

Arhe XVI, 31/2019
UDK 1 Kierkegaard S. : 32
DOI <https://doi.org/10.19090/arhe.2019.31.151-169>
Originalni naučni rad
Original Scientific Article

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KIERKEGAARD ON THE POLITICAL FORM OF DESPAIR

Abstract: In our times, political despair seems to take over other political perspectives as regards the life of the citizen, his relationship with the State, his connection with his fellow citizens, his participation in the political process etc, but most of all it appears as a latent political factor that passes through all stages of the political life. For Kierkegaard, despair is a state of being, not just a temporary sentiment or resentment for life. In his theory, despair is a situation which coincides with the loss of our own self; and there is a political self to lose too. It regards a condition in which one remains attached to a wrong conception of his self but also of others. For some of the scholarship, this brings the implications of a coherent bond between human and political ontology, in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Under this prism, one of the deforming mirrors of political reality and thus a partial culprit for the loss of a realistic conception of the political phenomena is the mass media. The Danish philosopher turns against the Press of his time, in order to defend subjectivity as a major element in the political process, closely related with truth and individuality. Politics cannot be authentic if they do not stem from a persistent comprehension of existential despair. The political is always part of the existential; that is a major affirmation in Kierkegaard's thought.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, political, despair, freedom, selfhood, individual

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In Kierkegaard's thought the political phenomena do not seem to receive much of attention. Despite the fact that he is mostly considered by scholars either as a moral or as a religious philosopher, the Danish thinker surprises us with the depth of his political insights. Although Kierkegaard focuses, to the largest extent, on the apocalyptic force that human existence may be able to come in contact with, he also offers to the history of philosophy a political exegesis for certain concepts that receive a new light due to his theories. Thus, while he deals with the paradox of faith as a passion, he encounters prerequisites which do not incur just moral, religious or even aesthetic repercussions but also political ones. Despair is only one of them. According to Kierkegaard, not just general aspects of human life, but also politics suffer from the sickness of despair. Despair is not merely an ever-emerging fact in human societies over the mishaps of current political life, it is a state of being and it has to do with the state of sin that is considered to be the main cause of despair as the concept is interpreted in the kierkegaardian theory. Despair, in other words, is a situation which coincides with the loss of our own self; and there is a political self to lose too. It is a condition in which one remains attached to a wrong conception of his self but also of others. However, there is not a restrictive argument against despair; quite the contrary, Kierkegaard is eager not to demarcate despair in any place other than the particular human being, which is a mostly dynamic place:

“Is despair a merit or a defect? Purely dialectically it is both. If one were to think of despair only in the abstract, without reference to some particular despairer, one would have to say it is an enormous merit. The possibility of this sickness is man's advantage over the beast, and it is an advantage which characterizes him quite otherwise than the upright posture, for it bespeaks the infinite erectness or loftiness of his being spirit. The possibility of this sickness is man's advantage over the beast; to be aware of this

sickness is the Christian's advantage over natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness."³

Graham Smith rightly believes that Kierkegaard helped our understanding in the limitations of politics through his analysis of the relationship between human and political ontology. Indeed, Kierkegaard supports that despair is responsible for our inability to achieve religious spirituality. He finds ways through the criticism of the political affairs of his time to attack to the religious authorities, which he thought that were causing despair to the public. Kierkegaard is aware of the power of both the Press and the majority on the formation of the individual. The self, nonetheless, can be seen lucidly only as a spiritual entity in relation to God. That means that any other formative influence may not be exerting a positive action on the individual while it may be interfering with his salvation. It is only faith that makes the self able to stand in front of God and build a kind of relationship with Him. And it is only God that can help one overcome despair, while facing it, in any form of human life.⁴

In accordance with the above, it needs to be posed as a question whether the mass media is generally thought to be responsible for the spread of despair in everyday life. Additionally, it needs to be asked whether Kierkegaard's conception of despair could find any real implications in our epoch, even as a model of interpretation. Certainly, people live in a condition of despair which arises from politics and the way their communities are ruled. Under this prism, faith does not seem to be an issue for anyone in the political sphere and also despair, although it is noticeable, it is not considered as a political parameter. Not only that but also the relationships of people suffer from lack of sincerity and truth, which adds to the overall negativity. People, especially in our times, are trapped in a virtual reality and seem unable

³ Kierkegaard, S., *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, (v. 19), Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 45.

