

THE SENSE OF DEATH IN TOLSTOY AND KIERKEGAARD

By

MICHAEL K. MACRAKIS, M.A., Ph. D.

INTRODUCTION

Death is a subject which concerns mainly religion, the philosophy of religion. «The oldest and most common definition is that *religion is the link between man and God*¹. According to this definition, religion is derived from *religare* and originally meant «a bond». This bond, of course, is not between two men, «between the sexes», as Ludwig Feuerbach wishes², but between God and man because religion can not exist without God.

The bond, which was made the first time between God and Adam, was broken by original sin through which physical death entered the world. «Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned»³. Sin in general is that which separates man from the infallible God and creates in human consciousness what Rudolf Otto called *mysterium tremendum*⁴. For this reason, sin, as cutting man off from God, who is the source of life, was characterized by the Church Fathers as «death of the soul» (*θάνατος ψυχῆς*)⁵. And it is exactly this meaning that Kierkegaard gives to despair as identical with sin in his book, *The Sickness unto Death*⁶.

1. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Religion, and Wherein Lies its Essence?* (Chto takoye religiya i v chem sushchnost yeyo), in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. with an Introduction by Aylmer Maude, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 231. See also the other definitions of religion which Tolstoy mentions in his above book and which have been given by Vauvemargues, Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Bayle, B. Constant, Gobbet d' Alviella, and A. Réville (*Ibid.*, p. 231-232).

2. F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, New York, International Publishers, 1941, p. 34.

3. Rom. 5:12.

4. R. Otto, *Das Heilige*, Breslau 1922, 8th ed., p. 14ff. See Michael K. Macrakis, *The Sense of Death and the Longing for Salvation in Leo Tolstoy* (in Special Reference to his Work, *Resurrection*), dissertation for Ph. D., Athens 1978, pp. 41-43 (in Greek).

5. See Basil of Cappadocia, «Sermon on the martyr Joulietta», § 9, *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 31, col. 260A and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II, 7, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 8, col. 969A.

6. Comp. with John 11:4.

Thus, besides physical death, there is also spiritual death from which man is redeemed by the so-called «philosophical death». The latter is what constitutes, according to Plato, the definition of philosophy: «the study of death» (μελέτη θανάτου)¹. It is the daily endeavor of the true philosopher to disengage himself from the body by governing his passions; the endeavor of man in general, according to St. Paul, to «mortify [his] members on the earth»². In reality, mortification is immortality for it is related not to the mortal nature of man but to the immortal life of his soul. This immortality is attained, according to Kierkegaard, by the choice of the «self» or the «spirit»³, which spirit is defined by him in terms of self-mortification. Spirit, he says, «is to live as though dead (dead to the world)»⁴.

In view, then, of the double nature of death, the physical and the spiritual, the latter in relation to self-mortification, we divide our essay⁵ into two parts. In the first part we treat death in its real sense, death as a concrete and actual event contrasted to life. In the second part we examine death in its relation to immortal life, and therefore death as identified with life. The first case concerns Leo Tolstoy⁶ while the second is the case of Søren Kierkegaard⁷.

1. *Phaedo* 81a (See the *Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett with an Introduction by Raphael Demos, New York, Random House, 1937, vol. 1, p. 465).

2. Col. 3:5.

3. «Spirit is the self» (S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, New York, Doubleday and Co., p. 146).

4. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, trans. by A. Dru, New York, Harper and Bros., 1959, p. 254.

5. This essay was submitted at first in May 1960 in two different forms of a term paper for the courses Slavic 133D and Scandinavian 175 during my studies as a graduate student of Philosophy in the University of California in Berkeley.

6. Though this essay is referred to a special subject, we cite here for every one who is interested in a wider study of Tolstoy his Complete Works published in Russian by the title *Polnoye sobraniye sochineni* (Jubilee Edition), 90 vols., Moscow-Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1928-1958. For the English reader the bibliography is available in Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, Boston, Little Brown and Co., 1946, pp. 824-836. An analytical bibliography of Tolstoy (main sources and secondary sources) we give in our mentioned dissertation, *The Sense of Death and the Longing for Redemption in Leo Tolstoy*, pp. 337-399 (See especially the articles which were published in newspapers and periodicals on occasion of the celebration of 150th anniversary of Tolstoy's birth, pp. 376-385).

7. About the bibliography on Kierkegaard, see his Complete Works in Danish by the title, *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Vaerker*, 3rd edition, edited by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange, revised by Peter P. Rohde, 20 vols., Copen-

I

THE CONTRAST OF DEATH TO LIFE
IN LEO TOLSTOY

We begin with a legend, the legend of Narcissus. Who was Narcissus?

A young man «unequalled for his beauty» who one day went to a fountain to quench his thirst when, seeing his face in the crystal-clear water, for the first time became conscious of his beauty. But let us see better how Ovid narrates Narcissus' legend in the third book of his *Metamorphoses*:

There was a fountain silver-clear and bright,
Which neither shepherds nor the wild she-goats,
That range the hills, nor any cattle's mouth
Had touched —its waters were unsullied— birds
Disturbed it not; nor animals, nor boughs
That fall so often from the trees...

.....

...Here Narcissus, tired
Of hunting and the heated moon, lay down,
Attracted by the peaceful solitudes
And by the glassy spring. There as he stooped
To quench his thirst another thirst increased¹.

While he is drinking he beholds himself
Reflected in the mirrored pool — and loves;
Loves an imagined body which contains
No substance, for he deems the mirrored shade
A thing of life to love²...

.....

hague, Gyldendal, 1962-1964; *Kierkegaards Papirer*, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting, 20 vols., Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1906-1948; *Søren Kierkegaard: International, Bibliografi*, edited by Jens Himmelstrup, Copenhagen, Nyt Nordisk Forlag 1962 (6.995 numbers). For a bibliography in English (Works of Kierkegaard and books or articles on Kierkegaard) we mention the books: *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, edited by Robert Bretall, New York, The Modern Library, 1946, pp. 483-488 and *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard*, transl. by Lee M. Hollander, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960, pp. 249-259.

1. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bk. III), trans. by Brookes More, Boston, Massachusetts, The Cornhill Publishing Co., vol 1, p. 107.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

And how he kisses the deceitful fount;
 And how he thrusts his arms to catch the neck
 That's pictured in middle of the stream!
 Yet never may he wreath his arms around
 That image of himself. He knows not what
 He there beholds, but what he sees inflames
 His longing, and the error that deceives
 Allures his eyes¹...

Nor food nor rest can draw him thence — outstretched
 Upon the overshadowed green, his eyes
 Fixed on the mirrored image ne'er may know
 Their longing satisfied, and by their sight
 He is himself undone²...

Thus, unable to satisfy his love for himself, he slowly wasted away; until one day the fair Narcissus died. And in the place where he died, at the quiet water's edge, there was only a pale and lovely flower which to this day bears his name.

1. *The Reflection of Tolstoy's Life on the Mirror of Art.*

This is the legend of Narcissus as Ovid recorded it in his *Metamorphoses*³. But, why did we refer to this tragic story? What relation can there be between Narcissus and our subject on death? Is there any similarity between Narcissus's and Tolstoy's death? No, since Tolstoy died very old from pneumonia⁴ while Narcissus died very young from marasmus or, if you prefer, from consumption. He is the first and the most famous tuberculous sufferer whom, from that time, the most sensitive and noblest beings followed to his grave, dying from the same disease⁵. Among them were two brothers of Tolstoy, Dmitri and Nik-

1. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

3. «The myth of Narcissus, though probably of remote antiquity, has not been recorded by any of the earlier classical writers» (Thomas Edwards, *Cephalus and Procris. Narcissus*, from the unique copy in the Cathedral Library, Peterborough; edited by Rev. W. E. Buckley, London, Nichols and Sons, 1882, p. 265).

4. Tolstoy died from pneumonia on November 7/20, 1910 in the railway-station of Astapovo. He was then 82 years old.

5. See the book of J. Arthur Myers, *Fighters of Fate; A story of men and women who have achieved greatness despite the handicaps of the great white plague*, with an Introduction by Charles H. Mayo, Baltimore, The Williams and Wilkins Co., 1927,

olai¹. So, on this point we can make a comparison of Narcissus' death with that of Tolstoy's brothers but not with Tolstoy himself. Then, why did we refer to the legend of Narcissus? If he has no relation with Tolstoy on the subject of death, then what relation can there be between them? What relation can there be between the extraordinary beauty of Narcissus and the excessive ugliness of Tolstoy? He was one of the two most characteristic examples of physical ugliness in the history of great men. The other is that of Socrates who had «a snub nose and projecting eyes»². Tolstoy, like Socrates, was an ugly man. In his memories of *Childhood* he talks with despair about his ugly face: «I imagined», he says, «that there could be no happiness on earth for one with such a broad nose, such thick lips, and such small, grey eyes as mine»³.

We must not, therefore, seek out the similarity between Tolstoy and Narcissus in their faces but in something much more profound. Narcissus is a fable and it is not necessary to interpret this fable literally. Like every other fable, the fable of Narcissus, too, has a symbolic meaning. Narcissus lives in the idyllic and lovely nature of Boetia, Greece, which is as beautiful as he is. The beauty of nature reflects his own beauty. So, seeing the beautiful nature, Narcissus becomes conscious of another beauty. But, what kind of beauty? At the pool where Narcissus goes, it was the complete silence and the transparency of the water that attracted him. With the help of this silence, then, he looks within himself and discovers a world more beautiful than the world which surrounded him. So, when he stooped in the still and quiet pool, what he saw there was not his face and his body. It was his soul!...

