

Kierkegaard's use of Plato in his Analysis of The Moment in Time

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Introduction

It has become a commonplace in recent times to contrast Platonism and Christianity on the basis of their differing attitudes toward time and history. For Plato, events in time were of only relative significance. His chief concern was to ascertain the invariable forms transcending temporal events which invisibly and immoveably define those same events, and of which the latter are shadowy and incomplete copies. The goal of the lover of wisdom was to attain to an extra-temporal vision of that divine Reality which was the ultimate cause of all things. In the light of such a vision, the relativity of personal concerns and historical successes and failures was decisively manifested.

As opposed to this "metaphysical" attitude, Christianity, or at least the dominant form of it in the West, introduced a new concern for the historical situation. Replacing the pursuit of the metaphysical "now" divorced from all events in time was a new concern for the vibrant presence in the temporal of a history-making God. Philip Sherrard, in his lucid study of the Christian tradition, gives the following description of this new concern, which some hold to be the only concern possible for the believing Christian:

Christianity, . . . perhaps because it stressed very strongly from the beginning the personal relationships of God and man, Creator and created, has tended to go to the opposite extreme [to that of Plato], and to attribute to particular events and personages an almost absolute value in themselves. History is the epiphany of God, the scene of action of a divine-human drama of cosmic significance, and God is a personality who not only creates, but ceaselessly intervenes in time. Historical events and personages are expressions of the divine will, and, as such, are concrete and intrinsically significant "situations" of man in the face of God. So great in fact has been the value given to historical events and personages that not only has their essentially relative nature when compared with the "eternal now" of the extra-temporal world been obscured; but it has

been forgotten altogether that Christianity possesses a genuinely metaphysical, and therefore non-historical, side.¹

One would not expect to find someone less sympathetic to the metaphysical attitude than the so-called father of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard. It was Kierkegaard, after all, who stressed the importance of personal concern, the historicity of Christ, and the particularity of the human situation. Instead of striving to show the inherent rationality of the world by directing the mind, through discourse, to a vision of its ultimate cause, Kierkegaard seemed bent on showing forth the irrationality, novelty and irreducible particularity of human existence. It would seem that Kierkegaard's concern with the "existential now" of personal, historical existence would exclude any abstract or philosophical concern with the metaphysical or eternal "now" which Sherrard speaks of. Further, it would seem unlikely that Kierkegaard would show, in articulating his particular interpretation of time, any interest in Plato's metaphysical analysis of it.

Just as, however, it is possible to miss the non-historical and metaphysical side of Christianity by over-emphasizing the historical elements in that tradition, it is possible to overlook, because one is anxious to link Kierkegaard's own position with a modern, historical one, what is genuinely metaphysical and non-historical in his thinking. It is particularly evident, in his profound analysis of time and the "moment" in *The Concept of Anxiety*, that there are genuinely metaphysical elements in Kierkegaard's view of Christianity. In carrying out his analysis of time, Kierkegaard makes decisive use of Plato's interpretation of the instant of time in the *Parmenides*. What I will attempt to show is that Kierkegaard neither accepts nor rejects Plato's position unequivocally. He does, however, accept far more of Plato's position than is generally thought, and it is with the complexities of this relationship that I am chiefly concerned.

The following analysis of Kierkegaard's account of time in *The Concept of Anxiety* attempts to manifest the metaphysical position which is its basis. Though there are important differences between the views of Plato and Kierkegaard on the nature of the "moment" in time, it will be shown that these differences are based on a more deeply rooted metaphysical position common to both of them. Though the relationship of Plato to Kierkegaard is in some respects a narrow concern, it bears a crucial importance for the contemporary problem of the relationship between Christianity and

1. Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 30.

Platonism. If Kierkegaard, a modern Christian thinker of great importance, finds it necessary to refer to Plato to adequately express the fundamentals of Christian belief, then perhaps even we, in an even more "historical" era, must find it necessary to do so as well.

I The Concept of Repetition

In language which recalls Plato's description of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, Kierkegaard states that: "Eternity is the winged horse, infinitely fast, and time the worn-out jade; the existing individual is the driver."² The fact that the individual is composed of eternity and time gives rise to passion. True passion consists in concentrating on the unity of these two elements which co-exist in the depths of the human soul. But this unity is not yet conscious in the sinful man, nor is it realized in time, since the irreversible flow of time prevents it.

The individual is interested in becoming entirely present to himself, even though the process of time repeatedly sets him in opposition to himself. He must "while everything else changes . . . actually realize repetition."³ The achievement of true repetition is the achievement of true presence, which is why Kierkegaard can say in a journal entry that "the point of the essentially Christian is that it is presence."⁴ The idea of repetition in Kierkegaard's thought is closely bound up with the problem of the relationship between eternity and time. The individual, though he exists in time, must realize a core deep in his soul which is essentially eternal. The particular action ought properly not to have a purely temporal goal as its end, but instead must be directed toward the manifestation of that in the self which is eternal.

2. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 276. Soren Kierkegaards *Samlede Vaerker*, eds. A.B. Drachman, J.L. Heiberg, and H.O. Lange (Kobenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1901 ff.), Vol. 7, p. 267. Hereafter cited *SV*, followed by volume and page numbers. English translations have been altered where they are considered inadequate.

3. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 18n. This translation is volume 8 in the series *Kierkegaards Writings* and will therefore be referred to hereafter as *KW*, followed by volume and page number. This form of citation will be used for any other volumes of this series. *SV* 4, 291.

4. Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, eds. Howard and Edna Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967 ff.), Vol. 1, 76. Latter number refers to passage rather than page number, *Soren Kierkegaards Papirer*, eds. P.A. Heiberg and V. Kuhr (Kobenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1909), IX A 114. Hereafter *Pap*.

Kierkegaard clarifies his notion of repetition by referring to the Platonic opposition of being and becoming. This reference is made by way of a criticism of Hegel, according to whom being and becoming are dialectical, and, because they mutually imply one another, are both contained in the notion of process. According to Kierkegaard, Plato perceived the difficulty of combining being and becoming in this manner. Hegel's mediation of being and becoming by means of the notion of process is belied by the individual's actual experience of the disparateness of these elements. In the attempt to achieve presence, or in attempting to realize the repetition of an eternal good, the individual experiences within himself the disparateness of being and becoming, which is at the same time the experience of the irreversible flow of time which appears to cause this disparateness. Hegel's reconciliation of being and becoming, in Kierkegaard's view, did not correspond to this fundamental experience of *suffering*. He turns, therefore, to Plato because this philosopher preserves in theory the very dualism that is experienced in practice by the individual.

Kierkegaard claims that his own notion of repetition, while it unifies being and becoming in a way foreign to Plato, preserves the real distinction between these elements, a distinction which is recognized in Plato and overlooked in Hegel. He insists that his own solution explains the relation between the Eleatic notion of unchanging being, and Heraclitus' idea of ever changing being.

Repetition is the new category that will be discovered. If one knows anything of modern philosophy and is not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, one will readily see that this category precisely explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus, and that repetition is what has mistakenly been called mediation.⁵

According to many of the Greek thinkers, everything which is novel or "moving" in time constitutes a degradation or partial image of the eternal. True being can never become, because it always has been. In this sense true being is "past" and pre-exists the temporal instances which are copies of it. In the words of Bergson, this understanding of being

. . . establishes between eternity and time the same relation as between a piece of gold and small change — change so small that payment goes on forever without the debt being paid off. The debt could be paid at once with the piece of gold. It is this

5. Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, trans. Edna and Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), KW 6, 148. SV 3, 189.

which Plato expresses in his magnificent language when he says that God, unable to make the world eternal, gave it Time, "a moving image of eternity."⁶

Bergson's elegant metaphor of gold and small change expresses precisely what Kierkegaard understands to be the Greek conception of time. According to the Greeks, in Kierkegaard's view, nothing can "come to be" in time which instantiates eternal being perfectly.

