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KIERKEGAARD'S PROBLEM
AND HIS THEORY OF
EXISTENCE

by

William Leo Kelly, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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1952

the time. In Germany Friederich Schleiermacher, an outstanding Protestant theologian of the day, was emphasizing feeling in religion. Religion for him was had in and through the infinite, and everything temporal, in and through the eternal. This pantheistic tone was the theological echo of Spinozan philosophy, which was having its most recent fling in Lessing's Hamburger Dramaturgie, and Friedrich Jacobi's Allwill's Briefsammlung, along with the works of men like J. G. Hammon.²

H. L. Martensen, profoundly influenced by Hegel, attempted a speculative theology which could mediate between rationalism and orthodoxy. His attempt involved the use of the Hegelian dialectic with a doctrine of existence (Dasein) by which he could mediate everything in the world which had meaning in existence. Hence nature and history, poetry and art, along with philosophy would harmoniously unite to form a temple of the spirit in which Christianity would be the all-governing and all-explaining center. Martensen supposedly had removed all difficulties confronting reason. Along with Martensen the men of his time confused ethics with contemplation, Christianity with abstract speculation.³

The influence of Hegelianism on Christianity brought about a spiritual bankruptcy and a perversion of the meaning of

2 For a further consideration of the philosophers mentioned above, see Frierick Ueberweg, History of Philosophy, New York, trans. by Geo. S. Morris, 1903, Vol. II, 120-122, 198-200.

3 John Bain, Søren Kierkegaard, London, 38-108.

Christianity as it had formerly been accepted. It was this Hegelian theology which was the pale substitution for the Christianity formerly held even by the Lutherans.

The philosophical prelude to this Hegelian field-day had its roots as far back as Hume's subjective interpretation of reality. After Hume, Kant's philosophy of apriorism had been taught in the German Universities. Fichte, a onetime student of Kant, had supplanted the phenomenon and noumenon of his former master with his "Transcendental I." This "Transcendental I" or "I-am-I" Kierkegaard satirized in his general rejection of speculative philosophy as the answer to his problem. Schelling had been teaching radical indifferentism in which the real and the ideal were identified. This indifferentism was perceived and its motion was started by intellectual intuitionism. Adolf Trendelenburg, who was a professor at the University of Berlin and a great Aristotelian scholar, was at this time a severe critic of Kant, Hegel, and Spinoza. His objections to some of Kant's prods led to prolonged discussions with Kuno Fischer, Professor at Jena, and other men of repute. Such opposition to the German masters of philosophy was not without significance for Kierkegaard. It would seem that Kierkegaard was greatly influenced by Trendelenburg. This influence is indicated in Kierkegaard's writings.

The philosophy chairs and publications of Kierkegaard's

day were not the only sources for dissemination of the school of German philosophy. The poets did their part, too. Friedrich Schiller popularized the moral and esthetic doctrines of Kant. John Paul Richter, known for his dialogue on the immortality of the soul, Kampanerthal, was the forerunner of the romantic movement. Richter was also a contemporary of Kierkegaard. Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis, and Tieck, who were likewise contemporaries of Kierkegaard, were the more outstanding publishers of romanticism in poetry. Friedrich Schlegel, another contemporary of Kierkegaard and author of Lucinde, after contributing much to the cultus of genius ultimately turned to the Catholic faith.⁴

On October 30, 1830, Søren Kierkegaard matriculated in the University of Copenhagen after passing his examinations cum laude.⁵ He chose the faculty of theology in conformity with his father's wish. His brother, Peter, had already passed his theological examination in Copenhagen and was studying for a doctorate in Germany. After a year Kierkegaard passed the "Second Ex-

4 For further discussion of the philosophers, theologians and romanticists of Kierkegaard's day see James Collins, "The Spheres of Existence and the Romantic Outlook" and "The Attack Upon Hegelianism," Modern Schoolman, XVI, January, 1949, 121-129, and March, 1949, 219-231 respectively.

5 For extensive biographical material on Kierkegaard see Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, London, 1938.

amination" in Latin, Greek, physics, Hebrew, and history with the rating of cum laude. In philosophy and mathematics, he received the citation laudabilis prae ceteris. He was now a candidate for theology and could take his examination whenever he felt prepared. But it was not until nine years later, in 1840, that Kierkegaard received his license to exercise the pastoral ministry. During these nine years Kierkegaard witnessed the death of his mother and father, a brother twenty-four years old, and two sisters twenty-three years old. In 1837 at the age of twenty-seven he became engaged to Regina Olsen, who was then seventeen years old. This engagement Kierkegaard broke on October 11, 1841. The reason for this decision according to Kierkegaard was that he did not wish to subject Regina to the inborn melancholy which he inherited from his father.⁶

After this experience with Regina Olsen, Kierkegaard turned again to study and writing. It was Ludvig Keiberg who first introduced Hegelianism into the University of Copenhagen. Keiberg had studied under Hegel and had a personal esteem for his master. But it was H. L. Martensen who made Hegelianism the leading and ruling philosophy in Denmark. Martensen's attempt to reconcile Christian orthodoxy and Hegelianism in his Dogmatics,

⁶ Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Minneapolis, 1938, 4-5.

Christian Ethics, and other works was of pivotal importance for, and an object of Kierkegaard's most bitter and sustained attacks against speculative philosophy as the explanation of Christianity.

Though Kierkegaard had admiration for Hegel, he never tired of heaping invectives upon Martensen who, obsessed by the fixed idea of the age, always claimed to go "beyond Hegel. To Kierkegaard, "going beyond" Hegel was something like living in the country where one's letters had to be addressed via a big town. In this case the address was John Doe via Hegel.⁷

This philosophy which Kierkegaard studied was that of Hegel. It was a philosophy of the Absolute. This absolute was regarded as being beyond the contradictory relationships which were comprehended within itself. A constant process of evolution was necessitated for the mediation of contradictories through dialectics. By this logical progression, the immanent idea unfolded itself and became more apparent. The initial stage of this process was one of absolute indeterminism. The evolution was toward the determinate. Such a philosophy was hardly the one to answer so concrete a problem as was Kierkegaard's. His reaction, as might have been expected, was strong. In the following statement Kierkegaard hits at the core of Hegelian weakness.

We certainly do not need Hegel to inform us that relative contradictions can be mediated, for it is already told by the ancients, . . . but personality will protest in all eternity against the proposition that absolute contradictions

7 Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, Princeton, New Jersey, 1948, 7.

can be mediated (and this protest is incommensurable with the assertion of the mediation); it will in all eternity repeat its immortal dilemma: to be or not to be--that is the question.⁸

The basic difficulty of the thinking of his age, according to Kierkegaard, was the divorce of life from thinking. In Ancient Greece, philosophy had always maintained a relation to ethics, and a thinker was "an existing individual stimulated by his reflection to passionate enthusiasm."⁹ Again the difference between Kierkegaard's way of thinking and that of the philosophers of his day is evident. His way of thinking was practical, concerned with the concrete individual. In Socrates Kierkegaard found a thinker to his liking. He looked upon him as his prototype. For Kierkegaard Socrates was the existing philosopher in whom thought and living were united, not divorced. It was Kierkegaard's aim to use the Socratic method so that thought and Christianity might be united. Thus he would not speculate about Christianity, but he would join Christian truth to the existence of the individual. This method Kierkegaard considered directly opposed to the logical systems of the day. Existence, he would say, in many ways is the frustration of the logical attempt to

⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, Journals, trans. A. Dru, London, 1938, No. 286.

⁹ Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, trans. Walter Lowrie, and David Swenson, Princeton, New Jersey, 273.

explain reality. Kierkegaard bitterly caricatured the philosophers of his day by saying that they were men who built enormous castles but were themselves content to live in shacks nearby.

Kierkegaard inveighed against Hegelianism not only because it lacked a non-conceptualistic foundation but also because it had a devastating effect on Christianity. The age was one of "doctrinizing," as he put it. Everything had to be understood in a "doctrinizing manner." Kierkegaard ironically summed up the situation well in the following words: "It is as if Christianity also had been promulgated as a little system, if not quite as good as the Hegelian It is as if Christ were a professor and as if the apostles had founded a little scientific society!"¹⁰

Not only did Kierkegaard observe the effect which Hegelian philosophy had on Christianity, but also noted the influence which the professors of the universities had on the minds of the public. " [I]n our time all stand in relationship with the professor, the professor is the genuine Christian. And with the professor came scientific learning, and with learning came doubters, and with learning and doubters came the scientifically learned public, and then came persons pro and contra. . . ." ¹¹ In such a situation Kierkegaard considered himself a man with a mission. He

10 Ibid., 193.

11 Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves, trans. Walter Lowrie, London, 1940, 203-204.

felt it was his task to correct the prevalent ways of thinking, and to reinstate Christianity to its proper place. "My only analogy is Cocrates. My task is the Socratic task--to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian. I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can reveal the fact that others are still less entitled to the name than I am!"¹²

When Kierkegaard studied the monistic and pantheistic philosophies of his day, he noted that the individual had all but been lost in the speculative contemplation of world history. As an antidote to this way of thinking, Kierkegaard would present his own Copernican Revolution in which the individual would be the supreme interest and humanity in general would evanesce into the shadow of an abstraction. In connection with Kierkegaard's reaction to the speculative philosophy and theology of his day, it may be noted that he also revolted against the established state religion, Lutheranism. In this he stirred the animosity of many churchman and the censure of his friends.¹³

12 Søren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon Christendom, trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, New Jersey, 1944, 283.

13 For a systematized and classified presentation of Kierkegaard's objection to the philosophy, religion, and the manner of thinking of his day, the reader is referred to Jean Wahl's collection of extracts from Kierkegaard's numerous Journals which cover the periods between 1834 and 1839, and between 1849 and 1854. Etudes Kierkegaardiennes, deuxième ed., Paris, 1949, 455-568.

From what has been seen of the person of Kierkegaard, one might take him for an intellectual revolutionary who objected to everything and who was basically ignorant of the thinking of man throughout the ages. But from his own references in the Postscript it seems that he had a fair acquaintance with the Greek schools of thought. He mentions the Eleatic school in connection with the monism of Fichte and Hegel. He speaks of Plato's theory of recollection when he treats of thought and abstraction. Other names such as Protagoras, Empedocles, Zeno, Plutarch, and Origen find their place in his pages. Aristotle is mentioned when he treats of the logical nature of the Hegelian system.

His acquaintance with the thinkers of the Middle Ages seems to be almost nil. He seems to have had a general knowledge of the major tenets of the modern philosophers. He mentions Descartes' Cogito ergo sum in connection with his discussion on thinking and existing. The ontological argument for the existence of God is mentioned in connection with Kant. But for the most part Kierkegaard restricted his discussion of speculative philosophy to that of Hegel. He made several trips to the University of Berlin to listen to the lectures. His comment on Schelling was that he was an old driveller, even though at first he enjoyed attending Schelling's lectures given in opposition to Hegelianism.

Kierkegaard did not limit his attack to philosophers

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LIFE

William Leo Kelly, S.J. was born in Baltimore, Maryland, November 11, 1924.

He was graduated from Loyola High School, Towson, Maryland, June, 1942. He entered the Society of Jesus at Wernersville, Pennsylvania in August, 1942. Upon completing two years of Noviceship, he entered the Juniorate where he spent two years studying Latin, Greek, and English Literature. In September, 1946, he transferred to West Baden College, affiliated with Loyola University, and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1947. He is now enrolled in the graduate school of Loyola University working for his Master's degree in Philosophy.

and theologians as such, but he even included in his total warfare his own bishop.

Here in Denmark the Hegelians have several times been on the warpath, especially after Bishop Mynster, to gain the brilliant victory of speculative thought. Bishop Mynster has more than once become a vanquished standpoint, though he seems to be doing very well, and it is rather to be feared that the tremendous exertion incident to the winning of the victory has been too much for the unvanquished victors.¹⁴

The above censure Kierkegaard directed at his bishop because he tried to reconcile Christianity with speculative Hegelianism. In the midst of the philosophical and theological fermentation proper to his time, Kierkegaard set himself the task of upsetting the whole modern trend of thought. Alone he would oppose "the System" of the Hegelians and any other position which in the least resembled that of Hegel. The dialecticians he would attack with dialectics, but his dialectics would not be the necessary evolution of the Idea. Rather his dialectic would have its roots in existence. He would not be concerned with the intricate points of dogmatic theology, but he would emphasize the individual and the individual's personal relation to an all-important truth. His every endeavor would be to bring a solution to his problem--how to become a Christian. The following three chapters propose this problem as Kierkegaard saw it and answered it.

14 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 270.

CHAPTER II

KIERKEGAARD'S PROBLEM: HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

To understand the philosophical thought of men like Bernard of Clairvaux, Pascal, or Saint Augustine, one must realize that the problem which confronted them was a religious one. Kierkegaard likewise had a religious problem.¹ Kierkegaard states his problem in the following passage.

Here is a literary productivity, whose total idea is-- the problem of becoming a Christian. . . . But the author has thoroughly understood from the beginning, and consistently developed the consequences of the fact that the situation is in Christendom. . . . To become a Christian in Christendom is tantamount either to becoming what one already is, and this requires reflection in the direction of inwardness and subjectivity, or else it means to be freed first from the grip of illusion, and this cannot be done without reflection. The problem is: being in a certain sense a Christian, to become a Christian.²

Kierkegaard also states his problem clearly in the introduction to the Postscript.

The objective problem consists of an inquiry into the truth of Christianity. The subjective problem concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity.) To put it

1 Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, Toronto, 1949, 142.

2 Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, trans. Walter Lowrie, Oxford, 1939, 42-43.

simply: How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity? The problem concerns myself alone.³

In the solution of this problem in Christendom, the Christendom in which he lived, Kierkegaard encountered confusion. The Hegelians accounted for most of this confusion; it consisted in believing that to be a Christian was to know Christianity, and that there was a system, a speculation, or a specular knowledge through which it was possible to become a Christian.⁴ To remove this confusion, Kierkegaard had first to investigate speculative philosophy which to him was in the main Hegelian philosophy.⁵

3 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 20.

4 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 142-143.

