

KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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CHAPTER I

KIERKEGAARD AND HIS AGE

Søren Kierkegaard, sometimes called the father of "Existentialism", lived over one hundred years ago in the city of Copenhagen. Outwardly, his life was an unusually uneventful one: he spent his entire 42 years (1813-1855) in Copenhagen except for four trips to Berlin; he led a rather wild life at the University, and was converted; though in love, he renounced the girl and never married; a popular magazine caricatured him and he became an object of public ridicule; in the midst of his attack on the Danish State Church, he died.<sup>1</sup> Yet Kierkegaard did not live isolated from his times. Conditions of life and the general climate of thought in Denmark (and to a lesser degree, in Europe) deeply affected his inner decisions about his life and the focus of his works as an author. As Price writes, "Kierkegaard was appalled at the decay of human dignity in the Europe of his day, and he was convinced that the cause lay in the nature of the age itself, an age which marked the end of a way of life which had hung together for centuries but was now

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Bretall (ed.), "Introduction", A Kierkegaard Anthology (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 1.

passing away."<sup>2</sup>

Barrett emphasizes the decline of religion, the development of science, and the increasingly rational organization of human life as the historical trends which characterize the modern era. Between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century, Western man lost connection with a transcendent realm of being, i.e., God; the center of his horizon shifted from the religious to the secular in the revolutionary effects of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. The entire psychological system which enveloped the individual's life, giving it consistency and completeness, was supplanted by a confidence in human reason and in man's mastery over the whole earth. With these changes, the rapid development of modern science has tended to estrange man rather than bring him closer to an understanding of himself. Engulfed by the depersonalizing forces of modern life, man lives in an increasingly mechanized, and mass society; his life has become externalized and he lives on a level of abstraction, i.e., outside himself, which is unprecedented in human history.<sup>3</sup>

To these developments of "modern" history Kierkegaard addressed himself, though most of their main consequences were not widely explicit until after the world-shattering war of 1914. In The Present Age, Kierkegaard alludes prophetically to the

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<sup>2</sup>George Henry Price, The Narrow Pass (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>William Barrett, Irrational Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1958), pp. 24-31.

drift toward collectivization in modern life. The numerical quantity rather than the quality of the individual has become the qualification for the truth: "Twenty-five signatures make the most frightful stupidity into an opinion,"<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard writes with characteristic irony. The collective idea has come to dominate even ordinary consciousness; men are determined to lose themselves in some movement or to identify themselves with the age, the century, or humanity at large. Kierkegaard writes of his age:

Each age has its own characteristic depravity. Ours is perhaps not pleasure or indulgence or sensuality, but rather a dissolute pantheistic contempt for the individual man. In the midst of all our exultation over the achievements of the age and of the nineteenth century, there sounds a note of poorly conceived contempt for the individual man; in the midst of the self-importance of the contemporary generation, there is revealed a sense of despair over being human.<sup>5</sup>

Kierkegaard denounces the "public" as the master of this "leveling process" which is "the victory of abstraction over the individual."<sup>6</sup> The public is that "all-embracing something which is nothing;" it is an abstraction "consisting of unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization--and yet are held together as a whole."<sup>7</sup> The public is less than a single man, however unimportant; for Kierkegaard, the individual is concrete while the crowd is the abstract and therefore the embodiment of untruth.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Present Age, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1962), p. 91.

<sup>5</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 317.

<sup>6</sup>Kierkegaard, The Present Age, pp. 66-67. <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>8</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), p. 98.

Kierkegaard's concern with the individual in relation to the crowd is part of a larger problem of the age which is the dominating theme of his thought: "The central fact for the nineteenth century, as Kierkegaard...saw it, was that this civilization that had once been Christian was so no longer."<sup>9</sup> Here again the power of the numerical law enters to produce what is called Christendom--the most prodigious illusion to which man has succumbed in the modern age. There are "Christian states, Christian lands, a Christian people, and (how marvelous!) a Christian world."<sup>10</sup> But, asks Kierkegaard, are there any Christians in a world where all claim they are Christians as a matter of course? Man is Christian en masse; he arrives at such fantastic entities as Christian states by adding up units which are not Christian. If all are Christians, the concept of Christianity (as Kierkegaard views it) is nullified.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard saw Christendom as a blasphemous perversion of Christianity not so much because it paid no heed to Christian truth, but because it made it an insignificant generality.<sup>12</sup> Everyone knows "privately" that the whole thing is untrue, but no one will say so "officially;" this is the existing state of decay and falsity.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Kierkegaard attacked the

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<sup>9</sup>Barrett, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup>Kierkegaard, "The Attack Upon Christendom," A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 438.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 446-447.

<sup>12</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.166.

<sup>13</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Journals, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 246.

hierarchy, the institutionalization, and the smug complacency of the Established Church of Denmark with vengeance. By extension, this attack had an important impact upon the Christianity of the entire Western world.<sup>14</sup>

The character of Kierkegaard's writings is related to his interpretation of the contemporary situation as well as to his definition of the individual. As a child, Kierkegaard was profoundly influenced by the piety of his father whom he considered a deeply religious man. His Journals reveal the powerful effect his father's serious and melancholy nature had on him; while being drawn toward Christianity, he felt a dread of it. The problem of the age he considered as his own: "to make men aware of Christianity." This was a personal task which he undertook "without authority" and for his own education.<sup>15</sup>

In his definitive statement concerning his vocation as an author, Kierkegaard maintains that the one purpose behind his entire literary effort was "how to become a Christian."<sup>16</sup> Acutely aware of the paradoxical nature of the illusions which bound men to Christendom, he concluded that they could not be dispelled by direct means; this would only reinforce men's complacency. By denying that he was a Christian, Kierkegaard endeavored to communicate with men on a level different from the religious; he felt that it was necessary to find man where he was and begin there. He must:

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<sup>14</sup>Barrett, pp. 172-174.

<sup>15</sup>Kierkegaard, Journals, pp. 149, 175.

<sup>16</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 145.



