

SITUATING MELANCHOLY IN KIERKEGAARD'S *THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY*

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Abstract

In this article, I draw on Kierkegaard's often over-looked work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, to gain deeper insight into the tenor of melancholy. We discover that Kierkegaard labels anxiety, due to its connection to hereditary sin, as the source for melancholy. Thus, contrary to the usual interpretation of Kierkegaard, I argue that melancholy is more than an individual's struggle with existence, but is intimately tied to the historical environment, because it is steeped in an ever-increasing, ever-deepening anxiety. This link between anxiety and melancholy clears away misunderstandings about Kierkegaard's description of melancholy and suggests implications in psychology, philosophy, and theology.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, emphasizes the unbreakable link between the human condition and the mood of anxiety by calling attention to Grimm's fairy tale, "The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Anxiety Was."¹ Just as the young man in the fairy tale had to face a series of tests, including three horrific nights in a haunted castle, to figure out what it means to be anxious, so all humans must go through some kind of adventure in order to recognize their anxiety (Kierkegaard 1980, 155). In addition to anxiety, though, Kierkegaard also points to another mood which plagues humanity: the mood of melancholy.

Like anxiety, melancholy is another fundamental aspect of our human condition, manifests itself in apathy, and is often brought on by feelings of intense guilt; unlike anxiety, however, it thrives in a particular cultural and historical environment. Kierkegaard argues that during his time, the cultural and historical environment has al-

lowed melancholy to flourish into a dominant characteristic of society. In *Either/Or II*, through the pseudonymous Judge William, he states that due to the frivolity of this age we are compelled to talk about its melancholy. He asks, “[I]s not melancholy [*Tungsind*]² the defect of our age? . . . [I]s it not melancholy which has deprived us of courage to command, of courage to obey, of power to act, of the confidence necessary to hope?” (Kierkegaard 1987, II 22: 23–24). Not only the recurring presence of anxiety and melancholy in Kierkegaard’s own works, but also the prevalence with which other writers have taken up his ideas, reveals that these two moods, anxiety and melancholy, play an undeniably prominent role in Kierkegaard’s understanding of humanity.³

Even a cursory glance at the secondary literature will demonstrate the overwhelming amount of material that has been written about Kierkegaard’s melancholy, both his personal melancholy as well as his description of it (Cappelørn 2008; Ferguson 1995; Hannay 2008; Khan 1985, 1994; Marino 2008; McCarthy 1977; McCarthy 1978; Ostenfeld 1978; Podmore 2011; Verstrynge 2006). Additionally, there is a fair amount of literature, though not as much, written on Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety, both his book on the topic as well as its appearance in his other works (Beabout 1996; Grøn 1994; Marino 1998; McCarthy 1978; McCarthy 1985). This literature culminates in a body of work which describes Kierkegaard’s overall view of psychology, thereby giving rise to entire schools that have implemented his thought into their practices (Evans 1990; Khan 1994; May 1977; Nordentoft 1978).

The relationship between melancholy and anxiety has, however, been addressed only by a few writers (Cappelørn 2008; Ferguson 1995; McCarthy 1985; McCarthy 1978), and relating melancholy to his monograph, *The Concept of Anxiety*, has been almost completely disregarded.⁴ This neglect is due, first of all, to the fact that *The Concept of Anxiety* is simply a difficult work, and thus much of the literature has focused on trying to unpack the meaning from the text. Furthermore, melancholy does not appear, on a first reading, to be a primary theme of *The Concept of Anxiety*. However, I believe that by exploring the relationship between anxiety and melancholy we will not only clear away misunderstandings about Kierkegaard’s description of

melancholy, but also come to a greater awareness of how melancholy relates to our present human condition.

In this paper, I will begin by briefly considering Kierkegaard's concept of melancholy according to its historical and etymological context. Second, I will turn to the text of *The Concept of Anxiety*. By looking at both the explicit and implicit references to melancholy in the text, I will demonstrate the undeniable relationship between anxiety and melancholy. I will also argue that, contrary to the usual interpretation of Kierkegaard, melancholy is more than an individual's struggle with existence, but is intimately tied to the historical environment, coming from an ever-increasing, ever-deepening form of anxiety. Third, I will indicate how this link between anxiety and melancholy is reflected in Kierkegaard's other works.

1. The Concept of Melancholy

To begin, it is important to note that Kierkegaard actually uses two Danish terms for melancholy: *Melancholi* and *Tungsind*. *Melancholi* comes from the Greek word, *melancholi*, which literally means "black bile." According to the Greek understanding of melancholy, which was held even up until the seventeenth century, a person suffering from melancholy was thought to have an excessive amount of a cold and dry substance called black bile. Throughout the historical literature on melancholy, all sorts of symptoms are attributed to this excess of black bile, but there is one characteristic of melancholy which is almost always affirmed: it has a *sorrow without known cause*. *Tungsind* is the other Danish word for melancholy and is composed of two Danish root words: *Tung* (heavy) and *sind* (mind or spirit). *Tungsind*, then, literally means "heavy-spiritedness" or "heavy-mindedness," but is usually translated as either "melancholy" or "depression" as we see in Kierkegaard's works. (These two words are similar to the German words: *Melancholie* and *Schwermut*.) Simply speaking, as Vincent McCarthy puts it, "the two roots present two different images: blackness [from *Melancholi*] and heaviness [from *Tungsind*]" although they are related to the same mood (McCarthy 1978, 55–56).

Naturally, there is a scholarly debate over whether or not there is a formal distinction between these terms in Kierkegaard's writing and if so, what is the exact nature of the distinction. McCarthy argues

extensively in several places that *Melancholi* is a lighter, more Romantic form of melancholy, which leads into *Tungsind*, a deeper, more religious form of melancholy or depression (McCarthy 1977, 152–65; 1978, 55; 1985, 105). Karl Verstrynge affirms this distinction in his article on melancholy (Verstrynge 2006, 12–14). However, Abraham Khan counters McCarthy's account arguing that actually *Melancholi* and *Tungsind* are not linked in this way and could be as different as the emotions love and hate (Khan 1985, 80), but his analysis is based heavily on one single work, *The Concept of Irony*. Simon Podmore agrees with Khan's point that McCarthy's distinctions are overstated, but he holds that there is still room for ascribing a sense of religious longing of spirit to melancholy (Podmore 2011, 56–59).