5 In his article, "The Mind of Kierkegaard: The Attack Upon Hegelianism," published in the Modern Schoolman, XXVI, March, 1949, 223, n., James Collins makes comment in these words: The important qualification "Hegelian" should be attached to each of these terms [v.g., philosophy, logic, reason, and metaphysics]. Hence I cannot entirely agree with J. Wahl (Etudes kierkegaard-iennes (Paris, 1938) pp. 174-175) that Kierkegaard's attack upon idealistic philosophy is formally extended into a repudiation of all philosophy. Only when it pretends to be all-inclusive on the basis of identity between thought and being does philosophy fall under Kierkegaard's condemnation. But since, aside from Aristotle, he was unacquainted with any definite philosophy free from a claim to self-sufficiency, Kierkegaard is not careful enough in distinguishing between Hegelian philosophy and other possible types of philosophy. That there can be non-idealistic ways of seeking a systematic philosophical outlook is rightly stressed by P. Weiss, in opposition to both Hegel and Kierkegaard (so far as the latter leave some room for misunderstanding by his omission): "Existenz and Hegel," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, VIII (Dec., 1947), 206-16.

"This therefore became my resolve: to discover where the misunderstanding lies between speculative philosophy and Christianity."⁶

It was not long before Kierkegaard concluded that for his problem the two, Christianity and speculative philosophy, were irreconcilable. He soon let loose one of the severest attacks that Hegelian philosophy was to undergo in its day or in more recent times. Kierkegaard's barbed condemnation of Hegelian speculative philosophy as the answer to his problem flowed with cunning irony and stinging satire.

Speculative philosophy achieves the triumph of understanding Christianity entire; but it is to be noted that it does not understand in a Christian manner, but speculatively, which is precisely a misunderstanding, since Christianity is the very opposite of speculation.⁷

But what other presupposition can, generally speaking, come into question for the so-called Christian philosophy but that Christianity is the precise opposite of speculation, that it is the miraculous, the absurd, a challenge to the individual to exist in it, and not to waste his time by trying to understand it speculatively.⁸

The attitude of Kierkegaard reflected in the above passage is one like that of the Imitation of Christ when it says, "I would rather feel compunction, than define it."⁹ To exist as a Christian rather than define dogma was Kierkegaard's concern.

6 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 216.

7 Ibid., 243.

8 Ibid., 338. See also 193-195.

9 Thomas A Kempis, The Following of Christ, I, 1, 3.

The following passage from Kierkegaard clarifies his stand on the problem of becoming a Christian. Again the subjective point of view must be kept in mind. For Kierkegaard it is the problem of the individual relating himself to Christianity, rather than the individual having a profound knowledge of objective truths of Christianity.

The problem is relevant to Christianity. Less problematically in the form of a dissertation, it might be viewed as involving the apologetic presuppositions for faith, the approximations leading toward faith, the quantitative introduction to the decision of faith. That which accordingly would have to be treated would be a multitude of considerations, which are, or were once dealt with by theologians in an introductory discipline, in the introduction to dogmatics, and in apologetics. But in order to avoid confusion, it is at once necessary to recall that our treatment of the problem does not raise the question of the truth of Christianity. It merely deals with the question of the individual's relationship to Christianity. It has nothing to do with the systematic zeal of the personally indifferent individual to arrange the truths of Christianity in paragraphs; it deals with the concern of the infinitely interested individual for his own relationship to such a doctrine.¹⁰

In the above passage Kierkegaard specifies clearly that the problem of Christianity is not one of objectivity, one of measuring the truth of Christianity. The truth of Christianity he takes for granted. To measure this truth, in Kierkegaard's opinion would be the approach of the speculative philosopher.

From the speculative point of view, Christianity is viewed as an historical phenomenon. The problem of its truth therefore becomes the problem of so interpenetrating it with thought, that Christianity at last reveals itself as the eternal truth. The speculative approach to the problem is characterized by

one excellent trait: it has no presuppositions. It proceeds from nothing, it assumes nothing as given, it begs no postulates. Here then we may be sure of avoiding such presuppositions as were met with in the preceding.

And yet, something is after all assumed: Christianity is assumed as given. Alas and alack! philosophy is altogether too polite. How strange is the way of the world! Once it was the risk of his life that a man dared to profess himself a Christian; now it is to make oneself suspect to venture doubt that one is a Christian.¹¹

Kierkegaard goes at great length in his writings to satirize the explanation of Christianity according to speculative philosophy, or more properly, according to Hegelian philosophy, as may be gathered from the tone of the above passage. The problem of Kierkegaard was an ethical one, a religious one which concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity. Speculative philosophy, understood as a philosophy with no roots in reality independent of our thought, cannot answer his problem, which concerns the existing individual. Speaking of the Platonic theory of recollection, he puts it this way.

The recollection-principle belongs to speculative philosophy and recollection is immanence, and speculatively and eternally there is no paradox. But the difficulty is that no human being is speculative philosophy; the speculative philosopher himself is an existing individual, subject to the claims that existence makes upon him. There is no merit in forgetting this, but a great merit in holding it fast, and this is precisely what Socrates did.¹²

11 Ibid., 49.

12 Ibid., 184-185, see note.

The reference to Socrates in the above passage is typical of many others which Kierkegaard made to the early Greek philosopher. For Kierkegaard, Socrates was the ethical philosopher, and the model of his own philosophizing. Kierkegaard likened Socrates to a lover. The early Greek did not merely know and teach wisdom, but he was in love with wisdom. Just as the true lover is not one who knows much about love but does not actually love, so Socrates was not one who merely knew about wisdom, but he was the very love of wisdom walking around the streets and places of Athens. Kierkegaard compared himself to Socrates not in wisdom but in the manner of philosophizing. To be a Christian did not mean to have an objective knowledge of Christianity but to be subjectively a Christian. Since the problem of becoming a Christian is one of the individual, of the subject, and not one of objectivity, Kierkegaard rejects the objective explanation of it.

Objectively, what it is to become a Christian is defined in the following way: A Christian is one who accepts the doctrine of Christianity. But if it is the doctrine which is to decide in the last resort whether one is a Christian, then instantly attention is directed outward, in order to learn to know in the minutest detail what the doctrine of Christianity is, because this indeed is to decide, not what Christianity is, but whether I am a Christian. . . . [I]n the end the decision whereby one becomes a Christian is relegated to oblivion.¹³

Once Kierkegaard has established for himself that Christianity has little in common with the objective standpoint, he

states what Christianity is from the subjective standpoint.)

"Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness."¹⁴ Now that Kierkegaard has removed Christianity from the objective solution and placed it on the ground of subjectivity, he describes more specifically the nature of the subjectivity. "Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is the paradox, paradox and passion are a mutual fit, and the paradox is altogether suited to one whose situation is, to be in the extremity of existence."¹⁵

In the above quotation the keynote of all Kierkegaard's thought is sounded. The Alcibiadean lever with which he overthrew the mass of Hegelian thought will now lay open his problem and prepare the way of solution. That lever, that keynote is existence.

Specifying more clearly the nature of existence, Kierkegaard claims that "Christianity is not a doctrine but an existential communication expressing an existential contradiction."¹⁶ To one asking what the nature of this contradiction is, Kierkegaard replies, "The existential contradiction proposed by Chris-

14 Ibid., 33.

15 Ibid., 206.

16 Ibid., 339, also 18, 290, 342, 495, 497, 499, 501.

tianity is the one I have sought to formulate in the problem of an eternal happiness decided in time by a relationship to something historical."¹⁷ This something historical is the absolute paradox. "The paradox consists principally in the fact that God, the Eternal, came into existence in time as a particular man."¹⁸ In the Fragments Kierkegaard says, "But the paradox unites the contradictories and is the historical made eternal and the eternal made historical. Everyone who understands the paradox differently may keep the honor of having explained it, which honor he won by not being content to understand it."¹⁹ The importance of this paradox Kierkegaard sets off in the following quotation. "The characteristic mark of Christianity is the paradox, the absolute paradox."²⁰ The paradox takes its existential importance from its relation to the individual. "The paradox is altogether suited to one whose situation is to be in the extremity of existence."²¹ The significance of this relation Kierkegaard brings out in the following passage.

In comparison with this direction toward the absolute telos, any and every result, even if it were the realization of the most glorious fancy born in a wishing individual's head, or

17 Ibid., 340, also 323, 330, 347.

18 Ibid., 528, also 529.

19 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David F. Swenson, Princeton, New Jersey, 1944, 49 and 79. In this book Kierkegaard devotes an entire chapter to the Absolute Paradox.

20 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 480

21 Ibid., 206.

in a poet's creative imagination, constitutes an absolute loss. The striving individual is better off if he thrusts it aside and says: "No, thanks, let me rather keep my relationship to the absolute telos."²²

Kierkegaard continues on, giving a further description of this relationship whereby we become a Christian. "Subjectively, what it is to become a Christian is defined thus: The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness."²³ The other inwardness to which Kierkegaard refers might be taken as that in the language of a Hegelian. It is the inwardness which is found in the third sphere of existence in religiousness A. It is a type of faith which might be had even by a pagan through "self-annihilation" before the deity. A further study of this inwardness will be treated in chapter four of this thesis. But to emphasize the nature of the inwardness of pure abstractions, Kierkegaard asserts: "The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian. This how can only correspond with one thing, the absolute paradox."²⁴ Kierkegaard adds:

. . . the appropriation by which a Christian is a Christian must be so specific that it cannot be confused with anything else. One defines the thing of becoming and being a Christian

22 Ibid., 356, also 468, 506, 515.

23 Ibid., 540, also 191, 539.

24 Ibid., 540.

PREFACE

Søren A. Kierkegaard, who was considered by many as just another Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century, was not until recently deemed worthy of much philosophic study by professional philosophers. For others, Kierkegaard was merely another modern fad nor was he studied seriously as were some of his German philosophic predecessors. But within the past ten years, the works of this hitherto unknown author have been spreading out from their humble origin in Copenhagen, Denmark by way of French, Italian, German, and English translations.

Kierkegaard is of interest both from a philosophic and a theological point of view. Philosophically, he is now studied in connection with the present movement called "existentialism." He has been called the father of modern existentialism. His theories bring to view such problems as the knowledge of reality, the validity of objective truth, and the question of existence. He is a key figure of the nineteenth century as a rebellious reactionary to the systematic speculative philosophy of Hegel.

Theologically, Kierkegaard is of concern to one interested in the Lutheran notion of faith as it was proposed in the day when Hegelian philosophy had all but swallowed up Lutheranism.

not objectively by the what of the doctrine, nor subjectively by appropriation, not by what has gone on in the individual, but by what the individual has undergone: . . . there is needed a specific definition of inwardness and appropriation whereby the witness of the Spirit in the individual is distinguished from all other universally defined activity of spirit in man.²⁵

In the above text, Kierkegaard explains what he means by appropriation as proper to the activity of becoming a Christian. It is distinct from all other appropriation such as that which is proper to knowledge by which one after a fashion "becomes other things." His appropriation is the volitional activity by which one assumes a moral personality. In becoming a Christian, appropriation for Kierkegaard is the repeated decisions by which one makes himself other than he is by becoming related to the Absolute Paradox. This appropriation of which Kierkegaard speaks is personal. It pertains to the individual in his quest to become a Christian. The individualistic aspect of this appropriation is brought out in the following words of Kierkegaard.

Christianity proposes to endow the individual with an eternal happiness which is not distributed wholesale, but only to one individual at a time. Though Christianity assumes that there inheres in the subjectivity of the individual, as being the potentiality of the appropriation of good, the possibility for its acceptance, i.e., by volitional concentration on the absolute telos in the highest degree, it does not assume that the subjectivity is immediately ready for such acceptance. . . . It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists.²⁷

25 Ibid., 539.

26 This insert is taken from the Postscript, p.353.

27 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 116, also 539.

Kierkegaard leaves no doubt that his problem of becoming a Christian is one of subjectivity. It is in this subjectivity alone that truth is found. It is not objective truth which is known, but it is subjective truth which is lived. Jolivet comments on Kierkegaard's consideration of truth. In his comment, he likens this subjective truth to truth as it was in Christ, a life.²⁸

It has been shown that Kierkegaard rejects the speculative or Hegelian way as the solution to the problem of becoming a Christian. Likewise he rejects the objective way, or way of abstract thought which gives only a specular knowledge of reality as the solution to his problem. It is in subjectivity, one distinct from all other subjectivity such as is found in thought, that Kierkegaard finds the solution to his problem. In this subjectivity of inwardness one finds truth. The following chapter will give Kierkegaard's views on subjectivity and truth.

28 Regis Jolivet, Introduction à Kierkegaard, Abbaye Saint Wandrille, 1948, 103: "Sans doute, Kierkegaard professe-t-il qu'il n'y a de vérité pour l'homme que dans la 'subjectivité,' c'est-à-dire que, loin de diluer le moi dans l'intemporel de la pensée objective et abstraite, la philosophie doit m'apporter une vérité à laquelle mon être individual puisse communier, que le comprendre doit conduire à l'agir, qu'il ne saurait suffire de savoir la vérité, mais qu'il importe avant tout d'être dans la vérité. Il n'y a de vérité pour l'individu qu'en tant qu'il la produit lui-même en agissant. En effet, l'être de la vérité n'est pas le redoublement direct de l'être rapporté à la pensée. Non, l'être de la vérité a son redoublement en toi, en moi, en lui, de sorte que ta vie, la mienne, la sienne, dans l'effort où elle s'en approche, est l'être de la vérité, comme la vérité fut dans le Christ une vie, car il fut la vérité. Autrement dit, je ne connais en vérité que lorsqu'elle devient vie en moi."

CHAPTER III

OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

For Kierkegaard, as has been seen, the matter of becoming a Christian is an existential problem. It is one of subjectivity. A further analysis of the nature of this subjectivity is needed. Kierkegaard explains it by contrasting it with objectivity.

Objectively the interest is focussed merely on the thought-content, subjectively on the inwardness. At its maximum this "how" is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is the truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity becomes the truth. Objectively there is no infinite decisiveness, and hence it is objectively in order to annul the difference between good and evil, together with the principle of contradiction, and therewith also the infinite difference between the true and the false. Only in subjectivity is there decisiveness, to seek objectivity is to be in error.¹

Kierkegaard distinguishes here two kinds of truth, subjective and objective. If one is to become a Christian, he cannot be indifferent to subjective truth and must be indifferent to objective truth since it prescind from individual existence. Subjective truth is ethical and must be lived and willed by decisiveness. Objective truth in itself is only in the intellectual order

1 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 181, also 116, 173, 176, 537.

as knowledge, and is a mere approximation to reality. It has no reference to the ethical subject, nor does it in any way require decisiveness or willing. When Kierkegaard states that objective knowledge annuls the difference between good and evil, the principle of contradiction, and the infinite difference between the true and the false, he seems to mean that the validity of the principle of contradiction, of good and evil, of truth and falsity rests on an existential basis. The principle of contradiction is enunciated in terms of being and of esse. Similarly the subjective aspect of good and evil rests upon the existing subject or individual in his choices of that which is objectively good or evil. Likewise, the living of truth requires an existing subject.

