

## KIERKEGAARD HIER AND AUJOUR’HUI

### THE AGES OF LIFE: CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, AND ADULTHOOD

LUIS GUERRERO

If an observer will only pay attention to himself, he will have enough with five men, five women, and ten children for the discovery of all possible states of the human soul.<sup>1</sup>

Vigilius Haufniensis

Erloschen sind die heitern Sonnen,  
Die meiner Jugend Pfad erhellt,  
Die Ideale sind zerronnen,  
Die einst das trunkne Herz geschwellt,  
Er ist dahin, der süße Glaube  
An Wesen, die mein Traum gebar,  
Der rauhen Wirklichkeit zum Raube,  
Was einst so schön, so göttlich war.<sup>2</sup>

Friedrich Schiller

**Abstract.** This paper recollects a topic that is very present through Kierkegaard’s works: the reflections about the ages of life, childhood, youth and adulthood-old age. It highlights a continuity in the position on this issue despite the diversity of Kierkegaardian pseudonyms and their divergent positions. Childhood is seen as a time of innocence, unconsciousness and immediacy; youth, the age more appreciated by Kierkegaard, because of its openness to the demands of life and momentum to face life; adulthood-old age as a more psychological than chronological attitude, where people tend to settle down in the world, retaining the existential purposes they once had, thus returning to an unconsciousness of the spirit.

**Key words:** childhood, youth, adulthood, ages, life.

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<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 393

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, F., *Poesía filosófica*, Hiperión. Madrid, 1998.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, numerous studies have been written about Kierkegaard. Some of these studies are supported on better hermeneutic elements than others; that is, they do not only refer to the internal net of the works (pseudonyms, *papirer* and works signed by Kierkegaard) but also to external elements such as intellectual influences, historical background, cultural traditions, etc. Even the use of modern information technologies has helped in many researches. These elements have brought up the role of indirect communication and Kierkegaard's irony in the works. They show the difficulty of referring to Kierkegaard's thought when identifying it with one of the pseudonymous writers or when quoting indistinctively from several works.

However, these elements do not alter the fact that it is possible to find concepts that appear in all of Kierkegaard's works and that show an originality which cannot be reduced to the context. The study of his works cannot be simplified to the review of some determined works. Otherwise we would lose the richness of those concepts that can only be appreciated in the whole. I think this is the case concerning his reflexions on the ages of life: childhood, youth and adulthood. Kierkegaard was an acute observer of human nature, of the anthropological and psychological motives of daily life.

One can hardly find any references in Kierkegaard's works (whether pseudonymous or not) which are not closely related to the main idea of the work at hand. His observations, descriptions, and examples actually refer to the reality he is pointing out, and they also help to get brilliant details about specific topics. This is true, as well, of his multiple considerations about the ages of life: one can see the main elements of his thought and his idea of the human being. My purpose in this paper is to show the main characteristics of these ages, as well as to give some patterns of interpretation for their analysis.

For Kierkegaard, man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical united by the spirit.<sup>3</sup> These extremes are studied in their different categories depending on the work or the pseudonymous author: possibility/necessity, finitude/infinity, temporal/eternal.<sup>4</sup> Each man's task is to become a self through his spirituality, to determine the self qualitatively as spirit; this is the central topic of his thought. Although human beings essentially have the same constitution,<sup>5</sup> secondarily man

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 315.

<sup>4</sup> Though each one of these determinabilities is important in order to understand the ages of life, I consider the synthesis of the psychical and the physical and the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal to be more relevant for this study. See the chapter called *Lo constitutivo en el hombre: el yo como síntesis*, in my book *Kierkegaard: Los límites de la razón en la existencia humana*, Publicaciones Cruz, México, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> "Nevertheless, the difference is not such that man and woman are not essentially alike despite the dissimilarity." *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 334.

has some quantitative determinabilities such as sex, age, talents, genetic traits, etc., which are not the key for the qualitative determinability, but provide the richness and psychological diversity of human beings and at the same time reflect the degree of spirituality they have reached.<sup>6</sup>

The ages of life show the quantitative determinabilities concerning temporality; in other words, the psychological way in which an individual can adopt his or her own spirit—depending on his or her age. In general terms, childhood is a dreaming state of the spirit; youth is the awakening and the approachment to the spiritual; and adulthood is the contrast between the gravity of life and the gradual withdrawal from the spiritual. Passion, inwardness, anxiety, and despair are different depending on the age.

