THE SELF AND THERAPY

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Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) went to Berlin to study under Hegel and learn the System. He returned to his native Copenhagen and declared, "The System is magnificent; it is like a perfectly designed and constructed castle, the only problem is that I don't live in the castle, I live in the privy." Much of Kierkegaard's philosophizing can be seen as a reaction to Hegel. Kierkegaard's rejection of the dominant philosophical doctrine of his time was typical of him. Søren didn't cotton to much of anything that was accepted by his contemporaries. He wrote, "In our time everyone wants to make things easier, especially the professors who write handy compendiums, so I will take as my life work making things more difficult."

As we have seen, for Hegel, Thought and Being are one. The Absolute that becomes manifest (actual) in human history is rational in the sense of being logically necessary; all of Being, everything that is, is grounded in rationality, in logical necessity. The System demonstrates this. Kierkegaard responds, yes, that's fine and dandy, but what does that have to do with me living in my odoriferous outhouse? Indeed, what does the System have to do with any human being struggling with his or her particularity? How does it help me, for example, to know that my being tortured is logically necessary and is transparently grounded in the rationality of the Absolute? Hegel's rationality has nothing to do with human purpose. (Hegel agrees, but isn't upset by this. Kierkegaard is.) Paradoxically, Hegel's rationality is much more like the classical Greek *Ananke* (Necessity)—the blind will of the gods, against which we struggle in vain. To say that the brute facticity of life is rational is nonsense. Fatedness isn't rationality. It isn't Hegel the theodicist and philosophical idealist who is persuasive. On the contrary, Hegel is much more convincing in his awareness of the irrationality of history and of the indifference to human concerns in the unfolding of the Absolute, and in his emphasis on the centrality of conflict and aggression in human history and interpersonal relations. Hegel's synthesis is an attempt to make the conflict disappear by absorbing it into a "higher unity," and in that way Hegel's System is a theodicy, an explanation of the ways of God to man. Kierkegaard doesn't think much of theodicies. He would have agreed with A. E. Housman that "Mead does more than Milton can to explain the ways of God to man." Housman, of course, is thinking of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in his famous couplet. According to Kierkegaard,

the trouble with the System, or any other explanation of the way things are, and the reason why they have to be that way is that the individual existent gets lost. There is no place for the self as lived rather than as related to the totality of things. Kierkegaard didn't want to be part of the System, of any system philosophical, religious, social, or political. He wrote that he wanted to be remembered as "The Individual" and have that engraved on his tombstone.

What sort of man was "The Individual"? A strange one. Søren Kierkegaard was born and lived his life, with the exception of some time in Berlin spent studying Hegelian philosophy, in Copenhagen. He was the son of a self-made man who had come to the Danish capital from a bleak, impoverished area of Jutland. The morose father, even when he had become wealthy, retained the bleakness of his early environment, which he had internalized. In a moment of despair, he, the father, had climbed a hill and cursed God; his consequent guilt never left him. Søren grew up in a gloomy, sin-obsessed home, dominated by his depressed, guilt-ridden, albeit prosperous, father. Søren's relationship with his father was the most powerful and enduring emotional relationship of his life. His father, who had been married previously, married his servant—who became the mother of his children— with unseemly haste after his first wife's death. We do not know Søren's feelings about his father's first wife, nor his reaction to his father's quick remarriage to the woman who became his mother, but we do know how another melancholy Dane reacted to his mother's hasty remarriage; this is certainly a different case, yet one remarriage somehow echoes the other. In any case, Søren brooded about what appeared to be family secrets.