Here then is the power of the beauty which attracted the love of Narcissus: the *soul* and not the *flesh*. With such a meaning, the spiritual meaning, Plotinus, the greatest of the philosophical mystics, «in his disputation *περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ* [of the Good] introduces it [the myth

1. The former, who died in 1856, at Orel, was described later by Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* under the characteristics of Levin's brother Nikolai. The latter also died from tuberculosis on September 20, 1860, at Hyères. The death of both of Tolstoy's brothers from the same disease caused a great impression on his wife (See Tabiana K. Kuzminskaya, *Moya zhizn doma i v Yasnoi Polyane*, 2nd ed., Moskva, izd. M. i S. Sabashnikorykh, 1927, vol. 1, p. 85).

2. *Theatetus*, 143e (*The Dialogues of Plato*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 144ff).

3. Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood*, in *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, trans. by A. Maude, London, Oxford University Press, pp. 71-72. See also *Boyhood*, p. 151, and *Youth*, p. 224.

of Narcissus] in illustration of his argument that the soul must penetrate through the outward to discover the inward beauty¹. This inward beauty, which every work of art reflects, characterizes especially Tolstoy and his art in such a manner that Romain Rolland says: «In him life and art are one. Never was work more intimately mingled with the artist's life; it has, almost constantly, the value of autobiography»². Tolstoy himself says, too: «The reflection of life in poetry and art of all kinds afforded me pleasure: It was pleasant to look at life in the mirror of art»³. For this reason, we can not understand Tolstoy's ideas without considering them in close connection with his own life. And, if this is true concerning every subject related to Tolstoy, it is all the more true concerning the subject of death, as the opposite of vitality, which, especially in the case of Tolstoy, is also, in the same manner as the sense of death, very intensive.

2. Tolstoy's Vitality Contrasted to his Sense of Death.

According to Stefan Zweig, the sense of death in Tolstoy «is supernatural like his vitality»⁴. «His gradual orientation towards death», says J. Lavrin, «was all the more crushing because of his enormous vitality»⁵. Indeed, Tolstoy could never have been so conscious of death if he had not previously felt so much the love of life. «Men who do not understand life», he says, «dislike to think of death»⁶. Especially «of Tolstoy it can

1. Thomas Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 274. See also the relative passage from Plotinus' *Enneads*, vi, 8, which the writer quotes on the same page.

2. Romain Rolland, *Tolstoy*, trans. by Bernard Miall, Dutton and Co., New York, p. 12. About this autobiographical character of Tolstoy's work, Ernest J. Simmons says the following: «More than that of any other major novelist, Tolstoy's fiction is autobiographical» (E. J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, New York, Vintage Books, 1960, vol. 1, p. 100). See also A. Mazon, «La constructeur de cathedrales», *Europe*, nos 379-380, novembre-décembre 1960, consacré à Tolstoï, Paris, Les Editeurs réunis, 1960, p. 8; D. Stremoukhoff, «En relisant Tolstoï», *ibid.*, p. 154; Sophie Laffitte, «Je ne suis pas né pour être comme les autres», in *Tolstoï*, Collection: Génies et Réalités, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1966, pp. 54, 67.

3. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, trans. by A. Maude, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, ch. IV, p. 22.

4. S. Zweig, *Tolstoï*, traduit de l'allemand par Alzir Hella et Olivier Bournac, Paris, Editions Victor Attinger, 1928, p. 23; see also in this book the whole chapter by the title: «La vitalité de Tolstoï et sa contre-partie» where the writer examines Tolstoy's vitality as contrasted to death (pp. 23-48).

5. J. Lavrin, *Tolstoy: An Approach*, New York, The McMillan Co., 1946, p. 82.

6. Leo Tolstoy, *On Life* (O zhizni), ch. XVII, in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. by A. Maude, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 115.

be said», remarks Philip Rahv, «that he truly lived his life, and for that very reason he was so tormented by the thought of dying»¹.

This love of life which derives from his unique vitality and his great health² is manifested very early in his life by an excessive sensibility³ and a strong feeling for Nature⁴. In his memories of *Youth* he compares the fresh young life with Nature. «I enjoyed», he says, «the consciousness of just such fresh young life within myself as Nature was breathing all around me».⁵ This feeling of Nature is so strong in him that there are moments in which he can not separate Nature from his own existence, such as those moments of his youth, for example, during which he remains awake to look at the full moon in the sky: «At those moments», he says, «it seemed to me that nature, the moon, and I, were all one and the same»⁶. We especially find this identifying of his existence with nature in his best work—from the point of view of descriptions of landscapes—*The Cossacks*, in which Tolstoy through his main hero Olenin feels that he is becoming one with the trees, the grass, the animals, the insects⁷. And the same love he has for himself he has for Maryanka, the Cossack woman, with whom Olenin has fallen in love. «Perhaps in her», he says,

1. Ph. Rahv, «The Green Twig and the Black Trunk», in *Leo Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Henry Gifford, Great Britain, Penguin Books Ltd., 1971, p. 228; see also C. Roy, *Description critiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, pp. 254-255.

2. S. Zweig characterizes the vitality of Tolstoy as «incomparable» and his health as «terrific» (*op. cit.*, p. 23).

3. In his autobiographical notes, dated from 1878, Tolstoy affirms that he remembered the impression from swaddling clothes and the bath which he took in the small tub when he was only two years old. This fact quoted by S. Zweig (*op. cit.*, pp. 34-35) and M. Hofmann — A. Pierre (*La vie de Tolstoï*, Paris, Gallimard, 1934, pp. 34-35) is considered by them as something unquestionable but not also by R. Rolland who simply cites it in a footnote of his book on Tolstoy (See Romain Rolland, *La vie de Tolstoï*, Paris, Hachette, 1921, p. 12n.).

4. His natural environment, Yasnaya Polyana, the village in which he was born and spent most of his life, contributed also in a high degree to this love of Nature in Tolstoy (See Ossip - Lourié, *La philosophie de Tolstoï*, Paris, Librairie, Félix Alcan, 1931, pp. 1-2).

5. Leo Tolstoy, *Youth (Yunost)*, ch. XXXII, in *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, p. 342; see also the whole chapter (ch. XXXII) entitled «Youth» which constitutes the heart of the whole book.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 348. This identity caused him, in opposition to Shelley, for example, to feel much stronger the horror of death. As Plekhanov remarks, «Tolstoy experienced most strongly the feeling of horror before death at the very time when he most enjoyed the consciousness of his unity with nature» (G. V. Plekhanov, «Tolstoy and Nature», in *Leo Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology*, *op. cit.*, p. 138).

7. See especially the scene of the hunting and wandering in the forest, ch. XX.

«I love nature: the personification of all that is beautiful in nature»¹. In nature he finds the real happiness: «Happiness is being with nature, seeing her, and conversing with her»². As R. Rolland says about this book, «Tolstoy lives through this hour of youth in a delirium of vitality and the love of life. He embraces Nature, and sinks himself in her being»³.

This deep feeling of nature which in Tolstoy derives from his enormous vitality and his love for life is already contrasted so strongly with the sense of death in *Sevastopol in May* in the scene in which he describes the dead bodies that lay on the flowery valley. «Hundreds of bodies», he writes towards the end of this tale, «freshly stained with blood, of men who, two hours before, had been filled with various lofty and trivial hopes and wishes, lay with stiffened limbs on the dewy, flowery valley... And, just as on other days, the dawn appeared over the Sapoun hill, the twinkling stars paled, the white mist rose above the dark roaring sea, the rosy morning glow lit up the east, the long purple

1. Leo Tolstoy, *The Cossacks* (Kazaki: Kavkazskaya povest), in *The Cossacks and Other Tales of the Caucasus*, trans. by L. and A. Maude, London, Oxford University Press, p. 191. On this point compare Tolstoy with the French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) who said: «Nature gives me the same emotions as love». Like Tolstoy, Courbet was also fond of Ornans, the region where he was born, for this reason he was called the «Master of Ornans». André Chamson says the following about this: «He always remains a man of the region where he was born, the Master of Ornans, a rustic, a sort of feudal lord, as the notables of French provinces were so often during the last century» (*Gustave Courbet*; text by André Chamson, New York, Pocket Library of Great Art, p. [6]).

2. Leo Tolstoy, *The Cossacks*, p. 188; see also p. 187: «You do not know what happiness is...» and, generally, the whole chapter XXXIII, i.e. the letter that Olenin wrote to his friends without sending it, in which Tolstoy includes the central idea of his book: return to nature in which we can find the real happiness. Here, the influence of J.-J. Rousseau is obvious. «I made him», says Tolstoy about Rousseau, «an object of religious worship. I wore a medallion portrait of him hung around my neck, as though it were a holy image» (Paul Boyer, «Entretiens avec Tolstoï», in *Le Temps*, August 28, 1901). About the influence of Rousseau on Tolstoy as also that of Schopenhauer, see B. Zenkovsky, *Histoire de la Philosophie russe*, traduit du russe par C. Andronikoff, Paris, Librairie Gallinard, 1953, vol 1., pp. 433-434 (Of Rousseau's influence especially, see J. Benrubi, *Tolstoï continuateur de Rousseau*, Annales de la société de Genève, 1907; M. Markovitch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Tolstoï*, Paris, H. Champion, 1928; G. Dwelsshauvers, «Rousseau et Tolstoï», in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Paris, mai 1912, n° consacré à Rousseau). In general, we can say that, as Rousseau influenced Tolstoy on the sense of life (fondness of Nature, etc.), so, on the other hand, Schopenhauer influenced him on the sense of death.

3. R. Rolland, *La vie de Tolstoï*, p. 51.

clouds travelled across the blue horizon...¹. But, let us leave the clouds to travel in the sky and «let us rather look at this ten-year old boy... walking about the valley, looking with dull curiosity at the French and the blue flowers with which the valley is strewn. Returning home with a large bunch of flowers he holds his nose to escape the smell which is borne towards him by the wind, and stopping near a heap of corpses collected together, he gazes long at a terrible, headless body which lies nearest to him. After standing there some time... the boy gives a sudden scream, hides his face in his flowers, and runs towards the fortifications as fast as his legs can carry him»².

