

The Concept of Anxiety and the solution to man's problems.

In The Concept of Anxiety Vigilius Haufniensis is on the quest of human *nature*. He persistently talks about human nature and his book is meant to be a *scientific* description of human nature. (Cmp. BA introduction). The subject of Vigilius is human sin but his main subject and interest is obviously human nature. How can we possibly explain sin he asks? And his answer is a theory of human nature. Human nature must be of such quality that it makes sin possible and Vigilius asks: What is the nature of man? Human nature is constituted by disposition. Maybe ethics or Christianity or dogmatics will oppose and accuse him of blasphemy – but Vigilius don't care. Human nature is according to Vigilius a certain probability, disposition, an inherent direction, or directedness and to describe that disposition with the method of science is to Vigilius more important than anything else.

Kierkegaard presented several surprising and innovative solutions to the human crisis and condition in his work The Concept of Anxiety which was published June 1844. Some of these of Kierkegaard's thoughts will be analyzed in the following pages.

So-called Naturalism and Naturalization as well as Neo-Aristotelean philosophy have been fairly important in philosophy in recent years. How can we relate Kierkegaard to this interest in and to this conceptualization of human nature and the human condition?

A major problem in this context is of course that the concept of so-called Naturalism has been defined in very different ways. But most forms of Naturalism point out that we cannot with any meaning talk about human essence, existence, values, relationships, or ethics without some sort of theory of human nature. Kierkegaard is obviously far apart of many tendencies in this contemporary Naturalism. Naturalistic ethics (e.g. Philippa Foot or Rosalind Hursthouse in philosophy of morals) is fundamentally the idea that the *purpose* of ethics and values is to make man happy and flourishing – and Kierkegaard is basically much opposed to this sort of thinking of *values*. In his strongly methodological and theoretical Introduction to The Concept of Anxiety he attacks Aristotle and his Nichomachean Ethics vehemently for such false views. This sort of ethics – the ethics of Eudemonism - is a sort of undesirable and untrue Reductionism to Kierkegaard.

It is a main point for Kierkegaard in his The Concept of Anxiety that the science of dogmatics is a necessary and indispensable forerunner to the science of ethics. Without dogmatics, human ethics is basically without any meaning. In Kierkegaard's world this probably implies that a Christian ethics with no base in a Christian conception of salvation, renewal of man, or atonement is completely impotent and unproductive and does not give birth to anything of value as Vigilius - the author of The Concept of Anxiety - writes in his Introduction. Very interestingly, The Concept of Anxiety is in this way an attack on a *pure Kantian* philosophy of morals. (Grundlegung 1785). Traditional Kantian ethics and its presuppositions have been vehemently attacked and criticized in recent years () and – very surprisingly – Vigilius is not far apart from a criticism of Kant of such sort. This ethical point is recapitulated several times in the book – for instance in Vigilius' criticism of remorse and in the concluding chapter of The Concept of Anxiety Caput V.

And maybe even more important is the following thesis of Vigilius in The Concept of Anxiety: Any talking about dogmatics *presupposes* a theory of *psychology*. The whole purpose of The Concept of Anxiety is to find the true *nature* of things and the true *nature* of man – including the *nature* of male and female. Vigilius has a fundamental point: Without a theory of man and the human condition we cannot talk about Christianity, ethics, dogmatics, attitudes, or values. The purpose of The Concept of Anxiety is to present of description in the form of science of man,

nature, and history. This may be much surprising in relation to our general ideas of Kierkegaard. But in The Concept of Anxiety Vigilius is very firm and resolute. His idea is that we need a basis and this basis must be provided by scientific studies. In this surprising way The Concept of Anxiety, Vigilius, and Kierkegaard enter the scene as Naturalists. The science of psychology is according to Vigilius the most important science although not the only important tool of knowledge. By way of psychology we can find a true and reliable representation of life and man. But as we shall see later not only psychology is the method or focus of The Concept of Anxiety. Several of the analyses of the work are in fact sociological, biological, or historical. But Vigilius has a strong belief in the value of science and psychology as means to create a necessary basis for our solutions. Without safe knowledge of reality, nature, life, and man – we will never reach any solutions to our basic life or cultural problems. Vigilius puts it in this way: Ethics is *waiting* for dogmatics, and dogmatics sits *awaiting* the *grounding basis* of and the expected results of the science of psychology or the establishment of factual *knowledge*. This is the core thesis of Vigilius and The Concept of Anxiety. Without factual and reliable knowledge about reality and nature – including man's nature - we are completely *lost*.

True knowledge about man points to a certain dialectics of man and generation, collectivity, community, or history. No man is an island according to Vigilius. Collectivity or community presupposes the individual – no individual, no collectivity - and individual man presupposes collectivity – no community, no individuality. These ideas of Vigilius' may not be mainstream interpretations of Kierkegaard's philosophy but they are most important to Vigilius. Kierkegaard has been much criticized in the 20th Century e.g. by Adorno, Levinas, or Buber for so-called acosmism and for being ahistorical, or asocial. (Brandes). The ideas of Vigilius point in quite another direction. Probably, in the interpretation of Kierkegaard, we should pay much more attention to these ideas of Vigilius.