For Kierkegaard the idea of knowledge as recollection accompanies necessarily the Greek view of the relation of being and becoming. Because we are eternal, we already know the truth from our very birth. Ignorance is a kind of forgetfulness which allows us to confuse what becomes with what truly is. By means of due separation of what is from what appears to be we may re-collect and re-member what is separated by becoming and change.⁷

The philosopher, however, is always prevented from realizing this remembrance by the fact that he exists in time. To become truly wise he has to exit from the life which ties him to becoming, or what is the same thing, he must make his living a practice of dying:

The Greek philosopher was an existing individual, and did not permit himself to forget that fact. In order that he might devote himself wholly to thought, he therefore sought refuge in suicide, or in a Pythagorean dying from the world, or in a Socratic form of philosopher's death. He was conscious of being a thinker, but he was also aware that existence as his medium prevented him from thinking continuously, since existence involved him in a process of becoming. In order to think in very truth, therefore, he took his own life.⁸

It was precisely the consciousness of this very tension in the depths of reality which made "every Greek thinker . . . a passionate thinker."⁹

Recollection, according to Kierkegaard, corresponds to a view of reality which asserts that non-being does not exist. The only thing which really is, is (unchanging) being itself. Becoming, which is a kind of non-being, is not at all. Repetition, on the other hand, implies that true being may come to be in the instant of free choice.

6. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913), p. 335.

7. See Plato, *Meno*, 86a-b; *Phaedo*, 75c-76a; *Phaedrus*, 248c.

8. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 274; SV 7, 265.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 276; SV 7, 267.

In recollection something eternal (the soul) comes into an eternal (or past) relation to eternity; in repetition something eternal (the existing individual) comes into a *temporal* (present) relation to the eternal.

For as the eternal came into the world at a moment of time, the existing individual does not in the course of time come into relation with the eternal and think about it . . . but *in time* it comes into relation with the eternal *in time*; so that the relation is within time, and this relationship conflicts equally with all thinking, whether one reflects upon the individual or upon the Deity.¹⁰

This is why Kierkegaard says that for Socrates "every point of departure in time is *eo ipso* accidental, an occasion, a vanishing moment."¹¹ For Socrates every moment of becoming has an irreducible admixture of non-being, and therefore prevents the true presence of the eternal. Nothing he does or thinks in time will alter his eternal relation to eternity. The moment of time in Socratic thought is not "decisive" in this sense. During no moment of the lifetime of the philosopher can his full eternal reality be realized. His eternal happiness is not decided in time but is instead a past and therefore ever-present reality. He becomes aware in time that he already is eternally related to eternity. In this sense, the true condition of the thinker, though veiled by forgetfulness, is always commensurable or adequate to the knowledge of reality. His forgetful ignorance is like a veil thrown over this true core. The veil is time and the true core is eternity.

According to Kierkegaard, Christianity has taught that man has lost through sin the condition which makes it possible for him to accord with reality. He has "fallen" out of relation to the real. The task is to "repeat" or recover the lost relation. Through an act in time, a new relation to the eternal must be realized. But, as was said, an occasion in time is inadequate to or incommensurable with the eternal. Sinful man cannot exit from time through an act of will. Nevertheless, the idea of repetition implies that the historical moment is commensurable with eternity, and that "what is" can be repeated in time. Through time one can become related to the eternal.

The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been — otherwise it could not be repeated — but the very

10. *Ibid.*, p. 506: SV 7, 497.

11. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. David F. Swenson and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 13. SV 4, 181.

fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new. When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical view of life, repetition the modern; repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword in every ethical view; repetition is *conditio sine qua non* for every issue of dogmatics.¹²

The Greek view of being implies, in Kierkegaard's mind, that becoming in its vanishing only points toward unchanging true being. For Kierkegaard, true being is still beyond time but is at the same time "in" time. Time and eternity, though incommensurable, become related in a single moment of time: "The Moment makes its appearance when an eternal resolve comes into relation with an incommensurable occasion."¹³ The eternity of the Greek philosopher is already realized beyond time in eternity, while in repetition eternity is realized in time.

In so far as the resolve of the individual is eternal, it is an act out of time. In so far as the eternal is *resolved* upon, it is an act in time. The "Moment" or the "Instant", as Kierkegaard understands it, is the unity of these two elements. The individual's "resolve, which stands in no equal reciprocal relation to the occasion, must be from eternity, though when realized in time it constitutes precisely the *Moment*."¹⁴

In so far as the act is an eternal act, it is a recollection. That is to say it wholly recovers the eternal self. To the extent that the act, while having a beginning in time, is at the same time eternal, it is a repetition. Repetition implies the possession of the condition making one adequate to the real, and the simultaneous dis-possession or absence of this condition. The eternal is both present and absent at the same time. Because the individual is a created synthesis of eternity and time, he is in possession of the condition which makes him adequate to the eternal. He simply remembers in consciousness that he is eternal. But in so far as he has forfeited the condition by an act, he has lost the condition. The fallen individual therefore receives a new nature in a specific moment of time. Interpretations fail, however, when it is overlooked that this novel

12. KW 6, 149; SV 3, 189.

13. Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, p. 30; SV 4, 194.

14. *Ibid.*; SV 4, 193-94.

repetition is at the same time a recollection. Repetition is a recollection in a forward direction.¹⁵ It is a recollection that is not completed out of time but in time.

In so far as the learner exists he is already created, and hence God must have endowed him with the condition for understanding the Truth. For otherwise his earlier existence must have been merely brutish, and the Teacher who gave him the Truth and with it the condition was the original creator of human nature. But in so far as the moment is to have decisive significance (and unless we assume this we remain at the Socratic standpoint) the learner is destitute of this condition, and must therefore have been deprived of it.¹⁶

The relation of the individual to eternity is both an accomplished or past relation, *and* a relation which must come to be anew at this and every future moment. In this present moment we must choose what is in principle unchoosable. It is not through the fact that the present is undetermined and open-ended that the present choice is charged with passion. The choice is not free because it is the unrepeatable and creative product of human freedom. The choice, to be a real choice, must be a repetition of the eternal in time. The relation of the individual to the eternal is both a passion, in the sense that the eternal is eternally absent from time, and an action, in the sense that it is only realized through time itself, or through an action which takes time.¹⁷

To be fully present in time, in Kierkegaard's view, is to be fully concentrated in the moment. Past and future must be gathered together and repeated in the moment. The achievement of this presence is not possible by a mere act of the will. A third thing is required which unites the eternal part of the self with the temporal part. The individual becomes conscious that he already is eternal,

15. KW 6, 131; SV 3, 173. "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward."

16. Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, p. 18; SV 4, 184-85.

17. Passion is used in the sense of suffering, which is the sense in which Kierkegaard usually uses it. The quality of suffering distinguishes the religious stage of existence from the ethical stage. The existing individual is related to God through love, and yet at the same time, as the result of sin, is unable to actualize this love in time. This simultaneous wealth and poverty of the soul is experienced as suffering. This is why Kierkegaard states that "the distinguishing mark of religious action is suffering" (*Postscript*, p. 387; SV 7, 375). There is in Danish, unlike in English, a close etymological connection between passion (*Lidenskab*) and suffering (*Lidelse*).

and at the same time sustains this fact by his action. By what is he moved? It must be the eternal itself which turns him toward his real self and true presence.

When by the help of eternity a man lives absorbed in today he turns his back to the next day. The more he is eternally absorbed in today, the more decisively does he turn his back to the next day, so that he does not see it at all.¹⁸

To be entirely present to oneself is to be out of time while at the same time in time. It is this contradiction that Kierkegaard is wrestling with when he claims that the task of the individual consists in "the simultaneous maintenance of an absolute relationship to the absolute *telos* and a relative relationship to relative ends."¹⁹ The eternal does not rest in an immobile stillness entirely divorced from events in time. The eternal both rests in immobility and is at the same time present in what is mobile. In so far as one is consciously concentrated *in* the moment *on* eternity, one is present to oneself. In so far as this concentration comes to be in a moment of time, the eternal consciousness is arrived at through time. The individual "*in time . . . comes into relation with the eternal in time.*"²⁰ T.S. Eliot expresses the same contradiction in the following way.

Time past and time future
 Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only through time time is conquered.²¹

The idea of repetition, therefore, involves bringing into complete relationship two elements, time and eternity, which in principle cannot be brought into complete relationship. Though Kierkegaard departs from Plato in claiming that in the "moment" of time a real relationship between eternity and time is actualized, he presupposes, and therefore accepts, Plato's division between being and becoming by assuming that this relationship is impossible and "paradoxical". How this relationship of eternity and time can be

18. Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University, 1971), p. 76. SV 10, 77.

19. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 386; SV 7, 374.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 506; SV 7, 497.

21. T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, in: *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 192.

actual, and yet inherently impossible, can only be explained by referring to the close analysis of the "moment" given in the third chapter of *Anxiety*.

