

# Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*. Existence in Motion<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article tries to make sense of the concept of repetition in Søren Kierkegaard's works. According to Kierkegaard repetition is a temporal movement of existence. What is repetition and what is its meaning for human existence? In answering this question the Danish philosopher depicts repetition by comparing three different approaches to life. Throughout the article I try to develop a coherent argument on 'the new philosophical category' by analysing the three types of repetition and their corresponding human prototypes. I consider repetition a key concept in summarizing Kierkegaard's theory of existence, where existence pictures the becoming of the human-self that follows several stages. Constantin Constantius's repetition is an unsuccessful attempt, an aesthetic expression of human-life. The young lover's repetition is spiritual, albeit not yet authentic, religious, but more poetic, even if he regains his self. Only Job's repetition is an authentic movement of existence, an expression of a spiritual trial and of genuine faith.

**Keywords:** Søren Kierkegaard, repetition, recollection, self, existence, motion

In 1843, Søren Kierkegaard published *Repetition*, under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, 'an insane book' (as was designated by the author of *The Concept of Dread*, Virgilius Haufniensis), followed by, in the very same day, the *Fear and Trembling* volume, signed by Johannes de Silentio. After just a few weeks, Kierkegaard published a piece on *The Book of Job* in his *Edifying Discourses* series. The coherence between the three works is hardly fortuitous, a feature emphasized by their topics.

Thus, in *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham, 'the father of faith,' must sacrifice his only son only to get him back later. Between the pages of *Repetition*, we also learn, on the one hand, about Constantin Constantius' voyage in Berlin, undertaken with the hope of retrieving some of the contentment experienced during a previous visit, and on the other hand, we meet the unfortunate case of a young lover who ended the engagement with his fiancée, only to languish over her afterwards. Also, *Repetition* concisely brings up the sufferings of a biblical character, Job.

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As one can easily notice, all the above-mentioned characters are connected by the same underlying tendency, the need to re-experience a previous condition. The degree to which such a reliving (a re-turn) is possible and most of all, finding out whether such a temporal motion is possible, can be achieved only through the ‘new philosophical category’ framed by Kierkegaard through Constantin Constantius’ voice, namely through repetition.

Repetition is one of the most problematic terms found in Kierkegaard’s works. At the beginning of the previous century, Walter Lowrie confessed that one cannot find a more important and, in the same time, more confusing term in Kierkegaard’s writings, as the term repetition (Lowrie 1938, 630). Among other reasons, this confusion is also generated by the merely rigorous manner in which Kierkegaard chooses to approach the discussion on repetition.

As a genre, *Repetition* can be rather described as a love story or a psychological novel; concurrently, the book can be regarded as a diary with inserted letters.<sup>2</sup> Anyhow, Repetition is not an objective philosophical treatise; its reading does not necessarily lead to the elucidation of the concept proposed for inquiry. Nevertheless, one cannot reach the conclusion that *Repetition* is completely deprived of a conceptual framework that could lead to the conclusion that the meaning of the concept remains completely undisclosed.

To all intents and purposes, one could find two different routes for approaching repetition, two modes that will also organize the contents of the following pages. In other words, I identified two alternative routes: a conceptual approach and an experimental one. Examining concepts with already established philosophical grounds, such as the concept of recollection, motion or mediation, connected by Kierkegaard to the idea of repetition, and to the analysis of the existential examples offered by the characters from *Repetition*, should ultimately throw light upon this new philosophical category proposed by Søren Kierkegaard.

Paraphrasing Constantin Constantius, in the following pages, I will try to discover what repetition is, whether it is possible and what its (existential) meaning is. By clarifying these aspects, I will be able to reach some interesting conclusions about the role of repetition in the process of self-becoming, in the light of the three stages of individual existence, proposed by Kierkegaard. Concurrently, I will be able to highlight Kierkegaard’s particular approach of the concept of time.

## 1. Recollection vs Repetition

Constantin Constantius introduces the ‘the new category that will be discovered’ (Kierkegaard 1983, 148), as the author described the concept of repetition, during a rather confusing discussion about motion and recollection in Ancient Greeks:

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<sup>2</sup> Besides, the subtitle of *Repetition* is *A venture in experimental psychology*.

## Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*. Existence in Motion

When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward, because he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them. When I was occupied for some time, at least on occasion, with the question of repetition – whether or not it is possible, what importance it has, whether something gains or losses in being repeated – I suddenly had the thought: You can, after all, take a trip to Berlin; you have been there before, and now you can prove to yourself whether a repetition is possible and what importance it has (Kierkegaard 1983, 131).

After evoking the hilariously ended dispute between Diogenes and the Eleatics, Constantin Constantius confessed that he has been occasionally (thus, rather detached) concerned with this problem, a problem that he preferred not to call motion, but repetition. The natural transition drawn by Constantin from one passage to another leaves us with the impression that the anecdote about Diogenes and the Eleatics and his preoccupation with repetition are concerned with the one and the same thing; a not at all wrong impression, further confirmed by the introduction in the text of the second invoked mention, recollection. "Repetition and recollection are the same motion, except in opposite directions" (Kierkegaard 1983, 131). Could Constantin Constantius have tried an experiment similar to the one employed by Diogenes to convince himself of the possibility of the motion? Hard to say, although it is true that, to test the possibility of repetition, he took a trip to Berlin, a few months after his first, very enjoyable visit to the same city.

If repetition is motion, one has to decide its direction. A useful clue is identifiable hereinafter, following the fragment cited above:

Repetition and recollection are the same motion, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward (Kierkegaard 1983, 131).

Because both are movements, a first step in uncovering the concept of repetition is the act of 'remembering' the meaning of recollection in Greeks. The doctrine of remembrance, introduced by Socrates in the Platonist dialogue *Menon*, has its origin in the following controversial topic:

A man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about he is to enquire (Jowett 1892, 40).

The reasoning thus phrased seems to inhibit any possibility of knowledge or, at least, any learning attempt. Socrates uncovers this paradox, by shifting the focus from the object of knowing on the knowledge itself, more specifically, on understanding the ways in which knowing manifests in the person. Thus, through a series of sequential interrogations, Socrates manages to bring to light a slave's knowledge in Geometry; the kind of knowledge that the slave was never acquainted with and which was thus possessed by his soul since from the beginning. However, they could be brought to light through Socrates' mediating

intervention. Nevertheless, Socrates does not teach Geometry to the slave. He only brings the decisive occasion, thanks to which, Menon's slave reveals his acquired knowledge, either in a forthcoming existence, or knowledge that he had since the beginning, latently manifested in his soul. In this sense, Socrates' conclusion is "... for all enquiry and all learning is but recollection" (Jowett 1892, 40).

What needs to be underlined here, of relevance for the present discussion, is the fact that recollection is a form of knowledge, through which we generally try to find out that "the truth of all things always existed in the soul" (Jowett 1892, 47).

If recollection is a way of knowledge that recuperated a truth that already exists, repetition should recapture a forthcoming truth. What becomes increasingly clear is the fact that the movement proposed by the two forms of knowledge is not one that happens along a 'spatial' axis as it is, in a first denotation, indicated by Diogenes' solution), but one that follows a temporal axis.<sup>3</sup> Remembrance points to a past moment. Anyone who can reach an earlier reality through recollection travels back into the past. In a Platonist acceptance, remembrance indicates a static previous time, unidentifiable and eternal. Repetition, in turn, as a movement opposed to remembering, is directed towards a future time.<sup>4</sup>

However, the act of repetition requires the existence of a 'repeatable,' reactualizing reality; otherwise, repetition would have the meaning of a simple feeling of hope or a planning act. Trying to acknowledge, at this first level, the meaning of repetition in Kierkegaard's vision, I could state that: repetition is that human need of bringing into actuality, of reviving, the joy produced by the presence of an object (broadly defined) or an endeared lost person, at a certain

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in the supplement to the Hong & Hong edition of the *Repetition*, we can read the following phrase:

Movement is dialectical, not only with respect to space (in which sense it occupied Heraclitus and the Eleatics and later was so much used and misused by the Sceptics), but also with respect to time (Kierkegaard 1983, 309).