...present the aesthetic with all its fascinating magic, enthrall if possible the other man, present it with the sort of passion which exactly suits him, merrily for the merry, in a minor key for the melancholy, wittily for the witty, etc. But above all do not forget one thing, the purpose you have to bring forward...the religious.<sup>17</sup>

Acknowledging the double nature of his works, Kierkegaard contends that their aim, from first to last, was religious; he emphasizes (in retrospect) that the religious discourses of his early period were evidence of this direction, while admitting that the precise nature of the "aesthetic" works was not clear to him until after 1848.<sup>18</sup>

In the writings of the early period (1841-1845), Kierkegaard employed a method of indirect communication--with pseudonyms of various kinds, poetic imagery, humor, irony, and pathos. To compel men to take notice, Kierkegaard maintained a mode of existence which supported the pseudonyms; he wanted to be considered the preacher of worldliness, an utterly frivolous and purposeless wag. These "aesthetic" works were a deception designed to lead men from one set of beliefs to another; herein lies their paradoxical quality. For Kierkegaard, it was necessary in the beginning to stir up the crowd in order to secure communication with the individual immersed in it.<sup>19</sup>

The years 1846-1848 mark a transition in Kierkegaard's writings and his life as well. Beginning with Concluding

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-74, 142, 150.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51, 146. Though his purpose was religious, Kierkegaard was very sensitive to the 'public' which he so detested. The attack on him in the Corsair, a popular magazine, was a crucial experience in his life, directly affecting his decision to use a direct form of communication in his task.

Unscientific Postscript, he concentrated on the means by which one moves toward Christianity instead of discussing its themes indirectly. This change of costume, as it were, parallels a metamorphosis in Kierkegaard's life in which he experienced a spiritual reawakening.<sup>20</sup> Of the year 1848 Kierkegaard writes: "It was beyond all comparison the richest and most fruitful year I have experienced as an author."<sup>21</sup> The "religious" works of this later period include poetic discourses on the Christian life and The Attack Upon Christendom. The direction of Kierkegaard's works as a whole is from aesthetics through the Postscript to Discourses at Communion on Fridays. Their dialectical character parallels the problem in Christendom: to become a Christian when one is a Christian of a sort, to make Christians into Christians.<sup>22</sup>

Whether the 'real' Kierkegaard appears in the aesthetic or the religious works is an open question. Thomas Hanna suggests that he wrote in a lyrical, indirect manner because he had no precise words to express his insights about human existence. Indeed, the terminology Kierkegaard used was novel; as will be seen, it must be understood within a particular frame of reference. The pseudonymous works are a description of the nature of the human situation; this description, in turn, is a vital part of Kierkegaard's attempt to redefine "what it means to be a Christian."<sup>23</sup> In the Postscript, Kierkegaard writes

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<sup>20</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), II, 391.

<sup>21</sup>Kierkegaard, Journals, in Lowrie, p. 393.

<sup>22</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., pp. 17, 43, 142.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Hanna, The Lyrical Existentialists (New York: H. Wolff, 1962), pp. 20, 23.

that he endeavored, by the indirect form of communication, to bring to the attention of the reader the connection between Christianity and existence.<sup>24</sup> This paper will first center on the Kierkegaardian definition of the individual and existence. Its general focus is on the pseudonymous rather than the religious works. Within this primary theme, however, a secondary one (which is an inherent part of the first) will be developed: the Kierkegaardian concept of Christianity which he views as the opposite of Christendom. Kierkegaard "sought a concept of man entirely in terms of a certain psychology of himself."<sup>25</sup> As a thinker and as an individual, he accepted the finite world as wholly real and the ordinary experiences of man's life as serious. Thus there is such emphasis on the nature of love and marriage in his writings. Kierkegaard restricted his inquiry to the only concrete reality in his view--the ways individuals exist in the world.<sup>26</sup> Man's reality is defined most decisively by the fact that he exists:

The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation that is more than cognitive is his own reality, the fact that he exists; this reality constitutes his absolute interest.<sup>27</sup>

This particular definition can be seen more clearly if it is contrasted with the romantic and speculative views of reality. Implicit in the ideas of both the romantics and the speculative thinkers, according to Kierkegaard, is an alienation of the individual from his inner self. The essential place of faith is the creative process of the individual and

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<sup>24</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 244.

<sup>25</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 230.

## CHAPTER II

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE HUMAN SITUATION

The distinguishing factor of Kierkegaard's thought is the seeming truism that man is, first of all, an existing individual. Kierkegaard "sought a concept of man entirely in terms of a certain psychology of himself."<sup>25</sup> As a thinker and as an individual, he accepted the finite world as wholly real and the ordinary experiences of man's life as serious. Thus there is much emphasis on the nature of love and marriage in his writings. Kierkegaard restricted his inquiry to the only concrete reality in his view--the ways individuals exist in the world.<sup>26</sup> Man's reality is defined most decisively by the fact that he exists:

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<sup>25</sup>Price, p. 12.      <sup>26</sup>Hanna, pp. 24, 28.

<sup>27</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 280.

aesthetic sensibility as the means by which a grasp of reality can be attained and existence given a meaning. An inherent part of this belief is a dualistic image of existence-- a dichotomy between the mind and the body, and between oneself and the world. Also, one can proceed from the finite world into one outside him through the senses or the emotions; therefore, there exists, between nature and the human order, a fundamental harmony which one can grasp.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to this, Kierkegaard denies that any direct grasp of reality through 'feeling' or 'intuition' is possible. He saw man as a victim of the romantic philosophy--a mixture of deism, nature worship, intuitionism, Herder's folk-lore, and Rousseauism. In the first decisive break with the theories of association-psychology traditionally held by Western philosophers, Kierkegaard believed that human knowledge of reality was limited by the senses rather than expanded.<sup>29</sup> The tension between the world and the individual's need to understand his existence must remain intact; as Hanna explains:

The foundation stone of Kierkegaard's understanding of human nature is this discovery of disaccord between the self-conscious individual and the world which is the object of this consciousness, and it is essential to recognize that Kierkegaard appeals to the universal ground of human experience for proof of this assertion.<sup>30</sup>

In conjunction with his antipathy to the romantic tendencies of the age, Kierkegaard drastically criticized the speculative philosophers who attempted to render reality coherent through reason. In attacking "the System," he centered

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<sup>28</sup>Price, pp. 89, 99, 109, 113.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 12, 83, 120.

