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## Soren Kierkegaard: The Meaning of Existence and the Nature of Truth

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SØREN KIERKEGAARD: THE MEANING  
OF EXISTENCE AND THE  
NATURE OF TRUTH

A Graduate Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The meaning of existence and the nature of truth were central to Kierkegaardian thought. Any discussion of Kierkegaard's thought would include various aspects of these themes. In every matter, whether it be Kierkegaard's ethics, the nature of the individual, the religious life, we are forced to consider these themes.

In modern times existentialism has become popular. Yet the existentialism of Kierkegaard, the call to a difficult but ultimately rewarding life as an individual Christian, is not popular. Such a philosophy is not part of the contemporary "good-life Christianity" so commonly promoted. The complacency of the nineteenth century church has fallen again upon the twentieth century church.

Kierkegaard searched for meaning in existence and found it rested in becoming involved with one's own existence. Christianity, subjectively understood and existentially appropriated, supplied the existing believer with a focus for his existence. Appropriation must be a decision made by a solitary individual willing to give himself completely to the task of becoming. It was within this process of becoming that truth became known subjectively through the passion of inwardness.

### Justification of Study

The fact that man needed to hear a message of challenge to become a Christian was good reason for such a study. Søren Kierkegaard gave his life to delivering such a challenge. The need to hear such a challenge in Kierkegaard's own inimitable way still remains.

The understanding of how Kierkegaard viewed existence and truth were foundational to a more complete understanding of Kierkegaard. The meaning of existence cannot be determined outside of existence, thus Kierkegaard looked to his own existence to discover the road to meaning. An existential analysis was unique, for it required the individual to look to his own existing circumstance rather than step outside and use speculative and abstract systems to measure one's own existence. It was within this existence that one could find meaning for his existence and realize the truth by which his existence would be governed. Therefore existence and truth were the bedrock of Kierkegaardian thought and offered the opportunity of essential understanding. The final result was not to draw one into the belief's of a new system but to stimulate one into the realization of a meaningful existence. The serious reader of Kierkegaard needs to come to an understanding of Kierkegaardian existence and truth. Kierkegaard would stimulate the same individual into the process of becoming whereby existence will become meaningful and truth will become evident.

Philosophy should be concerned with making man's existence



more meaningful. Philosophy, as a discipline, is a task by which man can more clearly perceive his existential situation. If we do not know where we are, we cannot chart a course. Kierkegaard has provided us with a process by which we may discover where we are. He felt obligated to act as a midwife, bringing to birth our own innate ideas. We could find what we ought to be and what we ought to do, within ourselves. The study of Kierkegaard brought about understanding of Kierkegaardian existence and truth and one's own existence.

#### Method of Procedure

This study was largely descriptive in nature. It gave introduction to two fundamental elements within Søren Kierkegaard's thought. Of utmost importance was Søren Kierkegaard's own thought as opposed to a discussion of the merits of his views. The primary focus was upon the nature of man and the meaning of his existence which culminated in S.K.'s expression, "truth is subjectivity." The existential nature of S.K.'s thought required brief biographical references which are reflected in the developing concepts. The study did not follow a particular historical outline but reflected several period's of S.K.'s life. The design of the study focused upon the central themes of existence and truth and followed a logical conceptual pattern rather than a historical sequence.

Throughout the study S.K. has been allowed to speak for himself, without commentary. The debates and views of S.K.'s opponents were set aside so that the heart of S.K.'s message may be more clearly seen. While the study of S.K.'s reason for certain concepts and

thoughts has occupied others, there was little attempt to show the roots of S.K.'s thought. We were not concerned with the "whence" but with the "what" and "why" of Kierkegaard's thought.

#### Limitations of Study

The study was limited by the selective nature of the study. Kierkegaard's thought was permeated with existential elements, but reflected a diversity of concerns. This study concentrated upon those works which spoke most directly to his existential view. Two fundamental areas of thought were arbitrarily selected from the whole of his work for closer scrutiny. Therefore the study was limited by its inability to encompass the whole of S.K.'s thought, which would have been more true to Kierkegaard, but much beyond the scope of this study.