Thus, while there is disagreement over the precise distinction between these two terms, I think it is safe to say that *Tungsind* can include a sense of religious longing (though not in every instance) and is built on the traditional notions of *Melancholi*, expanding them and deepening them, as the Danish indicates. For our purposes, we will focus our attention on *Tungsind* since that is the word that Kierkegaard uses in *The Concept of Anxiety* and the term that he employs the most throughout all of his works.

In addition to referring to the history of melancholy, Kierkegaard also focuses on *Tungsind* because it was a fashionable idea of his time (Verstrynge 2006, 14). Although the society of his time considered melancholy a sorrowful condition, it also believed that it was linked to intelligence, depth of character, and artistic talent. Kierkegaard appears to be capitalizing on the popularity of *Tungsind* to attract the attention of his readers: he wants them to look deeper into their melancholy in hopes that they will eventually look upward to faith. Harvie Ferguson's entire book, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, is written to highlight this theme. Ferguson argues that Kierkegaard views melancholy as the "most widespread and . . . the most characteristic mood" of modern society, but through an awareness of it, individuals can move beyond it to the Absolute (the God-relation) (Ferguson 1995, xv). N. J. Cappelørn summarizes this well:

In Kierkegaard's writings, then, *Tungsind* must be regarded as the continuation of a long tradition that goes back to the Greek *melancholy*, through the medieval *acedia*—through reformulations,

reinterpretations, refinements, and supplementation—on to the contemporary “spleen” [Cappelørn’s translation of *Tungsind*], *Schwermut*, and *ennui*. (Cappelørn 2008, 133)

By using the term *Tungsind*, Kierkegaard is attempting to capture both the historical quality of melancholy, from the Greeks on through the medievals, as well as the current fashionable notion of melancholy (see also Podmore 2011, 51–56).

Understanding both the historical and present nineteenth century notions of melancholy is helpful in revealing the source for Kierkegaard’s concept of melancholy (*Tungsind*), but we are still left wondering why the notion of heaviness is related to melancholy. Why, we might ask, does melancholy weigh so much? I believe that by linking anxiety to melancholy, we will be able to fill this gap in our understanding of Kierkegaard’s melancholy and discover why he believes that it is a *depressed* mood, a mood which presses and weighs the individual down. Kierkegaard’s preference for the term *Tungsind* will become clear when we look to its origin in objective anxiety, an anxiety characterized by the heavy burden of all the world’s sins. The context, then, for Kierkegaard’s concept of melancholy (*Tungsind*) is built on these three factors: the historical significance of melancholy, the contemporary, fashionable idea of melancholy of his day, and the relationship of melancholy to anxiety.

2. Situating Melancholy in the Framework of Anxiety: Explicit and Implicit Textual References to Melancholy in *The Concept of Anxiety*

Kierkegaard writes *The Concept of Anxiety* under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, but he must have felt that the content was close to his own heart since he considered publishing it under his own name (Kierkegaard 1980, 177). Nevertheless, as Haufniensis, he writes his complex treatise on anxiety where he provides the context for the mood of melancholy. In this section, we will dig deeper into the text of *The Concept of Anxiety* to discover the relationship between anxiety and melancholy through the following topics: (a) the relationship between one type of anxiety, objective anxiety, and melancholy, (b) the introduction of a genius to combat this deeper anxiety (melancholy), (c) the characteristics of melancholy seen in the anxiety about the good, and

(d) the teaching-quality of anxiety that is amplified by melancholy. We will then conclude by addressing some objections to this strong connection between anxiety and melancholy.

2.a. Objective Anxiety and Melancholy

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard carefully chooses psychology and dogmatics as his methods of inquiry, because of their insight into the connection between anxiety and sin. Psychology establishes the real possibility of sin, or *how* an individual sins. Dogmatics, however, establishes the ideal possibility of sin, or *why* an individual sins (Kierkegaard 1980, 32). Kierkegaard does not take the time to argue for this link between anxiety and sin, but simply assumes that the two must be connected. It is here in this necessary connection between anxiety and sin that we can uncover the roots of melancholy. First, however, we must understand the nature of sin by looking to the sympathetic example of Adam, the human who first sinned. And then, by comparing and contrasting our experience of sin with Adam's experience of sin, we will discover how one particular type of anxiety becomes melancholy.

Adam, as the representative for all individuals, offers a picture of what it means to sin, because he, along with every other individual, is simultaneously "both himself and the race" (Kierkegaard 1980, 28). The more we are able to understand how and why Adam sinned, the more we are able to understand how and why any individual sins. Kierkegaard states, "How sin came into the world, each man understands solely by himself" (Kierkegaard 1980, 51). Whether the agent is Adam or a subsequent individual, sin always enters the world in the same way: through anxiety. Adam does not have anxiety about his past sins, since he is innocent, nor does he have anxiety about evil, since he does not have full knowledge of good and evil, and yet, he is still in a state of anxiety, because he is in the realm of possibility. For Kierkegaard, it is simply the presence of possibility, due to the freedom of choice, which breeds anxiety. Thus, every human, on account of free choice, lives in a certain state of anxiety, making anxiety a "fundamental part of the human condition," as Stephen Evans describes it (2009, 109).