<sup>30</sup>Hanna, p. 43.

his polemic on Hegel; to Kierkegaard, Hegel's philosophy symbolized a belief basic to the Western philosophic tradition: the cosmos is completely rational and through reason man can find a meaningful pattern in the world and his existence.<sup>31</sup> As Jean Wahl writes, "Hegel had shown that the truth is the whole, be it in art, in science, in history, and that beyond the particular whole there is the absolute whole which contains everything."<sup>32</sup> The Hegelian dialectic is based on the progressive evolution of the Idea as a logical system and is relative to an observer contemplating the world process; in the sphere of contemplation, opposites are reconciled, and thereby annihilated.<sup>33</sup> The institutions of society, embodying universal truth, are constantly evolving into more perfect forms with which man can identify.<sup>34</sup>

In his monumental work, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard mercilessly satirizes Hegelian ideas. In an age of vastly increased knowledge, men have lost themselves in the "totality of things", forgetting what it means to exist; it was characteristic, felt Kierkegaard, that men were captivated by Hegel's scheme which posited a total view of man and the world:

But does our age bring forth a generation of individuals who are born without capacity for imagination and feeling? Are we born to begin with Paragraph 14 of the System? Let us above all not confuse the historical development of the Human spirit at large with the particular individual.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Barrett, p. 158.

<sup>32</sup>Jean Wahl, "Existentialism: A Preface," New Republic, CXIII (October 1, 1945), 142.

<sup>33</sup>David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), p. 119.

<sup>34</sup>Price, p. 157. <sup>35</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 308.

<sup>35</sup>Price, p. 113.

Here a fundamental dichotomy in Kierkegaard's thought appears-- the general versus the particular. Speculative philosophy is concerned with the human being in general and therefore, with a fictitious objective subject. Kierkegaard believed that the self is not an organic unity consciously developing a system of thought; actual existence cannot be conceived as a finite whole. Positing an identity between being and thought, the system brings contradictions together in abstraction and is complete in itself. Existence, on the other hand, separates thought and being, and is the opposite of finality. From the existential viewpoint, there are contradictions in life that cannot be mediated; consequently, an existential 'system' is impossible. In addition, 'positive knowledge' is objective, i.e., uninterested in the particular existence; therefore, it offers no basis for an individual's understanding of himself. Ultimately, it ignores the negative elements in existence, incorporating them into the positive whole.<sup>36</sup> As Price points out, Kierkegaard does not deny laws of thought and logic in their sphere; nor does he say that reality lacks any rationality. Even scientific procedure has its domain in relation to physical phenomena. Yet reason cannot say, with positive certainty, what the unknown is; unaided, it cannot master the paradoxes of life. Ultimately, all knowledge of the phenomenal world is ambiguous.<sup>37</sup>

The speculative thinker becomes a comic figure who fails to recognize the relationship between his abstract thought and his existence.<sup>38</sup> He seals himself out of the world he has

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 267, 107, 112, 75, 275, 278, 201.

<sup>37</sup>Price, p. 113.

<sup>38</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 268.

created, a world of which, nevertheless, he is still a changing part: "In relation to their systems most systematizers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack close by..."<sup>39</sup>

Kierkegaard's attack on Hegelian theory clarifies the characteristics which he considered essential to the human situation. As an author, Kierkegaard expresses his view of man's existence in pairs of contrary terms. Yet as Lowrie points out, his use of dialectics is different from that of Hegel. Hegel "mediates" between opposites and comes to a point of repose; Kierkegaard continually alternates between opposites, emphasizing their contradiction and the paradoxes inherent in existence. His pseudonymous works illustrate his use of dialectics in the sense that they form a sort of dialogue, contrasting different ways of existing.<sup>40</sup> The Kierkegaardian dialectic is a dialectic of the self; the Hegelian dialectic is a dialectic of the world process.

Among the pairs of contrary terms which are evident in Kierkegaard's dialectic of the self, the following predominate:

Finite	Infinite
Temporal	Eternal
Actuality	Possibility
Necessity	Freedom

Lowrie suggests that each member of the pairs can best be defined in terms of its opposite. Almost any term in one column can be contrasted with every term in the other; in addition, there is an essential similarity between all the terms in one column.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Kierkegaard, Journals, p.98. <sup>40</sup>Lowrie, p.630. <sup>41</sup>Ibid.



It must be emphasized that Kierkegaard does not intend that these pairs of opposites be established as a formula for a concept of existence. For him existence is too dense and concrete to be enclosed within a unified, mental concept.<sup>42</sup> A system, Kierkegaard writes, is by definition closed; existence does not possess this quality of finality. This is a further reason for the indirect form of communication; the elusiveness of existence can only be expressed in the "absence" of a system.<sup>43</sup>

Basically, the existential dialectic is characterized by movement rather than by permanence. Kierkegaard repeatedly asserts that "it is impossible to conceive existence without movement" and "an existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming."<sup>44</sup> Life for the living is an unfinished process; the existing individual is--and yet he is not:

Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity ...a synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self.<sup>45</sup>

As Hanna explains, "the self-conscious individual is not but he becomes."<sup>46</sup> He points out an important distinction in Kierkegaard's thought which clarifies this dialectic of the self. It is based on a juxtaposition of a description of the nature of human existence with a prescription of what the existing individual should become. Kierkegaard's "conception of what man should be is rooted in and derived from his descriptions

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<sup>42</sup>Barrett, p. 162.

<sup>43</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 111.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 79, 273.