Michael Kierkegaard believed in and practiced a dour Protestantism that emphasized guilt and damnation. In his adult life Søren pilloried the liberal Christianity, upbeat and self-congratulatory, that had become the dominant strain of religion in Denmark. In some sense, this was an unconscious identification with his father, whose life-style and values he had consciously repudiated. During his adolescence, there were frequent deaths in the family as Søren lost sibling after sibling, until only one brother remained. The father interpreted these visitations as manifestations of Divine wrath and as punishment for sin. Søren's darkest suspicions were confirmed. In the central trauma of his life, Søren discovered that his father had been carrying on an affair with his servant, Søren's mother, whom he had more or less raped, while his first wife was still alive. Furthermore, his father felt, perhaps at least partly correctly, that his infidelity had killed the woman he loved and whom he continued to love throughout

his life. So his father, the idealized incarnation of piety and respectability, was indeed doubly damned: for cursing God and for murder. Søren's disillusionment was profound; he broke with his father and went through a phase of rebellious "worldliness."

If this twisted religiosity wasn't enough of a burden, young Kierkegaard also had to cope with deformity: he walked with a crab-like gait, hunched and deformed from a childhood accident, falling out of a tree. Was it the tree of knowledge the young Kierkegaard fell out of? At least in his unconscious it was. In spite of all this gloom, Kierkegaard's swift intelligence and rapier wit gave him a certain social presence. He had held his own at school and at the university. Kierkegaard became a man about town, frequenting the theaters and the cafes—even visiting a brothel. He became a feature of Copenhagen's intellectual life, playing to strength, so to speak, and built a reputation of being a "character." He was both admired and ridiculed. In his mid-20s he fell in love with an adolescent girl, Regine Olsen. In the second of his spiritual crises, the first being the traumatic disillusionment with his father, he broke off his engagement and renounced Regine Olsen. In *Fear and Trembling* (1843/1941b) he wrote of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as an heroic act, describing Abraham as a *Knight of Faith.* The parallel of his "sacrifice" of Regine is as intended as it is obvious. Søren saw his giving up of the possibility of marriage as a spiritual act. Nevertheless, later in life he wrote, "If I had had faith I would have married Regine." He remained obsessed with her, or at least with his decision, the rest of his life. Regine, on the other hand, seemed to have casually forgotten him, marrying another and rarely mentioning him after he became famous.

In a state of deep depression, Søren fled to Berlin. Hegelian philosophizing proved to be a poor antidepressant, and he returned to Copenhagen to play the gay bachelor while writing his "psychological works." It is with his psychological works that we are concerned. Published under pseudonyms, such works as *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843/1944b), *Fear and Trembling* (1843/1941b), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1944c), and *The Concept of Dread* (1844/1944a) are early exemplifications of what became known as *depth psychology* (i.e., of a psychology concerned with unconscious as well as with conscious phenomena). Kierkegaard's psychological works have much to say about the nature of the self.

Kierkegaard found himself at war with the increasingly liberal bourgeois culture of Denmark. He hated the modern church, the professors, the social reformers, and the "levelers." He was appalled by the

revolutions of 1848, finding in them confirmation of his worst fears. He anticipated and abhorred the mass societies of the 20th century, but in so doing he became something of a reactionary. Although primarily a religious philosopher, his social criticism points backward; its social, political, and economic implications are regressive. Siren's concerns are with spirituality, with the inner life, not with political philosophy or economics per se, but his distaste for the life he saw around him led to no redeeming social vision, but only to what seems to me a morbid religiosity. His father, with whom he was by now reconciled, won out. Wealthy, comfortable, and an increasingly acerbic intellectual, Kierkegaard mocked the established church and all the other official comforters from the Hegelian popularizers to the liberal prime minister. He was completely blind to the ravages of the Industrial Revolution, the growing proletariat, or the social or economic inequalities of Europe. In a sense, his quarrel was more with Norman Vincent Peale than with Marx or the Utopian socialists, but there is a blindness to other than spiritual suffering in his spiritually aristocratic inwardness.

