

Kierkegaard on the Structure of Selfhood

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In this essay, we shall try to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of Kierkegaard's very complex view of the structure of selfhood by analyzing his arguments as expressed primarily in *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Dread*. It will be maintained that Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood can be more adequately grasped by placing his discussion within its historical context. As will become evident, the task of understanding this issue is complicated considerably by Kierkegaard's tendency to use different categories interchangeably, and by his persistent use of philosophical terms to which he gives meanings different from those traditionally associated with them.

1. *The Problem*

Kierkegaard opens *The Sickness Unto Death* with his most complete, and his most perplexing, definition of the structure of selfhood.

Mennesket er Aand. Men hvad er Aand? Aand er Selvet. Men hvad er Selvet? Selvet er et Forhold, der forholder sig til sig selv, eller er det i Forholdet, at Forholdet forholder sig til sig selv; Selvet er ikke Forholdet, men at Forholdet forholder sig til sig selv. Mennesket er en Synthese af Uendelighed og Endelighed, af det Timelige og det Evige, af Frihed og Nødvendighed, kort en Synthese. En Synthese er et Forhold mellem To. Saaledes betragtet er Mennesket endnu intet Selv.

I Forholdet mellem To er Forholdet det Tredie som negativ Eenhed, og de To forholde sig til Forholdet, og i Forholdet til Forholdet; saaledes er under Bestemmelsen Sjæl Forholdet mellem Sjæl og Legeme et Forhold. Forholder derimod Forholdet sig til sig selv, saa er dette Forhold det positive Tredie, og dette er Selvet. (XI, 127)¹

In this passage Kierkegaard first defines man as "spirit" (*Aand*), and then

¹ Quotations from Kierkegaard's works are from *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, 1st Udg., edd. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, og H. O. Lange, København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1905.

proceeds to identify spirit with »the self« (*Selvet*). Furthermore, he argues that man is a synthesis. He offers several different formulations of the elements of this synthesis: infinite (*Uendelighed*) and finite (*Endelighed*), temporal (*Timelige*) and eternal (*Evige*), freedom (*Frihed*) and necessity (*Nødvendighed*), body (*Legeme*) and soul (*Sjel*).² In another context Kierkegaard contends that the spirit, or the self, is the means by which the synthesis of these different components is achieved.

Men en Synthese er utænkelig, naar de Tvende ikke enes i Tredie. Dette Tredie er Aanden. (IV, 315)

In these texts, we have the basic factors involved in Kierkegaard's notion of the structure of selfhood. If confusion is to be avoided, some terminological clarification is necessary at the outset of our investigation. As will become more evident, in the passages with which we are concerned, Kierkegaard employs the term "self" in a more restricted way than it is usually used. Rather than referring to the overall personality, "self" is used to designate one component of the personality. For this reason, when discussing Kierkegaard's argument, it will be helpful to use the term "self system" to designate the total structure of the personality. The word "self" will be reserved for the more narrow use which Kierkegaard follows. A second clarification concerns one of the sets of terms mentioned above. It has been seen that one way in which Kierkegaard indicates the elements of the synthesis is "freedom and necessity." This way of stating the polarity is, however, misleading. If it is maintained, insuperable obstacles develop. The polarity is better expressed by the terms "possibility" (*Mulighed*) and "necessity" (*Nødvendighed*). This is actually in keeping with Kierkegaard's meaning, for when he elaborates this distinction, he uses the terms "possibility" and "necessity."

From these initial comments it is clear that Kierkegaard designates two aspects of the self system. The first he calls spirit or the self. The second he indicates by various expressions of the elements in a synthesis. In addition to this, the two aspects are closely related, for it is through the spirit (self) that the synthesis of the different components is accomplished. To begin to understand the way in which these various aspects of the self system are related, it

2 "Sjel" is a very difficult word to render accurately in English. "Soul" is used as the translation. This should not, however, imply strictly religious connotations, though these are involved. The word refers more to the essential psychic and mental aspects of the individual's personality. This broader meaning of *Sjel* must be kept in mind if the following argument is to be comprehensible.

is necessary to try to distinguish the different expressions of the synthesis which Kierkegaard presents. Upon investigation, it becomes apparent that the four formulations of the elements of the synthesis are not equivalent. A basic distinction must be made between the synthesis as expressed by the categories temporal/eternal, and the synthesis as expressed by the categories infinite/finite, possibility/necessity, and soul/body. *In this context*, each of the last three sets of terms is the *functional* equivalent of the other two. They all endeavor to explore the same dimension of selfhood. From the foregoing designation of the elements of the self system, the distinction between the synthesis expressed in terms of temporality and necessity and the other three formulations is not, however, readily apparent.

We can see the manner in which Kierkegaard establishes this distinction by recalling that spirit is the necessary third through which the other components of the self system are synthesized. Kierkegaard goes on to identify the spirit (self) with the eternal.

