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## The Moment and Inwardness

### I. Introduction

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Søren Kierkegaard deals with human anxiety about the possibility posed by freedom as it relates to sinfulness and spiritual progress. This paper will show that Kierkegaard's concept of the moment and his prescription for inwardness, both in the context of spirituality, are connected. Importantly, inwardness depends on the moment and the possibility of transition that does not take place in time, transition that seems sudden if spotted from a temporal perspective. First, this paper will make sense of Kierkegaard's concepts of time, eternity, and the moment, which will be an interpretation taken from his discussion at the first part of chapter three. Second, it will explain what his concept of inwardness is and what it means for human life, which will be based on text from chapter four, section two, subsection two ("Freedom Lost Pneumatically"). Finally, it will use those points to explain the connection between the moment and inwardness and then point out the importance of that connection.

### II. Time, Eternity, and the Moment

Time and eternity are important concepts that correspond to the finite and infinite aspects of human life. Time is the realm occupied by the human body, the human psyche, and all worldly affairs. In everyday thought people spatialize the events in this finite realm in terms of the past, present, and future. Eternity is the realm of the spirit that synthesizes the body and psyche, and spirit is the aspect of human life that belongs to the infinite. Kierkegaard thinks of eternity strictly in an infinite sense and wants to avoid regarding as eternity the indefinite passing of time.

The inspiring concept that begins in the analysis of finite temporality is transition. Transition is initially important in this work to describe how sin comes into the world or

into a person's life, which is by way of a "qualitative leap." This kind of transition occurs by the introduction of a quality whose being does not admit to a more or less of anything else. The appearance of such a new quality is sudden or instantaneous, meaning that it does not come about in a process that takes time, although a process of quantitative, temporal events could affect when the moment of the leap into the new quality occurs.

Therefore a transition of the important kind, a qualitative leap, does not occur within the scope of time. Kierkegaard relates this concept to an ancient discussion of motion that asks how an object may enter or exit motion, and the Platonic answer is that such a transition is sudden. Likewise, important spiritual transitions in human life are sudden events whose coming to be can only be explained by an atemporal break between two states. The work's dominant theme of psychological anxiety surrounding the conditions of sin raises questions about the role of further possible qualitative transitions beyond the first transition into sinfulness.

Kierkegaard claims that the present, as thought about in the conventional sense, does not really exist. If time is a passing by of events, then the present is simply a dividing line between the past and future that cannot be rigidly defined to encompass a definite amount of time. It is the reference point that time progresses past. This demonstrates the notion that the present is a period in which transition may occur.

In contrast to the finitude of time, eternity is infinite and includes humanity's unlimited spiritual possibilities. The infinite is the realm of spirit and of God, and it is spirit that completes humankind's nature of bridging the finite and infinite. Eternity is commonly thought of as an indefinite, unending succession of time, but this perspective from finitude is not capable of grasping spirit's nature. Spiritual possibility cannot be grasped from only temporality, but humanity is grounded in the temporal world, so the two perspectives must be reconciled.

The future represents temporal possibility, so future is to temporality as eternity is to spirit. Thus the past is a limited range of actualized possibility, so the past is properly regarded as a part of the whole of future. To do justice to spiritual possibility, the past should not be regarded as a final way to define a person's actuality, so it should not be

dwelled upon but simply be allowed to illustrate the nature of possibility in the future.

Since the moment at present is not properly a unit of time, it can be thought of an “annulled succession” of time. This moment can be thought of as encompassing the past and future since these make up the succession of time, but this is only meaningful in the context of spiritual possibility. Since the future relates to eternity, and since the past is part of the future, then the moment encompassing past and future must be understood to relate to eternity.

This point should be made clearer before proceeding. The moment at present indeed does not exist in temporal terms, so there is no temporal content. The only content possible in the moment is that of spirit since spirit is atemporal. Again, the temporal moment is the break between past and future, so the moment is only spiritually useful in relating possibility to temporality. Thus someone that regards life in the moment in temporal terms will live without meaningful content, so Kierkegaard’s point about the parody of the eternal is clear: Eternity thought of as indefinite temporality is empty whereas eternity proper has spiritual content, making temporal “eternity” a parody of the real thing.

