

Decentering in Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy – recentering in Kierkegaard

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Abstract The paper will evaluate fundamental concepts within Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT); while considering whether aspects of Kierkegaard's psychology may benefit professionals and patients alike. Given that MBCT centers its treatment on **self-awareness**, the paper will examine Kierkegaard's understanding of **self-relation**, by viewing his work "Repetition" as a psychological case study. This will be evaluated with regards to the therapist's ability to connect with the patient, which is a fundamental aspect of MBCT as well. Within this aim, the dynamics of selfhood will be investigated regarding the patient's ability for inner change while **decentering**. Moreover, the paper will argue that MBCT's focus on decentering may benefit from an equally important method of **'recentering'**; the presupposition for ¹which we find throughout Kierkegaard's **double movements** of existence. Taken as a whole, the paper will conclude in favor of distinguishing between different types of self-relations as a premise for the patient's ability to decenter and possibly recenter.

Introduction

The scope of Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood is rather large to say the least, and perhaps not always clear-cut. His use of pseudonyms possibly confuse and set up debates on the particular author's understanding of the individual, the self, or the conditions of being human. However, these conditions can be read as straighter forward, as far as his basic view of the human psyche goes: that man is a self-relation, whether suffering from despair or blissfully ignorant of life's predicaments. Given the aim of the paper, the topic will obviously center on the crises and suffering experienced by patients or other individuals. It will examine Kierkegaard's and MBCT's views as to how one endures or overcomes crises, and which outcome one may expect.

For all intents and purposes, the following writings were chosen in an attempt to unite these particular concerns. The texts are "Repetition"

(Rep, 1843), “Either/Or II” (E/O II, 1843) and “Fear and Trembling” (FaT, 1843). Parts of each text will be met with a specific objective in mind vis-à-vis MBCT, although only the first is regarded as a psychological work by its author. Eventually, we shall see that each text consider the problem of self-relation from different existential perspectives; a fact we will draw upon in the papers analysis. Through Rep we will investigate the complexities of overcoming the breach to *immediacy* (Umiddelbarhed) as a result of crisis. Immediacy understood as the harmonious self before the moment of crisis. With attention to E/O’s existential concerns in ‘the Balance’,¹ we shall come across difficulties regarding the therapist’s ability to relate to the patient. And finally, through FaT, we shall see that different premises for inner conflict provoke different types of self-relation.

Other more psychological writings by Kierkegaard, such as “The Concept of Anxiety” (CoA, 1844) and “The Sickness unto Death” (SuD, 1849), will not play major roles in this paper. However, the psychological considerations within these texts will, to some extent, be presumed as accurate views of man. At least the following undertaking will take as true, that man is determined by *spirit*, i.e. a ‘relation that relates itself to itself’. This does not in any important manner disagree with MBCT, which emphasizes the patient’s relation to thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations; all of which incorporate some degree of self-relation.

Furthermore, we shall assume SuD’s suggested way out of despair, in which “...*the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process.*” (SuD, 1980 p. 30)² This statement represents a generalization of ‘infinite’s double movement’ and will be elaborated from abovementioned texts; that is, through other existential types of inner movements. Additionally, these double movements will be points of reference regarding MBCT’s explicit lack of a recentering process.

¹“The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality”.

²”Udviklingen maa altsaa bestaae i uendeligt at komme bort fra sig selv i Uendeliggjørelse af Selvet, og i uendeligt at komme tilbage til sig selv i Endeliggjørelsen.” (SuD, SKS p. 25).

Nevertheless, we shall start off with the argument of researchers and professionals alike that mindfulness may benefit patients who are suffering from a wide range of disorders, including Segal et al.'s version which focuses on the nature of depression and depressive relapse. So with regards to MBCT the paper will principally make use of Segal et al.'s "Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for depression" (2002), yet include recent research results if necessary. This is accounted for in the following.

1. MBCT

The fact that patients generally tend to believe that their negative thoughts are true during episodes of depression, but less so when in remission is widely accepted. Segal et al. made use of the further assumption that people who are vulnerable to depression differ from others in their approach of dealing with depressed mood itself. As it happens, some people respond to low mood by focusing their attention internally, by *ruminating*, while others take their minds away from themselves. Rumination is defined as the process of thinking perseveratively about one's feelings and problems in response to stress (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Empirical results suggest that the mind's repetitive thinking about negative aspects of the self, or foreseeing challenging situations, served to perpetuate rather than to resolve depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). These results also suggested that participants who introspected about their mood actually believed they had a better understanding of themselves, while in fact demonstrating reduced ability to actively solve their problems. Since people who are vulnerable to depression particularly deal with depressed mood by ruminating, analyzing this mindset could prove valuable, and so it did.

The analysis showed that the dynamics of rumination comprised of what Segal et al. label the *discrepancy monitor*. It is a process that persistently monitors and evaluates the self's current situation against a standard of what should be desired or feared. The discrepancy monitor automatically triggers negative feelings, as an indication of unmet ideals,

which is routinely followed by thought patterns designed to reduce the gap between present and desired states. Such a design stems from a mode of being Segal et al. define as *doing mode*. Doing mode is actually more a way of life or existential stance, so to speak, where the general setting is that something ‘has to be done’ about life’s challenges or difficulties. The unacceptable or inadequate present state cannot stand.

This ‘westernized’ mindset is occasionally appropriate, and providing that problems are solved, it usually gives no cause for alarm. As a form of disorder however, doing mode simply complicates matters. In case of disorder, the patient’s only target is to monitor success or failure at meeting goals. Eventually, the monitoring mind will not be fully tuned on present experiences, since it is preoccupied with analyzing the past or the future, thereby giving the present low priority. Hence, unsuccessful results in closing the gap to desired states may further motivate attempts to reduce the discrepancy, as well as fueling further negative feelings and thoughts. This vicious circle continues to process any information in doing mode, dwelling on discrepancies and rehearsing possible ways to reduce them. Mental habits, it appears, deceive depressed people into thinking their way out of their problems. This habit takes up a great deal of ‘cognitive capacity’ that should be employed for action; a capacity that is sorely needed at times of potential relapse in case negative thought patterns are reactivated. Still, the fact of the matter is that rumination is a result of the monitoring activity, which in itself, is a variant of the more basic doing mode.