3. *The First Acquaintance with the Phantom of Death.*

Who, hearing the «sudden scream» of the ten-year old boy of Sevastopol, does not remember that other «cry of horror» which another boy of the same age, Nikolai Irtényev³, had loosed forth from his little chest when he saw the dead body of his mother in her coffin in front of the grave? Who is the boy with the flowers in Sevastopol we do not know. But, certainly, we all recognize under the characteristics of Nikolenka⁴ Tolstoy himself, when he was a child of ten⁵. He is the one who narrates the innocent and carefree age of *Childhood* which, alas, in the case of Irtényev was oppressed from the very beginning with the sad cloud of «the dreadful dream about the death of the mother» for which the little Nikolenka «cried in his sleep»⁶. Poor Nikolenka! Could you foresee then that this dream would be realized so soon? Of course, the death of the mother is a dream at the beginning of the book, but at the end of *Childhood*, where the narration is brought to the death of the mother, this dream becomes a reality. The poor boy could not believe

1. Leo Tolstoy, *Sevastopol in May* (Sevastopol v Maye 1855 goda), ch. XVI, in *Sevastopol and Other Military Tales*, trans. by L. and A. Maude, New York, Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1903, pp. 63-64.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

3. This is the name of the little hero who is also the narrator of Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth* (See L. and A. Maude's translation, p. 230).

4. Nikolenka in Russian is the pet name for Nikolai (See Tolstoi, *Detstvo*, in *L. N. Tolstoi: Sobraniye sochineni v 12 t.*, Moskva, Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo khudozh-estvennoi literatury, 1958-1959, vol. 1 [1958], ch. XV, pp. 51, 52). L. and A. Maude translate this name into Nikolya (*op. cit.*, pp. 59-60).

5. The story of *Childhood* begins «on the 12th of August 18.., exactly three days after the tenth birthday [of N. Irtényev]» (*Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, p. 7).

6. *Ibid.* p. 8-9; see also p. 19.

how «the smile of the mother»¹ on her face could be replaced by that pale-yellow color of death. «I got up on a chair», narrates little Nikolenka, «to look at her face, but in its place I again saw the same pale-yellow, translucent subject. I could not believe that it was her face. I gazed at it more intently and little by little began to recognize in it her dear, familiar features. I shuddered with terror when I realized that this was she»². But, it was at the funeral that he felt the really great terror. Standing before the grave and seeing his mother's corpse in the coffin, «I was struck», he says, «by a piercing cry of such horror that I shall never forget it were I to live to be a hundred; whenever I think of it, a cold shudder runs down my body»³.

Such is the impression which the death of his mother made on Nikolai Irtényev who, as we said, is Tolstoy himself. «Nikolenka in the story», says A. Maude in his introduction to *Childhood*, «is to a large extent, Tolstoy's mouthpiece, though the occurrences in the story do not at all resemble the events of his own life. He could not, for instance, remember his mother who died before he was three»⁴.

But, if Tolstoy was not able to remember from such an age the death of his mother, we can not say the samething about the death of his father which occurred when Tolstoy was nine years old. Tolstoy loved his father very much. For this reason, death, which came to deprive him of his most beloved in this world, made a great impression on him. «I loved my father very much», says Tolstoy, «but did not know how strong this love of mine for him was until he died»⁵. According to Ernest Simmons, «only after his father's death did he begin to realize how much he had loved him, and the event awoke in his sensitive mind a feeling of religious horror before the eternal questions of life and death»⁶. Tolstoy's father died on June 21, 1836 and in that day, as B. Zenkovsky remarks, «the first real acquaintance of the child with the phantom of death»⁷ took place.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

4. *Ibid.*, p. vi. Tolstoy's mother, Marya Nikolayevna Tolstaya, died on August 4, 1830. Though Tolstoy in that year was only two years old, S. Zweig says that Tolstoy remembered the death of his mother. However, Zweig believes mistakenly that Tolstoy was then five years old and not two (*op. cit.*, p. 38).

5. P. Birukoff, *Leo Tolstoy: His Life and Work*, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1906, vol. I, p. 28.

6. E. J. Simmons, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 33.

7. B. Zenkovsky, *Histoire de la Philosophie russe*, vol 1, p. 429.

4. Tolstoy's Awareness of Death.

Death, however, began to be conscious in Tolstoy twenty years after his father's death when he faced another tragic event, the death of his brother Dmitri from consumption¹. Tolstoy described him later in *Anna Karenina* in Levin's brother Nikolai. «Nicholas Lévin», says A. Maude, «is a portrait of Tolstoy's third brother, Dmitri (1827-56). Even the name of the woman Masha with whom he lived and the circumstances under which he took her correspond to the facts of the case»². The similarity exists also in their death. «The description of Nicholas' death», according to Maude again, «is closely taken from that of Tolstoy's third brother, Dmitri»³. And, as in fact so in fiction, this death was caused by the same disease: consumption.

But, the great similarity concerns Tolstoy himself, who in this novel appears under the characteristics of the main hero, Constantine Levin. About this similarity, too, Maude says: «Levin in many ways is closely drawn from Tolstoy himself. Besides his physical strength and agility, his love of country life, his sympathies with the peasants and fondness for agricultural work, there is a similarity in their dislike of town ways and of all artificiality, as well as in Levin's frankness and sincerity, the strivings that obliged him to treat life seriously, and his endeavours to perfect himself morally»⁴. The similarity, therefore, exists as concerns also the impression that Levin had from his brother's death. Seeing death approaching through the illness of his consumptive brother⁵ who «was a mere skeleton covered with skin»⁶, Levin began to think of his own death, too. «Death, the inevitable end of everything, confronted him for the first time with irresistible force. And that Death which was present in this dear brother (who, waking up, moaned and by habit called indiscriminately on God and on the devil) was not so far away as it had hitherto seemed to be. It was within himself too—he

1. Dmitri Tolstoy died on January 21, 1856, at Orel. In the meantime, ten or eleven months after his father's loss, his grandmother Pelageya Nikolayevna Tolstaya had died; while a few years later, on August 30, 1841, his aunt Alexandra Ilyinichna Osten-Saken died, too.

2. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. by L. and A. Mande, London, Oxford University Press, Bk. I, p. 496, note 8.

3. *Ibid.*, Bk. II, p. 439, note 2; see also Bk. I, p. 500, note 32.

4. *Ibid.*, Bk. I, p. 495, note 3.

5. *Ibid.*, Bk. I, p. 395.

6. *Ibid.*, Bk. I, p. 394.

felt it. If not to-day, then to-morrow or thirty years hence, was it not all the same? But what that inevitable Death was, he not only did not know, not only had never considered, but could not and dared not consider. 'I am working, I want to do something, and I had forgotten that it will all end in Death!'¹.

It was on an autumn evening that Levin, seeing his brother faded like the autumn leaves, felt this horror of death. And, now, when Nikolai was dying «the sight of his brother and the proximity of death renewed in Levin's soul that feeling of horror at the unscrutability, nearness, and inevitability of death which had seized him on that autumn evening when his brother had arrived in the country»².

But the death which stirred up Tolstoy entirely was that of his eldest and most beloved brother, Nikolai. About this death, which «produced a strong impression on Tolstoy», he writes in his diary: «This event has dreadfully turned me away from life»³. Nikolai died from tuberculosis at Hyères on September 20, 1860. Tolstoy, who was present during his last moments, wrote one month later to his friend, the poet Fet: «I presume you already know what has happened. On the 20th of September he died, literally in my arms. Nothing in life has ever produced such an impression upon me. He spoke the truth when he used to say there is nothing worse than death. And when one clearly realizes that it is the end of all, then there is nothing worse than life either. What should one worry about or strive for, if of that which was Nicholas Tolstoy nothing has remained?...»⁴. Though in the meantime Tolstoy faced many other tragic events, he always remembered with the same vividness his brother's death. So, about twenty years later he wrote in his *Confession*: «Wise, good, serious, he fell ill while still a young man,

1. *Ibid.*, Bk. I, p. 396. «In this and the following chapters», notes Maude, «Levin encounters 'a new and insoluble problem — Death!'» (Bk. I, p. 500, note 32).

2. *Ibid.*, Bk. II, p. 78; see also the whole chapter (ch. XX) which the writer entitles: «Death» (pp. 72-79). Generally, about Nikolai Levin, see Bk. I, Pt. I, chapters XXIV-XXV and Pt. III, ch. XXXI-XXXII.

3. Tolstoy's Diary, 13th Oct., 1860 (See P. Birukoff, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 287). Such is the impression of his brother's death on Tolstoy that after this event he uses in his intimate diary (Diary for myself alone) the expression: «If I live» which, according to Nicolas Weisbein, «strangely reminds us of the monastic *Memento mori*» (N. Weisbein, *Tolstoï*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, p. 37. About Nikolai's death in general, see N. Weisbein, *L' évolution religieuse de Tolstoï*, Paris, Librairie des Cinq Continents, 1960, p. 74-76.

4. Letter to Fet of the 17th Oct., 1860 (See P. Birukoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288).

suffered for more than a year, and died painfully, not understanding why he had lived and still less why he had to die. No theories could give me, or him, any reply to these questions during his slow and painful dying¹. It was his great love for his «beloved» brother², whom he did not separate from himself, that made him feel his death as his own and see it with different eyes from those with which he had seen the thousand deaths of Sevastopol. As P. Birukoff remarks, «Tolstoy, who had witnessed thousands of deaths of Sevastopol, had noted them then only with 'bodily' eyes. But here the death of a beloved brother made him see death for the first time with his 'spiritual' eyes... From that moment one may say the idea of death never left him»³.