<sup>45</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup>Hanna, p. 68.

of what man is."<sup>47</sup> Thus Kierkegaard's beliefs about being and becoming are closely interrelated. As the lyrical nature of his works cannot be literally reproduced here, it is necessary to separate the two phases for purposes of analysis. It must be remembered that for Kierkegaard, they are part of the same process.

For Kierkegaard, man is neither soul nor body exclusively, but a synthesis of the two.<sup>48</sup> Physical and psychic activity are equally a part of man's existence. One cannot clearly divide his thinking from his emotional behavior:

In existence thought is by no means higher than imagination and feeling, but coordinate....The task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, [thought and feeling] but to give them equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is existence.<sup>49</sup>

Thus irrational as well as rational forces are motivating factors in human experience. Price clarifies this point: "The self is not only a thinking, it is an eating, a drinking, a feeling, an imagining, a lusting and fighting, all of which are carried on in the most intense simultaneity."<sup>50</sup> Reason clarifies existence and existence gives reason its content and material.<sup>51</sup> In this context, Kaufmann emphasizes Kierkegaard's break with the dualistic Platonic conception of the self or soul as substance, comparable to the body. Originating motifs that remained central to existential thought up to the twentieth

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>48</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 73.

<sup>49</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., pp. 310-311.

<sup>50</sup>Price, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

century, Kierkegaard portrays the self as an intangible phenomenon, understood only in terms of possibility, dread, and decision.<sup>52</sup>

This synthesis of the self (the soul and the body) is reflected in the contrary terms, the temporal versus the eternal, and the finite versus the infinite.<sup>53</sup> Kierkegaard defines time as a process, a "going-by" and an "infinite succession"; the eternal is present in thought as "annulled succession."<sup>54</sup> The reality of the present exists in a dialectical moment between time and the eternal:

The instant is that ambiguous moment in which time and eternity touch one another, thereby positing the temporal, where time is constantly intersecting eternity and eternity constantly permeating time. Only now does that division...acquire significance: the present, the past, and the future.<sup>55</sup>

Man is caught in the temporal, the worldly sphere; it is a part of the negative aspect of his reality of which Kierkegaard, according to Hanna, was extremely conscious.<sup>56</sup> The temporal if related to the finite which Kierkegaard defines as the "limiting" factor in existence. The eternal is related to the infinite, the "expanding" or limitless element.<sup>57</sup> In finitude represents the uncertain, conditional nature of human experience; it is comparable to futurity and becoming in the individual's existence: "To be constantly in the process of

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<sup>52</sup>Walter Kaufmann(ed.), Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre(Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1956), p.17.

<sup>53</sup>Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, p. 76. *ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77. <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 80. <sup>56</sup>Hanna, pp.17,30.

<sup>57</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

becoming is the elusiveness that pertains to the infinite in existence."<sup>58</sup> One example of this elusiveness is the possibility of death; positive security becomes suspicious amidst the unknowns of living. Kierkegaard describes the unrest and incongruity of experience metaphorically: "Eternity is the winged horse, infinitely fast, and time is the worn-out jade; the existing individual is the driver."<sup>59</sup>

As existence is not a closed system, the individual within it faces tomorrow; he is confronted with open possibilities which suggest the chance that he may not continue to be the particular person he is. The existing self is, at the same time, both concrete and contingent. The antithesis of actuality and possibility is not definite, however. Lowrie explains that Kierkegaard regards the actual, finite person as something that has become and which is, therefore, permeated with possibility and contingency.<sup>60</sup> In short, "actuality is a unity of possibility and necessity."<sup>61</sup>

In this context, a fourth pair of opposites acquires significance--necessity versus freedom. In relation to possibility, necessity is the limiting factor in the self.<sup>62</sup> The necessary of existence is exemplified, according to Lowrie, by the laws of nature as well as moral laws; obligation and responsibility are a part of one's being. Yet the whole of one's reality is not determined by necessity; unlike Hegel, Kierkegaard

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<sup>58</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 79. <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>60</sup>Lowrie, p. 629.

<sup>61</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

does not identify the necessary with the actual of existence. He associates actuality with possibility, and this is the opposite of necessity:<sup>63</sup>

The self is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. Inasmuch as it is itself, it is the necessary, and inasmuch as it has to become itself, it is a possibility.<sup>64</sup>

For Kierkegaard, to exist is to possess the possibility of freedom; he often uses the terms 'freedom' and 'possibility' interchangeably.<sup>65</sup> Within the individual's consciousness, the possibility of freedom exists as dread, an ever-present condition of human reality.<sup>66</sup> The essential characteristic of dread is its lack of an object. It is an agonizing premonition prompted by nothing concrete, but by horror at nothingness; it is the possibility of the possibility of freedom:

...dread is the dizziness of freedom...which gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself...the nothing of dread is a complex of presentiments which reflect themselves in themselves...<sup>67</sup>

The nothingness of dread which the individual both loves and fears is the relation of possibility to freedom and to individual existence.<sup>68</sup> Price emphasizes that Kierkegaard recognized dread as a fundamental factor in human activity long before the advent of depth psychology.<sup>69</sup>

The central qualities of human reality are contradictory,

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<sup>63</sup>Lowrie, pp. 631-632.

<sup>64</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 54.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 149. <sup>66</sup>Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, p. 23.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 55. <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 48. <sup>69</sup>Price, p. 65.

composed of factors which are constantly in opposition to each other.<sup>70</sup> Composed of elements of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the actual and the possible, the existing individual is an incomplete synthesis.

In his contingent and ultimately paradoxical condition, he is faced with freedom and dread and with death. This reality

posits a constant tension and unrest within the individual's consciousness which, Hanna maintains, is "the undergirding theme of the entirety of Kierkegaard's thought."<sup>71</sup>

born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal and is therefore a constant striving."<sup>72</sup> Viewing existence

as an inherent part of existence, Kierkegaard conceived of an optimum level of existence, an authentic personality,

toward which the individual is drawn by the fact that he exists. Price suggests that Kierkegaard interprets existence as "the

process in which I struggle to be the individual I imagine I ought to be."<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard's thought reveals three existence-

spheres which portray different ways in which existing individuals respond to the problems, joys, and anxieties of life.