When analyzing the quantitative determinabilities, like in this case with the ages of life, one has to consider that these are just general approximations and that there might be exceptions. Kierkegaard cautiously notes this; otherwise we would get close to a determinism that would shut the door to freedom.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, for instance, youth does not necessarily correspond to an individual's chronological age but to his psychological state concerning illusions and passion towards life. There are elderly people who keep themselves young and young people who were never near the spirit.<sup>8</sup>

It is also important to take in consideration that, according to the context, the analysis of the different ages made by the pseudonymous authors and Kierkegaard himself refer, in some cases, to what generally happens to the individuals in that age; in another case, to what would be ideal in an individual of certain age; in yet another instance, to the false conceptions of certain age;<sup>9</sup> another time, he just considers the temporal aspect, and finally in another case, the temporal united to the spirit.<sup>10</sup>

The topic of the different ages in life is a good example of the parallelism that the pseudonymous authors have in some matters. In this paper, I will consider Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*; Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety*; Johannes Climacus in *The Postscript*; Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness*

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 162.

<sup>7</sup> "And now the differences between human beings! How infinite! If it were not so, then humanity would be degraded, because humanity's superiority over animals is not only the one most often mentioned, the universally human, but is also what is most often forgotten, that within the species each individual is the essentially different or distinctive." *Works of Love*, SV IX 220.

<sup>8</sup> "This is not the case, even though one may be foolish enough to believe it. On the contrary, we can often enough meet men and women and older people who have illusions just as childish as any young person's." *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 170.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Works of Love*, SV IX 239. *The Sickness unto Death*, SV XI 170.

<sup>10</sup> "Generally it is thought that there is a certain age that is especially rich in hope, or we say that at a certain time, at a particular moment of life one is or was so rich in hope and possibility. All this, however, is merely a human manner of speaking that does not get at the truth; all this hope and all this despair are as yet neither authentic hope nor authentic despair." *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 150.

*Unto Death*; as well as Kierkegaard himself in some of his works and some entries of the Journals.

Each one of them, with their own personality and position, pose different and particular questions. However, all of them – in the whole of their references – have a very similar anthropological basis which may complement each other. This is the case with the ages of life: the psychological basis is the same, and one can find parallel texts in several works.

In spite of this parallelism, however, it is useful to understand the context and specific purpose of each author in order to understand some nuances within the texts.

Now I will describe each age keeping in mind what I have just said.

## 2. CHILDHOOD

In order to understand a child's way of being in the context of the philosophical anthropology, we must remember that the pseudonymous authors and Kierkegaard agree in defining man as a synthesis of the psychical and the physical united by the spirit; in the child this dialectical structure is present, but the spirit is as if in a dreaming state, so there is a peculiar dialectic in childhood. One cannot, in any way, say that the spirit is not present in the child, "In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man."<sup>11</sup> The spirit is present, but it is also in a remote corner of its reality. Vigilius Haufniensis, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, calls this state a pleasant anxiety. In a sense, the spirit is a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relationship between soul and body, but at the same time it is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relationship. It cannot relate itself to itself nor do away with itself.<sup>12</sup>

A journey from innocence, which is the unconsciousness of what it means to exist, starts with birth. As time goes by, and depending on man's own will, it turns to an existentially spiritual life. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard mentions this initial relationship:

Since a human being, even from the moment of birth, is spirit, he still does not become conscious of himself as spirit until later and thus has sensately-psychically acted out a certain part of his life prior to his. But this first portion is not to be cast aside when the

<sup>11</sup> "Because we are entitled only to assume that the eternal is present in the child potentially, not to demand it of him as of the adult, for whom it holds that he is meant to have it." *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 315.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 315.

spirit awakens any more than awakening of the spirit in contrast to the sensate-psychical announces itself in a sensate-psychical way.<sup>13</sup>

In his essay of experimental psychology (*A venture in experimenting psychology*), Constantin Constantius gives an example of this childish attitude: once he saw on the street a nursemaid pushing a baby carriage with two children. The oldest child who was about two years old had pushed herself to the front of the carriage and took up a good two-thirds of the space, and paid no attention to the baby next to her, much younger than she was, or to anything else. When a cart came speeding along, the baby carriage was in danger; people ran toward it, and with a swift turn the nursemaid pushed it into a doorway. All the by-standers were apprehensive. The two-year-old, however, was quiet and busy with her childish interests. When reflecting on this facts, Constantin Constantius comes up to the conclusion of a childish unconcern: selfish unconcern towards the little sister and unconscious unconcern toward danger.<sup>14</sup>