II *The Problem of Transition in Time*

Kierkegaard begins Chapter three of *Anxiety* by criticizing the use of the notion of transition in speculative philosophy. For Hegel, transition is a moment in the circular, and therefore necessary, process of time.²² The nature of Spirit is to pass over into its opposite and at the same time return to itself. The source of its motion is not outside of itself in a "beyond" which is above time. Spirit is the very presence of the timeless in time through the form of the historical process. This process is a negative, self-mediating process through which Spirit comes to consciousness of itself. Ideas do not rest in stillness beyond time, but are present in the very temporal forms which they invisibly define.²³

22. Hegel describes the circular character of time in the following way. "While we are . . . concerned with the Idea of Spirit, and in the History of the World regard everything as only its manifestation, we have, in traversing the past — however extensive its periods — only to do with what is *present*; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the *eternally present*. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future but an eternal *now*. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps. These have indeed unfolded themselves in succession independently; but what Spirit is it has always been essentially; distinctions are only the development of this essential nature. The life of the ever present Spirit is a circle of progressive embodiments, which looked at in one aspect still exist beside each other, and only as looked at from another point of view appear as past. The grades which Spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of its present" (G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree [New York: Dover Publications, Inc.], 1956, pp. 78-79).

23. History is the process in which the negative or phenomenal aspect of the world is changed into a manifestation of Spirit. The movement exhibited in the phenomenal world is the necessary and immanent movement of the Spirit "producing" itself in time. Time therefore contains its own negation and its own overcoming. "History, is a *conscious, self-mediating* process — Spirit emptied out into Time, but this externalization, this kenosis, is equally an externalization of itself; the negative is the negative of itself" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller [New York: Oxford University Press, 1977], para. 808). As Stephen Crites clearly expresses it, the comprehension of Spirit in definite historical conditions, for Hegel, "is at the same time the transcendence of these conditions. The temporal manifestation is in the end a dialectical moment in an essentially timeless self-relation of Spirit" (*In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History* [Chambersburg: American Academy of Religion, 1972], p. 77).

When in the third chapter Kierkegaard attacks the speculative concepts of transition, negation and mediation he is essentially criticizing the idea that Spirit realizes itself in history by means of a necessary process.

In the following quotation, Kierkegaard links these three concepts with the notion of beginning philosophy "without presuppositions", a beginning which he claims is recommended by Hegel. His main point is that these concepts involve a reference to time which is not adequately accounted for by Hegel. The presuppositionless beginning in fact presupposes "terms and phrases borrowed from transition in time."²⁴

In recent philosophy there is a category that is continually used in logical no less than in historical-philosophical inquiries. It is the category of transition. However, no further explanation is given. The term is freely used without any ado, and while Hegel and the Hegelian school startled the world with the great insight of the presuppositionless beginning of philosophy, or the thought that before philosophy there must be nothing but the most complete absence of presuppositions, there is no embarrassment at all over the use in Hegelian thought of the terms "transition", "negation", "mediation", i.e. the principles of motion, in such a way that they do not find their place in the systematic progression. If this is not a presupposition, I do not know what a presupposition is. For to use something that is nowhere explained is indeed to presuppose it. . . .Negation, transition, mediation are three disguised, suspicious, and secret agents (*agentia* main springs) that bring about all movements. Hegel would hardly call them presumptuous, because it is with his gracious permission that they carry on their ploy so unembarrassedly that even logic uses terms and phrases borrowed from transition in time: "thereupon", "when", "as being it is this", "as becoming it is this," etc.²⁵

For Kierkegaard a presuppositionless beginning implies a thinker who occupies the standpoint of absolute or universal doubt. Indeed in referring to Descartes in his lectures on philosophy, Hegel said that we must make an "absolute beginning" wherein we "renounce all prepossessions" and "all

24. Kierkegaard borrows this argument from Adolf Trendelenburg, whose criticisms of Hegel Kierkegaard greatly admired. The best summary of these criticisms is given by Trendelenburg himself in "The Logical Question in Hegel's System" trans. T. Davidson, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 5 (1871), 349-59.

25. KW 8, 81; SV 4, 350-51.

hypotheses which are accepted in their immediacy." This "true beginning" is identified with the doubting subject which is now to be "the fixed and settled basis" of knowledge.²⁶ Kierkegaard's argument is that immediacy cannot be transcended in this manner. Experience always has an element of givenness or naturalness which cannot be fully comprehended within a conceptual system. The very language we use with regard to motion and change, e.g. "when", "thereupon", has a givenness at which we can only wonder. Just as an individual can never become absolutely independent in his freedom, so his use of language "presupposes" a web of meaning which is simply given. Philosophy has in language a medium which is not freely chosen or constructed.

The mystery of consciousness, according to Kierkegaard, is that it is a unity, or better a synthesis, of the natural or given on the one hand, and the cognitive freedom of the individual on the other. Absolute doubt would have to take place out of time and without relation to an existing situation, whereas real doubt is involved in time and in a web of meaning which pre-exists that doubting. The claim to unbiased philosophy ignores the fact of the relation of thought to language, and language to reality. As Kierkegaard states in his journal,

If it were the case that philosophers are presuppositionless, an account would still have to be made of language and its entire importance and relation to speculation, for here speculation does indeed have a medium which it has not provided itself, and what the eternal secret of consciousness is for speculation as a union of a qualification of nature and qualification of freedom, so also language is partly an original given and partly something freely developing. And just as the individual, no matter how freely he develops, can never reach the point of becoming absolutely independent, since true freedom consists, on the contrary, in appropriating the given and consequently in becoming absolutely dependent through freedom, so it is also with language, although we do find at times the ill-conceived tendency of not wanting to accept language as the freely appropriated given but rather to produce it for oneself, whether it appears in the highest regions where it usually ends in silence or in the personal isolation of jargonish nonsense.²⁷

26. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson (New York: The Humanities Press, 1974), Vol. 3, pp. 224-25. Hegel's identification of the absolute beginning with the doubt of everything (*de omnibus dubitandum est*) was the subject of much ridicule by Kierkegaard. See his *Postscript*, pp. 101-06; SV 7, 90-96.

27. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 3, 3281; *Pap.* III A 11.

When we refer to events in time we use language. When Hegel refers to transition, according to Kierkegaard, he is presupposing its meaning. Indeed he must so presuppose it because transition cannot be explained fully in terms of a coherent system of concepts. If one attempts to explain transition in time logically, contradictions are always generated. In order to explain these contradictions, Kierkegaard refers to Plato, who at the same time is criticized for possessing only an abstract view of time and the temporal moment.

Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel is not that he discounted or ignored the fact of becoming, but that he falsified the real experience of time by reconciling the changing and the unchanging in an unlawful and abstract manner. His error lay in his claim that time and becoming can be viewed from a point of view outside of all time and becoming. What Kierkegaard has in mind in the following quotation is the absolute standpoint that Hegel claims has been afforded him by virtue of his very position in history. By virtue of this position, he is able to know and understand what previous thinkers only believed. Becoming and being, according to Hegel, are unified through the necessary process of history, a process in which true being becomes the product of becoming. For Kierkegaard the reality of becoming is severely attenuated in this account.

In spite of all that Hegel says about process, he does not understand history from the point of view of becoming, but with the help of the illusion attaching to pastness understands it from the point of view of a finality that excludes all becoming.²⁸

In separating "finality" and becoming in such a way, Kierkegaard would seem to be embracing an Eleatic interpretation of the relation between these elements. It will become clear from his treatment of Plato's *Parmenides* and its account of transition that this is not quite the case. He does adopt such a view, however, in so far as it brings out the contradictions which are produced when one seeks to conceive time and transition.

Kierkegaard therefore introduces Plato as one who has "fully recognized the difficulty of placing transition into the realm of the purely metaphysical, and for that reason the category of *the moment* cost him so much effort."²⁹ In the "Introduction" to *Anxiety*, Kierkegaard stresses that science can possess certainty only if it

28. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 272n; SV 7, 263n.

29. KW 8, 82; SV 4, 351.

deals with stable, unmoving *states*.³⁰ The science of psychology can only deal with the abstract conditions of states predisposing the individual to the actual fall into sin. Psychology can no more deal with the actuality of sin than geometry can deal with the sides of a triangle during the time in which they are being drawn. Science deals with states that *are*, not with states which are coming to be. Kierkegaard insists that sin is not a state at all: “. . . sin is not a state. . . . As a state (*de potentia*) it is not, but *de actu* it is, again and again” (15; 287).

