D. W. WINNICOTT, a psychoanalyst, proposes the following three stages of self-development: dependence, independence, and interdependence. On Winnicott's account, the ground of the self is located within the world of social relations. Nevertheless, he contends, "Human nature does not change." I shall argue that his concept of "interdependence" reconciles the romantic's dilemma whether the self finds fulfillment, ultimately, by being alone (with God or nature) or with her fellows (as Durkheim seems to suggest).

I have drawn a connection between Kierkegaard and Rousseau, and suggested that perhaps Durkheim need not be a foe. Yet, so far, I have only hinted that the sociological school may help us revise Kierkegaard's account. We need to see how to bring the two schools together. We will see how Winnicott's concept of interdependence allows us to expand Kierkegaard's account of the self in light of the sociological school. I proceed by considering each of Winnicott's stages.

**Dependence and Independence**

Winnicott was initially interested in Freud's idea that mental illness could be traced to trauma in early childhood. The early years of life are, according to Winnicott, characterized by dependence. Taking Freud as his point of departure, Winnicott surmised that if there were problems with meeting the early needs, these could be repercussions at later stages of development.

The main feature of Winnicott's approach is an emphasis on the environment as a contributing factor to the development of the self. He writes, "Providing for the child is therefore a matter of providing the environment that facilitates individual mental health and emotional development." Winnicott does not think that one can even become a human being without a proper social context. He contends that defining health as an absence of illness is not good enough. Mental health is about becoming a full human being.

Winnicott writes, "But the fact is that life itself is difficult, and psychology concerns itself with the inherent problems of individual development and of the socialization process..." He says, for example, "We look with suspicion on any theory of schizophrenia that divorces the subject from the problems of ordinary living and the universals of individual development in a given environment."
Winnicott provides an example of his approach: "A psycho-analyst comes to the subject of guilt as one who is in the habit of thinking in terms of growth, in terms of the evolution of the human individual, the individual person, and in relation to the environment." That is, he looks to the environment to find the causes of mental ailments. For him, mental illness is a self-defence mechanism, a reaction to an aversive environment. More generally, he says, "Today, I suggest, we are coming round to the view that in psychosis it is a very primitive defence that is brought into play and organized, because of environmental abnormalities."

Upon Winnicott’s account of mental illness, schizophrenia, for instance, is viewed as a regression to a more primitive mode of existence. In order to escape present difficulties; we take flight to a more rudimentary self. Winnicott posits the idea that an aversive environment could cause the positing of a fake self (in order to protect the real self). Thus, we may embark on the path of regression because of previous problems encountered in the maturation process (relating to an insufficient environment). Mental illness is often suffered as a consequence of a problem whose etiology is rooted in the human environment of our relations to others. According to Winnicott, it is clear that we can be unwell even in the absence of obvious physical problems.

The point of development is to not remain dependent (like the child). Winnicott points out that the environment facilitates the conditions for the realization of potentials. For instance, the etymology of the word "infant" can be traced back to "not talking." We are born without being able to speak, but are later granted speech by our environment. Similarly, the environment ideally "enables a child to realize potential" in every other field as well.

The infant cannot see itself as separate from its environment (usually the mother). The first stage of development is thus characterized by pure dependence. As Winnicott says, "If dependence really does mean dependence, then the history of an individual baby cannot be written in terms of the baby alone. It must be written in terms also of the environmental provision which either meets dependence needs or fails to meet them." The dependence that is experienced in infancy is mitigated by a move toward greater independence by a transitional object.

The transitional object, according to Winnicott, occupies a space of both imagination and reality. The transitional object takes the place of the mother, and hence shifts the dependence from the mother to the object (be it a toy, pacifier, blanket, or whatever). The child clings to the object, which on the one hand has reality as a real thing in the world, yet on the other is also imaginary insofar as the object substitutes the mother for the child). As we become dependent upon transitional objects, at least in fantasy, and to the extent that these objects are invested with emotional energy—cathected, to use Freudian jargon—we move in the direction of greater independence.

According to Winnicott, it is only when we recognize that we are not the environment that we are said to be self-conscious. A child does not necessarily understand "I am gone to the store." For the child, when the mother is present,
she is there, and when she is absent, she is dead. (This is not to suggest the child understands the concept of death but, rather, that the object is absent without the understanding it shall return.)