5. *The Triumphal Parade of Death through Tolstoy's Life.*

Though Tolstoy's marriage with Sophia A. Bers, two years after Nikolai's death, and the happiness which followed, at least during the first years of his family life, removed from his mind the thought of death, this thought was not late to come again, and even much stronger than any other time. The reason for that was a row of successive deaths of relatives and friends, such as those of the wife of his close friend D.A. Dyakov, the critic V. P. Botkin, his father-in-law, A. E. Bers, his own sister Marya's former husband, and others. Thus, after so many attacks, death became for Tolstoy a real phantom which, according to E. J. Simmons, «seemed to mock his happiness»⁴.

As such a phantom, death appeared to Tolstoy during the night of the 2nd September, 1869, in a little house of the town of Arzamas in Penza Province. Of his agony, which he felt at two o'clock after midnight and similar to which he had never experienced before, he wrote in an indefinite manner to his wife two days later on the 4th

1. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession* (Ispoved), trans. by A. Maude, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 13.

2. We find the same love in the two brothers in *Sevastopol in August* where Tolstoy puts his love for his eldest brother into Volodya, a young fellow of seventeen, who said of his older brother Misha: «I love my brother more than any one in the world. I wish to die with him» (ch. VII). And, as Tolstoy in 1851 followed Nikolai to the army in the Caucasus so Volodya did; he followed his brother to the army in Sevastopol.

3. P. Birukoff, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 289; see also J. Lavrin, *Tolstoy: An Approach*, p. 86.

4. E. J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, vol. 1, p. 325.

of September. What happened that night he probably described accurately in his autobiographical *Notes of a Madman* some twelve years afterwards¹.

According to his narration, the writer, while spending the night in Arzamas, felt death as a physical presence which threatened to destroy all he held dear. He went out into the corridor, hoping to escape from what tormented him. But it pursued him and obscured everything. At the moment he thought that it was an illusion, something which happened in his imagination only. «What is this stupidity?», he said to himself. «What am I distressed over? What do I fear?».

«Me», answered the voice of death. «I am here!»².

Ernest Simmons, who in his book on Tolstoy cites the above event from the writer's narration³, remarks: «Tolstoy in horror struggled with the phantom»⁴. But it was so strong that he finally was obliged to wake his servant and leave in a state of panic. However, though he left Arzamas, the agony of that night did not leave him. It was not late to come again and demand an answer to its incessant question.

Four years after «the terrible specter of death» in Arzamas and within the short space of only three years he lost his beloved son Petya, who died on November 9, 1875 and two other children: Nikolai and Varvara, who died in the same year (February and November of 1875). During this period (1873 - 1875) he lost his nephew Alexander and his niece Dasa (January and May of 1873), and also his aunts Tatyana Alexandrovna Ergolskaya (June 20, 1874) and Pelageya Ilyinichna Yushkova (December 22, 1875).

Thus, facing this new series of deaths, it is not strange that Tolstoy feels again the same agony of Arzamas which makes him give forth in the dark night sharp screams of horror and call his wife for help⁵. He thinks that he sees alive again his dead children, together with all his relatives and friends who have died since he was a child and who are coming now to claim his own life, to take him with them into another world.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

2. Leo Tolstoy, *Notes of a Madman* (Zapiski sumasshedshevo); see *Polnoye sobraniye sochineni* (Jubilee Edition), vol. 26 (1936), pp. 469-470.

3. E. J. Simmons, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327; see also Henri Troyat, *Tolstoi*, Les grandes études littéraires, Paris, Fayard, 1965, pp. 388-391.

4. E. J. Simmons, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

5. Henri Troyat, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

Under the impression of so many successive deaths which are victorious, bearing trophies over his life—a triumphal parade of Death through Tolstoy's whole life, he finishes *Anna Karenina* with the tragic ending of the main heroine who killed herself falling on the rails. And the little peasant, whose horrible vision came from time to time to disturb her while she lived, appeared now. «...A little peasant muttering something was working at the rails. The candle, by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light than before lit up for her all that had before been dark, flickered, began to grow dim, and went out for ever»¹.

6. *Death in Complete Contrast to Life.*

By the time he finished *Anna Karenina*, «though happily married, famous as a novelist, and enjoying a large income, Tolstoy had become dissatisfied with himself»². His spiritual crisis, which was a result of the idea of death, began to approach its highest degree in the year 1879 when he wrote his *Confession* in which death appears as a horrible Dragon who takes away all the joys of life from him so that life «no longer tasted sweet». «I saw the dragon clearly», he says, «and the honey no longer tasted sweet... The deception of the joys of life which formerly allayed my terror of the dragon now no longer deceived me»³. It was this

1. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. by L. and A. Maude, Bk. II, ch. XXXI, p. 381. Here, we could also mention *War and Peace* with the thousands of deaths in the fields of the different battles as also the deaths of Count Bezukov (Bk. I, §§ 12-13), of Prince Nikolai Bolkonski (Bk. X, § 8), of Lise (Bk. IV, § 9), and especially the death of Prince Andrew (Bk. XII, § 4). Another remarkable writing of Tolstoy on our subject is the *Three Deaths* (the death of the lady, of the peasant, and of the tree) whose conclusion, as J. Lavrin remarks, is simple: «the more primitive the consciousness, the easier the death...». Of this conclusion Tolstoy himself writes in one of his letters (May 1st, 1858) to Countess Alexandra Tolstaya (See J. Lavrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85). However, Tolstoy's impression of death in these books and especially in *War and Peace* which, according to George R. Noyes, «was the fruit of the happiest and most buoyant period of Tolstoy's life» (G. R. Noyes, *Tolstoy*, New York, Duffield & Co., 1918, p. 158), is not so strong as in *Anna Karenina*, for example, and later writings.

2. E. J. Simmons, «Leo Tolstoy», in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago-London 1977, vol. 18, p. 484.

3. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, p. 21; see also p. 20 in which Tolstoy speaks about the Eastern fable of the Dragon. On the basis of this fable, J. Lavrin in his book, *Tolstoy: An Approach* entitles the chapter VI: «The Dragon of Death».

Dragon of Death that made Tolstoy feel like this so that on the summit of his life, when he had everything (an enormous fame, many children, and many riches), he saw nothing before him. «Having with matured mental powers reached the summit of life from which it all lay before me, I stood on that summit—like an arch-fool—seeing clearly that there is nothing in life, and that there has been and will be nothing»¹.

Death in the *Confession* achieves such a power in Tolstoy's life that it transforms it into something absurd². In this sense, death is contrasted completely to his life, to his vitality, which especially in his case is so great³. Surely this contrast is a result of the successive deaths in his family, but it derives also from the influence of Schopenhauer's pessimism.

Tolstoy discovered Schopenhauer during the summer of 1869, from May to the end of August⁴, exactly before the night of Arzamas in which death appeared to him as a real phantom. A few years later, in 1877, the year he finished *Anna Karenina* and began to think of *Confession*, he had in his office the portrait of Schopenhauer⁵. Tolstoy him-

1. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, ch. IV, p. 19. In his letter to Fet (Oct. 17, 1860) about his brother's death, Tolstoy wrote: «As soon as men reach the highest degree of development, they clearly see that all is bunkum, deceit...» (P. Birukoff, *op. cit.*, p. 289). We find also the same contrast in the death of Ivan Ilyitch where the main hero had reached the highest point of success in his career (Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, trans. by Aylmer Maude, New York, The Modern Library [w.d.], pp. 19, 21, 22, 25) so that he said: «I was completely happy» (*Ibid.*, p. 21) and wrote: «I feel fifteen years younger» (p. 23) when, suddenly, after a visit to the doctor he was informed of the seriousness of his disease which a while later led him to death (See concerning this impression after the doctor's diagnosis, ch. VI, p. 30ff.). However, this work is more important from another point of view of which we speak in the next chapter where we compare Tolstoy with Kierkegaard.

2. This «absurd», of course, must be understood in Tolstoy as Albert Camus understood it in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, where he finds that the universe is «without meaning», something «inexplicable and limited» (A. Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe, Essais*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, Edition Gallimard, 1965, vol. 1., p. 113).

3. Henri Troyat, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

4. This summer Tolstoy read for the first time the works of the German philosopher, to whose ideas he had been initiated by his friend Fet (See Leo L. Tolstoy, *The Truth about my Father*, London, John Murray, 1924, p. 4). After this reading of Schopenhauer's works he wrote enthusiastically to Fet on August 30, 1869: «I don't know if I shall change my mind, but at the moment I am sure that Schopenhauer is the greatest genius among men» (A. A. Fet, *Moi Vospominaniya*, Moskva 1890, vol. 2, p. 199).

5. N. Weisbein, *L' évolution religieuse de Tolstoï*, p. 136n.

self mentions again and again in the *Confession* the name of the German philosopher¹, as for example, in the case in which he talks about those people who do not know that «life is an evil and an absurdity»².

The evil of life, according to Schopenhauer, consists in what he calls *Wille zum Leben* (the will to live)³, which is the essential principle of life⁴. Evil appears in the world because the will in every particular being is egotistic⁵ and as such it contradicts the other wills so that all beings are in a continual combat (*steter Kampf*)⁶, an eternal fight for their existence, a struggle which man is destined to loose⁷, since at the end death will win⁸. Thus what man carries along from this life is the pain resulting from his struggle⁹. This pain is for the philosopher of pessimism «the essence of life»¹⁰. It rules over it from the beginning to the end. For this reason, «life», according to him, «is that which should not be»¹¹. It is, as Tolstoy repeats the thought of Schopenhauer, «an evil; and the passage into Nothingness is the only good of life»¹². In the same way Tolstoy concludes that «it is no good deceiving oneself. It is all—vanity! Happy is he who has not been born: death is better than life, and one must free oneself from life»¹³.