The reason for mentioning this is that immediately before the sentence quoted above about Plato’s recognition of the difficulties in the notion of transition, Kierkegaard makes an exceedingly odd statement. He uses both terms (“actual” and “state”) to describe the concept of transition, the same terms which he used as opposites in reference to sin. Transition is not merely a state, nor is it purely actual; it is both at the same time. The close reader is astonished to read the following.

The term “transition” is and remains a clever turn in logic. Transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom, for transition is a state and it is actual. (82; 351)

To say that transition is both a state and actual means that it both *is* and *is becoming*. The fact that transition contains both these elements renders problematic the attempt to explain it in terms of concepts only. It is precisely this difficulty which, according to Kierkegaard, Plato’s *Parmenides* acutely expresses.

In the section of the dialogue with which Kierkegaard is concerned, the character Parmenides is explaining how it is that transition takes place in a moment of time which, strictly speaking, does not exist. In particular the dialogue is concerned with how the

30. KW 8, 21-22; SV 4, 294. “The subject of which psychology treats must be something in repose that remains in a restless repose, not something restless that always either produces itself or is repressed. But this abiding something out of which sin constantly arises, not by necessity (for a becoming by necessity is a state, as, for example, the whole history of the plant is a state) but by freedom — this abiding something, is a subject of interest for psychology. That which can be the concern of psychology and with which it can occupy itself is not that sin comes into existence (*bliver til*), but how it can come into existence. Psychology can bring its concern to the point where it seems as if sin were there, but the next thing, that sin is there, is qualitatively different from the first.” Since quotations of this work are so frequent in the following pages, references to *Anxiety* will be placed in the text after the quotations enclosed in brackets. The page number of the English edition will be given first, followed by the page number of the Danish.

"one" (*to en*) can undergo changes in time from one moment to the next. The most interesting aspect of the discourse is how "presence" is defined, and then how the "one" is conjoined with this presence. The fact that we can affirm that the one "is" one, means that it has being. Being is defined not merely as an eternal present beyond time, but as "having existence in conjunction with time present."³¹ From this he draws the conclusion, which incidentally is refuted in an earlier section of the dialogue,³² that "if the one is, it is in time."³³ But Parmenides has already asserted that being present means being present somewhere: ". . . anything that is must always be somewhere."³⁴ To be present is to have a place (*topos*).

Now because time is advancing, the "one" which is in time is becoming older. Because it is becoming older it must be becoming older than something else which is at the same time becoming younger. This younger thing is the one itself. Therefore, the one is both becoming older and younger than itself. But since Parmenides equates presence with a stable state of being, the state of being older is contrary to the fact of actually becoming older. The word which expresses this static presence or being is the "now", which is "with the one always." This now is therefore a standing, spatial now which is the contrary of becoming:

When in becoming older, [the one] coincides with present, it stops becoming and *is* then older. . . . the present is with the one always throughout all its existence, for at whatever time it is existing, it is existing "now".³⁵

If the line traversed by becoming is made up an aggregate of "stops" or "nows" in becoming, at what point will one stop change over into another stop? The argument of the character Parmenides is essentially the same as that made by the historical Zeno concerning the flight of an arrow.³⁶ If the arrow is said to "be" somewhere at each point in its flight, and if to be at a point is to be at rest in that point, then at each point in its trajectory the

31. Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F.M. Cornford, in: *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 151e. Greek text from the Loeb edition, *Parmenides*, trans. H.N. Fowler (London: Heinemann).

32. *Ibid.*, 140e-141d.

33. *Ibid.*, 152a.

34. *Ibid.*, 151a.

35. *Ibid.*, 152c-e.

36. See G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 294-95, for Zeno's arguments concerning the arrow.

arrow will be at rest. "When" does the arrow move? We assert that the arrow moves because we "actually" experience it. And yet when we piece together the movement logically, the movement is impossible. Similarly, if time is a series of static "nows", its flowing "actuality" can never be explained. What is the "actuality" of the time in relation to which the static nows are stops?

Time present, at least in the dialogue *Parmenides*, is equated with a state of being. Even motion is conceived as a state of being. The change between the state of rest and that of motion is an "instant" in which the "one" is neither in one state or the other. Because being present is equated in this argument with being somewhere, it means being present in a particular given state. When the one is present, it cannot be present in two places or states at the same time. On the other hand, it is in *neither* of those states. The word Plato uses to describe this placeless moment is *atopon*, "that queer thing", which is the privative of the word for place (*topos*). Because this change from motion to rest is sudden (the primary meaning of *exaiphnes*), it is no place. Because it is in no place, the transition occupies no time at all.

. . . when being in motion, [the one] comes to a stand, or being at rest, it changes to being in motion, it cannot itself occupy any time at all. . . . Suppose it is first at rest and later in motion, or first in motion and later at rest; that cannot happen to it without its changing. But there is no time during which a thing can be at once neither in motion nor at rest. On the other hand it does not change without making a transition. When does it make the transition, then? Not while it is at rest or while it is in motion, or while it is occupying time. Consequently the time at which it will be when it makes the transition must be that queer thing, the instant. . . . this queer thing, the instant, is situated between the motion and the rest; it occupies no time at all, and the transition of the moving thing to the state of rest, or of the stationary thing to being in motion, takes place *to* and *from* the instant.³⁷

This conclusion seems to contradict the first assumption that the one becomes older "in" time. Time present, or the static now, seems really to mean eternal being, which in no way comes into relation with the instant of transition. In so far as the instant "is", it must come into relation to time present, or to a particular state. The course of the argument has shown, on the contrary, that it is impossible for the instant to have this sort of existence. The logical analysis of time finally usurps the common-sense understanding

37. Plato, *Parmenides*, 156c-d.

of time as that in which changes occur. Time present is resolved back into an eternal, unchanging present.

In the following quotation from Kierkegaard's remarks about the *Parmenides*, he comments on this "vacillation" in the definition of presence. The vacillation arises from the fact that eternity and the instant are contradictory and exclude one another. Kierkegaard holds that this contradictory conception is more adequate than the explanation given by Hegel's philosophy, which Kierkegaard claims dissolves this opposition. Only in Christianity does one achieve the unity of opposites which does not dissolve the contradiction:

. . . it appears that [in the *Parmenides*] the present (*to nun*) vacillates between meaning the present, the eternal, and the moment. This "now" (*to nun*) lies between "was" and "will become", and naturally "the one" cannot, in passing from the past to the future, bypass this "now". It comes to a halt in the now, does not become older but is older. In the most recent philosophy [i.e. Hegel's], abstraction culminates in pure being, is the most abstract expression for eternity, and again as "nothing" it is precisely the moment. Here again the importance of the moment becomes apparent, because only with this category is it possible to give eternity its proper significance, for eternity and the moment become the extreme opposites, whereas dialectical sorcery, on the other hand, makes eternity and the moment signify the same thing. It is only with Christianity that sensuousness, temporality, and the moment can be properly understood, because only with Christianity does eternity become essential. (84n; 354n)

Plato, however, conceives the instant or the moment "abstractly" because he does not see that the eternal and the instant, though contradictory, are yet related to one another. For the purposes of his exposition, it appears that Kierkegaard reduces Plato's position to a purely Eleatic one. Indeed it may be that not even Parmenides so unequivocally opposed being and non-being. He reveals a subtler interpretation of the Greeks in the *Postscript*, where he affirms that they are the only ones who are truly concerned with the problem of motion and becoming.³⁸ But it is perhaps because they realized that, logically speaking, motion is impossible that they were moved to concentrate on the phenomenon of motion with such profound seriousness.

The arguments put forward in the *Parmenides* show the absurdity of conceiving time as a mere aggregate of "nows". Similarly, a line

38. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 274; SV 7, 265.

is not merely a row of points, since between any given two points an infinite number of points may be filled in.³⁹ The mere sequence of standing nows is not identical with the actual flow of time. The actuality of time seems to contradict the states which are found in it. The states are self-identical "places" through which a thing passes in the course of time. The "being" or presence of a state is in opposition to its non-being, which is at the same time the presence or being of another state. The "being" of my mood of happiness is at the same time the non-being of my mood of sadness. This relative non-being is of a different order than the non-being of transition, which is the non-being of any state at all. The problem of time is therefore how transition and the states which it somehow brings into being are related.