Furthermore, according to Kierkegaard, "the objectivity which has come into being is from the subjective point of view at most, either an hypothesis or an approximation, because all eternal decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity."²

The above passage contains three points which are of cardinal importance in the philosophy of Kierkegaard. The first of these points is that "all decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity." This point of subjectivity must be kept in mind at all times when reading Kierkegaard. It is a term which reflects Kierkegaard's rebellion against all systematic philosophy. It is es-

2 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 173, also 170, 509.

essential to his theory of knowledge, and it is basic to his concept of faith.

The second point is that of "approximation." Kierkegaard considered objective knowledge and objective truth as merely an approximation to the truth of reality. The reason for this, according to Kierkegaard's way of thinking, is that objective knowledge as such does not take account of the human knower who must affirm the truth according to his own situation in existence, nor does objective knowledge reach an understanding of the thing after its own mode of being, as a subject exercising existence in its own right. Objective knowledge prescind from existence. Or as Kierkegaard would have it, objective knowledge excludes existence.³

Thirdly, objective knowledge is "hypothetical" according to Kierkegaard in that it does not concern any particular subject but merely a fictitious subject-in-general. Since the subject-in-general is not an existing subject, it is hypothetical.⁴

Since knowledge which merely approximates reality or which stands on a hypothetic basis is not related to existence, it would be a matter of indifference for Kierkegaard as a solu-

³ For further discussion of the aspect of truth in Kierkegaard, see James Collins, "Three Kierkegaardian Problems: The Meaning of Existence," The New Scholasticism, XXII, July, 1948, 376.

⁴ Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, 103.

tion to his problem. Only knowledge whose relation to existence is essential, is essential knowledge for Kierkegaard. The knowledge which has validity for Kierkegaard is that which is directly related to the existing subject in the practical order.

For Kierkegaard, then, subjectivity is the truth. "Only in subjectivity is there decisiveness It is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor and not its content, for its content is precisely itself. In this manner subjectivity and the subjective 'how' constitute the truth."⁵

In the above passage, Kierkegaard mentions the term decisiveness. It is read many times in his pages, and should be noted as a caution to those who might misinterpret Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity. Clearly it is not the subjectivity of the "I-am-I" of Fichte, which he condemns.⁶ In general, the subjectivity of Kierkegaard had little in common with the solipsistic egos which emerged from the conceptualistic theories of cognition prevalent in the nineteenth century. These he rejected because they gave a priority of thought over being. Attempting to go beyond the epistemological dilemma between idealism and empiricism, he gave moral and religious sense to his term. If his thought were to be placed in any tradition, it would better fit into that of St. Augustine. Kierkegaard well would ascribe to the

5 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 181, also 182-183, 226.

6 Ibid., 107, 108, 176-177, 179.

proposition: in interiore homine habitat veritas. A man's subjectivity in this sense is his personal, inward condition in respect to the moral law and religious life, a phase of reality which is not open to scientific determination. In this sense, existential knowledge must be subjective.⁷

In the following passage, Kierkegaard shows his stand on the dilemma proposed to him be idealism and empiricism.

Whether truth is defined more empirically as the conformity of thought and being, or more idealistically as the conformity of being with thought, it is, in either case, important carefully to note what is meant by being. . . . If being in the two indicated definitions, is understood as empirical being, truth is at once transformed into a desideratum, and everything must be understood in terms of becoming; for the empirical object is unfinished and the existing cognitive spirit itself is in process of becoming. Thus the truth becomes an approximation whose beginning cannot be posited absolutely, precisely because the conclusion is lacking, the effect of which is retro-active. Whenever a beginning is made, on the other hand, unless through being aware of this, the procedure stamps itself as arbitrary, such a beginning is not the consequence of an immanent movement of thought but it is effected through a resolution of the will, essentially in the strength of faith. That the knowing spirit is an existing individual spirit and that every human being is such an entity existing for himself is a truth I cannot too often repeat. . . . But if there is any lawful and honest manner in which I could be helped into becoming something extraordinary like the pure I-am-I for example, I always stand ready gratefully to accept the gift and the benefaction. But if it can only be done in the manner indicated, by saying ein, zwei, drei kokolorum, or by tying a string around the little finger, and then when the moon is full, hiding it in some secret place--in that case, I prefer to remain what I am, a poor existing human being.⁸

7 For a similar explanation of Kierkegaard's subjectivism see Collins, "The Meaning of Existence," 179, and Haecker, Søren Kierkegaard, 27.

8 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 169-170.

The above passage contains Kierkegaard's rejection of empirical knowledge as an adequate road to reality. In this he shows his skepticism, rejecting empirical knowledge as an adequate representation of reality because everything is in the process of becoming. The conceptualism of the Hegelians, whose system requires a legerdemain, ein, zwei, drei kokolorum, to start the process of movement, he likewise rejects with irony. Rejecting the beginning of movement as the consequence of an immanent movement of thought, Kierkegaard posits a resolution of the will, "essentially in the strength of faith," as the lever which gives movement to reality. Here one can see a reflection of Kierkegaard's religious background, one in which faith unsupported by reason was of cardinal importance. More will be said of faith in Kierkegaard in the following chapter.

It is sufficient to note here that in the term faith Kierkegaard shows himself as the religious writer, the moralist. For him truth is practical, always unfinished, and essentially paradoxical. This truth is concerned with the individual human existent and his self-development rather than with general laws and natures. Subjective reflection is ordained to a practical operation--to the cultivation of the self in its free relations with God. Because human existence and its potentialities are regarded in relation to the infinite God, they can never be treated as being in a state of equilibrium and rounded-off completion. Because the individual is related to an infinite God, his existence

his continual striving will never be complete. Hence Kierkegaard excludes the possibility of an existential system in contrast with the logical system of Hegel.

System and finality are pretty much one and the same, so much so that if the system is not finished, there is no system.⁹ . . . A logical system is possible; and existential system is impossible.¹⁰ . . . Nothing must then be incorporated in a logical system that has any relation to existence, that is not indifferent to existence.¹¹

In contrast to the closed system of the logicians, Kierkegaard posits the ideal of the existing individual. "The ideal of a persistent striving expresses the existing subject's ethical view of life."¹²

Thus far Kierkegaard has explained his conception of objectivity as contrasted with subjectivity. He has discarded the objective way as the way of truth because it is hypothetical and merely an approximation to reality. He has presented two extremes in the explanation of truth, the idealistic and the empiric, and has given his own explanation from the ethical standpoint--that truth lies in subjectivity. The following passage

9 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 98.

10 Ibid., 99.

11 Ibid., 100.

12 Ibid., 110. Further references to "The System" as viewed by Kierkegaard may be found in the discussions of the following works: Wahl, Etudes Kierkegaardienes, 271; Haecker, Søren Kierkegaard, 22, 28; Collins, "The Meaning of Existence," 376-378; Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 148.

ity. But pure thought is still a third medium, quite recently discovered. It therefore begins, as the saying is, after the most exhaustive abstraction. The relation which abstract thought still sustains to that from which it abstracts is something which pure thought innocently or thoughtlessly ignores. Here is rest for every doubt, here is the eternal positive truth, and whatever else one may be pleased to say. That is, pure thought is a phantom. If the Hegelian philosophy has emancipated itself from every presupposition, it has won this freedom by means of one lunatic postulate: the initial transition to pure thought.¹⁵

From the above matter it should be noted that Kierkegaard does not speak of abstract knowledge as he does of "speculative" philosophy. As shall be seen later in the treatment on faith, abstract thought, which is the objective way of which Kierkegaard speaks, ultimately will not be valid as a solution to his existential problem. But it has some value in that it presents possibility, the possibility of reality. The actuality of this possibility is found in existential thought, in the relating of the individual subject to the truth of Christianity. Speaking of reality from the ethical standpoint, Kierkegaard explains why abstract thought cannot explain the existential problem.

Abstract thought embraces the possible, either the preceding or the subsequent possibility; pure thought is phantom. The real subject is not the cognitive subject, since in knowing he moves the the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject. An abstract thinker exists to be sure, but this fact is rather a satire on him than otherwise. For an abstract thinker to try to prove his existence by the fact that he thinks, is a curious contradiction; for in the degree that he thinks abstractly he abstracts from his own existence. . . . But the act of abstraction nevertheless becomes a strange sort of proof for his existence, since it it succeeded entirely his existence would

To read Kierkegaard without an insight into his life and background merely adds confusion to bewilderment. To read Kierkegaard without patiently understanding his purpose or the meaning he applies to terms is likewise befuddling. Kierkegaard must be read not only in the light of what one understands by the terms employed but with some acquaintance with the philosophy which Kierkegaard had been taught, and with an understanding of the modification of meaning which he gave to terms already common in German philosophy.

Not only must one be acquainted with the terminology in Kierkegaard, but also with the way in which the various works were written. His works are mainly divided into three types, the esthetic, philosophical, and religious. The esthetic works are mainly imaginative. The first of this series, Either / Or, which feigned to be written by Victor Eremita, presents two views of human life. The one view is represented by the Youth, and it is esthetic and amoral. The second view is represented in the words of Judge Wilhelm, and this view is the ethical viewpoint. Of the philosophical works the Fragments and the Concluding Unscientific Postscript are most representative. They contain the most philosophical presentation of Kierkegaard's basic thought and have been used as the primary sources of this thesis. The Edifying Discourses, Christian Discourses, and the Point of View For My Work As An Author are representative of his religious writings.

cease. The Cartesian cogito ergo sum has often been repeated. . . . But if the "I" in cogito is interpreted as meaning a particular existing human being, philosophy cries: "How silly; here there is no question of yourself or myself, but solely of the pure ego." But this pure ego cannot very well have any other than a purely conceptual existence; what then does the ergo mean? There is no conclusion here, for the proposition is a tautology.¹⁶

The above criticism of Descartes' proposition cogito ergo sum is Kierkegaard's fundamental criticism of all abstract thinking. Not only does abstract thinking abstract from the existence of the object known, but Kierkegaard would even have the abstract thinker abstract from his own existence.

In the following passage, another reference is made to the Socratic way of philosophizing. Again, Kierkegaard emphasizes the ethical point of view, and distinguishes abstract thought from pure thought.

In Greece as in the youth of philosophy generally, it was found difficult to win to the abstract and to leave existence, which always gives the particular; in modern times, on the other hand, it has become difficult to reach existence. The process of abstraction is easy enough for us, but we also desert existence more and more, and the realm of pure thought is the extreme limit of such desertion. In Greece, philosophizing was a mode of action, and the philosopher was therefore an existing individual. He may not have possessed a great amount of knowledge, but what he did know he knew to some profit, because he busied himself early and late with the same thing. . . . The ethical may impose some restraint, since it accentuates existence, and abstract thought and humor still retain a relationship to existence. But pure thought has won through to a perfect victory, and has nothing, nothing to do with existence.¹⁷

16 Ibid., 281, also 278, 293, 296, 515.

17 Ibid., 295.

Kierkegaard has been charged by some commentators with being irrational. That Kierkegaard was irrational can be affirmed and denied provided the proper distinctions be given. Those who would favor the affirmation of the charge would most likely choose a passage like the following one to substantiate their charge. Abstract thought, since it "abstracts from existence, . . . is ethically so little meritorious that it must be regarded rather as reprehensible."¹⁸ Abstract knowledge for Kierkegaard had no ultimate and absolute value as a solution to his problem. In this sense he considered it reprehensible, and hence Kierkegaard is rightly charged with irrationality. Ultimately faith, the final stage in existence, will bring the final solution to Kierkegaard's ethical problem. It will be a faith which receives no aid from reason. But it would be inaccurate to brand Kierkegaard as being completely irrational. In the above quotation, the words, ethically meritorious, are highly significant for a proper understanding of Kierkegaard's way of thinking.

To misconstrue Kierkegaard's ethical, volitional, and "decisive" problem as a problem of knowledge would be to miss the point of his thought. Kierkegaard admits the what of abstract thought, but the how of living it is precisely his problem. Kierkegaard states this in another way as has been seen in Chapter I

¹⁸ Ibid., 358.



of this thesis, when he says that the truth of Christianity is taken for granted. The real problem is how to live it.

Treating abstract thought in terms of objectivity, Kierkegaard distinguishes the what of objectivity from the how of subjectivity. "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said. . . . Objectively the interest is focussed merely on the thought-content; subjectively on the inwardness."¹⁹ Moreover, he asserts that "[abstract thought] at its highest is possibility."²⁰ Since abstract thought does not posit an ethical relationship within the individual, it does not solve Kierkegaard's problem--the problem of reality, of becoming a Christian. The relationship of abstract thought to reality, Kierkegaard puts in the following way.

Abstract thought can get hold of reality only by nullifying it, and this nullification of reality consists in transforming it into possibility. All that is said about reality in the language of abstraction and within the sphere of abstract thought is really said within the sphere of the possible. The entire realm of abstract thought, speaking in the language of reality, sustains the relation of possibility to the realm of reality; but this latter reality is not the one which is included within abstract thought and the realm of the possible.²¹

Again, Kierkegaard takes the stand that abstract thought excludes existence, and that it abstracts thought-content from

19 Ibid., 181.

20 Ibid., 515.

21 Ibid., 279.

reality and thus reduces reality as known to possibility. Hence he distinguishes the order of abstract thought from that of ethcal reality, the order of human existence. A more particular reason for this distinction according to Kierkegaard's way of thinking is that "existence as a particular human being is not a pure ideal existence; it is only man-in-general who exists in that manner, which means that this entity does not exist at all. Existence is always something particular; the abstract does not exist. From this to draw the conclusion that the abstract is without validity is a misunderstanding."²²

From the above passage and from those immediately preceding, it can be seen that Kierkegaard was at grips with a problem that has had great importance in the history of philosophy--that of universals and the knowledge of existence. Though Kierkegaard relegates abstract thought as representative of reality to the world of possibility, he nevertheless does not write it off as a phantom as he does the pure thought of the Hegelians. This in his own words would be a misunderstanding.

Kierkegaard waxes most satirical in his condemnation of pure thought and "the System," the Hegelian philosophy which was taught in the universities of his day. For him, "the so-called pure thought is in general a psychological curiosity, a remarkable

22 Ibid., 294.

species of combining and construing in a fantastic medium, the medium of pure being."²³ Again, he denies the validity of pure thought by stating that "pure thought is a phantom."²⁴ His satirical antipathy for pure thought as the antithesis of a solution to the problem of existing he states in many passages similar to the following one.