The most common feature of doing mode is therefore a recurring sense of self-dissatisfaction, caused by the attempt to eliminate that very mood. Accordingly, dissatisfaction presupposes the belief promoted by the discrepancy monitor that the self is inadequate or worthless. But such belief is in turn upheld by a constant working with negative thought content, which the ruminative mind experiences as a real representation of the self. So although these negative feelings are certainly real, they are made into goal-related objects that need to be dealt with. This turns feelings into ‘things’ that have independent reality and permanence.

Furthermore, the mind attaches concepts to these feelings in a ‘thought-affect cycle’ that support the belief of an inadequate self, thereby further generating negative feelings. These concepts are therefore falsely experienced as real, rather than seen as mental events that produce estimations or possible scenarios. Seeing negative thoughts as no more than mental events seemed to be of key value for recovery and an important aspect of Segal et al. research.

So, although the explicit emphasis in cognitive therapy (CT) is on changing thought content, Segal et al. were lead to recognize the likelihood that when successful, treatment would implicitly lead to changes in patients’ ‘relationships’ to their negative thoughts. The group found that regular identification of negative thoughts as they arose and the ability to ‘stand back’ from them, to evaluate the accuracy of their content, created a more general shift in the patients’ perspective on their own thoughts. Patients simply switched to a perspective within which they saw negative thoughts as neither necessarily valid reflection of reality, nor central aspects of the self. The importance of distancing oneself from negative thoughts, or *decentering*, had previously been recognized by cognitive therapy, but usually as a means to an end, i.e. to change thought content (Beck et al., 1979). Segal et al. on the contrary considered decentering as an end in itself and took decentering to be a fundamental aspect of cognitive therapy that could protect patients against impending depression. If such decentering did not take place, the risk of getting caught up in thought patterns would arise. In an attempt to think their way out of their problems, patients would be left pondering about the truthfulness of their thoughts by evaluating changes in content. In other words, they would be ruminating on their ruminative thoughts. The task was therefore to find

...ways to teach people to decenter from their negative thoughts; preferably in a way that would take up the cognitive “capacity” in a mind otherwise filled with ruminative thoughts. (...) This implies that if the limited channel can be filled with nonruminative material, the person, for that period, will simply be unable to ruminate.” (Segal et al., p. 39)

Segal et al. found a theoretical model that would emphasize the importance of changing patient's relationships to their thoughts in Jon Kabat-Zinn's therapeutic method of *Mindfulness-based stress reduction* (MBSR). This particular mindfulness approach showed patients how negative thoughts and feelings often are expressed through the body and involved exercises on 'purposeful awareness' of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. We shall not dwell on diverse exercises, but they include 'body scan', 'sitting meditation', 'breathing awareness', 'mindful walking' and more. The benefit of these exercises is precisely the development of a self-awareness that would occupy cognitive capacity. This development therefore prohibits the factors that allow the thought-affect cycle to self-perpetuate. Not least, purposeful awareness would also provide an early warning system of imminent depression.

What was different from previous methods of cognitive therapy was the fact that all of this took place in a context, where no attempts were made to deal with the patient's thought content. Moreover, there was evidence for the efficiency of this method in related disorders that often went along with depression, such as anxiety disorders. If all of this were true, then there was no need to change the content of patients' thoughts, but only how they related to this content through decentering. In fact, "...the MBSR approach was explicit about the danger that such attempts at fixing might merely reinforce people's attitude that their problems were the "enemy";" (Segal et al., p. 60). This also went for the mistaken attitude that everything would be in order if only negative thoughts were removed. As mentioned above, this misleading notion may encourage further attempts by patients to solve problems by pondering on whether their thoughts were true or not. Attempts that would keep them trapped within the state from which they were trying to escape. Instead, mindfulness instructors aimed at showing patients how fighting against unwanted mental or physical states could create more tension and suffering.

So when patients said they felt depressed, anxious, or that they had judgmental thoughts, they were simply encouraged to bring these feelings, bodily sensations and thoughts to awareness and to 'breathe

with them', or tune into *being mode*, as it were. Patients are encouraged to 'allow' difficulties into the present, to bring to them a 'kindly awareness', and to adopt a more 'welcoming' than a 'need to solve attitude'. The approach of being mode is therefore invitational. In fact, the MBSR program teaches patients to explore their relationship to their difficulties. Responsibility was therefore noticeably left with the patients themselves, whereas the instructor's primary role was guiding and empowering patients to relate mindfully to their experience on a moment-by-moment basis.

As such, mindful exercises actually focus away from cognitive therapy's emphasis on changing the content of negative thinking, toward attending to the way all experience is processed. The attention to process shows the key difference between doing and being mode, namely their time focus. In doing mode the mind often focus' on the future or the past, and the experience is one of not actually *being* in the present here and now. Attention to process on the other hand is always based on the present moment.

Nevertheless, doing mode may be difficult to overcome, not only during patients' efforts but also facing the therapists' guidance. For that reason it is important that the therapists embody their own clear and apparent mindful attitude while interacting with patients. Instructors ought to be governed by the same principles demanded of their patients, the assumption being "...that minds tend to operate in similar ways, and there is no basis for discriminating between the minds of those seeking help and those offering it." (Segal et al., p. 55) Specifically the difficulty of describing and communicating the processes of mindfulness in words emphasizes the importance of understanding them from within.

In the following sections we shall attempt to examine what has been summed up about MBCT, while introducing some of Kierkegaard's thoughts. This will be done by establishing a psychological setting for what has been illustrated as a therapeutic method. We shall start by providing an account of Rep in the form of a case study, since the text deals with what generally initiates a therapeutic case, namely a crisis

situation followed by a therapeutic effort. Some preliminary thoughts will be introduced on the way before elaborating on theoretical topics believed to be similar.