III Christianity and the "Moment"

According to Kierkegaard, Christianity attributes a certain kind of presence to the non-being of transition in its doctrine of sin and atonement. Sin is the denial of what is real. We should recall at this point Kierkegaard's claim that the Greeks did not possess a concept of sin in the Christian sense. The philosopher in the Greek sense is in possession of an eternal relation to the eternal, in relation to which his life in becoming is merely appearance. According to Kierkegaard, the eternal "comes to be" in the moment of time. The individual has through sin "lost" the eternal relation to the eternal. This relation to the eternal must come to be again, or be repeated. This achieving of an eternal present and of true being Kierkegaard calls the Atonement. The fact of the incarnation implies the absurdity that true being comes to be from non-being. The non-transitory (the eternal) comes to be out of the moment of transition.

The Christian view takes the position that non-being is present everywhere as the nothing from which things were created, as semblance and vanity, as sin, as sensuousness removed from spirit, as the temporal forgotten by the eternal; consequently, the task is to do away with it in order to bring forth being. Only with this orientation in mind can the concept of Atonement be correctly understood historically, that is, in the

39. Aristotle makes a similar comparison of the "now" and the point. Just as the "now" is not a "part" of time, so is the point not a "part" of the line: "obviously the 'now' is no part of time, nor the section any part of the movement, any more than the points are parts of the line — for it is two lines that are the parts of one line" (Aristotle, *Physics* 220a 18-20, quoted in: Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [Bloomington: Indiana University Press], p. 250).

sense in which Christianity brought it into the world. If the term is understood in the opposite sense (the movement proceeding from the assumption that non-being is not), the Atonement is volatilized and turned inside out. (83n; 352n)

Now the claim that the interpretation of the moment in time in Christianity is new rests on the assumption that eternity and time are related in a new way. Two elements, being and becoming, which are incommensurable according to speech, are brought together in an existing being, i.e. in Christ. God is not only the God which is beyond and before time, but is a God which has come to be in time and space. Christianity includes an historical element in so far as it presupposes the coming into being in time of an eternally necessary being. Or, as he says in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "The historical assertion is that the Deity, the Eternal, came into being at a definite moment in time as an individual man." The contradiction in this assertion is that it attributes becoming to a being which by virtue of its essence cannot "become". This is why the "historical fact" of the Incarnation "is not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd."⁴⁰

In the assertion that God has lived and died, there is contained an inherent impossibility, in so far as one assumes that God has eternal being by virtue of his essence. He therefore possesses a kind of being distinct from the "existence" of creatures in the world. Kierkegaard goes as far as to deny Him existence of this sort: "God does not think, he creates; God does not exist, he is eternal. Man thinks and exists, and existence separates thought and being, holding them apart from one another in succession."⁴¹ Christ is Christ in so far as he incarnates a God which cannot be incarnated. God is not historical in his essence, but comes into *relation* with the historical. Christianity is a paradox in that it both rejects and accepts the following statement about being as voiced by Empedocles:

For it is impossible that there should be becoming out of what is not at all, and impossible and unheard-of that what is should perish utterly. For there it will always be, wherever one may keep thrusting it.⁴²

40. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 512; SV 7, 504.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 296; SV7, 287.

42. Quoted in: *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*, trans., with an introduction and commentary by F.M. Cornford (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., n.d.), p. 54.

God is both above all time and existence and *in* time and existence. He is deathless and yet has undergone a death.

After discussing Plato's account of the instant in a long footnote, Kierkegaard proceeds to explicate his own idea of time. It should be noted that, in doing so, he is criticizing the notion of the absolute beginning in Hegel's thought. His aim is to show that a true beginning must take into consideration the paradoxical nature of the relation of time and eternity. The explanation of time given by Hegel, according to which it is circular and therefore a necessary manifestation of the eternal, does not, in Kierkegaard's view, deal adequately with the problem of time in its true depths. He raises the problem of time in order to prepare the way for the reader to understand the Christian view of the relation between eternity and time.

He begins by repeating a sentence which I have claimed expresses a contradiction.

In the sphere of historical freedom, transition is a state. However, in order to understand this correctly, one must not forget that the new is brought about through the leap. If this is not maintained, the transition will have a quantitative preponderance over the elasticity of the leap. Man, then, is a synthesis of psyche and body, but he is also a *synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*. (85; 354-55)

Historical freedom is the eternal freedom which comes to be. Freedom is a state of being. We truly "are" free before we make any choices. At the same time our freedom comes to be in that, through sin, the state of freedom is lost. In historical freedom transition is a state. We are free even while we are moving out of the state of freedom. Freedom is united with change only through a "leap". Freedom is not a *product* of the process of transition. This is why he says that transition should not acquire a "quantitative preponderance over the elasticity of the leap." One chooses in time *in relation to* what is unchoosable or eternally necessary.

Both the fall into sin and the rising out of it are eternal acts of freedom. Like the impossible incarnation of God, an eternal act involves an inherent impossibility. All acts of the will are temporally limited. The fall of the soul into sin is not a mere product of choice, but is, nevertheless, related to choice. The movement of the individual from state to state is a leap because a constant intersection of time and eternity is implied. In Chapter four of *Anxiety* Kierkegaard describes the "history" of the individual as a series of such leaps:

The history of the individual proceeds in a movement from state to state. Every state is posited by a leap. As sin entered into the world, so it continues to enter into the world if it is not halted. Nevertheless, every such repetition is not a simple consequence but a new leap. (113; 381)

Were the process of time a simple series of states, there would be no essential difference between time and space. But in so far as these states succeed one another "in" time by leaps, it seems that time and space are related as contraries. In order to stress the fact that man is a unity of these contraries, Kierkegaard designates man's nature a synthesis (*Synthesen*). After affirming that in historical (human) freedom transition is a state, he shows the connection between this fact and the structure of the self. He continues, "Man, then, is a synthesis of soul and body; but he is also a *synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*" (85; 355). To affirm that freedom is historical, and that transition is a state, is equivalent to saying that the self is a synthesis of soul and body. At the same time, man is a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal. In so far as man "is", he is in a state of being. In so far as he is a being divided in himself and in transition, he is in a "state" of non-being. Man is therefore a relation between the divided and the undivided, between non-being and being. That is to say he is a synthesis of soul and body, and a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal.

Kierkegaard must now show how the two contrary elements (*Momentet*) are actually united. To begin he notes a difference in the structure of the two polarities he has attributed to man's being. That which "synthesizes" the elements soul and body is the element of spirit. Spirit relates the changing and unchanging elements of the self to one another. Spirit "identifies" these elements in a relation and creates a "self", thereby bringing the unchoosable into relation to the choosing of the individual. It is both the self-relating aspect of the self, and that which relates the self in "absolute dependence" to the "power" which sustains the relation. It is the "third thing" (*det Tredie*) which harmonizes the contraries contained in the self.⁴³

In the synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, the third thing which binds them together is not yet evident. The third thing is

43. See Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), KW 19, 13-14. SV 11, 127-28.

required in order to unite the two elements which in themselves are contradictory to one another. The synthesis cannot "be" as long as the elements are related as contradictories. The mystery of this relation prompts Kierkegaard to ask about the nature of the temporal. In the one synthesis,

. . . the elements are soul and body, and spirit is the third [*det Tredie*], yet in such a way that one can speak of a synthesis only when spirit is posited. The latter synthesis has only two elements, the temporal and the eternal. Where is the third element [*des Tredie*]? And if there is no third element, there really is no synthesis, for a synthesis that is a contradiction cannot be completed as a synthesis without a third element, because the fact that the synthesis is a contradiction asserts that it is not. What, then, is the temporal? (85; 355)

When Kierkegaard completes his analysis of the temporal, he will put forward the moment (*Øjeblikket*) as the third thing through which the temporal and the eternal are related. This instant is not the immediate moment which is always passing away when we attempt to apprehend it. It is *the* instant in which the entirety of past and future are contained wholly in an eternal present. It is the instant in which the synthesis is actual and not merely thought.