The spheres and the individual's task which is revealed through them are postulated from a conception of what man should be:

There are three existence spheres... The aesthetic is that of immediacy, the ethical is that of requirement, the religious is that of fulfillment.<sup>74</sup>

Kierkegaard sees all human existence in terms of these spheres or a combination of them. As Hanna implied, they must be

understood in relation to the dialectical nature of existence.

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<sup>70</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 45.

<sup>71</sup>Hanna, p. 39.

<sup>72</sup>Kierkegaard, "Stages on Life's Way," A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 159.

and of the self. In experience the spheres do not form completely distinct divisions between individuals or within the self; they merge, thereby reconstructing the paradoxes of living.<sup>72</sup> To capture the full and essential character of each sphere, Kierkegaard portrays each in a somewhat isolated manner.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

The contradictory nature of human reality (the essence of Kierkegaard's dialectic) is the basis for his assertion that life is a never-ending struggle: "Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal and is therefore a constant striving."<sup>72</sup> Viewing movement as an inherent part of existence, Kierkegaard conceived of an optimum level of existence, an authentic personhood, toward which the individual is drawn by the fact that he exists. Price suggests that Kierkegaard interprets existence as "the process in which I struggle to be the individual I imagine I ought to be."<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard's thought reveals three existence-spheres which portray different ways in which existing individuals respond to the problems, joys, and anxieties of life. The spheres and the individual's task which is revealed through them are postulated from a conception of what man should be:

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<sup>72</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 85. <sup>73</sup>Price, p. 116.

<sup>74</sup>Kierkegaard, "Stages on Life's Way," A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 159.

and of the self. In experience the spheres do not form completely distinct divisions between individuals or within the self; they merge, thereby accentuating the paradoxes of living.<sup>75</sup> To capture the mood and essential character of each sphere, Kierkegaard portrays each in a somewhat isolated manner.

In Either/Or, his first major work, Kierkegaard sought "to exhibit the existential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical within an existing individual."<sup>76</sup> He depicts, as the author of volume one, a gifted young aesthete who experiments with life and trusts in the world to satisfy his desires. This man's motto is "one must enjoy life";<sup>77</sup> he lives for pleasure and the conditions for his enjoyment lie outside him. Merged with the crowd which carries him through life, he reflects the world and "coheres with the whole earthly life."<sup>78</sup> The essential aesthetic principle is "that the moment is everything."<sup>79</sup> The aesthetic individual, always choosing what pleases him, chooses only for the moment, and "is immediately what he is."<sup>80</sup> Kierkegaard captures the quality of the aesthetic moment in a scene from a banquet at which one of the guests asserts:

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<sup>75</sup>Hanna, pp. 20,52. <sup>76</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 224.

<sup>77</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959), II, 187.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>79</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 265.

<sup>80</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 182.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>86</sup>Price, p. 158.



To be good, a thing must be all at once, for 'at once' is the most divine of all categories...so that what does not occur at once is of the evil.<sup>81</sup>

Kierkegaard's symbol for the immediacy of the aesthetic life in its purest form is the sensuous-erotic genius--Don Juan of Mozart's immortal opera. The essence of the unreflective, joyous, amoral character of the aesthetic life, Don Juan "desires in every woman the whole of womanhood";<sup>82</sup> he lives in and for the moment in which his desire can be satisfied, but it never is. He is "an energy, a storm, an impatience..that exists in a succession of moments."<sup>83</sup> Thus his life has no actual coherence; he is constantly being formed but is never finished:

...he does not have a stable existence at all but hurries in a perpetual vanishing, precisely like music, about which it is true that it is over as soon as it has ceased to sound, and only comes into being again when it again sounds.<sup>84</sup>

Because of its immediate aspect, the aesthetic is not an actuality but an "existential possibility tending toward existence..."<sup>85</sup>

For Kierkegaard the aesthetic is the most fragmented and fragile mode of existence; yet it represents the life of the average man and a general level of experience.<sup>86</sup> Devoting himself to pleasure above everything, the aesthetic man is constantly beyond himself and his life lacks continuity. In the immediate consciousness, contradictions do not exist; the

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<sup>81</sup>Kierkegaard, "Stages on Life's Way," p. 177.

<sup>82</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, I, p. 98. <sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 101. <sup>85</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 226.

<sup>86</sup>Price, p. 168.

aesthetic individual is ultimately concealed from himself because he never has the dialectical elements of existence within him; instead they exist outside him.<sup>87</sup> As Hanna explains, the aesthetic man is not conscious that the world is not his ally and he is deceived by his confidence in something outside himself.<sup>88</sup> Because he lacks this awareness, the aesthetic man has no self outside the moment; according to Kierkegaard, he is in despair whether he is conscious of it or not. He is in despair because he exists in the realm of possibility seeking to infinitize himself. For Kierkegaard the immediacy of the aesthetic life is precisely the definition of unconscious despair--the despair of not willing to be oneself.<sup>89</sup>

In the aesthetic crisis, if one despairs of the immediate, the possibility exists for him to attain another mode of existence. This is the ethical sphere; its basis, as Price maintains, lies in the Kierkegaardian dialectic of the self as being and yet becoming.<sup>90</sup> The self is primarily a possibility until it is posited by an act of will: "The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision, and to renew it."<sup>91</sup> The only answer for the aesthetic man is to "choose despair"; in this act of courage and honesty, he puts a distance between himself and the immediate world. Only in

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<sup>87</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., pp. 387-388, 227.

<sup>88</sup>Hanna, pp. 41-42.

<sup>89</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 38, 50, 55, 83.

