Kierkegaard as a Paradoxical Therapist

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Abstract: The essential problem that Søren Kierkegaard is concerned with in his authorship is that of becoming a Christian. It is argued that Kierkegaard's authorial strategy reflects the principles of paradoxical psychotherapy. These principles indicate that both the psychological problem and its solution involve an ironic process. In the Kierkegaardian frame of reference, the situation of the immature self is paradoxical, and so is the pathway to full selfhood. The philistine and the aesthete attempt to secure autonomy and personal freedom through an external orientation. But the way to the self is inwards. Consequently, these personalities get caught in an ironic process. The further they push outwards, the further they move away from the locus of genuine selfhood and freedom. This immature form of life can only lead to a loss of self and the associated experience of despair. Paradoxically, Kierkegaard advocates the choice of despair as the way to find oneself in God.

Søren Kierkegaard is clearly no ordinary religious author. Whereas most theological writers present their work more or less directly, Kierkegaard adopts an elaborate strategy of indirect communication. His authorship has two parts. There are, first, works published under his own name; and then there are others published pseudonymously. Kierkegaard established a pattern that began with the publication of his first major work, Either/Or, and continued up until Concluding Unscientific Postscript appeared. For every pseudonymous work that was offered, a religious discourse published under his own name would appear.

Kierkegaard has a very definite, and quite complex, authorial strategy. What he presents are existence communications. His aim is to lead his readers into existential reflection. The pseudonyms are poetised individuals. They each have a particular perspective to offer, and everything they say is designed to fit with their characters. Rather than tell people what to think, Kierkegaard aims to hold up a variety of distinct viewpoints on life, on the self, and on God. In this way, the reader is introduced to a community of reflection.
Despite the variety in his work – we find works of an aesthetic, philosophical and an ethico-religious nature – Kierkegaard maintains that in all he presents he deals with one essential problem, namely that of becoming a Christian. ¹ That he wrote aesthetic works under pseudonyms as part of a strategy aimed at luring readers into facing up to this essential problem is, he admits, “a deceit”. ² In this essay, an attempt is made to shed light on the nature of this strategic deception. It will be argued that in his efforts to provoke his readership into the inwardness that is necessary to move more deeply into one’s God-relationship, Kierkegaard has adopted principles that are central in the approach of the paradoxical psychotherapists. In any attempt to integrate two disparate modes of discourse, it is important to acknowledge the differences between them. The major ones are fairly obvious. First, those suffering from neurosis are only too aware of their problem, whereas the sickness of soul experienced by nineteenth century Danes functioned mostly on an unconscious level. Secondly, the aim of the therapist is facilitating freedom from neurotic symptoms, whereas Kierkegaard had as his goal helping people experience the inwardness that leads into the eternal. I will argue that despite these differences, a reference to paradoxical therapy points up the central dynamics in Kierkegaard’s authorial strategy.

Those psychotherapists who employ paradoxical strategies observe that both the problem situation and the therapeutic solution involve an ironic process. A common way in which persons get enmeshed in psychic suffering is through the attempt to achieve by an act of the will a state (sleep, elevated mood, etc.) which can only be attained spontaneously. Paradoxically, these persons are attempting to force a spontaneous behaviour. The paradoxical therapist attempts to deal with this ironic process by offering another one: she will “prescribe the symptom”. That is, in some form or other the client is asked to embrace the very problem that he or she is seeking help in curing. The insomniac, for example, is directed to try to stay awake. In this way, the symptom is reframed so that the client can “experience the symptom in a positive way, as an ally”.³

It is my contention that Kierkegaard employs an authorial strategy that constructs both the problem and the solution in ironic terms. The quasi-Christian of nineteenth century Danish Christendom is presented by Kierkegaard as a person who attempts to establish the self in freedom.

² Kierkegaard, The Point of View, 6.
through an outward orientation. He or she lives under the illusion that because he or she is able to make choices concerning love interests, hobbies and other interests, and career path, he or she is functioning as an autonomous, free self. The reality is, however, that the self can only be established in freedom through an inward process. Ironically, most people look outward to find the freedom that can only be found through the inwardness of reflection. The "symptom" that develops as people are caught in this bind, says Kierkegaard, is despair. The solution that he offers is also paradoxical in nature. Kierkegaard counsels the aesthetic personality to "choose despair". Despair is presented as ally rather than enemy. In embracing her despair, a person is able to shatter the illusion of freedom that is restricting her development in selfhood.

PARADOXICAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

Paradoxical therapy has been described as "dialectics applied to psychotherapy". Dialectical thinking is built upon the premise that things are not what they seem. Any statement of the way things are contains its opposite within it. When it comes to dealing with a psychological problem, it may seem that the way to promote healing is to do the opposite of what is causing it. Paradoxical psychotherapists, however, reverse the thinking in this common sense approach. It may seem that the most natural thing to do in helping a depressed person, for example, is to attempt to cheer her up. The problem, though, is that the depressed person is thereby put under a demand to shed certain feelings (sadness, pessimism, etc.), and to embrace others (joy, optimism, etc.). Unable to meet the demand, she becomes even more depressed. She already suffers under a heavy emotional burden; now she has to cope with the added load of feeling that she has failed the good people who have tried so hard to lift her out of her gloominess. What may have begun as a temporary sadness, now becomes the depression. Paradoxically, the solution has become the problem.

Paradoxical therapists reverse the processes that common sense dictates. In their approach the symptom becomes the solution. They promote the seemingly absurd suggestion that the solution to the psychic dysfunction is to be found in what looks at first glance to be a worsening of the problem. At the core of the paradoxical approach to therapy is the strategy of "prescribing the symptom".

7. See Euhl, "A Feminist Model", 257.
Two early pioneers in the technique of symptom prescription were Alfred Adler, one time disciple of Freud, and Viktor Frankl, founder of logotherapy. A good example of Adler’s approach concerns work with a patient who couldn’t face going to work:

Rather than insisting the patient go to work the patient was encouraged to stay home and in addition he was encouraged to take in a movie. The patient’s staying home was already sanctioned by the therapist and while the patient was willing to stay home he was not willing to stay home and enjoy it. Since it is futile to fight the patient’s aggressive pouting act of staying home (force) the therapist suggests that the patient stay at home (joining the force of the patient’s symptom) but enjoy himself. If he just stays home, he has the therapist’s sanction. If he stays home and takes in a movie he has turned a socially useless act into a positive venture for himself; if he negates the therapist’s suggestion and goes back to work he is engaging in responsible pro-social behavior. Rather than challenge and contest, the therapist provided a new area of functioning to be opened for exploration.\(^8\)

Viktor Frankl began using a paradoxical approach in psychotherapy as early as 1929.\(^9\) He found that obsessive-compulsive and phobic clients were helped by paradoxical intention. For such clients, attempts to avoid actions that cause fear only serve to heighten the level of fear. Frankl encouraged his clients to do, or to wish to happen, the very thing they fear. This is obviously a form of symptom prescription.

Here is an illustration of the technique at work. A teenage apprentice is called to his boss’s office.\(^10\) He begins to sweat a little and the boss, noticing this, makes a harmless comment. The lad, however, takes it to mean that the boss has observed something inferior in his make-up. He is not as calm and collected as he should be. The next time he is called for a meeting, he finds himself worrying over the possibility of embarrassing himself again through sweating. In the presence of his boss, he sweats even more than the first time. What started as an insignificant incident has become for him a serious problem. He is so afraid of being summoned to the office that on days when this is likely to happen he calls in sick. The sick days mount and the boss is on the verge of firing him.

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10. The following illustration comes from E. Lukas. I found it in D. Capps, Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 28.
The young apprentice knows that unless he deals with the problem he will lose his job. He turns to a psychotherapist for help. The intervention that she uses consists of telling him that the next time he is called to meet with the boss he should intend to do the very thing he is afraid of, namely sweating. He should aim to show the boss just how much he can sweat. In fact, he should attempt to produce a puddle for the boss to swim in. The next time he entered the boss’s office, there was no sweating.

The more the young lad tries to control his sweating through an act of the will the worse the sweating gets. He is thus caught in a bind that is paradoxical in nature. With cases such as this one in mind, Rohrbaugh and Shoham suggest that at the core of paradoxical therapy is the attempt to identify and interrupt an "ironic process". They observe that the essential idea in this approach is that "problems persist as a function of people’s attempts to solve them, and that focused interruption of well-intentioned solution efforts is sufficient to resolve most problems." It is important to note that irony is involved in both the formation of a problem and in its resolution. To refer again to the case of the lad and his sweating, his problem can be described as an example of what is called a "Be spontaneous!" paradox. People suffer psychic dysfunction because they attempt to achieve through an act of the will a state that can only be attained spontaneously. The more volitional effort we exert in our attempts to control the behaviour that we fear, the worse the problem gets. Paradoxical therapists, observing this, attempt to interrupt the ironic process that is the problem through a solution that is also ironic. If the problem is sweating, aim to sweat as much as you can. If you suffer from insomnia, stare at the ceiling with your eyes wide open. Alfred Adler used "anti-suggestion" to treat the anhedonia of the depressed person. He would tell such a patient, "Never do anything you don’t like." If she wants to go to the movies, or on a holiday, she should do it. Now of course depressed persons usually cannot find anything they enjoy doing. Adler was prepared for this. Upon hearing the predictable response, "But there is nothing that I really want to do", he would counter with, "Then refrain from doing anything you dislike."

