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The significance of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition as '*the task of freedom to overcome despair*' for Carl Rogers' person-centred form of existence-oriented therapy

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There he was, ready to go and not going[1].

Antonio Di Benedetto

§0. Introduction

My aim in this essay is to show how Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition can provide valuable guidance to existence-oriented therapists towards one of their central aims: to help individuals to overcome despair by actualising their potential for freedom. The human potential for freedom lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition. For him, however, the actuality of such freedom is not merely given, in the form of a natural human possession. Rather, he conceives of freedom as a human *task*. As we shall see, what Kierkegaard means by 'repetition' is intimately connected with this task, the 'task of freedom.[2] As the key term in his conception of this task, 'repetition' is a movement of self-renewal and refers to the transition from the potentiality of freedom to its actualisation. What are the factors that inhibit repetition? What are the conditions of its realisation in the context of therapy? These are the two questions that broadly motivate my thesis.

Kierkegaard's idea of repetition is of particular interest in the context of therapy because of the dominance of the psychoanalytic view of repetition as unconscious compulsion associated with neurotic personalities[3][i]. On this view, repetitions are problematic mental phenomena.[ii] In contrast, existence-oriented therapists are more concerned with the challenges of human existence as a whole, rather than interpreting its partial manifestations as psychological disorders. These practitioners

[1] A. Benedetto, 2016, p. 1
[2] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 312
[3] S. Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, in Standard Edition of Complete Works, p. 3726

construe existence as ineluctably grounded in relations with one's self and with others.[iii] Therapists from a diversity of clinical models gravitate towards an existential orientation, often through their own first-hand experience as client. While there is no single school of existential therapy, I refer in this paper to Carl Rogers' person-centred approach, which in the overall formulation of its clinical philosophy[4] stands out as a salient form of contemporary existence-oriented therapy. Rogers' existential-phenomenological credentials rest upon his emphasis on affectivity and embodiment that ground his view of selfhood within the human organism.

Rogers discussed the implications of the inter-subjective relations on the constitution of selfhood with Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Rollo May[5], to remain guided by contemporary thinkers of his time. Whilst Rogers' affectivity-based, body-centred theory of selfhood has been compared to a number of existential philosophers including Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty,[6] we should take particular note of Rogers' own claim to have been influenced by Kierkegaard's view of self[7]. Following these leads, my aim is to develop a Kierkegaardian basis for building a positive account of repetition as the movement of self-renewal in a therapeutic context, with the intended outcome of fostering clients' capacity for existential freedom and overcoming despair. In sum, what I want to show is how Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition can help us to explain why it makes sense to treat the client's freedom as the *telos* of existence-oriented therapy; Rogers' theory then helps us to see how this conception can be developed and applied in a therapeutic setting.

In what follows, I will adopt a two-pronged approach to this task. Part A will provide an exposition of *Repetition*, read as a novella and as a drama of failed repetition. Part B will build on this exposition and develop a layered account of the theory of repetition as a task of freedom to overcome despair, and thereby establish its significance for existence-oriented therapy. My paper is structured as follows:

Part A: Repetition - a case study in despair and failed therapy

[4] K. Tudor and M. Worrall, 2005
[5] M. Cooper, 2011 pp. 43-56
[6] M. Cooper, 2004, pp. 95 - 124
[7] C. Rogers, 1961, On becoming a person

§A1 presents the story in *Repetition* of an overwrought young man's romantic crisis and the ensuing despair through his disavowal of feelings of loss of desire, injured pride, and associated shame.[iv] I will then consider, through the lens of psychotherapy, the two factors that inhibit repetition in the story. First, §A2 provides a psychological perspective on the young man's despair. Second, §A3 relates to the ineffectiveness of Constantius' counselling interventions.

Part B: Theory of repetition as task of freedom and conditions that facilitate therapeutic growth

§B1 gives an account of Constantius' concept of repetition as a 'task of freedom'. In response to a critical review[v] of *Repetition* by J. L. Heiberg – which levelled the criticism that it lacked an account of repetitions in nature and in world-history – Constantius defended his treatise by claiming that it is a modern philosophy of existence, with an eye on freedom as an inward movement of spiritual self-renewal. He is emphatic that his aim is not to provide a comprehensive system of the kind he associates with Hegel. In §B2, by drawing together threads from Part A and §B1, the meaning of the 'task of freedom' is expounded as a task of overcoming despair in light of Anti-Climacus' *Sickness Unto Death.* For this, Daniel Dahlstrom's phenomenological analysis of how freedom can be retrieved through despair when aided by solidarity with 'the enabling power of another,'[8] will help consolidate this section. §B3 reflects on the account so far in the context of Carl Rogers' therapeutic approach, in which self-renewal entails overcoming 'incongruence', i.e. self-alienation and despair, and is envisaged as being fostered within a certain kind of relationship between therapist and client. This relationship is regarded as form of Kierkegaard's notion of neighbour-love.

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The remainder of my remarks in this introduction will briefly outline Rogers' theory to foreground its compatibility with repetition, and also to anticipate the worth of Kierkegaard's repetition for existence-oriented therapy.

[8] D. Dahlstrom, 2010, p. 73

Rogers formulated his theory of therapy in two parts: theory of personality (or self) and theory of practice (or therapeutic relationship). He explicitly acknowledges his debt to Kierkegaard for the former when he writes in a chapter titled '*To Be That Self Which One Truly Is*' in reference to *Sickness Unto Death*:

> I have been astonished to find how accurately the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, pictured the dilemma of the individual more than a century ago, with keen psychological insight. He points out that the most common despair is to be in despair at not choosing, or willing, to be oneself; but that the deepest form of despair is to choose 'to be another than himself.'' On the other hand 'to will to be that self which one truly is, is indeed the opposite of despair', and this choice is the deepest responsibility of man.[9]

The second part of Rogers' theory – i.e. the theory of therapeutic practice – defines the ideal relationship conditions between therapist and client. For this, Rogers draws upon the first part, the theory of selfhood, and articulates the conditions under which therapeutic change within the self is cultivated and fostered.

My enquiry paves the way for the existential substance of Rogers' person-centred theory to become fully explicated in light of Kierkegaard's philosophy. On this basis, I propose envisioning Rogers' approach as a form of existence-oriented therapy that is best viewed as building on Kierkegaard's view of repetition as the task of freedom to overcome despair. *Repetition* is concerned with the intricacies of selfhood in terms of balancing the change and constancy in the movement of self. Kierkegaard's philosophy offers valuable resources for our understanding of Rogers' approach in which the self is conceived not an entity but a process. The movement of self-becoming indicates the self as being synonymous with its ongoing self-transformation. In other words, for both Kierkegaard and Rogers, self and self-transformation are one and the same, and involve the dynamic interplay between change and constancy. Self-renewal is however a specific kind of self-transformation. It involves freedom to become oneself through overcoming despair and incongruence. The ongoing necessity to balance change and constancy keeps a person vulnerable to self-alienation. Repetition as the task of freedom, then, means

[9] C. Rogers, 1961, p. 110

progressively overcoming the despair of self-alienation, and continually retrieving the self's freedom to become itself.

The unusual structure and narrative of *Repetition* in which the identities of its two protagonists remain ambiguous allow multiple interpretations of the text. For the purpose of this essay, I will keep both characters distinct, and set aside the alternative of reading *Repetition* as a dramatization of two conflicted aspects of one person[vi].

PART A

Repetition - a case study in despair and failed therapy

§A1. *Repetition:* Crisis in the life of a young man

As stated previously, *Repetition* depicts the plight of a desperate young man hopelessly embroiled in a romantic ordeal. The narrative thread is held by Constantius as the character-narrator. This is an account of his involvement with the young man who, shortly after pledging his love for a young woman and having his feelings reciprocated, loses his desire for her. He is unable to recover his erotic feelings or to truthfully end the relationship. Thus emerges the crisis of despair over his self-alienation.

Initially, during the courtship, his new acquaintance with Constantius grows into a friendship through frequent meetings between them. Once his feelings change towards his fiancée, a rift also develops between him and Constantius. Due to a lack of emotional attunement, the nature of Constantius' practical counsel misses the mark and their contact falls apart. The young man is desperate to preserve his pride and avoid the shame that hides behind it. He then realises that a resolution is beyond his own individual power. He becomes conscious of his need for another to help him vent his rage and overcome his despair, although by this time he has retreated into isolation communicating with Constantius only

through one-side correspondence. He does eventually find a reprieve through the powerful act of another individual: when, ironically, his fiancée decides to marry elsewhere and thereby frees him.

Equally significant in the story is the way Constantius, who assumes the role of mentor, analyses the young man's character traits accurately, but can offer no real help for two main reasons. Firstly, Constantius, by his own admission[10], is a dispassionate observer and an abstract thinker. In the earlier part of the story, he becomes entangled with the young man's crisis and is unable to relate supportively to help the young man to honestly grapple with his intensifying distress. Secondly, partway through the story, the young man places himself out of Constantius' reach; thus preventing Constantius from taking any reparative measures. The young man revives a tenuous link by initiating a one-sided correspondence but withholding a return address, leaving Constantius unable to respond. In the end, it is the rejected fiancée, who terminates the engagement and decides to marry another. It is clear that both men have misjudged her by implying her character as submissive and manipulative. It is at her initiative that the young man recovers himself; thus he cannot be said to have earned his freedom through his own conscious efforts.

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Partway through the story, the desperation of the young man's need to be understood and accepted by another person – Constantius in particular – turns the narrative from being a romantic melodrama to an intense existential trial. The young man suffers self-alienation, isolation, and desperately searches for a redeeming other to free him. It is this turn that makes *Repetition* a compelling psychotherapy case study about the despair of shame and the vital role that a therapist can play in the resolution of the crisis of self.

Repetition is a story of two parallel relationships: one between the young man and his fiancée, and the other between him and Constantius. The fates of both relationships turn on the protagonists' capacity

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[10] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 5

for congruent relating to oneself and to others. The story can teach us how repetition as genuine self-renewal entails working through the demands of aesthetic sensibility (passion and desire) and of ethical integrity (responsible relating to oneself and others). Both aesthetic sensibility and ethical integrity are grounded in a capacity for emotional attunement. Ultimately however, Constantius claims, the conflict in both can only be reconciled in the religious life-view[vii][11]. Repetition as a task of freedom, we come to learn, is anything but an abstract, logical, process of self-determination of identity.

Upon first meeting the young man, Constantius finds him 'a deep person with many levels to his character',[12] and 'deeply, passionately, beautifully, and self-effacingly in love.'[13] Initially, and to contain his first rush of extravagant feelings, the young man has "needed a confidant in whose presence he could talk to himself out loud."[14] Constantius persuades him to confide his relationship difficulties and observes the young man avoiding a real bond with his fiancée. The affair heads for a disaster as he appropriates the woman inwardly as a muse for his poetic sensibilities without developing genuine intimacy. Instead of spending time together, he recites at a distance love poems that would fit an older man recollecting his youthful days of a burgeoning romance towards the natural end of their lives:

> There comes a dream from the spring of my youth
> To my old easy chair
> I feel a passionate longing for you
> My queen with the golden hair[15]

Constantius senses an ill omen in this premature recollection by which the young lover has become 'an old man with respect to the whole relationship'[16]. He realises that the melancholic young man is leaping over the present instead of taking time to allow his feelings of love to mature. Instead of cultivating his relationship through sustained contact with the girl, the young man avoids genuine intimacy. He

[11] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b p. 302
[12] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 5
[13] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 6
[14] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 8
[15] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 7
[16] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 7

surmises that the recollected love begins with loss.[17] 'This is its security — it has nothing to lose.'[18] Indeed how can the young man lose his beloved if he does not risk losing himself? His only stake is in the idea of a romance that has not been actualised. Constantius is sympathetic to this defensive stratagem of young lovers who fear loss and separation upon initiating a romance. Constantius predicts an unhappy fate for the young man, and remarks,

> "He was basically finished with the whole relationship. Simply by having begun, he advanced such a terrific distance that he had leapt right over life. It would make no great difference if the girl died tomorrow.[19]"

Eriksen succinctly captures this by saying the young man 'changes the present into a dream.'[20] The young man cannot find the equilibrium between possibility and necessity, infinity and time, immanence and transcendence. But just as he seems unable to allow his own immanence permeated and destabilised by the transcendent otherness of his beloved, so Constantius too cannot relate sympathetically or empathically to the young man's growing distress. Constantius either over-identifies with the young man's suffering[21] or analyses disinterestedly from an emotional distance. Relating without collapsing the separates of one's own existence is beyond the reach of both men.