Winnicott adopts the phrase “going-on-being” to characterize our growth. (He also uses the word “journey.”) According to Winnicott, the process of becoming a self involves the past (who we were), the present (who we are), and the future (who we want to be). Within its history, there is a continuity that characterizes the self. Winnicott writes:

The psyche begins as an imaginative elaboration of physical functioning, having as its most important duty the binding together of past experiences, potentialities, and the present moment awareness, and expectancy for the future. Thus the self comes into existence.

According to Winnicott, creativity is central to human development because it involves how we deal with the future: “the link can be made, and usefully made, between creative living and living itself, and the reasons can be studied why it is that creative living can be lost and why the individual’s feeling that life is real or meaningful can disappear.” Winnicott, in fact, sometimes uses the idea of not feeling real as a measure of ill health.

Play is also important in human development, because it aids us on the road to independence. It is through play that we can separate ourselves from the moment, make plans, and mentally conceive of different states of affairs. Play, Winnicott contends, occupies a space between reality (e.g., the necessity of social norms) and imagination (where rules may be transgressed). Winnicott notes that becoming lost in either extreme, however, whether imagination or reality, is an illness of sorts.

Winnicott conceives of psychotherapy as a situation in which the therapist becomes the transitional object, invested with emotional energy, only to exercise the movement to autonomy. Whereas Freudian psychotherapy recreates and works out unresolved Oedipal conflicts, Winnicott's brand of psychotherapy plays out a transition to a greater independence than was achieved in childhood. The successful achievement of independence, however, is not where Winnicott ends his story of the self.

INTERDEPENDENCE

According to Winnicott, morality is not external to us—it does not require the mediation of God—but should rather be seen as an innate human capacity. Yet, the acquisition of morality requires a social context in much the same way as the acquisition of independence requires the support of social relations. He writes:

The dynamic is the growth process, this being inherited by each individual. Taken for granted, here, is the good-enough facilitating environment, which at the start of each individual's growth and development is the sine qua non...
If we do not get the support we need, he contends, we are bound to remain dependent as a symptom of the lack of a satisfactory facilitating environment.

Winnicott thinks that it is important to be able to be alone. He writes, “Maturity and the capacity to be alone implies that the individual has had the chance through good-enough mothering to build up a belief in a benign environment. This belief is built up through a repetition of satisfactory instinctual gratifications.” As he explains, “The state of being alone is something which (though paradoxically) always implies that someone else is there.” We are never alone in the sense that we are part of an entire web of social meanings that we carry with us in our “internal environment.” By being well integrated, we can be outwardly independent. Winnicott says:

Independence is never absolute. The healthy individual does not become isolated, but becomes related to the environment in such a way that the individual and the environment can be said to be interdependent...The value of this approach is that it enables us to study and discuss at one and the same time the personal and the environmental factors. In this language health means both the health of the individual and the health of society, and full maturity of the individual is not possible in an immature or ill social setting.

Winnicott recognizes both the social context and individual as being contributors to the development of a self. He writes:

Independence does not become absolute, and the individual seen as an autonomous unit is in fact never independent of his environment, though there are ways by which in maturity the individual may feel free and independent, as much as makes for happiness and for a sense of having a personal identity.

Winnicott is careful to qualify that having a sense of belonging must depend on an environment with genuine social bonds. Thus, he says, only a real local community can satisfy the needs of social belonging:

We need to accept the fact that psychiatrically healthy persons depend for their health and for their personal fulfillment on loyalty to a delimited area of society, perhaps the local bowls club. And why not?

In his practice, in fact, he started noticing that his patients complained of feelings of not being real and of feeling separate from the world, which suggest a collective aberration much like that discussed by Durkheim.

Broadly, the theological and sociological accounts are both within the romantic tradition in terms of subjectivity, social critique and teleology. Winnicott’s theory, specifically, also bears similar generic resemblances to Kierkegaard’s. For both Kierkegaard and Winnicott, there are three stages of development that can be related thus: dependence (the aesthete), independence
Winnicott furthermore thinks that too much dependence or independence is a sign of mental illness. Similarly, in Kierkegaard’s thought, reality is associated with necessity, and imagination with possibility; going to either extreme leads to the despair experienced by the ethical man and the aesthete, respectively.

