

Kierkegaard - The Subjective Experience of Self

16 September The Subjective Experience of Self - Kierkegaard - Maria Contempree

Maria looks at Kierkegaard's solution to the malaise in society.

What can help society out of its malaise – a question addressed by philosophy!!

In dealing with such a question Kierkegaard's solution was a religious one.

Paradox is at the centre of Kierkegaard's understanding of life

Here's a paradox-

The ultimate humbling experience is to realize that we were created- that we have no ownership of our deep self, no control and no origin that we can organize, manipulate or put in order

Paradoxically

The ultimate elevating experience is to realize that we were created out of a love similarly

over which we have no ownership and that we cannot organize, manipulate or control

and therefore

the conclusion can be reached that thereby we are truly loved because we had no part in being created-

we did not, could not organize, manipulate or control it

and that indeed we were created out of being loved, a Being that loved

If we apprehend that Being as God- noting that according to an interpretation of Kierkegaard- "God is indirectly experienced in the experience of the absolute dependency of our own existence."

If we apprehend that Being as the Creator as God, then our life is

either

Denying and escaping the demands of that love

Or

Longing to respond to that love fully

And

Living in fear and trembling of what it means to respond to that love fully

Kierkegaard says: "I see it all perfectly; there are two possible situations - one can either do this or that."

Either

Deny and escape the demands of that love and live at the aesthetic level

Or

Employ imposed and institutionalized moral codes to attempt respond to that love fully

Or

Live at the religious level by establishing a relationship with the Creator that requires becoming an individual

This talk is intended to introduce the concept of the formation of that Individual, that is the Individual of Kierkegaard's definition —

and to set that in opposition to the modern concept of "the individual";

Kierkegaard's concept of "the individual" is not to be confused with the high priority that individuality or being an individual has in our way of living-

Not the individuality of Assertiveness, Personality, Fame or Status and including making of an individual through psychological therapy -

and to show that Kierkegaard's Individual resolves the paradox between the individual and the way in which he lives in the social community.

Indeed, the way in which society can be helped out of its malaise for Kierkegaard centers on the supremacy his religious

meaning

The experience of becoming an individual Self, as explained by Kierkegaard, provides a model that is Individual, Christian, and social.

He weakens the traditional authority of objective truth,

a professed God,

the imposition of the law and

a life circumscribed by the answers of others

and provides a way in which his individual can live socially in the human condition.

The question being asked of individuals by Kierkegaard is about the way the individual self is constituted and the result that this has for relationship and community.

Kierkegaard's stance innately criticizes individuals and the way in which relationships are constructed and lived out in society.

He demonstrates, in his pseudonymous fiction, the negative result of anything less than a religious answer to the question of the way in which the individual lives socially.

Literature is a metaphor a way of seeing things- and it is, essentially, social comment. Kierkegaard wrote his books for "that individual whom I call my reader- bringing the reader as an action researcher together with the character and by way of active reflection creating a participation in the actions of the character.

Either/Or begins with an elaborate foreword by the pseudonymous author, Victor Eremita, who explains that he found two manuscripts, each in a different hand, in an antique secretary he had purchased. The first, "Either," was written by "A" who is never identified; the second, "Or,"

Either/Or identifies three categories or modes of living:

the aesthetic is associated with the constant search for novelty and pleasure "The Diary of a Seducer," reminisces on various seductions of a number of young women, stresses life's meaninglessness and we are given A's prescription for avoiding boredom.

Kierkegaard created, in the very form of his writing, the chaotic nature of unquenchable striving and the elusiveness of satisfaction for characters that had become their own objective reality.

The negative result of living at the aesthetic level is repetition and boredom responding to the unarticulated magic of the masses to lose oneself

A second mode of living – the ethical is the subject of Volume two. Letters written by a Judge William expounds on commitment, and duty. Later he lectures his friend on the importance of choice in the formation of human character, and on the importance of self-appraisal in determining that choice.

Kierkegaard mournfully laments over nominal Christians. For him the "whole mirage [or blinding illusion] of Christendom," (In such a situation, "[a] person's life is essentially homogeneous with the secular mentality and this world." And as long as one keeps to the principles of the ethical sphere, in "the most dangerous of all illusions" one's understanding of becoming a self is far from Kierkegaard's idea of Christian understanding.

as the title implies Either/Or, is obviously about choice,

but it is also about the possibility of change, not only from the aesthetic to the ethical,

but a fleeting glimpse of the third mode of living- the religious is given.

In the Religious stage the person characterized by having the idea that one has the truth within oneself, subjectively .

He or she is different from the merely ethical person in that the self comes to itself subjectively and essentially for the first time in relationship to God.

Kierkegaard's use of subjectivity in relation to belief in God does not mean that there are no criteria of truth and falsity, right and wrong, depth and shallowness, involved. There are criteria of them within what Kierkegaard calls "subjectivity". But these criteria belong to realm of faith itself. The love of God is not based on the facts, but is itself the measure by which the Christian assesses the facts.

According to the person in Religious stage, the self is made up of an infinite aspect and this infinite within us is the agent which makes the relationship between God and man possible.

As far as the person has this infinity a relationship can be established with God.

The connection with the Eternal is "part of the self's constitution."

Apart from God the self would not be itself.

God 'constitutes' the self – a human was intended to become himself or herself in relationship to God.

There is a sort of continuity between God and the infinite within the human being. The infinite within us is the "point of contact" between the self and... God." As far as the infinite within us is concerned the paradox is that one is in the temporal realm. So there is a tension between one's essential eternity and one's staying in the temporal realm. By Coming to be in the temporal world one has forgotten one's eternal essential nature and the essential relationship between God and man. However one has, within oneself, the possibility of remembering one's eternal nature by establishing one's relationship to God. The bond between the human being and the Eternal, or God, is still there to be discovered.

The experience of the subjective self is the reconciliation of paradox It is in the faith experience of a subjective self that the individual is born.

In *Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard resolves the paradox

in

the subjective experience of self where Kierkegaard ultimately has introduced a mystical way for existing and understanding God

• Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite: personal transcendental God and the dependent finite man,

• of the temporal and the eternal: In the religious tradition of Kierkegaard God revealed himself in the historic person of Christ, in whom eternity meets time

• of freedom and necessity

• in short, a synthesis: God is not regarded as an objective reality existing independently of human consciousness, but is in some way constituted by subjectivity.

The importance of the inexplicable in such a moment of apprehension is that the individual of Religious B as a lonely individual standing before God is born.

To go to an example of the religious self in action we can consider the story of Abraham as a lonely individual standing before God who responds in unconditional dedication to God in faith and freedom to the demands of love. Called to sacrifice his son — he denies the ethical demand of the law and responds to a higher telos. ...and in the freedom of his relationship with god at the level of Religious B Abraham responded to God only to be graced by him.[sparing his killing of his son]

Finally

To become an Individual, in the Kierkegaardian sense, the connection with society must be avoided in the 'aesthetic', 'ethical' and 'religious' stages of existence. The lesson of repetition, of reflection, the experience of the underlying sickness, that qualifies all such connecting, must be used to animate the inward journey. Such a journey is an experience that has disposed of the demands of the aesthetic way of life, of applying the ethical rules of others, of the security of dependence on the majority and the masses. It is a journey that has relativised the authority of the State, the priests and significant others.

Such a solitary journey will yield the individual the authority of the Self. The fullness of revelation that Selfhood brings, brings also the requirement for action. 'Me giving myself to you' [not unlike Buber's 'I/Thou' experience] is the model for Kierkegaard's idea that genuine community emerges only when the egoism of individuals has been transformed into unselfish benevolence.