But is this state of anxiety the same for Adam as it is for the post-lapsarian individual? Yes and no, Kierkegaard replies, and then distinguishes between two types of anxiety: subjective anxiety and objective

anxiety. Subjective anxiety, or qualitative anxiety, is in all individuals and is the consequence of the individual's own sin, whether actual or potential (Kierkegaard 1980, 56). Objective anxiety, or quantitative anxiety, is the "reflection of the sinfulness of the generation in the whole world" and is found in the nonhuman aspects of creation (Kierkegaard 1980, 57). Although Kierkegaard does not clarify how objective anxiety is reflected in nonhuman existence, he does cite the groaning of creation spoken of in Romans 8:22 as an appropriate illustration. This seems to indicate that objective anxiety is revealed in the broken and destructive aspects of the natural world. For example, nature appears broken to us and, in a way, evil when it wreaks havoc on the ones we love through the form of natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and plagues. Such groaning of nature, as seen in natural disasters, can be understood as a consequence of objective anxiety. Arne Grøn describes objective anxiety, or "reflective anxiety," as he calls it, as "the change that happens with anxiety" due to the "guilt [which] accumulates over the course of history" (Grøn 1994, 36).⁵ Such guilt also directly affects the individual. The consequence of objective anxiety in an individual results in the feeling of carrying the "guilt of the whole world" (Kierkegaard 1980, 109). The weight of anxiety on nature as well as on the individual only increases since the sins of humanity continue to increase over time; more and more people, more and more sin.

Adam and the postlapsarian individual suffer from both types of anxiety, but in different amounts. Adam suffers more from subjective anxiety than the subsequent individual, because the consequence of his potential act of sin is greater than the consequence of the individual's sin. But, the individual suffers more from quantitative anxiety than Adam, because the amount of sin has increased since the time of Adam. (Of course, for Adam, the amount of previous sin equaled zero!) As sin has accumulated over time, objective anxiety has grown due to the guilt for this ever-increasing amount of sin and due to the gnawing suspicion that more and more humans cannot withstand the temptation to sin. Not only has Adam sinned, but every other human in the thousands of years since Adam, with the exception of Christ, has sinned; the possibility of the next individual choosing not to sin

seems less likely, and the inevitability of sin heightens this objective anxiety from generation to generation.

The ever-increasing, ever-deepening nature of objective anxiety is what creates the environment for the mood of melancholy. Melancholy, then, is not necessarily tied to an individual's personal journey, but represents a historical phenomenon. Anxiety begins in innocence, as in Adam as well as in a child, but when it takes root in a culture, the mood of anxiety over time deepens into the mood of melancholy. Kierkegaard explains:

Anxiety has here the same meaning as melancholy [*Tungsind*] at a much later point, when freedom, having passed through the imperfect forms of its history, in the profoundest sense will come to itself. (Kierkegaard 1980, 42–43)

Kierkegaard is pointing out that anxiety has a similar composition to melancholy and in fact becomes melancholy at a later point. This prepositional phrase “at a much or far later point” (*paa et langt senere Punkt*) initially appears ambiguous for it suggests two possible interpretations.

First, Kierkegaard could mean that anxiety becomes melancholy at a later point *in an individual*. An individual may struggle with anxiety for twenty years only to sink finally into a state of melancholy. Or, second, Kierkegaard may mean that anxiety becomes melancholy at a later point *in history*. Both McCarthy and Ferguson, despite recognizing the significant connection between anxiety and melancholy, indicate only the former: the progression from anxiety to melancholy is part of an *individual's* sequence of moods. McCarthy believes that anxiety “serves as a passageway” from one mood to another, playing a part in the structural development of an individual's moods (McCarthy 1978, 33). While each mood in the sequence never completely disappears, McCarthy holds that an individual develops according to this natural progression, where one mood becomes more prominent than the others until it reaches its crisis point. Ferguson places his discussion of melancholy in the context of the modern age, thus, discovering connections between the characteristics of modernity and melancholy. However, Ferguson still speaks of the manifestations of melancholy only in individualistic terms (Ferguson 1995, 134, 147).

Both Ferguson and McCarthy appear to view melancholy as a later stage in an individual's mood progression.

Although an individual experiences melancholy as a progressive or deeper form of anxiety, as McCarthy and Ferguson describe, a fuller understanding of objective anxiety provides the context for *why* an individual experiences this phenomenon. This context has been overlooked by recent scholarship, because some have seen Kierkegaard's discussion of objective anxiety as difficult, incomplete, or even forced (McCarthy 1985, 106; 1978, 41). But, upon looking again at objective anxiety, we will find that the link between anxiety and melancholy becomes much clearer. Since objective anxiety is based on the accumulation of sin over time, the later an individual lives in history, the more sin he or she must face. As the quantity of sin increases, the mood of anxiety deepens into the mood of melancholy, not just for the individual, but for all of humanity. Thus, when Kierkegaard states that melancholy is a later form of anxiety, it is my contention that he is reflecting on the mood progression of history and not simply the mood progression of an individual.

The second part of the quotation, which states, "when freedom, having passed through the imperfect forms of its history, in the profoundest sense will come to itself," describes how melancholy develops out of anxiety due to the way the notion of freedom changes over time. As we have seen, anxiety comes from the possibility of freedom. Even before Adam sins, he is anxious because he, at some level, recognizes the possibility to sin. But upon succumbing to the temptation of sin, Adam's anxiety increases, which results in his loss of freedom. Because Kierkegaard believes that Adam provides a picture for how every individual sins (Kierkegaard 1980, 51), each subsequent individual also experiences this loss of freedom upon sinning. This guilt from sin propels the individual toward more and more sin, making the individual feel as if he or she has little choice.

Again, as seen by his reference to freedom in relation to its *history*, Kierkegaard has more than an individualistic context in mind, but recognizes that it is the historical context that takes part in creating this loss of freedom. This is not to say that, during this age of melancholy, freedom is completely lost, but the heaviness of sin certainly thickens the air, making humans feel more and more oppressed by its

inescapable power. The inevitability of falling into sin and the increasing amount of sin weighs down upon the individual and makes the individual feel as though he or she is not free. And yet, freedom will come back to itself “in the profoundest sense” or, as the older translator Walter Lowrie put it, “in a deeper sense” (*i dybeste Forstand skal komme*) (Kierkegaard 1957, 39). Even in the loss of freedom, there is the hope that in giving it up, it can be received back in an even profounder and deeper way. This greater freedom is not simply the freedom to choose, but the freedom to be who one is intended to be, and it comes from the teaching-quality of deep anxiety (melancholy), as we will discuss shortly.