2. *Repetition*

This is the scenery: on the one hand you have ‘the young man’ who finds himself in a state of crisis, and on the other hand you have Constantin, say, an amateur psychologist reflecting on the nature of ‘repetition’. Prior to his crisis, the young man’s fiancé accepted his marriage proposal. Eventually, and in spite of his affection for his fiancé, he regrets the engagement and calls it off. This causes inner turmoil that is only strengthened by ‘the young girl’s’ lingering grief, all of which brings him to a state of depression. He therefore seeks the assistance of Constantin. Constantin, who provides us with his communiqué to the anonymous young man, takes on the obligation, more or less as an experiment in relation to his own philosophical endeavor: the issue of whether repetition is possible or not.

The experiment is initiated by Constantin’s definition of *repetition*. He states that “*Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward.*” (Rep, 1983 p. 131)³ According to this quote, repetition is a forward ‘recollection’ thusly related to cognition. Hence, through the young man’s predicament, Constantin would be able to establish ‘empirical evidence’ in order to psychologically verify his philosophical outset. Since repetition is related to the psychological

³ “Gjentagelse og erindring er den same bevægelse, kun i modsat retning; thi hvad der erindres, har været, gjentages baglænds; hvorimod den egentlige Gjentagelse erindres forlænds.” (Rep, SKS p. 4). The Danish term for repetition is “Gjentagelse”. The direct translation is to ‘retake’ (gentage) or to take again (tage igen), which involves a new opportunity. In this sense of the term, the French translation is perhaps more spot on in using the term “la Reprise” (Resumption, or even recovery) rather than “la Répétition”. Kierkegaard also uses this sense of the word explicitly, although with another purpose in mind, when he says that “...life unremittingly and treacherously retake everything it had given without providing a repetition.” (Rep, 1983 p. 172) / “...Livet ustandseligt og troløst tage Alt igen, hvad det gav, uden at give en Gjentagelse.” (SuD, SKS p. 71).

process of recollection, the young man should be able to return to his condition prior to his crisis – to a ‘redintegratio in statum pristinum’.⁴

However, Constantin’s analysis reveals that his patient, even though consumed by his desire for the young girl did not actually love her, rather he had an abstract or idealized affection for her. Loving her would not cause depression as Constantin puts it; on the contrary, it would cure it. The problem seems to be that the young man is caught within the *aesthetic* sphere of recollection and cannot dedicate himself to the *ethical* sphere of marriage, which is repetition proper. Dedication to one person reveals the repetition of marriage, for it is a forward recollection that constantly reconfirms the relationship. The aesthetic sphere of recollection on the other hand abstractly retains the fantasy of romance and infatuation. It is a backward repetition of pre-marital relationship thus disconfirming marriage. So, his idealized affection ended the relationship before it even could begin, and in his rumination he clings to this ideal, making it impossible for a marital bond to develop.⁵ He could therefore only cherish her after leaving her, and merely in a romantic manner. In fact, she had become the accidental cause for his newly found ‘poetic creativity’; a characteristic that in turn upheld an overly reflective and romanticized relation to her. This characteristic consequently keeps him within a depressive condition, and makes it impossible for him to quench his desires.

Neither being able to withstand the repetition of marriage nor return to his former self as a consequence of this crisis, his repetition must therefore be in reverse form; that is, he must annul the self he had become. Accordingly, Constantin instructs him to turn into a deceiver, and embody an unreflective, rude and unsympathetic personality. He even proposes to go as far as overt infidelity (‘overt’ relative to that historical era). This would allow his fiancé and their shared community to perceive him as the opposite of what he had become, thereby

⁴ Reestablishment of the prior state.

⁵ In the following I shall to some extent use the terms recollection and rumination in the same sense. This seems reasonable in view of studies that suggest that rumination is predominately focused on the past, as opposed to *worry*, which is focused on the future (Watkins et al., 2005).

performing the ethical duty of making the wedding cancellation tolerable for her. The point being that this behavior would definitely and publicly end the relationship, as well as even out his desires for the young girl. In so doing, he would reconfirm his duty towards her and return to his former self. In a word, repetition would have succeeded. However, the young man refuses to stomach this process, which will be examined in next section.

3. Preliminary thoughts

Constantin's advice for the young man to suit the role of a deceiver seems ambiguous at first or lacking explanation. But there is more. We later learn from the communiqué of August 15th that the young man did not take Constantin's advice due to what appears to be social anxiety, and that he secretly fled the country. His anxiety therefore prevents him from enduring public rejection. Since the latter obviously is part of Constantin's plan, one could suggest that Constantin's analysis of the young man essentially reveals his epinosic gain. The young man's primary gain would therefore subsist in the absence of anxiety by fleeing the country. But this makes it all the more difficult for him to rid himself of depression, which is partially the price he pays for not confronting his community. Constantin also explicitly correlates the young man's depression with his poetic creativity.⁶ Now, as mentioned above, the movement of repetition is within the ethical sphere and therefore societal (*det Almene*)⁷ in nature, while recollection is within the aesthetic

⁶ See for instance Rep pp. 137 and 183.