In the year of 1845 the Danish philosopher Rasmus Nielsen wrote in his book about Logic: - *These days it has become a most important and accepted idea that the individual is in the same moment himself and the collectivity and generation!* (Koch quoted 331). Probably Rasmus Nielsen had The Concept of Anxiety and the philosophy of Vigilius in his mind. Individual man is according to Vigilius a participant in a sort of Praxis, a collective form of life or tradition. Talking in this way Vigilius is not far apart from Neo-Aristotelean philosophers like Lovibond, MacIntyre or McDowell. When individual man is born he takes over the Praxis, consciousness, and values of the context or collectivity. No man is in Vigilius' philosophy born with a Lockean *tabula rasa*. Being born in this context, we develop this collective consciousness in a dialectic process with society, family, culture, and history. A baby born now in the 19th Century is like a sixteen year old man in the old ages, Vigilius maintains. We are in some way incarnations of a development and according to Vigilius consciousness, understanding, perception, and abilities of recognition are *accumulated* in the stream of history. A grown-up man in the 19th Century is in no way like a grown-up man in the Middle Ages or among the Greeks. Vigilius points out that no man starts from himself. No man is isolated from the generation, context, tradition, or collectivity Vigilius says. (The Concept of Anxiety n 9). It is according to Vigilius absurd to think of any man falling off the tree of the race or collectivity. If we could isolate one man from history, Praxis, or society we would completely annul the whole idea and concept of race, mankind, or humanity. Collectivity is defined by the individual and the individual is defined by and only intelligible defined by the collectivity. According to Vigilius this is the essence and quality of man opposed to the life of an animal. If one animal fell off the tree of the species no one would care and it would be completely inconsequential for the existence of the species! (The Concept of Anxiety n 9).

The individual participates in a collective Praxis – a form of life. In such a living Praxis the individual realizes itself. This is constituted according to Vigilius in two ways: In a *passive* form: We are made real and existent in this dialectical process within this Praxis. And in an *active* form: We manifest, make real and realize our being in this context. Alone or isolated there would be no man, no human life, and no realization. In this way Vigilius maintains a very strong idea of the essence of our lives as a matter of *participation*. Man is according to The Concept of Anxiety a participator. In a way we are limbs on a body. This collective body is supposed and posed a long time before individual man and it expands far apart both in time and in range. Individual man enters a state of being a self and of being himself in this participation, context, tradition, and Praxis. Any Praxis can be seen as well as a certain *being* or living as a certain *consciousness*. Without this consciousness of the collectivity man would according to The Concept of Anxiety possess no consciousness at all. Man would be a completely static being as in the philosophy of 18th Century Rationalism, an animal with no possibility of development or evolution. But the essential quality of man is – according to this Kierkegaardian thought - man's evolution, historical change, and development. The idea of Vigilius is a truly and strong *teleological* philosophy.

According to Vigilius there is a dialectic relationship between my individual tale or story and the tales and stories of others and the stories of the contextual communities and collectivities. Without the stories of other people my individual story would be impossible and without any meaning – my unique story or history would be unintelligible. Vigilius conceives of man as *embedded* and *embodied*.

According to Vigilius there is a *progression* in this relationship of dialectics. Consciousness or life or values are not static or eternal. Man changes. Nature is in a process of change and development. This development is realized within the contexts of Praxis, community and relationships. Any progression is the work of the individual but as a complete paradox simultaneously the work of the collective context. Changing values are in a way qualities of the collective. I *participate* in these collective communities of Praxis and in that way I become a part of this tradition and I acquire and learn values or knowledge or insights. No man is an isolated actor playing on his own stage as Vigilius puts it. Vigilius interprets the so-called Pelagian philosophy as an example of the view that man is isolated and standing alone upon his own stage in a theatre and that man does not need other people and does not need to care or worry about them. And Vigilius sharply attacks this view or conception of man's nature. (BA 341). The Pelagians are quite wrong when they portray individual man playing his own part on his *private theatre*. (341). According to Vigilius man is no lonely or isolated Cartesian Ego. Man's nature cannot be defined in such Cartesian ideas of substance. The progress and evolution of all mankind is paralleled in the progress and evolution of the single man. Evolution is phylogenetic as well as ontogenetic according to this view of Vigilius in The Concept of Anxiety.

The history of this development and evolution is a history of a sort of *growth*. This sort of growth is according to The Concept of Anxiety paradoxical, doubly qualified, ambivalent, and dialectical – but it is nonetheless a process of growth and evolution. In the view of Vigilius this growth is a development of consciousness, knowledge, insight, understanding, capabilities, and values. Vigilius says explicitly that we in this gradual process are learning a *second nature* or with his explication new *habits* within this evolution! (cit Caput 2 start). Man's nature is according to The Concept of Anxiety no static thing. Man is no animal. Our second nature is that disposition which *becomes* natural to man in the evolution of history. And according to Caput V Vigilius also seems to perceive a *third* nature possible to man. Within life and history man develops a new nature. This new nature in The Concept of Anxiety is or seems to be a further development of our inherent or biological nature. Vigilius persistently maintains that living this life is a dialectical relationship with man's

