unity of the two. »I become simultaneously conscious in my eternal validity . . . and in my accidental finitude.«

Kierkegaard's use of the term *Tilfældig* (the accidental or fortuitous) to describe what he means by the phenomenological is of key importance because it is this term that he takes forward into all his major works to characterize human finitude. To describe human existence with this term means two things for Kierkegaard at this early stage: first, »that I am this particular being, born in this land, at this time, under all the multifarious influences of these changing circumstances;« and secondly, that every event could occur in an infinite variety of ways. This complex dimension of being human is not something to escape from but to welcome. It certainly fills my life with uncertainty and anxiety but is also what gives me my particular unique selfhood. So even »the divine inhabits and accepts finitude«.

In this way Kierkegaard is saying that the »phenomena« of my life are not mere »appearances« behind and above which dwells »reality«. The phenomenological is an integral dimension of reality. Therefore, to say that Kierkegaard's method is phenomenological means that everything he

thinks, says and believes about human existence and about becoming one's self must begin and end with the specificity and concreteness of his, my and your »fortuitous finitude«. This dimension of existence cannot be »annuled« by or »assimilated« into the realm of thought and ideas. It has a kind of irreducible being of its own. It must be reckoned with, but not reluctantly: it has a positive meaning, it is indispensable for my very being, as well as for my well-being.

What I mean when I say that his basic method is phenomenological can be stated simply: he *begins* his every exploration of human existence with an analysis of his own self, his own experience, whether the topic is sin, anxiety, despair, faith, love or God. And his goal, his *ending* is not a system of ideas or even understanding, but is to turn his »subjective reflexion« toward the task of transformation of his concrete existence as a self. His writings are replete with evidences of this approach, but a couple of explicit statements of it will be helpful at this point. In treating the matter of the proofs for God's existence, Kierkegaard says that these proofs »do not prove anything, least of all an existence (*Tilvaerelse*), but merely develop the content of a concept.« So he concludes that the only alternative is that »I always reason (*shutter*, come to a conclusion) not toward existence, but I reason from existence.«<sup>27</sup> And when the object of thought is not existence in general but the ethico-religious character of human existence, then the phenomenological base for reflection is considerably narrowed. One certainly cannot discern this dimension in the »world-historical« with any clarity or certainty because that sphere is to be penetrated only by a »quantitative dialectic«. Even the experience of another person is known only through externals »and to that extent is allied with irregularities«. Thus »for the study of the ethical, every human being is assigned him/herself. One's self is in this respect more than enough; indeed this is the only place where *one* can study it with any certitude.«<sup>28</sup>

That Kierkegaard did use this approach and method for the production of his writings has often been noted. Mark Taylor remarks that »Hegel's and Kierkegaard's works are quasi-autobiographical. They summarize the phases through which the authors have passed in their personal, religious, and philosophical development.«<sup>29</sup> Malantschuk, even in his earlier *Kierkegaard's Thought (Dialektik og Eksistens hos Søren Kierkegaard, 1968)*, recognizes that »when Kierkegaard seeks a deeper understanding of the nature of anxiety and despair, he again works with his own difficult problems.« And he gives as examples his relations to his father and to Regine.<sup>30</sup> Ten years later Malantschuk does not dwell on a dialectical method of »consistent thinking«, but turns to a study of »Kierkegaard's dialectic of existence« as concerned with the self, freedom and the ethical and centered on the thesis that »the individual can become a self only through freedom and the ethical and by relationship to the transcendental.«<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of this study, he says that Kierkegaard, seeking a solution to the problem of freedom and existence, turned

to »his own experience and the testimony of others with regard to free will, man's responsibility and the manifold forms of appearance of freedom and existence.« And then he observes, »The very fact that Kierkegaard, for the solution of this question uses his own personal experience and that of others results in the fact that all his examinations tend in the direction of the concrete and withdraw from abstract speculation.«<sup>32</sup> Likewise, James Collins asserts that »Kierkegaard does not think about the self in splendidly pure speculation but constantly relies upon his actual experience for problems and confirmations.«<sup>33</sup>