Kierkegaard was a great admirer of Socrates. He wrote his dissertation on Socratic irony, and he saw himself as fulfilling a Socratic role. He, like Socrates, wandered about the marketplace of his hometown challenging the comfortable and comforting ideas of his fellow citizens. "Everyone makes things easier, I will make them harder." His work was "calculated to make people aware," and he didn't write books "to be perused during the afternoon nap." He disturbed his fellow citizens' un-self-aware complacency by challenging the unexamined, indeed often unconscious, assumptions by which they lived their lives of "quiet desperation." Like Socrates, Kierkegaard relied heavily on irony in carrying out his self-appointed task. Kierkegaard projects some of his bitterness onto Socrates: "Why, I wonder did Socrates love youths, unless it was because he knew men" (1849/1944a, p. 193). His identification with Socrates was deliberate and self-conscious. Kierkegaard described his chosen role as that of "gadfly," which is of course Plato's Socrates' self-description. Like Socrates, he was an existential radical and a sociopolitical reactionary: one who pushed himself and his fellows toward inward depths while supporting traditional authoritarian social structures. Furthermore, in his hostility toward and attacks on the "Establishment," Kierkegaard invited, but did not succeed in provoking, a similar fate.

The last phase of his life, following yet another spiritual crisis, which led him to formulate his mission as the destruction of the established church of Denmark, brought him a sense of fulfillment. The products of his final crisis—his religious works, both devotional and critical—were published under his

own name, unlike his psychological works, which appeared under pseudonyms. Becoming a pamphleteer, he exhausted himself writing invective, collapsed in the street, and died at the age of 47. It is said that, in his final outburst of rage, he finally escaped his lifelong depression.

What did this tormented, guilt-obsessed man have to say about the nature of reality and the nature of the self? Before we can evaluate what Kierkegaard believed to be true about the self and the world, we need to understand his doctrine of truth. Of our various writers about self, his is the most sustained defense of the nonrationality, indeed the irrationality, of human life as lived, and of the consequent futility of reason as a guide to understanding that life. His theory of truth is congruent with his suspicions about the rationality of the world.

Kierkegaard's theory of truth has more to do with passion than with thought. He holds that *Truth is Subjectivity*. Although Kierkegaard has no quarrel with science and its empirical truth seeking, science's kind of objectivity and universal truth don't interest him. In fact, one of his books is entitled *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846/1941a). "Truth is subjectivity": what does that mean? Clearly, this is neither a correspondence theory (a proposition is true if, and only if, it corresponds to a state of affairs; e.g., the proposition "the cat is on the mat" is true if, and only if, the cat is on the mat), nor is it a coherence theory (a proposition is true if, and only if, it is consistent with, or can be reconciled with, the totality of knowledge, in Hegelian terms, the System; e.g., the proposition "the cat is on the mat" can be true only if cats are the sort of things that can be on mats). Kierkegaard is interested in neither correspondence nor coherence, though he would not deny them their place in scientific theory or in daily life. What he is interested in is the truth as lived, truth as personal commitment, truth as passionately held belief. It is human commitment to it, its subjective quality, that makes the truth true; otherwise it is empty abstraction. Kierkegaard is, here, as almost always elsewhere, focused on the particular, the individual, or the concrete rather than on the general, the universal, or the abstract. Even the truth of Newton's Laws comes from the passionate commitment of Newton and other men to the belief that these laws are true. This is not rational, or at least not necessarily rational. For Kierkegaard, the most important thing is his commitment to Christianity, his decision made in "fear and trembling" to believe. Christian belief is not rational belief; the Incarnation is a mystery not illuminated by Reason. Tertullian, the early church father, wrote, "*Credo ad absurdum":* "I believe because it is absurd." Kierkegaard doesn't quite subscribe to this, but he isn't too far from it. He doesn't say, I believe because it is absurd, but he does say, even if what I

believe is absurd, it is true if I believe it passionately enough. Kierkegaard is clearly on the side of those who believe that feeling is a better guide to action than thought, at least better than abstract thought. Here Kierkegaard, with his focus on the individual, particularly the individual as heroic truth seeker, is clearly part of the early 19th-century Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment thinking of the 18th century. There is something of Hume here, but without his skepticism and distrust of enthusiasm; Kierkegaard is much closer to the Pascal of "the heart has its reasons."