Childhood is the farthest extreme from spirit, and it is what is closer to the merely natural. "There is something in a child and a youth which belongs to them so naturally that one must say that God himself has willed them to be that way. In essence, the child and the youth are only psychically qualified, neither more nor less."<sup>15</sup> The most characteristic element of this natural life is immediacy, which expresses itself by the almost total absence of reflexion (meditation) and, therefore, by the control of the sensate over the psychical and the spiritual.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Concept of Anxiety* we can find the notion of innocence with constant references to childhood. Innocence is based upon the dreaming spirit which is far away from the consciousness of its own dialectical structure, far away also from its freedom, and therefore, from guilt. Though we should distinguish between children's innocence and Adam's innocence, a child's innocence is a kind of beatific state that keeps it away from evil. In *Works of Love* there is a short account that shows the innocent behavior of a child:

Put a child in a den of thieves (but the child must not remain there so long that it is corrupted itself); that is, let it remain there only for a very brief time. Then let it come home and tell everything it has experienced. You will note that the child, who is a good observer and has an excellent memory (as does every child), will tell everything in the greatest detail, yet in such a way that in a certain sense the most important is omitted. Therefore someone who does not know that the child has been among thieves would least suspect it on the basis of the child's story. What is it then, that the child leaves out, what is it that the child

<sup>13</sup> *Works of Love*, SV IX 201.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Repetition* III 210.

<sup>15</sup> Pap. VIII 1 A 663.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pap. VIII 1 A 649.

has not discovered? It is evil. Yet the child's story about what it has seen and heard is entirely accurate. What, then, does the child lack? What is it that so often makes a child's story the most profound mockery of the adults? It is knowledge of evil, that the child lacks knowledge of evil, that the child does not even feel inclined to want to be knowledgeable about evil.<sup>17</sup>

This innocent beatitude is present during sleep, since sleeping is an expression of the absence of spirit, whose vigilant presence is not demanded, "Whereas the child is more beautiful in sleep."<sup>18</sup> That is why when he wakes up, he does with a celestial smile.<sup>19</sup>

Ignorance is closely related to innocence.<sup>20</sup> First of all, an ignorance of what his own identity is, because "it takes a long time for a child to learn to distinguish itself from objects and an equally long time to disengage itself from its surroundings."<sup>21</sup> This psychical ignorance is shown in the imperfect form of childish language that gives names to the objects repeating them as in a book of stamps.<sup>22</sup> But this ignorance also has a deeper sense as ignorance qualified by spirit. This is the case of modesty. Modesty is a presence of the spirit that faces an ignorance of something that is there with its demands, but ignoring it at the same time.<sup>23</sup>

The child faces the world in a childish way through fantasy.

For what the powerful cannot persuade the man of, the child with his cunning is able to persuade him, and what the adult with all his might is unable to torment out of actuality, the child gets from it richly and in superabundance.<sup>24</sup>

It is through this fantasy that the child can let in, in his way and with the typical urge for adventure, the anxiety present in every human being, inventing monstrous or enigmatic things.

Due to his innocence, which has not had time to deceive or be deceived about what it perceives, the child has a kind of clairvoyance and honesty. "There is also a proverb which says: "One hears the truth from children and the insane. " Here it is certainly not a question of having truth according to premises and conclusions; but how often have not the words of a child or an insane person thundered at the man who would not listen to an intellectual genius?"<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Works of Love*, SV IX 272-273.

<sup>18</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 335. Cfr. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 314.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pap. II A 320.

<sup>20</sup> "Innocence is ignorance". *The Concept of Anxiety* SV IV 378. See also *The Concept of Anxiety* SV IV 338.

<sup>21</sup> Pap. I A 75.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 317.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 338.

<sup>24</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 314.

<sup>25</sup> Pap. I A 75.