The young man despairs upon realising that once the love affair 'gets going' he has no means to 'keep going'. This threatens his pride and the resulting shame weakens his sense of self. This dilemma develops into an ethical quandary: since his passion has waned, how should he meet his obligation to the young woman? Constantius notices that the possibility of confessing his predicament to his fiancée raises anxiety in the young man of injuring her honour and wounding his pride. He remarks:

> To explain to her the confusion, that she was just the visible form, whereas his thoughts, his soul, sought something else that he had attributed to her, that would be to wrong her so deeply that his pride protested against it.[22]

[17]S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 8
[18] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 8
[19] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 8
[20] N. N. Eriksen, Repetition 31
[21] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 5
[22] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 12

The young man perpetuates deceit by rejecting the idea of admitting the truth to the fiancée on the grounds of protecting her honour. Constantius is of similar view, although at the end he accepts that confessing to her would have been the 'more respectable thing to do'[23]. Hence, the relationship is starved of real contact and the emotional distance between the two lovers widens as the depressed young man proceeds with a fabrication whereby '[a]ll his poetic talents were now used to amuse and entertain her.'[24]

Constantius remarks on his anticipating a kind of psychic explosion,[25] although he does not share this concern with the young man. He is aware of the conflict intensifying within the young man due to the discrepancy between his actual self, and the ideal self with which he identifies. Constantius applies this insight by advising him to:

> Transform yourself into a contemptible person whose only pleasure is in tricking and deceiving. If you can do this, then you will have established equality[26].

Constantius reasons that by consciously choosing to become a 'contemptible person', the young man's inner turmoil would end. If the discrepancy between his actual self and ideal self could come 'to a point of agreement'[27] his despair could be alleviated. What this means is that one's existential reality is the ground of one's selfhood. The feelings, thoughts, sensations, and imagination that constitute our experiential reality can give us all the selfhood we need to exist in the world with others. This selfhood, then, which is indexed to our existence, throws up a paradox: how we identify ourselves, both to ourselves and to others, tends to remain relatively steady over time whilst our existential reality is always in movement. Without a sense of continuity, our world would be nothing more than a chaotic flux. Constantius muses near the beginning of *Repetition*:

> Who would want to be a tablet on which life wrote something new every moment, or a memorial to something past? Who would want to be moved by the fleeting, the new, that is always effeminately diverting the soul?[28]

A sense of continuity is the bedrock of how we recognise ourselves and how others recognise us. As

[23] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a,
[24] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 12
[25] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. ??
[26] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 12 - 13
[27] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 12
[28] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 4

Daniel Watts observes:

> Without the possibility of some form of meaningful continuity or constancy across time… we moderns could only regard life in time as 'one damned thing after another'—if anything so coherent as that.[29]

In fact, without a minimal degree of self-continuity, it would be impossible for us to even register any discontinuity. In *Fear and trembling,* which can be regarded as a companion piece to *Repetition,* since both were published on the same day, Johannes de Silentio writes:

> …if underlying everything there were only a wild, fermenting power that writhing in dark passions produced everything, be it significant or insignificant, if a vast, never appeased emptiness hid beneath everything, what would life be then but despair?[30]

The young man's vacillating preoccupations gradually acquire coherence as his thoughts move in the direction of how will he be judged. His initial concern for how his fiancée will be affected ebbs as his anxiety changes direction. His concern about his own character – what kind of a person he is becoming – shifts away from the fact of his change of heart to how will he perceived by others. He expresses these anxieties in letters to Constantius. He fears an external power robbing him of his pride and judging him guilty as a deceiver:

> What kind of a power is it that wants to take my honour and my pride from me, and does it in such a meaningless way? Am I lost? Will I be guilty and a deceiver in whatever I do, even if I do nothing? – Or am I perhaps crazy?[31]

Then he laments:

> What kind of a life is it, when I have, with my beloved, lost honour and pride and lost it in such a way that no one knows how it happened or why I can never make it right again? Must I allow myself to be snuffed out in this way? Why was I ever born then? I didn't request it. [32]

Constantius is silently critical of the young man's self-recriminations, implying that these are not worthy in a mature adult:

> What concerns him is achieved the instant he can redeem his honour and his pride! As if it were not also an issue of honour and pride to defy such childish anxieties![33]

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[29] D. Watts, 2017, p. 2
[30] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 15 FTR
[31] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 61
[32] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 62
[33] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 50

The young man's distress mounts to perilous levels when he writes "I cannot endure my life any longer. I loathe existence; it is insipid, without salt or meaning"[34]. His outrage takes on a distinctly farcical – even hysterical – tone of a dissatisfied customer who has been sold damaged goods when he complains about having been thrust into the world without his say-so:

> Why was I not asked, why was I not informed of the rules and regulations…? ... Am I not free to decide?...Where is the manager, I would like to make a complaint![35]

The breakdown that Constantius alerted us to at the very beginning, nears a cliff-edge moment when he writes to Constantius:

> My mind has become paralysed; or would it be more correct to say that I have lost my mind? At one moment I am so tired, so dulled, it is as if I had died of indifference. The next moment I am raving mad, travelling from one end of the world to the other in search of someone on whom I could vent my rage. The whole of my being shrieks in self-contradiction. How did it happen that I became guilty? Or am I not guilty?[36]

There is much in this passage to illustrate how close the young man is to acknowledging his despair beyond what sounds like the incoherence of someone on the verge of a collapse. Crucial to note is an intuitive awareness of his need for another to help make sense of what he is experiencing. He is not seeking practical help, but emotional support. His emotional crisis is a crisis of meaning:

> Firstly he is unsure whether his mind has become paralysed or has it been lost. I propose that both words – 'paralysis' and 'loss' capture poignantly the young man's intense self-alienation. Paralysis is lack of movement, and immobility is what he experiences in relation to his crisis. This reflects his sense of having stagnated. Further, stagnancy of self also distorts his self-transformation since, as previously stated, the process of self and self-transformation are one and the same. Hence, he experiences the stagnancy as a loss of self.
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> Secondly, he experiences another kind of self-loss when the self has become unmoored due to overwhelming contradictions. The thwarted movement of selfhood is experienced at once as

[34] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 60
[35] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 60
[36] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 60

having stagnated as well as having lost its anchor. The mutually regulating processes of constancy and change of self have become split. The self-contradiction appears both irresolvable and ungraspable which renders the young man in despair, and fills him with rage. The 'shriek' of self-contradiction is his deepest anguish at experiencing psychic fragmentation.

Thirdly, amidst these intolerable emotions he voices the effect of 'indifference' as extinguishing his very existence. It is an expression of a desperate need for someone to whom his existence makes a difference; someone to whom he matters enough for him to be able to reveal truthfully the intolerable emotions of rage. This is a painful cry of someone whose self-imposed isolation out of shame exacerbates his sense of emotional abandonment. Recall that shame is a manifestation of discrepancy between the self that one perceives oneself to be and the self one needs to be perceived as by others. However, the one thing worse than being ashamed in the eyes of others is to be shameful in one's own eyes. Paradoxically, therefore, being recognised in the condition of shame by another can free up the individual from isolated shame[viii].

The intensified despair the young man expresses at this stage by writing that he feels as if he has died of indifference would alert any therapist to the risk of a severe breakdown, if not suicide. It is here that I want to suggest *Repetition* opens up fully as a dramatization of despair resulting from irresolvable self-contradictions, and the implications of the absence of a genuinely solicitous relationship for containing his destabilising emotions.

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The young man discontinues his personal meetings with Constantius, retreats into isolation by escaping Denmark, and speculates in wait for an ideal resolution. But now there is no one to confront his self-absorbed pride, and no one to turn to for solace when he feels a desperate need for someone to witness his suffering. His only alternative is to write to Constantius but – based on their prior history when he could not bring himself to act on Constantius' unorthodox counsel – he prefers to keep his correspondence one-sided. This can only deepen his isolation for he has no way of knowing

Constantius' reactions. At best, the letters serve as a cathartic device for him, as at first, when he merely 'needed a confidant in whose presence he could talk to himself out loud.'[37]

He writes to Constantius that he has turned to the Book of Job for what appears to be a call for divine intervention. If his desire for the fiancée could simply be revived, then his crisis would be eradicated. Through rejuvenation of his personality he would be rendered fit to be a husband. He identifies with the Biblical story of Job and hopes for a 'thunderstorm' that would result in a kind of spiritual re-birth. But he is unlikely to have developed a genuinely religious feeling, for as Garff[38] explains, his comparison to Job is unfounded, and that the young man's 'absurdist manifesto'[39] is in fact a 'furious call for meaning'[40]. This is plausible, since the young man has run out of words to meaningfully represent his despair as is evident from his letter to Constantius:

> What a miserable invention is human language, which says one thing and means something else![41]

Yet, the young man claims to have found an indescribably 'complex and subtle'[42] meaning from his religious ordeal[43]. Ideally he too would like a reversal of the recent fateful events such that his world can be restored: his passion for the fiancée, the meaningfulness of his ordeal leading to his self-renewal, and freedom to become himself once again in repetition. There is no concern for regaining his freedom through his own efforts and overcoming his despair. He would settle for anything that would undo his crisis, as is evident from below:

> I wait for a thunderstorm – and for a repetition. And yet, if only a thunderstorm would come, I would be indescribably happy, even if my sentence were that repetition was impossible[44].

The young man clings to his pride tenaciously and wishes for the 'thunderstorm' to destroy his whole personality such that he couldn't recognise himself. As long as he can redeem his pride, and somehow also become fit to be a husband, he seems prepared to lose himself entirely:

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[37] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 6
[38] J. Garff, 2005, p. 241
[39] ibid
[40] ibid
[41] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 60
[42] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 63
[43] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 63
[44] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 70

> What would be the effect of this thunderstorm? It would make me fit to be a husband. It would destroy my whole personality, I would be finished. It would make it so that I would hardly know myself. I do not waver, even though I stand on one leg. My honour would be saved, my pride redeemed and however it might change me, I hope the recollection will remain with me as an inexhaustible comfort, remain after it has happened.[45]

This shows the extent to which he is ashamed of the emotional downturn towards his fiancée. Note that hitherto he has disguised his shame as concern for protecting her honour in order to justify concealing the truth from her. Now he would rather dispense with his self entirely than accept the loss of a part of himself. Even at this stage, his primary concern is not to become capable of love, or be truthful to her, or to avoid causing heartbreak out of concern for *her,* but it is to keep *his* false pride intact.

The much-wished thunderstorm arrives. There is news of the fiancée's decision to break-off the relationship and marry another. It is hard to accept a view that this denouement is anything other than an 'utterly non-divine dismissal'[46] initiated by his fiancée. He is released from the torment that he could not himself set free. The young man's release from the intensity of despair at the news of his fiancée's decision, to do what he could not, shifts his self-understanding. Although the reprieve alleviates his anguish, if we are to understand repetition as a task, by which an individual overcomes the despair by himself resolving his inner conflict, then it is clear that the young man's passivity contradicts repetition. Indeed, he too realises this when he says: 'There is only one thing I regret, that I did not ask the girl to give me my freedom.'[47]

Yet, he is euphoric at his reprieve, having managed to keep his pride intact and being spared a mental breakdown:

> I am back to my old self. This 'self ', which another would not pick up off the street, is mine again. The schism in my being has been removed. I am whole again. The anxieties of sympathy, which my pride nourished and supported, no longer force splits and separations.[48]

We should note three things from his remark above:

Firstly, he finds himself returning to a prior version of himself – 'my old self'. In this sense, there

[45] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 70
[46] S. Mulhall, 2011, p.406
[47] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 69
[48] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 74

has been no metamorphosis but only a return to *status quo* through a chance reprieve. Along with despair also vanishes the specific possibility of repetition without its actualisation. In other words, his freedom remains entangled with despair, and must be retrieved by overcoming the despair at its next appearance.