Winnicott wondered whether the types of mental illness he encountered as a psychotherapist might perhaps have been related to the time in which he lived. It is at least plausible then to assume that he would have been receptive to the sort of social critiques of the industrial age typical of the romantics.

Kierkegaard and the sociologist, however, seemingly part company on whether the self finds fulfillment alone (Kierkegaard) or with others (e.g., Durkheim). Winnicott’s psychology offers a solution to this romanticist dilemma with his idea of interdependence. For Winnicott, psychological growth is not complete until one has reached a state of interdependence, with the autonomy of the individual preserved. Winnicott’s idea of interdependence captures what the romantics, more generally, intended, that is, a desire to avoid two modern enigmas: alienation (where we are isolated) and totalitarianism (where we are engulfed).

The notion of interdependence is consistent with Kierkegaard’s view that we have to be alone with God (separated from our fellows and dependent upon him) in order to have a ground for ethics—indeed, independent action that relates to our fellows. Even for Kierkegaard, as I remarked in chapter 3, there is, in the end, a social dimension to the self.

The notion of interdependence is also consistent with Rousseau’s and Durkheim’s emphasis on the social conditions for autonomy without annihilating it. Being in a social context does not annul free choice but, rather, makes it intelligible. What I can choose is of course in part socially determined; free will is to choose from within the set of broadly understood socially assigned possibilities, not to will in a vacuum. For instance, there are things a member of the Zulu tribe could aspire to, for example, some place of status within the organization, that are not even possible for me. The issue of free will is no basis to think there is an unbridgeable chasm between Kierkegaard and say, Durkheim.

In fact, Winnicott’s concept of interdependence can reconcile a tension in the history of romantic thought: in the case of Rousseau, for instance, where we are pulled between two competing visions of human fulfillment, that of being alone or with others. Winnicott captures the dynamic nature of the self, and pays heed to social and individualistic aspects, which Kierkegaard, it is plausible to think, would endorse.

For Winnicott, however, it is not God but our fellow human beings who help us become interdependent. (God could well figure in Winnicott’s theory as a ruse on which to organize a social group, though.) God, according to Kierkegaard, helps us be independent and relate to others ethically (the man-God-man relationship). Only in the religious stage does man achieve interdependence. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy, for the purposes of my argument, is that the final stage of human development, for both thinkers, can be characterized by
interdependence, though the substance differs. Even if we sit alone, engaged in a mathematical, musical, or literary investigation, we are conversing through the social mediums these pursuits provide. Kierkegaard and the sociologists agree, it is plausible to think, that our lives as persons (as opposed to, say, automata), our limitations and aspirations, require a social vehicle. I will not dwell on the God-relationship, since my main objective is to explore what can be gained from bringing the two schools of thought together.

We may wish to notice in passing, however, the following caveats to the notion of interdependence upon which I have put emphasis. First, it is reasonable to assume that interdependence can be frustrated if the necessary prerequisites, such as freedom from extreme forms of oppression, are not obtained. Social injustice must be confronted precisely because it is antithetical to human flourishing. Durkheim details how the self can, for instance, come apart when society goes to extremes of egoism or envelopment. Furthermore, he illustrates the idea that a theory of the self can be a bulwark against social injustices; it can guide public policy. Interestingly, the generically Kierkegaardian theory of the self, developed hitherto, has historically provided the basis for social action, as I shall attempt to illustrate.

Second, as stated in the introduction, it is my intention to develop a Kierkegaardian account of the self, and in the interest of that pursuit I reserve the right, when appropriate, to go beyond what he says. Kierkegaard's theory requires emendation, and justifies a need to go beyond his own writings. His account of the self is rendered robust by explaining the social dimension of the self that seems derivative in his account. Although there is a social element in Kierkegaard's account of the self already (the man-God-man relationship), it can be further developed and emphasized, inspired by Rousseau, Durkheim, and Winnicott. For example, Winnicott's concept of interdependence allows us to view sociological thought as a complement to Kierkegaard's theory of the self.

Next I shall consider some of the possible consequences for practice of adopting the purely theological or sociological conception of the self. I shall also consider results yielded by adopting the generically Kierkegaardian approach, which takes into account the sociological tradition of Rousseau, Durkheim, and Winnicott.