We may conclude, therefore, that Kierkegaard's »method« may properly be called »phenomenological« because the »truth« he first of all attends to is the direct presuppositionless knowledge that emerges from the interplay of the objective aspect (noema) and the subjective aspects (noesis) of intentional experience (the subject consciously involved in being conscious of something).<sup>34</sup> His method might also be called »pragmatic« because of his insistence that this knowledge is not an end in itself but must be enacted in concrete human existence through the »leap« of passionate decision. Only then does one know *the* truth. But Kierkegaard's method may be called phenomenological in another sense because he is deeply concerned with a problem that engages the major energies of Husserl and all the phenomenologists that follow him: namely, can my experience, my self-consciousness in all its complexity, serve as a clue to the nature of consciousness as experienced by every other human being? Can the method that begins with analysis (reduction) of the phenomena of my own immediate consciousness be extended to explore the presuppositions that »transcend« and thus make possible my own experience of details of my unique existence? Can my own »transcendental subjectivity« lead by analogy to a »transcendental intersubjectivity«? Is there any authentically phenomenological path of transition from the »being-status« of my ego-consciousness to the »being-status« of the Other and of all Others so that I can speak confidently of a nature held in common by all egos?<sup>35</sup> Husserl was seeking a way that would unite the intuition of essences and the intuition of empirical objects, without reducing either one to the other. He wanted to avoid ending in either empiricism or in subjectivism. He wanted to succeed where Descartes and Hume failed. But considerable opinion of weighty critics, including Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur, concludes that Husserl ended in a kind of transcendental idealism that did not reach and establish a truly Other and a universe that contains both ego and other.<sup>36</sup>

Although Kierkegaard proclaimed that »subjectivity is truth«, and claimed the particular individual as his category, he clearly believes that the phenomenology of his own self-consciousness also yields a phenomenology of human nature in general. In other words, he believes that when he turns inward by means of »subjective reflexion« and becomes conscious of his self with passion and interest, he does indeed come to

know himself as a unique, particular, individual person in the unity of its noematic and noetic aspects. But he also believes that he comes to know an »other«, what he sometimes calls »universal humanity« (*det Almene-Menneskelige*). He says that love -- whether from God or towards neighbor -- takes two forms: »First of all, it makes no distinctions. Second, it makes infinite distinctions in loving the differences.«<sup>37</sup> »Love which overcomes all distinctions« is no art but a work, »because *art* is related to the accident of talent, and work is related to the universally human.«<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the artist, the poet, the scientist, etc., »the ethicist relates himself to the universally human (consequently to every human being, and equally, not differentially). . . . An ethicist must constantly insist and emphasize that every human being is just as capable as she/he is.«<sup>39</sup> Thus, »when distinctions hang loosely, then there steadily shines in every individual (*Enkelte*) that essential other, that which is common to all, the eternal likeness, the equality.«<sup>40</sup>