Everywhere it is decisively concluded that thought is the highest stage of human development; philosophy moves farther away from contact with primitive existential impressions, and there is nothing left to explore, nothing to experience. Everything has been finished, and speculative thought has now to rubricate, classify, and methodically arrange the various concepts. One does not live any more, one does not act, one does not believe; but one knows what love and faith are, and it only remains to determine their place in the System. In the same way the domino-player has his pieces before him, and the game consists in putting them together.²⁵

Again, there is evident the antithesis between Hegelian philosophy in its approach to reality and that which Kierkegaard would have. It would seem from Kierkegaard's writings that his knowledge of Hegelian philosophy was not a very profound one based on a close study of Hegel's works. But it must be noted that Kierkegaard was not wanting in the fundamental refutations of "the System." Those refutations he culled from personal experience and from reflection on his own existence. The concreteness of

23 Postscript., 269.

24 Ibid., 281

25 Ibid., 307-308; cf., e.g., 269, 273, 283, 295.

Kierkegaard's argumentation bears out this observation, as may be gathered from the following refutation which he offers.

When an existing individual raises the question of the relation between thought and being, thinking and existing, and philosophy explains that it is one of identity, the answer does not reply to the question because it does not reply to the questioner. Philosophy explains: "Thought and being are one; but not in connection with things that are what they are solely by virtue of existing, as for example a rose, which has no Idea within itself; and hence not in connection with things that make it most clearly evident what it means to exist as opposed to what it means to think. But thought and being are one in connection with things whose existence is essentially indifferent, because they are so abstract as to have only conceptual existence." To answer the question in this manner is to evade it; for the question had reference to existence as a particular human being. An existence of this sort is of a different order from the existence of a potato, but neither is it the kind of existence that attaches to an Idea. Human existence has Idea in it, but is not purely ideal existence.²⁶

The above rebuke to Hegelian thought contains a denial of the identity of thought and being. Kierkegaard also makes it clear that existence, though he treats it as subjectivity in his own philosophy, is not an ideal existence. He likewise distinguishes existence in the ethical sense in which he takes it, from existence such as is had by a rose or potato. In other words, Kierkegaard's approach to existence is not a metaphysical one, but an ethical one. The existential value of truth he repeats is the following diavowal of Hegelian thought.

But a philosophy of pure thought is for an existing individual a chimera, if the truth that is sought is something to

26 Ibid., 294-295.

exist in. To exist under the guidance of pure thought is like travelling in Denmark with the help of a small map of Europe, on which Denmark shows no larger than a steel pin-point--aye, it is still more impossible. The admiration and enthusiasm of the youth, his boundless confidence in Hegel is precisely the satire upon Hegel.²⁷

In speaking of existence in Hegelian philosophy, Kierkegaard states that it is a philosophy without a beginning. "The eternity of abstract thought is arrived at by abstracting from existence. The realm of pure thought is a sphere in which the existing individual finds himself only by virtue of a mistaken beginning; and this error revenges itself by making the existence of the individual insignificant, and giving his language a flavor of lunacy."²⁸ This is strong language for one engaged in so erudite and polite a circle as philosophy. Nor can one help being somewhat astonished at the outspoken manner of Kierkegaard when he reflects on the position which Hegelian philosophy held in Kierkegaard's own day and country.

One last quotation here will suffice for an indication of the relation between speculative philosophy and Christianity as Kierkegaard saw it. "Speculative philosophy, as abstract and objective, entirely ignores the fact of existence and inwardness; and inasmuch as Christianity accentuates this fact paradoxically,

27 Ibid., 275.

28 Ibid., 277.

speculation is the greatest possible misunderstanding of Christianity."²⁹

Before moving to the third kind of thought proposed by Kierkegaard as the only valid kind--that of the subjective, existing thinker, the reader may review briefly the main points made by Kierkegaard concerning abstract and speculative thought.

Abstract thought since it abstracts from existence is inadequate to represent reality as it is actually. However, it has validity in that it represents reality as possibility, and in this sense retains a relation to reality.

Speculative thought, or the pure thought of Hegelian philosophy is mere phantom and worthless. The major point of criticism which Kierkegaard levels at Hegelian philosophy are the following: motion in Hegel is abrogated by pure thought³⁰ or relegated to the confines of logic; existence is abrogated by pure thought; contingency and human freedom cannot be explained in terms of human experience and existence along with the necessity of the triadic evolution of the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; and finally, the fact that speculative philosophy has assumed the prerogative of making Christianity what it thinks Christianity

29 Ibid., 507.

30 For a fuller discussion of Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegel, see Collins, "The Attack Upon Hegelianism," 219-252; also by the same author, "Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegel," Thought, XVIII, March, 1942, 74-100.

ought to be.³¹

After one has seen Kierkegaard's views on abstract and speculative thought, it is proper to turn one's attention to that thought which Kierkegaard accepts as the solution to his problem. It is the thought of the subjective thinker. Kierkegaard introduces his reader to the subjective thinker by way of a comparison. "There is an old saying that oratio, tentatio, meditatio faciunt theologum. Similarly there is required for a subjective thinker imagination and feeling, dialectics in existential inwardness, together with passion."³² Already it is possible to see from the terms employed in this quotation and inclination toward the subjectivism of the faith in which Kierkegaard had been reared. Faith according to Kierkegaard's Lutheran upbringing was one which shared little company with the rational tradition of philosophy, but which did take into account the emotional disposition of the individual. For the subjective thinker, Kierkegaard has a specific task prescribed-- that of "understanding himself in

31 Further discussion of the points mentioned here may be found in the following works: Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, 81, 96-118; Wahl, Etudes Kierkegaardiennes, 89-172; Jolivet, Introduction a Kierkegaard, 99-103; E. L. Allen, Kierkegaard, His Life and Thought, London, 1935, 62-72; P. Weiss, "Existenz and Hegel," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, VIII, Dec., 1947, 206-216; E. Hirsch, Kierkegaard-Studien, Gutersloh, 1933, II, nos. 1-2.

32 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 313.

his existence."³³ Kierkegaard goes on to explain it. "The task of the subjective thinker is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses whatever is essentially human."³⁴ The personal aspect of the thinker is marked in the following words. "An existential thinker must be pictured as essentially thinking, but so that in presenting his thought he sketches himself."³⁵ The sphere of action of the subjective thinker is indicated in the following words, "The subjective thinker has only a single scene, existence."³⁶ More specifically this scene is "inwardness in existing as a human being; concreteness is attained through bringing the existential categories into relationship with one another."³⁷ These existential categories will be treated in the following chapter on existence; so there will be no further discussion of them here. In connection with the relationships just mentioned, Kierkegaard mentions another note which is characteristic of the subjective thinker. This note is that of reflection stated in connection with truth interpreted in the subjective manner as understood by Kierkegaard.

33 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 314.

34 Ibid., 318.

35 Ibid., 319.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 320.

If most of the works which preceded the religious works, Kierkegaard used pseudonyms. Thus by placing before his readers living personalities who think and speak for themselves, Kierkegaard hoped to teach indirectly man what it means to live. By the pseudonyms he also hoped to avoid a title most odious to him, that of Professor.

In an appendix to the Postscript Kierkegaard acknowledges the authorship of the pseudonymous works. "Formally and for the sake of regularity I acknowledge herewith . . . that I am the author, as people would call it, of Either / Or, . . . Philosophical Fragments (Johannes Climacus), . . . Concluding Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments (Johannes Climacus) . . ." ¹

One further point Kierkegaard makes clear concerning the foundation of the pseudonyms.

My pseudonymity of polynymity has not had a casual ground in my person, . . . but it has an essential ground in the character of the production, which for the sake of the lines ascribed to the authors and the psychologically varied distinctions of the individualities poetically required complete regardlessness in the direction of good and evil, of contrition and high spirits, of despair and presumption, of suffering and exultation, etc., which is bounded only ideally by psychological consistency, and which real actual persons in the actual moral limitations of reality dare not permit themselves to indulge in, nor could wish to. What is

1 Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, New Jersey, 1944, 551.

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.³⁸

It is to be noted that Kierkegaard in the above passage again distinguishes truth taken in the objective sense and in the subjective sense. In the objective sense, the purpose of our reflection is to establish the truth or falsity of what is known. But this is not the truth which interests Kierkegaard. Subjective truth or that which one lives from the ethical point of view is his concern. The question which is of most importance to Kierkegaard in this matter is the mode of the relationship of the individual to what he knows. In other words, the existential aspect is the important one, and it is not concerned with the proof of objective truth as such. To make this point clear, Kierkegaard appends the following note to the passage quoted above. "The reader will observe that the question here is about essential truth, or about the truth which is essentially related to existence, and that it is precisely for the sake of clarifying it as inwardness or as subjectivity that this contrast is drawn."³⁹

38 Ibid., 178.

39 Ibid.,

One should note in reading the above passage that existence as taken here is not existence in the metaphysical sense, but an existence in decisiveness. Hence it is an ethical existence. When one reads the word "thinking," he usually considers it strictly as a purely intellectual activity. But for Kierkegaard, the term embraces much more--thinking, willing, and feeling in the composite of ethical existence. The term frequently used by the commentators to designate this activity is existenz.

In attempting to understand Kierkegaard's stand on truth, one must recall that his point of view is that of the moralist. For him, knowledge is valid if it is an ethico-religious knowledge whose truth lies in its very appropriation by the knowing subject. Such knowledge does not aim to know the object as such, nor does it aim to know the objective truth about its object. It does not even aim to know that that with which it establishes relations is true. In this subjective knowledge of Kierkegaard, the relationship itself is the truth. The only reality which an existing being can know otherwise than through some abstract knowledge is his own, namely the fact that he exists. This reality is his absolute interest.⁴⁰ The following passages from Kierkegaard bear out this interpretation.

⁴⁰ An accurate discussion of the ethico-religious knowledge of Kierkegaard may be found in: Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 149.

The mode of apprehension of the truth is precisely the truth.
 . . .⁴¹ The subjective thinker is a dialectician dealing with the existential, and he has the passion of thought requisite for holding fast to the qualitative disjunction. . .
⁴² The subjective thinker is not a man of science, but an artist. Existing is an art.⁴³

The art of existing for Kierkegaard is one of dialectical movement which culminates in faith. But before the exister arrives at that peak, he must first make his way dialectically by struggle and constant striving. It is through the decisions of the will that the individual exister moves through the spheres of existence finally to become a Christian.

In the above passage Kierkegaard states that it is necessary to hold fast to the qualitative disjunction or distinction between the spheres of existence. Here he opposes the quantitative disjunction of the Hegelian dialectic, which is effected by the necessary evolution of the Idea. But any disjunction or distinction to be attained in the life of an existing individual comes from the qualitative disjunction, that is, any change from one sphere of existence to another is effected by the decisiveness of the existing individual.

Kierkegaard likens the subjective thinker to the artist who subordinates and integrates the various elements of life into his life portrait. For Kierkegaard, the subjective thinker, or

41 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 287.

42 Ibid., 313.

43 Ibid., 314.

the artist of living, "is esthetic enough to give his life esthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to interpenetrate it with thought."⁴⁴ The artist of living always keeps as his point of unity the all-important factor of existence. "[H]e does not abstract from existence, but lives it while at the same time thinking. In all his thinking he therefore has to think the fact that he is an existing individual."⁴⁵

The point of this existential preoccupation for Kierkegaard is that in this way alone can the Christian solve the problem of becoming and being a Christian. "To understand oneself in existence is also the Christian principle, except that this 'self' has received far richer and deeper determination, still more difficult to understand in conjunction with existence."⁴⁶

The last striking characteristic of the subjective thinker, which is all-important in the last sphere of existence, paradoxical religiousness, is that "the believer is a subjective thinker."⁴⁷ The subjective expression of the believer is faith. Before this treatment of subjectivity in Kierkegaard is concluded, the meaning of faith in Kierkegaard will be briefly considered.

44 Kierkegaard, Postscript, 314.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

For Kierkegaard faith is the maximum position of existence. "From the Christian point of view there is no advance beyond faith, because faith is the highest stage for an existing individual."⁴⁸ In relation to the absolute telos, already considered, faith is the "collision of finite and infinite."⁴⁹ Defining faith by its object, Kierkegaard says, "For the absurd is the object of faith and only object that can be believed."⁵⁰ To specify more this object of faith, "The absurd," he says, "is that the eternal truth has come into being in time."⁵¹ In relation to the intellect faith is the "crucifixion of the understanding."⁵² But the crucifixion of the understanding, unintelligibility is not enough for the existential philosopher. "Faith must not rest content with unintelligibility; for precisely the relation to or the repulsion from the unintelligible, the absurd, is the expression for the passion of faith."⁵³ Kierkegaard defines the passion of faith in the following manner. "Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness,

48 Ibid., 259.

49 Ibid., 208.

50 Ibid., 189.

51 Ibid., 188.

52 Ibid., 489.

53 Ibid., 540.

which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree. This formula fits only the believer, no one else, not a lover, not an enthusiast, not a thinker, but simply the believer who is related to the absolute paradox."⁵⁴

Kierkegaard now distinguishes this passion of faith from the passion of other spheres of the exister. "Faith is a sphere for itself which, paradoxically distinguished from the esthetic and metaphysical, accentuates existence, and paradoxically distinguished from the ethical, accentuates the existence of another person, not one's own existence."⁵⁵ The existence of the other person referred to here is the existence of the absurd.

To tie faith more closely with his problem of becoming a Christian, Kierkegaard gives the ultimate specification of the object of faith. "Well, it is perfectly true that Christ is the object of faith."⁵⁶ Thus the ultimate phase in becoming a Christian is faith, whose object is the God-man.

Again it may be noted that in Kierkegaard's conception of faith there is no room for the company of reason. Faith in the final sphere of existence excludes reason. A further criticism of Kierkegaard's notion of faith will be given in Chapter V

54 Ibid., 540.

55 Ibid., 514.

56 Ibid., 530.

of this thesis.

By way of conclusion of this chapter on subjectivity, the qualities of the subjective thinker may be summed up in the following manner. The subjective thinker is one whose task is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly expresses in existence whatever is essentially human. For him existential inwardness is required. Essential knowledge for the subjective thinker is all knowledge which is related to existence. The mode by which the existential thinker apprehends truth is precisely the truth. He is not a scientist, but an artist who integrates in his life portrait all the essential elements of human life.