⁴ Smith, G. M., *Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political*, History of European Ideas 31, University of Lancaster, UK: Elsevier Ltd., 2005, pp. 35-39.

to escape from it. They lack trust in politicians and though they recognize despair in every aspect of their life, they are obliged to endure it. Of course the influences are all around. Our consciousness is shaped by the communication images which we are bombarded with through the mass media. Our contemporary mass culture is based on images that are socially employed to shape our way of thinking. In *Sickness unto Death*, it becomes clear how despair accompanies modern life at every stage and how it is unconsciously experienced in social relationships. Individuals suffer from despair but they do so unconsciously.⁵

In the same way, the press presents a vague way of life in the reflective age of illusion. The ‘public’, which is a victim to this illusion, as a concept did not exist in antiquity because people *en masse in corpore* participated in every situation that arose and were responsible for their individual acts. When the relationships are not strong enough, as in the historical precedent mentioned above, and the resolutions do not emerge from direct contact among the people, the press is able to shape and influence the opinion of the public. That influence fuels more the isolation of the people and their inability for a direct connection among them. A derivative result is that this connection is lost with their own selves as well. These losses are not only social and political in their nature, but also originally existential. The public consists of people who will never be able to exist in a true and substantive union, even though they are together as a quantitative whole. They seek truth but cannot achieve it, so they face despair.⁶

Kierkegaard comprehends that this has to be encountered through highlighting the defects of the situation; thus he attacks the press while he fervently fosters spirituality. His attacks on the press are mainly attacks on its readers. Readers are the masses of individuals who deny their individuality in order to join the impersonal crowd and lead

⁵ Elrod, J. W., *Kierkegaard on Self and Society Kierkegaardiana*, 11, 1980, pp. 178-196.

⁶ Kierkegaard, S., “The Present Age: A Literary Review”, in: Bretall, R., (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, U. S. A: Princeton University Press, 1846, pp. 265-266.

inauthentic lives. Politics, in the same way, does not have any authenticity and fails to understand how individuality could be the key to healthy socio-political relations, i.e. relations that stand far from self-interestedness and false sociality.⁷ They can only be achieved through a spiritual understanding of the individual. Modern politics recognizes a misrelation to God, the self and the others and consequently can only be understood as a form of despair. According to Kierkegaard people fail to recognize what they are while they tend to ignore the seriousness of selfhood.⁸

Another parameter is that public opinion is not simply the opinion that is publicly expressed. Frequently citizens choose it when they wish to communicate, thinking that through it they avoid the manipulation of the masses on them. Manipulation, however, is always there, even in the cases when one is under the illusion that his public expression equals with an unbiased and unaffected delivery of personal thought. The media has an impact on public opinion as well as on public discourse. Yet, it presents a distorted view of the world, which interacts with the social consciousness it shapes. All this falsehood makes people live in despair because they cannot trust the people who represent them in public but also they cannot be fully aware of the penetration of that influence into their lives and of the erosion of their spirituality.⁹

Like the egotism of private relations that is often disguised as love, the egotism in public relations is often disguised as a political activity that preserves some interest for other people and for their affairs. The struggle for property and power is, however, in Kierkegaard's view a struggle for self-identity. But that is not feasible if the identity of the other is left outside or consistently ignored. Elrod

⁷ Smith, G. M., *Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political*, History of European Ideas 31, University of Lancaster, UK: Elsevier Ltd., 2005, p. 49.

⁸ Smith, G. M., *Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political*, History of European Ideas 31, University of Lancaster, UK: Elsevier Ltd., 2005, pp. 57-58.