<sup>4</sup> The distinction operated by Kierkegaard between the way recollection and repetition act can be related to the author's distinction between the two types of religiosity (A and B), that define the last stage of his existential dialectics, also corresponding to the movement of the eternal resignation and the movement of belief by the virtue of the absurd, concepts that are central for the volume *Fear and Trembling*. It is important to note that, similarly to the infinite resignation, recollection is an action whose success resides in the hands of the person, while the success of repetition requires the involvement of the divine, who will find not only the possibility of a repetition but also the reaction of the person, through faith; because, as we will find out, repetition is also a religious movement by virtue of the absurd. Also, the two types of religiosity present two distinct ways of accessing the eternal, and they could be identified as recollection, through which the eternal is regained and repetition, through which the eternal is projected (believing by virtue of the absurd). Anyhow, Kierkegaard identifies religiosity A as rather specific to the pagan, greek world, while repetition is a religious movement by virtue of the absurd, thus identifiable with religiosity B.

moment. What brings specificity to this new category in Kierkegaard's thought is the paradoxical belief<sup>5</sup> in regaining what was lost, despite the competing evidence.<sup>6</sup> Repetition brings into present a past reality, a reality of whose truth we will be edified only in an indeterminate, eternal future.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, it is important that we direct our attention once again towards the anecdote of Diogenes. Commentators such as Claire Carlisle point to the fact that the fragment reveals the opposition between ideas (philosophy) and movement, opposition that, in Kierkegaard's terms, parallels the antinomy between recollection and repetition. Thus, if remembrance is a form of knowledge that regains an already existing truth, as *Idea*, repetition is a movement of becoming, of truth's coming into existence (Carlisle 2005a, 522). For that matter, Kierkegaard himself operates this distinction, through Constantin Constantius voice:

When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actually, which has been, now comes into existence (Kierkegaard 183, 149).

Recollection is a form of knowledge through which the person actualizes or brings into existence a permanent truth. Repetition is, however, an act in motion, by which truth becomes known, together with and through the repetition experience. The event which is 'to be repeated' is not a static ideality, fixed in a past eternity, which imprints a model of reality. The object that 'is to be repeated' represents only the starting point or motivation for becoming. If recollection regards knowing the (already existing) truth, repetition requires its discovery; in other words, its reception through belief.

A movement (recollection) is static, it does not bring anything new, and it does not alter the individual's existence. The alternative movement (repetition) transforms the individual's existence; it re-actualizes it by attaching a meaning and coherence to it.

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<sup>5</sup> Søren Kierkegaard conceives paradox as the circumstance in which logic and reason are obsolete, defied, characteristics that confirm its validity. In addition to this idea, Kierkegaard also notes:

When repetition is defined in that way, it is: transcendent, a religious movement by virtue of the absurd- when the borderline of the wondrous is reached, eternity is the true repetition (Kierkegaard, 1983, 305).

<sup>6</sup> As I will show in the following pages, there are several kinds of repetition, some of them failing not only as imposed motivation but due to their execution; others, such as those enacted by Job or Abraham, are successful precisely due to the mentioned elements.

<sup>7</sup> At this point, Clare Carlisle's observation is also noteworthy:

So, both recollection and repetition are movements of truth: the former moves towards a past eternity, and the latter moves towards a future eternity (Carlisle 2005a, 525-526).

## 2. Repetition is a 'Transcendental Movement'

What has been defined as repetition up to this point is, according to Kierkegaard, inadequately interpreted as mediation (ger. *Vermittlung*) by the Hegelian thought. In one of the strictly philosophical fragments in *Repetition*, Constantin asserts "that repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation" (Kierkegaard 1983, 148). In order to better understand Kierkegaard's view on mediation, one needs to focus on *The Concept of Dread*, a book that is generally recognized as the conceptual framework for the colloquial volume signed by Constantin Constantius.

The central point in Kierkegaard's critique of the Hegelian philosophy in this context is the claim about the possibility of motion in logic. Kierkegaard's argumentation starts from the observation that (Hegelian) logic cannot regard reality as its ultimate concept. Logic cannot find its culminating point in reality, in the real existence.

What makes this relation impossible is the category of *arbitrary*, an essential part of Kierkegaard's view of reality. The author considered that logic does not allow the arbitrary to reach 'inside,' in the midst of the logical system. On the other hand, by constraining reality inside this system, logic doesn't manage to do more than incorporating it, "it has anticipated what it ought merely to predispose" (Kierkegaard 1957, 9). Put differently, if Kierkegaard sees the arbitrary as an essential component of reality, of the real existence, for Hegel, in logic all things happen from necessity and this relation also determines reality. From Kierkegaard's point of view, Hegel conciliated reality and logic, without great success, through the act of mediation. The problem consists in the confusing result:

Mediation is equivocal, for it designs at once the relation between the two terms and the result of the relation, that in which they stand related to one another as having been brought into relationship; it designates motion, but at the same time rest (Kierkegaard 1957, 11).

Negation is the force that set Hegelian logic in motion. However, Kierkegaard does not regard negation as the catalyst of a proper movement, rather of an immanent motion. For Kierkegaard, any movement has to be transcendental. This implies that logic has to overcome the limits of its own category to reach another. Inside existence, this movement is represented by becoming, which is the transition that the self makes from one stage to another. As a matter of fact, according to Kierkegaard, motion (resembling the meaning of the Greek term κίνησις) is present only in existence, not in the realm of speculation, of the abstract thought (Elrod 1975, 55). In *Philosophical Fragments*, one can read the following:

Can the necessary come into existence? Coming into existence is a change, but the necessary cannot be changed, since it always relates itself to itself and relates itself to itself in the same way. [...] Everything which comes into

existence proves precisely by coming into existence that it is not necessary for the only thing which cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary is. [...] Nothing whatever exists because it is necessary, but the necessary exists because it is necessary or because the necessary is (Kierkegaard 1962, 91-92).

Motion, with the meaning provided by Kierkegaard, can be understood as becoming, that takes place in the midst of existence, a space destined for coming into being, not just for the simple living. Within this conception, logic is the space of the necessary, to the degree to which the necessary simply *is*, while existence is the space of becoming, to the degree to which the individual self *becomes* (not only *is*).

However, logic is not the environment of becoming and becoming requires a transcendental motion (at least given the fact that the reason and goal of becoming is represented by the immediate relation with God). In its characteristic synthetic and incisive style, Kierkegaard presents the failed, inadequate relation between logic and motion, in the following fragment from *The Concept of Dread*:

In logic no movement can come about, for logic is, and everything logical simply *is*; and this impotence of logic is the transition to the sphere of becoming where existence and reality appear. So when logic is absorbed in the concretion of the categories it is constantly the same that it was from the beginning. In logic every movement (if for an instant one would use this expression) is an immanent movement, which in a deeper sense is no movement, as one easily convinces oneself if one reflects that the very concept of movement is a transcendence which can find no place in logic. The negative then is the immanence of movement, it is the vanishing factor, the thing that is annulled (*aufgehoben*). If everything comes to pass in that way, then nothing comes to pass, and the negative becomes a phantom. (Kierkegaard 1957, 47).