From a spiritual perspective (qualitative but not quantitative) the child awakens from the childish dream with sin because “innocence is lost only by guilt.”<sup>26</sup> This is also the deep sense of ignorance. The great difference between a child and an adult, as shown in *The Sickness unto Death*, is that in a child ignorance is absence of sin, and in the adult ignorance is a very specific way of being in sin.<sup>27</sup> Vigilius Haufniensis, concerning the loss of innocence, mentions a mistake when considering sin in children; namely, to think that they are angels and that it is the environment that corrupts them, believing that they are neither good nor bad, since company determines their behavior. The mistake is to consider decision an external factor and not an internal factor within every child. In *The Expectancy of Faith*, Kierkegaard gives an example of the individual personality of every child:

For example, if two children were brought up together and always shared the same things in such a way that when one was singled out for distinction, the other was also, when one was reprimanded, the other was also, when one was punished, the other was also, they could still learn altogether different things. The one could learn not to be proud every time he was singled out for distinction, to humble himself under admonition every time he was reprimanded, to let himself be healed by suffering every time he was punished; the other could learn to be haughty every time he was singled out for distinction, to be indignant every time he was reprimanded, to store up secret anger every time he was punished.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding education, Kierkegaard has two very interesting ideas, keeping in mind that the child has spirit, but that it is in the happy dreaming innocent stage. In the first place, the child should not be exposed to evil or to anguish about the future, etc., as a way of education; one can see this in the following quotation: “If a child were told that to break a leg is a sin, in what anxiety he would then live, and he would probably break it more often and even regard coming close to it as a sin.”<sup>29</sup> Or as it is also said in the Journals, we should not frighten children about the future: “Those daily assurances, “You are happy now, but wait until you are older – then the troubles will come,” etc.”<sup>30</sup> It is senseless trying to awaken the child's spirituality. Otherwise, we would deserve Mathew's admonition: “Woe to the man that brings scandal to the world!”<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, the good educator should look

<sup>26</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 308. “But innocence is always lost only by the qualitative leap of the individual.” *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 309.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *The Sickness unto Death*. The Despair That Is Ignorant of Being Despair, or the Despairing Ignorance of Having a Self and an Eternal Self. XI 155.

<sup>28</sup> *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, The Expectancy of Faith, SV III 28.

<sup>29</sup> Pap. VI A 105. Cf. Pap. VIII 1 A 499.

<sup>30</sup> Pap. II A 12.

<sup>31</sup> Mt. XVIII, 7. However, there are different entries of the Papirer that promote a rigid education in christianity; for example Pap. VIII 1 A 663.

for the closest category to the spirit, such as reflection, but at the same time, try to surpass the naturally childish qualities. This can be done through the natural impulse of asking and knowing in the child; this would be a socratic way of education, using questions so that the child, little by little, far from being corrected by the teacher, has the feeling of being able to discover what things are by himself. Vigilius Haufniensis says:

The art is that of constantly being present, and yet not being present, so that the child may be allowed to develop himself, and at the same time one still has a clear view of the development. The art is to leave the child to himself in the very highest degree and on the greatest possible scale, and to express this apparent relinquishing in such a way that unnoticed, one is aware of everything.<sup>32</sup>

There are several references in different works, sometimes with an autobiographical tone, about the children who have an extraordinary childhood. In essence, a nature of this kind leaves very soon the state of immediacy to get to a state of reflection, and can easily constitute itself as a spirit. There is an entry in the Journals that tells us the advantages and disadvantages of such a childhood.

Naturally the exceptions have a very unhappy childhood and youth, for to be essentially reflective at that age, which by nature is spontaneous or immediate, is the most profound melancholy. But there is a return. Most people drift on in such a way they never become spirit; all their many happy years of immediacy tend toward spiritual retardation and therefore they never become spirit. But the unhappy childhood and youth of the exceptions are transfigured into spirit.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. YOUTH

There are many texts that join childhood and youth giving common characteristics for those ages, and distinguishing them from adulthood.<sup>34</sup> However, these two ages are different concerning their anthropological synthesis. In fact, youth is the psychological state more valuable in man to Kierkegaard, because it is the one that is naturally closer to spirit. There is an idea repeated, with some differences, in several works: Kierkegaard was convinced that Socrates realized that, unlike mature men, the youth was more open for the things of the spirit. In *Works of Love* he says, talking about Socrates:

<sup>32</sup> *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV 393.

<sup>33</sup> Pap. VIII 1 A 649.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Pap. VIII 1 A 649, X 2 A 97. *Works of Love*, SV IX 239.