⁹ Champagne, P., *H kataskevi ths koinhs gnwmis [Faire l'opinion: le nouveau jeu politique]*, Athens: Patakis Publications, 2004, pp. 123, 151.

demonstrates how Kierkegaard claims that “*in order to be himself, a man must first be expertly informed about what the others are, and thereby learn to know what he himself is – in order then to be that.*” Existing for the natural self “*lies in existing only before others, in not knowing of anything else but the relationship to others.*” Consequently, “*he is what the others make of him, and what he makes of himself by only being for others.*” Other than the monotonous exigency for the awareness of an individual existential anthropology, Kierkegaard keeps very close to a more profound detection of the political connection and of the prerequisites that may lead individuals and societies to political despair. Public relations established in the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of life may also become the means through which individuals seek to establish themselves. Despite that fact and the repercussions of using relations for self-establishment for social reasons, Kierkegaard’s analysis of class conflict does not settle on its economic and practical-political dimensions but centrally on the spiritual ones, which are truly political.¹⁰

Kierkegaard finds that despair is eventually prevalent in most kinds of relations, including those mentioned above. That is how he discerns it as a necessity to elaborate on a life project that will help overcome the apparent predicament which interferes not only with personal but also with collective fulfillments. Initially he exposes us to wondering what despair is, how it develops and which forms it takes, which are crucial issues in order to cope with the more important matter of human freedom. Being in desperation means originally that one has no hope in anything. At that point despair becomes a constant threat to one’s existence. Kierkegaard juxtaposes freedom as a personal, dynamic and endless reality, which is absolutely achievable. It comprises a component of our existence and denotes our struggle with different possible forms of despair. The probability of reaching at a certain stage of despair provokes a revolution into a higher form of freedom; that is

¹⁰ Elrod, J. W., *Kierkegaard on Self and Society Kierkegaardiana*, 11, 1980, pp. 178-196.

the freedom from despair which also refers to the political form of living among other things.¹¹

In *Sickness unto Death*, despair is described as a sickness of self. Faith brings truth into realization as the individuals believe that truth is conceived immanently and brings them into despair. Being into despair, they have the ability to own the truth without being close to God. Despair means a kind of misrelation in the synthesis of the self to itself. This synthesis is the first political synthesis; any other follows from that original one. Without the synthesis of the self, a human being exists in despair, which in turn damages all kinds of relationships. The synthesis is not simply a misrelation. It is the possibility of this misrelation, because if the synthesis had to do with the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all. It would be something that the individual suffers from, like a disease or a death, which is fate for everyone and purely deterministic.¹² The self has to relate with the power that created it, in order to create a relation of faith, otherwise it comes to despair or sin. Anti- Climacus stresses that out:

*“The formula that describes the state of self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”*¹³

This reference to power of course never relates with the stages of human power in politics. The existential way that Kierkegaard proposes is the way to solve the problem of the self as well as the problem of communal existence. Despair seems to be the result of an

¹¹ Dahlstrom, D., “Freedom through Despair: Kierkegaard’s Phenomenological Analysis”, in: Hanson, J., (ed.), *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: an experiment*, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010, pp. 57-58.

¹² Kierkegaard, S., *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, (v. 19), Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 15-26.

¹³ Kierkegaard, S., *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, (v. 19), Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 14.

effort to overcome or solve the paradox of human existence. Whenever an individual tries to overcome it, he falls into despair. It is a dialectical antithesis: people can be either in despair or in faith, *tertium non datur*. Despair ignores the paradox of human existence, whereas faith affirms it. Kierkegaard describes the self as a task achieved when somebody takes the responsibility for his life history. Despair can be overcome only if a person's life history is viewed in terms of the social roles that a person occupies. In the philosopher's communicative theory of the self, the individual is socially constituted in relation to others, which is a strong affirmation of how despair needs to be defeated in all his social and political roles and it is never a unilateral case, never a condition that does not include misrelation as a general pathos.¹⁴

Anti-Climacus emphasizes that all individuals fail to achieve selfhood, so they reach into despair. Despair, here, is individual and comprises a matter of consciousness. Theologically, despair is a primary mortal sin. It relates with the life of all Christians who consider themselves to be Christians, but do not live in a Christian way. The individual is free to turn towards or away from God, thus distancing himself from despair or approaching it. For Anti-Climacus despair is a possibility of the relation of the self and it should be related to the power that created it, the cause of spirit, God. Kierkegaard concludes that the most despairing thing is that the individual fails to recognize even the lowest forms of despair and even its possibility to appear in his life. An individual ought to understand his spiritual task of selfhood and the true relationship between their temporal and spiritual aspects of how to relate correctly to God. Only if selfhood gets free of any misrelation, can spirituality be achieved.¹⁵

Despair is a sickness that appears when the self is out of balance. This misrelation is caused by an individual failing to attain the self. An individual cannot accept himself as his real nature is and this

¹⁴ Stewart, J. B., *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social- Political Thought*, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing, 2011, p. 62.