Secondly, the self that he recovers is one that in his own estimation is not worthy of being 'picked up off the street by another.'[49] This intimates his awareness of the unresolved inward despair. We shall see in Part B how his rage indicates a form of defiant despair has subsided, and he comes to accept the weakened self as his own. There has been no genuine self-renewal, which for Kierkegaard comes only with the establishment of self in relation to itself and to others. Yet, with the healing of 'splits', the discrepancy between the real and the ideal aspects of himself have been granted a healing through the act of his fiancée.

Thirdly, he accepts that the 'anxieties of sympathy' that he has felt towards his fiancée were sustained by his pride; and by implication, not out of genuine concern for her. This is a marked change in his self-consciousness: at last he is able to see how his pride was implicated in his ethical failure as well as psychological disintegration.

On my reading, then, the young man dreads the possibility of having become guilty, for this would injure his pride and expose him to the shame that hides behind it. His call for a religious turn has been but a wish for a fantastic reversal of fortune that would fulfil all his desires, including his desire for desire itself, and dissolve his ethical dilemma. If, like Job, all his losses were to be reversed, he too could claim a religious repetition. It would reignite his passion, sustain his pride, confirm his ethicalness, and leave him replenished like Job, who even in the commanding presence of God had steadfastly claimed to be in the right. But the young man misreads the Book of Job when he places too high an importance on what is returned to Job, and not enough on Job's capacity to endure his ordeal without causing 'splits and separations' within himself. In this, he misses the essence of Job's tale, which is one of withstanding

[49] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 74

loss and standing firm in God's presence. Job pleads 'Not Guilty' without doubting his faith even after losing everything worldly, and yet he makes no desperate appeals to have everything returned to him. What renders Job's tale as one of true religious repetition is that it is 'not self-choice, but self-reception that becomes the operative term'.[50] Further, since Job's self-reception is grounded in the constancy of faith in God, the absolute Other, Job's self-relationship proves to be securely established in the self-transcendent movement of change.

In contrast to Job, the young man has failed in his 'task of freedom' and become instead 'a pawn to events' through a 'volatilized personality' that is unable to stabilize itself[51]. Away from Denmark and further isolated, the vertiginous movement of 'all change and no constancy' leaves him no capacity to overcome his despair and steady himself. Thus, without attempting an inward self-renewal, he merely awaits his crisis to collapse through an external intervention. His anticipation for a Job-like whirlwind is borderline delusional. As Stephen Mulhall observes: "Constantius is very clear from the beginning that the young man has…misunderstood what a genuinely religious response to the difficulties of his situation might have been".[52] Marilyn Piety is harsher in her judgement in regarding the young man as at best 'a lightweight, and most likely a *poseur*.'[53] The young man gets a whiff of the religious, but then, as Constantius describes:

> [T]he instant the temporary tension is relieved, he comes back to himself, but as a poet, and the religious is driven underground.[54]

In view of the above it could be safely concluded that the possibility of a genuine existential repetition in case of the young man remains thwarted. Instead, we remember him swerving between bouts of paralysing ruminations and sudden lurches into impetuous action throughout the story.

Repetition ends cryptically, with intimations of fused identities of the two protagonists. On any of the

[50] M. Piety, Introduction to S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. xi
[51] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 315
[52] S. Mulhall, 2011, p. 406
[53] M. Piety, Introduction to S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. xiv
[54] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 74

possible readings of the text, which has been described as 'baffling',[55] we find a portrait of human existence that is more convincing when it is incoherent, more pathos-filled through its farce, more meaningful in its absurdity, and more emotionally persuasive when it is less intelligible. The text is ideally to be read – and read repeatedly – for the reader to meditate on the true and constructive message of repetition.

Existential repetition depends upon an individual undergoing a kind of transition, a metamorphosis that is constitutively different from the ongoing self-transformation occurring through life changes occurring through all manner of contingencies relating to repetitions in nature and world-history. Existential repetition involves the individual activating his own potentiality for self-renewal such that there is a departure from the past as the sole determinant of events. On this level, the project that Constantius announces at the beginning of the text does not bear fruit. As Eriksen remarks, 'the failure of his project becomes a riddle than an answer,'[56] since 'the concept [of repetition] never comes in the individualities depicted in *Repetition*.'[57] However, on the level of literary fiction this failure can act as *via negativa* for the individual reader who might uncover the true meaning of repetition and imaginatively keep alive the possibility of its realisation.

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Having reviewed the young man's story I will now take a therapist's perspective to examine the factors that inhibit the overcoming of his despair and achieving repetition. I will do this in two steps. First, in §A2 I will discuss the young man's despair as issuing from an emotional complex of pride, shame, and rage. Next, in §A3 I will assess the effectiveness of Constantius as therapist in relation to the young man. Following this, in Part B, I will conduct a theoretical analysis of the key themes raised so far before moving to consider how the concept of repetition fits with Rogers' person-centred approach as a form of existence-oriented therapy.

[55] E. F. Mooney, 1998, p. 283
[56] N. Eriksen, 2000 Repetition Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction, p. 38
[57] N. Eriksen, 2000, p. 38

§A2. A psychological perspective on the young man's despair

Early on in the story, Constantius states that the young man's 'melancholy longing'[58] was an appropriate 'erotic mood'[59], and not uncharacteristic in romantic love[60]. Constantius remarks that the young man however needs another mood alongside to counter-balance this depression: "An ironic elasticity is also required." I understand this to mean a need for restrain in the young man's melancholy to ground his relationship in the real, rather than hover in abstract fantasy of 'recollected love'. This lack of ironic elasticity takes the form of despair, and trails the young man until the end of the story. His poetic sensibility prevents him recognising the self-alienation underlying his despair, which is covered up by pride since he is also contending with the feeling of shame. Pride keeps him psychologically trapped: unable to see himself as ashamed, he cannot initiate a movement to liberate that self by becoming it. In the concluding section of the text, Constantius remarks that if the young man had not become a poet,[61] the same crisis would have transformed him differently:

> [H]e would then have acted with an entirely different iron-like consistency and firmness…..he would have gained a fact of consciousness he could have stuck with.[62]

The young man lacks the tenacity - 'iron-like consistency' – to become aware – 'gain a fact of consciousness' - of the futility of his attempt to cling to his ideal self for the sake of his pride. As stated above, pride serves to hide the feeling of shame when he despairs at the contradictions in himself. Shame results from the gap between how one perceives one's self in relation to one's ideal and imagines being perceived by others. It is a complex affect and bound up with hidden layers of other intra-personal and interpersonal feelings: one can feel angry, sad, withdrawn, helpless, etc. at feeling worthless, inferior, and unlovable. Expounding on the existential phenomena of emotional sedimentation, the inter-subjective psychoanalyst Robert Stolorow writes:

[58] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a. p. 8
[59] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a. p. 8
[60] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a. p. 8
[61] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a. p. 80
[62] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a. p. 81

> Many psychological disturbances have a double-layered emotional structure consisting in a first-order painful feeling combined with a second-order feeling about that first-order feeling. [63]

Let us consider in this light the young man's self-alienation as functioning to disavow painful and complex emotions. These come to his awareness with the loss of his desire for his fiancée, guilt at hurting her, and bewilderment at not knowing what to do. These emotions contradict his self-identity as a romantic poet, one who is devoted and of unequivocal heart; constant in love. Deviating from this aesthetic ideal fills him with despair, and activates his shame about not measuring up in his own eyes, as well as being perceived as inadequate and deceitful. He has not yet grasped that genuine self-constancy is not a static portrait of unchanging passions. Self-constancy is not fixity but fluidity since the concrete self is not a solid self. The possibility of self-constancy is realisable only in the context of movement of the self (kinesis), when the self is free to remain open to its flow of awareness of existential phenomena, that is, become itself.

The psychoanalyst Benjamin Kilborne confirms that shame lies at the core of Kierkegaard's 'terrible sickness unto death'.[64] He regards it as a 'failure to conform to an ideal'.[65] This prevents the unlocking of freedom to overcome his despair. For another psychoanalyst Melvyn Lansky, shame is a hidden phenomenon of the psyche. He writes:

> Shame may as affect be simply an unpleasant or even a painful emotional experience, but shame also has a signal function heralding dangers that range from mild embarrassment to disgrace, or relegation to contemptible or inferior status—the most calamitous form of separation, total social annihilation.[66]

Such pride, I propose, is a defence against the painful presence of shame. From a psychotherapy perspective, shame is not a simple type of affect but rather an intricate, affective web that regulates an individual's relations with himself and others within the social order. Lansky writes:

> At its most unbearable, the affect itself signals loss of all connection to the social order, the ultimate form of separation—social annihilation.[67]

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[63] R. Stolorow, 2013 The Shame Family
[64] B. Kilborne, 1999, p.35
[65] B. Kilborne, 1999, p.35
[66] M. Lansky 2005 p. 870
[67] M. Lansky 2005 p. 879

Shame is a dynamic interaction between the self that one is for oneself and the self that one is for others. An individual's sense of self-worth, in terms of genuine pride and honour, or its lack, determines the scale of his own self-acceptability. The self-evaluative eye is bi-directional: how one sees oneself and how one imagines being seen by the other. Pride, shame, and despair, therefore, belong to the same nexus of phenomena of the self.

Intense shame can stagnate an individual' selfhood by posing the threat of an intolerably painful idea coming into awareness. Freud introduced the notion of 'incompatible idea' to depict the self's inner conflict with the 'dictates of conscience'[68]. Such an idea could 'arouse the affects of shame, of self-reproach and of psychical pain and the feeling of being harmed'[69]. So long as the idea remains out of awareness, the painful affect of shame is kept at bay. Instead, through its displacement by a more acceptable defence such as pride, honour, duty, normativity, loyalty, illness, disability, and so forth, the individual preserves a semblance of integrity and minimises the dread of inner fragmentation.

The persistence with which the young man upholds pride as the value to salvage from his crisis, suggests the presence of an incompatible idea that exerts a repelling force. What is at stake for the young man in this affective complex is his freedom as an individual to become himself, i.e. to end alienation by accepting himself without denial or defiance of his despair, in order to move in the direction of his unattained but attainable congruence of self. Quite simply, I propose, the incompatible idea associated with shame has been disclosed to the reader by Constantius: the young man is not really in love at all but merely using the relationship to feed his poeticism. He takes his desire as an object that he can acquire or lose at will without himself changing. However, emotional states are not properties of selfhood but rather they are constitutive of it. On this picture, it is not that the young man does not *have* desire for the fiancée, but that he *is* 'no-desire-for-the-fiancée'.

[68] M. Lansky 2005 p. 869
[69] J. Breuer and S. Freud, 1895, p. 268 - 269

Consider in this light Pia Soltoft's observation in her essay on the relation between subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in Kierkegaard's philosophy that the young man in *Repetition*:

> … lacks the ability to become and remain himself in relation to another human being, namely the young girl'… [and that]… 'he can only become himself *without* her. Only by losing her to another can he can get himself back. Only in his recollection of her can he possess her and ultimately possess himself, his Self[70].