In summary, we have seen that over time, objective anxiety grows heavier due to the weight of sin and deepens into the mood of melancholy. Although an individual exhibits this melancholy, he or she is representing the historical progression of the mood due to the accumulation of sin and due to the resulting loss of freedom. This heavy anxiety, especially when linked to the darkness of melancholy, provides a rather bleak picture for the state of the individual. Kierkegaard offers hope, however, through his concept of the genius, which is the only way that an individual can combat this deep anxiety or melancholy.

2.b. Concept of Genius

To counter the anxiety of sin, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of genius. The first type of genius, the immediate genius, focuses on the outward—the present circumstances and people in his or her life—and enjoys the pleasure of the moment. An individual with such an outward focus refuses to perform self-reflection, and thus has a lack of inwardness or earnestness. At first, by disregarding inwardness and centering their life on aesthetic pleasure, such persons can accomplish, what Kierkegaard calls, a “defiance of melancholy” because they have successfully distracted themselves from the inward pain of anxiety (Kierkegaard 1980, 146). But, despite the fact that the immediate genius can “become great and his accomplishment astounding,” he will “never become great to himself” (Kierkegaard 1980, 101). The absence of self-reflection results in a loss of inwardness and creates an emptiness inside of the individual; the individual’s own identity becomes like nothing, without content, and “dubiously melancholy” (Kierkegaard 1980, 101). Thus, we see that the attempt of an immedi-

ate genius to counter anxiety, which may at first ward off melancholy, will ultimately fail. The connection between anxiety and melancholy is revealed even here in the immediate genius since his or her inability to counter anxiety leads the individual to fall into the deeper form of anxiety, melancholy.

But to truly overcome anxiety, to renounce anxiety without anxiety, the genius must change and become a religious genius. Kierkegaard appears to relate personally with this struggle between being an immediate genius and a religious genius; he writes the following in an apparently autobiographical tone:

Such a struggle is indubitably very exhausting, because there will come moments when they [the geniuses] almost regret having begun it and *recall with melancholy at times possibly unto despair*, the smiling life that would have opened before them had they pursued the immediate inclination of their talent. Nevertheless, in the extreme terror of distress, when it is as though all were lost . . . and the smiling way of talent is cut off from him by his own act, the person who is aware will indubitably hear a voice saying: Well done, my son! Just keep on, for he who loses all, gains all. (Kierkegaard 1980, 107; italics added)

In this quote, Kierkegaard begins in the third person plural, turns to the third person singular, and ends in a statement directed to an implied “you” (second person singular). His language illustrates how this struggle is drawing closer and closer to his heart. He painfully recognizes how the loss of the immediate life, with its gratifications and pleasures, can bring about a state of melancholy and even despair, but by becoming a religious genius, he can take comfort in the eternal reward for a life filled with pain and struggle yet lived for a higher calling. A religious genius is one who does not remain in the immediate, but engages in self-reflection and is willing to embrace anxiety in order to move above it and beyond it.

This metamorphosis, from an immediate genius to a religious genius, must involve an embrace of anxiety and an acknowledgement of one’s great guilt. Kierkegaard explains, “In freedom’s possibility, it holds true that the more profoundly guilt is discovered, the greater the genius, because the greatness of a man depends simply and solely on the energy of the God-relation in him” (Kierkegaard 1980, 109–10). A

religious genius knows more fully the depth of his or her guilt through an encounter with anxiety, and as a result, looks with eagerness to the absolution found in the God-relation. Anxiety, through the voice of melancholy, brings an awareness of the individual's sin and guilt, which can lead to the realization of an individual's desperate need for forgiveness and then draw him or her to turn to a God who forgives. The greater the acknowledgement of sin, the more the individual will be grateful for the absolution through forgiveness.

Kierkegaard may be thinking in terms of Jesus's words, after the sinful woman poured perfume on his feet: "[H]er many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Those, like the sinful woman, who have come to see the gravity of their sin, will be all the more eager to turn toward the God-relation to receive the needed forgiveness and love. Such forgiveness is accomplished through the work of the Atonement, and this is discovered from the teaching-quality of anxiety and melancholy, which I will describe later in more depth.

2.c. Anxiety about the Good

Thus far, the text of *The Concept of Anxiety* has revealed two aspects of the relationship between anxiety and melancholy. First, we have seen how one type of anxiety, objective anxiety, has, due to the historical accumulation of sin, deepened into melancholy. Additionally, the text has revealed how the inability of the immediate genius to counter anxiety can lead to melancholy, but that, through the embracing of anxiety (and thus, melancholy), the immediate genius can become a religious genius who is able to counter anxiety. In this section, we will look at the connection between the anxiety about the good and melancholy. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard does not explicitly mention melancholy in his discussion on the anxiety about the good, the characteristics of the anxiety about the good align themselves so closely to the melancholic spirit that we cannot ignore their connection.

Kierkegaard differentiates between two objects of anxiety: the evil and the good. (At first, Kierkegaard states that anxiety has nothing as its object when speaking of the anxiety of Adam, because it is based only the possibility of sin and not on something definite [Kierkegaard 1980, 41–43]. But here, he does attribute objects of good and evil to anxiety. It is not that he is contradicting himself, but that the anxiety, as

we discussed earlier, changes after the fall so that sin is no longer only a possibility but a reality.)⁶ Evil is the more obvious object of anxiety; we can imagine the anxiety that comes as a result of a past, present, or future evil action. This anxiety leads the individual into the bondage of sin, which creates “an unfree relation to the evil” (Kierkegaard 1980, 119). In such bondage, the individual is anxious about sinning, and in that anxiety, he or she leaps into sin. The individual may engage in false repentance, only to be pulled back into the cycle of sinning.