¹⁵ Smith, G. M., *Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political*, History of European Ideas 31, University of Lancaster, UK: Elsevier Ltd., 2005, pp. 41-47.

creates problems to all his relations. As a result, he feels dissatisfaction with the people who govern him and take decisions on behalf of him. Here comes the point when dissatisfaction grows and the individual starts to feel despair for the politicians who rule him and affect his life as a single individual or as a member of the society. A parallel symptom is that he feels despair over the other citizens as well, thus isolating himself further, although he has not found a secure understanding of what the self is. Kierkegaard believes that only when a human realizes himself as a spirit, or as something which is intimately tied to God, can he avoid despair. Even in one's political life, it has to do with his level of consciousness. The less conscious an individual is, the farther he is removed from God and from the understanding of his existential situation (among them, also the political). Unconscious despair occurs when the individual is unable to recognize his own despair, or his own selfhood. Staying far from his surroundings of selfhood, responsibility and spirituality, practically isolated from God, the individual faces some kind of despair within the crowd¹⁶. He lives within a fake spirituality, as he cares only for ephemeral pleasures, the only thing that connects him with the crowd, instead of a healthy political bond. This temporality is prevalent in politics, as the politicians focus on temporal pleasures and achievements and not on the future and the well-being of the society. They only seek for individual power and recognition among a despairing crowd of people, not realizing how far from spirituality and authentic politics they move.

In order to get free of despair, the self has to understand his own nature and to find the cure close to God. Unconscious despair is the worst form of despair, because the individual is removed from truth. The same happens with political despair, which is a side-effect of man's pretension that spirituality is not necessary in the practical sides of life.

¹⁶ G. M. Smith (2005, p. 49) rightly observes that: "in Kierkegaard's thought it is not the case that the individual is the opposite of community. In fact, as we have seen, the true opposition occurs between the inter-related notions of the individual and community (on the one hand), and the Crowd and natural man (on the other)".

Due to the above reasons, people live more like animals than human beings, according to Kierkegaard. They cannot participate beneficially in a society, offer in it or accept its governors. Alienation is an overall reverberation of their not approaching the truth. In other words, people suffer from political despair which is a symptom of their ignorance of what a collective life could be like and how the individual may prosper as a spirit in it and with constant self reference. In a government as it is however, it is not clear who the ruler is and what the principles are. Not only that but it is rather vague whether not being alone has any virtue in it at all. Alienation is one side effect; tyranny over oneself is the other, as Kierkegaard warns:

“A people’s government is the true picture of hell. For even if one could last out its torment, it would still be a relief if one got the permission to be alone; but the torment is that ‘the others tyrannize over one.’”¹⁷

In this passage, the philosopher links government with hell. He even regards the tyranny of the crowd as demonic, because it fails to show the individuality of the single individual and to take him close to God. The mass eliminates the understanding of the individual as a religious concept. The person as a part of the mass cannot relate to an ideal, to others or to his own selfhood.¹⁸ Alienation is the only possible outcome and man stands aloof from himself and from others as all political connection seems impossible.

Hopefully it becomes evident that for the Danish thinker, the relation of man with God and the way he communicates with the spirit and the absolute being are connected with the overall existence of society, despite Kierkegaard’s continuous emphasis on the individual. The individual is a single entity compared with the universal nature of the political sphere but an entity which also participates in another

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, S., *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, Volume 4, Sections 4144, 4235, Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975.

¹⁸ Smith, G. M., *Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political*, History of European Ideas 31, University of Lancaster, UK: Elsevier Ltd., 2005, p. 54.

singularity, the one that contains the individual and the other in an undividable way: the community. Kierkegaard does not omit to refer to the political events of his time and the feelings of negativity they create to his contemporaries. He lives through a great tension between the idealism and the pragmatism which are meddled in the Christian way of life. This upheaval primarily creates problems in his community, which is facing a continuous despair. Despair exists everywhere in his time, from everyday life to the political thought and discussions that took place with his contemporaries.¹⁹