IV *Spatial Time and Actual Time*

Kierkegaard proceeds to define the temporal as an "infinite succession" (*uendelige Succession*). He shows that the distinctions of past, present and future normally ascribed to time do not derive from time itself. Each moment of time "is" only in so far as it immediately ceases to be. The very moment we grasp a moment and hold onto it with our mind's eye, the moment itself is already past. The immediate moment of time seems to have no presence, because we find it impossible to attribute *extension* to any given moment. In order to measure time, a permanent presence is required in relation to which the various moments of time may be compared. It is in relation to this permanent presence that the distinction among the tenses of past, present and future becomes meaningful. Time itself cannot provide this stable presence, since every moment of time is at every moment passing away. If time is to have any presence whatsoever, it must be because it comes into relation with the eternal. The real distinction between past, present and future depends upon a real point of division, a point of division which the "eternal" provides. In the flow of time no moment can be said to be, since the moment we state: "it is", it is gone.

If time is correctly defined as an infinite succession, it is most likely also defined as the present, the past, and the future. This distinction, however, is incorrect if it is considered to be implicit in time itself, because the distinction appears only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time. If in the infinite succession of time a foothold could be found, i.e. a present, which was the dividing point, the division would be quite correct. However, precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future. (85; 355)⁴⁴

The only way to make this division from within time is to freeze each moment into a tiny little eternity of its own. Just as a line can be viewed as a row of discrete points, the process of time can be seen as a line of time units of equal magnitude. In this way the moments can be equated to visually represented, spatial magnitudes.

The purely spatial differences of colour, shape and position can reveal themselves to the eye in a single moment of time. A painting, for instance, can be taken in entirely at a glance. New things about the picture could appear "over" time as the result of

44. The problem of time which Kierkegaard is focussing on is essentially the same as that discussed by Augustine in the *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), where he asks, "how can we say that even the present *is*, when the reason why it *is* is that it is *not to be*?" (Bk. 11, Ch. 14). The "is" of the present moment in time cannot be associated with any particular duration of years, days or minutes (*ibid.*, Bk. 11, Ch. 15). The only thing which can be present is, like in Plato, an "instant" which is without duration and extension. "In fact the only time that can be called present is an instant, if we can conceive of such, that cannot be divided even into the most minute fractions, and a point of time as small as this passes so rapidly from the future to the past that its duration is without length. For if its duration were prolonged, it could be divided into past and future. When it is present it has no duration" (*ibid.*). But if this were true, it would be impossible for Augustine's instant, just like Plato's, to come into relation with time past and time future, or as Augustine himself says, "as for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it could not be time but eternity" (*ibid.*, Bk. 11, Ch. 14). In Augustine, as in Plato, the present "wavers" between meaning time and eternity. Augustine proceeds to show in the *Confessions* that, because time is not grounded in the movement of bodies, but is an extension of the mind, the connection between past, present and future is grounded in the memory, attention and expectation of the mind (Bk. 11, Ch. 27). For Kierkegaard, this connection is established by the intersection of time and eternity in the "moment".

sustained attention, but in principle such details can be present in the first glance. Music, however, requires the succession of time in order to be heard. A symphony can neither in principle nor in fact be played instantaneously. This is because music is the art corresponding to the ear, and an art which, like hearing, depends on the successiveness of time in order to be actual.⁴⁵ To transform before and after into units of magnitude interchangeable with one another subtly alters the character we naturally attribute to succession.

The "visual" or spatial representation of time, for Kierkegaard, can be expressed in the image of a line of kings. These spatially distinct units (i.e. the kings) cannot be conceived as passing through the present by a process of coming to be and passing away. If they were so conceived, they would cease to be complete and spatially present units. If their passage through the present is to be caught and held in a concept, the moments must be abstracted from their actual passing. Kierkegaard concludes, therefore, that when the infinite succession of time is visually represented it becomes a present which is "infinitely contentless". This is not the real present which unites being and non-being, but the present which is simply equivalent with static, spatial being. The real present includes the qualitative character of successiveness, of "before" and "after", while the present of the spatial magnitude is quantitative in form.

In so far as these time units never pass through the real present, one could argue that they never really are. The units are equivalent to static being, which never comes to be nor passes away. Every time a given moment is expressed by a given magnitude of time, the moment itself is already past. The task of the time measurer is similar to that of one who would like to write a word in a pool of water. The word is only there in an imaginary sense as he is writing and ends up in the state it was in at the beginning: as a mere thought. The actual relation of this thought to the image successively produced in the water still remains in question. For this reason, the visual representation is referred to by Kierkegaard as an "infinite vanishing". The static being of the line of moments is at the same time a "nothing" which is infinitely empty. In the visual representation the successive quality of the succession is lost:

45. Kierkegaard reflects on the connection between music and time in his analysis of the sensuous genius, who is the "aesthetic man" par excellence, and whose existence is identical with the immediacy of time. See *Either/Or*, Vol. 1, trans. David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 55. SV. 1, 40. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 63, 67, 94; SV 1, 47, 50-51, 76.

If it is claimed that this division [between past, present, and future] can be maintained, it is because the moment is *spatialized*, but thereby the infinite succession comes to a halt, it is because representation is introduced that allows time to be represented instead of being thought. Even so, this is not correct procedure, for even as representation, the infinite succession of time is an infinitely contentless present (this is the parody of the eternal). The Hindus speak of a line of kings that has ruled for 70,000 years. Nothing is known about the kings, not even their names (this I assume). If we take this as an example of time, the 70,000 years are for thought an infinite vanishing; in representation it is expanded and is spatialized into an illusionary view of an infinite, contentless nothing. As soon as the one is regarded as succeeding the other, the present is posited. (85-86; 355-56)

The succession of one moment upon another presupposes the passage of the moments through an instant of time which is no-place. For the purposes of his argument, Zeno described the flight of an arrow as a row of now-spaces which, when placed together, yielded a single static now. For this reason Zeno could claim that the arrow was motionless during its flight. The qualitative way in which actual moments arise out of one another is obscured if the moments are set beside and after one another like pebbles. What is the ground of the presence we presuppose in all our statements about past, present and future?

In the preceding quotation, the final sentence states that when we admit succession in its fullness we "posit" or presuppose the present. Though Kierkegaard denies that the present which is "posited" in time is a simple spatial magnitude, he also denies that time and the present are simply identical. He does not by any means reduce space to time. In the human being time and space come into *relation* as contraries. Instead of equating presence with time, Kierkegaard equates it with the "eternal". He does not describe the eternal as something which develops through a process in time. The eternal is the true present and as such contains no division of past and future.

The present, however, is not a concept of time, except precisely as something infinitely contentless, which again is the infinite vanishing. If this is not kept in mind, no matter how quickly it may disappear, the present is posited, and being posited it again appears in the categories: the past and the future. The eternal, on the contrary, is the present. For thought, the eternal is the present in terms of an annulled succession (time is the succession that passes by). For representation, it is a going forth that nevertheless does not get off the spot, because

the eternal is for representation the infinitely contentful present. So also in the eternal there is no division into the past and the future, because the present is posited as the annulled succession. Time is, then, infinite succession; the life that is in time and is only of time has no present. In order to define the sensuous life, it is usually said that it is in the moment and only in the moment. By the moment, then, is understood that abstraction from the eternal that, if it is to be the present, is a parody of it. The present is the eternal, or rather, the eternal is the present, and the present is full. (86; 356)

From this account it seems that time and eternity are sheer opposites. Eternity is present and full. Time is never present and is always empty. Eternity is the absence of succession, whereas time is the absence of presence. Eternity and time can even be defined as each the absence of the other. How, then, are they to be brought into relation? As the third thing which unites eternity and time, Kierkegaard brings forward the "moment" (*Øjeblikket*). Kierkegaard appears to agree with both Plato and Augustine's view of the instant in so far as he affirms that time in and of itself can have no duration.⁴⁶ On the other hand, he disagrees with Plato in assigning the passing moment a real point of contact with the eternal.

V The "Moment" as the Fullness of Time

In the account of the *Parmenides*, the instant was that "queer thing" which occupied no time at all. It had no existence or presence. The instant is that "moment" when a thing is in neither one state or another. A thing can never actually change, since it cannot move into another "now" or state without being *in* a "now" or state. As Kierkegaard puts it, the thing changing "cannot . . . bypass this 'now'" (84n; 354n). According to Kierkegaard the instant is the "leap" in which time and eternity touch (*berore*) one another. This instant is not a mere dividing point between past and future, because such a division is "abstract". The explanation of the instant as a mere division between past and future treats the instant as if it were an ideal mathematical point. But if the instant is to have real duration and presence, it must stand in relation to the eternal, just as a line is tangent to a certain point on a circle.