⁷ The English translation is *the universal* (Rep, Princeton 1983). I prefer the more ethical emphasis of the term *societal*. Rep and FaT provide ethico-religious definitions of *det Almene*, but on account of the paper's psychological aim, the judge's description of the term in E/O II seems more appropriate. He says that "*In other words, the universal in itself is nowhere to be found, and it is up to me, to my enterprising consciousness, whether I will see the universal in the particular or see only the particular*". (E/O II, 1987 p. 329)/"*Det Almene er nemlig intetsteds som saadant, og det ligger i mig, i min Bevidstbeds Energi, om jeg i det Enkelte vil see det Almene eller blot det Enkelte*."(E/O II, SKS p. 344), and that "... *the universal is a severe master when one has it outside oneself. It continually holds the sword of judgment over him and asks, "Why do you want to be an outsider?" And even if he says, "It is not my fault", it still blames him for it and demands itself of him.*" (E/O II, 1987 p. 331)/"... *det almene er en streng herre, naar man har det udenfor sig, det holder bestandigt dommersværdet over ham og siger: hvorfor vil du være udenfor, og om han end siger, det er ikke min skyld, den tilregner ham det dog og fordrer sig selv af ham.*"(E/O II, SKS p. 346). Here, the universal seems to be understood as a structure of consciousness that mirrors social reality,

sphere, thus sensuous in nature. Since the quality of the young man's recollection entails a poetic creativity, this secondary gain would yet again stand in the way of recovery, i.e. reentering the ethical sphere.⁸

This additional analysis, if accurate, may afford Constantin's intention some legitimacy. In regards to the young girl, there is a duty to amend her grief by staging a tolerable wedding cancellation. In regards to the young man, there certainly is a therapeutic truism in exposing oneself publically to confront one's social anxiety, especially when social rupture such as marital cancellation has occurred. And since the young man's epinoic gain, be that the absence of anxiety or his poetic creativity, scarcely harmonizes with social duty, the intention of the deceiver approach also seems reasonable in terms of transforming recollection into repetition. In other words, duty is a societal matter that produces his anxiety, the absence of which is gained precisely by not performing his duty (this goes for the ethical duty of marriage as well as the duty of compensating for its cancellation).⁹ Of course, there is the matter of sacrificing even more communal status in the process, which surely poses further ethical questions to the follow-through, but as expected Constantin concerns himself above all with restoring the young man's psychological condition. Despite the setback caused by the young man's forfeit, we shall in the following section see whether Constantin will be able to verify his philosophical outset.

and as quoted, this mirror may effectuate collisions within the individual. In the following I shall perceive *the societal* in this manner, and *social reality* as communal life.

⁸ The correlation between social anxiety and rumination has been suggested in several studies. What is interesting is the probable use of rumination as emotional suppression (Liverant et al., 2010). In this case, recollection would help suppress the young man's anxiety. As regards note 5, one might add in tune with Constantin's definition above, that rumination is worrying about the past (thus suppressing possibility), and worry is ruminating about the future (thus suppressing necessity).

⁹ If there is any truth to this reading it shows the dialectics of rumination and anxiety: on the one hand, rumination functions as emotional suppression (Liverant et al., 2010), here social anxiety. On the other hand, if sustained, rumination produces more social anxiety (Wong et al. 2010).

4. *The unrepeatable repetition*

Since the young man refuses to go through Constantin's plan, Constantin carries on experimenting repetition by challenging himself to the experience. The possibility of repetition would therefore be reenacted by a previous occurrence: a pleasant trip to Berlin. Eventually the ordeal ends disappointingly in every possible way. He therefore declares that "... *there simply is no repetition and had verified it by having it repeated in every possible way.*" (Rep, 1983 p. 171)¹⁰ He further adds that "... *I am completely convinced that if I had not gone abroad with the idea of assuring myself of it, I would have amused myself immensely with the very same thing.*" (Rep, 1983 p. 174)¹¹ It is presumably more accurate to construe these declarations as frustration over what essentially appears to be exaggerated responses to minor incidences. Besides, he does not entirely disprove repetition, since both quotes question his *attempts* at repetition, rather than repetition itself.

In the following part of the text appropriately entitled "Repetition", Constantin broods over his failed attempt, and concludes that the possibility of repetition, proper, must take place by virtue of *the absurd*. This involves accepting the impossibility of ever realizing one's hopes and desires within *finitude*, thereby transcending it.¹² The obvious problem is that none of them would tolerate transcendence. Unfortunately, as regards repetition, we learn that this option would no longer be possible for the young man. In his final letter to Constantin the elated young man announces that the young girl had freed him of his predicament by marrying someone else.

So, after providing the young man's essentially religious letters that show apparent emotional instability, Constantin presents his own letter

¹⁰ "... *gentagelsen slet ikke var til, og det havde jeg forvirket mig om, ved paa alle mulige Maader at faae det gentaget.*" (Rep, SKS p. 70).

¹¹ "... *jeg er aldeles overbevist om, at dersom jeg ikke var reist i den Hensigt at forvirkte mig derom, saa havde jeg mere mig kostelig ved aldeles det samme.*" (Rep, SKS p. 75).

¹² Man is in *essence* a synthesis between finitude and infinitude, and must balance this relation in existence. The relation may also be defined by body and soul, the temporal and the eternal or possibility and necessity, but it is the individual's relation to that relation which defines man as spirit. In Kierkegaard's account, living within the aesthetic way of life is a form of despair. See the following interpolation.

to the reader. This letter puts emphasis on what was previously interpreted as epinoic gain, within an overall analysis of the young man's failed attempt to overcome his crisis, owing to the young girl's marriage.¹³ Although her marriage may have freed the young man from finitude's suffering, it did so only by maintaining his poetic self within infinitude's abstract detainment. What should have translated into a triumph over the young man's crisis is accidentally canceled out by what caused the crisis in the first place, namely the relief from duty.

Following this short description and partial analysis of Rep, we shall aim to illustrate Kierkegaard's grasp of the psychological presuppositions that would account for some of MBCT's therapeutic considerations. In the next sections' interpolation some conclusions from this particular case are interpreted through these therapeutic considerations as well.