We can speak of transcendental movement only in the case of a transition towards real existence. However, we know that, according to Kierkegaard, reality cannot be regarded as an (ultimate) part of logic. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard does not advocate the idea that logic lacks motion, but only the fact that this movement remains an immanent one. The negation, the catalyst of movement in logic, represents the immanence of movement or the immanent movement, only that this cannot be a movement in the proper sense (transcendental, according to Kierkegaard), because negation not only negates, not only denies, but also generates opposition. Negation annihilates, but its result is a counter position, not an object that no longer exists. In other words, Kierkegaard points to the fact that negation, in the Hegelian logic, is not a transcendental movement (as it should be, if logic could embed reality), but an immanent one, that does not become something else, that does not cross into existence. Negation remains inside the space of the logical system, a system that only exists. Becoming in logic, if one can use this formula, is achievable inside its

system. The denied object, thus lifted to a superior status, does not transcend the limits of the logical system.

Pointing to the relation between movement and transcendence, Constantin's words gain a much simpler meaning:

Modern philosophy makes no movement; as a rule it makes only a commotion, and if it makes any movement at all, it is always within immanence, whereas repetition is and remains a transcendence (Kierkegaard 1983, 186).

The comparative analysis of the three concepts presented here, recollection, repetition and mediation, leads to the conclusion that, according to Kierkegaard, only repetition is an authentic movement, one that allows a transcendental motion.<sup>8</sup>

To support this working hypothesis, it could be interesting to take a look upon a lesser known text of Kierkegaard, published in the Supplement of the Hong & Hong edition of *Repetition*. The text is named *Open letter to Professor Heiberg* and is Constantin Constantius' response to a review of the *Repetition*, written by a known contemporary Hegelian Danish thinker, Johan Ludvig Heiberg. In this letter, Constantin raises the problem of repetition in logic:

There they have called repetition 'mediation.' But movement is a concept that logic simply cannot support. Mediation, therefore, must be understood in relation to immanence. Thus understood, mediation may not again be used at all in the sphere of freedom, where the subsequent always emerges- by virtue not of an immanence but of transcendence. Therefore, the word 'mediation' has contributed to a misunderstanding in logic, because it allowed a concept of movement to be attached to it. In the sphere of freedom, the word 'mediation' has again done damage, because, coming from logic, it helped to make the transcendence of movement illusory. In order to prevent this error or this dubious compromise between the logical and freedom, I have thought that 'repetition' could be used in the sphere of freedom (Kierkegaard 1983, 308).

One can notice here Constantin's intention to underline the opposition between immanence and transcendence, with the goal of clarifying the concept of movement, a concept that is crucial for understanding repetition. What is new here is the suggestion that Hegelian philosophy transfers mediation from the space of logic into the space of liberty (existence), a fact that determines the illusory character of the transcendence of motion. For Kierkegaard, repetition is a subjective, spiritual movement that depends on the reality and becoming of the self, aspects that maintain its transcendence. The space of liberty is the space of subjectivity. Liberty is the reality of the self, the domain of self-choice, of decision.

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<sup>8</sup> However, Edward Mooney argues that mediation and recollection appear in the text as alternate solutions to the problem of transition or motion, especially of the transition as development, as self-actualization. For instance, it regards the way an individual manages to pass from an aesthetic to an ethical life stage. (Mooney 2007, 286).

I will attempt the transition towards the second kind of inquiry on repetition through the extremely thorough observation offered by Wilson Dickinson. From his point of view, Constantin Constantius (as an author) does not oppose a doctrine of repetition to the notions of recollection and mediation. The possibility of repetition is followed according to the different modes of existence and forms of subjectivity. Recollection, for instance, is not opposed to a theory of repetition that describes reality more accurately, but is opposed rather to an active and contextualized mode of thinking. Then, the definition of the term 'repetition' can be found only in brief descriptions, as the personal reflections of the two characters in the book (Dickinson 2011, 8).

Consequently, the attempt of clarifying Kierkegaard's thought solely by conceptual means is not the best approach of the Danish philosopher's texts.<sup>9</sup> Hence, in the following pages, I will discuss the category of repetition through the perspective of the existential example offered by the two (perhaps three, if we choose to include Job's story) characters analyzed by Kierkegaard for this purpose.

I will thus start with the form of repetition experimented and proposed by Constantin Constantius, the pseudonymous author and central character of *Repetition*.

### 3. Constantin Constantius or the Failed Act of Repetition

Constantin Constantius made clear his intentions regarding repetition right from the beginning of his writing. He wishes to know whether such a temporal motion is possible and meaningful. Initially, Constantin attached equal importance to repetition and recollection, considering that existence can be meaningful only by accessing one of the two ways of knowing: "If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise" (Kierkegaard 1983, 149). However, Constantin's aesthetic vision (he is an exponent of this stage) does not allow recollection to become a workable solution for him. A decisive sign of Constantin's aesthetic way of life is his anchoring in the present moment, regarded as discontinuous and perpetually ephemeral.

Constantin considers that recollection requires determining an event or moment with capital existential importance in an already past moment. This generates a temporal separation between the subject and his existential ideal,

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<sup>9</sup> In the same article, Wilson Dickinson shows that through the anecdote with Diogenes and the Eleatics, Kierkegaard sought to bring his reader's attention to the proposed philosophical concepts and philosophical stance that could be identified in his text, but also to the narrative itself, which would point to the roles, expectancies and activity of the reader. The purpose of *Repetition* would become an ethical one, through the empathetic involvement of the reader, that brings the text in the practical and interpersonal realm (that pertains to the ethical domain) (Dickinson 2011, 3).

located somewhere in the past. The attitude of the person for whom the remembrance gives life meaning could be summed as follows:

That is all right, I do not want a relationship with it [n. ideal] now; I just want to remember how it was when I found it (Morris 1993, 311).

So, recollection starts 'by default' with a loss, with an absence, because it does not offer a connection with one's own ideal, established in a past moment and its reactivation in the present. Constantin finds it unacceptable to approach knowledge and existence other than immediately, in a concrete form, right at this very present moment. Thus, if life happens to hold any meaning for him, then it can only be offered by repetition, not recollection.

While reaching these conclusions, Constantin suspected repetition of holding the primary role in re-actualizing that past idealized moment, thus offering its meaning also in the present:

Indeed, what would life be if there were no repetition? Who could want to be a tablet on which time writes something new every instant or to be a memorial volume of the past? (Kierkegaard 1983, 132-133).

Therefore, Constantin Constantius plans his second travel to Berlin intending to attest the meaning offered by the first trip. Hence he wishes to maintain a present connection with the first idealized image of the trip.

Constantin's vision and solution can be expressed as simply as possible as follows: instead of maintaining our ideal (in a general understanding) in the past, we have to project it into the future, so that we can experience it in the present. The present moment represents the goal from the point of view of experiencing temporality.

Thus, the aim here is to understand how exactly Constantin expects to achieve repetition. Motivated by the perspective of confirming the meaning of existence determined by repetition, he goes to Berlin for the second time, with the intention of reliving the experiences he had a few months ago. As a result, Constantin chooses the same apartment, visits the same café's and attends the same theatre plays, exclusively motivated by the curiosity regarding the possibility of repetition. Unfortunately, the flat that was presented in some earlier paragraphs as one of the most pleasant in Berlin, now appeared gloomy. The most appreciated café from the last visit was not so enjoyable this time and the restaurant with a so hospitable ambiance was now offering monotony, a pathetic twinge of the possibility of repetition.