The subjective thinker is a believer for whom faith is the highest stage of existence. His faith is a collision with the infinite, which is referred to as the absolute telos, or end of all the subjective thinker's striving. Specifically, the absurd is the eternal truth, who has come into being in time. Faith renders reason unintelligible and has its expression in the passion resulting from the relation to or the repulsion from the absurd. Faith accentuates existence and is paradoxically distinct from the ethical sphere of existence in that it accentuates not its own existence, but that of another. This other is the person of the God-man, Christ. Hence faith has as its object Christ. This sphere of existence is the ultimate stage in becoming a Christian.

Faith has been seen here to be the highest sphere of existence. It is now apropos to treat of the spheres of existence which are preparatory and subordinated to this final sphere. The treatment of the spheres of existence will follow immediately in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THREE STAGES OF EXISTENCE

To appreciate adequately Kierkegaard's theory of existence, one must always keep in mind his point of view. It is not that of the metaphysician nor that of the logician, but that of the subjective thinker. Consequently, his explanation of existence will be in the realm of the ethical for the most part since he has clearly rejected any idealistic explanation of existence. Lest the subjective point of view startle those who are accustomed to viewing reality always from the objective point of view, it might be noted that Jacques Maritain thinks that the intuition by which Kierkegaard evolved his theory of existence is the same as that which is at the heart of Thomism, the intuition of the absolutely singular value and primacy of the act of existing, and of existence as exercised.¹

The active aspect of existence Kierkegaard brings out in

¹ Jacques Maritain, *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, Paris, 1947, 208. "Nous croyons que l'intuition centrale dont vivait l'existentialisme d'un Kierkegaard était en fin de compte celle même qui est au coeur du thomisme, l'intuition de la valeur absolument singulière et de la primauté de l'exister, de l'existentia ut exercita."

the following passage.

Existence itself, the act of existing, is a striving, and is both pathetic and comic in the same degree. It is pathetic because the striving is infinite; that is, it is directed toward the infinite, being an actualization of infinitude, a transformation which involves the highest pathos. It is comic because such a striving involves a self-contradiction.²

In his treatment of truth Kierkegaard asserts, as has been seen, that abstract thought, the second medium, abstracts from existence. But existence, the first medium, "has combined thought and existence by making the existing individual a thinker."³ This combination of thought and existence in the subjective thinker is effected by decisiveness, or will-action, since decisiveness is precisely the act of the subjective thinker. Hence the union of thought and existence in the existing thinker constitute the existential relation of ethical truth in the subjective thinker. Kierkegaard refers to this moment of choice which is repeated again and again in the dialectical movement toward faith. "Reality or existence is the dialectical moment of a trilogy, whose beginning and whose end cannot be for the existing individual, since qua existing individual he is himself in the dialectical moment."⁴ Kierkegaard then connects the concepts

2 Postscript, 84.

3 Ibid., 278.

4 Ibid., 279.

written² therefore is in fact mine, but only in so far as I put into the mouth of the poetically actual individuality whom I produced, his life-view expressed in audible lines.²

Though Kierkegaard would seem to give the impression that the thoughts represented in the words of the pseudonymous authors are not his personal thoughts, nor a reflection of his own life, the facts of his life would seem to indicate the contrary. Perhaps the use of the pseudonyms was a foil by which he would avoid the charge of indoctrinating the public with his personal theories. He took it upon himself to show man how a Christian should live. He did not wish to do this directly, but rather indirectly by presenting ideally people who express their thoughts for themselves. By seeing how they thought and lived, perhaps his readers would follow their example. In this way, Kierkegaard could indirectly communicate to his readers the way to live without being called Professor.

The purpose of this thesis is to give a logical presentation of the philosophy of Kierkegaard. The procedure will be exegetical. The passages which best explain the various points of Kierkegaard's doctrine have been taken from many places in his two most philosophic writings, the Unconcluding Scientific Postscript, and the Philosophic Fragments.

2. Ibid.

of existence and decision while speaking of movement. "The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision and to renew it."⁵

Again, Kierkegaard puts movement out of the sphere of the metaphysical as such, and into the ethical, because his problem is not one of becoming as such, but one of becoming a Christian. From the Christian point of view as Kierkegaard sees it,

subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is the paradox, paradox and passion are a mutual fit, and the paradox is altogether suited to one whose situation is, to be in the extremity of existence. . . . The existing individual has by means of the paradox itself come to be placed in the extremity of existence.⁶

Here Kierkegaard joins the problem of becoming a Christian with the problem of existence. The explanation of existence which Kierkegaard will give, will be the explanation of his basic problem of becoming a Christian.

By introducing the note of consciousness, Kierkegaard's explanation of existence moves in the direction of the ethical. "But really to exist, so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming; that is truly difficult."⁷ The difficulty arises from the making of a choice and its renewal. Just as Kierkegaard's consideration was inadequate in that he was not formally concerned with ontological or with logical truth as such,

6 Ibid., 206.

7 Ibid., 273.

but rather with an ethico-religious truth as the explanation of his problem, so too, his concept of reality follows the same pattern. "The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality. . . The real subject is not the cognitive subject, since in knowing he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject."⁸ It would be a hasty step to take this statement as the basis for a rejection by Kierkegaard of all reality outside the existing subject. Kierkegaard is interested in ethical existence essentially but as was seen in the previous chapter, he does admit the existence of other things in reality. However, the existence of things such as a rose is not an ethical existence and consequently of little interest to Kierkegaard.

In accord with his entire position on subjectivity, Kierkegaard asserts that "to exist essentially is inwardness."⁹ Since existence is the reality of the ethical individual, existence is the sphere of his determination and growth.

As a consequence of having made a decision in existence, the existing individual has attained a more specific determination of what he is; if he lays it aside, then it is not he who has lost something; he does not have himself while happening to have lost something, but he has lost himself and must now begin from the beginning.¹⁰

8 Postscript., 280-281.

9 Ibid., 388.

10 Ibid., 437.

This statement of Kierkegaard more clearly specifies what was referred to in a previous chapter as the ethical or moral personality of the existing individual who is his actions involving choice. Nor does one acquire this personality by a mere single choice. "[E]xistence is not an abstract spurt but a steady striving and continuous meanwhile."¹¹ This striving for Kierkegaard is the "process of becoming."¹² This becoming is the dialectical movement of the individual toward faith, the highest point in existence. One of the more subtle characteristics which Kierkegaard attributes to existence is that it is a "synthesis of the infinite and the finite and the existing individual is both finite and infinite."¹³ To interpret this statement, one cannot immediately jump to the conclusion that it is some form of pantheism, because Kierkegaard goes to great trouble in rejecting mediation between the existing individual and the fantastic I-am-I.¹⁴ Rather the finite and infinite aspect of the individual must be explained in terms of willing and eternal happiness.

All relative volition is marked by willing something for the sake of something else, but the highest end must be willed for its own sake. And this highest end is not a particular something, for then it would be relative to something other

11 Ibid., 469.

12 Ibid., 517.

13 Ibid., 350.

14 Ibid., 176-177.

and be finite. It is a contradiction to will something finite absolutely, since the finite must have an end, so that there comes a time when it can no longer be willed. But to will absolutely is to will the infinite, and to will an eternal happiness is to will absolutely, because this is an end which can be willed every moment.¹⁵

Kierkegaard expresses infinitude here in terms of the volitional, the existential. He makes it clear that it is not a question of distinguishing the finite from the infinite but it is a question of existence. "It is the existence of the individual always and repeatedly to will an eternal happiness. In this sense the individual, a finite creature, is also infinite because his willing of the infinite happiness will have no end. Kierkegaard brings out this distinction more clearly in connection with the question of mediation, a Hegelian term for the reconciliation of opposites.

But when the scene is in existing and not on paper, the mediating individual being an existent individual (and thereby prevented from mediating), then any individual who becomes conscious of what it means to exist (that he exists) will instantly become an individual who distinguishes absolutely, not between the finite and the infinite, but between existing finitely and existing infinitely. For the finite and the infinite are put together in existence, in the existing individual.¹⁶

This synthesis of the finite and the infinite is not a permanent state at which one arrives through a single act. On the contrary, "it is only momentarily that the particular indi-

15 Ibid., 353.

16 Ibid., 375.

are three stages: an esthetic, an ethical, and a religious. But these are not distinguished abstractly, as the immediate, the mediate and the synthesis of the two, but rather concretely, in existential determinations as enjoyment-perdition; action-victory; suffering."¹⁹ These stages according to Kierkegaard are not completely independent of one another, but they have a mutual relation in the growth of the existing individual.

But in spite of this triple division the book is nevertheless an either-or. The ethical and the religious stages have in fact an essential relation to one another. The difficulty with *Either-Or* is that it was rounded out to a conclusion ethically. . . . In *Either-Or* the esthetic standpoint is represented by means of an existential possibility, while the ethicist is existing. Now the esthetic is existential; the ethicist is militant, fighting incipito praelio against the esthetic, over which he again readily gains the victory, not by means of the seductive gifts of the intellect, but with ethical passion and pathos; he seeks to defend himself against the religious. In rounding out his position as an ethicist, he does his utmost to defend himself against the decisive form of higher standpoint. That he should defend himself is quite in order, since he is not a standpoint but an existing individual.²⁰

From the above passage, one gets a glimpse of the stages Kierkegaard would have the individual go through to become a Christian. What Kierkegaard says here is somewhat similar to what one frequently hears in terms of asceticism. A person who is bent on attaining perfection will often strive against what is called his lower self, the self which seeks enjoyment and which

19 Postscript., 260.

20 Ibid., 261-262.

tries to rationalize everything he does. He wants to regulate his life as a good one, yet he fears and in a way fights against the higher standpoint of perfection which involves suffering. This experience can be shown to be the case in the lives of most men.

For Kierkegaard, the first stage is that of possibility of the intellectual approach to life. It is not concerned with living the truth but with grasping truth intellectually and imaginatively. Hence its criterion of action is not whether this is good or evil, but rather whether this truth is grasped intellectually. The truth which the esthetic individual grasps is reduced to a possibility which in the ethical sphere may become for the existing individual an actuality.

In connection with the esthetic and the intellectual, to ask whether this or that is real, whether it really has happened, is a misunderstanding. So to ask betrays a failure to conceive the esthetic and the intellectual ideality as a possibility, and forgets that to determine a scale of values for the esthetic and the intellectual in this manner, is like ranking sensation higher than thought. Ethically it is correct to put the question "Is it real?" But it is important to note that this holds true only when the individual subject asks this question of himself, and concerning his own reality. He can apprehend the ethical reality of another only by thinking it, and hence as a possibility.²¹

For Kierkegaard it is not enough for the individual to have an idea of his eternal happiness in order to be existing in the real sense of the word. The conceptions of eternal happiness

21 Ibid., 286.

and of the final end to Kierkegaard merely meant the possibility of change in the individual. This change or transformation occurs when the individual refers such a conception to himself so that he makes it his chief concern to strive with inwardness and pathos to relate himself to that for which the concept stands. Kierkegaard puts it in the following words:

In the relation to an eternal happiness as the absolute good, pathos is not a matter of words, but of permitting this conception to transform the entire existence of the individual. Esthetic pathos expresses itself in words, and may in its truth indicate that the individual leaves his real self in order to lose himself in the Idea; while existential pathos is present whenever the Idea is brought into relation with the existence of the individual so as to transform it. If in relating itself to the individual's existence the absolute telos fails to transform it absolutely, the relationship is not one of existential pathos, but of esthetic pathos. The individual may, for instance, have a correct conception, by means of which he is outside himself in the ideality of the possible, not with himself in existence, having the correct conception in the ideality of the actual, himself in process of being transformed into the ideality of the conception.²²

Again Kierkegaard makes the point that to have a concept of eternal happiness is not to be existentially related to it. This relation must be established by decision. It is like the difference between love as depicted by the poet, which is in the sphere of ideality alone. For the actual lover love means choice. Another statement of Kierkegaard brings out the distinction between the ethical sphere of actuality and the esthetic sphere of possibility.

For an existing individual the concept of an eternal happiness is essentially related to his mode of existence, and hence to the ideality of the actual; his pathos must be correspondingly qualified. If we conceive love esthetically, we must acknowledge the principle that the poet's ideal of love may be higher than anything that reality presents The pathos of the poet is therefore essentially imaginative pathos. An attempt to establish a poetic relationship to reality is therefore a misunderstanding. . . . Esthetically it is the poetic productivity which is essential, and the poet's mode of existence is accidental.²³

Kierkegaard formulates what has been said above into a principle: "The esthetic and intellectual principle is that no reality is thought or understood until its esse has been resolved into its posse. . . . But esthetically and intellectually the ideality is the possible (the translation from esse ad posse.)"²⁴ In so far as the activity of the esthetic individual is absorbed in the intellectual and imaginative appropriation of reality, reducing actuality to the possibility of thought, Kierkegaard distinguishes his mode of existence from the inwardness of the ethical individual as an outward action.

Action outwardly directed may indeed transform existence (as when an emperor conquers the world and enslaves the peoples), but not the individual's own existence. . . . All such action is therefore only esthetic pathos, and its law is the law for esthetic relationships in general; the non-dialectical individual transform the world, but remains himself untransformed, for the esthetic individual never has the dialectical within him but outside him, or the individual is outwardly changed, but remains inwardly unchanged.²⁵

23 Ibid., 347-348.

24 Ibid., 288-289.

25 Ibid., 387-388.

The idea here expressed is similar to that of Saint Paul: "If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."²⁶

The point that Kierkegaard is making is that one's external actions may seem to indicate great achievements in his existential development; but if his "inner life"²⁷ is not transformed by a relationship to the absurd through the appropriation of choice, then his development has not progressed beyond the field of possibility, the esthetic sphere.

For Kierkegaard, the individual whose activity is directed outward, is in the esthetic sphere of existence. However, such an individual is not confined to that field of existence. That field is merely the first step in his existential development. "The esthetic is unopened inwardness; hence that which is or should be inwardness must manifest itself as an outward perception."²⁸ Since the outwardness of the esthetic is unopened inwardness, the actual existence of the esthetic is the potential existence of the ethical individual.

26 I Cor. 13, 1.

27 Postscript, 387.

28 Ibid., 482.

The notes given above are the predominant characteristics which Kierkegaard ascribes to the esthetic sphere of existence. They may be briefly summed up in the following manner. Esthetic existence is mainly enjoyment; it finds no contradiction in existing. Esthetic existence is action outward and non-dialectical. Its dialectic is outside itself. Esthetic existence is unopened inwardness, the potentiality of ethical existence. Its operations are mainly in the imaginative and intellectual order. The principle of the esthetic sphere of existence is formulated as follows: No reality is thought or understood until its esse has been resolved to posse; reality is reduced to abstract and imaginative thought, which is possibility, not actuality.