So spirituality can be grasped in a moment, meaning that a spiritual transition can occur in an instant. But since the present moment is a point past which time progresses, spiritual transition can occur at any moment and has the capability of relating to quantitative, temporal processes. This means that spirituality permeates time and thus infinity meets finity through the synthesizing nature of spirit. The moment is a blink of an eye, says Kierkegaard, so his readers can imagine that in the instant that the blinking eye is closed and cannot see the temporal world, the eye can see spiritual possibility; but since the blink takes no time then the owner of the eye can simultaneously see temporality and spirituality.

### **III. Inwardness**

Kierkegaard writes on page 142 that “inwardness is precisely the fountain that springs up unto eternal life, and what issues from this fountain is precisely earnestness.” This tells us that to grasp eternity we must seek inwardness, and to reach inwardness we

must develop earnestness.

Earnestness is a special connection between self-consciousness and feeling. Being earnest requires an honest awareness of our true selves. There is a type of self-reflection involved, but it is strictly in a spiritual sense, and it concerns action, not contemplation. Earnestness allows original thought and feeling to precede actions undertaken in the temporal world; this connects one's actions to spiritual possibility and prevents finite concerns from overwhelming one's spiritual growth.

Earnestness leads to one's acceptance of life as a task, a life in which the synthesis by spirit is acknowledged and grappled with. If one takes his or her life as a task, one is able to turn inward in a spiritual sense. By turning inward one can avoid the finite self-reflection that is the content of sinful pitfalls such as unbelief, superstition, hypocrisy, offense, pride, and cowardice. These pitfalls are conditions that may appear to be spiritual trials but actually prevent the freedom in possibility that is required for such.

Inwardness should only be understood in a spiritual sense. Temporal inwardness in something like disdain for the finite world is actually obsession with worldly affairs that overlooks spiritual needs. Genuine inwardness realizes that human life does depend on the finite world while at the same time understanding that the soul should not be involved in the day-to-day details. Inwardness will allow a balanced worldly life to coexist with the possibility of fruitful spiritual trial. Further, inwardness is strictly qualified by the need to involve earnestness about one's own life, not about human life or spirituality in general.

Inwardness plus the earnestness that it entails set the stage for a transition into faith. Kierkegaard does not describe that leap in this work, but he provides an understanding of how anxiety can be dealt with in a positive manner that will allow that next leap. Inwardness permits one to accept the natural and inextricable place that anxiety occupies in human life and then use it to spiritual advantage.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It has been shown that Kierkegaard's system posits that the moment connects the temporal and atemporal, that transitions occur in the moment, that spirituality is

atemporal, and that inwardness is a conscious way of relating the temporal to the spiritual. From this it follows that inwardness is related to the moment that is present with spirit. It can even be said that one becomes inward in a qualitative leap, an instantaneous transition, but that statement alone would draw attention from the fact that necessary conditions are brought about in the temporal world and that a certain but proper relation with the temporal world should be maintained.

The first significance of this conclusion is that inwardness is not achieved simply through a process. Although inwardness concerns action, inwardness cannot be measured by quantitative determinations. Therefore one's spiritual qualities cannot be defined by experiences in the temporal world, which is unfortunately done too frequently, such as when one's reputation is based on the frequency of his or her attendance at church, choice of occupation, family status, or proclamations about piety.

The second significance of this conclusion is that it elucidates the importance of the moment as well as its nature. One angle on this is that abstracting the moment from spirituality, namely, to focus on the temporal moment involving worldly affairs, is to prevent spiritual inwardness to be reached. Another angle is to understand that with spirit it is possible to understand the future with an immediate sense of its possibility to go about life as an earnest task, which means that one does not need to be anxious about the future and idly waiting for it to come in order to understand human possibility.

Finally, it should be added that since spirituality is best regarded from the immediacy of the moment, understanding the moment helps one understand Kierkegaard's goal in this work of preparing his readers for understanding the leap of faith.

## **Bibliography**

Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Concept of Anxiety*. Trans. Reidar Thomte. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.