Under the influence of Schopenhauer's pessimism, Tolstoy arrived at a real nihilism¹⁴, which led him to the verge of suicide. Fearing

1. Besides the name of Schopenhauer, Tolstoy mentions also the names of Solomon and Buddha whose ideas influenced not only the German philosopher, but Tolstoy himself (Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, ch. VI, pp. 32-43).

2. *Ibid.*, ch. VII, p. 39.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. VI, p. 33.

4. Arthur Schopenhauer: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Stuttgart/Frankfurt am Main, Gotta-Insel Verlag, 1960, Bk. IV, § 54, p. 380, § 57, p. 428.

5. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 58, pp. 438-439.

6. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 56, p. 424, § 61, p. 454.

7. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 57, p. 429.

8. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 57, p. 427.

9. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 56, p. 425.

10. *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, § 57, p. 431. This concept is very basic in the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

11. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, ch. VI, p. 38.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. Tolstoy begins the Introduction to his book *What I Believe* as follows: «I lived in the world for fifty-five years, and after the first fourteen or fifteen of childhood I was for thirty-five years a nihilist in the real meaning of that word, that is to say, not a socialist or revolutionary, as those words are generally under-

that he would kill himself with his gun, he avoided going out to hunt and, when he was alone in his room, he hid any rope about so that he could not hang himself¹. This tendency towards self-destruction was then in opposition in the highest degree to his lust for life (his love of pleasures and of his earthly goods), an opposition similar to that between the impulse to death (*Todestrieb*) and the impulse to pleasure (*Lustrieb*) in Sigmund Freud's relative theory.

According to the psychiatrist of Vienna, there are «erotic instincts which are always trying to collect living substances together into even larger unities, and the death instincts, which act against that tendency and try to bring living matter back into an inorganic condition. The cooperation and opposition of these two forces produce the phenomena of life to which death puts an end»².

Though this theory of Freud «has been criticized on many grounds»³, it can explain in general from the psychological point of view, especially in Tolstoy's case, what he considers as «absurd», that is, the complete contrast of death to life.

stood, but a nihilist in the sense of an absence of any belief» (Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe* [V chem moya vera] in *A Confession, the Gospels in Brief, and What I Believe*, p. 307). This nihilism of Tolstoy appeared in reality from his boyhood and youth. Referring to this period of his life, he says: «At the age of eighteen I no longer believed any of the things I had been taught» (*A Confession*, ch. I, p. 3).

1. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, ch. IV, p. 18.

2. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1937, p. 139 (from A. Storr, p. 6; see next footnote).

3. According to Antony Storr, «the idea of the death instinct has been criticized on many grounds, not least because the conception of instinct as self-destructive runs counter to the biological view of instinctive patterns as those which tend to preserve life and encourage the reproduction of living organisms» (A. Storr, *Human Aggression*, London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1968, p. 6).

II

THE IDENTITY OF DEATH WITH LIFE
IN SÖREN KIERKEGAARD

We begin with a legend, the legend of Narcissus¹. Who was Narcissus?...

As Greek mythology tells us, he was a young man of extraordinary beauty. His beauty reflected on Nature which was joyful so long as Narcissus was joyful, too. In the brilliancy of his joy the waters danced as they rolled down on their river beds and the trees sang as the wind blew through their leaves. The nymphs and the dryads flitted and chattered like uncaged warblers. They were delirious with love of joy. Such was the perfection of the face and form of Narcissus that all the maidens, and especially Echo², pursued him. Narcissus did not love any of them. He spurned them without excepting Echo³ who, for this reason, day by day wasted away from sorrow.

Her miserable body wastes away,
Wakeful with sorrow; leanness shrivels up
Her skin, and all her lovely features melt,
As if dissolved upon the wafting winds—
Nothing remains except her bones and voice—
Her voice continues, in the wilderness⁴.

Narcissus, too, pined away from sorrow and melancholy because of love, but for quite a different reason. He had fallen in love not with Echo or with any other maiden but with himself.

«One day», as H. J. Wechsler narrates this strange love, «the boy saw his own reflection in a quiet pool of silvery water. As he stretched himself at the stream's edge to drink of the clear water, he fell madly

1. Kierkegaard in his *Prelude to Fear and Trembling* narrates the same story of Abraham's sacrifice (Genesis, ch. 22) in four different ways beginning always with the same sentence: «It was early in the morning...» (S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, New York, Doubleday and Co., pp. 27-29). In a manner similar to that of Kierkegaard we ourselves, too, begin each of the parts of this essay with the same legend but in a different form every time.

2. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bk. III), trans. by Brookes More, vol. 1, p. 105.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

4. *Ibid.*

in love with the image that looked back at him. Pathetically enough, he admired and desired his very self. He tried in vain to kiss the reflection he saw. He sought again and again to clasp the over-elusive shape which vanished as soon as he dipped his anxious arms into the water. Neither eating nor sleeping, he suffered the cruelest pangs of unrequited love...¹. And, as the poet says of Narcissus:

So did he pine away, by love consumed,
And slowly wasted by a hidden flame².

Echo, who in the meantime, as we said, had wasted away, too, seeing that Narcissus' fate was the same as hers, «though angry at his scorn, only grieved»³. And she comes now with her remaining voice to reply to his last «farewell».

And when he breathed a sad «farewell!», «Farewell!»
Sighed Echo too. He laid his wearied head,
And rested on the verdant grass; and those
Bright eyes, which had so love to gaze, entranced,
On their own master's beauty, sad Night closed.
And now although among the nether shades
His sad sprite roams, he ever loves to gaze
On his reflection in the Stygian wave.

.

Where he had been, alas he was not there!
And in his body's place a sweet flower grew
Golden and white, the white around the gold⁴.

1. The Reflection of Kierkegaard's Personality on his Philosophy.

This is the legend of Narcissus according to Ovid.

But, why did we refer to this tragic story? What relation can there be between Narcissus and our subject of death? Is there any similarity between Kierkegaard's death and Narcissus'? No, since Kierkegaard, as Hans Bröchner wrote after his death, died in peace and

1. H. J. Wechsler, *Gods and Goddesses in Art and Legend*, U.S.A., Pocket Book, 1950, p. 48.

2. Ovid's, *Metamorphoses*, p. 111.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

with a preservation of «loving sympathy for others»¹ while Narcissus died from melancholy caused by his falling in love with himself, a situation which, according to Kierkegaard, «certainly ends not infrequently in suicide»². What then about their similarity in melancholy? Like Narcissus who suffered from melancholy because of unrequited love, Kierkegaard was a very melancholic person. So intensive was his melancholy that one thinks the legend of Narcissus was written especially for the case of Kierkegaard³.

However, on this subject there is a great similarity between Kierkegaard and Narcissus and between Echo also who, as the Danish philosopher says in his «Diapsalmata», is his only friend because of his sorrow which «Echo does not take away from him»⁴. But, this is not the similarity that interests us here. The real reason for our referring to the legend of Narcissus is something other. What we wish in reality to illustrate by

1. See A. Dru's introduction to *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, New York, Harper and Bros, 1959, p. 32. See also Frithiof Brandt, *Søren Kierkegaard, sa vie ses oeuvres*, traduction: Pierre Martens, édité par Det Danske Selskab, Copenhagen 1963, p. 106.

2. S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1959, vol. 2., p. 236. This is the only passage in which Kierkegaard mentions Narcissus. Another passage in which he speaks of Narcissus, not directly of him, but of his parents, is also in *Either/Or*, trans. by David F. Swenson and Lilian Marvin Swenson, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959, vol. 1, p. 402 (Compare with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bk. III, p. 103). Besides the legend of Narcissus's birth, in the same page, Kierkegaard also mentions Echo.

3. Kierkegaard, distinguishing three stages on life's way (the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious), characterizes in general the first one (the Aesthetic) as a stage of melancholy and of imagination, for «imagination is always melancholy». Kierkegaard himself was the most melancholic person ever known (much more than Chopin in music or Heine in poetry). He is Dürer's «Melancholy». In his «Diapsalmata» he says: «My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known» (*Either/Or*, vol. I, p. 20). And in his *Journals* (1848): «My life began with a terrible melancholy, a melancholy which threw me for a time into sin...» (p. 141). About Kierkegaard's melancholy in general, see the chapter by the title, «La mélancolie est ma nature», in Marguerite Grimault's book, *Kierkegaard par lui-même*, Paris, «Écrivains de toujours» aux Éditions du Seuil, 1969, pp. 21-49.

4. In his «Diapsalmata» Kierkegaard says: «I have but one friend, Echo; and why is Echo my friend? Because I love my sorrow, and Echo does not take it away from me» (*Either/Or*, vol. I, p. 33). Compare the above passage with this: «My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known» (*Ibid.*, p. 20). Of Echo see also pp. 23, 402.

this picture in a symbolical manner¹ is the subjectivism in thought and art, that is, the reflection of the philosopher or the artist on his work. With such a meaning, the spiritual meaning, B. Tatakis also refers, in general, to the legend of Narcissus, transporting his picture to the «endeavor of the human mind» whose «function is to search for truth», to know «being as such» without man «ever succeeding to go completely out from himself as a person»². This is what Fichte accepts, too: «The philosophy of every philosopher», he says, «depends on his character»³.

And, if this subjectivism in thought and art which was called «Narcissism» is true for every philosopher, it must be true much more in the case of Kierkegaard who developed into a whole theory (his theory of knowledge) his saying: «Truth is subjectivity»⁴. Kierkegaard puts himself in his work so much that we could study his life through his writings. For this reason, as in the case of Tolstoy's art, so in the case of Kierkegaard, we can not understand his philosophy without connecting it with his life. Surely, this connection concerns every subject related to Kierkegaard's philosophy; but much more it concerns the subject of death, which death, according to Marjorie Grene, «is for Kierkegaard, as for contemporary existentialism, a central and terribly serious motif in the interpretation of human life»⁵. Especially in Kierkegaard, more than in any other existentialist philosopher, death characterizes his life in such a manner that we can say life and death are identical.