Neither Königstäter, appreciated in the past for the comic of the farces and for the artistic qualities of its actors, did not generate the same joys and aesthetical satisfactions. The conclusion Constantin reached after all these experiences is at least a strange one:

The only repetition was the impossibility of a repetition [...]. When this had repeated itself several days, I became so furious, so weary of the repetition that I decided to return home. My discovery was not significant, and yet it was

curious, for I had discovered that there simply is no repetition and had verified it by having it repeated in every possible way (Kierkegaard 1983, 170-171).

This conclusion is reinforced by the surprise he experiences returning home, where, in his absence, his valet turned his house upside down, under the excuse of making a clean sweep of the house. This temporary, although reversible trouble of his intimate space, will conduce Constantin Constantius to the pessimistic conclusion that "I perceived that there is no repetition, and my earlier conception of life was victorious" (Kierkegaard 1983, 171).

I briefly stated before that Constantin Constantius' concept of life is mainly aesthetic. There is no need to review here all the main elements of the conceptions on aesthetic life in Kierkegaard. However, what I'm interested in, at this point, is the aspects, the principles applied to one's own existence, that were 'put in parentheses' by Constantin when he decided to take the trip to Berlin. Constantin's confession from the following paragraph is destined to verify these very aspects:

...for I am completely convinced that if I had gone abroad with the idea of assuring myself of it, I would have amused myself immensely with the very same thing. Why is it that I cannot stay within the ordinary, that I insist on principles, that I cannot go around dressed like others, that I like to walk in stiff boots! Do not all agree – both ecclesiastical and secular speakers, both poets and prose writers, both skippers and undertakers, both heroes and cowards- do they not all agree that life is a stream. How can one get such a foolish idea, and, still more foolish, how can one want to make a principle of it (Kierkegaard 1983, 174).

Constantin Constantius' failure is generated by the way in which he decided to test the possibility of repetition that distanced him by the patterns of his ordinary existence. Put differently, Constantin did not receive things as they usually arrive in life, immediately, rather he attempted an intentional experimental approach, theoretically grounded, but with an edificatory existential projection of the effects. By aiming to verify the validity of so-called existential principles, Constantin Constantius reached the conclusion that such a proposal is useless. Principles don't have to dictate your intended purposes; they have to be directly connected to the real existence, immersed in the present, in 'aesthetical purity' but without projecting expectancies (Morris 1993, 334). At this point, Constantin Constantius' view of repetition can be condensed as follows: if repetition is possible, either it cannot be grasped, or it emerges in a rather surprising and unexpected way, within the natural course of ordinary life events.

Constantin Constantius initially discussed repetition with enthusiasm and interest. He now faces disappointment while experiencing the possibility of reaching it. The contrast is total and the conclusion is necessary: *Constantin understands repetition objectively, externally, theoretically, when the success of a*

*repetition depends mainly on an authentic personal involvement.* He can describe the movement of repetition, but cannot create it.<sup>10</sup>

His attitude is detached as he approaches repetition as a hypothesis that can be empirically confirmed. Moreover, according to a previously cited fragment, although Constantin discovers that repetition is impossible, it does not hold great importance to him. The effects of repetition are neither devastating, nor revealing for his existence. The only thing Constantius gets to confirm through his unsuccessful trip to Berlin is his old attitude on life, a fact that confirms Clare Carlisle's observation:

Constantin's journey to Berlin is in fact an empty parody of repetition. His failure indicates that he has searched for repetition in the wrong place, and in the wrong way (Carlisle 2005b, 79).<sup>11</sup>

The failure of the Berliner experiment was not caused by the trip itself. As I have already mentioned, not even the intimate space of his own house grants Constantin the possibility of repetition. He is stuck with a paradox, if we take into consideration his position on the movement of recollection. Constantin is looking for a repetition by reproducing an idealized past. The effect generated by this attempt to re-experience the events lived in the past is not the expected one. Events are not refreshed by their re-living, they are rather suffocated by their memory, which can be regarded as a previously established personal norm. At the same time, Constantin becomes aware of his inability to transcend the effects of recollection, when, on his way out, he manages to realize that:

My home had become dismal to me simply because it was a repetition of the wrong kind. My mind was sterile, my troubled imagination constantly conjured up tantalizingly attractive recollections of how the ideas had presented themselves the last time, and tares of their recollections choked out every thought at birth (Kierkegaard 1983, 169).

Finally, it becomes obvious that Constantin is more capable of recollection, rather than repetition. He had fixed an idealized image in the past to be repeated in an aesthetic frame (as it is, for instance, a theatre hall), in the present. This image becomes the measure of the attempt to test the present external reality (Gouwens 1993, 291). What Constantin Constantius could not reach was the very experience he attempted within repetition and which he amended in the domain of recollection. Maintaining idealized pictures of events from and in a past moment does not go beyond recollection.

The effect of this conclusion practically denies any possibility of repetition, given the fact that Constantin only attempts to reenact a past moment. The object of repetition is not an exterior one. Not the trip is to be repeated, but the remembered joy of that trip, in other words, an 'object' of inwardness, and the remembered joy cannot be subjected to the repetition without experiencing the

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<sup>10</sup> From this point of view, Constantin Constantius can be seen mostly as an ironist.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the fact that the only plays he attended in Berlin were farces is hardly accidental.

new. However, novelty does not arise from the diversification of the external objects of life, but from the interior transformations required by the movement of repetition.

By proceeding in this way, Constantin neglects his inwardness, his self. By experimentally and externally approaching repetition, he becomes a simple subject within a general test that could attest or infirm the possibility of repetition for anyone, but to a lesser degree for the particular person, for himself. In this way, repetition becomes exterior to the personal edificatory experience.

In the same letter addressed to Heiberg, Constantin Constantius (Kierkegaard) confesses that repetition is just a parody, a fact that generates the confusion about this term:

The confusion consists in this: the most interior problem of the possibility of repetition is expressed externally, as if repetition, if were possible, were to be found outside the individual when in fact it must be found within the individual. For which reason the young man does indeed do just the opposite, conducts himself quite calmly. The consequence of the journey is that I despair of the possibility and step aside for the young man, who by means of his religious primitivity is going to discover repetition (Kierkegaard 1983, 304).

A summary of the reasons why Constantin fails in his attempt to achieve repetition is necessary. In the first place, the success of a repetition does not consist in validating an all-purpose universal method. Constantin approaches repetition as an experiment, motivated by (an aesthetic) curiosity, rather than animated by the need of internal transformation. In a broader understanding, Kierkegaard does not consider human accomplishment to be determined by the comprehensive understanding of intellectual contrasts, such as that between recollection or repetition and neither by deciding the superiority of one of the two. Accomplishment and human flourishing 'are nourished' by the direct, concrete confrontation with what is problematic for human existence (Mooney 2007, 301).

Secondly, Constantin's failure resulted from his attempt at repetition, being in tune to rather external aspects of existence than to his own subjectivity. Preoccupied by exteriorty, Constantin is an observer of his own existence and of his intellectual projections (Carlisle 2005a, 531). This generates his difficulty of getting involved in a relationship with the surrounding reality of any kind, other than conceptually and ideally. Also, Constantin reveals this aspect of his personality on at least two separate occasions:

...as a rule I tend to relate to men as an observer (Kierkegaard 1983, 134).

This, then, is the thanks one gets for having trained oneself every day for years to have only an objective theoretical interest in people and also, if possible, in everyone for whom the idea is in motion! (Kierkegaard 1982, 180).