Was it not because he perceived that young people still had a receptivity for the divine, which is so easily lost over the years in wheeling and dealing, in erotic love and friendship, in subjection to a merely human judgment and to the demands of the times!<sup>35</sup>

Anti-Climacus, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, criticizing what life becomes with the passing of the years states: "This improved-condition, which, to be sure, has come with the years, he now in despair considers a good thing (...) Why, I wonder, did Socrates love youth if it was not because he knew man!"<sup>36</sup> We also find in the Journals the following note: "Socrates loved young men, and why? Because there is a breath of the infinite in them, and it was this he wished to preserve."<sup>37</sup>

Spirit, which was in a dreaming state during childhood, awakes with the youth. This awakening is ordinarily more transparent, without the vices that can be acquired with time. Why is it so? Kierkegaard and the pseudonymous authors consider human life as a time of trial, where existential dialectic cannot be solved definitely, and the spirit has to continually face a world dominated by immediacy. The youth is able to more or less notice this state of things and has the illusion and the hope of facing life with courage and wants to carry out great deeds.<sup>38</sup> But as time goes by, the danger of losing passion and struggle and of choosing a comfortable worldly life is present.<sup>39</sup>

From a psychological point of view, youth is not just an awakening, which means being aware of our being and reality; it is also a consciousness of a life ahead, of being a person that has to be determined and that one can be determined by oneself; a world of possibilities is open. "The youth has illusions, hopes for something extraordinary from life and from himself."<sup>40</sup> And although most of these hopes are temporal and not eternal possibilities, it is easier to find the possibility to the eternal.<sup>41</sup>

There is an idea in the *Postscript* that agrees with this view of youth. It is used against Hegel's philosophy. When a youth enough doubting personality gets to philosophical matters of existence and studies Hegel, he will not find what he looks for. He will find in the System a very quick answer that does not solve satisfactorily the problems.

<sup>35</sup> *Works of Love*, SV IX 124.

<sup>36</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 171.

<sup>37</sup> Pap. XI A 591.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. Pap. XI A 239.

<sup>39</sup> "It goes with the race as with the individual; the older it becomes the more apparent becomes the corruption residing in it - youth conceals much and mitigates much." Pap. XI I A 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 170. Cf. Pap. I A 72.

<sup>41</sup> "The youth despairs over the future as the present in futuro; there is something in the future that he is not willing to take upon himself, and therefore he does not will to be himself." *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 171.

Therefore, something terrible can happen to Hegel's philosophy – an indirect attack can be the most dangerous. Let a doubting youth, but an existing doubter with youth's lovable, boundless confidence in a hero of scientific scholarship, venture to find in Hegelian positivity the truth for existence – He will write a dreadful epigram on Hegel. (...) The Youth is an existing doubter; continually suspended in doubt, he grasps for the truth -so that he can exist in it. Consequently, he is negative, and Hegel's philosophy is, of course, positive – no wonder he puts his trust in it. But for an existing person, pure thinking is a chimera when the truth is supposed to be the truth in which to exist.<sup>42</sup>

Though there are some texts that position the youth in the category of the immediate, in this sense, the youth has not advanced qualitatively in comparison to the child; the youth has the privilege of being psychologically constituted as possibility, a key characteristic for Vigilius Haufniensis; as passion, a key characteristic for Johannes de Silentio; as inwardness, a key characteristic for Johannes Climacus; as inwardness, a key characteristic for Anti-Climacus; and open to the essence of the divine, a key characteristic for Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*.

The man's task is, definitely, to awake the spirit and keep himself young throughout his life.

#### 4. ADULTHOOD

Once we have understood the youth's psychology and courage, it is logical to understand Kierkegaard's and the pseudonymous authors' critical tone concerning adulthood. Just as youth is the age of opening, adulthood is the age of the closing of the spirit.

On the contrary, it is very easy to leave something behind as a matter of course over the years. And over the years, an individual may abandon the little bit of passion, feeling, imagination, the little bit of inwardness he had and embrace, as a matter of course, an understanding of life in terms of trivialities (for such things come as a matter of course). This – improved – condition, which to be sure, has come with the years, he now, in despair, considers a good thing.<sup>43</sup>

What usually happens to those that lose their internal youth can be called a frantic wish of settling in the world, of having everything under control; they are in the school where “he learns to copy others, how they manage their lives.”<sup>44</sup> This

<sup>42</sup> *Postscript*, SV VII 266.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 171.

<sup>44</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 165.

way of seeing things change the image of the youth, which is now considered an age that has been properly overcome by adulthood. “The adult, of course, is not troubled by the illusion of hope but instead by the quaint illusion, among others, of looking down on the illusions of youth, presumably from a higher point free of illusion.”<sup>45</sup>

The ideals of the youth are just that – “ideals of the youth”.

With this confusion about existence, man cannot become a spirit because it has become numb by the worries of the world. It is then considered a successful existence that which knows the art of living, which means knowing how to get on with immediacy.