5. Interpolation I

1. So what is the issue at hand? Starting with Kierkegaard's definition of man in SuD as a relation that relates itself to itself, and consequently despair as a misrelation in that relation, i.e. a spiritual sickness, it is fairly clear that he perceives both individuals in Rep to be in despair. However, their symptoms are to some extent dissimilar; the obvious difference being the cause of the young man's depression, namely a crisis situation. Constantin's despair on the other hand, revolves around his extensive use of reflective abilities. This he admits more than once, for instance while pointing out that it is the 'objective theoretical' interest of the individual that concerns him, and that the plan he introduces to the young man was scaled by the idea as a criterion.¹⁴

¹³ Constantin's analysis may well be interpreted as sublimation rather than epinoic gain. This is probably the case in the psychological analysis of 'the poet' on pages 228-229. Constantin is also astonished by the young man's 'awakened' poetic creativity, which on page 138 compares the young girl to a 'ladder rung by which he had climbed'. He is also amazed by the young man's mental and imaginative aptitude, which on page 183 is seen as 'the perfect substitute for all erotic love'. Yet, the fact that the young man uses his poetic creativity in order to 'delight and amuse' the young girl (Rep, 1983 p. 138), his need for Constantin's attention, on top of his depression and social anxiety makes an argument for epinoic gain. Nevertheless, I believe the outcome to be the same concerning repetition, for even if the young man, by virtue of the young girl's marriage, 'gains himself again' – he does so as a poet. Be that sublimation, it is still not repetition.

¹⁴ See for instance Rep pp. 180 and 218.

More importantly, these reflective abilities are mostly ruminative and depressive in nature when he experiments repetition on himself. What is interesting in this regard is that the young man seems to resent Constantin because of his overly passionless approach, and even calls him mentally disordered. In spite of his resentment he nonetheless needs Constantin's confidence and analytical abilities, which he conversely describes as superior.

Also conflicting with MBCT instructions, Constantin presumably perceives feelings as durable objects that can be considered independently of the self. His fixation on an ideal repetition of his trip to Berlin is an obvious example. He considers this experience objectively and as something that can be repeated, feelings and all, by simply reenacting it. This he does it to such an extent that one almost senses an arithmetic notion to his comparison between the two different experiences

I did believe, however, that the enjoyment I had known in that theater would be of a more durable nature, precisely because a person must have learned to let himself be trimmed by existence in many ways and yet learned to manage somehow until he actually got a sense of life - but then life also ought to be all the more secure. Should life [Tilværelsen] be even more deceitful than a bankrupt! He still gives 50 percent or 30 percent, at least something. After all, the least one can ask for is the comic - should not even that be capable of repetition?"¹⁵

The center of attention is on the discrepancy from an ideal and not the present state of affairs, which immediately generates depression when his experiences do not live up to standards. Obviously, his time focus is directed to the past, but even when he is not noticeably unconcern with the present moment, boredom infiltrates his perspective on life. As he claims, one would think that life's enjoyments were more durable, perfectly demonstrating his unsuccessful attempts to escape tiresome

¹⁵ Rep, 1983 p. 169 "Imidlertid troede jeg dog, at den nydelse, jeg havde haft i hiin Theater, skulde være af Durablere art, netop fordi man maatte have lært at lade sig paa mange maader reducere af Tilværelsen og dog hjælpe sig, før man egentlig fik sands for den; men desto sikkrere maatte den også være. Skulde Tilværelsen være endnu svingfuldere end en Fallent! Han giver dog 50 Procent, eller 30, Noget giver han dog. Det Comiske er dog det Mindste, man kan forlange, skulde det heller ikke lade sig gjentage?" (Rep, SKS p. 67).

habits. Ironically, these habits are applied by himself and something he rather obsessively depends on.

This psychological dialectics between despair and experiencing the present moment is in line with Kierkegaard's basic assertion that the eternal part of the synthesis provides significance to the individual's personal history within the temporal.¹⁶ As notated above, man is among other a synthesis between the eternal and the temporal, in which the concept of time has a great importance. *The moment* (Øjeblikket) arises when time and eternity touch each other, thereby positing temporality. In CoA, Kierkegaard calls it *the atom of eternity* as opposed to *the atom of time*, the latter simply being a time process lacking the materiality and significance of the former. It is the empty 'now', as it were. So, when the individual focuses extensively on the temporal, as a means to achieve satisfaction, the eternal is not contained by the present moment, and life becomes tedious routine. Temporality within the aesthetic way of life is therefore often experienced as meaningless, since "... *habit arises as soon as the eternal disappears from repetition.*" (CoA, 1980 p. 149)¹⁷ As a result, Constantin is in fact right, when he claims that repetition is not possible on account of his experiments.

This manner of treating experiences and feelings as things is also noticeable in his advice to the young man. The logic of the deceiver approach seems to be that an annulment of a position, or a mode of being, can be effectuated by its negation, the opposite of that mode of being. As mentioned before, his intentions seem reasonable. However, experiences and their repetition are, yet again, largely seen as objects, here, from on the basis of a social context. In this sense, the opposite of being a 'poet' is being a scoundrel.

On the whole, Constantin's attempts and advices appear to presuppose doing mode of mind, which he admits by figuratively saying: "*I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot rise above myself.*" (Rep, 1983 p. 186)¹⁸ It is apparently the doing mode of 'circumnavigating' that is excessively

¹⁶ (CoA, 1980 pp. 88-89).

¹⁷ "... *Vane opstaaer, saasart det Evige gaaer ud af Gjentaelsen.*" (CoA, SKS p. 167).

¹⁸ "*Jeg kan omseile mig selv; men jeg kan ikke komme ud over mig selv,...*" (Rep, SKS p. 92).

practiced by Constantin, rather than ‘rising above’, thusly transcending his predicament by accepting his mode of being. Constantin therefore initially focuses more on what the young man ought to do to avoid his pain, rather than focusing on the suffering he lays upon himself, by ruminating over his painful relationship. As the quote indicates, Constantin ultimately acknowledges his mistake.