Paradoxical therapists view psychological dysfunction as determined by an ironic process. The solution that they propose is also ironic in

13. See Watzlawick et al, Change, 64ff.
nature. In a word, this form of psychotherapy is "a therapeutic use of a double-bind".15

Kierkegaard, I am suggesting, is a kind of paradoxical therapist. He constructs both the problem for the quasi-Christian of Christendom and its solution in ironic terms. We turn now to a consideration of how Kierkegaard talks about the essential problem. This will be followed by a discussion of his strategy for provoking his readers into facing it squarely.

THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM AND KIERKEGAARD’S STRATEGIC RESPONSE

The fundamental problem that Kierkegaard addresses in the totality of his work is that of becoming a Christian.16 The people in the surrounding society are almost all living under the illusion that the lives they lead constitute genuine Christian discipleship. The reality, according to Kierkegaard, is that they live in the aesthetic, or at best, in aesthetic-ethical categories.17 The aesthete is a person who lives primarily through the senses. The form of her life is determined by the natural impulse to seek the pleasurable and the beautiful.

The kind of existence that most are living is a cozy and comfortable one. Intent on enjoying life at all costs, they embrace only the externals of the Christian faith. What is required is a "reduplication" of the witness of Christ.18 To re-present the love and righteousness of Christ in the world one must live "absolutely in passion".19 Comfortable Christians, sadly, have no appreciation of this and are content to "live in relativities".20

In order to live in the realm of the absolute it is necessary to make the message of Christ one's own. This turn requires the inwardness of reflection. Religious truth for Kierkegaard is subjective truth. It is a truth that is appropriated by the individual. The quasi-Christian of Christendom approaches the gospel on the objective level. She hears the "facts" of the Christian story presented and gives her intellectual assent, but she does not allow the story to penetrate to her deepest level of personal existence.

Kierkegaard, then, contrasts objective and subjective truth. The former is appropriate where "the positive" in thought is required. That is to say, it has a place in sense perception, historical knowledge and in

16. See Kierkegaard, The Point of View, 5-6.
17. See Kierkegaard, The Point of View, 25.
speculative philosophy. But when the objective mode of appropriation is introduced to Christianity it "constitutes well-nigh an irreducible exaggeration". In the religious sphere, what is required is the subjective reflection of the single person. "The world [needs] essential individualities, [persons] artistically interpenetrated with reflection, self-thinking [persons], as distinct from town-criers and docents." Those who move in the positive sphere of thought work with "approximation-knowledge". There is for them the feeling that they have arrived at a point of approximate certainty. This, of course, can only be a delusion. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is associated with the realm of negativity. It is grounded in a person's nature as infinite spirit. Subjective reflection is a journey into the infinite; there is never any point of closure, not even a relative one. The "wound of negativity" is always open. To be reflective is to exist in a state of becoming.

The religious author aims to promote the process of becoming. She therefore resists the temptation to lay out all the knowledge that she possesses. Such a direct form of communication may cause the wound of negativity to close over. The recipient of the message may be deluded into thinking that the message she has received brings closure. Now she thinks that she knows what it is to be a Christian. It is not external appropriation but rather the inwardness of reflection that the religious author must seek to incultate. Her aim is to provoke what Kierkegaard calls "a double reflection". He describes the process in these terms: "In thinking, he [the addressee] thinks the universal; but as existing in this thought and as assimilating it in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated." What Kierkegaard means by this reference to the universal is that the reflective person becomes aware of the possibilities that are available to her qua human being. Thinking the universal constitutes the first phase in double reflection. Once one is cognizant of the fact that human life is defined by possibility, it is necessary to appropriate particular possibilities in one's own individual existence.

24. Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 75.
25. Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 75.
Kierkegaard is aware that his task of provoking reflection begins with presenting existential possibilities. His pseudonymous authorship aims “to present to the reader, in sharpened form, basic options in human existence to which the reader can respond.”

Kierkegaard wants to stimulate the inwardness of reflection and sees that the only way to do this is to communicate indirectly. The people around him are living an illusion: they think that as long as they attend to their religious duty and respond to at least some of the ethical demands of life they are Christians. Removing this illusion is no easy thing. Certainly Kierkegaard sees that the direct approach of attacking the comfortable and easy life of the Christian of Christendom is worse than useless. “Once in a while there appears a religious enthusiast: he storms against Christendom, he vociferates and makes a loud noise, denouncing almost all as not being Christians – and accomplishes nothing.”

In the frame of reference of paradoxical therapy, this represents the common fallacy in the approach to change, namely, that if something is a problem one should apply its opposite to bring about improvement. Thus, if a person is depressed, others need to do their best to cheer her up. If a person is having trouble sleeping, he should try harder to relax when he goes to bed. The problem for the quasi-Christian is settling for a comfortable faith, so therefore the way to bring change, thinks the religious enthusiast, is to denounce her way of life and to exhort her to become more passionate. Kierkegaard realises – as do the paradoxical therapists – that the direct approach will only make matters worse. The person under attack becomes angry and resentful and is now less likely than ever to want to change.

Kierkegaard’s strategy involves adopting an indirect communication. He seeks to “approach from behind the person who is under an illusion.” If people are living primarily in the aesthetic mode, this is where one should start:

[O]ne does not begin thus: I am a Christian; you are not a Christian. Nor does one begin thus: It is Christianity I am proclaiming; and you are living in purely aesthetic categories. No one begins thus: Let us talk about aesthetics.

Here Kierkegaard gives expression to a fundamental tenet in the Adlerian approach to paradoxical therapy, namely, do not oppose the patient. What one must avoid at all costs, urges Adler, is setting up an

32. Kierkegaard, The Point of View, 41.
action and reaction dynamic in the therapist-patient relationship. “Instead of creating forces and then counterforces, paradoxical strategies seek to move in the same direction the patient is moving (joining the force of his symptom) but perhaps farther than the patient really wanted to go” [emphasis in original]. 33 It is this principle of “joining the force of the symptom” that is central in the Kierkegaardian approach:

Denounce the magical charm of aesthetics – well, there have indeed been times when you might have succeeded in coercing people. But with what result? With the result that privately, with secret passion, they love the magic. No, let it come out.... Be the amazed listener who sits and hears what the other finds the more delight in telling you because you listen with amazement.... If you are capable of it, present the aesthetic with all its fascinating magic, enthral if possible the other [person], present it with the sort of passion which exactly suits him, merrily for the merry, in a minor key for the melancholy, wittily for the witty, &c. 34

Kierkegaard, then, begins with the aesthetic because this allows him to make contact with his readers. Assuming he establishes a connection, what then? How does he hope to move them to the inwardsness of reflection? The first step is to help people become aware that, despite indications to the contrary, all their attempts to enjoy life can only ever end in despair. The way in which Kierkegaard interprets this despairing state shows up its paradoxical nature. And the solution he proposes is also ironic in form: overcome despair by choosing despair. Following the method of the paradoxical therapists, Kierkegaard prescribes the symptom. It is to these issues that we now direct our attention.

THE PARADOXICAL SITUATION OF THE IMMATURE SELF

We have seen that for Kierkegaard, development as a person requires the perpetual promotion of inwardsness. In order to reach maturity, one must choose the self that one is. This process necessarily involves reflection and self-awareness. The reflective person opens herself to possibility. The person who lives in the realm of the external is trapped in necessity. Pointing to the fact that she has constructed for herself an agreeable lifestyle through exercising personal choice, she will say that she is a free person. Kierkegaard contends, however, that this feeling of freedom is in fact illusory. Genuine freedom involves going beyond making trivial choices to making the only one that really matters, namely the choice of the self. Never able to go deeper than the

34. Kierkegaard, The Point of View, 29.
enjoyments, interests and pleasures that make up the surface reality of human existence, the aesthete will always remain in a state of immaturity.