Hence, when Kierkegaard understands his own experience of angst (anxiety, dread), or how finitude and infinitude, how necessity and freedom, interplay in his own becoming, he believes that he understands how they operate in the lives of all humans, that he grasped some universal concepts and categories that explain the experience of every human being. But does his extension of his basic method deserve to be called phenomenological? Mark Taylor says that the central thesis of his book is »that Hegel and Kierkegaard develop alternative phenomenologies of spirit that are designed to lead the reader from inauthentic to authentic or fully realized selfhood . . . The effort to define the structure and development of genuine selfhood is a central concern of both Hegel and Kierkegaard.«<sup>41</sup> But Paul Ricoeur says that, on the one hand, Hegel's phenomenology had the great strength of acknowledging the »negative experiences of disappearance, contradiction, struggle, and frustration«, but that, on the other hand, by rejecting the »old logic« of identity and noncontradiction and by using the negative as a method for producing »transitions« so as to discover and to produce »systematic cohesion« in all reality and in our consciousness of it, Hegel's »new logic« swallowed up the negative and all its tragedy and thus actually »eliminated phenomenology«. In contrast to Hegel, Ricoeur argues, Kierkegaard remains strictly phenomenological in two respects. Firstly, he »initiates one of the most extraordinary apparatuses for the description of subjectivity ever constructed.« Secondly, against Hegel he develops an anti-system »by elaborating actual 'categories' of the individual over against those of *logik*«, and by »a strict elaboration of the 'concepts' of the anti-system and thus toward a phenomenology, which, unlike Hegel's, will never be swallowed up in logic. In these two ways Kierkegaard is at the origin of existential phenomenology.«<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether Kierkegaard's elaboration of categories and concepts lands him in a kind of idealism like that of Husserl. Is not the elaboration of universal categories and concepts

a process of what Kierkegaard calls »objective reflexion« in which reason abstracts from and leaves behind the realm of human existence where the only human truth resides? Do these categories and concepts have a phenomenological base in human experience and self-consciousness? Kierkegaard clearly believes that he arrives at his categories and concepts by direct analysis and depiction of factors of concrete human experience, not by a process of logical deduction in the realm of pure thought. This thesis must eventually be tested by detailed application to each of the major concepts. Here three of them are just mentioned to illustrate the nature and scope of the problem. (1) Kierkegaard contends that the givenness of life is an inherent aspect of the experience of the ethical dimension of life. (2) Then the Giver of life makes an appearance, negatively, in our experience of freedom and failure and guilt. (3) Finally, the Giver appears positively in our encounter with the Eternal concretely within the facticity and temporality of history. In this encounter our givenness, freedom and failure take on new meanings, and the possibility of self-fulfillment opens up.

The judgment of the authenticity of Kierkegaard as »phenomenologist« depends upon one's evaluation of his success in these endeavors, and finally upon testing his concepts in one's own self-consciousness and self-fulfillment.

Finally, the question must be asked: are the two »methods« (dialectical and phenomenological), described above, mutually exclusive? Did not Kierkegaard use both? Does not phenomenology use logical analysis and consistency as its tools or method of analysis and depiction of the objects of consciousness? To a degree this is true. But in a phenomenological approach, there are (at least) two modifications of a purely rational process of analysis and deduction.

First, the resulting concepts are not tested or revised simply by their logical or rational consistency with each other. Rather, the test is by reference back to the phenomena themselves: are the concepts or depictions faithful to, consistent with the continuing actuality of consciousness? This test allows for rational paradoxes to emerge, and prevents their being smoothed out or eliminated by revising the concepts purely in relation to *each other*, rather than in relation to the continuing phenomena.

Secondly, the full and best depiction of the phenomena of consciousness is not in the form of abstract concepts. The most faithful reporting and depiction of some of the phenomena of the experience of human existence is often accomplished in (even requires) figurative, metaphorical, poetic language. This is true both in one's own private self-understanding and in attempts to communicate this understanding to others.

The first modification is clearly exemplified in the way Kierkegaard constantly revised and added to his total »understanding« and description of human existence, reflecting the growth, change and development to his own selfhood – especially under the impact of his deepening Christian

faith. And of course, one of his main principles was the incompleting, open ended character of human existence and therefore of its depiction. An existential system is impossible.

The second modification raises another major aspect of the question of method: namely, method has to do not only with the mode of arriving at the truth but also with the form for the expression of the truth. These two cannot be separated, but neither should the one be collapsed into the other. Some argue that epistemology is the whole question, and the description of results is secondary and obvious. Others contend that truth is a purely linguistic event, and so linguistic problems are the only problem.