Indeed, Kierkegaard was born, lived and died accompanied al-

1. The illustration in general of an abstract idea by a legend, story or parable, is used to a great degree by Kierkegaard himself. According to Thomas C. Oden, «no writer in [western philosophical] tradition has made more persistent use of parables, stories, and narrative metaphors than has Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), whose gift of storytelling has imprinted unforgettable images on our minds» (*Parables of Kierkegaard*, edited, with an Introduction, by Th. C. Oden, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1978, p. vii).

2. B. Tatakis, «Narcissism in Art and Thought», in *English-Greek Review*, monthly edition of British Council, Athens, June 1947, p. 46 (in Greek).

3. See N. I. Louvaris, *History of Philosophy*, Athens, Elephtheroudakis, 1933, vol. 1, p. 16 (in Greek).

4. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David F. Swenson and completed by Walter Lowrie, 3rd print., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, pp. 169ff. This theory refers to the connection of the truth with a person's life. Therefore, it is the life that reflects truth and not the truth that reflects life. However, in Kierkegaard's case his knowledge of truth is a result of his «existential» life. And, in this case it is his thought that reflects his life.

5. Marjorie Grene, *Introduction to Existentialism*, Phoenix Books, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 27.

ways with his most inseparable idea of death. He lived always under the shadow of death which did not cease at any moment to accompany him. He ate and slept with the idea of death. One could think that death had become his best friend and that, therefore, what he said about melancholy and Echo he could say much more about death: «I have but one friend, Death; Death is the most faithful friend I have known». For this reason, there is not any other inscription that we could put on his grave than his saying: «To live as though dead»¹. He lived all his life in close connection with death, carrying a very intensive sense of it within him.

2. *The Successive Deaths of his Brothers and Sisters, and the Death of his Mother: His Rest in their Embrace.*

The sense of death in Kierkegaard is so deep that one thinks that it was implanted in him at birth by original sin. It is not only the original sin that is itself directly connected with death² but also every kind of sin as those, for example, of Kierkegaard's father³ who, for this reason, arrived at the conclusion that his sins were the cause of his children's death. Within a few years, five of his seven children and his second wife died. Søren Kierkegaard, his youngest son, was left to see all these deaths:

In 1819 his brother Søren Michael died at the age of twelve as a result of bumping his head against another boy's head when Kierkegaard

1. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, edited and with an Introduction by Alexander Dru, p. 254.

2. According to the Bible, death is the result of the original sin (Gen. 2:17; comp. Rom. 5:12). In relation to this sin Kierkegaard treats in a whole book written in 1844 by the title *Begrebet Angest* the concept of dread which the first man felt because of the forbidding commandment of God and the threat of his punishment by death («...thou shalt die») (See S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread: A simple psychological deliberation oriented in the direction of the dogmatic problem of the original sin*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie, 2nd ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 40-41).

3. Kierkegaard in his *Journals* writes the following about his father: «How terrible about the man who once as a little boy, while herding sheep on the heaths of Jutland, suffering greatly, in hunger and in want, stood upon a hill and cursed God—and the man was unable to forget it even when he was eighty-two years old (p. 96). However, another sin which must be also accounted for his father is that of his sexual relations with his female servant before the death of his first wife (See A. Dru's Introduction to *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 12).

was seven years old. Three years later, in 1822, his eldest sister Maren Kirsten died of cramps at the age of twenty-four. Then, ten years later three others of those who were left in the family followed the first ones to their grave. First Nicoline Christine died on September 10, 1832, when she was thirty-three years of age, in giving birth to a still-born baby. A year later, on September 21, 1833, Niels Andreas died in his twenty-fifth year at Paterson, New Jersey. This was a loss which Kierkegaard felt keenly, for Niels was the brother nearest to him in age. Fifteen months later, on December 29, 1834, the most brilliant of his sisters, Petrea Severine, who had married Henrik Ferdinan Lund, a director of the State Bank, died in the thirty-third year in giving birth to a son.

Thus in the space of two years Kierkegaard had lost three of his brothers and sisters. And it was at that time, on July 31, 1834, that his mother, Anne M. Kierkegaard (Sörensdatter Lund), after a painful illness of many weeks, accompanied them with her own death¹.

Under the impression of all these deaths in which his father saw, as we said, the punishment of God, «the hand of an angry God»², for his sins, Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals*, in 1835: «The outstanding intellectual gifts of our family were only given to us in order that we should rend each other to pieces: then I felt the stillness of death grow around me when I saw my father, an unhappy man who was to outlive us all, a cross on the tomb of all his hopes. There must be a grief upon the whole family, the punishment of God must be on it»³.

Such is the impression which his beloved dead made on him with their departure from this world that in their remembrance he thinks he is outside the body, resting in their embrace. So, after one of his evening walks which he used to take in one of his favourite places, in Gilbjerg, he writes in his *Journals* (July 29, 1835): «And as I stood there one quiet evening as the sea struck up its song with a deep and calm solemnity... whilst on the other side the busy noise of life subsided and the birds sang their evening prayer — the few that are dear to me came forth from their graves, or rather it seemed to me as though they had not died. I felt so content in their midst, I rested in their embrace, and it was as

1. Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1958, pp. 64-65.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

3. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 39.

though I were out of the body, wafted with them into the other above...»¹.

3. *His Father's Death as a Turning Point of Kierkegaard's Life: His Return Home.*

Among the chorus of his beloved dead his father, the dearest of all, came also to be reckoned, soon after the last death which had happened in his family. Of this event Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals* on August 11, 1838: «My father died on Wednesday (the 9th) at 2 a.m. I had so very much wished that he might live a few years longer, and I look upon his death as the best sacrifice which he made to his love for me; for he did not die from me but *died for me* in order that possibly I might still turn into something»².

Indeed, the death of his father «had a sobering effect on Kierkegaard»³ and became the turning point of his life. Later, in the year 1848, when he could see more clearly, Kierkegaard wrote in his *Journals* arranging his life as follows: «My life began without immediateness, with a terrible melancholy, in its earliest youth deranged in its very deepest foundations, a melancholy which threw me for a time into sin and debauchery and yet (humanly speaking) almost more insane than guilty. Thus my father's death really pulled me up. I dared not believe that the fundamental misfortune of my being could be resolved: and so I grasped eternity with the blessed assurance that God is love, even though I was to suffer thus all my life; yes, with that blessed assurance»⁴.

His father's death upon which he looked as «the best sacrifice» saved him. «Humanly speaking», Kierkegaard writes in another page of his *Journals*, «I am saved by one already dead, my father»⁵ to whom «I owe everything, from the beginning»⁶.

So, the tragic event of his father's death which coincides almost with the episode of his return home from the life of «perdition» and his reconciliation with his father separates his whole life into two main

1. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

3. Peter P. Rohde, «Søren Kierkegaard», in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago-London 1977, vol. 10, p. 465.

4. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 141.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

periods. The first, which includes the *Aesthetic* stage of Kierkegaard's life, is the period of «perdition»; and the second, which includes the *Religious* stage with the *Ethical* as introductory to it, is the life of salvation. And, if we would characterize these two kinds of life from the point of view of death, we could say that the first is the life of his spiritual death in his sins¹ and the second is his spiritual resurrection from the death of his sins², like the Prodigal Son, who «was dead, and is alive again»³.

In this parable the similarity is not only on the part of the son but also on the part of the father who symbolizes, according to Christ, our Father in Heaven. Kierkegaard also uses the same comparison as concerns his father who, as he says in his *Journals*, gave him «some idea of divine fatherly love»⁴. Of course, the similarity of Kierkegaard and his father is valid as concerns the relation of the Father in Heaven to every sinful soul in general, but not as concerns His relation to His only-begotten Son in particular. In the parable of the Prodigal Son the «fatted calf»⁵ which the father sacrificed in order to eat and make merry for his son who «was dead, and is alive again» is the symbol of Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Who was sacrificed on the Cross in order to give man «everlasting life»⁶. In this case, therefore, it was the Son, and not the Father as in Kierkegaard's case that was sacrificed.

4. *His Waiting for Death and his Concrete Awareness of it (Death in a Subjective Sense).*

Kierkegaard was saved by his father's death but in the meantime he had to wait for his own death which, according to his estimates, might

1. Christ in the Gospel according to St. John speaks of this kind of death when he says: «If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins» (John 8:24).

2. Of this kind of resurrection St. Paul speaks when he says: «Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from dead, and Christ shall give thee light» (Ephes. 5:14).

3. Luke 15:24,32.

4. «How thank you, Father in Heaven», Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals* on July 9, 1838, «that you have preserved my earthy father here upon earth for a time such as this when I go greatly need him» (*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 59). «Great heavens!» he writes on another page on July 19, 1840, «The task cannot be so small when compared to all that I owe him. I learnt from him the meaning of fatherly love and so was given some idea of divine fatherly love, the one unshakable thing in life, the true archimedean point» (*Ibid.*, p. 66).

5. Luke, 15: 23,27,30.

6. John 3:14-16.

come very soon. He had a strange feeling that he could not live beyond his thirty-fourth year. He writes to his eldest brother Peter on the occasion of the celebration of his birthday that year: «Both father and I were of the opinion that no one in our family would live beyond thirty-four. However little I may otherwise have been at one with father we had, in certain particular ideas, a real meeting point, and in conversations such as those, father was always quite enthusiastic about the way I could describe the idea with a vivid imagination, and follow it with rigid consequence. It was an altogether peculiar thing about him that he had most markedly what one least expected, imagination, a really melancholy imagination. The thirty-four year was then to be the limit and father was to outlive us all. And now it has not happened — I enter upon my thirty-fifth year...»¹.