The third and maybe the most important reason for Constantin's failure could be questioningly expressed in the following way: is repetition something a person could reach only through his volitive efforts of any kind? Does the success of repetition depend on the individual? For the moment, I will limit my answers here to negative responses to these questions, emphasizing the fact that Constantin's repetition is a project initiated by himself, whose success is conditioned by his own will and unfolded along some pre-established steps. Exclusively conceived as a human endeavor or as the effect of reasonable expectations, repetition is impossible. As we will see in the case of Job, the essence of repetition consists in assuming the shock of its impossibility, as human finality (Mooney 1998, 289-290, 300).

Constantin's understanding of repetition stops with the failure of his experiment. His conclusion is that in life you can never be truly satisfied, an attitude that Constantin assumes, together with the aesthetic self-sufficiency that recognizes the impossibility of repetition (Gouwens 1993, 291). He accepts his failure, this gesture being the most important existential step he managed to make because he realized that repetition is a transcendental, religious movement (Carlisle 2005b, 79). Viewed from this perspective, Constantin's failure gains the nuances that open the possibility of investigating other forms of repetition, that of the young lover and Job's. I will first take care of the young lover's case.

#### **4. Repetition of the self**

The presence of the young man within the pages of the *Repetition* is marked by three progressively linked moments that determine the process of becoming and the inner transformation. These three moments could be expressed schematically as follows:

1. Moment one: the confessional relation, friendship with Constantin Constantius;
2. Moment two: putting his own existence under the example of Job's trials;
3. Moment three: the re-turn, the re-discovery of the self as an expression of repetition;

1. The first part of the *Repetition* conveys the apparition, in a rather secondary role, of the young man, who will not express himself directly until the second part of the book, through the letters addressed to Constantin. Initially, we get acquainted with the character through the stories and observations made by Constantin Constantius, regarding a love story confessed by a young, melancholic man, that is under the influence of the friendship and advice he gives. As Clare Carlisle also mentioned, the first thing we know about this young man is his predisposition towards melancholy, a feature that is specific to aestheticism, under the form of indifference and immobility, as existential attitudes (Carlisle 2005a, 533). The young man's melancholy determines his preoccupation not only with the joy of loving the girl with whom he has fallen in love, but rather

with the avenue of losing her. This observation shifts our attention towards the comparison between recollection and repetition. Through Constantin's voice, we find out that the young man experiences his love by putting it through the lenses of recollection, a fact that determines, on one hand, the lack of happiness in his relationship with the girl and, on the other hand, his impossibility of believing and understanding repetition:

He was deeply and fervently in love, that was clear, and yet a few days later he was able to recollect his love. [...] Recollection has the great advantage that it begins with the loss (Kierkegaard 1983, 136).

My young friend did not understand repetition; he did not believe in it and did not powerfully will it. [...] If the young man had believed in repetition, what great things might have come from him, what inwardness he might have achieved in this life! (Kierkegaard 1983, 145-146).

Constantin finds it problematic that his young friend cannot experience his love fully and concretely, because of his tendency to idealize it. As noticed before, this idealization is a movement of recollection. Suspending a moment in a past time, with the intention of establishing an existential reference, inhibits its actualization in the present. From Constantin's perspective, the condition of the young lover perfectly fits this model. The young man idealizes his love, otherwise sincere and intense, a love that, in fact, he cannot enjoy anymore. The young man's dilemma and suffering are based on the unhappy remembrance of what he should actually hope to encounter.

At this point, it is necessary to highlight the difference between Constantin's and the young man's perspectives. While for Constantin, the negative conclusion about recollection brings him to an experiment based on external criteria for repetition, for the young man, the experience of love as recollection becomes an occasion for inner (re)discovery.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth mentioning here Stephen Crites' observation: the term *recalling*, more exactly, its Danish correspondent, *Erindring* (in German, *Erinnerung*), literally means interiorization (Crites 1993, 232). The fact that the young man falls in love does not materialize the relation with the girl, as one might expect. The incident puts him into a rather poetic disposition, maintained by the constant longing for his lover. Love is transformed into longing, wistfulness. The young man discovers an absence in himself, a void that, to his despair, cannot be replaced by the real presence of his lover. This is what Constantin Constantius wrote about this:

Nevertheless, he did not still love her, because he only longed for her [...]. The young girl was not his beloved: she was the occasion that awakened the poetic in him and made him a poet. That was why he could love only her, never forget

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<sup>12</sup> In the same supplement, we can read the following: "His being has been split, and so it is not a question of the repetition of something external but of the repetition of his freedom" (Kierkegaard 1983, 304).

her, never want to love her, and yet continually only long for her [...]. As time went on, his state became more and more anguished. His depression became more and more dominant (Kierkegaard 1983, 137-138).

When the effects of an event don't fit the expectations, we face a dilemma and this dilemma requires a decision. The young man's dilemma is, in this case, an ethical one. On the one hand, he feels responsible for the girl he fell in love with and to whom he confessed his love and, on the other hand, he feels responsible towards his own self, who pushes him into a solitary existence, determined by his melancholic nature. For this young man, the girl has a tremendous importance, but not as herself, but through the effect she has on him "...The girl was not an actuality, but a reflection of motions within him and an incitement of them" (Kierkegaard 1983, 185).

Preoccupied with all these thoughts, the young man turns his hopes towards his confessor, Constantin, and his advice.

One can ask oneself whether Constantin Constantius' conclusions and observations regarding the young man could be taken seriously, as his own experiment on the possibility of repetition failed. It is true that he failed to experience repetition, but this does not mean that, conceptually, Constantin didn't apprehend this existential movement. What he reproached to his young friend is the fact that *he didn't understand repetition, not that he couldn't experience it*. Constantin accepted the fact that, for him, repetition is a transcendental, religious, thus inaccessible movement, a movement that is considered, however, by the young man, the solution to his own existential dilemmas. By moving from the understanding of repetition in the absence of the ability to experience it, to the need of living it even without a full understanding, the young man moves from the influence Constantin had on him to the one manifested by Job's example.

The first signs of this mutation were already visible when the young man refused to accept Constantin's plan to liberate him from the burden of his love. As I already mentioned earlier, the young man's dilemma is an ethical one, a dimension that Constantin cannot grasp, his advice being based on his personal, failed repetition experiment. Consequently, Constantin's plan according to which the young man could break the engagement with the girl, exiting the relation clean-handed, proves to be an unacceptable solution for the honest young man; this is also due to his lack of 'ironic resiliency' as Constantin labeled it (Kierkegaard 1983, 137). The young man materializes his refuse and, together with it, the end of the confidential, direct relation with Constantin, embarking on a solitary trip to Stockholm. This transfer is captured by Constantin with the lucidity of a reflexive person, detached from the 'thunders' of life:

The issue that brings him to a halt is nothing more nor less than repetition [...]. It is fortunate that he does not seek any explanation from me, for I have abandoned my theory, I am adrift. Then, too, repetition is too transcendent for me. I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot rise above myself. I cannot find

the Archimedean point. Fortunately, my friend is not looking for clarification from any world-famous philosopher or any professor publicus ordinarius [regularly appointed state professor]; he turns to an unprofessional thinker who once possessed the world's glories but later withdrew from life – in other words, he falls back to Job (Kierkegaard 1983, 186).

