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## Brief Report

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### Pastoral Counselling: Kierkegaard and the Psychotherapeutic Imperative of Establishing Selfhood

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In psychotherapy, the overall task is to facilitate the patient's discovery of authentic self (Rogers, 1961). The "anatomy of self" developed and conveyed within Kierkegaard's internal taxonomic framework furnishes a view of process, or development, which is conducive to growth in pastoral counselling. Life provides each of us with a great number of tasks and challenges. Some of these are well-defined and short-lived, others are much more complex and require the individual to wrestle with issues involving values, ethics, and "ultimate" questions. When a holistic or "Kierkegaardian" notion of the human person is adopted by the therapist, (i.e., one which includes the spiritual dimension) a critically important avenue to conflict resolution is introduced. According to McCarthy (1981), discovery and development of the religious realm, in both cognitive and emotional terms, provides one of the few sense-giving and equilibrium-restoring sources for the series of emotional upheavals which represent life.

Generally speaking, in the evolution of his religious notion of humankind Kierkegaard draws particularly on Augustinian and Lutheran strains within the New Testament tradition. Kierkegaard defines the primary task and critical aim of his psychological framework in terms of facilitating the negative understanding which envelopes the consciousness of sin (Nordentoft, 1978). Just as effective pastoral care helps Christians define in a concrete way the radical sin of their sociocultural situation and personal being (Duffy, 1983), for Kierkegaard the consciousness of sin represents the most definitive expression of self-knowledge (Nordentoft, 1978). Although knowledge itself is insufficient, Kierkegaard recognizes that encouraging psychological insight has true significance. All humans are religiously conditioned, even if to different degrees (McCarthy, 1981). Those who truly know their own soul, know it "as a thing which [they] can indeed describe well and accurately" (ED II 85). Kierkegaard's psychological and edifying writing is a maieutic offer of help (Nordentoft, 1978). His purpose is similar to the psychotherapist's—that is, to unmask the existential despair behind the presenting façade, to discover and to convey a sense of empathy for the anomic identity of emptiness and misery, to highlight misperceptions and mistaken cognitions; to unmask the presence of sin.

The purpose of Kierkegaard's writing is to firmly demonstrate and entrench the religious element as integral to any analysis of the human

being. His notion of the emotional realm presupposes the religious as the foundation, or deepest ground, of the individual. The consequent schema of "[hu]man as whole" serves to transcend popular wisdom and superficial psychologies of all types (McCarthy, 1981). It is this notion of humans as spiritually qualified beings that introduces the issue of choice and responsibility in a meaningful context within the therapeutic imperative. Kierkegaard's envisaged solution to realizing the aim of authenticity, is to choose oneself in each of life's stages, to accept the challenge of crisis within each stage, and to seek resolution in a way that advances the finite human spirit toward the Infinite. As Duffy (1983) points out, personal sin is only concretely revealed in all its deforming capacities when viewed and discussed within the context of the challenges and crises of each life stage of the individual.

Hence, in a sense, one may say that Kierkegaard restricts his psychological theories to the religious realm (McCarthy, 1981). And, for good reason, given that the religious focus incorporates the emotional, represents the developmental challenge of human existence, and can be seen to transcend the "logical" values and hierarchies of contemporary secular society. In fact, the religious focus facilitates an all-encompassing perspective consonant with faith in the spiritual foundation of the human being. Kierkegaard examines, both empirically and reflectively/speculatively, the truth of human growth through his phenomenology of moods.

Kierkegaard conceptualizes mood as an attunement affecting perception. Four moods lead to religious subjectivity: irony, anxiety, melancholy and despair. As Heidegger believed, once the therapeutic imperative is incorporated in a mood, it is accepted in terms of self-revelation. Just as the aims of psychotherapy are to create insight and encourage motivation to develop authenticity, Kierkegaard's interest is in the relationship between mood and the ability to reflect and become self-conscious. The potential utility of moods are their ability to intensify the experience of subjectivity and to call one's true identity into question (McCarthy, 1981).

Once again, there are clear parallels between Kierkegaard's attention to self and that of psychotherapy. Kierkegaard focuses on the self in two senses: the self as shattered and a burden, and the self as task to be accomplished. The latter self may be considered as the developmental task of self-realization in client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1961); it could be considered as representing the path to existential meanings of authenticity, also as transcending these in the sense of grounding the person in the "One Possible Source" who is by degrees recognized (McCarthy, 1981). Self-reflection or analysis of the phenomenology of moods serves to throw one back upon oneself, and in the process reveals the critical task of Christian living.

According to Kierkegaard, each of the moods are innately present in

personality, representing as they do an underlying message or signal concerning life's purpose. Kierkegaard describes his psychological method of therapeutic intervention as "the negative element in maieutics" (Nordentoft, 1978). It runs parallel to the Socratic method of deceiving the others by taking their foolishness from them and obtaining the truth for them by means of trickery. It involves analysis, unmasking, breaking down. What holds for the religious focus also holds for the psychological/emotional: it "intrudes searchingly into the interior of a [hu]man. . . . It pushes through him, [or her] trying him, [or her] in order to show the double-mindedness in him [or her]. . . ." (PH 56).

From a Socratic point of view, truth is ignorance. From a psychological focus, truth may be described in terms of secular self-knowledge and context-bound motivations. From a Christian point of view, truth is consciousness of sin (Nordentoft, 1978). What Kierkegaard hopes to encourage in his religious psychotherapy, in a negative and maieutic manner, is the consciousness of sin. As Duffy (1983) notes, sin must not be a theological abstraction. And, the setting of pastoral counselling allows the clear delineation of sin as the antithesis, and personal alternative, to self-hood and a life of Christian commitment.

Historically, pastoral care has been most authentic when, in place of abstract definitions, it has provided a process whereby Christians can begin to see their own sin and God's grace actually enfleshed in the concrete experience of their own world (Duffy, 1983). An internal dwelling on self through the Kierkegaardian perspective affords the opportunity of awakening the spirit in self, a process which represents the consciousness and task of religious subjectivity. As McCarthy (1981) notes, in the final resolution — that is, in the reconciliation of God and humankind — re-fusion of the self ultimately is dependent upon divine Grace. The unique perspective of pastoral counselling allows affirmation and commitment to this healing dimension of the Christian faith.

#### References

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