As soon as the young man begins his love affair he becomes lost in recollected love. As Constantius observes, 'he advanced such a terrific distance that he had leapt right over life.'[71]" The fiancée was merely 'the occasion that awakened the poetic in him'; and that the young man never fully entered the relationship. As such Soltoft's remark confirms that it is not marriage with *this* woman that is problematical: the difficulty the young man has with self-constancy whilst in relation to *any* person is the underlying source of his distress. The emergence of this realisation in his consciousness is an idea that is incompatible with his pride; it activates his shame, and brings him closer to despair – all of which he fervently resists. Further, Soltoft says that it is in the process of *losing her to another* that he can get himself back, that is, regain his freedom and become himself. In other words, he needs *her* to leave *him* and set him free although he cannot permit this idea to reach his consciousness. The idea is so removed from his poetic self-image that it would provoke intense shame and force him to contend with the scale of his despair at the self he actually is. Despair in Kierkegaard's account is not a psychological or emotional state but rather an existential condition relating to loss of self. Despair persists when freedom has been misappropriated for disavowal of shame and upholding false pride.

On the reading I have developed, then, the young man does not achieve repetition, and although he is granted freedom by chance, he does not accomplish the task of freedom. Freedom's task, for him, would involve confronting the incompatible idea – and accepting it as part of himself. Instead of repetition as freedom's demand to 'be whomever I want', repetition as freedom submits to the demand to 'become who I am'. He must consider that neither going through the motions of marriage nor abandoning his

[70] P. Soltoft, 2000, p. 41
[71] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 8

fiancée and escaping the situation will resolve his crisis. It is in this light that we must review Constantius' involvement with him, and consider whether his efforts to realise the young man's freedom through finding equilibrium in the movement of change and constancy of self are commendable. This balance, Mulhall remarks:

> [N]ot only implies a vision of what their integration within a self might make possible; it also indicates that, and how, one's relationship with another person can facilitate the attainment of that internal integration.[72]

As Mulhall points out above, this raises the question of how one's relationship with another person can facilitate the attainment of that internal integration.[73] Taking this cue from Mulhall, I will now take up the question: given that Constantius insinuates himself into the role of being a 'wise doctor of souls',[74] how effectively does he 'facilitate the attainment of that internal integration' in the young man? In other words, why does not Constantius succeed in enabling the young man to become free to recognise and overcome his despair?

§A3. The ineffectiveness of Constantius' counselling interventions

Mulhall finds Constantius to be an incompetent analyst since Constantius is under the illusion that he stands in no need of analysis himself.[75] I support this view on the basis that Constantius as a counsellor fails in leading the young man to a truthful picture of himself. Mulhall does not however spell out an alternative approach that could succeed in raising awareness in the young man of the illusions that stand in need of therapeutic attention. On my reading, whilst Constantius can abstractly interpret the young man's self-alienation, he cannot relate therapeutically to the young man. The absence of dialogue in *Repetition* leaves neither of their voices being listened to fully. They fail to occupy a communicative space in which each could recognise, accept, and understand the emotional complex of pride, shame, and despair as a necessary part of the young man's self-integration. So long as the affective substance of

[72] S. Mulhall, 2011, p. 402
[73] S. Mulhall, S. 2011, p. 402
[74] S. Mulhall,, 2011, p. 404
[75] S. Mulhall, S. 2011, p. 402

the young man's self-alienation remains unresolved, he cannot overcome his despair and become free; i.e. achieve repetition. Constantius fails to grasp that even though the young man can leap over his life in recollected love, he cannot leap over his emotional existence: this is what makes recollected love unhappy.

As such, it is both Constantius' didactic posturing as a wise advisor as well as the specific counsel he offers the young man - to appear deceitful to his fiancée – that injures the therapeutic potential in their relationship. How Constantius understands his own personality, strongly illuminates his suitability – or otherwise – as therapist:

> Despite the fact that I ordinarily have a tendency to relate to other people merely as an observer, it was impossible for me to do this with him. Say what you will, a love-struck young person is such a beautiful sight that one cannot help but rejoice in it and thus forget to observe. Deep emotions always disarm the observer in a person. The desire to observe comes only when there is an emptiness in the place of emotion, or when emotions are coquettishly concealed.[76]

Although Constantius regards himself as a disinterested observer, and in spite of his dispassionate and abstract thinking characteristic of his narrative voice in *Repetition*, he is not emotionally uninterested. On the contrary, there is a distinct sense of his embroilment with the young man's crisis when he begins to take it over as his own. His emotional entanglement betrays the presence of his own emotional complexity that we glimpse as his moods in the passages covering his trip to Berlin. Consider when he says, "I suffered a great deal *for* the young person who wasted away day by day (italics mine)."[77] This, I think, compromises his effectiveness as an empathic counsellor. It is a common, albeit naïve, tendency in novice therapists to blur the distinction between the capacity for emotional attunement involved in therapeutic empathy that helps to resonantly apprehend the client's emotional states, and unreflective immediacy of emotional identification with their clients' feelings. It is uncontroversial that identification with a client's suffering detracts from the therapeutic task of encountering the client with a genuinely unconditional empathy.

[76] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 5 - 6
[77] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 11

Whilst my claim is not that Constantius acts maliciously; I think there is good support for Mulhall's comment about his demonic plan and his embroilment in the situation as motivated by some personal, perhaps unresolved, unconscious reasons of his own. Consider when he muses: 'I already had a tight grip on the reins. I was unusually anxious concerning the outcome.' Mulhall finds this to be Constantius' 'theatrical enactment'[78] whereby he is attempting to stage-manage the young man's 'despairing denial of selfhood'[79]. Such manoeuvres are frequent subjects of scrutiny in clinical discussions on transference and counter-transference.

Although Kierkegaard's main thesis on the theme of self and its affliction with despair appeared some years after *Repetition* in *Sickness Unto Death,* we can see how the themes taken up in the latter are prefigured in the former. The nexus of pride, shame, and despair linked with the incompatible idea that hiddenly plagues the young man, as discussed above, leads us to consider whether and how therapeutic was Constantius' involvement with the young man. Given his own peculiar failure to achieve repetition, what should we make of Constantius' claim that the young man has 'from the beginning, been in good hands'?[80]

The sustainability of Constantius' claim of 'good hands' will turn on whether he has been able to put his theory to salutary practice vis-à-vis the young man. Two factors that we should consider in evaluating the therapeutic efficacy of Constantius' involvements are 1) whether he enables the young man to become awareness of his incongruence, and related despair and lack of freedom, and 2) whether he helps the young man reconcile the conflicting parts of himself, for overcoming despair and become free to be himself.

On one occasion, as described above, Constantius dares the young man to go to extremes, and become a contemptible person.[81] He recommends this as a way of resolving the crisis: the young man should simply transform himself into someone who takes pleasure in tricking and deceiving[82]' in order to

[78] Mulhall, S. 2011, p. 395
[79] Mulhall, S. 2011, p. 395
[80] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 81
[81] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. ??
[82] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 13

‘establish equality’.[83] Here Constantius attempts to bridge the gap between the young man’s real self and ideal self to remove the discrepancy and create ‘equality’ between his feelings and his actions. He counsels him to become less romantically appealing by producing a ‘mawkish quasi-love, that is neither indifference nor genuine desire’,[84] and having as unpleasant a manner ‘as it is to see a man drool’[85]. Finally, Constantius offers to arrange an affair between the young man and a seamstress with a view to letting his fiancée find out, and end the engagement. In this, Constantius’ intention is to free up the young man from his crisis but without enabling him to consciously confront his despair with understanding in order to become free to overcome it. Constantius’ advice, if taken up, could prevent the young man from understanding the meaning of his emotional pain; and without meaning he cannot accept the pain as part of himself. Emotional and cognitive contents of the psyche – thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and imagination - are intricately interwoven. Whilst Constantius is not without emotions and, as seen above, is emotionally over-identified with the young man, his interpretative insights as abstract thinker are rooted in generalities, and disconnected from the specific distress of the young man. As abstract thinker, Constantius’ favoured way of existing is on the basis of propositional thought that lead to assertoric claims. Notwithstanding an aphorism or an epigram here and there, assertoric claims in general are vulnerable to being refuted by even a single exception. This is demonstrated non-assertorically – and ironically – by Constantius himself at the beginning of *Repetition*:

> When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes….did not say a word, but simply walked back and forth a few times, with which gesture he believed he had sufficiently refuted the Eleatic position.[86]

Such abstractions betray Constantius’ lack of genuine emotional understanding of what the young man’s dilemma means to him. Consider in this in light Kierkegaard’s own commitment to emotions, that is ‘central to his thinking about subjectivity, inwardness, existence, and character.’[87] As Siri Hustvedt reminds us:

[83] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 13
[84] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 13
[85] ibid
[86] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 3
[87] R. C. Roberts, 1998, p. 203

> Emotional states, “fear and trembling”, “anxiety”, and “despair” are elevated in Kierkegaard’s works to philosophical concepts that describe the human condition, the particular reality of the single individual and his subjectivity…[88] (loc. 9118)

In contrast to the above, Constantius’ interactions with the young man are defined by a lack of emotional attunement. A sense of missing emotional connection pervades the text, leaving Constantius’ reflections and the young man’s outpourings hovering *in abstracto* without the embodied affectivity that is constitutive of meaningful dialogues. Constantius fails to grasp the meaning of what is at stake for the young man. What worsens the young man’s crisis is not merely his unresolved despair, but also a lack of intimate human connection within which his pain can be brought to light, made sense of, and integrated in order for him to become free again. A capacity to understand that he is in despair – with imagination and feeling – not reason alone - could set the young man free to overcome the stagnancy of self. Without understanding his distress as a proximate part of himself, the young man remains unable to disentangle himself from his crisis. Only a pathos-filled transition could enable this renewal of himself, *as himself;* by acknowledging the self that he has lost as well as the self he has to gain. The self-renewal entailed in the movement of repetition is a pathos-filled transition: a new beginning, which occurs in the moment of leap of discontinuity with the past.[89] It is a passionate metamorphosis that is characterised, in Eriksen’s words, not by actualisation of possibility but by annihilation of possibility[90]. This is in stark contrast to a mere dialectical transition, which is a logical process based on abstract reflection, confined to immanence without enduring the pathos of self-surrender involved in transcendence. Although it is not an activity of will or reason, ‘pathos-filled transition is not an arbitrary or ungrounded transition’[91] and ‘is capable of being critically assessed’[92].

In light of Constantius’ insensitivity, his plan of staging an affair between the young man and a seamstress, for misleading the fiancée to think of her lover as a scoundrel, results in the young man’s

[88] S. Hustvedt 2016. Kierkegaard’s Pseudonyms and the Truths of Fiction, in A Woman Looking At Men Looking At Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind
[89] J. Ferreira, 1998, p.222, passim
[90] N. N. Erikson, 2000, p. 125
[91] J. Ferreira, 1998, p.222
[92] J. Ferreira, 1998, p.222

withdrawal from Constantius in high anxiety. The young man intuitively sees how this could only make things worse: firstly acting on Constantius' advice would 'bewitch the beloved into believing a lie'[93]; and secondly, there would be a risk of becoming destabilised in the process and turning into 'the character you used for this pious deception'[94]. The young man questions whether one can ever separate one's self-identity from one's actions. Immersed in abstract universalities, Constantius fails to regard the moral implications of the particular means to achieve the end. He also overlooks the necessity for the young man to confront his crisis as an existential task of becoming free and overcoming despair.

As mentioned previously Constantius remarks on the young man's plaintive comments about redeeming his honour and his pride as 'childish anxieties'. He implies that a truly honourable person would defy such unwholesome concerns.[95] Yet, Constantius gives no thought, nor makes any attempt to let this insight emerge within the young man. Despite his keen psychological analysis, Constantius is unable to make the best therapeutic use of this talent in practice. This is primarily because at this stage of the story, he has no means to respond to the young man since he does not have a return address to reply to his letters. But how might Constantius have responded if he did have the opportunity? This is a speculative question that can only be answered by deducing from his earlier interactions and later reflections on the letters he receives. Before their personal contact is broken off, Constantius makes interventions that fail to convey any empathic acknowledgement of the severity of the young man's emotional difficulty. This lack of responsiveness in Constantius to the young man's affective crisis, along with a failure to confirm the young man's acute emotional suffering, is counter-therapeutic.