In the summary above and in the preceding passages taken from Kierkegaard, the term dialectic is used. Since Kierkegaard uses it frequently when treating of the spheres of existence it should be briefly considered before the treatment on the ethical sphere of existence.

Kierkegaard has already said that the existing individual is a dialectician dealing with existence. He vigorously opposes the notion of the dialectic as had in Hegelian philosophy, namely, the mediation of opposites in the sphere of immanence, where the outward is the inward by an identity of thought and being. Transition in the Hegelian dialectic is effected by a smooth evolution of the Idea on a quantitative basis according to Kierkegaard. When he refers to the quantitative disjunction of

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opposites in the Hegelian dialectic, he seems to mean that there is merely a numerical distinction between abstractions. Since thought and being are identified in the Hegelian dialectic, the mediation of opposites by the necessity of its evolution in Kierkegaard's opinion must be quantitative. This type of dialectical immanence will preclude any kind of transcendence qualitatively distinct from thought since thought and being are identified. This notion would exclude the possibility of a transition from reason to faith for Kierkegaard. But reality for Kierkegaard is not a mere evolution of abstractions. Contrary to this theory of "the System" he posits his existential dialectic which admits a qualitative distinction between opposites. Transition from one opposite to the other is not effected by a mediation of the two into a synthesis which necessarily evolved, but rather transition is the qualitative change from one opposite or sphere to another. This transition is effected by a free choice. By this choice the individual changes to another sphere qualitatively distinct from its opposite. This theory leaves room for transcendence, which for Kierkegaard is faith, the ultimate sphere of the existing individual. The decision by which one changes from one sphere to another is called the "leap." Kierkegaard expresses himself on the dialectic in the following passage:

From the abstract point of view there is no decisive conflict between the standpoints, because abstraction removes that in which the decision inheres: the existing subject. But in spite of this consideration, the immanent transition

of speculative philosophy is still a chimera, an illusion, as if it were possible for the one standpoint necessarily to determine itself into the other; for the category of transition is itself a breach of immanence, a leap.²⁹

The immanent transition of the "System" was a mere chimera for Kierkegaard. As he saw it, this transition prohibited the individual from determining itself from one category to another. Again, Kierkegaard's point of view is the "existing subject" in whom the decision inheres. Kierkegaard continues to comment on the Hegelian dialectic.

We must abstract from the consideration already touched upon in the preceding, that access to the realm of the historical is subject to a quantitative dialectic. . . . But again and again to be absorbed in this everlasting quantification is harmful to the observer, who may easily lose the chaste purity of the ethical, which dismisses the quantitative infinitely with a sacred contempt.³⁰

Kierkegaard now applies the Hegelian dialectic to his problem of becoming a Christian.

For there is no immediate transition from the introduction to the becoming a Christian, the transition rather constituting a qualitative leap.³¹

Philosophy offers an immediate introduction to Christianity, and so do the historical and rhetorical introductions. These introductions succeed, because they introduce to a doctrine, but not to becoming a Christian. . . . But if the real difficulty is to become a Christian, this being the absolute decision, the only possible introduction must be a repellent one, thus precisely calling attention to the absolute decision. Even the longest of introductions cannot bring the in-

29 Ibid., 262.

30 Ibid., 126-127.

31 Ibid., 340.

dividual a single step nearer to an absolute decision. For if it could, the decision would not be absolute, would not be a qualitative leap, and the individual would be deceived instead of helped.³²

In the above passage, Kierkegaard is referring to the introduction to Christianity made by the Hegelians with their quantitative dialectic. But inspite of their attempt to reconcile Christianity with "the System", Kierkegaard remains steadfast in his proposition that regardless of how far one strings abstractions, they still remain abstractions. Regardless of how many mediations or changes are made in that process, those changes still remain quantitative and not qualitative. They still remain in the sphere of immanence, and of necessary evolution, not in the sphere of the freely existing individual who determines himself.

By way of summary, the main points in Kierkegaard's notion of the dialectic are as follows: he rejects the Hegelian dialectic with its necessity of evolution, its quantitative transition, and its preclusion of transcendence, going beyond reason by a qualitative transition, or by one which is effected by decision. This decision by which one crosses from one sphere to another is called "the leap."

When the individual makes the transition from the esthetic sphere to his new mode of existence, he becomes an ethically

32 Ibid., 343

existing individual. It has already been seen in the treatment of the esthetic sphere of existence that the ethical sphere is one of action-victory. In terms of existence, Kierkegaard puts it in this way: "The real is an inwardness that is infinitely interested in existing; this is exemplified in the ethical individual."³³

Kierkegaard considered the esthetic sphere basically as one of possibility. He now treats of the ethical sphere as the actualization of that possibility.

Ethically regarded, reality is higher than possibility. The ethical proposes to do away with the disinterestedness of the possible by making existence the infinite interest. . . . Ethics closes immediately about the individual, and demands that he exist ethically. . . . The ethical lays hold of each individual and demands that he refrain from all contemplation especially of humanity and the world. . . . Such ethical contemplation is impossible, since there is only one kind of ethical contemplation, namely, self-contemplation. . . . For the ethical, as being the internal, cannot be observed by an outsider. . . . This ethical reality is the only reality which does not become a mere possibility through being known, and which can be known only through being thought; for it is the individual's own reality. Before it became a reality it was known by him in the form of a conceived reality, and hence as a possibility.³⁴

Kierkegaard in the above passage is bringing out the details of his theory of subjectivity. The ethical individual is interested in existence, his own existence. This interest is the relation of the individual to truth by thinking it in terms of "self." It is the ethical sphere where thought and existence are

33 Ibid., 289.

34 Ibid., 284.

united in the existing individual, not as abstract thought is related to a cognitive subject but as thought related to the individual thinking out his existence. Kierkegaard formulates the principle for the ethical sphere in this way: "The ethical principle is that no possibility is understood until each posse has become an esse."³⁵ In other words, thought is not real unless it is actually related to the existing individual who lives it. Lest the ethical be confused with any objective study of ethics, Kierkegaard qualifies still more his notion of the ethical in terms of the individual. "The ethical is concerned with particular human beings, and with each and every one of them by himself. . . . The ethical requirement is imposed upon each individual, and when it judges, it judges each individual by himself."³⁶

Moreover, the knowability of the ethical is proper only to the individual himself, since only he can realize it. "It can be realized only by the individual subject, who alone can know what it is that moves within him."³⁷ The point here is similar to that contained in the saying: you can't judge a man's conscience but the individual himself is the ultimate judge, God excepted. The last note of the ethical sphere of existence which we shall treat Kierkegaard states in terms of the dialectical. "If the

35 Postscript., 288.

36 Ibid., 284.

37 Ibid., 284-285

individual is dialectical in himself inwardly in self-assertion, hence in such a way that the ultimate basis is not dialectic in itself, inasmuch as the self which is at the basis is used to overcome and assert itself, then we have the ethical interpretation."³⁸ The meaning of this passage seems to be that if the individual finds in time the contradiction of existing, that is, basing one's eternal happiness upon something historical, then he is ethically dialectical. The self-assertion is the discovery within oneself that the individual is eternal, that is, destined for eternal happiness. He is dialectical in that he paradoxically relates himself, a being in time, to that which is eternal. The ultimate dialectical basis is the absolute paradox by which the eternal has come into time. This dialectical basis is the basis for faith, as will be seen in the treatment of the third sphere of existence. The ethical individual finds himself in a struggle to overcome outwardness and to maintain his relation to the absolute telos. Ethical existence, "essentially struggle and victory"³⁹ by its self-assertion in inwardness and by its discovery of the existential contradiction in its relationship to the absolute telos for its eternal happiness, is propaedeutic to the religious sphere of existence. The ethical sphere of existence is essentially related to the religious sphere of existence. By

38 Ibid., 507.

39 Ibid., 256.

living ethically one tends to the religious sphere.

Before the last sphere of existence is considered as Kierkegaard saw it, the qualities of the ethical sphere of existence may be summed up as follows: ethical existence can be realized only by the individual; ethical existence is essentially struggle and victory in inwardness; the ethical interpretation of existence is had when the individual is dialectical, that is, moving toward faith. The ultimate basis of this movement of dialectical inwardness is the self used to overcome and assert self. The ethical individual finds the contradiction of existence (having one's eternal happiness dependent on a relation to something historical) in self-assertion. Finally, the ethical principle is that no possibility is understood until each posse has become an esse, that is, no truth (possibility in the abstract) is understood until one lives it in one's own existence.

The last sphere in Kierkegaard's scheme is the religious sphere of existence. Kierkegaard explains the religious sphere in terms of the individual. "The religious individual is reflected inward, is conscious of being existentially in process of becoming, and yet maintaining a relationship to an eternal happiness."⁴⁰ Thus far the religious sphere seems to be the same as the ethical. This is true, and in so far as this much of the religious sphere

is the same as the ethical, it is frequently referred to as the ethico-religious sphere. But the note which distinguishes the religious from the ethical is "suffering." "The religious individual sustains a relationship to an eternal happiness, and the sign of this relationship is suffering, and suffering is its essential expression for the existing individual."⁴¹ Kierkegaard briefly explains suffering as he understands it in the preceding passage. "For the suffering is rooted in the fact that he the religious individual is separated from his happiness, but also signifies that he has a relationship to this happiness, so that to be without suffering means to be without religion."⁴²

Kierkegaard gives a further qualification of suffering as the characteristic trait of the religious sphere as distinct from the ethical and esthetic.

This suffering has its ground in the fact that the individual is in his immediacy absolutely committed to relative ends; its significance lies in the transposition of the relationship, the dying away from immediacy,⁴³ or in the expression existentially of the principle that the individual can do absolutely nothing of himself, but is as nothing before God; for here again the negative is the mark by which

41 Ibid., 407.

42 Ibid., 406.

43 The term immediacy is used by Kierkegaard in opposition to the term reflection. By it he means the apprehension of nature directly either by the senses or by intuition without reflection. Hence he speaks of immediacy frequently when he speaks of the esthetic sphere of existence. Cf. Postscript, 251, 310, 469, 507.

the God-relationship is recognized, and self-annihilation is the essential form of the God-relationship. And this self-annihilation must not receive an external expression. . . . The individual must not allow himself to imagine that it can be done once for all, for this is esthetic.⁴⁴

From the above passage it can be seen that the religious sphere is distinct from the ethical in that the God-relationship is not found with self-assertion, which is proper to the ethical sphere, nor is it found with external expressions of the God-relationship, which is proper to the esthetic as found in religious poets.⁴⁵

Besides the characteristics of the religious sphere already seen, Kierkegaard further qualifies this sphere by distinguishing two types "religiousness A" and "religiousness B."

In terms of the dialectical Kierkegaard speaks of religiousness A in the following manner. "Religiousness A is the dialectic of inward transformation; it is the relation to an eternal happiness which is not conditioned by anything but is the dialectic inward appropriation of the relationship, and so is conditioned only by the inwardness of the appropriation and its dialectic."⁴⁶

In terms of immanence, a Hegelian term which Kierkegaard appropriated, changing its meaning from identity of thought and

44 Postscript, 412.

45 Ibid., 347-348.

46 Ibid., 494.

being to thought in being, he explains religiousness A in a new light.

The religiousness A comprehends the contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, although with immanence, but by ethically accentuating the fact of existing it prevents the exister from becoming abstract in immanence.⁴⁷

The apprehension of the distinction "here" and "hereafter" is decisive for every existence-communication. Speculative philosophy resolves it absolutely into pure being. . . . Religiousness A, which is not speculative philosophy, but yet is speculative, reflects upon this distinction when it reflects upon what it is to exist.⁴⁸

From this passage it can be seen that Kierkegaard posits as the basis of the God-relationship thought which is related to the existing individual and is accompanied by suffering. It is called the pathetic-dialectic since the individual is unhappy because he is separated from his eternal happiness but is dialectically working out the existential contradiction of an eternal happiness based on something in time. The paradoxical dialectic of religiousness B will be based on the opposite of thought, which is faith. Hence, Kierkegaard says, "Religiousness A can exist in paganism."⁴⁹ But he adds this qualification; "Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any question of becoming aware of the dialectic of B."⁵⁰ These words

47 Postscript, 507.

48 Ibid., 508.

49 Ibid., 495.

50 Ibid., 494.

IV. THREE STAGES OF EXISTENCE 50

Existence itself--Consciousness--Reflection--Essential existence as inwardness, and action in inwardness--Existence as constant striving--Existence as the synthesis of the finite with the infinite--Spheres of existence--The esthetic as one of possibility--The esthetic as enjoyment and action outward--The existential dialectic as qualitative and not quantitative--The ethical sphere as realized by the individual--Struggle and victory of the ethical sphere--The religious sphere of existence--Religiousness A in immanence--Religiousness B or paradoxical religiousness in faith--Faith as the sphere of transcendence--The paradoxical relation--Eternal happiness determined by the creature's relation to God.

V. CRITICISM OF KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY 87

Kierkegaard's ethico-religious point of view--Two fundamental mistakes--Rejection of a speculative philosophy as a basis for his doctrine--Partial skepticism--A form of relativism--Inconsistencies in Kierkegaard--A lesson from the study of Kierkegaard's ethics.

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may be taken as another indication that Kierkegaard was not completely irrational in his approach to faith, which for him is the maximum state of existence for the individual.

Paradoxical religiousness, or religiousness B, which Kierkegaard considers to be true religiousness, is contrasted with religiousness A on the point of immanence.

If the individual is paradoxically dialectic, every vestige of original immanence being annihilated and all connection cut off, the individual being brought to the utmost verge of existence, then we have paradoxical religiousness. . . . The paradoxical religiousness breaks with immanence and makes the fact of existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence, but against immanence. There is no longer any immanent fundamental kinship between the temporal and the eternal because the eternal itself has entered time and would constitute there the kinship.⁵¹

It can be seen from what Kierkegaard writes here that he is pushing the development of becoming a Christian in the direction of faith. The relationship by which the existing individual dialectically establishes the grounds for his eternal happiness has as its termini the existing individual as existing in time, and the eternal, also in time. The eternal is discovered in immanence, the inwardness of thought. In this relationship proper to religiousness A, the individual does find the contradiction of existence, but it is within himself in immanence. Religiousness B is not so. It finds no eternal determinant within itself. It establishes a relationship which conflicts with all

51 Ibid., 507-508.

understanding."