Kierkegaard adopts a critical attitude to politics focused on racial, tribal, ethnic, economic and religious differences among people. The thoughtful choice of the self is the basis of his philosophical doctrine. Moral despair and political emptiness are prevalent concepts in his work. The lack of values is accompanied with his critique on any form of absolutism and authoritarianism. The major contribution of Kierkegaard in politics is eventually his rejection of any political ultimacy. Conscience is the criterion to judge any form of human relations, especially the political ones and conscience is always destined to remain on the side of the subjective. Thus the dominance of the crowd and self-interest lead to a loss of direction in political affairs. Trying to find a cure for that, Kierkegaard focuses on internal moral integrity and coherence at a stage after the aesthetic. Egoism is apparent, though the philosopher suggests that both ethical and religious subjectivity are important for an effective political leadership. For him it is quite obvious that the emergence of leveling as a social phenomenon influenced the relations of classes, since it increased the egoism of the modern state. Subjectivity comes with the consciousness of our own self and what the individual is as a human being. The problem, according to Kierkegaard, is that we must choose who and what we will be based on subjective interests, since our choices

¹⁹ Stocker, B., *Kierkegaard on Politics*, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey: Macmillan, 2014, pp. 290-291.

need to signify a reasoning, feeling being.²⁰ But can the State be a subjective structure or is that an impossible advancement?

To deal with this issue, in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard stresses the significance of unity among races and classes. Besides, he gives a religious justification for social policies based upon differences. As he upholds:

*“Christianity does not want to take away the dissimilarities, neither of high rank nor of lowliness. But on the other hand, there is no temporal dissimilarity, neither of the lowest nor of the most acceptable to the eyes of the world with which Christianity sides within partiality.”*²¹

Kierkegaard views modern politics as a failed relationship between God, the self and others. It is the lack of selfhood and spirituality in politics that has been caused by getting far from God. Despair has been the result of the bad relation with God since wonder and doubt dominate our life.²²

*“It was terrible when wonder deserted man and he despaired of himself, but it was just as terrible that one should know all this, allow even far more and yet not have experienced it and most terrible of all that one should know all this, know even far more, and yet not have experienced it, and most terrible of all that one should have known everything, and not have begun to do the least. And if it should be so with me, O, let me begin over again. Return, O youth, with your wishes and your lovable wonder; return, O youthful striving, with your reckless daring and your shudder before the unknown; seize me, O despair, who breaks both wonder and the wonder of youth!”*²³

²⁰ Cappelán, N. J. et al., *Kierkegaard's revisited: Proceedings from the conference*, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1997, pp. 146-150.

²¹ Kierkegaard, S., *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*, Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 71.

²² Canjar, K., *Kierkegaard: On Selfhood, Love, and Politics*, University of Lethbridge, Research Repository, 2013, p. 5.

²³ Kierkegaard, S., *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, Copenhagen, 1847, pp. 17-18.

A person in despair desires by all means to be himself, but he does not want to get rid of himself. The self he despairingly wants to be is a self that he is not at that moment; yet he wishes to tear his self away from the power that established it. In spite of all his despairing efforts, this power forces him to be the self he does not want to be.²⁴ In this confusing situation, which is no less than an existential and dialectical debate, the being feels the despair of his own identity, which makes him realize that politics cannot help him get rid of his despairing self; hence this form of the political life is recognized as an inauthentic situation. In this way, the political affects his other relations, the one with the self and the one with God. As a result, the being loses his real self, gets far from God, loses his faith and gets trapped in a dead end that encloses all kinds of despair. At that moment, he expresses sorrow for being at distance with God, not attaining in clarity and unambiguity a form of community with Him:

“A sigh without words is the best prayer when the thought of God only sheds a faint glow over existence, like the blue mountains far distant on the horizon, when the lack of clarity in the soul is satisfied by the greatest possible ambiguity in the thought. But if God is present in the soul, then the sigh will find the thought and the thought will find the word- but also the difficulty, which is not dreamed of when God is at a distance. In our day we hear it proclaimed to the verge of nonsense, that the highest task is not in living in the stillness where there is no danger.”²⁵

Despair, moreover, arises when there is imbalance in the synthesis between opposite elements of self. Reaching the true self requires great courage, commitment and constant effort. Whatever the way of our living is, the result is despair if faith is not included. Faith is the one and only cure for our sickness unto death, therefore the only

²⁴ Kierkegaard, S., *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, (v. 19), Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 20.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, S., *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, Copenhagen, 1847, pp. 10-11.