The anxiety about the good, however, represents an even deeper level of unfreedom; in fact, it is characterized as a demonic stronghold. When an individual is anxious about the good, he or she cannot have any relationship with it: “the demonic is an unfree relation to the good” (Kierkegaard 1980, 119). Kierkegaard uses the example of Jesus encountering someone who is demon-possessed in the Gospels to illustrate the anxiety about the good. Upon Jesus’s approach, a person may not speak at all (Luke 11:14) or may ask, “What do you want with me?” (Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28) or as Kierkegaard puts it, “What have I to do with you?” (Kierkegaard 1980, 124) The freedom lost under the anxiety about the good is of the worst kind: an individual can no longer have any connection or relationship with anything good or divine. Anxiety about the good (the demonic) manifests itself in two states attributed to the mood of melancholy: the state of contentlessness or boredom and the state of a severe loss of freedom.

The state of contentlessness or boredom is brought on by the individual’s lack of identity and inability to define a self-identity. This emptiness, as we saw above, leads to an individual becoming “dubiously melancholy” (Kierkegaard 1980, 101). The repulsion with regard to anything good keeps an individual from finding any meaning in life; everything appears boring and without substance. A melancholic is often plagued with the feeling of boredom, which stems from an absence of self-knowledge, and is soon overcome by intense sorrow and despair. In the demonic aspect of anxiety, we find the most common historical description of melancholy as being a *sorrow without content or cause*. Kierkegaard will reference this symptom directly in his *Either/Or II* (Kierkegaard 1987, II 170–71: 188–90), as we will see, but here he is simply alluding to it through an aspect of anxiety.

Secondly, the frightful loss of freedom, brought about by the demonic, ties directly to melancholy because it reveals the relationship between melancholy and the changing nature of freedom, as we saw in Kierkegaard's earlier remark (see again the key passage [Kierkegaard 1980, 42–43]). This demonic loss of freedom is displayed in two ways: somatically-psychically and pneumatically.

When freedom is lost somatically-psychically, an individual's anxiety manifests itself in a bodily way by increased susceptibility to mental disorders or physical ailments. These manifestations can range from the almost undetectable to the completely conspicuous including "hypersensibility[,] hyperirritability, neurasthenia [a condition associated with tiredness, headaches, and emotional instability], hysteria, hypochondria" (Kierkegaard 1980, 136). In each of these disorders, the mind and body are not free to pursue what is good for the individual so that he or she becomes trapped in unhealthy patterns of living. Kierkegaard is highlighting the loss of freedom which, he believes, often accompanies many mental disorders; such an individual lacks the freedom to be who he or she is intended to be and to pursue what is best for his or her life. To be clear, Kierkegaard references the spiritual and psychological aspects of these mental and physical disorders not to deny that there are also real physical and material causes, but to point out that the mood of anxiety is linked to the physical health of the individual. This link between anxiety and mental disorders does not make the individual blameworthy for the condition as if his or her own sin is the direct cause; rather, we are reminded that Kierkegaard sees his time in history as one of deepened anxiety, an age of melancholy, where the culture itself creates increased anxiety, which will reveal itself all the more in an individual's mind and body.

The pneumatic loss of freedom is displayed in less physical ways, but takes place when an individual denies his or her very spirit. This denial ultimately rejects any inclusion of truth because truth must be connected with one's spirit. As a result, an individual becomes susceptible to such states of mind as unbelief, superstition, hypocrisy, offensiveness, pride, and cowardice. Here, as we discussed before, one may be able to defy melancholy by living according to untruth and deception, but such defiance will only be temporary, as it is difficult for any human to stay forever in a fantasy world (Kierkegaard 1980, 146).

In review, the characteristics of the anxiety about the good also demonstrate the necessary coupling between anxiety and melancholy. The two key elements in the anxiety about the good—the loss of content and the loss of freedom, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually—reveal ways individuals in a society may begin to descend from anxiety to melancholy. Amplifying these characteristics of anxiety in a particular environment will allow for the entrance of melancholy. This entrance, though painful, may allow an individual in such a society an opportunity to be educated and turned toward truth.

2.d. Teaching-Quality of Anxiety

Kierkegaard closes his treatise on anxiety, somewhat abruptly, with further thoughts on the role of faith and the Atonement. Anxiety, he argues, makes the individual aware of the infinite possibilities of sin due to all the sin that has been committed, could be committed, and will be committed, and then trains the individual to embrace the resulting infinite guilt. Embracing one's infinite guilt is possible only through the help of faith and the power of the Atonement. Kierkegaard concludes, "Therefore he who in relation to guilt is educated by anxiety will rest only in the Atonement" (Kierkegaard 1980, 162). Gordon Marino states that "it is only the person who knows that he is infinitely guilty who will look in the right direction for rest" (Marino 1998, 327).

Kierkegaard is constantly emphasizing, both in this work as well as others, that in order to find rest or peace, one must first descend into the depths. Anxiety contributes to this descent by bringing an awareness of one's infinite guiltiness. Thus, melancholy, as a deeper, heavier form of anxiety, allows an individual to descend even lower; for, the lower one descends, the greater the potential for higher ascent, a greater grasping of truth. In this low state, there is a desperation, which can drive an individual toward a thirst for truth and toward a willingness to change his or her whole being. According to Kierkegaard, no change is possible without an individual first embracing this deepened form of anxiety, this melancholy. He argues, under the pseudonym Judge William, "But the persons whose souls do not know this melancholy [*Tungsind*] are those whose souls have no presentiment of a metamorphosis" (Kierkegaard 1987, II 172: 190). An immediate genius, for example, must come to know melancholy in order to transform into a religious genius. This kind of soul-transformation, demonstrated by

the acknowledgement of truth, can happen only once a person has descended into the depth. In one of the most beautiful passages of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard writes:

Truth has always had many loud proclaimers, but the question is whether a person will in the deepest sense acknowledge the truth, will allow it to permeate his whole being, will accept all its consequences, and not have an emergency hiding place for himself and a Judas kiss for the consequence. (Kierkegaard 1980, 138)

An acknowledgement of the truth, which is an expression of freedom, arises out of an embrace of all its consequences, including the intense struggle with melancholy, and rejects any hiding from the truth or betraying of the truth.