Alongside the aesthete, we find another type of immature self in Kierkegaard's authorship, namely the Spišský or philistine.35 The philistine can be any person in the society. She may be well educated, sophisticated and successful. Like the aesthete, she thinks that she is in command of her destiny. She is convinced that she is a person of substance. But in fact, she only lives on the surface. "Philistinism tranquilizes itself in the trivial..."36

What I hope to make clear is that the way in which Kierkegaard constructs the situation of both the aesthete and the philistine points up its paradoxical nature. These personalities look outwards, into the external world, to find the personal freedom that can only be established in the inwardness of reflection. The more they immerse themselves in the surface realities in their attempts to experience ever-increasing levels of enjoyment and satisfaction, the further they move away from the self and from the God who establishes it. They may think that they are enjoying life and that all is well, but the truth is that they are actually living in deepair. In this attempt to point up the paradoxical in the situation of the immature self, we'll begin with the philistine.

The self for Kierkegaard is a synthesis of infinity and finiteness. That the self is characterised by possibility means that it is also infinite. To live in possibility is to be free. The human person experiences a "dizziness of freedom". When "the spirit would posit the synthesis, freedom then gazes down into its own possibility..."37 This freedom, however, is only established when the self chooses itself in both its finiteness and its infinitude. The philistine lacks the inwardness of reflection that is required to choose the self. Failing to establish himself as an individual, he becomes simply a number in a crowd:

The worldly view always clings fast to the difference between [person] and [person], and naturally it has no understanding of the one thing needful...and therefore no understanding of the narrowness and meanness of mind which is exemplified in having lost one's self - not by evaporation in the infinite, but by being entirely finitized, by having become, instead of a self, a number, just one man more, one more repetition of this everlasting Einerlei.38

38. Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 166.
Those existing in the category of philistinism are spiritless. We have seen that the self is a synthesis of infinity and finiteness. Kierkegaard also describes this synthesis as an integration of body and soul that is united by a third factor, spirit. When the spirit posits the synthesis, the self knows itself in possibility. But the philistine lacks spirit and is therefore a prisoner of necessity, of determinism. Not only has he lost the self, he has lost God with it. To know God requires a certain level of imagination. It requires breaking out of the prison of the concrete and the necessary. "Philistinism lacks every determinant of spirit and terminates in probability, within which the possible finds its insignificant place. Thus it lacks sufficient possibility to take notice of God." 40 Whether the philistine consciously recognises it or not, the catastrophic losses experienced by a self that is bound to necessity plunges it deep into despair. 41

The aesthete is similarly trapped in necessity. The form of her life is determined by the drive to excite the senses. She exercises choice in this realm rather than in that of the infinite. Judge William from the second part of Either/Or puts it this way: "[The aesthete] has not chosen in the right way, not simply in the sense that he had no eye for his error, but that he has seen himself under the category of necessity — himself, this personality, with all these manifold characteristics.... But he has not seen himself in his freedom, has not chosen himself with freedom." 42 This loss of self, this spiritlessness, means also a loss of freedom. And when possibility evaporates the end result is always despair.

Given the way in which Kierkegaard defines the self, a fall into despair is inevitable for anyone with an outward or external orientation. When one loses the self, one loses God with it. The self for Kierkegaard is relational. It is "a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self". 43 It is notoriously difficult to grasp the full meaning in this passage, but it is at least clear that the self is relational and, further, that selfhood is posited through a relation of the self to itself. This should not be taken to mean, though, that the self can be understood in isolation from its relationship to other selves. 44 Kierkegaard makes this clear when he says that "in relating itself to its

41. See Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 174.
43. Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 146.
44. See C. S. Evans, Søren Kierkegaard’s Christian Psychology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 45.
own self, [the self] relates itself to another". The self is not an independently existing entity. Indeed, since it is constituted by another it is in fact totally dependent. The only way in which the self can reach a state of equilibrium, says Kierkegaard, is by relating itself to the Power which posited the whole relation. When the self attempts to establish itself independently of the God-relationship, it necessarily constitutes itself as a "disrelationship". It is this disrelationship that leads to despair. "The disrelationship of despair is not a simple disrelationship but a disrelationship in a relation which relates itself to its own self and is constituted by another, so that the disrelationship in that self-relation reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the Power which constituted it."7

The disrelated self is caught in a paradoxical situation. She is constantly making choices in the realm of the external and this produces in her an illusion of autonomy and personal freedom. But the further she moves outwards the further she moves away from the place where genuine freedom is to be found. Spirit can only live through the inwardness of reflection. The aesthete and the philistine suffer through attempting to attain through an outward orientation something, namely freedom, which can only be established through inwardness. In knowing the self that one is and in choosing that self one experiences both freedom and hope. A life constructed out of relativities is a life lived in despair. Ironically, Kierkegaard asks the sick soul to see her despair as an "infinite advantage". Some might prescribe activities designed to distract the sufferer from her gloominess. Kierkegaard is too psychologically astute to adopt this common sense approach. His prescription is the choosing of despair. In Kierkegaard's frame of reference, then, both the problem and the solution are paradoxical in nature.