About fourteen months before writing to his brother the above words, at the approach of his thirty-four year, he published (February 27, 1846) his work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in which under the impression of not living beyond that year he treats death in a concrete sense. In this important work Kierkegaard distinguishes the «objective» from the «subjective». «The objective accent», he remarks, «falls on *WHAT* is said, the subjective accent on *HOW* it is said»². In other words, by the «what» Keirkegaard means «the object of apprehension» and by the «how» he means «the subject's relationship to what he thinks»³.

Thus, as in any other theme, so in the theme of death Kierkegaard makes, according to his theory: «Truth is subjectivity»⁴, the same distinction; he distinguishes death in the «subjective» sense from death in the «objective» sense. Of this distinction he talks in the case of Soldin, the absent-minded book-dealer in Copenhagen⁵. «If the

1. Kierkegaard records this letter in his Journals (See *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, May 1847, p. 121). In another entry of his Journals dated two years before his death (i. e. on October 13, 1853) Kierkegaard writes also: «... I thought that I should die very young» (See Walter Lowrie, *A short Life of Kierkegaard*, p. 52).

2. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 181.

3. *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, edited by Robert Bretall, New York, The Modern Library, 1946, p. 191 (R. Bretall's Introduction to Kierkegaard's *Postscript*).

4. This Kierkegaard's theory of knowledge is contrasted to Hegel's theory: «The truth is the whole» (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J. B. Bailie, New York, McMillan Co., 1955, p. 81) which is objective knowledge, that is, «speculation» or «the system» (Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 370-379).

5. Soldin was «a book-dealer in Copenhagen about whose absent-mindedness

uncertainty of death», Kierkegaard says, «is only something in general, then my own death is only something in general. Perhaps this is also the case for systematic philosophers, for absent-minded people. For the late Herr Soldin, his own death is supposed to have been such a something in general: 'when he was about to get up in the morning he was not aware that he was dead'. But the fact of my own death is not for me by any means such a something in general, although for others, the fact of my death may indeed be something of that sort. Nor am *I* for myself such a something in general, although perhaps for others I may be a mere generality. But if the task of life is to become subjective, then every subject will *for himself* become the very opposite of such a something in general»¹.

It seems apparent, then, in the above passage that Kierkegaard distinguishes death in general or abstract sense from death in particular or concrete sense. By the former sense Kierkegaard understands death as perhaps philosophers understand it in their speculative knowledge. To this category the absent-minded people as, for example, the bookseller Soldin, also belong. By the latter sense, death in a concrete sense, Kierkegaard understands death in its connection with the individual. This is what he calls death in the «subjective» sense, in opposition to the other kind of death which is death in the «objective» sense. By «subjective» Kierkegaard means the death which concerns my own subject and my own existence, that is, death which «becomes more and more important for me to think of it in connection with every factor and phase of my life»².

The distinction between «subjective» and «objective» death is also found in Martin Heidegger's existentialism. According to William V. Spanos, this philosopher, «following Kierkegaard», distinguishes in his work, *Being and Time*, the «they» who say «One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with me» from the «dying, which is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative»³. In this sense death is «an entirely personal affair»⁴.

many humorous stories were current» (See Translator's Notes in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 564).

1. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 149.

2. *Ibid.*

3. W. V. Spanos, *A Casebook on Existentialism*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969, p. 7.

4. G. F. Kostaras, *Martin Heidegger, the Philosopher of the Care: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Existentialism*, Athens 1973, p. 184 (in Greek).

«It is only a subjective event as being experienced exclusively by the dying I. Those who survive understand it as an objective event»¹. For them the dying is not the concrete responsible person, but the average of the others, the «someone», the «one» (*das Man*)².

The double view of death, that is, the subjective or concrete and the objective or abstract view, corresponds to what Heidegger characterizes as «responsible» and «irresponsible» existence. The latter is the discharge from responsibility of the singularity of the «individual» which will be annihilated by death; it is avoidance of thinking of this death, and therefore a refuge from death itself³. In opposition to this kind of existence, the responsible existence is the awareness of the temporality of life; it is dread (*Angst*) itself⁴ before the nothingness (*Nichts*) which makes man see death not for the others, but for him himself. And not only as a futural event, but as a continuous presence, in such a way that he lives *sub specie mortis*. Thus, to exist in a responsible manner means to think of death by living it every moment of life; it is «being-for-death» (*Sein-zum-Tode*), which means to exist in death, by death, from death⁵.

This existential living of death is exactly the case of Heidegger, and even more the case of Kierkegaard, who in his *Postscript* treats death in relation to the living individual. «The question arises», he says, «as to what death is, and especially as to what it is for the living individual. We wish to know how the conception of death will transform a man's entire life, when in order to think its uncertainty he has to think it every moment, so as to prepare himself for it. We wish to know what it means to prepare for death, since here again one must distinguish between its actual presence and the thought of it. This distinction appears to make all my preparation insignificant, if that which really comes is not that for which I prepared myself; and if it is the same, then my preparation is in its perfection identical with death itself»⁶.

As we can see then from the above passage, Kierkegaard identifies death with life, death itself as an actual event with life which must

1. N.A. Nissiotis, *Existentialism and Christian Faith* in Søren Kierkegaard and the contemporary existentialists Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, Athens 1956, p. 230 (in Greek).

2. M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed., Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967, pp. 126ff., 252ff.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188, 190-191.

5. N. Nissiotis, *op. cit.*, p. 230; see also M. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, pp. 252ff.

6. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 150-151.

become a continuous preparation for death. But let us see in more detail in the following paragraph what Kierkegaard means by this identity.

5. *Kierkegaard's Dying to the World through Self-Mortification and Suffering.*

Though Kierkegaard lived beyond his thirty-fourth year without dying, this does not mean that afterwards there was no danger of dying from moment to moment. Death is so uncertain that nobody knows the moment of its visit. This uncertainty of death made him not cease to think and think again of it every moment of his life and not «once for all, or once a year at matins on New Year's morning», as Kierkegaard writes in his *Postscript*¹.

In this work, as we have seen in the above long quotation from it², the Danish philosopher says that to think the uncertainty of death by thinking it every moment is the same with man's preparation for death. This preparation means his perfection, that is, transformation of his entire life by connection of the conception of death with his own individual. It means a becoming in a new life which is realized every moment and instant, according to Kierkegaard, by dying to the world, by self-mortification. This is what Plato says also when in his *Phaedo* he defines philosophy as a «study of death»³.

Commenting on this «philosophical dying to the world», W. Lowrie says: «In *Phaedo* Plato recommends to the philosopher the ascetic discipline of dying from the sensible world, a thought which is prominent also in the New Testament—and not merely in ascetic theology»⁴. Indeed, St. Paul, for example, in his epistle to the Galatians talks of the true Christians who «have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts»⁵. In the same epistle, talking of himself, he says also: «God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world»⁶. And in his epistle to the Colossians he writes: «Mortify therefore your members which are

1. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

3. *Phaedo* 81a.

4. S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, p. 150, note No. 8.

5. Gal. 5:24.

6. Gal. 6:14.

upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry¹.

As we can see then, mortification is something which refers to the human passions, to evil in general or sin, as Christianity calls it. It is a purification of the soul from sin through what St. Paul characterizes «self-crucifixion», that is, through *suffering*, which suffering, according to Kierkegaard, is the main characteristic of the religious stage of life², and therefore of Christianity since the real aim of man in this stage is «to become a Christian»³. Christianity, writes Kierkegaard in his *Journals*, is «truthfully presented as suffering» and not as «happiness»⁴. For this reason, he says in another page of his *Journals*: «If I have to preach mortification, and that to be loved by God and to love God is to suffer, then I have to disturb others in their happiness»⁵.

In his *Journals* Kierkegaard compares his teaching of self-mortification with Schopenhauer's ethical point of view which is «to leaden or mortify the joy of life» «through suffering»⁶. However, «the main objection» of Kierkegaard in his comparison with the philosopher of pessimism is that Schopenhauer «himself is not an ascetic. And consequently he himself has not reached contemplation through asceticism, but only a contemplation which contemplates asceticism»⁷. What Kierkegaard means when he says that Schopenhauer «himself is not an ascetic» is that he does not put into practice what he teaches in theory. In opposition to Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard through his whole life was accompanied

1. Colos. 3:5.

2. Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1945, Introduction, p. 10. By its main characteristic this stage is contrasted to the *Aesthetic* stage which is characterized by «pleasure-perdition» (*Ibid.*). About suffering in Kierkegaard as a religious act, see John W. Elrod, *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, N. J., 1975, pp. 170-173.

3. «Christianity came into world as the absolute — not for consolation, humanly understood; on the contrary, it speaks again and again of the sufferings which a Christian must endure, or which a man must endure to become and to be a Christian, sufferings he can well avoid merely by refraining from becoming a Christian» (Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans. by W. Lowrie, 3rd Print., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 67; see also p. 194).

4. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 209; see also *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 416 where Kierkegaard refers to Feuerbach's saying about Christianity.

5. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 226; see also pp. 225-228.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

by suffering so that he writes in his *Journals*: «There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a cross»¹. On this point, therefore, we can compare him with Pascal who said: «Suffering is the natural state of the Christian, just as health is that of the 'natural' man». Referring to these words of Pascal, Kierkegaard explains that «he [Pascal] was a Christian and spoke out of his own experience»².