The verb Kierkegaard uses to describe this real contact is *at berore*, which means "to touch", "brush against", or even "hint at". It has the same ambiguity as the English word "touch", in the sense that it may indicate both tactile contact and the state of being

46. See note 44.

moved or affected by something. Indeed, its root, *rore*, means to cause commotion or movement. In the instant, therefore, eternity touches on time and sets it into motion. When the eternal defines time, the past and the future no longer define time. Strangely, the present as determined by the eternal is characterized in the same way as the present is defined in the sensuous life "which is in time and is merely that of time." In both the sensuous life and the religious life, past and future are "annulled" in some sense. The difference is that the eternal Moment of the religious life gathers up past and future in its presence, while the merely sensuous moment excludes past and future. Time is not a duration which wells up from the past and moves irreversibly through the present into the future. The Moment is not a "creative" moment. Time is a mere going-by and of itself does not give rise to anything. Its irreversible going-by is reversed through its *relation* in a *synthesis* to the *eternal*.

The moment signifies the present as that which has no past and no future, and precisely in this lies the imperfection of the sensuous life. The eternal also signifies the present as that which has no past and no future, and this is the perfection of the eternal. If at this point one wants to use the moment to define time and let the moment signify the purely abstract exclusion of the past and the future and as such the present, then the moment is precisely not the present, because the intermediary between the past and the future, purely abstractly conceived, is not at all. Thus it is seen that the moment is not a determination of time, because the determination of time is that it "passes by". For this reason time, if it is to be defined by any of the determinations revealed in time itself, is time past. If, on the contrary, time and eternity touch each other, then it must be in time, and now we have come to the moment. (87; 356-57)

If time is to have duration or presence, it is through a relation to the eternal. After one has defined the eternal as the present, the difficulty remains as to how such an unmoving presence "comes to be" in and through time. The problem of repetition as outlined in a previous section involved how a finite act in time could bring into being an "eternal" decision. In choosing oneself, one is choosing what one really is, or what existed before the choice. The fall out of the relation to the eternal must be done away with by an act which repeats the original innocence of the human being. If this act is to be possible, a real contact between the finite, temporal human being and the infinite, eternal presence must come into being in a particular moment of time. The problem of choosing oneself by means of a finite, temporally limited act can be reduced to the

problem of how undifferentiated eternal presence enters into relation to the differentiations of time *through* those very differentiations.

The word which Kierkegaard uses to signify the instant is *Øjeblikket*, which literally means "a glance of the eye". Kierkegaard's emphasis on this "figurative expression" obliges us to ponder its significance. The appropriateness of the eye to spatial forms has been mentioned. The whole of a painting may be grasped at once in a glance. Nevertheless this glance takes time to be executed. The moment of transition from not-looking to looking intersects with the spatial state revealed in a moment by the eye. The glance of the eye signifies the unity of state and transition, the problematic character of which is the reason for Kierkegaard's inquiry into time. Reasoning tells us that the moment of transition from state to state does not exist. But our equally convincing experience of this transition, in an act so simple as a glance of the eye, throws us into perplexity on the matter.

In the following quotation, Kierkegaard will compare his idea of the "instant" with the instant (*exaiphnes*) of Plato's *Parmenides*. He will say that the Greeks lack the concept of the temporal for reasons stated above. For them, according to Kierkegaard, no finite act could actualize eternity. The attainment of the whole of what one is depends upon the actual death of the philosopher. With the concept of spirit, a concept which apparently the Greeks also lacked, one arrives at the third thing which unites the eternal self with its finite acts. Spirit makes possible the choosing of what is unchoosable. Just as the eternal corresponds to the soul, and temporal to the body, the "moment" corresponds to the spirit.

"The moment" is a figurative expression, and therefore it is not easy to deal with. However, it is a beautiful word to consider. Nothing is as swift as a glance of the eye, and yet it is commensurable with the content of the eternal. . . . A glance [*et Blik*] is therefore a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. What we call the moment Plato calls *to exaiphnes* [the sudden]. Whatever its etymological explanation, it is related to the category of the invisible, because time and eternity were conceived equally abstractly, because the concept of temporality was lacking, and this again was due to the lack of the concept of spirit. The Latin term is *momentun* (from *movere*), which by derivation expresses the merely vanishing. (87-88; 357-58)

In the "Greek" account of time, according to Kierkegaard, the present "now" was always associated with an undivided state.

Each "now-state" could be described as a little atom of eternity, just as each point on the trajectory of the flying arrow is associated with a state of rest. The Greek indifference to the moment of transition Kierkegaard claims is reflected in the importance which the art of sculpture had for their culture. A piece of sculpture embodies in the simplicity of a plastic form the undivided unity of detail disclosed to the eye. The meaning of the sculpture is frozen in the spatial disposition of the parts which are held in unity by the plastic form. There is no hint of a past or a future in Myron's "Discus Thrower". There is no tension of the muscles, nor strain in the facial features, but only the pure, still radiance of the eternal circles which invisibly govern the movement of the athlete.⁴⁷ This form revealed to the eternal eye of the artist lacks the "glance" which implies the intersection of the static now with the moment of transition. Kierkegaard considers it "remarkable that Greek art culminates in the plastic, which precisely lacks the glance" (87n; 357n).

For the Greeks, eternity was not a matter for hope or expectation, but only acceptance and remembrance. The eternal did not come to be in time but hung placid above the world while at the same time casting its rays into it. Time was simply a non-entity in relation to the spatial and the eternal. The moment in Greek thought is an atom of eternity which, when reduced to its root, is identical with eternity itself.

Thus understood, the moment is not properly an atom of time but an atom of eternity. It is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt, as it were, at stopping time. For this reason, Greek culture did not comprehend the moment, and even if it had comprehended the atom of eternity, it did not comprehend that it was the moment, did not define it with a forward direction but with a backward direction. Because for Greek culture the atom of eternity was essentially eternity, neither time nor eternity received what was properly its due. (88; 358)

At this point, Kierkegaard returns to the problem which led him to question the nature of the temporal. He affirms that the synthesis of the eternal is not a second synthesis, but merely an expression of the first synthesis of soul, body and spirit. Just because man is a synthesis, he can come into relation to the "moment". He is in a *relation* to soul and body, the ground of

47. See E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1950), plate 53, and commentary, pp. 58-59.

which relation is spirit. Spirit relates the unchoosable eternal with the choosable temporal in the instant of time. Purely natural non-human beings cannot choose in opposition to what they really are. What distinguishes man from nature is just this capacity to fall out of relation to and yet at the same time remain related to his eternal being. He is distinguished by his ability to sin and to come into relation to nothingness.

In nature, therefore, time and space are equivalent. The animal does not undergo a transition which is in opposition to its true state of being. Its actions are merely the unfolding of a pre-determined essence. In a sense, the life of the animal is a bodily expression of memory. Its future is equivalent to its "past" essence, which remains unchanged throughout the course of time. The human being, on the other hand, may undergo a transition which is in contradiction to his true state. For the human being, time becomes significant. He has lost his true state through an act both temporal and eternal in nature, and therefore has reached a state lower than that of the animal. Because he may "repeat" this relation through another transition, a higher life is made possible for him.

The synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is not another synthesis but is the expression for the first synthesis, according to which man is a synthesis of soul and body that is sustained by spirit. As soon as the spirit is posited, the moment is present. Therefore one may rightly say reproachfully of man that he lives only in the moment, because that comes to pass by an arbitrary abstraction. Nature does not lie in the moment. It is with temporality as it is with sensuousness, for temporality seems still more imperfect and the moment still more insignificant than nature's apparently secure endurance in time. However, the contrary is the case. Nature's security has its source in the fact that time has no significance at all for nature. Only with the moment does history begin. By sin, man's sensuousness is posited as sinfulness and is therefore lower than that of the beast, and yet this is because it is here that the higher begins, for at this point spirit begins. (88-89; 358-59)

Repetitions in nature are also spatial in character. As Kierkegaard pointed out in the "Introduction" to *Anxiety*, repetition exists in nature in the form of an "immovable necessity". Natural objects move in cycles of growth and decay. The fact that this motion is by nature cyclical means at the same time that it is a kind of unmoving motion. The natural object which becomes by necessity is in a state of being throughout the whole process of its

changing. The "history" of a plant is therefore "a state" (21n; 294n). The history of the individual comes about through freedom.