<sup>90</sup>Price, p. 174. <sup>91</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 277.

this manner can a man acquire a consciousness of the tense relation between the contrary factors which define his existence. This self-consciousness is Kierkegaard's meaning when he declares that in choosing despair, one chooses oneself:

So then choose despair, for despair itself is a choice... What is it one chooses? He chooses himself, not in his immediacy, not as this fortuitous individual, but he chooses himself in his eternal validity.<sup>92</sup>

One enters the ethical life by an act of choice which is much more difficult than an aesthetic choice. In the immediate life, one chooses between relative ends; the ethical choice is an absolute one because it determines the personality of the chooser. For Kierkegaard there are only two alternatives for the existing individual:

Either he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual, by which he becomes a comic figure... Or he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual.<sup>93</sup>

From this ultimatum, one can see that the substance of Kierkegaard's view of ethics rests in the nature of one's choice. One does not choose between good and evil, right and wrong; he chooses good and evil or excludes them. The important thing is to choose; neutrality is the evil: "...in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses."<sup>94</sup>

For Kierkegaard the determinants of ethics do not lie outside the existing individual. The ethical life is not achieved by the realization of universal norms, but by an

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<sup>92</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 215.

<sup>93</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 109.

<sup>94</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 171.

inward decision arising from the depths of one's own individuality. Truth determined objectively is not necessarily truth for the existing individual; in fact, Kierkegaard asserts that objective (i.e., speculative or positivistic) truth represents a flight from existence, bringing the individual into contradiction with himself.<sup>95</sup> Price emphasizes Kierkegaard's aversion to traditional ethics with its accent on formalized categories which he felt had no relation to the man who formulated them. Traditional ethics, like reason, could not answer the questions about existence which were most crucial for Kierkegaard. Though his view of ethics was influenced by Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, Kierkegaard's individualism carried him to a further extreme. The imperative he proposes is more fundamental to existence than Kant's: The choice is not between good and evil, but between being oneself or not being oneself: "To be or not to be--that is the question," Price reminds us.<sup>96</sup>

In a shift which Swenson maintains "effected for theological thinking a veritable Copernican revolution," Kierkegaard places primary emphasis on subjective reflection as the only real source of truth for the existing individual.<sup>97</sup> His definition of subjective thinking, however, does not entail a distortion of reality but a deeper apprehension of it. Subjectivity, in the Kierkegaardian sense, is an attitude towards oneself of serious concern; it is a personal, passionate interest in thought and in its relation to one's own self in

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<sup>95</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., pp. 177, 183.

<sup>96</sup>Price, p. 155; also pp. 154, 149. <sup>97</sup>Swenson, p. 126.

existence.<sup>98</sup> In objective truth, the emphasis is on "what" is said; in subjective truth, the emphasis is on "how" it is said.<sup>99</sup>

The ethical man has 'chosen himself' in despair and thereby has revealed himself to himself. In the choice he recognizes that his ideal self is not outside himself as some abstract pattern, but that it is his very self. His task is to be himself and "to order, cultivate, temper, enkindle, repress... to bring about a proportionality in the soul..."<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to the aesthetic mood, the ethical is characterized by its non-transient quality. It is symbolized in volume two of Either/Or by the married man, Judge William. As one example of the ethical stage, marriage is not a succession of disconnected moments. It has a continuity which endures beyond the moment's sudden fancy:

...the ethicist...is a husband and concentrates himself upon marriage...by which, time is taken into the service of the existing individual, and the possibility of gaining a history becomes the ethical victory of continuity over concealment, melancholy, and despair.<sup>101</sup>

Instead of existing as myriad possibilities, the self has become an individual because it has chosen itself "concretely as this definite individual...with these talents, dispositions, instincts, passions...as this definite product of this definite environment."<sup>102</sup> The life of the ethical man is overt; according to Kierkegaard, his personality reveals itself most

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<sup>98</sup>Lowrie, p. 635. <sup>99</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 181.

<sup>100</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 267.

<sup>101</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 227.

<sup>102</sup>Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 255.

completely as the unity of the particular and the universal:

He who regards life ethically sees the universal, and he who lives ethically expresses the universal in his life, he makes himself the universal man, not by divesting himself of his concretion, for then he becomes nothing, but by clothing himself with it and permeating it with the universal.<sup>103</sup>

The ethical art of living is to be the one man in such a way that one is also the universal man. This task does not annihilate the aesthetical within man. The content of aesthetic experiences is not changed, but the way one interpretes it is revolutionized; the aesthetic is no longer one's primary goal.<sup>104</sup>

That passion to exist clashes with the universals of ethics. Faced with the bewildering complications between his duty to himself and to the world, the ethicist becomes aware of his own imperfections; being responsible for himself, he is unable to avoid the responsibility for the failure to be himself. He experiences a profound despair over his own personality which develops into a sense of guilt. The ethical stage is finally broken up by the ambiguities of existence.<sup>105</sup>

In Being/Ex. Judge William intimated the possibility of a form of life higher than the ethical. He spoke of experiences so weighted with sorrow that they made the individual an exception to ethical or universal categories and brought him to a grasp of life: this is the religious stage.<sup>106</sup> In this sphere, the ethical duty to oneself is given a further qualification and subjectivity acquires a more specific interpretation.

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 260. <sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 182, 255-256.

Thomte points out that the religious life does have some significance in the ethical life. The religiosity of Judge William he characterizes as the universal religion, a system of cultural values which are the background of the ethical life.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS SPHERE

In trying to express the universal in his individual life, the ethical man is constantly confronted with conditions which prevent him from attaining his ideal self. The individual passion to exist clashes with the universals of ethics. Faced with the bewildering complications between his duty to himself and to the world, the ethicist becomes aware of his own imperfections; being responsible for himself, he is unable to avoid the responsibility for the failure to be himself. He experiences a profound despair over his own personality which deepens into a sense of guilt. The ethical stage is finally broken up by the ambiguities of existence.<sup>105</sup>

In Either/Or, Judge William intimated the possibility of a form of life higher than the ethical. He spoke of experiences so weighted with sorrow that they made the individual an exception to ethical or universal categories and brought him to a higher sphere of life: this is the religious stage.<sup>106</sup> In this sphere, the ethical duty to oneself is given a further qualification and subjectivity acquires a more specific interpretation.

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<sup>105</sup>Price, p. 181.

<sup>106</sup>Reider Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 55.