But, how can an individual escape from the trenches of this deepened anxiety, this melancholy? Does a melancholic man pull himself up by his own bootstraps and climb out on his own strength? Certainly not. The possibility of ascent must come from outside of the individual, by placing one's faith in the only man who was "more than an individual" (Kierkegaard 1980, 38). "The only one who sorrowed innocently over sinfulness," Kierkegaard professes, "was Christ, but he did not sorrow over it as a fate he had to put up with. He sorrowed as the one who freely chose to carry all the sin of the world and to suffer its punishment. . . . Christ was more than an individual" (Kierkegaard 1980, 38). Leaving the discussion of the Atonement to the realm of dogmatics, Kierkegaard only hints at the power of the Atonement in *The Concept of Anxiety*, but his implication is clear: an escape out of the depths only comes from placing the burden of infinite sin and guilt on the willing recipient of Christ. According to Christian dogmatics, which Kierkegaard professes in other works, Christ is the substitutionary sacrifice who took the sin of the whole world by dying on a cross, but then offering the world life through his resurrection three days later. When an individual places his or her faith in Christ, he or she can be relieved of the burden of melancholy, brought on by historical and individual sin, and begin an ascent towards life, truth, and rest. This is the direction that Kierkegaard is heading in his discussion of anxiety, though he does not fully arrive. But he does drop hints at the importance of faith, through the concept of the religious genius and through the concluding emphasis on the teaching-quality of anxiety.

Kierkegaard, however, does qualify that faith is not the cure-all that takes away all the effects of anxiety and melancholy. Faith breaks the cycle of sin and allows the individual the potential for upward movement, but an individual may need to continue to renounce anxiety over and over again, as it will never fully go away during one's earthly life. Kierkegaard states:

The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety without anxiety, which only faith can do; faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but, itself eternally young, it extricates itself from anxiety's moment of death. (Kierkegaard 1980, 117)

An individual can break the bondage of sin due to the courage offered by faith. In this faith, he or she is able to renounce anxiety without anxiety, and while this renunciation does not destroy anxiety completely, it does remove the individual from its deadly grasp.

2.e. Objections

In review, the framework of anxiety is built on the fall of Adam, whose act of sin gives us a picture of every individual's fall into sin. Every individual has two types of anxiety, objective, due to the nonhuman effect of sin and its cumulative nature, and subjective, due to the individual's own possibility of sin and past sins. Melancholy comes from objective anxiety, the historical accumulation of sin, and appears in a loss of freedom, after freedom has been dragged through history, creating a culture of melancholy. Only a religious genius can escape from the oppression of anxiety by embracing his or her melancholy existence through the power of faith and the pursuit of truth. The anxiety about the good or the demonic, representing many characteristics of melancholy, can be countered only by such a religious genius who has been educated by anxiety. Anxiety, then, can help direct the individual toward faith, and thus, an individual, steeped in a culture of melancholy, is all the more desperate to grab hold of faith through the power of the Atonement. A descent into the depths may be the only path to ascend the heights.

Two serious objections can be raised to our discussion so far. First, to argue that melancholy, due to objective anxiety, is a historical phenomenon as opposed to being only an individual phenomenon, may seem counter to Kierkegaard's usually strong bent toward the

individual. He relies heavily upon an individual's experience and subjective understanding of truth, because he believes that this is the only way that one can actually *know* truth. He is interested primarily in the individual throughout all his works and fights against any kind of truth that is not personal or individualistic.

In response, two things may be said. First, I am not arguing that melancholy is *only* a historical phenomenon. It is manifested in the individual, as we can see, for example, in the characteristics of the anxiety about the good. In fact, the reason for Kierkegaard labeling his age, an age of melancholy, lies in the experience of individuals. Nevertheless, we cannot disregard how the sins of history affect the individual. Second, though Kierkegaard does emphasize the individual in his works, he also takes time to criticize the problems of his society around him. He is particularly critical of the hypocrisy in the Danish church and the flaws in the popular philosophical schools of Hegel. Such historical and social criticism indicates that he is reflecting upon the relationship between historical communities and individuals. In the same way, Kierkegaard is thinking in terms of relating the historical and social elements of melancholy to the experience of the individual.

A second objection is that I am drawing excessively rigid distinctions between anxiety and melancholy. By arguing that melancholy is a later form of anxiety, is Kierkegaard arguing that anxiety, in itself, is no longer active in his day, since everyone is overcome by melancholy? It seems unfair to try to categorize such slippery emotional states as anxiety and melancholy and, even worse, to make a claim that Kierkegaard, who revolts against systems, would make such clear distinctions.

This objection must be duly noted, and while it is helpful to draw these distinctions, we must be clear that these are loose distinctions. They help us place the moods and give us depth to their qualities, but we have to remember that such moods do not always follow the rules. The ambiguous nature of all of Kierkegaard's moods—irony, anxiety, melancholy, and despair—must be held in tension with the unique characteristics that Kierkegaard ascribes to them. In regards to anxiety and melancholy in particular, we have already seen how many of their characteristics overlap precisely because melancholy is a *form* of anxiety. Melancholy, then, does not do away with anxiety, but amplifies and deepens it.