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Constantius' interventions quickly lead to a rupture when the young man suspends all personal contact with Constantius. This is despite the young man's need for a listener and witness to his distress. These empathic failures occur, I propose, since Constantius is an abstract, aesthetic thinker. In Kierkegaardian

[93] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 53
[94] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 55
[95] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 50

terms, aesthetic thinking is characterised by abstract logical discourse and theoretical reflections. In several places Constantius describes himself as 'disciplined' to have 'only an objective intellectual interest in human beings'.[96] He refers to himself as an 'observer' whose 'desire to observe comes only when there is an emptiness in the place of emotion, or when emotions are coquettishly concealed'.[97] As such, Constantius participates in the young man's crisis 'aesthetically and psychologically'[98], as a problem that can be solved on the basis of reasoning alone. But 'reason is no test of *actual* lived bodily experience'[99] – and this is what emotions are.

The above leads me to claim that Constantius, despite his theoretical explication of repetition and logical analysis of the young man's crisis, is unable to help him transition from despair to freedom and self-renewal.

Part B

Theory of repetition as task of freedom and conditions that facilitate therapeutic growth

In the remainder of this paper, I will provide a theoretical framework for understanding *Repetition*, on the reading I have developed of this text as a drama of failed repetition, both in terms of the young man's failure to achieve genuine self-renewal and Constantius' failed therapeutic interventions. This will enable me to fulfil my overall aim of establishing the significance of Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition for existence-oriented therapy. Part B will be in three sections.

First I will draw upon Constantius' response to J. L. Heiberg's criticism of *Repetition.* This account claims that repetition is a task of freedom; and argues that the ultimate aim of freedom is freedom itself, implying that all other forms of freedom lead to despair.

Second, I will define the task of freedom as becoming free of despair, in the light of the dialectical

[96] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 45
[97] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 6
[98] S. Kierkegaard, 1844, p. 16 fn.
[99] S. Hustvedt

interplay between freedom and despair in Constantius' response to Heiberg, and Anti-Climacus' *Sickness*.

Third, having thus developed a composite picture of repetition as a task of freedom, which is to overcome despair, I will then consider how this is realised in Carl Rogers' existence-oriented approach to his person-centred therapy.

I will conclude by summarising that whilst Kierkegaard's repetition helps fully explicate Rogers' theory by locating freedom from despair as the aim of existence-oriented therapy, Rogers specifies the concrete conditions of love in human relationships as a potential avenue to realise the aim of repetition.

§B1. Repetition as task of freedom

The central point in Constantius' response to Professor Heiberg's critical review of *Repetition* is that "Apart from the heavens and world history, there is still a history called the individual's history."[100] Historical phenomena follow chronological time, and everything has a single trajectory of beginning and end. Not so, argues Constantius, for when it comes to an existing individual human being it is quite pertinent to ask 'whether what is lost through his initial beginning is not recoverable'.[101] In terms of world history each human being has one beginning, but in existential terms, an individual self has the potential to begin anew. In other words, the individual self can obtain renewal: this is repetition's freedom. For Constantius, repetition is an existential concept. It is concerned with the 'relation of freedom to the phenomena of the spirit, in the context of which the individual lives'.[102] The possibility of making fresh starts and new beginnings in life is what motivates individuals to embark on a quest of inward freedom. This is Constantius' sole concern: 'I have spoken only of the significance of repetition for the individual free spirit.'[103]

For Constantius, the first question in achieving the task of repetition is: 'How would the individual learn

[100] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 287
[101] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 288
[102] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 288
[103] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 306

to become sensitive to this question [of repetition]?'[104] For unless the individual is motivated to take up this possibility of self-renewal as a task of freedom, the ongoing movement of self transformation will continue to be dominated by the universal forces of nature and world-history. Constantius is alert to the criticality of an individual's awakening of interest in self-renewal. Unless the individual becomes conscious of the possibility of repetition as a kind of human endeavour oriented towards freedom, he cannot save his 'personality from being volatilised and, so to speak, in pawn to events'.[105] This means that without the potential capacity for freedom becoming actualised, a human being remains wholly determined by either external forces or inward phenomena – latent or unconscious psychic events – leading eventually to despair.

In Kierkegaardian thought the moment of crisis is pivotal in any kind of higher metamorphosis that goes beyond the mundane changes to the self. The search for freedom is usually instigated in response to an existential ordeal that makes the individual conscious of self-alienation and despair through eruption of painful emotions. The search can be undertaken in any combination of spheres: Religion, spirituality, philosophy, psychology, and arts are all modes of engaging with this quest. This is depicted poignantly in the story of the young man who deals initially in the aesthetic sphere as a poet before developing an ethical consciousness, then exploring the religious before returning to the poetic sphere. However, these are all partial movements and as I have argued, there has been no repetition in *Repetition.*

Constantius explains that in the young man's tale of *Repetition* it was this concept of repetition that he allowed to come into being 'in the individuality and the situation, working itself forward through all sorts of misunderstandings'.[106] Whilst the young man does not complete the full movement of repetition Constantius writes, 'Step by step, educated by life, he [the young man] now discovers repetition'.[107]

[104] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 290
[105] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 315
[106] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 302
[107] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 304

This leads us to consider that repetition is a continuing process of freedom and self-renewal.

> When applied in the sphere of individual freedom, the concept of repetition has a history, inasmuch as freedom passes through several stages in order to attain itself.[108]

Repetition is thus not a single event of self-renewal setting an individual free. We should, therefore, consider how the progression of freedom that is entailed in repetition takes place 'that in a way annuls repetition per se'.[109] Constantius' repetition goes beyond repetition *simpliciter*, whereby it overcomes it. His concept refers to the movement of self that can arise in the sphere of freedom; this is the movement of self-becoming that is not determined by the necessity of logical development alone. This is a kind of empty development as the 'ceaseless progress'[110] of the (Hegelian) spirit or the 'ceaseless repetition' in nature.[111] Mooney remarks on Constantius' mockery of that the '1,2,3 dance step of Hegelian dialectic,'[112] which is 'a tawdry substitute for the proper goal of continuing individuation.'[113] This is a 'purely immanent natural process'[114] in which possibilities are actualised without any real movement – it is only the 'commotion of modern philosophy.'[115] But, Constantius adds, "In the sphere of freedom, however, possibility remains and actuality emerges as transcendence."[116] This implies the emergence of actuality that is not wholly contiguous with the rational structure of the possibility.

On this basis, Constantius confirms that "Repetition is not repetition itself but what a person makes of it"[117] and that the significance of repetition consists in 'what the individual himself makes of it.'[118] The potent role of freedom surfaces as the factor that can transcend immanent causality. This is what Constantius means by 'pregnant repetition'[119] that is 'the individuality's own repetition raised to a new

[108] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301 - 302
[109] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 307
[110] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 380
[111] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 380
[112] E. F. Mooney, 1998, p. 286
[113] E. F. Mooney, 1998, p. 286
[114] E. F. Mooney, 1998, p. 286
[115] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 318
[116] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 309 - 10
[116]S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 293 - 294
[117] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 293 - 294
[118] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 290
[119] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 294

power'[120] and why 'repetition in the sphere of individual life has a far deeper meaning'[121]. The depth of meaning relates to the paradox that although repetition delivers us to what has existed before, that to which we are delivered is not the same since it has been renewed.

Finally, there are two aspects of Constantius' repetition, each related to human freedom in terms of an actualising movement. First, repetition is to be found inwardly within the individual, and second, repetition is future-directed. I will briefly expound on these to conclude this section to show their relevance to existence-oriented therapy:

> 1. Constantius alerts us to the prevailing confusion about freedom, which is that it is considered externally, 'as if repetition, if it were possible, were to be found outside the individual when in fact it must be found within the individual…'[122] Freedom is commonly understood as the range of choices one can make about the world. The progressive account of the dialectic of freedom and despair that I shall discuss next, rests upon inwardness as the site of repetition. For Constantius, and later for Anti-Climacus, freedom implies the capacity to overcome the despair of self-alienation. This freedom has a stake in the inward balance between change and constancy that are implicit in the movement of self-renewal.
>
> 2. Repetition's freedom is directed toward the future since it is an actualising movement. It implies the capacity of becoming through actualising oneself in accord with the possibility of transcendence. Immanence is characterised by dialectical movement, from one concept to another, one possibility to another. As stated above, there is no real movement in the logical development of immanence. These are transitions of necessity, not freedom.[123] Hence, freedom must be sought as a forward movement. As Constantius says, 'when the crisis comes, freedom

[120] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 294
[121] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 298
[122] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 304
[123] C. Carlisle, 2005, p. 73

> must press forward, not retreat'.[124]

In light of the above, I will now flesh out some of the complexity of the task that is implicit in Kierkegaard's thought on selfhood in relation to repetition. Selfhood in Kierkegaard's thought is characterised by 'concreteness'. This means that self is unfinished; thus it is neither abstract nor exhaustible. I propose that this complexity relates to the temporal and recursive aspects of selfhood. In other words, since Kierkegaard's 'concrete self'[ix] is a process, which is neither linear nor singular, repetition cannot be construed as a one-off undertaking. Consider in this light Constantius' remark:

> When applied in the sphere of individual freedom, the concept of repetition has a history, inasmuch as freedom passes through several stages in order to attain itself.[125]

This explains how Kierkegaard's conception of freedom is not a binary: an individual is neither simply free nor not free, since throughout one's existence, possibilities of freedom emerge recursively that can be progressively realised in stages. An individual's existential history is characterised by polyphonic strands of selfhood within a plurality of contexts embedded in a non-linear temporality. Consequently, an individual can experience freedom as a range of capacity in a wide array of psychosocial contexts. Within any specific context the possibility of freedom for the concrete self is never entirely stable. On this picture, the concrete self remains involved in recursive sets of non-linear and interweaving movements of past, present, and future. Historical selfhood comes up repeatedly against the existential challenge of relating to the past by making sense – sense in both senses of the word – understanding and feeling. Self-constancy thus implies continuity with the past sense, whereas any real change entails leaving the past sense behind. Eriksen offers this explication in his monograph on repetition:

> A historical person moves forward towards the future while facing the past. The problem of historicality thus arises from the tension between two indispensible aspects of the temporality of existence: understanding and 'living'.[126]

As existing creatures we make sense of life; and as temporal beings we do so continually. For this, we

[124] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 317
[125] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301
[126] Eriksen, 2000, p. 41

must accept the necessity of change while striving to attain constancy. Failure in constancy results in an inability to sustain any human endeavours. But restricting our perception of the future only to fit the past as its extension, would render the past not as something that *follows* but *leads* and encounters us continually as our present to every possible future. Any future actuality would thus become comprehensible only as a consequence of the past without realising a genuine openness towards the unknown that is yet to come. *Repetition* illustrates how recollection pursues the individual in the mode of knowledge, whereas repetition is concerned with engaging in the mode of existential freedom.

Selfhood as a recursive movement of becoming across all planes of time, renders Kierkegaardian self not as a fixed entity with thing-like properties. Nor is it - since self is a relation - an unmoved mover hovering above the affairs of its underlings or a Cartesian 'ghost in the machine'.[127] Thus, repetition emerges as a philosophical category that illuminates the complexity of attaining a dynamic balance between this paired set of self-related movements: change and constancy. Summing up in Mulhall's words:

> The possibility of repetition is the possibility of genuine individuality, of a mode of existence in which one's selfhood is neither endlessly redefined nor eternally fixed.[128]'

Although change and constancy seem to defy the principle of contradiction, the notion of self cannot be understood without either of these two interwoven elements. If there were no constancy, there could be no point of view from which change could be apprehended. If there were no change, the notion of constancy as phenomenon would be meaningless since any notion of a 'static phenomenon' would be an ungraspable contradiction or even nonsensical. Change implies a capacity to 'let go' of the old self for its renewal through becoming transfigured into a new unity. Similarly, the becoming self also involves a capacity to 'hang on' to the old, if only to register the process of 'letting go'. Balancing these twinned capacities of 'letting go' and 'hanging on' entails avoiding one-sidedness of either self-constancy or self-abandonment.