The young man's distancing from Constantin symbolized the transformation that took place in his own conscience, translated as the transition from the ideality to reality, from philosophy to existence, an idea that, also delineates the concept of repetition and which is expressed, in a metaphorical sense, in the first passage of *Repetition* (the example of the dispute between Diogenes and the Eleatics) (Carlisle 2005a, 534). I believe that the relation between Constantin Constantius and the young man personified the opposition between recollection and repetition. More specifically, Constantin intended to experience repetition and, in turn, he achieved recollection; the young man is suffering through recollection and projects his salvation through the movement of repetition.

2. The young man approaches Job with the hope of achieving repetition. For this, he decides to embark on a trip to Stockholm, distancing in this way from his lover and from Constantin's dubious influence. With these events, Kierkegaard changes the narrative register of the *Repetition* that marks the inner transformations of the young man. The writing pen passes from Constantin to the young lover, who signs eight confessional letters that were surprisingly addressed to the same Constantin. Although he recognizes his malign influence, especially when he was constantly in his company, the young man could not repress a certain attraction towards his ambiguous personality:

You hold me captive with a strange power. There is something indescribably salutary and alleviating in talking with you, for it seems as if one were talking with oneself or with an idea. Then, upon finishing speaking and finding solace in this speaking out, when one suddenly looks at your impassive face and reflects that this is a human being standing before one (Kierkegaard 1983, 188).

Actually, the one who manifested ambiguity was the young man himself. Firstly, he wasn't provided a name, as Constantin Constantius was. His personality swung between Constantin's influence and Job's existential example; he was thus a character that wasn't fully defined yet. Along the entire length of *Repetition*, the young man experiences a process of becoming, at the end of which we expected him to adopt one of the two alternatives of being or, even a different one, generated by his own decisions, meditations and experiences. In any case, the young man is a character defined by many open possibilities.

The young man explicitly expressed his admiration for Job in the second letter sent to Constantin. His admiration comes with his wish to tame his own suffering; not only by accessing a theoretical, philosophical solution, "what

miserable worldly wisdom poorly affords" (Kierkegaard 1983, 198) but by the power of a concrete example of an existential circumstance.

I have shown before that the reason the young man has chosen Job as his 'hero' was Job's successful repetition. From the young man's perspective, Job accomplishes repetition when, after losing everything, he then regains everything twofold. The young man validates the intensity of his suffering from losing his lover by comparing it to those experienced by Job:

I have not owned the world, have not had seven sons and three daughters. But one who owned very little may indeed also have lost everything; one who lost the beloved has in a sense lost sons and daughters, and one who lost honor and pride and along with it the vitality and meaning of life – he, too, has in a sense been stricken with malignant sores (Kierkegaard 1983, 198-199).

Therefore, suffering becomes the category through which the young man hopes to get closer to Job. Suffering distances the young man from Constantin's influence and brings him closer to Job's lesson. I reassert the idea that the repetition proposed by Constantin is only an experiment, a reflexive game, that doesn't require authenticity and personal involvement. Suffering, in contrast, involves a higher level of interiorization of the lived experiences and the young man is undoubtedly suffering, similarly to Job. The young man finds himself in the middle of a symmetric paradox, whose central element is suffering. On the one hand, Constantin's detached reflection limits his understanding of the very thing upon which he reflects the most, suffering. On the other hand, Job and all those who followed his example – 'proposed' a type of patient, wordless suffering, allowing the full understanding of the process, by avoiding the detached reflection but sharing the situation of the sufferer (Burges 1993, 254).<sup>13</sup>

There are two ways of understanding, personified by the two characters of the *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius and his young friend. As I have already asserted, Constantin's understanding of an idea, a concept or a person is objective, supported by reflection and his critical skills. His understanding is observational, discursive, detached. On the other hand, the young man (separated from Constantin's influence) develops a subjective kind of understanding, to the degree to which his actions are determined by personal involvement, self-consciousness and affective intensity. Constantin wishes to find out whether repetition is possible, his motivation being only a simple experimental curiosity. The young man wishes to experience repetition to cut his suffering and inner turbulence generated by his love story. His intention is not to understand repetition by experiencing it, *with the goal of understanding it*, rather he wants to live and understand it simultaneously, without one action causing the other. In the case of the young man, one can speak of coherence between the

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<sup>13</sup> I owe Andrew Burges this view of paradox, that places Job and Constantin in opposition, a vision that was developed in a study that proposes two central themes for the *Repetition*: repetition, as Constantin's perspective and suffering, as the young man's perspective.

concepts and his own existence. A category such as repetition does not represent a simple intellectual curiosity, but an existential aim.

With such an openness of the soul, the young man approached Job. Besides, in the first passage of one of the *Edifying Discourses* signed by Kierkegaard and entitled *The Lord Gave, and the Lord Hath Taken Away, Blessed Be the Name of the Lord*, we learn about the moral of Job's parable:

Not only do we call that man, a teacher who through some particularly happy talent discovered, or by unremitting toil and continued perseverance brought to light one or another truth; left what he had acquired as a principle of knowledge, which the following generations strove to understand, and through this understanding to appropriate to themselves. Perhaps, in an even stricter sense, we also call that one a teacher of men who had no doctrine to pass on to others, but who merely left himself as a pattern to succeeding generations, his life as a principle of guidance to every man, his name as an assurance to the many, his own deeds as an encouragement to the striving. Such a teacher and guide of men was Job, whose significance is by no means due to what he said but to what he did. (Kierkegaard 1958, 67).

Job's lesson is not a dogmatic one and the lack of this feature determines the young man's empathy in assuming his words:

I do not read him as one reads another book, with the eyes, but I lay the book, as it were, on my heart and read it with the eyes of the heart, in a clairvoyance interpreting the specific points in the most diverse ways. [...] Every word by him is food and clothing and healing for my wretched soul (Kierkegaard 1983, 204).

At this point, it is necessary to return to a term that I previously emphasized in the pages dedicated to Constantin's condition. Returning from his trip to Berlin, he recognized that "repetition is too transcendent for me. I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot rise above myself" (Kierkegaard 1983, 186). Transcendence, from Constantin's perspective, is the capacity to overcome certain limitations, here the limit being set by one's self. His existence is immanent, given the fact that Constantin does not cross the pre-established limits. Constantin's limit is represented by its reflexive and objective way of knowing, a limit that the young man surpasses, at least intentionally, by comparing himself, from the point of view of repetition, to Job. What the young man identified as a transcendent category in Job are the trials he is subjected to, the *ordeal*. "This category, ordeal, is not esthetic, ethical, or dogmatic – it is altogether transcendent." (Kierkegaard 1983, 210).

The ordeal transcends knowledge and requires suffering to be understood. Thus, it becomes obvious that the ordeal cannot be understood as an aesthetic category. Constantin's experimental repetition and everything I have concluded about him until this moment seem to advocate this idea.

The ordeal can neither be an ethical category, because the trials to which Job was subjected were not the result of divine punishment or (the sense of?)

guilt. All the rational, human explanations (see the interventions of Job's friends) lead to the idea, even if unconscious, of Job's guilt:

To him every human interpretation is only a misconception [...] It can be very becoming and true and humble if a person believes that misfortune has struck him because of his sins, but this belief may also be the case because he vaguely conceives of God as a tyrant, something he meaninglessly expresses by promptly placing him under ethical determinants (Kierkegaard 1983, 207).

The ordeal could be dogmatic only to the degree to which there could be a science that integrates it within its system of justifications. Such a validation of the ordeal could not be possible because "as soon as the knowledge enters, the resilience of the ordeal is impaired, and the category is actually another category" (Kierkegaard 1983, 210).