nature and our own developed nature. We are agent within this context of nature and developed habits. These habits or this second nature can be inhibiting or expanding for our growth as human beings. In this way Vigilius is close to contemporary sorts of Neo-Aristotelean philosophy or sorts of Naturalism – e.g. McDowell or Lovibond who explicitly describes this historically acquired second nature. Vigilius analyzes this development as a scientist and in this position he sees this development as *necessary*, *lawful*, and *teleological*. History moves towards a target or end station which in a way is embedded in the nature of man. With the objective glasses of the scientist we can recognize this development and evolution as necessary and purposeful. Anxiety is according to Vigilius a real force living in this world. This spiritual force has *entered* the world says Vigilius. (Caput 2 start). Anxiety or this definite sort of consciousness is a force driving or pushing man and history toward a telos according to The Concept of Anxiety.

Anxiety or we may say man's consciousness is *more reflected* and *developed* in the later individual. (Caput 2 start arve s progress). Vigilius asks himself why there is such a difference between man in the 19th Century and man 2000 years ago and he gives this thesis: - This difference is caused by our participation in the history and Praxis of history! The real cause we shall not find within single man isolated or alone. This development of knowledge, insight and understanding is situated in and caused by our participation I collectivities and communities – by our participation in the great or ggreater tales and stories. Vigilius is quite clear in his conception of man as contextual, historical, and as participator.

Time and change is strongly interrelated within the views of The Concept of Anxiety. Vigilius points clearly to the idea of evolution and progress. In our age of Post-Modernism we might discard this idea totally as a naïve relique of Romanticism. But this might be quite unwise. Kierkegaard himself probably experienced this sort of progress and evolution in his own life. The way he died seems to prove this. There is a potentially very strong force in this thought of development and Vigilius advises us to try this thinking also as a scientific solution, scheme or paradigm. The Concept of Anxiety has been highly influential in the psychology of development in the 20th Century and this seems to be a very possible interpretation of the work of Vigilius.

According to Vigilius life is an education or a school. We have a lesson to learn and only by participating and by actually trying, losing, failing by can learn the lesson. The Telos of this development is a certain formation of our *character*. What hinders man in this process of learning and in this process of formation is man's *fear* and *illusion*. In this life we are disciples in the school of possibility as Vigilius puts it and we can only learn from actual experience. (Caput 5). Nobody becomes a master or a Genius sitting alone in his room.

Our main problem according to Vigilius is our fear of learning. Intuitively we perceive the possibility of change and growth and liberation but we shrink back in fear of the consequences. We have become accustomed to a sort of abuse and addiction and even when we see the possibility of becoming free we become struck by fear or anxiety. This is our main problem according to Vigilius. In a way he has constructed his main theory in a scheme of abuse and addiction and he persistently talks about addiction, lottery, alcoholism, and ludomania! (BA 457,454). Man's Telos is to become liberated of this sort of blindness and humiliating state of being a victim. Man's Telos is a question of empowerment and dignity or becoming true man or whole man as Vigilius puts it. (325).

Vigilius points to the absolute necessity of a theory of man's nature. Words like *Nature* or *natural* are found 46 different places in The Concept of Anxiety in important connotations and this tendency singles out The Concept of Anxiety as an important Kierkegaardian work on human nature. Without such a theory we are without relevant criteria in our search of solutions to the human condition. Maybe most people live contrary to this nature (JVF Sygd til døden også) but this so-called normality does not change the fact that man has a definite nature and that living contrary to this nature is a quite unnatural thing for man. Man's nature is to be free and we should evaluate our own life and works and all social contexts within that criteria. This is the main thesis of The Concept of Anxiety.

In this we Vigilius is a sort of Naturalist. Vigilius' very long passage 420ff seems to suppose that we cannot talk about values, ethics or Christianity without first establishing a sort of basis in a scientific theory. Vigilius is no friend of a positivistic or context-independent theory of science. Vigilius' theory of science is primarily phenomenological. The Concept of Anxiety has been interpreted as a sort of forerunner to Psychoanalysis but this seems wrong. Vigilius is a strongly attacking scientific or philosophical *reductionism*. We do not according to Vigilius become any wiser to reality by *reducing* higher things to lower things. Vigilius would be a strong opponent to certain sorts of Naturalism which reduces man to biology or mere species in the Darwinian way of thinking. What we mostly need according to The Concept of Anxiety is a new sort of science which acknowledges man as a spiritual being in his own right. In this way Vigilius is a representative of the *Geisteswissenschaft* of the 19th Century and so a very important inspiration in today's world of science.

Vigilius finds the science of psychology to be highly important in the study of man. By his time in the 1840s psychology was established as an independent and scientific discipline. Vigilius has studied contemporary works of psychology and he clearly thinks of psychology as a true science. He attacks various forms of reductionism of human phenomena but his work is as well biological as sociological and historical in its method. Vigilius is a true friend of science. His theses of sexuality, generation, heritage, and sexual differences (Caput II) are partly biological. Biology is not according to Vigilius the problem. Spirit-less or stupid *reductionism* in the way of much science of the 18th Century is the problem.