3. Melancholy in Relation to Kierkegaard's Other Works

We will now turn to how melancholy relates to Kierkegaard's other works. At the outset, we may wonder why Kierkegaard did not write a treatise on the mood of melancholy, as he did with the other three moods: irony, anxiety, and despair in *The Concept of Irony*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *The Sickness Unto Death*, respectively. But perhaps the slippery nature of it, both historically as well as currently in his own time, made such a work too difficult to write.⁷ Furthermore, due to the closeness of melancholy to his own heart on account of witnessing it in his father as well as himself, he may have felt it was too painful to write about it straightforwardly. Instead, we discover the theme of melancholy interwoven throughout his works, often demonstrated experientially, rather than methodically. Through these narrative accounts, we come to find that connecting melancholy to a deepened notion of anxiety makes the accounts all the more vivid.

Because other writers have already devoted much attention to compiling Kierkegaard's references to melancholy, I will not attempt to do an exhaustive analysis of Kierkegaard's melancholy here, but, instead, look at a few key passages from a selection of his works in order to continue to build this link between anxiety and melancholy. The most important passage is found in *Either/Or II* where Kierkegaard, as Judge William, attempts to give a definition of melancholy. The quotation is quite lengthy but extremely important for this paper:

What, then, is melancholy [*Tungsind*]? It is hysteria of the spirit. There comes a moment in a person's life when immediacy is ripe, so to speak, and when the spirit requires a higher form, when it wants to lay hold of itself as spirit. . . . If this does not happen, if the movement is halted, if its repressed, then melancholy [*Tungsind*] sets in. One can try a great many things to consign it to oblivion; one can work, can snatch at more innocent remedies than a Nero, but the melancholy [*Tungsind*] continues.

There is something unexplainable in melancholy [*Tungsind*]. A person with a sorrow or worry knows why he sorrows or worries. If a melancholic person is asked what the reason is, what it is that weighs on him, he will answer: I don't know; I cannot explain it. Therein lies the limitlessness of melancholy [*Tungsind*]. . . . [M]elancholy [*Tungsind*] is sin, is actually a sin *instar omnium* [that stands for all], for it is the sin of not willing deeply and inwardly, and this is

a mother of all sins. This sickness, or more correctly this sin, is very prevalent in our day. . . .

But even the person in whose life this movement occurs most calmly and peacefully and at the right time will still always retain a little melancholy [*Tungsind*], but this is linked to something much deeper, to hereditary sin, and is rooted in this, that no human being can become transparent to himself. (Kierkegaard 1987, II 170–71: 188–90)

Kierkegaard, again, follows the classic understanding of melancholy by defining it as a state of sorrow without known cause. When the spirit chooses not to move upward or is prevented from the upward movement, melancholy sets in, placing a burden or weight upon the spirit. And then, in accordance with the medieval tradition of *acedia*, he proclaims melancholy as an actual sin. Not only is it a sin of the individual, but it is connected to the sins of humanity, for it is rooted in hereditary sin. Here we find anxiety lurking behind this definition of melancholy. Melancholy is built upon the anxiety of hereditary sin, the sin that weighs humanity down because of its sheer quantity. Kierkegaard illustrates here the “later point” foretold in *The Concept of Anxiety* (Kierkegaard 1980, 42), the point where anxiety turns into melancholy. Melancholy, as a result, becomes “very prevalent in our day,” as he puts it. Although Cappelørn does not explain the exact nature of the connection between anxiety and melancholy, in his brief chapter on this “definition” passage of *Either/Or II*, he does argue for the importance of including the concept of hereditary sin, which he relates to anxiety, in our understanding of melancholy (or spleen, as he prefers to translate the Danish *Tungsind*) (Cappelørn 2008). As Cappelørn rightly argues, even here in this section on melancholy, we find a reference to the mood of anxiety.

This helpful passage from *Either/Or* is somewhat of an anomaly because it addresses melancholy in a direct manner. In contrast, Kierkegaard’s melancholic themes in the rest of *Either/Or* are displayed through the narratives of his writers: “A” (the aesthete) and “B” (Judge William). The aesthete or “A,” whose collection of papers makes up the majority of *Part I* of *Either/Or*, often describes his own experience with melancholy. One of his complaints is:

I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding—the motion is too powerful; I don't feel like walking—it is too tiring; I don't feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don't feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that either. *Summa Summarum*: I don't feel like doing anything. (Kierkegaard 1987, I 4: 20)

The apathy of the melancholic aesthete is due to a loss of content in his life. The state of contentlessness or boredom, stemming from the anxiety about the good, is seen here in the experience of this melancholic character.

Another relation between anxiety and melancholy is seen in Kierkegaard's work *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*. Here we find the teaching-quality of melancholy emphasized, which, as we have seen, originates from the teaching-quality of anxiety. In *Repetition*, under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, Kierkegaard uses the relationship between Constantin and a young man to illustrate the nature of melancholy. Just as Kierkegaard in his own life breaks off an engagement with the love of his heart, Regine Olsen, the young man in this narrative forsakes the woman he loves. The young man's realization, perhaps mirroring Kierkegaard's own heart, is that he cannot bear to reveal his true melancholy nature to the woman. For, the young man's "melancholy nature" would be a "complete humiliation" to the lady, and he feels that he must break with her (Kierkegaard 1946, III 220–21: 89–90). This break, though, as Constantin foreshadows, will then allow the mood of melancholy to instruct and lead the young man toward something higher.

Similarly, in *Stages on Life's Way*, through a series of diary entries, a young man also refuses to marry due to his melancholy. In one of the pseudonymous journal entries, the diarist reflects:

My melancholy [*Tungsind*] hunts for the terrifying in all directions. Now it seizes me with all its dreadfulness.⁸ Flee from it, I cannot and will not—I must bear the thought; then I find a religious reassurance, and only then am I free and happy as spirit. (Kierkegaard 1988, VI 349: 374)

Due to its heaviness, the writer must carry all of the dreadfulness which comes from melancholy. Such heaviness, which can only come from

the weight of anxiety, cannot be avoided. It can only be dealt with by a turn to the reassurance of the religious, the power of the Atonement.