Synthesen af det Sjelelige og det Legemlige skal sættes af Aand, men Aanden er det Evige, og er først derfor, naar Aanden sætte den første Synthese tillige som den anden Synthese af det Timelige og det Evige. (IV, 360–361)

At this juncture an apparent problem emerges. Spirit was said to be the synthesizing agent for the different components of the synthesis. Now Kierkegaard identifies spirit with one of the elements to be synthesized – with the eternal. It would seem impossible for spirit (the self, or the eternal) to be both the synthesizing agent and that which is synthesized. This impression is supported when it is recognized that Kierkegaard thinks that two things can only be synthesized through a third. Spirit had been indicated to be the third through which the synthesis takes place. However, when spirit is identified with one of the elements to be synthesized, the third necessary for the process of synthesis would seem to have disappeared.

The problem encountered here can be resolved by clearly distinguished the expression of the synthesis within the self's structure in terms of temporality and eternity from the other expressions. The following text is illuminating in this connection.

Mennesket var altsaa en Synthese af Sjel og Legeme, men er tillige en *Synthese af det Timelige og det Evige*. . . . Hvad den sidste Synthese angaaer, da er det strax paafaldende, at den er dannet anderledes end den første. I

den første var Sjæl og Legeme Synthesens tvende Momenter, og Aanden det Tredie, dog saaledes, at der først egentlig var Tale om Synthesen idet Aanden sattes. Den anden Synthese har kun to Momenter: det Timelige og det Evige. (IV, 355)

This distinction should not, however, be thought to define two different and separate syntheses. All four sets of terms taken together define one complex synthesis which is the human self system.

Synthesen af det Timelige og det Evige er ikke en anden Synthese, men Udtrykket for hiin første Synthese, ifølge hvilken Mennesket er en Synthese af Sjæl og Legeme, der bæres af Aand. (IV, 358)

What the recognition of the distinction noted here does establish is that it is by virtue of the fact that man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal that he can be regarded as a synthesis of soul and body, of the infinite and the finite, and of possibility and necessity.

Yet the various expressions of the synthesis are even more complexly related. The three pairs of terms which are different expressions for the same aspect of selfhood (infinitude/finitude, possibility/necessity, and soul/body) are efforts to define one of the elements of the other pair of terms – temporality. It must be stressed that with respect to the self, no sharp separation of temporal and eternal is possible on Kierkegaard's terms. They are dialectically related. A deeper comprehension of Kierkegaard's analysis of the structure of selfhood can only be achieved by investigating the meaning of "temporal" and of "eternal" with reference to the self system.

Arriving at a satisfactory understanding of Kierkegaard's meaning of "temporal" and "eternal" is most difficult due to his idiosyncratic use of the philosophical tradition. This is especially evident in the case of the term "eternal." Despite the bewildering variety of ways in which Kierkegaard uses the word "eternal", a formal consistency can be discerned. "Eternal" always refers to: unchangeability and possibility. Although these two meanings are interrelated, in this context we must focus on the aspect of unchangeability. When eternity is understood to involve unchangeability, it is usually set in polar tension with temporality. Temporality, as distinguished from eternity, is the realm of change, the realm of becoming. The eternal, in contradistinction from the temporal is that which is, and does not become. The eternal is the unchanging as opposed to the changing. Another way of expressing the fact that the eternal is the unchangeable and the temporal is the changeable would

be to argue that the eternal is that which is self-identical, while the temporal by its very nature, lacks self-identity. The distinctions which Kierkegaard is making by his various uses of these terms, of course, date back to the Greeks, and it is within this context that he develops his views.

These definitions of "temporal" of "eternal" seem to raise further difficulties for Kierkegaard's view of selfhood. He argues that the self is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. However by "temporal" he means changeability (becoming) and by "eternal" he means unchangeability (being). This would seem to lead to the apparently self-contradictory conclusion that the self system is both changeable and unchangeable. Kierkegaard insists that precisely such a paradoxical conception of the self system is both correct and necessary. Being and becoming, or unchangeability and changeability, are dialectically related; each presupposes the other. Therefore, when Kierkegaard states that man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, he is arguing that the individual is a synthesis of being and becoming, or of unchangeability and changeability. Furthermore, because the eternal element in the self system is self-identical, it provides the factor of continuity without which the self system would be immersed in ceaseless flux.

When Kierkegaard contends that man is a synthesis of the temporal (the changing) and the eternal (the unchanging), he is using language which had a long history in philosophical reflection, but his meaning is not the same as much of that tradition. Further specification of what Kierkegaard means by "a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal" is, therefore, required. In an effort to clarify Kierkegaard's argument, it will be helpful to look at the historical context in which he develops his thoughts.

2. The Historical Context

The way in which the problem that Kierkegaard's foregoing reflections address was formulated in the history of philosophy might be stated as the problem of the one and the many with respect to the self. How can one assert the unity of the self while at the same time acknowledging that the self constantly experiences changing states? To put it explicitly in Kierkegaard's terms, what sense does it make to argue that the self is both changing and unchanging?

Throughout the course of philosophical reflection, a common way of

resolving this problem was to argue that the self is a *substance* in which *accidents* inhere. Substance was taken to be that which exists in and through itself, or what which does not depend on anything else for its existence. Accidents are that which exist in and through something else, or that which depend on something else for existence. Because substance is that which is self-identical, and which underlies accidents, it is regarded at that which holds together the otherwise disparate experiences or changing states of the self.