Thomte points out that the religious life does have some significance in the ethical life. The religiosity of Judge William he characterizes as the universal religious, a system of cultural values which are the background of the ethical life. The judge accepts his duty as coming from God. Yet his relationship to God is never a private one; God does not enter into his life in any special sense. This general religiousness of the ethical is sharply distinguished in Kierkegaard's thought from true Christian religiousness. It is based on the proposition (developed above) that subjectivity is the truth. Kierkegaard calls it 'immediate' or 'aesthetic' religion because it rests upon the supposition that God is immanent in the human personality and that by an inner effort one can attain the religious life.<sup>107</sup> To attain the optimum level of existence, according to Kierkegaard, one must break with this immediate relationship with God which is a kind of paganism. As will be seen below, Christian religiousness, the true religious stage, is based on the proposition that "subjectivity is the untruth."<sup>108</sup>

The ethicist chose himself out of fear of concealment, the loss of himself in aesthetic dreams and melancholy. Discovering that he is unable to fulfill the ethical demand, he faces a conflict between the ethical and religious modes of life, between the universal-ethical and a higher demand.<sup>109</sup> This is the theme of Kierkegaard's reinterpretation of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Fear and Trembling. In God's command that

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-66, 87.

<sup>108</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 515. <sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 231.



he sacrifice Isaac, Abraham encounters a duty which is the opposite of ethical requirements that he love his son; in the universal-ethical sphere, his act would be murder. In the religious sphere, however, the sacrifice is obedience to God's command; this is a higher duty and transforms the ethical duty into a temptation. Out of this contradiction comes the "fear and trembling" and the dread inherent in the paradox of faith.<sup>110</sup>

In this moment of dizzy freedom to choose between the ethical and absolute requirements, Abraham takes the "absolute risk" by venturing to believe against the understanding that God would restore Isaac to him.<sup>111</sup> In obeying God's demand, Abraham first makes the movement of infinite resignation in which he renounces the universal and the temporal; he resigns the love which is the content of his life, Isaac. In this break with the finite, Abraham reconciles himself to pain and suffering. Yet with the second movement of faith, its positive movement, Abraham believed that what he surrendered would be restored to him even though he recognized the impossibility, humanly speaking, of retaining Isaac. His faith rests on his belief "by virtue of the absurd;" because of it, he is able to regain Isaac in all his finitude.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, the finite and the temporal acquire a new meaning for Abraham; he lives in the temporal only by virtue of a private relationship with

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<sup>110</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 38, 91, 106-107.

<sup>111</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 384.

<sup>112</sup>Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, pp. 47-49, 55-56, 65-68.

the Absolute, God. In the 'leap' of faith, the absolute venture whereby he believes the absurd, Abraham moves into a new modality of being--the religious: "The 'real' self is first posited by the qualitative leap."<sup>113</sup>

Unlike the activities of the ethical man, Abraham's action is concealed from all other human beings; outwardly, it is unintelligible because the universal, as an intermediate category, has been suspended in favor of a higher value--the religious. This is the significance of Kierkegaard's assertion that there can be a "teleological suspension of the ethical."<sup>114</sup> In the religious sphere, the man of faith determines his relationship to the universal by his relationship to the Absolute. Paradoxically, he appears to exist like the ethical man and "...finiteness tastes to him just as good as to one who never knew anything higher..."<sup>115</sup> As Kierkegaard indicates, the true inwardness illustrated by Abraham demands no outward sign:

But the less outwardness, the more inwardness, and inwardness expressed through its opposite (the outwardness of being wholly like the others, and that there is outwardly nothing to see) is the highest inwardness-- provided it is there.<sup>116</sup>

The intimate connection that Kierkegaard establishes between existence and Christianity can be understood more fully if this characterization of the religious sphere is borne in mind. According to Kierkegaard, religious existence is closely related to existence as a human being: "If men had forgotten

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<sup>113</sup>Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, p. 71.

<sup>114</sup>Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 79.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 56. <sup>116</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 370.

what it means to exist religiously, they had doubtless forgotten what it means to exist as human beings."<sup>117</sup> One can truly become oneself (and a Christian) only by means of a private relationship with God and an awareness that one exists before God.<sup>118</sup> This relationship (and the self) is posited only if the individual believes the absurd proposition which, for Kierkegaard, is the essence of Christianity: "The eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox."<sup>119</sup> That which is eternal, and by its very nature unhistorical, was born, lived, and died in the person of Christ. This paradox is mirrored in the existing human being, a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal and the finite and the infinite situated in time. The essential principle of the paradox is becoming; for the existing individual, life is primarily a process of becoming. His task in this process is to become himself; the fundamental expression for this task is faith: "for faith...refers to becoming."<sup>120</sup>

In 'believing' the paradox, one does not 'understand' a series of doctrinal truths arranged in paragraphs. According to Kierkegaard, this is the speculative explanation which transforms Christianity into objective knowledge and abrogates its essence.<sup>121</sup> Christianity is not a matter for objective knowledge, but for individual belief: "faith begins precisely

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>118</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 40, 44.

<sup>119</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 188.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.; also pp. 196, 198.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 191, 196.

where thinking leaves off."<sup>122</sup> It is the nature of Christianity to be misunderstood; the only way to explain the paradox is to make it clear that it must be a paradox, i.e., that it cannot be explained by rational means. The measure of the intensity of faith in inwardness is the objective repulsion at the center of man's being before the Absolute Paradox.<sup>123</sup> The dialectical aspect of faith is that what is potentially offensive must be embraced in spite of its offensiveness:

One can 'know' nothing at all about 'Christ.' He is the paradox, the object of faith, existing only for faith...He can only be believed.<sup>124</sup>

Therefore the tasks of faith are to "discover" the improbable, the paradox; and then to hold fast to this discovery with the passion of inwardness.<sup>125</sup>

Through the "leap" of faith, a resolution of the will, the individual comes into a relationship with God and at the same time he posits the synthesis (which owes from God) that defines his existence: "In faith, the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."<sup>126</sup> In this sphere of Christian religiousness, the ethical does not lose its original content as task and human responsibility; but it is given a new orientation as the self becomes more conscious of its own imperfection.<sup>127</sup> The

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<sup>122</sup>Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, in Price. p.144.