There is something deeply dangerous about Kierkegaard's view of what makes the truth true. How is passionate commitment to Hitler and National Socialism to be distinguished from Kierkegaard's passionate commitment to Christ and Christianity? By Kierkegaard's criteria, they are equally true. Even allowing for rhetorical and polemical exaggeration and provocation, the doctrine that truth is subjectivity is hard to take seriously. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard is onto something here. Perhaps life and being are absurd in the sense of being *brute facticity*—of being that which cannot be explained. The world and the things in it are brutally factual, and that is all that can be said about them; they simply are. Why is there something rather than nothing? Can Being be deduced? Hegel thought so; Kierkegaard did not. We do indeed live in the outhouse much of the time. Taken as a statement that there is no truth apart from the human beings who believe that truth, Kierkegaard's doctrine that truth is subjectivity makes some sense. Subjectivity doesn't determine the truth value of propositions, but those propositions are indeed embedded in the belief systems of particular human beings and assume their significance from being part of these passionately upheld belief systems. Kierkegaard does not quite take William James's position that truth is determined by the "cash value" of a belief, or Christ's that "By their fruits Ye shall know them." After all, he is an early 19th-century religious philosopher, highly critical of Enlightenment thinking, not a late 19th-century pragmatist. Nevertheless, there is something of the pragmatist in Kierkegaard that he himself would not be comfortable with, even though the absolutist in him undercuts his pragmatic side.

In a more sympathetic mode, at least to me, Kierkegaard is extolling reflection—thinking infused with feeling—in contradistinction to abstract thought. He argues that reflection is closer to the *individual's concrete existence* than is pure dispassionate reason, and because it is, it (meaning reflection) is a better vehicle to discover some kinds of truth. His reflections were not only of inward reality. Throughout his career, he reflected on the world around him and found it not to his liking. He is certainly a prescient

social critic of the mass societies of modem times. He is the enemy of every collectivity and every facile comforter. His social criticism is essentially in the service of his commitment to the sanctity of the inner life and, for all of its narrowness, highlights the ways in which societies facilitate the escape from self, and the confrontations with self, that, for him, gives life its significance.

Kierkegaard's first book, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843/1944b), starkly summarizes his philosophy both in its title and in its content. There is no reconciliation of opposites, no absorption into a higher unity; it is either/or, and what man must do is choose. It is said that the urchins of Copenhagen followed Søren through the streets chanting "neither/nor." *Fear and Trembling* (1843/1941b) builds on and concretizes the insights of *Either/Or.* In retelling the story of Abraham and Isaac, Kierkegaard tells the story of Søren and Regine. For them there was no reconciliation in a higher unity. He either married her or he did not. In either case, he made his decision in fear and trembling, as did Abraham. Abraham is characterized as a knight of faith, a category Kierkegaard creates to contrast with the tragic hero. The tragic hero fails through a flaw; the knight of faith engages in tragic actions because they are entailed by his faith, not because he is flawed. The central point is that reason does not help man's fate, the human condition; on the contrary, "one thing is needful": a decision, a leap of faith. There is no avoiding that decision, although we can repress our awareness of the necessity for one. In his antiphilosophic, individualistic stance, Kierkegaard echoes Luther when he states, "Whoever wants to be a Christian should tear the eyes out of his reason." In a similar vein, Luther had written, "Reason is a whore."

One cannot but wonder how much unconscious hostility toward Regine is present here. After all, she is identified with Isaac who is to be sacrificed, and God did not intervene to announce that her sacrifice was not required. Had Kierkegaard expected him to? Here Kierkegaard is identifying himself with Abraham, the knight of faith, who is doing the sacrificing. But his identification is neither so simple nor so unambiguous. If he is Abraham, he is also Isaac being sacrificed by his fearsome father. Kierkegaard's deeply neurotic conflict with his father is embedded in this conflictual identification with Abraham and with Isaac. After all, his father had not spared him the sacrifice of his innocent belief in his father's purity, or protected him from traumatic disillusionment.