A category like the ordeal cannot have but a personal stake and validity, subjected to the human as an individual. The young man understands that the experience of the ordeal situates Job into a direct relationship with God and such a relation excludes the validity or the possibility of 'any explanation at second hand' (Kierkegaard 1983, 210) (thus, an ethical, dogmatic, or theoretical explanation of any kind). Entirely convinced by the possibility of a repetition, the young man identifies the very moment when this could have occurred in Job:

When every *thinkable* human certainty and probability were impossible. Bit by bit he loses everything, and hope thereby gradually vanishes, inasmuch as actuality, far from being placated, rather lodges stronger allegations against him (Kierkegaard 1983, 212).

Reaching this point, the two characters parted. The young man wishes to regain his lover, not by searching for God; also, his suffering does not overcome any limit of human understanding and empathy. Thus, our hero finds himself in the situation of having to turn his attention inwards.

3. The young man initially believed that the motivation to become a good husband could be identified with a successful repetition:

I am waiting for the thunderstorm – and for repetition. [...] What will be the effect of this thunderstorm? It will make me fit to be a husband. It will shatter my whole personality – I am prepared. It will render me almost unrecognizable to myself (Kierkegaard 1983, 214).

From this perspective, the young man faces a new series of issues and dilemmas, now on an ethical dimension, in the same time, provoking a disturbance of his own inwardness. The expression of the intensity of this turbulence is captured by the thunder metaphor. The thunder represents the event that could make repetition possible, an event that could start his interior transformation and could orient his subsequent existence. In Job's case, the

young man identifies the thunder with God's 'initiative' to test him, something that causes the possibility of repetition.<sup>14</sup>

Going back to the young man, the above mentioned aspects stress, once again, the dualism and ambiguity of his personality. What the young man is striving to repeat is still unclear. We cannot understand what he wishes, whether it is the re-actualization of the relation with the beloved girl or her forgetting, in order to become once again free and capable of self-discovery. A situation that opens the possibility of a decision and thus the movement of the young man towards the ethical stage of existence (either he chooses marriage or himself) is solved by an external event. The young man's 'thunder' is represented by the news of the marriage of his former lover. This event naturally determines a return to his inner self and a process of self-discovery. The news brings him the opportunity of experiencing repetition in a different form from his first expectations:

She is married – to whom I do not know, for when I read it in the newspaper I was so stunned that I dropped the paper and have not had the patience since then to check in detail. I am myself again. Here I have repetition; I understand everything, and life seems more beautiful to me than ever. It did indeed come like a thunderstorm, although I am indebted to her generosity for its coming (Kierkegaard 1983, 220).

Repetition is achieved accidentally; at least this is the interpretation the young man attributed to regaining his self:

Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double? Did I not get myself again and precisely in such a way that I might have a double sense of its meaning? (Kierkegaard 1983, 220-221).

Freed from the moral pressure and self-generated inertia, the young man (re) sets his self in motion. He understands and accepts the fact that the girl was nothing but an occasion for self-rediscovery: "it also gave me what I loved more – myself, and gave it to me through generosity" (Kierkegaard 1983, 220). His engagement determined an unpredictable change of self and his impossibility to decide brought him to a state of immobility. An external event resets his self in motion and his existence regains meaning. The young man is freed from the past by redefining it and this is how he regains the importance of the present moment.

In the aforementioned supplement, Constantin Constantius emphasizes:

In the explanatory letter it says, 'The young man explains it as the raising of his consciousness to the second power.' This certainly ought to be the most definite

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<sup>14</sup> One can observe here a similarity with the position of another biblical character, Abraham. The possibility of belief/ repetition by the virtue of the absurd is conditioned by the attempt or the trial designed by God, to which the person reacted. Faith and repetition are not movements of the self that could be exclusively generated by human possibility.

expression of the fact that I conceive of repetition as a development, for consciousness raised to its second power is indeed no meaningless repetition, but a repetition of such a nature that the new has absolute significance in relation to what has gone before, is qualitatively different from it (Kierkegaard 1983, 307).

Unlike Constantin, the young man manages to achieve repetition. He approaches existence not through external realities but through his inwardness. Repetition, unlike recollection, which only amplifies the experience for its clarification or intensification, is thus a movement of self-transformation (Crites 1993, 241).

Not only Constantin Constantius, but also the young man, personify two existential perspectives, in a process of movement (of becoming, in a more pronounced sense, in the case of the young man) along the *Repetition*. The first is a philosopher, whose movement is blocked inside a skeptical attitude that makes the conclusion that repetition is not possible. The second is represented by the lover, who is animated by passion and rediscovers his self and becomes his self because of the ethical crisis generated by the unhappy love story (Carlisle 2005a, 523).

The cause of the repetition's failure, in the case of Constantin, and the success of the young man is the same: their specific view of knowledge, love, recollection, repetition and existence. Their limits in understanding and living are traced by their own selves. In this case, however, the reached limit is not an obstacle, rather a source of existential stability. Not managing to achieve repetition, Constantin certifies in fact the validity of his earlier view on life. Moreover, one can notice an intensification of his contentment towards the monotony and uniformity of his own existence. In a similar way, the young man's love story produces the satisfaction of regaining his self, as the result of a kind of repetition adapted to his capacities. The limits achieved by the two in the realm of repetition become evidence for the validation of their life perspectives. The experiences they lived lead to a greater awareness of existence.

What I would like to stress here, as a possible version of the *Repetition's* conclusion, is Kierkegaard's intention to emphasize the importance of existential consistency. The way we understand existence, its principles, have to correspond to how we experience it. In other words, the way we live our life has to avoid contradiction with the way we understand it. What happens, though, when, despite such coherence, not only existence, but the capacity to understand, are subjected to a trial? How could we answer with a sense of understanding when our own existence becomes an ordeal? Finally, what is the human attitude that converts paradox into liberty? Through such interrogations, I will turn my research of the category of repetition as it is presented in the text where Kierkegaard discusses *The Book of Job*.

## 5. The Example of a Genuine Repetition - Job

Although between the pages of *Repetition* we could read about Job's ordeal as an example of authentic repetition, Kierkegaard doesn't develop a comparative

analysis of the biblical character; as he does with Constantin and the young man. A possible cause for this situation could be Kierkegaard's distinction between religious topics (approached in the texts signed and assumed by his real name) and his aesthetical writings (here we include all the books he published under pseudonym). Most probably, the seriousness of a biblical motif and the trials Job is subjected to, determines Kierkegaard to change the register of his writing and to transfer the analysis of repetition in one of the four *Edifying Discourses*, edited in the same year he published *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*.

Throughout this work, one is presented with the opportunity to discover, either by the analysis of the failed forms or repetition, or with the help of the textual clues left by Kierkegaard, that repetition, in its genuine form, is a religious category, transcendent, by virtue of the absurd, whose temporal correspondent is everlasting or the eternal. One of the clearest theoretical expressions of the concept of repetition can be found, once again, in *The Concept of Dread*. In a large footnote, the pseudonymous author Virgilius Haufniensis, distinguishes between repetition in the natural world, considered a necessary movement and repetition in the spiritual realm, which requires inwardness. Regarding the latter kind of repetition, Haufniensis reminds us that it emerges on the strength of religion and that it represents a transcendental, religious category, a movement by virtue of the absurd and that eternity is the real repetition.<sup>15</sup>

Kierkegaard does not intend to show directly, within the discourse about Job, this form of repetition. However, the references to Job found in the text of the *Repetition*, and the characteristics of this new philosophical category underlined above, encourages us to approach the Kierkegaardian version of this biblical chapter as the ultimate expression of the concept of repetition.