As stated, this despair is the most common, so common that this alone explains the common notion that despair is part of being young, something that appears only in the early years but is not found in the mature person who has reached the age of discretion. This is a desperate error or, more correctly, a desperate mistake that disregards – yes, and what is even worse, it disregards the fact that what it disregards is almost the best that can be said about people, because very often something far worse happens – it disregards the fact that, fundamentally, most people virtually never advance beyond what they were in their childhood and youth: immediacy with the mixture of a little dash of reflection.<sup>46</sup>

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus anthropologically explains this phenomenon of adulthood. Contrary to what we would think, the adult does not progress naturally. He needs a decided effort to live in spiritual categories. The text says:

In the life of the spirit there is no standing still (really no state, either; everything is acted upon); therefore, if a person does not do what is right at the very second he knows it – then, first of all, knowing simmers down. Next comes the question of how willing appraises what is known. Willing is dialectical and has under it the entire lower nature of man. If willing does not agree with what is known, then it does not necessarily follow that willing goes ahead and does the opposite of what knowing understood (presumably such strong opposites are rare); rather, willing allows some time to elapse, an interim called: “We shall look at it tomorrow.” During all this, knowing becomes more and more obscure, and the lower nature gains the upper hand more and more.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 170.

<sup>46</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 169-170.

<sup>47</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 205. Cf. *Works of Love*

As I have mentioned, existence is understood as a time of trial, where the spirit has to walk past the temporal and the immediate,<sup>48</sup> otherwise temporality and immediacy would continually win over spirituality leaving man stuck in a worldly life.

The mistaken notion that despair belongs only to youth is also desperate and despairing in quite another way. Moreover, it is very foolish and simply shows a lack of judgment as to what spirit is – along with a failure to appreciate that man is spirit and not merely an animal – to think that faith and wisdom come that easily, that they come as a matter of course over the years like teeth, a beard, etc. No, whatever a man may arrive at as a matter of course, whatever things may come as a matter of course – faith and wisdom are definitely not among them. As a matter of fact, from a spiritual point of view, a man does not arrive at anything as a matter of course over the years; this concept is precisely the uttermost opposite of spirit.<sup>49</sup>

For example, in a situation when a youth despairs -in part he despairs because of that opening when facing his dialectical being- an adult tries to overcome despair, forgetting the problem; Anti-Climacus says:

Ideally understood, it is extremely comical that underlying the worldly wisdom that is so celebrated in the world, underlying all that diabolical profusion of good advice and clever clichés – “Wait and see,” “Don’t worry,” “Forget it” – There is utter stupidity about where and what the danger actually is.<sup>50</sup>

When considering the impossibility of repetition of those things that once were pleasant, and from a rather nihilistic perspective, Constantin Constantius concludes that with the passing of time, human beings become more demanding, less obliging, and, therefore, more unhappy. “The older a person grows, the more he understands life and the more he relishes the amenities and is able to appreciate them – in short, the more competent one becomes, the less satisfied one is. Satisfied, completely, absolutely satisfied in every way, this one never is, and to be more or less satisfied is not worth the trouble, so it is better to be completely dissatisfied. Anyone who has painstakingly pondered the matter will certainly agree with me that it has never been granted to a human being in his whole life, not even for as much as a half hour, to be absolutely satisfied in every conceivable way.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, The Expectancy of Faith, SV III 25.

<sup>49</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 170.

<sup>50</sup> *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 169.

<sup>51</sup> *Repetition* III 210.

This criticism against adulthood refers only to those that live worldly; the old man that is faithful to the spirit is the one that keeps himself young.<sup>52</sup> It is important to note this, so that we do not think that the quantitative flow of time produces an irremediable qualitative category. In *Fear and Trembling* there is a text that criticizes the aging. It gives us the idea about youth being an existence fighting in the trial of becoming a spirit:

It was different in those ancient days. Faith was then a task for a whole lifetime, because it was assumed that proficiency in believing is not acquired either in days or in weeks. When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth, that the adult learned to control, but that no man outgrows – except to the extent that he succeeds in going further as early as possible.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> "This is not the case, even though one may be foolish enough to believe it. On the contrary, we can often enough meet men and women and older people who have illusions just as childish as any young person's. (...) This *fui*mus (we have been), which is common to older people, is just as great an illusion as the illusions of young people about the future." *The Sickness Unto Death*, SV XI 170.

<sup>53</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, SV III 59.