[127] G. Ryle, 1949 The Concept of Mind – Online Access
[128] S. Mulhall, 2011, p. 391

Repetition thus involves a continuing simultaneous movement in opposite directions of self-constancy and self-abandonment. This is the task of freedom: it is through balancing the change and constancy of self by releasing and retaining aspects of oneself, that one renews oneself in freedom. It is thus that repetition leads us to what has existed before, although, as Clare Carlisle remarks on paradox:

> Repetition signifies the coming into being of the new – but it also expresses the continuity of [individual] existence through time.[129]

On my reading, one of *Repetition*'s messages can be understood thus: the future has the potentiality to transcend the immanence of the past. Whilst the individual past as knowledge is identified with the 'I', the future 'me' belongs to the unknown 'Other'. This means that the boundary between immanence and transcendence are not that clear-cut. The problem of existential historicality is therefore one of realising that repetition is not a once-and-for-all task of freedom, but something to be understood as recurring as situation-specific and context-bound instantiations of selfhood.

Having delved into the complexity of selfhood in Kierkegaard's thought in order to derive the existential worth of repetition as a task of freedom, I will now proceed to define the task itself. As intimated above, it is here that I draw together the disparate threads of the notion of selfhood in *Repetition* and *Sickness*, to spell out the nature of the task of freedom, which is: to overcome despair. It is this crucial step that enables me to prove my claim of the relevance of repetition to existence-oriented therapy.

§B2. Repetition's task of freedom is to become free of despair

In a brief but crucial passage in his unpublished response to Heiberg's criticism, Constantius indicates that freedom is a task related to despair.[130] This renders repetition as a kind of sustained human endeavour that can be undertaken in stages. In this way the concept of repetition presages Anti-Climacus' *Sickness,* which gives a progressive account of despair in relation to freedom. In this section, I

[129] C. Carlisle, 2005, p. 75
[130] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301-302

assert that the adjacency of Constantius' repetition as a task of freedom in relation to despair, and Anti-Climacus' phenomenology of despair in relation to freedom, delivers a composite picture of the dialectical movement of freedom and despair that is significant for existence-oriented therapy. For this, I will refer to Daniel Dahlstrom's phenomenological analysis of freedom and despair. Although Dahlstrom's account draws entirely upon *Sickness* and makes no reference to *Repetition,* its relevance lies as response to the question with which *Repetition* remains preoccupied, a question that Piety formulates thus: whether we are built with sufficient resources to expel despair on our own – or instead, are radically insufficient to the task.[131]

No individual seeking therapy is motivated by an abstract philosophical interest in freedom. Rather, it is the affective implications of the lack of freedom – perceived or actual – and attendant despair in relation to an existential crisis that prompts one to seek out therapeutic help. By articulating the process of self-renewal as a dialectical relationship between freedom and despair, I will clarify how repetition's task of freedom is synonymous with the task of overcoming despair. It is this synonymy that supports my claim of repetition's significance for existence-oriented therapy.

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What follows next is a brief explication of Constantius' observation in his response to Heiberg that the ultimate aim of freedom is freedom itself, implying that all other forms of freedom lead to despair. It is here that we find Constantius' thought intersecting Anti-Climacus' account of despair. In contrast to Anti-Climacus who gives both, structural and phenomenological accounts of despair, Constantius signals the task of freedom as overcoming despair in the following ways:

Initially, Constantius identifies freedom with pursuit of desire, until eventually, 'freedom as desire despairs'.[132] This stage corresponds to Kierkegaard's aesthetic life-view in Either/Or, Part One, where Mozart's Giovanni embodies the aesthetic ideal: conquest after sexual conquest he lives for the

[131]M. Piety, Introduction to S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. ix
[132] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301

moment; every erotic encounter his first. Such freedom of lust leads an individual to dread repetition's 'magic power to keep freedom captive once it has tricked it into its power.'[133] Yet, repetition appears, and along with it appears despair. The flitting from one possibility to the next is the first stage of freedom. This form of repetition is unsustainable, no matter how thoroughly an aesthete commits himself to escaping actuality. In Ryan Kemp's words:

> He cannot indefinitely stave off the formation of a historical identity. The latter eventually takes shape and casts a pall on every future possibility, ultimately undermining the aesthete's ability to sustain Giovanni's weightlessness. [134]

Similarly, in the ethical life-view, freedom is identified with prudence ('sagacity') in a fervent commitment to sameness, without risking any genuine movement. But 'freedom's task in sagacity is continually to gain a new aspect of repetition'.[135] This is depicted in the essay 'Rotation of Crops' in Either/Or, Part One, but eventually, this too falls short of repetition and as Constantius remarks, 'freedom as sagacity despairs'.[136] This is the freedom of sagacity whose task is to continually abide by societal norms and achieve this by obtaining superficial variations as an antidote to boredom. It involves committing to values such as getting married and finding a vocation as tokens of bourgeois morality. Once one becomes subsumed as a fragment of the 'ceaseless progress'[137] of history, genuine receptivity to the transcendence of the future becomes negated. No change is permitted unless it has passed through the sieve of rule-bound ethicality. True repetition opposes a kind of stoicism that disguises the stagnation of dispassionate ethicality. For Constantius, this amounts to 'throwing something away in order to hide it most securely.'[138]

This leaves only the final movement of repetition, where 'freedom itself is now the repetition', meaning thereby that the end of freedom is freedom itself.[139]

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[133] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301
[134] R. Kemp, 2015, p. 216
[135] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301
[136] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 301
[137] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 281
[138] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 302
[139] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 302

We note from the above that Constantius' acknowledgement of despair in relationship to freedom leaves the concept of despair unthematised. It is in *Sickness* that despair takes a central stage, and where its dialectical relationship with freedom becomes possible to be articulated. Therefore, after discussing Constantius' view of the development of freedom through the stages in relation to despair, I will now examine Anti-Climacus' account of despair and its corresponding movement in relation to freedom.

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Since a thorough exegesis of *Sickness* would merit a paper in its own right, I will restrict my comments to address a form of despair that applies to *Repetition's* young man. This will help me in the next section to define the process of overcoming despair in a therapeutic context. I begin with Daniel Dahlstrom's guiding remarks about despair by which he argues that despair is self-inflicted; and this is how freedom is already implicated with it:

> To be in despair is, among other things, to feel hopeless and paralysed on some level; in despairing we are unable to act in a way that frees us from that self-inflicted paralysis… [D]espair is a constant threat to our existence, precisely insofar as we regard ourselves as freely self-developing…[140]

These remarks can be traced back to Kierkegaard's journal entry in which he notes that a person 'despairs by virtue of freedom; it is indeed freedom that despairs'.[141] This renders freedom inherently vulnerable to its own subversion; and it is thus that Dahlstrom describes freedom as a 'personal and fragile, dynamic and unfinished reality'.[142]

Anti-Climacus begins *Sickness* with a claim that 'self is relation'[143] and develops it by stating that in this relation, 'The self is freedom'.[144] The despair of self-alienation thus becomes synonymous with loss of freedom. Freedom and despair are closely entwined: it is because we can be free that we can despair,

[140] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 58
[141] S. Kierkegaard, (1849) p. 145
[142] D. Dahlstrom, 2010, p. 58
[143] S. Kierkegaard, 1849 p. 9
[144] S. Kierkegaard, 1849 p. 28

and it is through overcoming despair that we can become free. In *Sickness Unto Death,* Anti-Climacus announces with a sense of visceral horror the true peril of despair - its hiddenness.

> And to me an even more horrible expression of this most terrible sickness and misery is that it is hidden – not only that the person suffering from it may wish to hide it and may succeed, not only that it can so live in a man that no one, no one detects it, no, but also that it can be so hidden in a man that he himself is not aware of it![145]

In a famous passage he expresses thus the poignancy of this perilous human condition:

> The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed.[146]

What *Sickness Unto Death* shows is that it is not merely unconscious freedom that must be unearthed from despair; conscious despair too is, 'unmasked as an unwillingness to be who we are or a willingness to be less than we are out of a failure to accept who we are (and can be)'.[147] Hence, he notes,

> One finds the same effort to disclose the essence of the respective despair and freedom that lurks hidden but operative in the existence of the person despairing.[148]

For Anti-Climacus, since the self is a 'relation which relates itself to its own self'[149] as well as a 'relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation'[150], the self is always a process of double-relation. Constitutively immanent in the first relation and transcendent to the second, its dynamic structure means that the concrete self, being a synthesis of the finite and infinite, can never become complete. It must continually become itself if it is to avoid self-alienation, siting itself in perennial proximity to despair.

Despair indicates discrepancies between the self that one recognises as having become and the unrecognised self that one is in the process of becoming. Despair is therefore vulnerable to shame due to these discrepancies when they get played out in relation to self and others. Anticipation of one's own

[145] S. Kierkegaard, 1849
[146] S. Kierkegaard, 1849, p. 32
[147] D. Dahlstrom, 2010, p. 74
[148] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 74
[149] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 10
[150] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 10

and other's judgements can lead to attempts at controlling how one appears. According to psychoanalyst Benjamin Kilborne, 'every effort to control the way one appears is simultaneously an effort to regulate one's feelings'[151]; and that all such efforts to control who one is and how one feels through the way one is seen is an effort doomed to failure'[152]. Thus, for Kilborne:

> "[I]t is the concept of shame that lies at the core of Kierkegaard's concept of sin and also his concept of dread [sic] that terrible sickness unto death.'[153]

Anti-Climacus distinguishes between unconscious despair and its conscious forms. Unconscious despair is absolute since it is hidden from oneself, although it can be brought to conscious light. In its conscious forms despair can be either of 'not willing in despair to be oneself' or 'willing only to be the one self in despair '. Anti-Climacus regards these conscious forms as 'weak despair' and 'defiant despair'. However, it should come as no surprise that the forms of despair are not watertight compartments; nothing in Kierkegaard's authorship is so firmly systematised. Each form of despair contains traces of hiddenness, weakness, and defiance. Conscious despair too is hidden in the sense that it is progressively unmasked in proportion to growing freedom. Similarly, whilst defiant despair is the main form to which the young man's case may belong, Anti-Climacus states that 'No despair is entirely without defiance'.[154] He merges the two categories of conscious despair: weak and defiant. He states that in weak despair, 'the unwillingness to be the self as one is', defiance is implied in the expression, 'Not to will to be'.[155] Similarly, he states that 'even the extremest defiance of despair is after all never without some weakness.'[156] Yet it is the description of defiant despair that most elucidates the young man's incongruence. He fails to see the task of freedom as a transition *in* his crisis, not *from* his crisis. He can fulfill this task only by allowing self-transcendence. Instead of self-surrender, the young man persists in self-assertion, as though he is the constituting power by which he can will to construct himself. Anti-Climacus announces the fate of such despair:

> The self wants to enjoy the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of

[151] B. Kilborne. 1999, p. 35
[152] B. Kilborne. 1999, p. 36
[153] B. Kilborne. 1999, p. 35
[154] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941, p. 53.
[155] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 53
[156] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 53

> being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetical, this masterly plan according to which it has understood itself. And yet in the last resort it is a riddle how it understands itself; just at the instant when it seems to be nearest to having the fabric finished it can arbitrarily resolve the whole thing into nothing.[157]

Anti-Climacus' description of the despair of defiance comes close to representing the young man's distress:

> A self which in despair is determined to be itself winces at one pain or another which simply cannot be taken away or separated from its concrete self. Precisely upon this torment the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a demoniac rage. Even if at this point God in heaven and all his angels were to offer to help him out of it -- no, now he doesn't want it, now it is too late, he once would have given everything to be rid of this torment but was made to wait, now that's all past, now he would rather rage against everything, he, the one man in the whole of existence who is the most unjustly treated, to whom it is especially important to have his torment at hand, important that no one should take it from him -- for thus he can convince himself that he is in the right.[158]

The young man's crisis in *Repetition* can now be properly understood as one of shame that erupts once his false pride becomes unsustainable. However, as he nears a breakdown, his need for external intervention surfaces in the form of someone who can witness and accept his emotional catharsis - 'someone on whom I could vent my rage.'[159] His self-contradiction is reflected in his opposing needs that he expresses, by wanting to and not wanting to marry, by going into seclusion and at the same time wanting to be in redeeming contact with 'someone'. He does not recognise his 'self-absorbed insistence'[160] as someone who in defiant despair and 'infirm existence'[161] wants to do it with one's own power. The self-defeating impossibility of his demands becomes another case of 'throwing something away in order to hide it most securely.'[162] Dahlstrom remarks that one who is defiant in the face of despair is 'too proud to admit that people could be in the right in opposition to him.[163]' Consequently, the 'possibility of solidarity with the enabling power of another[164]' thus remains unrealised.