The parallels of this way of presenting the problem of the unity and the diversity of the self, or of explaining the fact that the same self has different experiences (i. e., that the self is both unchanging and changing) with Kierkegaard's argument should be evident. Substance, as Kierkegaard's eternal, is that which does not change. Attribute, as Kierkegaard's temporal, is that which changes. It is, furthermore, substance, as Kierkegaard's eternal, which is the factor of continuity in the otherwise changing self.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the view of the self as substance underwent a critical reevaluation. On the one hand, the notion of substance was extended from individual selves to the whole of being until everything became a mode of the single substance. On the other hand, the conception of substance was criticized as a figment of the imagination, and was completely dismissed. It is not possible to develop these trends of thought in detail in the present context. We must limit our comments to a brief statement of these two tendencies as the background for Hegel's consideration of the problem. It is on Hegel's analysis that Kierkegaard's argument depends.

It was Spinoza who extended the notion of substance to include all being within a single substance. This move, however, was implicit in the traditional view of substance. It has been seen that substance was defined as that which exists in and through itself. According to this definition, substance would be that which is self-sufficient. But it is usually thought that God alone is self-sufficient, while all of creation is dependent on God. Recognizing these implications of the conception of substance, Spinoza argued for a monism in which the single substance was regarded as God, and all else was seen as a mode of the self-sufficient substance, God.

The opposite extreme is expressed by the British Empiricists. In the works of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume the notion of the self as substance is criticized. It was primarily the empirical epistemology which formed the basis of their

criticism of the conception of substance. The idea of substance was regarded as imaginatively constructed and was not thought to derive from sense impressions. Because Hume, and his tradition, accepted empirical verification as the criterion of truth, they denied that substance was a true idea. With respect to the self, the denial of substance meant the denial of the unity of the self. It was argued that there is no underlying substance in which accidents inhere, for the self is nothing than the sum of its accidents or a "bundle of sensations."

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, repass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor *identity* in different times.³

The self is a ceaseless flux of sensations with neither unity at one time, nor continuity through time. Any unity predicated of the self is an imaginative illusion which is not rooted in experience.

Therefore, from one point of view it was argued that all selves are modes of the single substance, God, and from another point of view that selves are bundles of disunited sensations. Hegel finds both of these alternatives unacceptable. He tries to resolve the problem by reworking the idea of substance in terms of the idea of subject.

In the preface to his *Phänomenologie Des Geistes*, Hegel comments:

Es kommt nach meiner Einsicht, welche sich nur durch die Darstellung des Systems selbst rechtfertigen muss, alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als *Substanz*, sondern eben so sehr als *Subjekt* aufzufassen und auszudrücken. (19)⁴

In this text one can see Hegel's dissatisfaction with the metaphysical positions in the history of philosophy which drew on the Greek ideas of substance and accident. In place of these categories, which were drawn from the natural sciences, Hegel proposes to interpret reality in terms of social metaphors. He conceives one of his principle philosophical advances to be the replacement of the category of substance with the category of subject. Although many of Hegel's arguments are directed to reality as a whole, and not only to individuals which make up that totality, his insights likewise apply to individual selves.

³ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (London: John Noon, 1739), p. 439.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Hegel's work are from *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952). The page number is cited parenthetically.

This fact is important to recognize, for much of Kierkegaard's argument with respect to the self can be regarded as the application of Hegel's comments about the Absolute Self to individual selves. For this reason, we will consider Hegel's argument in connection with individual selves.

Hegel directly attacks the understanding of subject⁵ in terms of substance and attribute as it has been presented above when he writes:

Das Subjekt ist als fester Punkt angenommen, an den als ihren Halt die Prädikate geheftet sind, durch eine Bewegung, die dem von ihm Wissenden angehört und die auch nicht dafür angesehen wird, dem Punkt selbst anzugehören; durch sie aber wäre allein der Inhalt als Subjekt dargestellt. In der Art, wie diese Bewegung beschaffen ist, kann sie ihm nicht angehören; aber nach Voraussetzung jenes Punkts kann sie auch nicht anders beschaffen, kann sie nur äusserlich sein. Jene Antizipation, dass das Absolute Subjekt ist, ist daher nicht nur nicht die Wirklichkeit dieses Begriffs, sondern macht sie sogar unmöglich; denn jene setzt ihn als ruhenden Punkt, diese aber sie die Selbstbewegung. (23)

According to Hegel, when the subject is viewed as a substance, it is seen at a static substratum to which predicates are *externally* related. Hegel argues that this erroneous conception of the subject or of the self is derived, in part, from the grammar of statements that refer to the self in which the subject is linked to a predicate by the copula "is". From this emerges the notion that the subject is something independent of its descriptive predicates, or, as Hegel puts it:

... das Selbst ist, in das der Inhalt zurückgeht, so ist dagegen in seinem positiven Erkennen das Selbst ein vorgestelltes *Subjekt*, worauf sich der Inhalt als Akzidens und Prädikat bezieht. (49)

Because Hegel thinks that the very structure of grammar encourages this misunderstanding of the nature of the subject, he holds that

... die Natur der Urteils oder Satzes überhaupt, die den Unterschied des Subjekts und Prädikats in sich schliesst, durch den spekulativen Satz zerstört wird ... (50)

The subject does not exist independently of the predicates, but the predicates themselves fully express the subject.