Prescribing the Symptom: "Choose Despair"

The inward way, the way of reflection, leads to the self. To choose the self is to know real freedom. What is the self? asks Judge William in Either/Or, II. "It is the most abstract of all things, and yet at the same time it is the most concrete – it is freedom."46 This self is real. The self that an immature person works to establish through an external mode of existence, however, is illusory:

45. Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 147.
46. See Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 147.
47. Kierkegaard, The Sickness, 147.
The whole problem of the self in a deeper sense becomes a sort of blind door in the background of his soul behind which there is nothing. He accepts what in his language he calls his self, that is to say, whatever abilities, talents, etc. may have been given to him; all this he accepts, yet with an outward direction toward what is called life, the real, the active life; he treats with great precaution the bit of self-reflection which he has in himself, he is afraid that this thing in the background might again emerge. So little by little he succeeds in forgetting it... 50

The further a person moves outwards, the further she moves away from the self. The end result can only be despair.

There are a number of common sense approaches that might be suggested in attempting to help a person climb out of the pit of despair. She might be encouraged, for example, to break through the gloom by finding new and different aesthetic pursuits. Or she might be counselled to first identify what it is she lacks and then to attempt to fill the gap. Say that she feels dissatisfied with her level of achievement in life. Then she should work harder on developing the talents she needs to hoist her up the ladder of success.

Kierkegaard eschews all such superficial strategies for overcoming despair. Following a lead that a paradoxical therapist might offer, he prescribes the symptom. "Choose despair", he exhorts. When a person despair she chooses herself absolutely; she chooses herself in her "eternal validity". 51 Choosing despair leads to freedom because this action enables a person for the first time to pass through the externals of her life and to claim her true self. Claiming the self means claiming it in its eternal validity as a guilty self. Every person has a history. To choose oneself absolutely entails claiming this history in its totality. Both the virtuous and the vicious segments in one's personal story are owned. Appropriating one's history in this way, says Kierkegaard, is a form of repentance. "He cannot relinquish anything in this whole, not the most painful, not the hardest to bear, and yet the expression for this fight, for this acquisition, is... repentance." 52 This repentance, then, is another name for the choice of the self. Choosing the self means finding oneself in the eternal. "He repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God." 53

The one who chooses herself as guilty chooses herself absolutely. This absolute choice of herself expresses the fact that she has come to see

52. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 220.
herself not as her own creation but rather as gift of God. “[Her] self is, as it were, outside of [her], and it has to be acquired, and repentance is [her] love for this self, because [she] chooses it absolutely out of the hand of the eternal God.”

Here we find another expression of the paradoxical form of selfhood. In moving inwards the self discovers its true nature. It is not so much personal project as it is gift. This apparent loss of self that began with choosing despair ends with a gaining of self through grace. “The despair which is the passageway to faith is also by the aid of the eternal: by the aid of the eternal the self has courage to lose itself in order to gain itself.”

CONCLUSION

In this essay, an attempt has been made to shed fresh light on Kierkegaard’s authorial strategy. It has been argued that this strategy reflects the principles of paradoxical psychotherapy. These principles indicate that both the psychological problem and its solution involve an ironic process. In the Kierkegaardian frame of reference, the situation of the immature self is paradoxical, and so is the pathway to full selfhood. The immature person can never know genuine freedom. To live in freedom one must choose the self that one is. The philistine and the aesthete, however, attempt to secure autonomy and personal freedom through an external orientation. These personalities look outwards to achievements, to pleasures, and to the comfort of the crowd in their efforts to achieve selfhood. But the way to the self is inwards. In this way, they get caught in an ironic process. The further they push outwards, the further they move away from the locus of genuine selfhood and freedom. This immature form of life can only lead to a loss of self and the associated experience of despair. For Kierkegaard, despair is the symptom, and at the same time it is the solution. Choosing despair reverses the outward push; a person is driven back into herself. In facing her despair squarely, she chooses herself in her eternal validity.

54. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 221.