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[157] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 79
[158] S. Kierkegaard, 1849/1941 p. 82
[159] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 60
[160] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[161] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[162] S. Kierkegaard, 1843b, p. 302
[163] S. Kierkegaard, 1844. Kierkegaard's Writings, V, Volume 5: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourse. p. 354
[164] D. Dahlstrom, 2010 p. 73

I will now outline Dahlstrom's account of the dialectical process of freedom and despair as a phenomenological description of repetition.[165] A common thread linking the movement of freedom through despair in all their forms is the reversal of disempowerment of despair through the power of exercising freedom. Unconscious despair embodies pre-reflective and reflective forms of freedom. When freedom of self-reflection is exercised, it exerts power to retrieve itself from unconscious despair. Self-reflective freedom progressively transcends all except the weak and defiant forms of conscious despair. Both these forms are marked by a self-imposed closure, either as a defiant wilfulness to be oneself - even if only in self-absorbed autonomy or withdrawal from the world through unwillingness to be oneself. The person in conscious despair is walled off from others, and ultimately from God. Overcoming these forms of despair is possible through receptivity towards the enabling power of another's benevolent freedom.[166] In this way, similar to Constantius, Anti-Climacus emphasises the possibility of transcendence to resolve the crisis of despair and renew one's self through freedom. The latter states:

> This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it.[167]

This entails recognising the insufficiency of one's self-sufficiency, as it were, which depends on acknowledging, in Dahlstrom's words:

> the spiteful, self-absorbed insistence upon that infirm existence….an ultimately childish defiance of any possibility of solidarity with the enabling power of the other.[168]

Defiance does not permit one to secure freedom by one's own means, as Judith Butler comments:

> [I]f one knows one is in despair and seeks *by one's own means* to extricate oneself from despair, one will only become more fully steeped in that despair. That self is still trying to refuse its groundedness in that which is greater than itself. [169]

[165] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 74
[166] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[167] S. Kierkegaard, 1849, Sickness Unto Death, p. 11
[168] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[169] J. Butler, 1993, p. 372
[169] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73

For Kierkegaard this would imply a denial of the infinite, and presuming one has absolute power over existence. In Dahlstrom's words, 'a person's secret pride is her own worst enemy'.[170] Pride is, he explains, 'the deliberate failure to appreciate one's limits and thus to become aware of who one is, is the recipe for despair".[171] The necessary step here is to confront the 'self-absorbed insistence'[172] of the individual who fears himself as an emotional being, and disavows vulnerability and humility of his 'infirm existence'[173]. Pride prevents 'admitting the possibility of hope, [and] from humbling one's self before others.'[174] Kierkegaard regards 'pride and cowardliness as one and the same'[175]; and announces the utter futility of the proud individual by unveiling his true opponent:

> The proud person always wants to do the right thing, the great thing. But because he wants to do it in his own strength, he is fighting not with man, but with God.[176]

Anti-Climacus' account of despair is analogous to Constantius' account of repetition as a task of freedom. Both point to the inevitability of recognising the Other – as God, 'self-constituting power', or a benevolent other. Piety sums this up as the moral of *Repetition*:

> The moral is that when caught in despair there is, at the limit, no 'autonomous choice' by which one lurches out of the muck. One is remade and saved (if one is) by an intervention of the other, as it were. One is ordered a call or vision not of one's choice or making: the birds of the air, an assembly of true friends (not Job's mockers), an icon, a Saviour. One does not *create* Truth *ex nihilo*. It jolts one awake, strikes one dumb, steals one's heart.[177]

It is on the basis of the profound recognition of 'the possibility of solidarity with the enabling power of the other' that repetition confirms its place in the practice of existence-oriented therapy. How this power enables, and indeed how the power itself is enabled, in Carl Rogers' definition of the therapeutic relationship, is what I take up next in the penultimate section of this essay prior to its conclusion.

§B3. Freedom and despair in Roger's formulation of therapy and Kierkegaard's neighbour-love

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[170] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[171] D. Dahlstrom, 2010, p 64
[172] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[173] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[174] D. Dahlstrom, 2010. p. 73
[175] S. Kierkegaard, 1844b, p. 354
[176] S. Kierkegaard, 1844b, p. 354
[177]M. Piety, Introduction to S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. xi

Finally, then, let me return to the question of the application of these ideas in the therapeutic setting and in the context of existence-oriented approach. Rogers' own approach is predicated upon the notion of selfhood as being psychosocially constituted within an embodied state of its organismic life. For Rogers, '[p]sychotherapy is a process whereby man becomes his organism.'[178] Rogers' theory entails interplay of two sets of psychosocial conditions that determine therapeutic growth. Each set refers to the presence of inter-subjective contexts of degrees of emotional connectedness; contexts that determine the ongoing emergence – becoming – of the experiencing of selfhood. Selfhood implies a sense of self, meaning a self that senses. This renders selfhood a process of identifying itself in relation to its organismic experiencing.

Rogers' first set of psychosocial conditions, the 'conditions of worth'[179], emerges from the developmental milieu that begins in childhood and leads to the individual's later-day social world. These conditions provide a normative framework for the individual's behaviour; behaviour that invariably extends out of its affective states experienced as 'needs'. The norms determine the appropriateness of the individual's behaviour. Individual 'worth' is assessed by others, as well as by oneself, on the basis of conformity with these norms; the latter through a process by which the 'conditions of worth' become internalised. Non-compliance of norms is threatened with withdrawal of 'positive regard' (or love) in the form of emotional neglect, non-recognition, and exclusion. To secure 'positive regard' (or love) from significant others, an individual learns to curtail the immediacy of his instinctual behaviour by restraining his affective experiencing and expressing, especially when they are contra-indicated by the prevailing social conditions. Fulfilling 'conditions of worth' however incurs a cost of having to deny or distort one's affective reality. This can lead to anxiety and despair of self-alienation, or 'incongruence'.

Incongruence in Rogers' theory is a discrepancy between what he defines as the two aspects of the person, 'self-concept' and 'organismic experience' (emotions). The terms refer to identity and affectivity

[178] C. Rogers, 1961. On Becoming a Person p. 103
[179] C. Rogers, 1959, p. 224, *passim*

of selfhood. Both elements are self-regulated in relation to each other, to optimally balance the processes of change and constancy along different contextual parameters. Self-concept is determined through conditions of worth derived socially, whereas 'organismic experiencing' (emotions) is rooted in embodiment. Any gap between how one thinks of oneself (self-concept) and how one feels (emotions) can result in incongruence, which is indicated by feeling 'vulnerable or anxious'. The term 'vulnerability or anxiousness' covers a range of affective processes such as anxiety, shame, depression, fragility, guilt, rage, and dissociation.

For example, when a parent who sees herself as a devoted mother recognises her indifference towards her child's struggle at school, she can feel guilty as a result; or a caring relative of a disabled relative can in exasperation wish for them to die and subsequently feel ashamed. Note that incongruence entails second-level emotional responses to first-level emotions when they (the latter) are denied or distorted in self-awareness. Hence one can feel anxious through suppressing sadness, or ashamed at their sexual desire. Excessive incongruence between affective experience (one's actuality, derived from embodied existence) and self-concept (one's ideality, derived through conditions of worth) is susceptible to any experience that threatens to abruptly expose the inner conflict to others or even one's self. This can lead to one's capacity for self-regulation becoming impaired, and eventually to a breakdown.

We are now in a position to see how Kierkegaard's conception of repetition provides a philosophical framework for developing these ideas. Thus, for example, Rogers' idea of incongruence echoes Kierkegaard's account of despair as a form of self-denial, unwillingness to becoming one self, and as what needs to be overcome in a genuine process of repetition. From this perspective, genuinely to become oneself means overcoming such self-alienation. Again, both Kierkegaard and Rogers refer to this as a fluid process of self-becoming, a process which necessarily disturbs rigid and ossified forms of self-understanding.

Likewise, consider Rogers' second set of conditions. These – the 'therapeutic conditions' – serve to offset the anxiety and despair of incongruence through liberating the individual from the confines of the

first set, i.e. 'conditions of worth'. Rogers' therapeutic conditions can be summarised as follows: two people make contact in a therapeutic context when one of them (the client) is feeling 'vulnerable or anxious' about an incongruence and the other (the therapist) offers genuine and unconditional positive acceptance and empathic understanding of the client's inner reality[x], in a way that the client 'receives' the acceptance and understanding and feels received.

Rogers' therapeutic conditions offset the unduly restrictive effects of conditions of worth; which confine individual freedom to comply within its normative structure. Genuinely unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding of emotional distress can release an individual's freedom, enabling him to overcome the despair related to the self-alienating aspect of incongruence. Therapeutic growth is characterised by an enhanced capacity to 'process experience',[180] whereby an individual is able to regulate the emotional reactions in relation to the phenomenal stream of life-experiences, and abiding in the existential reality of the subject. Selfhood thus undergoes a constructive change in terms of how it actualises its possibilities once the self-concept tends towards alignment with 'organismic experience'.

A person is deemed to be congruent when his organismic experiencing, i.e. affective process, is synchronous with his sense of self, and behaviour is a consistent representation of this accord. The opposite characterises incongruence: organismic experiencing, i.e. affective process, is discrepant with his sense of self and behaviour, resulting in despair.

The primary therapeutic element in Roger's theory is the client's 'actualising tendency'. This concept represents the movement of 'immanent vitality'[181] at the root of organismic life of a person. Actualising tendency is often misread as 'self actualisation'. Another misconception is that incongruence implies a blocking of the actualisation process. For Rogers, selfhood is part of the human organism, which is continually actualising in response to its bio-psychosocial environment. The direction actualisation takes is crucially determined by the level of incongruence and congruence: constructive growth or destructive, pro-social attitude or anti-social, moral behaviour or immoral. Given the therapeutic

[180] M. Warner, 2009, p.109–126, *passim*
[181] M. Bazzano, 2012

conditions, Rogers asserts, actualisation will lead to congruence, i.e. integrity between self-concept and organism of the person. Becoming congruent is Rogers' primary aim in therapy. I propose that achieving congruence corresponds with the freedom from self-alienation and overcoming despair. This freedom comes in wake of an increased capacity to process experience, which means integrating emotions that have hitherto been denied and have thus resulted in incongruence, and incongruence-related emotional vulnerabilities.