Suffering as related in the religious sense to self-mortification has for Kierkegaard a special significance. «The significance of the religious suffering», he says in his *Postscript*, «is that it is a dying away from immediacy»³ which immediacy characterizes the Aesthetic stage of life⁴, that is, the stage of perdition or sin. Kierkegaard, like the Church Fathers, believed that sin is worse than any suffering⁵. So, in order to avoid sin (the spiritual death) he preferred to suffer any kind of suffering, even physical death. He preferred to die every moment by «the philosopher's death» in order to mortify his members. One can understand the significance of mortification through suffering in Kierkegaard, if he considers that his last words in his *Journals* refer to this subject of self-mortification in terms of which he defines «spirit». «Spirit», he says, «is: to live as though dead (dead to the world)»⁶. This is the definition that Kierkegaard gives to the spirit which, as he explains, is Christ, «for Christ», he says, «is spirit, his religion that of spirit»⁷.

6. *Contemporaneity in Christ's Passion by Suffering (Joy through Suffering in View of Eternity).*

Christ by his whole life, and especially by his Passion, is understood by Kierkegaard in terms of self-mortification or «suffering of spirit»⁸. In this sense, Christ is, according to him, the most representative

1. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

2. S. Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 416.

3. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 446; see also the previous pages.

4. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. 1, p. 63; see also vol. 2, p. 229.

5. This is especially Kierkegaard's belief in his work, *The Sickness unto Death*, where he identifies sin with despair (*The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by W. Lowrie, New York, Doubleday and Co., 1954, pp. 208ff.) as the highest point of the Aesthetic stage (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. 2, p. 197).

6. *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, p. 254.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 160.

type of the Religious stage¹ whose main characteristic, as we said, is «suffering». As W. Lowrie remarks, Kierkegaard «who had been affected in early childhood by the picture of Crucifixion... was extraordinarily fitted by nature and experience to be a passionate preacher of Christ's Passion»². Especially in his *Training in Christianity* he dedicates many pages to this subject³. «His [Christ's] life as a whole», says Kierkegaard, «is the suffering of inwardness. And then when the last period of His life begins with betrayal by night, He suffers also bodily pain and ill-treatment»⁴. He suffered all kinds of sufferings which approached at the highest point «the extremest suffering of feeling Himself forsaken of God, so that at no moment was He beyond suffering»⁵.

Since Christ's life is characterized by suffering, everyone who wants to follow Him must participate by his own suffering in his Passion and loneliness⁶. This participation in Christ's Passion is what Kierkegaard in his *Training in Christianity* calls again and again «contemporaneity»⁷. «If there is to be any seriousness in stationing oneself or standing beside the cross», he says somewhere in this book, «it must

1. Another representative type of this stage is Job of whom Kierkegaard talks so much in *Repetition* (See S. Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1946, pp. 94, 110-113, 121-124, 125-131, 132-134). Job who suffered, especially by his loneliness, more than any other man is a prophetic figure of Christ's Passion. Horace M. Kallen, making the comparison of Job with Christ, finds their similarity in «loneliness» which, according to Wolfe, «is the essence of human tragedy» (See H. M. Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy*, New York, Hill and Weng, 1959, p. xiv). According to Kierkegaard, «loneliness is the greatest suffering». In his *Gospel of Sufferings* he says: «The deepest sorrow and suffering: to walk alone and to walk on one's own» (S. Kierkegaard, *The Gospel of Sufferings*, trans. by A. S. Alworth and W. S. Ferrie, London, James Clarke and Co., 1955, p. 16).

2. S. Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, p. 107n; see also pp. 177ff.; and also W. Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, pp. 49ff.

3. S. Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, especially pp. 106-108.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

6. «The man who chose to follow Christ», says Kierkegaard, «goes forward on the way. And when he must also learn to know the world and what is in the world, the world's strength and his own weakness, when the struggle with flesh and blood distresses him, when the going is heavy, and there are many foes and no friends, then the agony of it may well wring from him the moan: I walk alone» (S. Kierkegaard, *The Gospel of Sufferings*, pp. 22-23).

7. This contemporaneity which means «to become like God» (S. Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, pp. 67, 97, 109-110, 243) is also a contemporaneity in «Christ's humiliation» (*Ibid.*, p. 233-234). For Christ's actual suffering

be in the situation of contemporaneousness, where it will mean *actually* to incur suffering with Him¹.

Thus Christ with His Passion must become the «pattern»² in which the true Christian participating by suffering can become contemporary to Him³, «for even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps»⁴. It was Christ Who said: «If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take his cross, and follow me»⁵. This verse is the motto of the first discourse in Kierkegaard's *Gospel of Sufferings*⁶. And, as he says there, «on that way where a man follows Christ, the height of suffering is the height of glory», because «here, on this way, the greater the suffering the nearer to perfection»⁷. So, «greater joy there cannot be than this—to be able to become what is highest»⁸. About this joy Kierkegaard says the following by which he ends his discourse: «In life there is one blessed joy: to follow Christ; and in death there is one final blessed joy: to follow Christ into Life! that is, into «eternity»⁹. Especially, Kierkegaard treats the joy through suffering in view of eternity in his third discourse by the title: «The joy in the thought that the school of sufferings forms us for eternity»¹⁰.

7. Identity of Death with Life by Mortification as a Means of Immortality.

From what we said above, it is evident that self-mortification by suffering is a transition to eternity. Such a transition is also the «study of death» in *Phaedo*, though there, as Kierkegaard explains, «the philo-

lies in the fact that, being God, «He became 'very man'» (*Ibid.*, p. 131). «Christ was born and lived in humiliation» (*Ibid.*, p. 234; see also pp. 44, 69, 167).

1. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

2. «He [Christ] lived here on earth, this life of His is the pattern» (*Ibid.*, p. 198).

3. «Contemporaneousness» in this sense is the subject of *Philosophical Fragments* (See S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by D. F. Swenson, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1958, ch. V: «The Disciple of Second Hand»),

4. 1 Pet. 2:21.

5. Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27.

6. S. Kierkegaard, *The Gospel of Sufferings*, pp. 13ff.; see also pp. 17, 19.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 22; see also pp. 23, 25.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 26; see also pp. 23-24.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 47ff.

sophical dying to the world» concerns eternity backwards and not forwards¹. What Kierkegaard means by «eternity backwards» is the Platonic recollection in which «the Greek eternity lies behind, as the past into which one enters only backwards»². In opposition to this movement of recollection is the movement forwards which concerns the new category of philosophy: Kierkegaard's own category «repetition» (*Gjentagelsen*). As such repetition maintains, according to the Danish philosopher, that movement «by which one enters eternity forwards»³.

This eternity as a belief not in pre-existence of the soul but in existence of the soul after death, that is, in the continuity of life in another life which begins for Kierkegaard from this life — this eternity, we say, is the essential characteristic which «the true repetition» takes in the second part of Kierkegaard's book where «repetition is regarded as a religious experience»⁴. It is in this part and towards the end of the whole book where Kierkegaard says that «eternity... is the true repetition»⁵. But, besides eternity, another characteristic of repetition is freedom. «Freedom itself is now repetition»⁶. This identity of repetition with freedom characterizes what Kierkegaard calls the religious stage of life. Freedom is essentially the same as eternity. For this reason, in his *Concept of Dread* Kierkegaard talks about a «possibility of the eternal (i. e. of freedom)»⁷.

Repetition as a motion (*κίνησις*) is a becoming which is «a change in actuality brought by freedom»⁸; not a becoming in nature (space), but a historical becoming (time), a becoming in the spiritual sphere, and therefore «a second becoming within the first becoming»⁹. As such repetition is a moral category and expresses the birth of the human soul in a new life, in eternity, which in the «process of becoming» is «the

1. S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, p. 80.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 80n. Making the comparison of repetition with recollection as a movement, Kierkegaard says: «Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards» (Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, pp. 3-4).

4. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, Part 2, pp. 81ff (See Translator's Notes, p. 166, No. 42).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

7. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, p. 81.

8. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 64; see also pp. 70-71.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

supreme choice» of self in its «eternal validity»¹, the instant in which in the religious sense time and eternity are met, «the moment that», as G. Cattani interprets Kierkegaard's thought, «lasts for ever»². This moment, then, «comes when we must break with the past without hesitation, throw off the old man and not look back»³.

This regeneration of man or «second becoming», like every other becoming, is realized by suffering for «all coming into being is a kind of suffering»⁴; it is a self-mortification through suffering, that is, a purification from sin, and therefore a deliverance from death itself since death is a logical consequence of sin, the latter being the real cause of death, «the sickness unto death», as Kierkegaard characterizes it⁵. In this sense, mortification becomes immortality because the question of immortality is raised for man, according to Kierkegaard, not metaphysically but ethically, that is, «how immortality practically transforms his life»⁶.

Considering this, we can understand how the conception of death when it transforms a man's entire life is identified with that very life, with immortality and eternity. And this is exactly what makes the sense of death in Kierkegaard quite different than in Tolstoy whose fear of death is in complete contrast to love and happiness of life. But let us see now in a particular part this difference and other differences, besides their similarities, in a comparison between Tolstoy and Kierkegaard on the sense of death.

(To be continued)

1. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. 2, p. 218; see also pp. 207, 215, 217, 235.

2. George Cattani, «Bergson, Kierkegaard and Mysticism», in *Dublin Review*, January, 1933, No. 384, p. 71. See also J. W. Elrod, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 62.

5. As Robert Bretall remarks on Kierkegaard's book which bears as title the above characterization, «*The Sickness unto Death* is an investigation of [the] corruption in human nature, which of course is what the Church calls *sin*, but which Kierkegaard, in accordance with the 'psychological' viewpoint here adopted, chooses to call *despair*» (*A Kierkegaard Anthology*, p. 340). This despair, like sin or evil which is *privatio bone*, «is always in Kierkegaard negativity» (Jean Malaquais, *Søren Kierkegaard: foi et paradoxe*, Paris, Union générale d'éditions, 1971, p. 248).

6. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 156.