And finally, we are compelled to turn to Kierkegaard's journals, which often display Kierkegaard's true heart, as a final confirmation of this particular relationship between melancholy and anxiety. From the very beginning of his life, Kierkegaard feels the weight of melancholy, which he attributes to his own natural bent as well as to his father's melancholic nature. He discloses:

It is terrible when I think, even for a single moment, over the dark background which, from the very earliest time, was part of my life. The dread [*Angest*] with which my father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy [*Tungsind*], and all the things in this connection which I do not even note down. (Kierkegaard 1959, 149)

Notice, even here in his journal, he makes the link between the anxiety (here translated as "dread") of his soul and the melancholy of his father. His father fills his soul with anxiety bringing upon him this frightful weight of melancholy. As a result, Kierkegaard often feels relegated to a "cabin of melancholy," isolated and alone in his own guilt (Kierkegaard 1959, 226). Repeatedly, he connects his melancholy with his father, viewing it as inherited from him and fostered by him. Even in his own personal experience, then, melancholy has a historical element, a burden from a previous generation placed upon his shoulders as a child. And yet, his melancholy continually turns him toward the God-relation and pushes him toward a metamorphosis. He writes, "I shall therefore remain quiet . . . and really think out *the idea of my melancholy together with God here and now* . . . in the faith that God has forgotten in forgiveness what guilt there may be" (Kierkegaard 1959, 128; italics in original). Again, the heavy guilt, coming from objective anxiety, is later manifested in an individual like Kierkegaard as the mood of melancholy. Only in faith can an individual recognize that he or she is infinitely guilty and, at the same time, turn to the forgiveness offered by God. Kierkegaard, according to his journals, personally experiences the later form of anxiety, melancholy, from his early childhood, bearing the weight of it all his life, and yet he allows it to bring him to a metamorphosis of faith.

As we mentioned previously, we have to be careful of making too great a distinction between anxiety and melancholy. It is true that anxiety

and melancholy have distinct characteristics and play different roles at different times in history. But this is not to say that anxiety does not pop back up in melancholy or that there is not some ambiguity between the two. As we saw in Kierkegaard's journal entry above, he points to both the anxiety and the melancholy of his father as tormenting him. In his papers as well, he even puts the terms together, labeling certain thoughts of man as coming from his "melancholy anxiety" (Kierkegaard 1980, 172). These references do not contradict our previous statements, but rather demonstrate that there is a flow between anxiety and melancholy. They are both one mood and two, at the same time. We can then speak of the melancholy anxiety of an age and understand such a claim according to the context given in this paper.

As a review, then, of this third section, we referred to the definition of melancholy in *Either/Or*, to the experiential accounts in *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, and *Stages on Life's Way* as well as to his personal diary in order to further investigate Kierkegaard's concept of melancholy. While there remains a natural element of ambiguity, our investigation confirms that the source of melancholy is, as we suspected, in the heaviness of sin and guilt, which is grounded in Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have found the appropriate context for Kierkegaard's concept of melancholy by discovering anxiety as its source. These reflections not only provide clarity to Kierkegaard's understanding of melancholy, hopefully dispelling some of the previous misconceptions, but also lay the groundwork for further work in pragmatic psychology. Applying Kierkegaard's insights to psychology is not a new idea, but has been done by others such as the members of the existential psychology movement (e.g., May 1977), Khan in his article on melancholy and depression for *The Journal of Medical Humanities* (Khan 1994), and Evans in his book relating Kierkegaard's ideas to Christian ministry (Evans 1990). In a similar fashion, the conclusions in this paper could lend themselves to a future study on how the link between anxiety and melancholy may offer a fresh perspective on modern-day depression.

Nevertheless, our present journey through anxiety and melancholy has come to an end. After walking through the paths of anxiety, we

have found the proper place for melancholy in Kierkegaard's objective anxiety. As anxiety builds up over time, the environment around humanity becomes intensely melancholic, culminating in an age of melancholy. Melancholy, though black and heavy, offers an individual the potential to hope. If melancholy is dealt with honestly, which, according to Kierkegaard, takes the character of a genius, an individual will reflect critically on his or her self. But even upon self-reflection, the emptiness in the self, coming from the guilt and the lack of personal identity, paints such a bleak picture that no individual, not even a genius, can endure it without a turning to faith, where a genius becomes transfigured into a religious genius. The turn to faith, for Kierkegaard, is the beginning of the ascent, an upward climb toward a closer connection with God, by accepting His forgiveness and His love. Upon such a turn, an individual may encounter a deeper sense of healing—no longer needing to wallow in the depths, but instead can feel called to scale the heights.⁹

Notes

1. The German title is *Märchen von einem, der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen*.
2. I will use “melancholy” for the Danish *Tungsind*, although the translators, Howard Hong and Edna Hong—understandably, as we will discuss—render it as “depression.”
3. Vincent McCarthy persuasively identifies four primary moods of Kierkegaard: irony, anxiety, melancholy, and despair (McCarthy 1978), but this paper will focus only on the connection between anxiety and melancholy.
4. McCarthy and Cappelørn both briefly reference it, as we will discuss (McCarthy 1985, 104–05; Cappelørn 2008, 142–45).
5. Unlike other commentators, as we will see, Grøn does not shy away from discussing objective anxiety. While he does not relate it directly to melancholy, his description is quite helpful and points in a similar direction as this paper.
6. See Grøn for a helpful explanation on why there is this ambiguity about the possible objects of anxiety (Grøn 1994, 42–45).
7. McCarthy argues that perhaps *Either/Or* serves as the missing work (McCarthy 1978, 53).
8. In the first English translation of *The Concept of Anxiety*, the word *Angest* was translated as “dread” (see Kierkegaard 1957). But since then, the English word “anxiety” has rightly been thought of as a more appropriate translation for *Angest*. Thus, the word here translated as “dreadfulness” is not *Angest*, but is the Danish *Rædsel*, meaning “terribleness” or “horrifying-ness.”
9. I would like to thank Michael Jones and Daniel Marrs for their help with the Danish language in this paper.

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