But what is the legitimacy of Constantin’s advice in regards to the young man’s crisis? From Constantin’s point of view, the young man has replaced his ethical dilemma, the duty towards his fiancé, into an aesthetic aptitude, a poetic creativity. He is therefore imprisoned by recollection, incapable of performing his duty, which depresses him. So the idea of altering the aesthetic content of his epinosis, from a romantic to a deceiver, is not simply a matter of changing his behavior. It is also a matter of generating a ‘substitute duty’ that would disentangle his crises, thereby changing the young man’s mental habits. In this case his mental habits or thought content, as CT would have it, is recollection. Now, the specificity of mental alteration is not explicit in Rep, yet the interpretation is most likely appropriate due to Constantin’s analysis of the young man’s ruminative character. But as a consequence of that character, the deceiver method merely provoked the young man to further reflections on whether this approach was viable or whether he would turn this ‘substitute duty’ into shallow chivalry. The presupposition of doing mode in the approach therefore simply kept him trapped within the state of depressing rumination. It did not implicitly lead to changes in his relation to his thoughts and feelings on the matter, nor did it switch his perspective of reality.

2. In addition to not being able to transcend himself, Constantin seemingly lacks the proficiency of *indirect communication* (Indirecte meddelelse), in so far as no inner movement, such as repetition, can be communicated directly. That is, by explicit pieces of advice or behavioral directions. Constantin does not, as required by Kierkegaard at least, understand that the therapeutic art of indirect communication consists in “... *making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then*

continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity.” (PiC, 1991 p. 133)¹⁹ In fact, he does the exact opposite. As mentioned before, it is the ‘objective idea’ of the individual that is of interest to him, resulting in an objectification of his patient rather than himself. This passionless approach obviously fueled the young man’s perception of Constantin as mentally disordered, especially since much respect given to therapists consists in their ability to value what is demanded of the patient, as well as communicating this properly. Perhaps more so when it concerns highly reflective individuals such as the young man. We shall return to this, but for the time being it seems appropriate to presuppose the legitimacy of indirect communication in aforesaid MBCT difficulty of communicating the processes of mindfulness in words, and for that reason guiding and empowering their patients instead.

3. The young man comes closer to a notion of the therapeutic issue while entertaining the question of guilt in one of his letters. In his communiqué of October 11th he contemplates his deceitful actions towards the young girl and whether he should repent his cowardice, along with his poetic compensation otherwise interpreted as epinosic gain. Agreed, this is still rumination. However, at this point he presumably had the opportunity to initiate a healing process, since these considerations reflect the fact that he cannot genuinely surmount his predicament without accepting some responsibility for it. He would therefore be required to repent, which could well have changed the relationship to his dilemma first and foremost by accepting it.

To put this in MBCT terms, repentance would give him the occasion to suspend the discrepancy monitor thus achieving being mode. As described above, this monitor evaluates the self’s present state against a standard of what should be an ideal state. This essentially defines the dynamics of guilt. Since the monitoring factor presupposes an ethical scale in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, then guilt would be

¹⁹ “...at gjøre sig selv, Meddelelsen, til Ingen, reent objektiv, og saa uafbrudt at sætte qualitative Modsætninger i Eenhed”. (IC, SKS p. 143).

determined by the distance between the scale's extremities.²⁰ It was also explained that the monitoring process produces negative feelings and thought patterns aimed at relevant courses of action based on those standards. But through repentance such patterns and actions would be redundant since this inner movement confesses ownership of present states irrespective of discrepancies. Alas, the young man stood firmly on his non-guilt.

4. So what is the conclusion of Interpolation I? Firstly, Constantin and the young man are somewhat set in similar situations. They both fail in their attempts at repetition, for one. Furthermore, it is rather clear that their feelings, thoughts and actions are ruled by random circumstances. Constantin defines repetition several times, but this is basically the only thing that is 'repeated'. Repetition *literally* escapes him. Save for abstract possibilities, there obviously is no concrete or real repetition in reflection, nor is there repetition in pursuing definitions according to random circumstances. Equally wavering, the young man goes from resentment towards Constantin to rationalization of his actions towards the young girl, or from manic to depressed conclusion of his own situation. He finally ends up by being alleviated by the young girl's marriage. Still, these are all accidental circumstances that have little to do with the movement of repetition.

Despair is the probable reason why they both are governed by random circumstances, since misrelation depends on being in two minds about everything. This is the essence of despair: not being able to ground one-self and withhold self-permanence. So, whatever they experience is processed through the vicious circle of misrelation and therefore always with reservation and hesitation. This goes for their view of present state of affairs, as well as their focus on the past or the future. Hence, the provisional conclusion is that repetition as defined by Constantin is not possible through the eyes of despair. What is aesthetically repeated are random events that emotionally shunt the individuals, inhibiting the very

²⁰ On a side note, the Danish term for guilty is *skyldig*, which also means to be indebted, emphasizing the individual's attempt to account for what is owed to an imbalanced scale.

thing that ought to be repeated, namely self-permanence or authenticity. As a consequence, this conclusion also changes the sense of repetition defined as a forward recollection. Repetition would therefore be an attempt to return to a *sense* of equilibrium based on new terms, rather than a return to a specific condition. By this new sense, repetition is not the process of reestablishing a prior state; it is the process of reacquiring ones originality or authenticity in a new state. As regards despair, it is probable that only the transcendence of repentance provides a remedy against misrelation, because true atonement of guilt does not concern itself with the entitlement of two-mindedness. To put it briefly, repentance is not relative to the cause of guilt, which is a temporal matter.

This however does not mean that repetition in itself is impossible. It is of course possible to find a sense of equilibrium based on new terms. Nevertheless, it generally depends on the particular individual's self-relation, and in the case of the young man this would be through repentance. So, in the following section, we shall further elaborate on the subject of repentance and other movements in regards to the concept of decentering, in addition to examining the important matter of being able to understand patients' crises and internal processes.

6. *Interpolation II*

1. Above the overall failed attempts at repetition, as well as Constantin's unsuccessful therapeutic endeavor were interpreted. As MBCT emphasizes, therapists ought to be governed by the same principles demanded of their patients, specifically because of the difficulty describing and communicating the processes in words. In Kierkegaard's vocabulary, this presupposes the proficiency of indirect communication if successful. To be fair, Constantin to some extent acts in accordance with this principle by confessing his ability to circumnavigate himself but inability to transcendence himself. He therefore cannot guide his patient efficiently. In contrast, another 'amateur psychologist', the judge from E/O II who has been brought up

a few times, appears to understand the transcendence of repentance, yet he does not fully appreciate his patient's condition.