We can now see how Rogers' vision of therapy provides a fertile soil for developing Constantius' conception of repetition as an ongoing task of freedom, and combines with Anti-Climacus' program of overcoming despair in *Sickness Unto Death.* Once a client becomes free to accept himself as the therapist accepts him, he is able to give up the rigidity of self that results in self-alienation. As the stranglehold of despair is loosened, the intensity of incongruence is diminished. I propose that the client-practitioner relationship in Rogers' theory, constituted by the therapist's empathic acceptance of the client's despair, resonates with Kierkegaard's account of neighbour-love.[182] Likewise, the non-discriminating spontaneous love in Kierkegaard's work finds a secular coordinate in Rogers 'unconditional positive regard' and 'non-judgemental acceptance' extended to the client.[183] Therapeutic love fosters freedom since it is free from conditionality, and thus despair can be understood as self-alienation without the binding force of love, including self-love.

As a case study in therapy, *Repetition* is an ironic tale: Constantius' therapeutic ineffectiveness results precisely from his zestful but disinterested reflections of repetition that prevent him from relating simply and genuinely to the young man. Genuine relating, for Rogers, involves forms of reciprocity that neither collapse into entanglement of emotional identification, nor do they risk abdication of ethical responsibility. It means the willingness to embody the therapeutic conditions and enter an open dialogue in which the therapist sees, and lets herself be seen, without the stance of expert observer. Acts of unconditionally empathic receptivity liberate the client to accept any shame that is concealed

[182] S. Kierkegaard, 1859, *passim*
[183] S. Kierkegaard, 1859/1962, pp. 255-56, p. 487, *passim*

behind the mask of pride, and to confront the incompatible idea underlying the despair of incongruence without fear of condemnation. This is akin to what in Sartre's terms might be a kind of non-shaming 'look'.[184]

Existence-oriented therapists understand catharsis as expressing one's hidden emotional pain to another. The release of pent-up emotions occurs not merely as evacuation of repressed instinctual energy in the psychoanalytic sense, but as a form of communication to a non-judgemental witness. Having another person bear witness to one's distress when one cannot bear it himself, does not entail the therapist carrying the emotional burden on his client's behalf. As Matthew Ratcliffe observes, 'To *enter* someone's world is not to *become* it.'[185] Ratcliffe comments that empathy 'is a way of approaching and interacting with another person', suggesting that empathy is an adverb, not a verb.[186] Note, however, that the empathic stance is aimed at the client's inner reality[187], not outer behaviours, especially when these are injurious to self or others. The therapeutic attitude is neither colluding, nor condoning, nor condemning. Yet, it is also not disinterested reflection or emotionally detached. As suggested by the 'look', such pathos-filled encounters can often be wordless expressions of unconditional acceptance of the suffering individual. As in non-verbal contact, so in verbal discourse, a non-didactic attitude as a communicative factor is potent in its effect of a profound re-formulation of self-identity through integration of disavowed emotions.

Constantius' didactic counsel to the young man - feigning a secret affair to induce his fiancée to dissolve the engagement – springs from his own disinterested reflection on the latter's plight, and metaphysical speculation on repetition. Although the young man can intellectually grasp both the intent and the content of the counsel, he cannot make use of this to resolve his crisis. The irony is thickened in light of Constantius' own earlier insight:

> Repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics becomes

[184] B. Cannon, 1999, P. 23 – 50, *passim*
[185] M. Ratcliffe, 2015, p. 243
[186] M. Ratcliffe, 2015, p. 243
[187] C. Rogers, 1959, p. 213

stranded.[188]

This means that while metaphysics aims to articulate the foundational principles for guiding the life of human beings, existence of each concrete individual becomes the exception that invariably aborts the universalising aims of the metaphysical project. Thus, when the young man finds himself in crisis, it is impossible for him to rationally figure out a resolution without first confronting his crisis at an emotional level. Despite the intellectual alacrity with which Constantius defends his thesis of repetition against Heiberg's critique, he cannot capitalise on his best insights in his counselling relation to the young man. No amount of theorizing by Constantius can by itself do the therapeutic work.

The irregular structure and the literary convolutions of *Repetition* leave the reader on an inconclusive note at the end of the story. Even so, as highlighted above, there is a critical shift in the young man's consciousness whereby he recognises the need for another's genuine interest and ability to accept and understand his distress. *Repetition*'s tragedy is that the young man does not get that opportunity. Without the genuinely therapeutic presence of another, the young man's crisis has a stultifying effect on him. His inner conflict fragments his consciousness and results in stagnation. He can neither let go of his fiancée, nor hang on to his desire for her. He can neither let go of the rigidity of ethical norms, nor hang on to his cherished values of love by re-visioning them. He can neither let go of the self that he wants to change, nor hang on to the self that he has become. He has not grasped the paradoxical nature of repetition in which constancy of selfhood rests upon willingness to change, not wilfulness to remain fixed.

Both Kierkegaard and Rogers regard selfhood as fundamentally mutable: this is implicit in the former's notion of 'concrete self' which is analogous to the latter's notion of 'fluid self'. Each also recognises the potency in human connection for fostering stability and balance. Cohabitating a shared emotional space alongside an empathic another, serves to enlarge the capacity for freedom to overcome despair, and to bear the paradoxical movement of selfhood. In a Kierkegaardian sense, this depicts the power of the benevolent presence of another that is termed as neighbour-love, which is truly an expression of one's

[188] S. Kierkegaard, 1843a, p. 19

devotion to God.[xi] For Kierkegaard:

> Love for God and love for neighbour are like two doors that open simultaneously, so that it is impossible to open one without also opening the other, and impossible to shut one without also shutting the other.[189]

The symmetry between love of God and love of neighbour further extends into proper love of oneself: 'to love God is to love oneself truly'.[190] This implies that to love one's neighbour entails helping another to love God, which eventually means helping another to love his neighbour, as well as to love himself. For Rogers too, the therapeutic conditions eventually replace conditions of worth, whereby a client is rendered capable of positive self-regard, or self-love.[191] In the secular context of existence-oriented therapy, without the restraining religious demands of neighbour-love and love of God, the notion of self-love as an aim must alert us to the peril of a narcissistic relapse into defiant despair. Here, then, Rogers own insight may be assuring when he writes:

> He [i.e. the post-therapy 'fully-functioning person'] will live with others in the maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal positive regard [i.e. love].[192]

Thus, in both, Kierkegaard and Rogers, there are corresponding movements of neighbour-love and self-love. But as previously shown, due to the recursive and temporal aspects of the concrete self, neither despair nor incongruence is entirely ineliminable. Instances of retrieving freedom from despair and incongruence are situation-specific and context-bound. It may be a sobering reminder to existence-oriented therapists that repetition as a task of freedom to overcome despair is a life-long endeavour, with episodic reversals of fortunes that are to be met with faith in one's commitment to the task.

Yet, therapeutic love can resolve despair and herald the freedom to be oneself. In this light, Kierkegaard's words in *The Point Of View* – slightly paraphrased below – provide a fitting counsel to therapists:

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[189] S. Kierkegaard, 1851 /1995, p. 487
[190] S. Kierkegaard, 1851 /1995, p.277
[191] C. Rogers, 1959, p. 230, p. 235
[192] C. Rogers, 1959, p. 230, p. 235

> Be the astonished listener, who sits and listens to what *ails* that other person whom it *ails a little less* that you listen in that way.[193],[xii]

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[193] S. Kierkegaard, 1859/1998, pp. 255-56

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End Notes

[i] Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: 'If we take into account observations such as these, based upon behaviour in the transference and upon the life-histories of men and women, we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle. Now too we shall be inclined to relate to this compulsion the dreams which occur in traumatic neuroses and the impulse which leads children to play.'

[ii] Some post-Freudian psychoanalysts have softened their pathological view of repetition. An excellent example is a paper by Hans Loewald (1971, Some Considerations on Repetition and Repetition Compulsion) who has attempted to reconcile Kierkegaard's category of repetition with the psychoanalytic concept. I find, however, that Loewald remains committed to the idea of repetition that is closer to a form of natural phenomenon – something Kierkegaard's pseudonym specifically rejects in Heiberg's critique of his *Repetition.* I also object to the centrality of transference in Loewald's paper, although it is not possible for me to expound on that here.

[iii] Writings of therapists who work within the existential frame are too many to mention individually. The following names stand out as significant contributors to the existential view of human suffering: Irvin Yalom, Rollo May, Betty Cannon, Carl Rogers, James Bugenthal, Emmy Van Deurzen, Ernesto Spinelli.

[iv] I define shame as an affective form of despair resulting from a failure to conform to an ideal self, and underlying the unsustainable pride due to the discrepancy between how one is actually, and how one wants to perceive oneself and wants to be perceived by others.

[v] *Repetition* was criticised by a renowned scholar and a close acquaintance of Kierkegaard, Professor Heiberg, which lead eventually to estrangement of their relations. Although the criticism was defended in detail by the pseudonym, Constantius did not publish it. Haufniensis clarifies this in a footnote to *The Concept of Anxiety.* He remarks that since Heiberg had not understood him but Constantius had understood himself as a writer who had written *Repetition* to be misunderstood, then the appropriate response to the former's criticism was to not respond and thereby preserve his intended misunderstanding.

[vi] The ambiguity in the text of *Repetition* makes it entirely possible to read it as an account of personification of two aspects of one person. Whether this person is 'really' the narrator-author Constantius or the young man – or Kierkegaard himself is a further question. This line of reading would however be an altogether different undertaking, and impossible to cover it here without straying beyond the boundaries of my essay. For an experimental rendering of some of Kierkegaard's own upbuilding works into a dialogical form, see George Pattison and Helle Moller Jensen's Kierkegaard's Pastoral Dialogues, 2012. Such a reading would be of interest from a dialogical perspective of existence-oriented therapy. The dialogical enactment of aspects of self has correlates in humanistic therapies such as Gestalt and Voice Dialogue, as well as forms of body-centered group work such as dance and movement therapy, drama therapy, Bioenergetics, Primal Integration, and Psychodrama. In these approaches, clients are encouraged to embody and act into conflicting aspects of their selfhood – including internalized images of significant others, using props such as empty chairs, cushions, photographs etc. The individual then 'becomes' one part and addresses other part/s and swaps roles, allowing a spontaneous dialogue to occur. The simplicity of these methods, and the powerful emotional force which they can unleash, have made these a popular tool for practitioners of other models of therapy.

[vii] How the religious dimension of repetition correspond to Kierkegaard's religious life-view, and how does either fit with application of Kierkegaard's philosophy to therapy, are questions I do not have the space to go into this essay. Suffice it to say that the presence of the religious sphere in Kierkegaard's thought has not obstructed psychotherapy theorists to draw valuable psychological insights for what is essentially a form of secular cultural practice.

[viii] The psychoanalyst Benjamin Kilmore argues, having God to witness the shame of Adam and Eve in fact protects them from fragmentation, disorientation, and annihilation of self that would occur if there were no one to recognise the shame. Benjamin Kilmore (1999) The Disappearing Who: Kierkegaard, Shame, and the Self in *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame and Writing*.

[ix] Jamie Ferreira clarifies Kierkegaard's notion of the concrete self: 'The concrete individual is not abstract, it is also inexhaustible' in her paper *Repetition, Concreteness, and Imagination.* (See references)

[x] Rogers terms this as 'internal frame of reference', which he describes as 'all of the realm of experience which is available to the awareness of the individual at a given moment. It includes the full range of sensations, perceptions, meanings, and memories, which are available to consciousness. The internal frame of reference is the subjective world of the individual. Only he knows it fully. It can never be known to another except through empathic inference and then can never be perfectly known.' See Carl Rogers, 1961, p. 210

[xi] Jamie Ferreira observes, "There is no doubt about the coincidence between love of God and love of neighbour."

[xii] The precise quote is: "No, let it come forward – and you earnest, rigorous man, remember that if you cannot humble yourself you are not the earnest one either – *be the astonished listener who sits and listens to what delights that other person, whom it delights even more that you listen in that way.*" (The Point Of View, p. 46, italics added)