The paradoxical religiousness defines the distinction ["here and hereafter"] absolutely by accentuating paradoxically what it is to exist. For as the eternal came into the world at a moment of time, the existing individual does not in the course of time come into relation with the eternal and think about it (this is A), but in time it comes into relation with the eternal in time; so that the relation is within time, and this relationship conflicts equally with all thinking, whether one reflect upon the individual or upon the Deity.⁵²

Kierkegaard explains the paradoxical accentuation which is proper to religiousness B.

The contradiction first emerges in the fact that the subject in the extremity of such subjective passion (in the concern for an eternal happiness) has to base this upon an historical knowledge which at its maximum remains an approximation. . . . But to require the greatest possible subjective passion to the point of hating mother and father, and then to put this together with an historical knowledge, which at its maximum only can be approximation--that is the contradiction.⁵³

Here Kierkegaard is explaining the contradiction of existence in accordance with the principles of knowledge which he posited, namely, that the only reality which one can really know is one's own. All other knowledge at best is an approximation because in the knowing of other things, something is omitted by abstraction--existence.

Kierkegaard further qualifies this sphere of religiousness B in terms of the individual and the Deity, the individual's

52 Ibid., 506.

53 Ibid., 510.

teacher⁵⁴ of existence.

And again the contradiction is a new expression for the fact existence is paradoxically accentuated; for if there is any vestige of immanence, an eternal determinant left in the exister--then it is not possible. The exister must have lost continuity with himself, must have become another (not different from himself within himself), and then by receiving the condition of the Deity, he must become a new creature.⁵⁵

Two things to be noted in this passage are the becoming another of the exister, and the giving of the condition by the Deity.

The becoming another by the accentuation of the existence of the God-man is what Kierkegaard means by becoming a Christian. Though one be baptized a Christian, and though one know the doctrine of Christianity, such a person is not a Christian, in Kierkegaard's opinion, until he has become another. This final stage in the existential dialectic is not self-acquired, since it is outside the realm of self-assertion, but it is a gift of the Deity. The gift is the condition for faith. Faith is finally viewed in connection with the absolute paradox. "Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree. This formula fits only the believer, . . . and solely the believer who is related to the absolute paradox."⁵⁶ One more quotation from Kierkegaard will bring

54 Ibid., 508; also Fragments, 5-17.

55 Postscript, 510.

56 Ibid., 540.

Kierkegaard's explanation of the problem of Christianity back to the starting point of his doctrine. That point was the question, "Are Christianity and speculative philosophy reconcilable?" Kierkegaard replies again after he has shown the way by which one should become a Christian.

The definition of what it is to be a Christian prevents the erudite or anxious deliberation of approximation from enticing the individual into byways so that he becomes so erudite instead of becoming a Christian; for the decision lies in the subject. But inwardness has again found its specific mark whereby it is differentiated from all other inwardness and is not disposed of by the chatty category of "quite differently" which fits the case of every passion at the moment of passion.⁵⁷

The third sphere of existence should not be concluded before mention is made of two categories which Kierkegaard places within the two types of religious existence. The first category, guilt-consciousness, is proper to religiousness A; the second, sin-consciousness, is proper to paradoxical religiousness.

According to Kierkegaard, guilt-consciousness is the "decisive expression for the existential pathos,"⁵⁸ Kierkegaard speaks more fully on this notion in connection with eternal happiness.

But how can the consciousness of guilt be the decisive expression for the relationship of an exister to an eternal happiness, and this in such a way that every exister who has

57 Ibid.,

58 Ibid., 469.

not this consciousness is eo ipso not related to his eternal happiness? One might think that this consciousness is an expression of the fact that one is not related to it, the decisive expression of the fact that one is lost and the relationship is relinquished. The answer is not difficult. Precisely because it is the exister who is to relate himself while guilt is at the same time the most concrete expression for the relationship. . . . Guilt is the expression for the strongest self-assertion of existence. . . .⁵⁹

Guilt consciousness is the expression of the relation constituted in religiousness A. Kierkegaard says this in another manner. "The consciousness of guilt still lies essentially in immanence."⁶⁰ It is a "higher expression of this relationship of the individual to eternal happiness than is suffering."⁶¹ Guilt consciousness is acquired by the individual through his freedom.

And in the suffering of guilt consciousness, guilt at once assuages and rankles. It assuages because it is an expression of freedom as this is found in the religious sphere, where the positive is recognizable esthetically: freedom recognizable by freedom.⁶²

Here Kierkegaard seems to be making the point that this expression of the relationship of the individual to eternal happiness contains two aspects. One is that the guilt consciousness is pathetic in itself by virtue of the individual's being infinitely con-

59 Ibid., 470.

60 Ibid., 474.

61 Ibid., 475.

62 Ibid.

cerned in being separated from his eternal happiness. Under this aspect guilt rankles. It assuages, however, in that the individual perceives that this expression of the pathetic based on his relationship to the eternal is due to his freedom, his free decisiveness. This he has posited by the self-assertion of his ethico-religious existence. Moreover, guilt-consciousness is found only in the sphere of immanence where the individual has made the decision of relating himself to an eternal happiness.

Consciousness of sin is distinct from guilt-consciousness and is proper to religiousness B. Similar to the expression of the religiousness of immanence, sin-consciousness "is the expression for the paradoxical transformation of existence. Sin is the new existence-medium."⁶³

Kierkegaard further distinguishes these two categories by the way in which the individual acquires them.

Hence the individual is unable to acquire sin-consciousness by himself, as he can guilt-consciousness; for in guilt-consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and sin-consciousness, on the other hand, is an alteration of the very subject himself, which shows that outside of the individual that power must be which makes clear to him the fact that in coming into life he has become another than he was, has become a sinner. This power is the Deity in time.⁶⁴

From the above treatment of sin-consciousness, a deeper insight into religiousness B can be had. Basically Kierkegaard

63 Ibid., 516.

64 Ibid., 517.

is saying the same thing that he said concerning paradoxical religiousness. It is the sphere where the individual is related paradoxically to the Deity, which is the power outside the existing individual giving to the exister the condition to become another by faith, to accentuate another's existence--that of the God-man. The expression of the pathos involved in this relationship is called sin-consciousness. The creature, the existing subject before the eternal in time, is annihilated and is absolutely different from God. The greatest point of difference between God and the exister is sin.

Further treatment on the doctrine of religiousness is found in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, Stages on Life's Way, the later Journals, Papirer, Training in Christianity, Edifying Discourses. It should be noted that Kierkegaard intended to stop writing with the publication of the Postscript. But attacks upon him by a weekly publication, The Corsair, forced him to take up his pen in defense of himself. The works which followed were almost entirely religious in character.

A treatment of the spheres of existence in Kierkegaard would not be complete if mention of the two "zones" of existence were not made. "There are thus three spheres of existence: . . . two boundary zones correspond to these: irony, constituting the boundary between the esthetic and the ethical; humor, as the boun-

dary that separates the ethical from the religious."⁶⁵ Irony, which is an intermediate stage between the esthetic and the ethical is defined by Kierkegaard in the following way.

Irony is a synthesis of ethical passion which infinitely accentuates inwardly the person of the individual in relation to the ethical requirement and of culture, which infinitely abstracts externally from the personal ego, as one finitude among all the other finitudes and particularities. This abstraction causes the emphasis in the first attitude to pass unnoticed, and herein lies the art of the ironist, which also insures that the first movement shall be truly infinite. The masses of men live in the converse manner; they are concerned to be something when somebody is looking at them; they are if possible something in their own eyes when others observe them; but inwardly when the absolute requirement looks in upon them, there they have no taste for accentuating their own persons.⁶⁶

Irony, then, according to Kierkegaard is "an existential determination,"⁶⁷ that is, it is a passion which follows upon the immediacy of the esthetic sphere and which accentuates the existential contradiction, the ethical requirement in self-assertion. This is what Kierkegaard means by the "first movement shall be truly infinite." This is the inward aspect of irony, its existential quality. But it also has a reference to externality. This reference constitutes its cultural aspect. By culture here, Kierkegaard means a development of the personality of the individual in spirit.⁶⁸

66 Postscript, 449-450.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 450.

The cultural or external aspect of irony is what distinguishes the truly ethical individual from people who are not inwardly interested in their existence. The irony consists in the fact that the ironist is not interested with what he appears to be externally, as is the case usually with most people, but he is interested with his inward reality. He may appear to the observer to be interested in the activity of externality, but the irony of it is that he is interested in the opposite. Kierkegaard refers to irony as the incognito of the ethicist. He explains this.

But why does the ethicist use irony as his incognito? Because he grasps the contradiction there is between the manner in which he exists inwardly and the fact that he does not outwardly express it. For the ethicist does indeed reveal himself, in so far as he pours himself forth in the tasks of factual reality in which he lives; but this is something that the immediate individual also does, and what makes him an ethicist is the movement of the spirit by which he sets his outward life inwardly in juxtaposition with the infinite requirement of the ethical, and this is something that is not directly apparent.⁶⁹

This explanation of irony is consistent with Kierkegaard's theory of subjectivity. It is another explanation of the subjective, existing individual who is infinitely interested in his existence and his eternal happiness. The notion of irony was always very interesting to Kierkegaard, especially in connection with his study of Socrates, his pagan prototype. He wrote his master's thesis on The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference

69 Ibid.

to Socrates.⁷⁰

Humor, the corresponding zone of existence, is the intermediary stage between the ethical sphere and the religious sphere. Kierkegaard explains it in this way:

So again in the case of the humorist and the religious individual, since according to the foregoing the dialectic of the religious sphere itself forbids direct expression, forbids the outward difference by which recognition could be effected, protests against the assumed commensurability of the external, . . . the humorous . . . sets the God-idea into conjunction with the other things and evokes the contradiction, but he does not maintain a relationship to God in terms of religious passion stricte sic dictus, he transforms himself instead into a jesting and yet profound exchange-center for all these transactions, but he does not himself stand related to God. The religious man does the same, he sets the God-idea into juxtaposition with everything and sees the contradiction, but in his inmost consciousness, he is related to God.⁷¹

Humor again is that whereby the existing individual relates the facts of externality to the God-idea, but by this relation the individual himself is not related to the God-idea. Hence, Kierkegaard distinguishes this zone of existence from real religiousness by placing it in a position propaedeutic to the latter. In explaining humor, he admits that external facts will have some relation to the religious individual. The dialectic of the religious sphere itself forbids reference outward and permits only to the inwardly existing individual in his subjectivity

99. 70 Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion,
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71 Postscript, 451.

CHAPTER I

SOREN A. KIERKEGAARD

Born May 5, 1813 in Copenhagen, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard entered a period of Denmark's history which was at once politically disintegrating and reviving in the field of literature. In the year of Kierkegaard's birth Denmark went bankrupt. A few years prior to his birth the British fleet bombarded Copenhagen and seized the Dano-Norwegian fleet. In the year after his birth the Danish-Norwegian union was dissolved. In the year of his birth the celebrated sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen, was forty-three years old. Adam Gottlob Oehenschlaeger, outstanding as the greatest of Danish romantic poets, and Hans Christian Anderson, equally famous for his fairy tales, were his contemporaries in Denmark.¹

The religious atmosphere of his time was saturated with Lutheranism, which was the religion of the Established Church in Denmark. The theology of his day had been shot through with Hegelian philosophy, which was the rage in Germany and Denmark at

¹ For more historical data on Kierkegaard's background, the reader is referred to David Swenson's work, Something About Kierkegaard, Minneapolis, 1941, 1-31.

reference to the external. Kierkegaard refers to this expression of the religious individual related to externality as humor because it is based on the comical, that is, an incongruity. This incongruity he explains as follows:

The comical is brought out when the hidden inwardness comes into relationship with an environment, in that the religious individual comes to hear and see that which when brought into conjunction with his inward passion produces the comic effect. Hence even when two religious individuals converse with one another, the one will produce a comic impression on the other, for each of them will constantly have his own inwardness in mind, and will now hear what the other says in the light of this, and hear it as comical, because neither dares directly express the secret of inwardness; at most they will entertain a suspicion of one another because of the humoristic undertone.⁷²

Kierkegaard's explanation of the humorous and the comical is consonant with his previous explanation of subjectivity and ethical truth. Truth cannot be communicated directly but only indirectly since in the process of knowing something, one must abstract from existence. Since existence is the reality of the ethical individual, and since the existential relation to the absurd is the reality of the religious individual, it is clear that these realities cannot be communicated directly to another individual. Communication with others must therefore be indirect, and the passion which accompanies this indirection in connection with the ethical sphere is irony, and in connection with and preparatory to the religious sphere is humor.

72 Ibid., 457.

Irony and humor are the last of the more important qualities which Kierkegaard attributes to the religious sphere of existence. The religious sphere of existence in brief might be summed up as follows: there are two types of religiousness, religiousness A and religiousness B. Religiousness A is defined as self-annihilation before God. It is held in the sphere of immanence. Paradoxical religiousness, or religiousness B, is had when the individual is paradoxically dialectic (by faith alone), and every vestige of original immanence (thought in being) is annihilated. At this point the individual is at the utmost verge of existence. This is the sphere of transcendence, faith, the ultimate stage in the dialectic. Suffering is proper to the religious sphere, which is based on the positing of one's eternal happiness upon an approximation (the historical truth, the absurd, the paradox), a thing which can be done only when one has in oneself no eternal determinant, and hence this again is connected with the paradoxical accentuation of existence. By the accentuation of the contradiction in the paradoxical relation, the individual loses continuity with self and becomes another as a creature created to become a Christian. This is the miracle of creation. Hence the Christian lives in faith dependent on God and the paradox for his eternal happiness.

There are two zones in the spheres of existence, that of irony and that of humor. The first is the external appearance of

the ethicist, who seems to be concerned with externality, but actually and ironically is only concerned with his own existence. The latter, humor, is the expression of the religious individual who is related to external things. External things are related to him by an incongruity. For the religious individual always has his inwardness in mind. Whatever is communicated to him produces a comic effect, since he knows that nothing can be communicated to him directly.

The two categories found in religiousness A and religiousness B respectively are guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness. These are the expression of the pathos which the creature feels before the absurd. This feeling results from the relation established by each type of religiousness.