The judge provides some guidance to his patient 'Aesthetic A' (who may well be the young man from Rep) about the importance of repenting as a means to overcome the despair of an aesthetic life style. Being able to repent himself, the judge presumably embodies what Constantin is bereft of. What he does not entirely realize however, is the great difference between his personal condition and the condition of Aesthetic A. Contrary to Aesthetic A, the young man or Constantin, the judge finds himself cozily situated within his community and at the level of the societal. He therefore has no problem repenting, or performing his social duties, or dedicating himself to the ethical sphere of marriage, and so forth. In contrast, Aesthetic A is situated outside his community and beneath the societal. The immediacy that once was bestowed him, namely the internal balance where the societal corresponds to social reality has obviously been breached by his crisis. In FaT, Kierkegaard points out that "*The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed.*" (FaT, 1983 p. 82)²¹ Here the ethical and the universal interpreted as social reality and the societal, respectively, are in agreement within the harmonious self, whereas the lack of disclosure reveals the misrelation and two-mindedness of despair.

So in a way the judge does not fully empathize with Aesthetic A's dilemma. He may be more competent than Constantin in describing and communicating the process of repentance, but from a condition that is in harmony with his own societal ideals, which in turn conforms to social reality. As such, MBCT further assumption (besides instructors following the same principles as their patients) that '*... minds tend to operate in similar ways, and there is no basis for discriminating between the minds of those seeking help and those offering it...*' is not entirely true in this context. Minds may operate in similar ways, but the operations are surely founded by different circumstances and therefore relative to the quality of the different types of self-relation. And it is the particular quality of the

²¹ "*Det Ethiske er som saadant det Almene, som det Almene er det igjen det Aabenbare.*" (FaT, SKS p. 86).

relating factor that is in question here. So, given Constantin's personal position within the aesthetic sphere, he is more suited to understand the young man's condition in regards to the difficulty of transcendence, repentance and repetition. Conversely, the judge may well be able to perform these movements but unfit to understand Aesthetic A's misrelation. In other words, the judge has nothing serious to repent. Consequently, even if minds operate in similar ways, the chasm between the different self-relating factors while performing identical operations is noticeable and cannot be understated.

2. The problem of repenting as regards to despair is that repentance actually represents two movements in one, which the judge indicates while emphasizing the importance of individual choice. He states that

The true concrete choice is the one by which I choose myself back into the world the very same moment I choose myself out of the world. That is, when repenting I choose myself, I collect myself in all my finite concretion, and when I have thus chosen myself out of the finite in this way, I am in the most absolute continuity with it.²²

In MBCT terms, repentance covers the movement of decentering. It is a decentering from finitude, and in regards to the despaired individual, it presupposes the acceptance of a breach to the societal. Repentance also presupposes the impossibility of ever realizing societal ideals from within that breached position. Yet, something that seems explicitly wanting in MBCT literature, but made clear by above citation, is a recentering movement. Repentance is also a recentering movement because its recognition of socio-ethical customs – in the young man's case, duty – grants the return to social reality and restoration. However, this return is an absurdity which the despaired individual must accept. It is absurd, because rationality no longer prevails as a means to close the breach, provided that the rational thing to do is to solve the crisis. On

²² E/O II, 1987 p. 249 ”Det sande concrete Valg er det, hvorved jeg i samme Øieblik som jeg vælger mig ud af Verden, vælger mig tilbage i Verden. Naar jeg nemlig angrende vælger mig selv, saa samler jeg mig selv i hele min endelige Concretion, og idet jeg saaledes har valgt mig selv ud af Endeligheden, er jeg i den absoluteste Continuitet med denne.”(E/O II, SKS p. 259).

top of this, rationality would invalidate the first decentering movement of accepting the breached position. In another sense, this movement is absurd when seen from the perspective of a misrelation, for even if the despaired individual accepts the societal breach, he is blamed by the very mechanism that caused the breach. As notated before, the societal ‘*continually holds the sword of judgment over him and asks, “Why do you want to be an outsider?” And even if he says, “It is not my fault”, it still blames him for it and demands itself of him.*’ Whichever way one perceives this absurdity, the fact of the matter is that closing the breach is a transcending movement, or a leap of faith, because no guaranty is given when repenting.

This absurdity is somewhat present in MBCT literature, in the form of the *paradox* of letting go of goals as a means of monitoring success while continuing to practice mindfulness regularly. Yet this paradox mainly involves the goals of finitude, even if these goals are disregarded in the decentering process. Consequently, the purpose of infinitude is overlooked. Infinitudes purpose is for the individual to meaningfully return to the absurd or hopeless reality of finitude. It is to recenter while finding meaning within the ‘meaningless’ reality that called for decentering. In other words, when recentering, the individual provides significance to his crisis and to his illness, irrespective of the possibility of recovery.²³ All of this and the following description is generalized by ‘infinitude’s double movement’, where ‘*the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process.*’ So, while MBCT instructors would suggest that the young man should accept the decentering paradox of letting go of finitudes goals of overcoming his crisis, in the process of treating it; a Kierkegaardian advice to the despaired MBCT patient may furthermore be to accept the recentering paradox of retaining infinitudes

²³ Yoon et al.’s study (Yoon et al, 2010) suggests that timing of distraction (as a form of decentering) is significant in regards to a positive outcome. Distraction followed by rumination produced more positive outcome than rumination followed by distraction. This begs the question to whether there are more features to the movement of decentering. More importantly, it may be central in providing a method of recentering, since the former type of distraction presupposes a return to finitude. The patient’s finitude being one of rumination.

goal, that this illness is meaningful enough to return to, *also in the process of treating it.*

3. As construed, repentance differs from other inward movements in that it also covers a recentering movement – the finitizing process. It also follows from above that supposing an already meaningful relation to social reality would not be as demanding to the repenting individual. It is therefore probable that the type of decentering that repentance offers is more suitable for reflexive individuals that have a greater breach to the societal. We saw above that the young man entertained this possibility, although he did not retain it. However, an assumption of diverse individual traits requires an introduction of diverse decentering or infinitizing movements. One is *resignation* (Resignation). Resignation is a movement equal to the infinitizing movement of repentance, but has another purpose. Whereas the repenting individual reluctantly accepts the societal in order to admit his guilt, the resigning individual reluctantly renounces the societal in order to perform his duty.