Vom Subjekte anfangend, als ob dieses zum Grunde liegen bliebe, findet

5 As is perhaps evident, "subject" and "self" can be used interchangeably when discussing Hegel's argument. Support for this is given by the fact that Hegel himself so uses the terms (subject – *Subjekt*, and self – *Selbst*).

es, indem das Prädikat vielmehr die Substanz ist, das Subjekt zum Prädikat übergegangen und hiemit aufgehoben ... (50)

The denial of the actuality of a subject or substance independent of attributes or predicates sounds very similar to the position of the British Empiricists which was noted above. While Hegel agrees with the empiricists insofar as they offered a criticism of the empty notion of substance, he does not think that they have presented an adequate analysis of the self. By denying the substance aspect of the self while affirming the attributes, they remained within a generally substantialistic conception of the structure of selfhood. Hegel seeks to give a more adequate analysis of the self than his predecessors had been able to develop.

In trying to present a satisfactory view of selfhood, Hegel consistently regards the self in the dynamic terms of purposive activity. In the following quotation he gives one of his most concise definitions of the self. The text is particularly important because it is remarkably similar to Kierkegaard's definition of the self which was cited above (p. 84).

Das Resultat ist nur darum dasselbe, was der Anfang, weil der *Anfang Zweck* ist; – oder das Wirkliche ist nur dasselbe, was sein Begriff, weil das Unmittelbare als Zweck das Selbst oder die reine Wirklichkeit in ihm selbst hat. Der ausgeführte Zweck oder das daseiende Wirkliche ist Bewegung und entfaltetes Werden; eben diese Unruhe aber ist das Selbst; und jener Unmittelbarkeit und Einfachheit des Anfangs ist es darum gleich, weil es das Resultat, das in sich Zurückgekehrte, – das in sich Zurückgekehrte aber eben das Selbst, und das Selbst die sich auf sich beziehende Gleichheit und Einfachheit ist. (22)

The actuality of the self is the function of "executed purpose" (*ausgeführte Zweck*), which develops through "unfolded becoming" (*entfaltetes Werden*). Hegel argues that the unrest (*Unruhe*), the activity, the movement by which purpose is executed is the self. Mediation is the name of the process by which the self actualizes itself.

Denn die Vermittlung ist nichts anders als die sich bewegende Sichselbstgleichheit, oder sie ist die Reflexion in sich selbst, das Moment des fürsichseienden Ich, die reine Negativität oder, auf ihre reine Abstraktion herabgesetzt, das *einfache Werden*. (21)

That is to say, the self becomes objective to itself in the form of a purpose to be carried out, or a goal to be achieved. The self is that which it intends to

become through its purposive activity, but initially it is that self in an immediate form. Hegel uses the term "*an sich*" to indicate this stage in the process of self-development. To put his point in other language, the self is potentially the self which it intends to be. However before the self actually is the self which it is now only potentially, the immediate must be mediated, the possible must be actualized. The self must strive to realize the potentialities which have been envisioned. The stage at which potentialities are realized is called by Hegel "*für sich*." The self first posits the ideal self as objective to, and distinguished from the real self. One then strives to actualize the potentiality imagined in this ideal self. When, after having realized the conceived possibilities, one comes to a clear understanding of his self as the actualization of his potentialities, the self can be said to exist in-and-for-itself.

These insights enable us to understand more fully Hegel's definition of the self which was cited on the foregoing page. Through establishing goals for itself, the self establishes an opposition within itself in the form of a distinction between the ideal self and the real self. In setting a purpose, or in envisioning an ideal self, one passes away from his actual self. In the realization of the ideal, one returns to his self. This movement by which the ideal self is actualized, or by which purposes are executed, is the activity in which the self "relates itself [its ideal self] to itself [its real self]." The self, properly so-called, is this process of self-relation. To put it briefly, the self is the active process by which possibilities are actualized.

Die lebendige Substanz ist ferner das Sein, welches in Wahrheit *Subjekt*, oder was dasselbe heisst, welches in Wahrheit wirklich ist, nur insofern sie die Bewegung des Sichselbstsetzens, oder die Vermittlung des Sichanders-werdens mit sich selbst ist. Sie ist als Subjekt die reine *einfache Negativität*, ebendadurch die Entzweiung des Einfachen; oder die entgegengesetzende Verdopplung, welche wieder die Negation dieser gleichgültigen Verschiedenheit und ihres Gegensatzes ist: nur diese sich *wiederherstellende* Gleichheit oder die Reflexion im Anderssein in sich selbst – nicht eine *ursprüngliche* Einheit als solche, oder *unmittelbare* als solche – ist das Wahre. Es ist das Werden seiner selbst, der Kreis, der sein Ende als seinen Zweck voraussetzt und zum Anfange hat und nur durch die Ausführung und sein Ende wirklich ist. (20)

A further aspect of Hegel's analysis of selfhood needs to be examined, for again there are marked parallels with Kierkegaard's view. This concerns the

manner in which possibilities are realized. For Kierkegaard the will, motivated by interest is the means by which possibilities are actualized. Hegel's view is remarkably similar.