Kierkegaard was profoundly intrigued with language and the complications of communication. So a full treatment of his »method« would require an exposition of his views on these two related issues. But this would carry us too far afield for this present study. Let one quotation suffice: »All human language [actually, »speech« (*Tale*)], even the divine language of Holy Scriptures, about the spiritual is figurative (*overført*) language. This is quite appropriate to it, or to the order of things and existence, since the human being, even though one is spirit from the moment of one's birth, first becomes conscious as spirit only later, and thus previously has lived sensuously-psychically for a time. The first portion of life shall not, however, be cast aside when the spirit awakens . . . The first portion is taken over by spirit, and, thus used, thus laid at the base, *it becomes figurative* . . . Figurative language, then, is not a brand new language; it is rather the language at hand. Just as spirit is invisible, so also is its language a secret, and its secret is this, that it uses the same words (*Ord*) as the child and the simple person, but uses them figuratively . . . The mode (*Vaesens*) of the spirit is the quiet whispering secret of the figurative – [audible] to the one who has ears to hear.«<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere, he calls this kind of language about the matters of the spirit »analogy« (*Analogi*) and »metaphor« (*Billeder*, i.e. picture or simile).<sup>44</sup>

To put it briefly, then, my conclusion is that Kierkegaard's »method« is both phenomenological and analogical. Both are required by the very nature of human existence for the exploration, comprehension and fulfillment of human existence. Neither term is to be taken in any restrictive technical sense. In fact, one of the important implications of his use of figurative language is that none of his terms ever receive a final definition. They acquire different shades of meaning in different contexts even within a single work. To the end of the authorship, Kierkegaard is still exploring and searching for new perspectives and new ways of expressing and depicting human existence, especially as accentuated by Christian faith.

Explanations:

1. References to S.K.'s collected works include: more recent *Kierkegaard's Writings* were available, equivalent volume and page ≠ is given in parenthesis;  
 (a) page reference in original English translation;  
 (b) when volumes of Howard and Edna Hong's

(c) volume and page ≠ in the third edition of *Samlede Værker*

(d) in parenthesis, volume and page ≠ in first edition of SV.

2. References to S.K.'s *Journals and Papers* include:

(a) item number in Hongs' English edition of that name;

(b) standard reference to volume and entry in Danish edition of S.K.'s *Papirer*.

3. For the two books by Hermann Diem and Gregor Malantschuk, I give first the page ≠ in the English translations listed, and secondly the page ≠ in the German and Danish editions listed in Footnote ≠ 1.

§§§§§

1. Herman Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959); or *Die Existenzdialektik von Søren Kierkegaard* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1950); Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); or *Dialektik og Eksistens hos Søren Kierkegaard* (København: H. Reitzels Forlag, 1968).

2. *Postscript*, pp. 312 f.; SV 10: 51 f.; (7: 303 f.).

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 278 f.; SV 10: 20 f.; (7: 269 f.).

4. *Journals and Papers*, ≠ 759; VII<sup>1</sup> A 84; for some interesting comments on this distinction cf. entries: 762 (X<sup>1</sup> A 219); 2339 (IV C 12); 261 (IV C 87); 808 (IV C 105); 896 (IV C 96); 764 (X<sup>2</sup> A 271).

5. *The Sickness unto Death*, p. 162; (KW 19: 29); SV 15: 87; (11: 142). Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 251, 251n 256; (KW 19: 120, 121, 125); SV 15: 169, 170, 174; (11: 229, 230, 234 f.).

6. Diem, op. cit., pp. 188 f. (187).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-38 (29-35). His quotes are from *Postscript*, p. 101; SV 9: 95; (7: 90 f.), and from *Journals and Papers*, ≠ 5601; IV C 97.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 37 (34). His quote is from *Stages on Life's Way* p. 288; SV 8: 116; (6: 284 f.).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 189 (187).

10. *Postscript*, p. 313 f.; SV 10: 52; (7: 304). The Danish is, »dialektisk nok til tænkende at beherske det«.

11. *Stages on Life's Way*, pp. 381-389; SV 8: 218-226; (6: 391-400).