therapy for an inauthentic political life, which *prima facie* sounds like a paradoxical argument. But that is because despair is a kind of sickness of spirit which stems from a misunderstanding of who we actually are as selves. Despair as a sickness unto death becomes an agonizing condition, trapped in which man efforts to 'die the death'. The man in despair cannot die and this consumes his own self even more. To despair means to despair over one's self, one's own being, one's own existential condition and to see those as restraints, not as freedom. Despair in this form turns to be universal and it appears to all people who live superficially.²⁶ This produces the inevitable sickness of modern politics. Selfhood provokes an inner transformation, which affects the way someone views himself and acts towards others. In modern society and modern politics, Kierkegaard finds that despair damages all kinds of relationships due to these reasons. If people cannot acquire selfhood, their actions will increase society's despair and destroy political life. Political relationships are generally based upon a misrelation of spiritual selfhood. Kierkegaard emphasizes on the transcendence of the purely human in favor of spiritual equality. One needs to build a relationship of mutual concern, sharing support, selflessness and self- sacrifice. If no genuine feelings arise, one creates a selfish relationship with others. People who take part in politics should aim at reciprocity thus achieving genuine selfhood. Otherwise, political relationships fail and they turn to be a triple misrelation to God, the self and the other.²⁷

In the *Works*, Kierkegaard upholds "*To admire another person is certainly not self-love, but to be the one and only friend of this one and only admired person- would not this relation turn back in an alarming way into the I -from which we proceeded?*"²⁸ Similarly in politics, there should not be any degree of exclusivity and intensity. There should not be

²⁶ Grunthaler, A. J., *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair*, www. Sophiaomni.org, pp. 1-7.

²⁷ King, P. & Smith, G. M., *Friendship in Politics, Amity in and between States*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 73-74.

²⁸ Kierkegaard, S., *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*, Hong V. & Hong, E. H., (eds.), USA: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 54-55.

any partial love or focus on the self uniquely. After all, this would not be a regression to an earlier stage, namely the ethical, due to the fact that each self would get the salvation that it would deserve on an ontological but also on a political level. In order to escape despair, politicians should be the first to try and improve the relations they have with the others. Only if we care for the other like we care for our own self, only if truth and purity prevail, can we hope that political despair could be eliminated. According to Kierkegaard, when individuals cannot relate to each other in ethical ways, they are doomed to fall into despair. This is unavoidable despite of the precedence of the subjective. Kierkegaard believes that before an individual relates with others, he should understand himself and analyze his selfhood through the existence of God. In this way the subjective takes the form of the objective and affects how despair is avoided in the communal sphere as well. The only way an individual can relate with others and move far from the temporal and from his ego is to emphasize on the spiritual; that is also valid for his political life. In order to build healthy religious relationships, he should find a way to connect with God. While he is developing these religious and ethical relationships, he is building stronger political relationships with others. The more he approaches God, the healthier these socio-political relations remain.²⁹

Worldly pleasures take people away from God and the spirituality within them. They have no consciousness of their spirit and are unable to relate to something greater than themselves. In such a political life, everyone cares only for his own sake, rather than for the sake of others. Still to care for others is not any form of falling off to the ethical stage for the reason that one's political life resembles his religious life by means of fighting against despair but now in a political sense. It is one thing to care for others ethically and another to care for others as an individual seeking for salvation at the religious level. Kierkegaard does not foresee any disconnection between the two whereas the connection is not purely ethical. As a matter of fact, he supports that this type of despair is the

²⁹ Canjar, K., *Kierkegaard: On Selfhood, Love, and Politics*, University of Lethbridge, Research Repository, 2013, pp. 14-18.

most common form of despair amongst individuals³⁰; thus to cope with the political part of despair does not fall far from the original target of any individual and it doesn't have to keep distances from God.