Zweck, Grundsätze, u. s. s. sind in unser Gedanken, erst in unser inneren Absicht, aber noch nicht in der Wirklichkeit. Was an sich ist, ist eine Möglichkeit, ein Vermögen, aber noch nicht aus seinem Inneren zur Existenz gekommen. Es muss ein zweites Moment für ihre Wirklichkeit hinzukommen und diess ist die Bethätigung, Verwirklichung, und deren Princip ist der Wille, die Thätigkeit des Menschen überhaupt. Es ist nur durch diese Thätigkeit dass jener Begriff sowie die an sich seyenden Bestimmung realisirt, verwirklicht werden, denn sie gelten nicht unmittelbar durch sich selbst. Die Thätigkeit, welche sie ins Werk und Daseyn setzt ist des Menschen Bedürfnis, Trieb, Neigung, und Leidenschaft.⁶

Furthermore, the will, moved to actualize certain potentialities through interest or passion, is constitutive of one's personality. In a statement which is contrary to the mood of the Speculative Philosopher who has forgotten the existing individual, Hegel writes:

Dieser particulare Inhalt ist so Eins mit dem Willen des Menschen, dass er die ganze Bestimmtheit dasselben ausmacht und untrennbar von ihm ist er ist dadurch das, was er ist. Denn das Individuum ist ein solches, das da ist, nicht Mensch überhaupt, denn der existirt nicht, sondern ein bestimmter.⁷

Thus according to Hegel, the self is that purposive activity by which possibilities are actualized. It is the self-relating activity in which the real self is related to the ideal self. As the ideal self is realized, the real self is negated. This constant unrest, this incessant striving is the self. The motor of this process is the will, and the will is driven by desire or by interest. Only in such dynamic and developmental terms does Hegel think that selfhood, and in the final analysis the whole of reality, can be understood. With these insights concerning the historical context in which Kierkegaard develops his conception of the structure of selfhood, and most particularly with an understanding of the manner in which Hegel reconstructs what had been the traditional ways

6 Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Sämliche Werke*, (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommann, 1961), vol. XI, p. 50.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

of construing the self, we are prepared to return to Kierkegaard's own argument.

3. Kierkegaard's Analysis

We can begin where we left off in the first section – by further clarifying the “temporal/eternal” polarity. We have seen that, in general terms, eternity refers to that component of the self system which does not change, while temporality refers to that aspect of the self system which is constantly changing, or perpetually becoming. From our previous analysis, it has become apparent that Kierkegaard equates spirit both with the self and with the eternal in man. Moreover, the self, the eternal, or spirit is “that in the relation which relates itself to its own self.” As should be apparent by now, Kierkegaard views the self system as a complex set of relationships. The self is that in the system which accomplishes these relationships. In full agreement with Hegel, Kierkegaard is intent on stressing that the self is not a static *entity* (as the substantialistic notions of selfhood imply), but is a *dynamic activity*. For this reason, he contends:

... Selvet er ikke Forholdet, men at Forholdet forholder sig til sig selv.
(XI, 127)

The self is the dynamic activity of relating itself to its own self. It should be clear that this line of argument is directly parallel to that of Hegel as it has been developed in the previous section. There we saw that Hegel concludes that

... das in sich Zurückgekehrte aber eben das Selbst, und das Selbst die sich auf sich besiehende Gleichheit und Einfachheit ist. (22)

We must try to grasp more completely what Kierkegaard means by this confusing language of an activity which “relates itself to its own self.”

We have seen that in the text in which Kierkegaard defines the self system he offers three sets of terms other than temporal/eternal to designate the components to be synthesized by the self. These are: infinitude/finitude, possibility/necessity,⁸ and soul/body. It is important to note, however, that

⁸ It should be pointed out that in the texts in which Kierkegaard develops his views on this problematic, he uses necessity (*Nødvendighed*) and actuality (*Virkelighed*) interchangeably. Our use of the terms follows that of Kierkegaard.

within the context of the initial definition of the self system, Kierkegaard does not include soul/body. This set of terms is added in the second paragraph. Although he tends to use soul/body more frequently in other contexts, most notably in *The Concept of Dread*, it is clear that in this context Kierkegaard's primary focus is on infinite/finite and possibility/necessity. This is underscored by the fact that when Kierkegaard turns to a detailed consideration of the various polarities, soul/body is eliminated. For this reason, we will restrict our analysis to the statement of the polarity in terms of infinite/finite and possibility/necessity. Because of the close relationship among the three expressions, no misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's intention results from such a restriction.