12. *Postscript*, p. 498 f.; SV 10: 230 f.; (7: 490 f.).

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 494, 496 f.; SV 10: 225, 228; (7: 485, 488).

14. Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 105 (103). Kierkegaard's Danish word is *Consequents*, or sometimes spelled *Conseqvents*, or in modern Danish *konsekvens*. It means »consistency«, »consequence« or »conclusion«. Kierkegaard often uses it in the common sense of »consequence« or »what follows«, but Malantschuk claims even for these cases a deep sense of logical coherence.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 109 ff. (107 f.).

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 114 f. (112 f.).

17. Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 125 (122).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 129 (126). Here Malantschuk adduces support for this view by saying, »The next step for Kierkegaard is to work out the parallel series of qualifications of subjective actuality by 'concentratedly deliberating upon it.'« His quote is out of a rather obscure journal entry (≠ 2257; II A 301) in which Kierkegaard compares »the development of a priori basic concepts« to Christian prayer. He says that true prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, he says, »there is no deductive development of concepts;« thinking by itself has no »constitutive power«. So »man can only deliberate upon it«, that is, he can only think about his problem, and will have to have a solution, and then wait for the gift, for the working that is beyond his own power. This is an example of Malantschuk's tendency to use ambiguous journal entries in support of his thesis of Kierkegaard's commitment to the principle of »consistency«.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-135 (126-131).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 170 (165).

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 359, 308 (339, 293); *Postscript*, p. 438; SV 10: 169 f.; (7: 426 f.).

22. Cf. *Postscript*, pp. 348 f., 498 f.; SV 10: 83 f., 230 f.; (7: 336 f., 490 f.).

23. Malantschuk, op. cit., pp. 113-115 (110-112).

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 166 f. (112, 161 f.).

25. Malantschuk, op. cit., pp. 360 f. (340 f.).

26. *Journals and Papers*, ≠ 1587; III A 1. Cf. Malantschuk's very helpful discussion of this entry in *Fra Individ til den Enkelte* (København: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1978), pp. 14-18.

27. *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 49 f.; (KW 7: 39 f.); SV 6: 40; (4: 207).

28. *Postscript*, pp. 126 f.; SV 9: 117; (7: 114 f.).

29. Mark C. Taylor, *Journal into Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 78.

30. Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, p. 34 (38); cf. also pp. 26 (31), 35 (39).

31. Malantschuk, *Fra Individ til den Enkelte*, p. 273.

32. *Idem.*, p. 15.

33. James Collins, »Kierkegaard's Imagery of the Self«, in Joseph H. Smith, ed., *Kierkegaard's Truth: The Disclosure of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 82.

34. Cf. David Stewart and Algis Mickunas, *Exploring Phenomenology* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1974), pp. 8, 37, 92, for an explication of »intentional experience«.

35. For a very helpful explication of these very abstruse concepts in Husserl, cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), especially pp. 91-93, 106-114, 123-135.

36. Cf. David Stewart and Algis Mickunas, op. cit., p. 42; Ricoeur, op. cit., pp. 168-174;

Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 106 f.

37. *Works of Love*, p. 252; SV 12:259; (9:257).

38. *Ibid.*, p. 330; SV 12:342; (9:340). Cf. also *Postscript*, pp. 320 f.; SV 10:58 f.; (7:310 f.).

39. *Journals and Papers*, #4444; VIII<sup>1</sup> A 160.

40. *Works of Love*, p. 96; SV 12:90; (9:87). For another clear statement about the »universal human«, cf. *Either/Or*, 2:260; SV 3:236; (2:229).

41. Mark Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 13 and 13n.

42. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, pp. 206 f.

43. *Works of Love*, pp. 199 f.; SV 12:203 f.; (9:201 f.).

44. *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 31, 59; (KW 7:25, 48); SV 6:28, 47; (4:194, 215). On p. 59, Swenson translates *Billedede* as »analogy«.