<sup>123</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., pp. 188, 198.

<sup>124</sup>Kierkegaard, "Training in Christianity," A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 388.

<sup>125</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 209.

<sup>126</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 132. Also pp. 44, 21.

religious man is aware of himself in existence as a man before God; he is conscious of himself as a sinner in the dilemma which posits an absolute duty higher than the ethical.<sup>127</sup> In contrast to the ethical mood of requirement and the aesthetic mood of enjoyment, the characteristic expression of the religious sphere is suffering. The religious man believes that life is found in suffering; he experiences, in faith, "the peril of lying upon the deep, the seventy thousand fathoms, in order there to find God."<sup>128</sup> This suffering persists throughout life, for the double movement of faith is not made once for all; faith is a "repetition", a "persistence in despair" which gives one a fuller possession of oneself.<sup>129</sup> The religious man is thus constantly aware of the tensions and incessant striving of existence. According to Kierkegaard, to understand oneself in existence is the Christian principle:

But to really exist, so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, at one and the same time eternal, and as if far removed from existence, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming: that is truly difficult.<sup>130</sup>

As a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, man is qualitatively different from God; he expresses "his own nature most adequately when he expresses this difference absolutely."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 50.

<sup>128</sup> Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 208.; Also pp. 239-240, 256, 390.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SINGLE INDIVIDUAL

In the religious modality, the individual exists "as the particular in opposition to the universal."<sup>132</sup> In his endeavor to obey God, i.e., believe by virtue of the absurd, the religious man is striving in isolation to fulfill God's absolute demand--that he be himself. For Kierkegaard, therefore, one's duty to be a Christian and to be oneself coincide:

The Christian heroism (and perhaps it is rarely to be seen) is to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual man, this definite individual man, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and this tremendous responsibility.<sup>133</sup>

The religious paradigm is the Kierkegaardian expression for authentic selfhood and the optimum level of existence. The man of faith represents "that particular individual" which Kierkegaard often calls "my category."<sup>134</sup> As the decisive Christian category, " 'The individual' is the category through which, in a religious aspect, this age, all history, the human race as a whole must pass."<sup>135</sup> "The individual" is above the race; against the numerical preponderance of the crowd, he is the only salvation. Kierkegaard asserts that "only one attains

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<sup>132</sup>Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 92.

<sup>133</sup>Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup>Lowrie, p. 633.

<sup>135</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 128.

the goal"; yet every man, "inasmuch as he is a man, can be, indeed, must be an individual."<sup>136</sup>

In the isolation and concealment of the religious sphere, the individual returns to a point where revelation (the essence of the ethical stage) is impossible. In this context, the significance of subjectivity as the untruth is clarified. One does not become a Christian solely by a passionate inner striving. The God-relationship is not entirely within oneself; that which aids the individual in entering a higher sphere is "something else," i.e., God. Paradoxically, the apparently aesthetic relationship (the individual related to something outside himself) is the proper relationship in Christianity. As Thomte points out, the secrecy regarded as harmful in the aesthetic and ethical spheres is part of the individual's inner religious life.<sup>137</sup>

The movement of the existing individual to the religious modality, the most complete level of existence, is "...from himself through the world to himself."<sup>138</sup> Or as Kierkegaard explains in the Postscript: "...the task is not to begin with the individual and arrive at the race, but to begin with the individual and through the race arrive at the individual again." <sup>139</sup> Kierkegaard's description of the spheres of existence expresses this movement: from the aesthetic (concealment) through the ethical (revelation) to the religious (concealment). In order to define Christianity and its particular sort of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>137</sup> Thomte, pp. 62, 96.

<sup>138</sup> Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 279.

<sup>139</sup> Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 283.

inwardness, Kierkegaard thought it was imperative to clearly explain its prior stages which he did in the pseudonymous works.<sup>140</sup> The stages reveal a dichotomy in Kierkegaard's concept of the individual between what the individual is and what he should be. In order to stir up the crowd and attract attention to 'the individual', Kierkegaard gave the category a double meaning:

'The single individual' can mean the one and only, and 'the single Individual' can mean every man. So if one would provoke attention dialectically, one should use the category of 'the individual' with a double lash to it.<sup>141</sup>

In the pseudonymous books, the individual is primarily the individual in the aesthetic sense of the pre-eminent person set apart from others by differences of intellect and culture. In the religious books, the individual is what every man is or can be by virtue of his existence as a human being. The ambiguity of this double meaning is the dialectic of 'the single individual,' who is at once the one and only and also every man.<sup>142</sup>

The dialectic of the individual lies at the core of Kierkegaard's thought. Based on the view that the existing individual is a being who is yet in the process of becoming, the dialectic has its ultimate foundation in Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christianity: the existential communication that the eternal God became a man in time. As Kierkegaard emphasizes, Christianity accentuates temporal existence:

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>141</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 124. <sup>142</sup>Ibid.



"the courage of faith is to grasp the temporal whole."<sup>143</sup> Yet in acting for this life, Abraham exists in the finite as a whole man by virtue of his belief in the existential communication of Christianity. Kierkegaard's description of the nature of human reality is thus inextricably bound to his idea of what the existing individual should become. Consequently, the existential and religious aspects of his view of the individual overlap. In the final analysis, the Kierkegaardian view of what it means to be a Christian coincides with what it means to be an individual, "the single individual."

As an author and as a man, the central problem for Kierkegaard was "how to become a Christian."<sup>144</sup> In calling attention to the category of Christianity, he also emphasized that of the individual and succeeded in his task

...to read solo the original text of the individual, human existence-relationship, the old text, well known, handed down from the fathers-- to read it through once more, if possible in a more heartfelt way.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 70.

<sup>144</sup>Kierkegaard, The Point of View..., p. 145.

<sup>145</sup>Kierkegaard, Concluding..., p. 554.

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