Kierkegaard is often regarded as the first *existentialist.* I once knew a man who told me he was an existentialist. I asked him what he meant by that and he replied, "An existentialist is someone who sits

alone in a room and meditates on the meaninglessness of life." That man was my patient in a psychiatric rehabilitation program, but he wasn't so far off. Existentialism, about which I will have more to say in a later chapter, is not a particular doctrine, but rather a way of philosophizing and a way of looking at the world that emphasizes extreme states, estrangement, singularity, and the limitations of reason. It is the philosophy of the privy, not of the castle. On the technical side, the central doctrine of existentialism is that existence precedes essence. This is not the nominalism (the doctrine that universals are but names and have no reality apart from particulars) of a logician; it is a statement that there is no a priori human nature apart from what we become. We are our acts. According to Kierkegaard, "The only 'thing-in-itself which cannot be thought is existence, and this does not come within the province of things to think." This is the existentialist position in a nutshell. If the existentialists, including Kierkegaard, were logically consistent, they could say nothing about the human condition or about the nature of the self. Any such statement has to be a statement about essence—the essence of being human—and essence does not precede concrete existence. Nevertheless, all the existentialists, starting with Kierkegaard, manage to say a great deal about these topics.

One of the essentials of the self, which on Kierkegaard's own premises has no essence, that he discusses are the *Stages on Life's Way* (1845/1940). This is a developmental schema that is simultaneously a parody of the Hegelian dialectic and an unconscious adaptation of it. In this schema, the first stage is the *aesthetic,* the naive enjoyment of the senses, of art, of nature, and of the good life. The aesthete lives for pleasure, novelty, and enjoyment. He or she may develop into a connoisseur of the beautiful. Kierkegaard is fully aware of the appeals of the aesthetic life. He himself has lived it. His criticism of it isn't moral or ethical, nor does he stand in judgment on it. Rather he sees the problem with the aesthetic stage as dialectical. A life of pleasure leads to its antithesis, boredom and satiation, and is ultimately unsatisfactory on its own terms; it ceases to be pleasurable and becomes painful. The synthesis of pleasure and boredom is morality, and the next stage is the *ethical.* In the ethical stage of development, one lives for duty, for official and family responsibilities, and for fulfilling one's duties as worker, marital partner, parent, and citizen. Ideally the aesthetic is *Aufgehoben,* annulled, preserved, and transformed, and is now encompassed in the ethical. But Kierkegaard has a finer sense of the irreconcilability of differing ways of being human than does Hegel; the degree of "Aufgehobenness" in Kierkegaard's developmental scheme is open to question. At any rate, the ethical, too, generates its antithesis, wooden

dutifulness—routine, unfeeling, dead fulfillment of duty. Kierkegaard probably has Kant in mind here, but he is primarily describing one way of being human, of existing and being. Having lived out the aesthetic and ethical stages and having experienced their limitations and self-generated contradictions, where is one to go? According to Kierkegaard, the next, and highest, stage is the *religious.* The religious is characterized neither by pleasure seeking nor by responsible action; rather, it is characterized by a nonrational leap of faith, a decision to believe: in Kierkegaard's case, the decision to be a Christian. In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard raises a terrifying question, "Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical" (1843/1911, p. 64), a putting aside of the dictates of morality (e.g., "Thou shalt not kill"), for the sake of an ultimate concern (e.g., obedience to God)? *Teleology,* from the Greek *telos,* end, is the study of final ends; hence, *teleological,* "in the service of, or because of, an ultimate purpose." Both the paradigm of Abraham and Isaac and his personal relinquishing of Regine raise this question. Kierkegaard worries it at length, and on balance seems to decide that there is such a suspension of the ethical. Presumably, in ordinary circumstances, there is both pleasure (beauty) and responsibility in the religious state, and in this sense they are *Aufgehoben* into it. But they do not characterize the religious stage. The leap of faith does.