As we saw earlier, Kierkegaard believes that healthy relations are based on truth. A person who is in despair can reach the truth, only if he goes through every kind of negativity and bad feelings. He must not be consumed by the sickness that is consuming human nature. Someone who lives in despair lives as one that loses hope, since only faith can save him. In this way, faith acquires political characteristics as well. Kierkegaard characterizes despair as a dialectical passion which affects law and ethics in consequence. As philosophical thought deals with personal fear and trembling, politics deals with collective fear and trembling. In *Training in Christianity*, Kierkegaard claims that every man should live in fear and trembling. This shows that man stays in a process of becoming through a procedure that helps him avoid despair. Faith and despair prove both our finitude and freedom as well as our connection to the political.³¹

The truth for Kierkegaard is, in the ethical and religious level, to recognize the crowd as the authority but not in terms of political power. The neighbor is the true expression for human equality and the more you share love, the farther you move from despair. If you achieve to love the neighbor as yourself, then perfect human equality could be achieved unconditionally. When people refuse to love the neighbor, they are not able to show interest to someone's good unconditionally. This brings one much farther than the Christian point of view; it makes one become a-political and morally autistic. In such a situation, personal ego becomes the motive behind every action. Those who ignore the crowd sink again into an endless despair. Politicians are in this way sunk into despair, since their Ego wins over the collectiveness.³²

³⁰ Canjar, K., *Kierkegaard: On Selfhood, Love, and Politics*, University of Lethbridge, Research Repository, 2013, pp. 6-9.

³¹ Marasco, R., *The highway of despair: Critical Theory after Hegel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 76-77.

³² Kierkegaard, S., *The Single Individual: Two Notes Concerning My Work as an Author*, 1998b, 110/XIII 597.

Apart from being a friend, in this purely dialectical comprehension, the Ego is also the enemy of political despair because it provides feelings of godlikeness that take despair far from its real essence or origin. Only humility can resist egotism and false perceptions of who we are. The despair is often concealed and cannot be easily perceived. It then opposes freedom and selfhood as they are challenged in politics like in any other field of human activity.³³ Kierkegaard continuously deals with the concepts of anxiety and despair, precisely for this reason. He didn't consider these concepts as something that ought to be avoided, because nobody could ever live an authentic life without being grappled by despair. Despair exists in any kind of relationships and politics could not be authentic if they did not stem from this comprehension of existential despair. The political is also always part of the existential. Kierkegaard concludes that the evil and sin that we experience in the present can be overcome by moral and religious movements of human self-transcendence that connect us to the eternal and beyond that at the same time. In our temporary movements of faith and love, God's eternal love becomes present as an overrun over time. Despair in any kind of relations, such as the political ones as well, can only be overcome through faith and always by means of an individual and cured perception.³⁴

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³³ Sirvent, R. & Morgan, S., *Kierkegaard and Political Theology*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018, p. 290.

³⁴ Welz, C., *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, Great Britain: Mpg Books Ltd, 2011, p. 310.

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KJERKEGOR O POLITIČKOJ FORMI OČAJANJA

Sažetak: Čini se da u naše vreme političko očajanje prevladava nad drugim političkim perspektivama u pogledu života građanina, njegovog odnosa sa državom, njegove povezanosti sa sugrađanima, njegovog učešća u političkom procesu etc., ali najviše od svega ono nastupa kao prikriveni politički faktor koji prožima sve stupnjeve političkog života. Za Kjerkegora, očajanje je stanje bitka, a ne samo privremeno osećanje ili ogorčenje prema životu. U njegovoj teoriji, očajanje je situacija koja se podudara sa gubitkom našeg sopstva; a postoji i političko sopstvo koje se gubi. To se tiče stanja u kojem neko ostaje vezan za pogrešan pojam o svom sopstvu, ali i o drugima. Prema nekim istraživanjima, to implicira da postoji koherentna veza između ljudske i političke ontologije u Kjerkegorovoj filozofiji. Iz ove prizme, jedno od iskrivljujućih ogledala političke realnosti i, prema tome, jedan od krivaca za gubitak realističnog shvatanja političkih fenomena jesu mas-mediji. Danski filozof okreće se protiv štampe svog vremena da bi odbranio subjektivnost kao glavni element u političkom procesu, tesno povezan sa istinom i individualnošću. Politika ne može biti autentična ukoliko ne potiče iz istrajnog spoznavanja egzistencijalnog očajanja. Ono političko uvek je deo onoga egzistencijalnog; to je glavna tvrdnja u Kjerkegorovoj misli.

Ključne reči: Kjerkegor, političko, očajanje, sloboda, sopstnost, individualno

Primljeno: 10.2.2019.

Prihvaćeno: 24.4.2019.