In FaT Kierkegaard illustrates the movement of resignation, when seen from different circumstances and different qualities of self-relation. This is among other shown from Abraham's and the merman's point of view. Abraham is above the societal and his community because his duty consists in following God's bidding, whereas the merman is beneath the societal due to the same ethical problems suffered by the young man. Contrary to Abraham, whose resignation is a consequence of his sacrifice, the merman would not benefit from resignation. The outcome of Abraham's resignation is winning back Isaac, which he was not promised. He thus returns to the societal giving it the greatest amount of significance as a result of his sacrifice.

On the other hand, the merman's breached immediacy is in discordance to the societal, and so performing the movement of resignation would be superfluous. In fact, a despaired individual would be more than willing to 'resign' and could probably do this with ease, for he recognizes the relativism of the social reality he has already left behind. So owing to his own internal breach he is free to resign, as it

were. But because this resignation is not reluctant, it is abstract and to no internal avail. Resignation by the despaired individual demands no responsibility before social reality nor does it demand humility while facing his guilt. The difficult task for the despaired individual would therefore be the finitizing movement, the return to social reality, because it demands transcendence of selfhood. This transcendence is the same finitizing movement of repentance – the return to finitude by virtue of the absurd.

Conversely, the infinitizing movements of resignation or decentering are far more demanding for the individual that has no breach to speak of, and to a certain degree still resides within the societal. This individual would be all too keen to return to social reality, for he has yet to experience the relativism of that reality. This may be a reason why public exposition as a means to confront social anxiety works for some and not for others. To some extent it depends on whether the individual is at the level of the societal or beneath it, although it probably would trigger anxiety in both parties. If the individual still resides within the societal the effort should work despite challenges. Firstly, because there would be no great difference between the individual's societal ideal and social reality. But more importantly, his renouncement of the societal is reluctant. So, the experiential avoidance of anxiety that is triggered by social situations may be painful to endure; however the difficult emotion (the societal) and the triggering situation (social reality) are more in tune with each other, thereby desensitizing the individual when exposed.

If the individual is beneath the societal his success in overcoming experiential avoidance is unlikely. Since his breach to the societal is not reluctant, the avoidance would be contained within his infinitized position unable to reach the temporality of social reality. No amount of exposition would dim his anxiety unless he reluctantly accepts the societal. In time the former individual's exposition will assist him in returning to social reality, whereas the latter individual would simply

learn how to control his reluctance towards the societal, thusly control his anxiety.

Concluding remarks

The conclusion of Interpolation II and the paper in general is that repetition is the goal of infinitudes double movements, because it is a mode of being that presupposes the ability to infinitize *and* finitize the self. Some individuals find it difficult to infinitize the self, seeing as it expands the painful gap to immediacy. Others, similar to the young man, find it difficult to finitize the self, seeing as it painfully reduces the gap to the societal. The former difficulty is something MBCT is aware of when instructing decentering exercises. Decentering is painful, but permits pain for the greater good. In any case, it is less painful than suffering the consequences of rumination. MBCT is therefore probably right in their assessment that the ability to decenter is the successful ingredient in CT. Yet, it may just as well be the ability to recenter that promotes recovery. To change ones perspective on thoughts and feelings involves the ability to ‘stand back’ from the former perspective, but a new perspective can only *come to be* by ‘stepping up’.

This appears to be what the young man lacks. In the context of his situation, he seems capable of standing back, but unable to finitize his ‘evaluations’ concerning the young girl, which is why any evaluation he might end up with is just as likely as another. The individual, who can switch to a perspective where the accuracy of negative thoughts is evaluated, is not necessarily able to provide significance to his evaluation, thus following it. The young man remains therefore in recollection until significance comes from without: the young girl remarrying. So standing back and understanding that thoughts and feelings are not necessarily true may not be the entire story. Briefly speaking, the individual may be able to stand back, accept the pain, see thoughts as no more than thoughts, but unable to synthesize this perspective into an existential whole. This of course was not the primary intention of MBCT, yet it could be fruitful if not ethically justifiable to venture into this realm.

In decentering or recentering it is therefore most likely the intention of the movement (in relation to the ‘center’) that is important. The movements have to be meaningful somehow, since decentering in itself does no more than detach from content. And even if the contents may not be necessarily true, it could still be meaningful to the individual. In fact, a false content may indeed be more meaningful to the individual than a true content. As a consequence, if there is such a thing as recentering, it presumably resides within being mode’s invitational approach (kindly awareness, accepting, allowing and welcoming) through which a return would be meaningful. Contrary to the explicitness of decentering within being mode, which is probably a more significant movement for most individuals; making a recentering movement explicit could just as well benefit highly reflective individuals such as the young man. Of course, there are different types of invitational approaches, which could complicate matters. For instance, the invitational approach of forgiving oneself seems more passive than repenting. Yet some times to achieve forgiveness, one may be forced to repent. The young man was given the former from without, but essentially needed to perform the latter from within.

On a final note; these conclusions are of course on the basis of an interpolation of very different topics that are Kierkegaard’s psychological writings and empirically based therapy. In regards to Kierkegaard, I have principally omitted his religious convictions and their constitution within infinitudes movement. As a psychological case study, I believe it could go no other way. However, omitting religious presuppositions is actually close to the way mindfulness originally was put into practice by CT. The beliefs, values and exercises are Buddhist in origin, but have been altered to fit a western society. As such, it may actually be easier to interpret inner movements through more acquainted sources as Kierkegaard.

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