Having lived through all too many "teleological suspensions of the ethical," through all of the 20th-century movements that have sacrificed the present for the future, that have put ends above means, that have murdered millions for the eschatological fulfillment of one or another Messianic dream, we at the end of the bloodiest century in history must reject any teleological suspension of the ethical. Kant's "treat every man as an end in himself," whatever its problems in practice, looks awfully good to me. None of this vitiates Kierkegaard's insight into three distinct ways of being human, of living life, nor of his description of the dialectical relationship between those stages as ways of being.

Kierkegaard contested both the philosophical dualistic legacy of Plato (and of Descartes) and the popular conception of the soul or self as substance, a thing comparable to the body. The self, in this traditional philosophical and common-sense view, is the permanent stuff to which things happen. The traditional categories are substance and accident. In this view, the self is the substance in which accidents adhere. Kierkegaard will have nothing of such substantiation—turning into a substance or underlying substrate—of the self. Nor can Kierkegaard accept Hegel's notion of the self as developing self-consciousness. For Kierkegaard this is still too rationalistic, too much a fluidization of Kant's

transcendental unity of the apperception. What I mean by this is that Hegel's self is still a logical category, indeed a logical necessity a priori, albeit a dynamic one. It is in motion but it is still a kind of stuff. Kierkegaard likes the dynamism and self-consciousness, but not the rationality, of the Hegelian concept of the self. Having rejected self as mind or thinking substance, and having rejected self as Hegelian rational process, Kierkegaard offers his own understanding of the nature of the self. His formulation is prolix and in some ways inconsistent, but integral in its insistence on the primacy of emotionality, as the self as something experienced in certain feeling states. He says,

> The self is essentially intangible and must be understood in terms of possibilities, dread, and decisions, when I behold my possibilities I experience that dread which is the*"dizziness of freedom,"* and my choice is made in*"fear and trembling."* I am what I choose. (1849/1944a, p.55)

Self is man deciding, and reason doesn't help. In his discussion of the self, the meaning of Kierkegaard's notion of truth becomes clearer. The truth of my existence is not propositional or logical, not objective but subjective. The closest thing in Kierkegaard to Hegel's absolute idea is the individual man's subjectivity. Consistent with his understanding of self and of truth, Kierkegaard writes, "The conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones," and "What our age needs is not reflection but passion."

What I find valuable in this is the notion of the "dizziness of freedom," of the vertigo that accompanies the idea that I have choices and that I am responsible for those choices. I see that clinically all the time. When people become more free-less neurotically constricted, less compulsive, less addicted —they also become more anxious. What Kierkegaard has come up with, although he doesn't quite say it, is the notion of the self as freedom, as existential, not as rational potentiality. Whatever the ontological status of the self, experientially it is free. At least in certain moods, I am aware that I experience myself as agent, as free, as maker of decisions, and chooser of choices. That is, whatever the ultimate truth about the free will-determinism question, I cannot live my life without experiencing myself as, at least to some degree, a free agent, and there is inescapable anxiety associated with that freedom. I think Kierkegaard is on target here; I do indeed discover me when I make choices and experience the Kierkegaardian dizziness. Kierkegaard's belief that choosing in fear and trembling is the only self-experience is contrary to fact, but it is indeed a central self-experience.

Kierkegaard is a psychologist of dread (anxiety) and despair (depression) *par excellence.* He was

the first to distinguish between dread (anxiety) and fear. When I am afraid, I am afraid of something—of losing my job, of illness, of a snake, of loss of love, or of the truck bearing down on me. Anxiety, on the contrary, has no object; it is dread of . . . nothing, of I know not what. The objectlessness of anxiety is what makes it so terrifying, and so difficult to deal with. My biologically preprogrammed response to fear is fight or flight, to combat the danger or to remove myself from it. But I can neither fight nor run from my dread. Kierkegaard saw this clearly. He also saw that both dread and despair can be unconscious. He wrote that man may be in despair without knowing it. He would very much agree with his also-solitary contemporary, Henry David Thoreau, that "most men live lives of quiet desperation."