The entire theory of Kierkegaard might be summarized in its broadest outlines as follows: he is presented with a problem—how to become a Christian. He rejects an explanation by Hegelian speculative philosophy because it is a philosophy without existence. The objective approach is likewise invalid since it abstracts from existence, and cannot represent reality as it is actually but only as it is potentially. His solution is posited in subjectivity. His subjectivity is one in which the individual is solely interested in his own existence. The greatest concern of his existence is his eternal happiness. This happiness he assures himself by constituting a relation with the God-man. This

relation is established by faith which is the "crucifixion of understanding." Faith is the ultimate stage of the dialectical movement through various spheres of existence. The changes throughout the dialectic are effected by decisiveness or the free will of the existing individual. Ultimately the individual arrives at the utmost verge of existence by a final "leap" (an act of decisiveness by which one goes from one sphere to another). This last "leap" is the act of faith.

Most of the major points and parts of Kierkegaard's theory of existence have been presented in this thesis. They have been taken for the most part from the Postscript, Kierkegaard's most philosophi work. A further study of these points may be made from different points of view such as Kierkegaard assumed in his other works. Before this thesis is concluded, a brief criticism of Kierkegaard's theories is in order. This criticism will follow immediately in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CRITICISM OF KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this criticism is to determine in some degree the value of Kierkegaard's theory of existence from the standpoint of experience and from the point of consistency within his own system.

A point of cardinal importance in the theory of Kierkegaard is his ethico-religious point of view. Viewing reality only from this standpoint, Kierkegaard concerned himself with that aspect of reality which would have bearing on his practical problem--how to become a Christian. Because of this point of view, he was solely concerned with the practical aspect of reality, not with the speculative.

It was this point of view which gave Kierkegaard so great an advantage in his attack upon Hegelianism. Using the standpoint of the individual and of existence as his basis of attack upon Hegelianism, Kierkegaard was in a very apt position to reject a speculative philosophy of essences which destroyed that about which Kierkegaard was most concerned--the existence of the individual.

In the speculative philosophy of Hegel, Kierkegaard found no help for his problem of existence. Kierkegaard was well aware that man's paramount problem in existence is the problem of Christianity. Each individual must attain his final end, eternal happiness, and he must attain it through Christianity by relating himself to Christ. In this Kierkegaard is right.

In the speculative philosophy of Hegel, however, Kierkegaard realized that there was no room even for the possibility of Christianity. Christianity is concerned with the individual and his relation to Christ. But in Hegelianism there is little emphasis put on the individual. The "System" is what counts. Christianity is concerned with the particular differences of individuals and the various ways by which each one strives for his eternal happiness. The "System" is busy with the classification of the species of reality with little concern for the differences in man which arise from existence. The individual is absorbed into the "System" and loses his identity as a Christian in the all-embracing identity of thought and being. It is easy to see the reason for Kierkegaard's antagonism toward this philosophy of idealism which showed such scant understanding of a primary aspect of reality--the existence of the individual. In this respect Kierkegaard is justified in his attack on Hegel.

Kierkegaard was so concerned with destroying the Hegelian philosophy of essences, however, that he fell into a position

which was the extreme opposite of Hegelianism, a philosophy of existence completely divorced from essence. Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegelianism was so violent that he made two mistakes-- that of underrating speculative philosophy and of overrating existence. This, again, was largely due to his utter concern with the practical problem of becoming a Christian.

In underrating the value of speculative philosophy, Kierkegaard constructed a theory of existence which lacked a metaphysical foundation. Existence for Kierkegaard is the ethical reality of the individual. It is the consciousness of the individual through reflection on his own existence. Finally, it is a constant striving of the individual toward a relation with the infinite through faith.

What Kierkegaard says here is true in a sense from the standpoint of Christian asceticism, and from a purely ethical and psychological point of view, if he presupposes the necessary foundation of a speculative philosophy which gives validity to these notions in their own order. But the entire tone of Kierkegaard's writings seems to indicate that he made no such suppositions. Having rejected the philosophy of Hegel, he seems to identify all speculative philosophy with that particular philosophy of essences. Hence his conception of existence is limited to the practical order. It is merely the repetition of the acts of volition, reflection, consciousness, and thinking of the indivi-

dual. These acts are meaningless unless they are the acts of an ethical being, one who has a human essence and a corresponding act of existence. Such an individual, in order to act as one ethically concerned with his existence, must be conceived as a person endowed with reason, free will, and the power to use these faculties which flow from his human essence. But to all appearances, Kierkegaard gives no such foundation for his theory of existence, and actually seems to do away with any such presuppositions when he rejects speculative philosophy as phantom, and abstract thought as the medium of pure possibility.

Kierkegaard shows no concern with what is existing, but only with the acts of existence in the individual. This leads him to a form of psychological subjectivism. In other words, Kierkegaard has a form of philosophy which includes all forms of truth within the individual. By this position Kierkegaard rules out the possibility of an epistemology and psychology which allow and explain an intentional order by which the individual comes in contact with, and grasps hold of, reality which is outside the individual. Such a philosophy immediately precludes the possibility of the individual to attain truth which lies beyond his own person, and restricts him to the realm of his own ego. It cuts off any contact of the individual with the existence of other beings, and destroys not only the existence of a philosophy which embraces all of reality, but even the possibility of attaining a

a speculative foundation for such a philosophy. Any objective body of truth will be meaningless to the individual who has cut himself from the very means by which such truth can be attained. Yet it is evident from experience that we know other beings as existing, and from this knowledge, once it has become general and speculative, we know more about our individual existence. Kierkegaard may have ended in this subjectivism because he was concerned with a psychological analysis of the workings of his own soul, and this preoccupation may have blinded him to the reality of existence outside him.

When Kierkegaard speaks of existence as a constant striving and becoming, he seems to take for granted the speculative foundation which he rejects. If he does not take this foundation for granted, then he has a form of Heracliteanism in which all reality is becoming and there is no permanence. If for Kierkegaard existence is merely the succession of the inward acts of the individual, a repetition of the moment now, then there is no subject to give permanence for the identity of the individual. Kierkegaard speaks of the individual as though he were the subject in which the acts of inwardness and becoming inhere. But he has laid no foundation for such an assumption, and seemingly has rejected the possibility of one. By assuming the ethical point of view as an adequate view of all reality, Kierkegaard cut himself off from the possibility of arriving at any doctrine of substance

which could have given to him a foundation for his observations on the ethical order of reality. From the standpoint of Christianity, Kierkegaard constructed a philosophy of the practical order only. But a philosophy of the practical order of reality without a philosophy of the basis of reality is like a castle built on sand. A practical philosophy without roots in a speculative philosophy which investigates the causes, standards, and the basis of the practical order, cannot give an ultimate reply to the questions which arise from an adequate view of all reality.

Kierkegaard conceived Christianity and the problems involved in it as though it were divorced from the basic principles which are essential to Christianity itself. Christianity without a basic speculative knowledge of truths such as causality, necessity, contingency, finite and infinite being, substance and accident, and finality, to mention some, would be difficult to explain.

But Kierkegaard would have no system such as a related study of these aspects of reality implies. He says there can be no system that is existential, but that there can be a logical system of essences. Again, his Hegelian background precludes the possibility of a third explanation of reality--one based on the combination of essence and existence in being. Kierkegaard's exclusion of an existential system seems to indicate that he wants either an existence without an essence, the basis of permanence, or else acts of existence without substance.

In the first case, from experience one knows that one cannot conceive existence without implicitly conceiving that which exists. In the second case, the individual knows that there is a permanent subject, the ego, which performs the psychological acts of which it is consciousness. Grant that there is a repetition of the moment now. The individual is still conscious that the present moment of inwardness is his act just as was the previous moment of inwardness. Kierkegaard, no doubt, would have little interest in this philosophical analysis of his concept of existence. But if his theory is to have any validity, then such philosophical suppositions must either be established or taken for granted. By limiting truth to the confines of the individual, and by restricting existence in the individual to his acts of inwardness, he seems to have rejected any speculative approach to his problem, and to have reduced the individual to the instability of his repeated acts of inwardness devoid of any principle of permanence.

In keeping with his point of view, Kierkegaard asserts that only the ethically existing subject and not the cognitive subject is the real subject. Consistent with his rejection of speculative knowledge, Kierkegaard here implies a partial skepticism. He completely rules out pure thought, but grants some validity to abstract thought. But the validity which he grants abstract thought in itself seems to be useless since abstract

thought cannot give a valid presentation of reality. Kierkegaard claims that abstract thought can get hold of reality only by nullifying it, and this nullification consists in transforming it into possibility. The reason for this is that Kierkegaard admits that the individual can only know actual reality as possibility. Reality as actuality is not known by the existing individual, because thought abrogates existence. Reality for Kierkegaard is not the all embracing ambit of being, that which is or can be, but merely that which is the existence of the individual. This theory of knowledge seems to be the consequence of his theory of existence according to which the individual is interested only in his own existence. But if the individual cannot attain reality as it is, then he can never attain any objective truth outside himself. This skepticism is at least one of the reasons which forced Kierkegaard to seek ultimately an irrational solution to his problem in a faith which was divorced from reason. This postulate of faith in his theory of knowledge is another aspect of the psychological subjectivism to which Kierkegaard reduced himself. By rejecting an objective approach to reality, Kierkegaard shut himself off from any objective truth, and condemned himself to some form of exaggerated subjectivism.

Speaking of truth, Kierkegaard says that when the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower

is related." If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be truthful. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship to what is known. If only the mode of the relationship is true, the individual is truthful even if he should be related to what is not true.

Here Kierkegaard shows that is not concerned with an objective standard of truth. Any such disregard for objective truth can only lead to a form of relativism, for the only standard left by which truth may be determined is the individual. Even if good faith be supposed in the individual, it is hard to see how anything but anarchy and chaos could result from such a philosophy. If there are as many standards for truth as there are existing individuals, and if the individual's actions are to be determined by subjective truth alone, then any such thing as an ordered society is out of the question. Such a relativism would possibly beget as many forms of Christianity as there are individuals trying to be Christians. There would even be the possibility that some such forms of Christianity would contradict others.

Kierkegaard says that he is not concerned with the what of Christianity, but with the how of becoming a Christian. Here he states in terms of Christianity the relativism which he states

above in terms of knowledge. Hence, if he were consistent, Kierkegaard should reject the objective teachings of Christ as he did other speculative and objective knowledge. In this case it is difficult to see how the individual could become a Christian in any way. Kierkegaard, indeed, states that he takes for granted the objective truth of Christianity. But what he does not seem to see is that the what or truth of Christianity determines the how of becoming a Christian. If the acts by which the individual becomes a Christian are to lead him to an end outside himself, then such acts must be directed by knowledge of reality outside the individual. But Kierkegaard has precluded this possibility by rejecting any rational approach to reality or to Christianity. Hence, again, he is reduced to a form of irrationalism which ends in the blind leap of faith. Such a blind leap is the logical consequence of his theory of existence and knowledge; but daily experience teaches us that a blind leap of this nature is not usually found in the customary actions of men. Before one puts faith in anyone or anything, he usually seeks motives and reasons for so doing. These motives and reasons are not found in Kierkegaard's theory.

Kierkegaard claims that the individual cannot know the existence of another outside himself. But his entire doctrine points at, and culminates in, the existence of God, which he has not proved. Again, if he takes this existence for granted, then

he presupposes the validity of speculative philosophy by which such truth is attained. If he does not presuppose an existence such as this, then it is hard to see why he devotes so much time to speaking about it. Similarly, Kierkegaard seems to be inconsistent when he wishes to establish a relation to the God-Man. If he has no way of knowing of the existence of the God-Man except by approximation (and this is not a knowledge of an existing subject as such) then he is establishing a relation to something which according to his own theory is non-existent as far as he is concerned.

Another seeming inconsistency in Kierkegaard is brought up in connection with his theory of communication. He claims that the existing individual can communicate with another individual only indirectly. This is effected by approximation through irony and humor. Such a relation seems to be untenable if the individual can only attain his own existence, and if thought abrogates existence. Even if such a relation is indirect, how can such a relation be directed to an existent person who is known only as a possibility? Actual relations cannot be sustained with possible termini, since they are in different orders. Here Kierkegaard was faced with the obvious fact that people talk to one another, and that such communication is effected by words and ideas which actually stand for reality as it is. But once he had posited his theory of subjective existentialism and of abrogation

of existence by thought, he could not explain a fact which is so obvious as conversation.

Though Kierkegaard says that the existence of another individual cannot be known by the existing individual, he seems to be quite aware of the existence of Bishop Mynster, Professor Martensen, and the adversaries who assailed him in the Corsair. Kierkegaard's theory of existence and thought, once removed from the confines of his own psychological experience, does not fit even the daily experience of Kierkegaard himself.

The final stage of existence in Kierkegaard's theory brings up another difficulty which can only be explained by speculative philosophy. By faith the individual establishes a relation to the absolute telos. But if existence is a constant striving, and as such rules out permanence of an existing subject, how can such a relation exist? Finite relations must have a subject of inherence, since such relations are ordinations of something which is, not of something which is merely becoming. Hence, even to establish some sort of validity for the blind leap of faith, Kierkegaard must presuppose a philosophy in which there is room for an existing permanent subject in which the acts of becoming a Christian may inhere.

To sum up this criticism, we may say that Kierkegaard made two fundamental mistakes. He underrated speculative philosophy and overrated existence. His ethico-religious approach to

reality blinded him to the full view of reality and confined him merely to the ethical aspect. His theory of subjective existentialism presupposes the basis of a speculative philosophy which he rejects. His theory of knowledge involves a partial skepticism, and limits the knowledge of reality as it is to the confines of the existing individual. This skepticism in turn results in a relativism since truth is only subjective. That is truth is found only in the relation of the existing subject to something that is known. That which is known and to which the subject is related may be true or false objectively and as such cause the individual little concern. This relativism causes Kierkegaard to be inconsistent when he tries to explain the fact of communication and the relation of the individual to the absolute telos.

In conclusion, it may be said that Kierkegaard rejected the very foundations which could have given validity to his observations on the ethical existence of the individual. His doctrine is not to be taken as a special branch of philosophy which has as its formal aim only the explanation of ethical reality. Kierkegaard himself seems to make the ethical reality the only reality that can be known and which has value. To take this doctrine thus as an adequate philosophy of reality is to mistake the part for the whole.

If one would grant the validity of the above criticism, he would be led to conclude, after seeing the defects of Kierke-

gaard's system of ethics, that there can be no ethics without a metaphysics to give permanence to the individual and essence to existence, an epistemology to explain the validity of man's knowledge of reality, a psychology to explain man's knowledge of himself and the workings of his faculties, and a natural theology to prove the existence of God and explain man's relation to God.

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The thesis submitted by William Leo Kelly, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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