

Seul l'écho / Only The Echo

(Poem by Joël-Claude MEFFRE – Music by Gérard ZINSSTAG)

One of the strong themes of Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological thinking is that of the relationship between **faith** and **doubt** in the area of human subjectivity. A similar situation occurs in area of the emotions, where anxiety (cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*) and despair occupy a central role closely linked to the question of faith.

The poem *Seul l'écho/Only The Echo* presents the faith/doubt dichotomy through metaphor; this duality ("duplexity") is in fact a basis for faith according to Kierkegaard. Hence the question: How could the persistent scream of a human voice hurled against the wall of the desert in the hope that the rebounding echo will contain a sign from God, continue to be repeated, if the echo is nothing but the mechanical, percussive result of the solitary voice? Hence Man's constant oscillation between hope and despair, doubt and desire/the longing for certainty.

Thus the echo of the human cry would appear to be either a sign of the Divine Presence or one of the crushing of that same hope. It resembles a harpoon thrown in the direction of God's silence by Man in the hope it will get caught on Him. In my poem, the echo becomes the messenger of the voice. The wandering trajectory of this echo in the midst of the silence and hustle and bustle of the world leads the human voice to the edge of the abyss of despair and doubt.

This explains the dialogue that now takes place between the echo and the voice until it becomes impossible to distinguish them – the echo of the voice, the voice of the echo – from each other. For the echo has acquired substance, just as consciousness has; it becomes like a reflection of consciousness so as to lead the voice crying for hope further. Here is an explicit reference to the fact that the wish to believe – the desire for God – emerges out of the dissolution of doubt, for doubt saps hope; and that Grace must forcibly go through the test of despair and its transformation into hope. This process, (slow in some cases, sudden in others) is the very ground of the spiritual path.

Therefore there is no hope of advancing towards God without conscious awareness that God Himself is the way, i.e. without experiencing the uncertainty involved in the passage through doubt and all it implies – confusion, illusion, false alarms. And so the voice, its heart racing, sees the return of the echo as something other than the reflection of itself.

This brings us to the heart of the human subjectivity that underpins Kierkegaard's theology. The ego remains locked in its finite nature. The echo of the voice therefore reverberates against the walls of this ego, whilst the human voice constantly cries out for its liberation through into infinity. Until that moment when the patient making his way towards God is given to understand that his own infinity lies within himself, and it is there he must hurl the scream whose echo will not come back to him.