Kierkegaard describes despair as *The Sickness Unto Death*. He goes on to say that only man can despair because only he has a spirit, and concludes from this that the self is spiritual. This seems to contradict his earlier conclusion that the self is its choices, but perhaps there is no contradiction. I suppose spirit (whatever that may be) can make anxious choices. Kierkegaard formulates his notion of self as spirit in the following way:

> Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self. *Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite,* of the *temporal and the eternal,* of *freedom and necessity,* in short he is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded man is not yet a self...the self is constituted by another—the *Power* that constitutes it...by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it. (1849/1944c p. 146)

There seem to be at least three notions here. One is that the self is reflexive. It consists in the act of relating itself to itself. Since to Kierkegaard there is no substantive self, it is the relating, not the relation, that is salient. But there is a problem here. How can you relate without relata? If I have a relation with myself and that self is the relationship, then what am I relating to? Is this an infinite regress? If, by relationship to myself, Kierkegaard means self-awareness, then there is no problem, but he doesn't seem to want to say, or merely say, that. He gets out of this dilemma by abandoning his existentialism for essentialism in characterizing man (the self?) as the synthesis of a series of opposites. Then the self becomes the act of synthesizing the paired opposites: finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, and freedom and necessity. Now the self is the self-awareness of the act of unification. It is the awareness of relating these antinomies to each other. Kierkegaard calls both the relating and the relationship spirit and identifies spirit with the self. He then introduces an entirely new notion—the incompleteness,

indeed irreality, of the self merely as synthesis ("so regarded man is not yet a self"), without that self being made real (actual) by another, the Power that constitutes it. This seems to mean that there is no self without God, and that by relating myself to myself, by being reflexive and by choosing to be the self that I become (since there is no self that I am), I do indeed achieve a selfhood that is validated by a power other than myself. This sounds like the Hindu Atman (the self within) is the Brahman (the self without), but Kierkegaard isn't a mystic and I don't think that is what he wants to say. For him, God is always other, so that the self within is not the self without. Rather, Kierkegaard seems to be saying that without the decision to be a Christian, or at least the decision to believe, there is no self. I don't quite know what to make of this third aspect of the Kierkegaardian self, but the notion of the self as affectively aware self-consciousness; of the self as potentiality, that becomes rather than is; of the self as reflexively relating to itself; and of the self as the synthesizer and synthesis of opposites makes perfect sense and enriches our concept of the self. So does Kierkegaard's realization that all, or at least most, of this can be unconscious. Affect, fantasy, and belief can all be unconscious. Kierkegaard's belief that awareness—consciousness—of self-activity is desirable is normative and not descriptive. Descriptively, he is perfectly cognizant of the role of unconsciousness process.

In fact, for Kierkegaard both dread and despair can be unconscious. However, since selfhood requires self-awareness, it is desirable that that dread and despair become conscious. Kierkegaard saw his role as facilitating that consciousness. Singleness of purpose, "to will one thing," is prerequisite to self-awareness. However, singleness of purpose is difficult to achieve because of the dialectical nature of human existence and human awareness. For example, there is a dialectical oscillation between "despair at not willing to be oneself" and "despair at willing to be oneself' (1849/1944c, p. 128). Kierkegaard is here doubly essentialistic: first he is, against his own formulation, talking about a oneself that appears to be substantive, although the oneself, that one wills and doesn't will to be, could be potentiality—angst-permeated decision. Perhaps more important, he seems to be saying that such an oscillation is intrinsic to being human. This is the case because despair is not something that happens to one—to me—from outside like a disease one contracts; it is not like a bacillus that I contract that sickens me; rather, it is something that happens from within, that is intrinsic. Despair, Kierkegaard's sickness unto death, is in this regard much like Freud's death instinct that resides within every living thing. Similarly, dread is not something that happens to me; rather, it is the anxiety concomitant with the realization that one is (I am)

insubstantial, not a thing. Dread is my response to the realization that I am free, and that in some sense what I do with that freedom can have no rational justification (i.e., lacks any sort of logical necessity).