Man has the possibility of becoming other than his given state. As we have shown, however, the moment is not purely historical in nature. The moment is the meeting of eternity and time, or of the non-historical with the historical. Freedom is in relation to the historical, or to becoming. The choice which brought about the fall was an eternal and at the same time a unique act. Whereas in Greek thought the future did not essentially influence the relation between the individual and eternity, in Christianity the future *may* alter this relation. We are in a relation of possibility to the eternal.

But does this historical dimension of possibility have any reality? The choice which chooses sin finally ends in the loss of the ability to choose.⁴⁸ The freedom which underlies this possibility is not autonomous, but dependent on the eternal "power" which grants this freedom. It is this ontological dependence that makes the "free" act ambiguous and elastic. It is at the same time my act and an act which by myself I am not capable of.

The state to which one is brought by freedom occurs through a leap which is ambiguous and elastic.⁴⁹ The elasticity of a substance designates the extent to which it can be stretched without snapping into two pieces. The point at which this snapping occurs is as sudden and instantaneous as heat lightning. When the eternal comes to be in time from out of the future, time and eternity intersect suddenly. Freedom, or the actual relation to the eternal, comes to be through time. Freedom is a non-historical historical movement. If freedom were purely historical there would be no way to distinguish it from mere becoming as such. The act of freedom, or the act which is truly free, is that act by which one becomes what one is, and is therefore a repetition: "to become is a movement away from that place [where the self is], but to become oneself is a movement in the place."⁵⁰

48. See Kierkegaard, *Journals* 2, 1261; *Pap* X² A 428: ". . . Christianity can say to a man: You shall choose the one thing needful, but in such a way that there must be no question of any choice — that is if you fool around a long time, then you are not really choosing the one thing needful; like the kingdom of God, it must be chosen *first*. Consequently there is something in relation to which there must not be, and by definition there cannot be, a choice, and yet there is a choice. Consequently, the very fact that there is no choice expresses the tremendous passion or intensity with which one *chooses*. Can there be a more accurate expression for the fact that freedom of choice as such means the sure loss of freedom? The content of freedom is decisive for freedom to such an extent that the very truth of freedom of choice is: there must be no choice, even though there is a choice." Cf. *Ibid.*, 1268; *Pap*. X⁴ A 175.

49. Kierkegaard refers to the leap as elastic in *KW* 8, 85; *SV* 4, 354.

50. *KW* 19, 36; *SV* 11, 149.

With the intersection of time and eternity, the divisions of past, present and future time gain their distinctiveness. The temporal is a synthesis of the successiveness of time and the undivided presence of eternity *in* the instant.

The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time. As a result, the above-mentioned division acquires its significance: the present time, the past time, the future time. (89; 359)

Just as the transition from innocence to guilt is a leap, so is that from eternity to time and from time to eternity. In "historical" freedom, transition is a state. One achieves through a temporal relation to the eternal an eternal happiness. In the sense that the eternal comes to be "in" time, the eternal is related to the individual as future. But the future is not identical with eternity but is an "incognito" of the eternal. This incognito is an expression for the fact that eternity is above or "incommensurable" with time and yet at the same time related to time. The eternal is both present and future. Again, the moment of time in which this simultaneity occurs is ambiguous:

By this division [of time into past, present and future time] attention is immediately drawn to the fact that the future in a certain sense signifies more than the present and the past, because in a certain sense the future is the whole of which the past is a part, and the future can in a certain sense signify the whole. This is because the eternal first signifies the future or because the future is the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time. Linguistic usage at times also takes the future as identical with the eternal (the future life — the eternal life). (89; 359)

In this regard, Kierkegaard draws a contrast between Christianity and the Greek conception of time. Since they lacked the idea of the eternal coming to be in time from the instant, the Greeks lacked a true understanding of the future. The temporal was essentially a matter of indifference for the Greek as Kierkegaard understands him. Because time did not enter into a relation with eternity in an essential way, the "moment" in the sense described above was not a crucial category. At the same time this meant that the categories of spirit and freedom, which correspond to the "moment", were unnecessary as well.

Because for the Greek nothing essentially new happens in time, time has no decisive significance for him. As stated above the philosopher is in an eternal relation to the eternal. His task "in" time is to recollect this eternal relation, though the relation is not realizeable in time. This is why Kierkegaard says that: "For the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the past that can only be entered backwards" (90; 358-59). When this eternal relation is lost by sin and then regained again by an eternal decision, the eternal relation comes into being in a moment of time. The future becomes an object of attention, expectation and waiting. Repetition is the recollection which occurs in a "forward" as opposed to a backward direction: "Here the category I maintain should be kept in mind, namely, repetition, by which eternity is entered forwards" (90n; 358-59).

Kierkegaard proceeds to criticize two ways of interpreting the instant of time. First, he shows the inadequacy of understanding the present moment as a given spatial magnitude, or a simple state of being. He compares the movement of time to the walking of a man along a road. To measure the distance travelled we must cut out mentally the actual walking and measure the distance he has already covered. We cannot measure the time and distance of his stroll while he is strolling. On the other hand, Kierkegaard finds it inadequate to define the instant as the mere division (*discrimen*) between past and future. If the moment is essentially futural, it can never be fully present.

The true "moment", for Kierkegaard, comprehends both past and future in an eternal present. The eternal is both past and future in an eternal present. The eternal is both past in the sense that it has always been and never changes and is "future" in the sense that it comes again "in" time. Kierkegaard calls this simultaneity the "fullness of time".

On the whole, in defining the concepts of the past, the future, and the eternal, it can be seen how the moment is defined. If there is no moment, the eternal appears behind as the past. It is as when I imagine a man walking along a road but do not posit the step, and so the road appears behind him as the distance covered. If the moment is posited but merely as a *discrimen* [dividing point], then the future is the eternal. If the moment is posited, so is the eternal, but also the future, which reappears as the past. . . . The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past. (90; 360)

Eternity enters into time by virtue of what for human understanding is a leap, and not by virtue of a necessary process. The fact that it is a repetition means that the instant is the coming to be in time of what has already been. It is the historical becoming of what is unhistorical in nature. This coheres with what was asserted in the *Postscript* in relation to the definition of the "absurd". The fact that Christ came in the fullness of time "is not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd."⁵¹ Kierkegaard, therefore, adopts the Platonic notion of eternity and, by means of his notion of repetition, places it in a real but contradictory relation to time. This he takes to be an adequate statement of the mystery of the Incarnation, and the mystery of its appropriation by the individual in the "moment".

Conclusion

Just as it is necessary, according to Kierkegaard, to distinguish the freedom of choice from true freedom, it is necessary to distinguish time from the moment "in" time. In the free choice which is truly a repetition of what is eternal, we found there is an inherent impossibility which accounts for the passion or the suffering element of choice. The individual has to choose what is not a matter of choice. The choice which does not correspond with this impossibility "is" not a choice at all. Similarly, the possession by the individual of a true present in time is dependent on the eternal being present *in* time, which, as was shown by Kierkegaard's analysis of the instant and of Plato's *Parmenides*, also involves an inherent impossibility.

Time of itself is therefore an "infinite vanishing", which, when reduced to a series of atoms lined up in a row, entirely loses the qualitative character it possesses of direction and irreversibility. If on the other hand one were to say that the present moment is a crisis point between past and future, i.e. that it is direction *alone*, the moment would again be an abstract "division", rather than being the impossible moment in which time and eternity meet. This impossibility is mirrored and anticipated in the very impossibility of motion, which, in the paradoxes of Zeno and the arguments of the *Parmenides*, achieves consummate articulation.

The logic of Kierkegaard's argument does not eliminate the Platonic dualism of eternity and time, and of being and becoming, but tacitly presupposes it. Without this tacit supposition the

51. *Postscript*, p. 512; SV 7, 504.

"moment" would cease to be the impossible meeting of incommensurables, or the impossible unity of state and transition, that it is. To understand man as "free" is, therefore, to understand him as spirit, which is to understand him as a synthesis of the unchoosable and the choosable. And freedom of the spirit becomes actual in the moment, which, though transitory and directional, is yet pervaded by the presence of the eternal.

And now the moment. Such a moment has a peculiar character. It is brief and temporal indeed, like every moment; it is transient as all moments are; it is past like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive and filled with the Eternal. Such a moment ought to have a distinctive name; let us call it the *Fullness of Time*.⁵²

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52. *Fragments*, p. 22; *SV* 4, 188.