Both infinite/finite and possibility/necessity refer to the fact that man is conditioned by his historical situation and free to act within the limits of this situation. Man is free and determined, but is neither fully free nor fully determined. The terms "finitude" and "necessity" refer to the fact of man's determination, and the terms "infinitude" and "possibility" refer to man's capacity to act. According to Kierkegaard's analysis, human selfhood always includes these two components which stand in polar tension. One always finds himself historically situated in a certain place and at a certain time. This situation conditions the possibilities which are open to the individual. One's historical epoch, spatial location, parents, natural abilities, etc. are all elements of his being which affect what the individual can do. It is never the case for Kierkegaard, as it was for some of his Existentialist followers, that man has a radical freedom which is unconditioned by his situation and by his past. Kierkegaard never holds that man has *liberum arbitrium*.

Infinitude and finitude and possibility and necessity are always dialectically related in concrete human existence.

Selvet er den bevidste Synthese af Uendelighed og Endelighed, der forholder sig til sig selv, hvis Opgave er at vorde sig selv, hvilket kun lader sig gøre ved Forholdet til Gud. Men at vorde sig selv er at vorde concret. Men at vorde concret er hverken at blive endelig eller at blive uendelig, thi det der skal vorde concret er jo en Synthese. Udviklingen maa altsaa bestaae i uendeligt at komme bort fra sig selv i Uendeliggjørelse af Selvet, og i uendeligt at komme tilbage til sig selv i Endeliggjørelsen. (XI, 143)

"Finitude" designates the temporally situated and determined aspect of the self system (i. e., the self's actuality). It is that which is *necessary*, or which is

given to the self, and from which the self must necessarily proceed in any further development. "Infinitude" indicates the capability of the individual so situated to imagine various alternative courses of action. It is the capacity of the historically determined individual to entertain different *possibilities*. That infinite/finite and possibility/necessity are parallel terms which refer to the same dimension of human experience is indicated by Kierkegaard's analysis of the latter expression.

Ligesom Endelighed er det Begrændsende i Forhold til Uendelighed, saaledes er Nødvendighed i Forhold til Mulighed Det, der holder igjen. Idet Selvet, som Synthese af Endelighed og Uendelighed, er sat, er *κατα δυναμιν*, for nu at vorde, reflekterer det sig i Phantasieens Medium, og derved viser den uendelige Mulighed sig. Selvet er *κατα δυναμιν* lige saa meget muligt som nødvendigt; thi det er jo sig selv, men det skal vorde sig selv. Forsaa vidt det er sig selv, er det Nødvendigt, og forsaavidt det skal vorde sig selv, er det en Mulighed. (XI, 148)

The reference to the imagination (*Phantasie*) raises an important point in this context. Imagination is, for Kierkegaard, the capacity by which an individual recognizes his infinitude, or envisions his possibilities. In the following passage, Kierkegaard indicates this function of the imagination in a way which parallels Hegel's views discussed above.

Ethvert Menneske har i høiere eller ringere Grad en Evne, som kaldes Indbildningskraften,⁹ den Kraft, der er den første Betingelse for hvad der bliver af et Menneske; thi Villen er den anden og i sidste Forstand afgjørende. Hukommelsen er stærkest i Barndommen, og tager saa af med Aarene; Indbildningskraften er stærkest i Ynglingsalderen, og tager saa af med Aarene. Vi ville nu tænke os en Yngling; med sin Indbildningskraft opfatter han et eller andet Fuldkommenhedens Billede (Ideal), det være nu et historisk overleveret, altsaa fra en forbigangen Tid, saa det altsaa har været virkeligt, har haft Værens Virkelighed, eller det dannes af Indbildningskraften selv, saa det altsaa ikke har Forhold til eller Bestemmelse af Tid og Sted, men kun Tanke-Virkelighed. Til dette Billede (der, da det for Ynglingen kun er til inden for Indbildningen, det er, indenfor Indbildningens uendelige Fjernhed fra Virkelighed, er den fuldendte Fuldkommenheds) drages nu Ynglingen ved sin Indbildningskraft, eller hans Indbild-

9 "Imagination" is the translation for both *Phantasie* and *Indbildningskraften*. Kierkegaard uses these two words interchangeably.

ningskraft drager ham dette Billede til sig; han forelsker sig i dette Billede, eller dette Billede bliver hans Kjerlighed, hans Begeistring, ham hans fuldkommene (idealere) Selv . . . (XII, 173)

By means of the imagination, the individual is able to construct an ideal self which is distinguished from his real or actual self. The ideal self presents to him his possibility (his infinitude), and the real self confronts him with his necessity (his finitude or actuality). These two aspects of the individual's self system are dialectically related, for the real conditions the ideal, and the ideal conditions real. Having posited an ideal self, one endeavors to actualize the potentialities there imagined. This is the identical process to which Hegel points in the argument which we have already considered. Furthermore, it was seen that Hegel identifies the self, properly so-called, with the active interrelationship of the real and the ideal selves.