Dread, like despair, may be conscious or it may be unconscious, but in either case it is inescapable. To be unaware of being in despair is to be in despair. Dread and despair are ontological in the sense of being structural components of self. To turn the potential into the actual (i.e., to make choices) is to lose potentiality, and there is a type of neurotic who can't fully live because he or she can't stand to lose potentiality. Choice is paradoxical in the sense that it is both eternal and nonannullable and renewed each living moment.

When Kierkegaard says that one is either in despair at knowing that one is in despair or in despair at not knowing that one is in despair, he is making despair ontological (i.e., intrinsic to the human condition). He holds the same to be true of dread (anxiety). So far he is merely being descriptive, descriptive of conscious and unconscious ways of being. But when he comes down on the side of consciousness, he is a moralist enjoining his fellows to greater self-awareness. Here he is both the protopsychoanalyst elucidating the power of the unconscious, and the inevitability of its being acted out if not brought to consciousness, and the religious traditionalist giving a new psychological twist to the ancient injunction "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Kierkegaard's self is a whole individual who feels and acts as well as thinks. That is why Kierkegaard's Subjectivity includes both objectivity and subjectivity as rooted in concrete human existence. The self is the "intermediate determinant" between psyche and soma and relates itself to both; however, it does not actually exist; it is only that which it is to become. "The self is reflection" and "generally speaking, consciousness, i.e., consciousness of itself, is the decisive criterion of the self'; in fact, "the more consciousness, the more self." Kierkegaard's individualism is not egotistic or narcissistic; rather, it is relational in both relating itself to itself and relating itself to the Power that constitutes it. Kierkegaard explicitly warns against narcissistic self-absorption and schizoid withdrawal, which he calls *Shut-Up-Ness* and characterizes as morbid inwardness. He himself spent his life fighting a tendency toward such morbid inwardness and shut-up-ness, which were both causes of, and consequences of, his lifelong depression. He was only partially successful in coming to terms with and overcoming that part of himself.

The dialectical nature of the self makes it possible to lose oneself in a false transcendence or in an empty concreteness; to succumb to a facile mysticism that gives an illusion of fusion with the totality of things, thereby denying one's uniqueness, separateness, and individuality; or to become a cipher in the crowd. To become either infinitized or finitized is to become less of a self. Authenticity of the self requires remaining aware of the opposites that constitute the self.

Oddly, Kierkegaard's notion of the self ends up not so very far from that of his hated and rejected alter ego, Hegel. For Hegel, the self is the "act of referring its contents to the unity of itself." Consciousness of this operation is the self. "The being of mind [here the self] is its act and its act is to be aware of itself." The difference between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's notion of self is essentially the level of anxiety in their respective formations. Hegel is aware of anxiety, but it is *Aufgehoben* into Reason; not so for Kierkegaard, for whom the self *is* anxiety. Kierkegaard's great contribution to the theory of self is his emphasis on affectivity, albeit only painful affectivity. Kierkegaard is far more aware than Hegel that unities are both tenuous and suspect. It is the act of unifying, not the unification, that is salient. These differences are important, but both emphasize selfhood as activity, that activity being self-reflection. For all the complexity of his thought about self, Kierkegaard essentially restates his hero Socrates' injunction that "the unexamined life isn't worth living," but as an ontological not a normative proposition. "The more consciousness, the more self," implies that self is not given, but is achieved, and that some have more self than others.