The first remark made by Kierkegaard is that, in the moment he was stricken, Job reminds himself and others, that first, the Lord was merciful, endowing him with everything that he has now lost. Thus, loss generates his gratitude in the first place. This view gave rise to the thought that, for something to be taken away, it has to be rendered first with generosity; this is why, prior to mourning his loss, Job expressed his gratitude:

At the moment when the Lord took everything, he did not say first 'The Lord took,' but he said first, 'The Lord gave.' The word is short, but in its brevity it perfectly expresses what it wishes to indicate, that Job's soul is not crushed down in silent submission to sorrow, but that his heart first expanded in gratitude; that the loss of everything first made him thankful to the Lord that

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<sup>15</sup> "...the passion of the absurd to which the concept of 'repetition' corresponds. [...] for in faith repetition begins. [...] In the sphere of nature repetition exists in its immovable necessity. In the sphere of spirit the problem is not to get change out of repetition [...] but the problem is to transform repetition into something inward, into the proper task of freedom [...] Here the finite spirit falls into despair. This Constantine has indicated by stepping aside and letting repetition break forth in the young man by virtue of the religious" (Kierkegaard 1957, 16-17).

He had given him all the blessings that He now took from him. (Kierkegaard 1958, 75).

Here, we can find a first understanding of the movement of repetition. In Job's case, the possibility of repetition first manifests as a consequence of the initial existence of an object 'to be repeated,' of a 'good' that can be lost. To be repeated, one needs to own a 'good,' a desired object, a beloved person, that one enjoys; and Job shows this attitude by first manifesting his gratitude. Gratitude is something that distinguishes Job from the two central characters of the *Repetition*. Constantin Constantius approaches repetition as a simple, objective and external experiment, while the young man accidentally achieves repetition, even if this is reached at a superior level of inwardness. However, neither of the two characters reacts to the movement of repetition – or through repetition – as a fundamental response, a limit of their existence. Repetition is not an assumed action, but rather objective or haphazard. In Job's case, however, gratefulness demands a deliberate and responsible reaction to a divinely imposed burden; an act, as in Abraham's case, that lacks ethical, rational justification.

Gratefulness indicates the possibility of authentic repetition. Through gratefulness, remembering what he had until then, as effect of God's grace, did not occupy Job's conscience in the form of a tormenting memory. This is in contrast to the consequences of repetition in Constantin's and the young man's case. We are reminded at this point of the disappointing effects of Constantin's visit at Berlin, as an attempt to repetition through recollection, and the inner torment of the young man, troubled by the memory of his love and then finding (him) self, but only in a melancholic and skeptical disposition, as baseline existential attitude.

Beginning with gratefulness, conceived as a right reaction to unfortunate life events, Kierkegaard presents, in contrast, the human, ordinary, rational and justifiable attitudes that usually occur as reactions to ordeal. For instance, we can find among the corresponding chapters, not only the situation, but also Constantin Constantius' and the young man's (let's call them existential) reactions. I illustrate here, with some revealing passages, first the representation of the young man, then Constantin's perspective, as failed attempts to integrate the loss and the memory of the lost 'good;' in other words, the effects of the failed attempts at repetition:

Thus his happiness became pernicious to him; it was never lost, but only lacking, and it tempted him more in the lack than ever before. What had been the delight of his eyes, he desired to see again, and his ingratitude punished him by conjuring it up as more beautiful than it had formerly been. [...] Thus he condemned his soul to living famished in the never satisfied craving of want. (Kierkegaard 1958, 77).

In fact, who would ever finish, if he wished to speak about what so frequently has happened, and will so frequently be repeated in the world? Would he not tire far sooner than would passion of that ever new ingenuity for transforming

the explained and the understood into a new disappointment, wherein it deceives itself! (Kierkegaard 1958, 78).

The second expression, "The Lord took away," illustrates Job's gaining of an insight on the reason of his loss. Similar to Abraham, Job recognizes God as the source of his ordeal. Job puts everything in God's hands and, in this way he distances himself from any possibility of providing a human, rational explanation or justification. Job does not blame the thunders, the enemy tribes or human nature for being generally corrupt, but accepts everything as coming from God (with the same attitude with which he manifested gratitude). This orientation towards God is not interpretable as guilt-inducing (a sign of rebellion, indignation or affront). Job decides to bear his ordeal and in doing so he also acknowledges his intimate relation to God. Just like Abraham, Job trusts God by the virtue of the absurd. Job trusts that everything will be returned to him due to a simple but terrible reason: to God, everything is possible. In this way, Job enters the category of the 'exceptional Individual,' because Job

did not retard his soul and extinguish his spirit in reflections or explanations which only engender and nourish doubt, even if the one who dwells on them does not realize it (Kierkegaard 1958, 81).

Actually, each of the three phrases that underline Job's exceptional character is doubled by the emphasis on the human, ordinary versions of reaction to the ordeal. To quote Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, this attempt underlines a teleological suspension of ethics. One by one, Kierkegaard puts under the questioning mark (and subsidiary, under the sign of failure) all the possible versions of reacting to the possibility of a spiritual trial. As a result of these interrogations, as in the case of Abraham's faith, the paradoxical nature of repetition is revealed. Because, eventually, similarly to Abraham, Job is a father of faith; the act of belief is the existential movement of repeating 'God's suffering in time,' the expression of the Absolute Paradox (Taylor 2000, 258).

It is worth mentioning here that the instances where the term *repetition* appeared in the text of this discourse have a deceiving effect; their aim is, however, to bolster the discrepancy between Job's success and attitude and the failure of the other presented trials. In this discourse, Kierkegaard assembles under this term the variety of the possible human behaviors, as potential reactions to Job's situation. Thus, repetition becomes an empty, hollow and specifically human endeavor, while the true kind of repetition is specific to the exceptional lives.

The last part of Job's discourse highlights God's grace. The ordeal is the event that, ultimately, makes faith possible. God took everything from Job, but not his peace of the heart, the spiritual balance that gave birth to that kind of belief by virtue of the absurd.<sup>16</sup> Peace of heart represents the measure of Job's

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<sup>16</sup> "Hence the Lord did not take everything, for He did not take away Job's praise, and his peace of heart, and the sincerity of faith from which it issued; but his confidence in the Lord

faith in God, springing from the certainty of a life without sin. In this way, Job expresses the liberty that is not suppressed by the characteristically human thought of believing that the ordeal and suffering are the effect of previous sins. Job affirms that his thinking is right and, in this way, he reveals his freedom, which is not a simple act of rebellion, as, through it, he chooses to sincerely believe in God and in his own innocence. The ordeal becomes an existential extreme situation, because it offers the person the right perspective on self-actualization: the becoming of the self does not rely exclusively and with certainty in the hands, power and will of the man, but is conditioned by divine intervention (Diaconu 1996, 154).

Job's words show the entire process of the temporal movement of repetition. Firstly, the person is offered everything, after which, he is deprived of it, to finally bring his contribution, through gratefulness and contentment for what he was given, in the very moment he has lost everything. The individual doesn't need to seek for explanations or rationalizations for his suffering, the spiritual trials, the experienced ordeals or joys, in the human goodness or badness, in the good or vicious nature of the human being. Similarly, the success of repetition is not an act that is (exclusively) subjected to will. The person does not *reach repetition*, he only *brings his contribution* to the genuine repetition; his contribution resides in suffering, pains, infinite resignation and belief in the virtue of the absurd, as reactions to the spiritual trial he is subjected to.

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remained with him as before, perhaps more fervently than before; for now there was nothing at all which could in any way divert his thought from Him" (Kierkegaard 1958, 83).

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