We are now in a position to see that Kierkegaard makes the same identification. It has been noted that he argues that "the self is a relation which relates itself to its own self." This can now be understood to mean that "the self is a relation which relates itself [its ideal self, its potentially, its infinitude] to its own self [its real self, its necessity, its finitude]. For Kierkegaard, as for Hegel, the unrest, the striving, in which the real self is negated by the effort to actualize the ideal self *is* the self. Put briefly, the self is the dynamic process by which potentialities are actualized; the self *is* purposive activity .

However, as is well known, one of the main points in Kierkegaard's argument is that the self develops through its own free decisions. That is to say, the self actualizes its possibilities through its freedom. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard makes the final move of identifying the self with freedom.

Selvet er dannet af Uendelighed og Endelighed. Men denne Synthese er et Forhold, og et Forhold, der, om end deriveret, forholder sig til sig selv, hvilket er Frihed. Selvet er Frihed. Men Frihed er det Dialektiske i Bestemmelserne Mulighed og Nødvendighed. (XI, 142)

It must, of course, be kept in mind that the freedom here in question is not an absolute freedom. It is always related to, and conditioned by, the actuality of the individual's situation in existence.

The careful reader should have noticed that with the equation of the self with freedom we have added another (and the final) term to the several equivalent categories which we have previously discussed. At the outset it was seen that Kierkegaard first identifies the self with spirit, and then proceeds

to equate the self with the eternal element in the self system. Now it becomes apparent that the self is also identified with freedom. That is to say, there are four terms which Kierkegaard uses to try to designate that part of the self system which is under investigation: spirit, eternal, freedom, and self. In a previous context we have noted that one of the fundamental meanings of "eternal" for Kierkegaard is that which is unchangeable, while one of the basic characteristics of the "temporal" is its changeability. We are now able to specify these terms further. The eternal component of the self system is nothing other than the self itself. The self is freedom. To put it another way, that which does not change within the self system is the fact of the self's freedom. It is the constant capacity of the self to relate itself (its ideal self, its possibilities, its infinitude) to itself (its real self, its necessity, its finitude). The eternal element of the self does not refer to an unchanging substratum or to a static substance, but designates the unchanging capacity of the self to act, to strive to actualize possibilities.

Temporality, as has been seen above, is characterized by its changeability; it is the realm of becoming. Becoming, however, arises from the interrelationship between possibility and actuality, or necessity. In a manner similar to Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that this interrelationship is the result of the exercise of the will. That is to say, it is the result of the activity which he calls the self. It is for this reason that spirit, or the self, is the synthesizing agent for the various components of the self system. The self is the necessary third which synthesizes possibility and necessity, infinitude and finitude, the ideal and the real selves.

When it is claimed that "temporality" refers to those aspects of the self system which constantly change, the intention is to stress that the possibilities of the self are always changing as one continues to exist. These changes are conditioned by the changes in the actuality or the necessity of the self. Such changes can be accomplished either by actions of others upon the self, or by the self's own actions. Although the concrete necessity and possibility of the self constantly change, what does not change is the fact that the self is free to act in each and every situation. The particular course of action open to the individual will not be the same, but the fact of one's freedom, and hence the capacity to take some course of action, is the unchanging factor in the self system. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard's claim that the self is both temporal and eternal, both changing and unchanging is to be understood.

Although we have made considerable progress in untangling Kierkegaard's complex notion of the structure of selfhood, at major problem remains. We have seen that for Kierkegaard a synthesis between two elements must always be accomplished through a third. For the polarities of infinitude/finitude, possibility/necessity, and soul/body the self (spirit, the eternal, or freedom) has been seen to be the synthesizing agent. But the self cannot be the means by which the temporal and the eternal components of the self system are synthesized, for Kierkegaard identifies the self with one of these two components (the eternal). Kierkegaard himself is aware of this dilemma. A more complete consideration of a text earlier cited makes this evident.

Hvad den sidste Synthese angaaer, da er det strax paafaldende, at den er dannet anderledes end den første. I den første var Sjæl og Legeme Synthesens tvende Momenter, og Aanden det Tredie, dog saaledes, at der først egentlig var Tale om Synthesen idet Aanden sattes. Den anden Synthese har kun to Momenter: det Timelige og det Evige. Hvor er her det Tredie? Og er der intet Tredie, da er der egentligen ingen Synthese, thi en Synthese, som er en Modsigelse, kan ikke fuldkommes som Synthese uden i et Tredie; thi det, at Synthesen er en Modsigelse, udsiger jo netop, at den ikke er. (IV, 355)

Kierkegaard solves this problem by the use of the category *Øieblikket* – the moment or the instant. In this context, the moment refers to the situation in which the individual is confronted with a choice – it is the moment of decision. In the moment one faces his possibilities in full recognition of his necessity (his actuality) and with a complete awareness of his freedom (limited though it be) to actualize possibilities.

