

[EDI - 62J - 19]

SOME ASPECTS OF EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

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A general analysis of existentialist philosophy, its drawback and its relation to the theory of positive disintegration is given in my paper "The Concept of Positive Disintegration in Philosophical Anthropology". I will restrict myself in this paper to a brief discussion of some ideas developed by Kierkegaard and try to show the extent to which the theory of positive disintegration seems to confirm his insights, and assist us in a deeper understanding of his thought.

There is apparent kinship between Professor Dabrowski's five levels of mental development and the distinction among the aesthetic, ethical and religious styles of life developed by Kierkegaard in Either/Or, Stages on Life's Way, Purity of Heart, and other works. I discussed the relationship between these two conceptions in my paper "The Concept of Positive Disintegration in Philosophical Anthropology". I shall restrict myself here to a glimpse of some of the Kierkegaardian preconditions of human development toward authentic existence.

One of the most challenging of his views is the claim that subjectivity is the truth. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he says:

The objective accent falls on what is said, the subjective accent on how it is said. This distinction holds even in the aesthetic realm...

His discussion, however, is not extended to all subject matters, but is clearly focused on what he calls essential truth, that is to say, the truth which is essentially related to existence, and that is the question of God. For Kierkegaard, objectively, the question is whether God exists or whether an object is the true God. Subjectively, the problem is whether the individual is related to what he considers to be God in such a manner that his relationship is a real God-relationship. Objectively, man is limited to the process of approximation, because all his objective knowledge is merely /hypothetical" and "approximate". It is hypothetical because it does not take full account of the knower, who must assist the theory,

read the instruments, etc. It is approximate in that it never reaches to an understanding of the object in accordance with its own mode of being.

Objectively, the question is to know in the minutest detail what the doctrine of Christianity is. It produces an erudite instead of a Christian. Subjectively, not every acceptance of the Christian doctrine makes one a Christian, but only that one becomes a Christian who "...is ready to live in it and to die in it, to venture one's life for it, etc." This cannot be achieved by approximation; one has to "appropriate" the truth. The appropriation is the inwardness, the "holding fast" in a distinct and unique way, "with the passion of inwardness".

Anybody can, Kierkegaard claims, pursue mathematical and scientific knowledge without being himself internally concerned about it. In philosophy and religion it is different. Thought alone is here not enough. A truly religious man and a true philosopher are involved in more than their abstract knowledge. Here one cannot be indifferent to one's thinking. In order to become a religious man and a philosopher, one has to assimilate and to appropriate one's ideas. His mode of existence must correspond to the structure of his thought. Hence the definition of truth: "An objective uncertainty self fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual". Thus, truth, for Kierkegaard, ceases to be a quality of propositions; it becomes a quality of the mode of existence, to use the present manner of speech, it becomes a matter of authenticity.

The theory of positive disintegration supplies us here with a theoretical framework which generalizes Kierkegaard's observation to all areas of possible codetermination and mutual transformation of mental functions. According to Professor Dabrowski it is characteristic of a primitive, nondevelopmental structure that the intellect is used merely as an instrument of crude instincts and emotions, and does not contribute to their transformation and refinement. At this stage a purely intellectual, "objective" expertise in Christianity is possible. However, the higher

is the stage of mental development, the deeper and more intensive is the process of inner psychic transformation, the closer is the integration of the intellectual and emotional functions, until they reach the maturity of higher emotions and empirico-evaluative compounds. In other words, we may say that the lower is the level of mental development, the larger is the number of those who are Christian "by approximation"; in the other hand, - the higher is the level of mental development, the larger is the number of those who are Christian "by appropriation".

Kierkegaard evidently had an intuition of this crucial role of higher emotions and empirico-evaluation compounds as it is indicated by the following passage from Concluding Unscientific Postscript:

Similarly there is required for a subjective thinker imagination and feeling, dialectics in existential inwardness, together with passion. But passion first and last ... All existential problems are passionate problems, for when existence is interpenetrated with reflection it generates passion. To think about existential problems in such a way as to leave out the passion, is tant amount to not thinking about them at all

There is in Kierkegaard's Journals a somewhat paradoxical passage whose message can be clearly decoded with the framework of positive disintegration:

The majority of men are subjective toward themselves and objective toward all others, terribly objective sometimes; but the real task is to be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others.

The meaning of this statement seems to be that people on a low level of mental development look at their own activities as though "from inside", always fully aware of all possible excuses, justifications and extenuating circumstances with regard to their own behaviour. At the same time, they are "matter-of-fact", "no-nonsense" people with regard to others, demanding, condemning, "terribly objective" not ready to listen and take into account their particular difficulties. On a high level of mental development, people are motivated by refined empathy and identification they understand others and sincerely share their sufferings and worries, their successes and joys. They never identify completely with others, but they look at their behaviour "from the other side of the fence". The dynamism of

subject-object in oneself and a high degree of self-criticism allow them to interpret their own actions in an objective way, as looked at and experienced by other people. This seems to be the real meaning of Kierkegaard's penetrating remark.

Two smaller papers of Kierkegaard deal directly with the problem of autonomy and authenticity. They are "The Present Age" and "That Individual: Two 'Notes' Concerning my Work as an Author". In the second Kierkegaard opposes the individual to the crowd, that is an impersonal, anonymous body of people. He quotes with particular liking St. Paul's saying that "only one obtains the goal". The crowd is untruth. It is unrepentant, a nobody, an anonymity. He sets himself the task to protect the individual from dissolution in the crowd:

...Never have I read in Holy Scripture the commandment, Thou shalt love the crowd--and still less, Thou shalt recognize, ethico-religiously, in the crowd the supreme authority in matter of "truth". (From "That Individual").

Although there is in the last passage a somewhat disquieting tone, slightly elitarian, authoritarian, and even a social, it carries a forceful message against the doctrine of cultural relativism. This assertion of the autonomy of the individual vis-a-vis society is at the foundation of mental development as conceived in the theory of positive disintegration. Moral opinions of one single individual at the level of secondary integration are more reliable than the vote of an overwhelming majority of a nation.

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IN PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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