Øieblikket er hiint Tvetydige, hvori Tiden og Evigheden berøre hinanden, og hermed er Begrebet *Timelighed* sat, hvor Tiden bestandig afskærer Evigheden og Evigheden bestandig gennemtrænger Tiden. Først nu faaer hiin omtalte Inddeling sin Betydning: den nærværende Tid, den forbigangne Tid, den tilkommende Tid. (IV, 359)

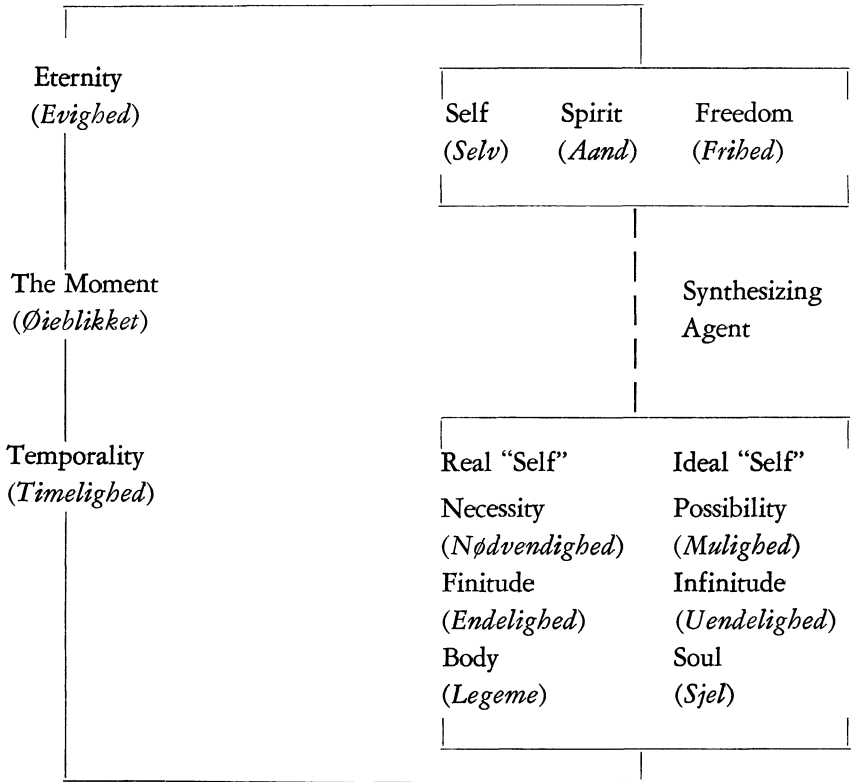
The decision which one makes constitutes a further definition of one's actuality. As we have seen, there are aspects of one's being which are given and which are not a function of the individual's own choice. These elements Kierkegaard calls one's actuality. But a person's actuality is also constituted by his own decisions. On the basis of one's given actuality, he strives to realize those possibilities which are commensurate with his actuality. The realization of

these possibilities, however, further defines one's actuality, and correlatively conditions one's possibilities. Kierkegaard's contention in the foregoing quotation that the moment posits the temporal is, in the final analysis, only another way of making this same point. It is the *present* moment of decision which decisively distinguishes one's future (his possibilities) from one's past (his actuality). In the present one must decide about his future, and thereby constitute his past. In other words, through the exercise of the will in the freedom of decision one realizes his possibilities and by so doing further defines his actuality. What Kierkegaard perceives is that the structure of selfhood and the modalities of time are fully interrelated.

4. Conclusion

With these insights, we have reached a satisfactory understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of the structure of selfhood. Because the argument has been long and involved, a brief summary is in order. The following diagram might help in this connection.

The Self System



According to Kierkegaard, the self system consists of various elements which stand in tension and which must be synthesized. A fundamental expression for the components of the system is that the self is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. Three other expressions are given: the self is a synthesis of infinitude and finitude, of possibility and necessity, and of soul and body.

These three expressions are functionally equivalent and are all aimed at disclosing aspects of one's temporality. That is to say, they all refer to one of the other expression of the synthesis – to the temporal. The eternal factor within the self system is also expressed by the terms: spirit, self, and freedom. It is this aspect of the self system which is the synthesizing agent for the other components. The third factor by virtue of which the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is accomplished is the moment. The moment refers to the instant of decision, or the moment of choice, in which the existing individual, conditioned by his situation and his history, is confronted with different possibilities which he might actualize. Through one's present decisions, certain possibilities are realized, and thereby one's actuality is further established. This actuality, in turn, conditions later possibilities open to the self. In this manner, all of the components of the self system are brought together in the moment of decision.

Our discussion has made it clear that in developing his conception of the structure of selfhood, Kierkegaard departs from the way in which much of the philosophical tradition had regarded the self. In constructing a more adequate view of selfhood, Kierkegaard draws on the insights of Hegel. In the final analysis, for Kierkegaard, the self must always be understood in terms of dynamic, purposive activity. His works present a detailed consideration of the structure of selfhood which underlies, and is presupposed by, human becoming. The fundamental task of selfhood is the effort to achieve imagined goals through the free exercise of the will in decision. In this process, the individual actually defines himself within the clear limits which Kierkegaard establishes. The goal toward which one strives through his decisions is the accomplishment of an equilibrium or a balance (*Ligevægt*) among the different components of the self system. The failure to achieve this balance is what Kierkegaard calls despair. The successful accomplishment of the equilibrium is faith.