#### Design of Study

The design of this study followed something of the logical development of concepts as observed within S.K.'s works. The second chapter provided a brief biographical sketch and laid out the historical context from which he spoke. This chapter permitted the reader to see some of the why of Kierkegaard's thought. The meaning of existence and the nature of man were the themes of the third chapter. The stages of life provided the framework by which the chapter was built. Included were Kierkegaard's ethical view and the place of aesthetics in existence. Chapter four gave voice to S.K.'s pivotal thesis, "truth is subjectivity." Here the principles of

existence and the nature of man were applied and illustrated. Theological considerations such as faith, sin, passion and God were reflected upon. Chapter five closed the study with some final remarks concerning Kierkegaard's contribution to contemporary thought and theology. Some observations regarding Kierkegaard's thought closed the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Søren Kierkegaard, the last of seven children, was born to Ann and Michael Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup> on May 5, 1813.<sup>2</sup> The family resided in Copenhagen Denmark, where Søren lived, did the bulk of his work and where he died. Søren Kierkegaard evidently loved Copenhagen because he rarely left it.<sup>3</sup> Here he found his inspiration for writing, suffered his pain and humiliation and began his attack upon established Christianity. He loved his country and his native tongue and exercised the utmost care in his use of it.

Expressing thanks for the sympathy and good will as have been showed me, I could wish that I might, as it were, present these works (as I now take the liberty of doing) and commend them to the nation whose language I am proud to have the honor of writing, feeling for it a filial devotion and an almost womanly tenderness, yet comforting myself also with the thought that it will not be disgraced for the fact that I have used it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Lowrie, A Short Life Of Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 14. For a fuller appreciation of Søren Kierkegaard's love for country and language, see pp. 9-16.

### A. Copenhagen

The Copenhagen of the early 1800's was a city of about two-hundred thousand inhabitants. It was the capital of the little land and the cultural center of Denmark.<sup>5</sup> Here came all the prominent artistic and literary figures of Denmark, of which many figured in the life of Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>6</sup>

Copenhagen was a quiet little town that still offered the benefits of a large city. It had not yet been struck by the industrial revolution and would not be until two years after Søren Kierkegaard's death.<sup>7</sup> Thus it was an old society, one that as yet had not been uprooted by the mood of change characterized by industrialism. The society was conservative and traditional with its Guild system and Absolutism.<sup>8</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard said the year in which he was born was "the year in which so many another bad note was put into circulation."<sup>9</sup> It was the year of national bankruptcy after a six year war with England as an ally of Napoleon. Kierkegaard's life spanned one of

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<sup>5</sup>E.J. Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>Lowrie, op cit., pp. 3-5.

<sup>7</sup>Frederich Sontag, A Kierkegaard Handbook (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

the poorest periods in Danish history.<sup>10</sup>

### B. The Church

Søren Kierkegaard belonged to the Lutheran church of Denmark. This church was the state church into which one was born. No personal commitment needed to be made to the faith, yet one could claim faith. The clergy had sold themselves to the "system" and indeed had become an inextricable part of it. They no longer were the clergy separated unto God but rather to State Christianity.

Kierkegaard's polemics thundered out against the complacency he found in the church. He saw the figures he respected (Mynster) not only representing this complacency but perpetuating it with their messages and their lives. The message, as he saw it, promoted not the individual commitment to a difficult life with Christ as demonstrated by the gospels, but a complacent and placid trip along the open road of ease in State religion.<sup>11</sup>

### C. The Father

Søren Kierkegaard's relationship with his father was one of strained intimacy.<sup>12</sup> Michael Kierkegaard was a man of unusual wealth

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Peter P. Rohde, "Søren Kierkegaard: The Father of Existentialism," Essays on Kierkegaard, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess Pub. Co., 1969), p. 29. A contemporary of Søren Kierkegaard, N.F.S. Grundtvig, promoted existential thought but emphasized fellowship in a Christian sense. Søren Kierkegaard grudgingly recognized him as a religious genius but remained in opposition to his denigration of the individual as Søren Kierkegaard saw it.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-51.

by virtue of the inheritance of his uncle's textile business. Michael had suffered deep physical and emotional pain as a child because of the harsh environment in which he was born. One night as a young shepherd boy he turned in desperation and cursed God. From that time forward a strange brooding and melancholy settled upon him because he felt he had committed the unpardonable sin.<sup>13</sup> This guilt and sorrow was carried heavily by the father until his death was subliminally implanted in his sons.<sup>14</sup>

In 1797 Michael Kierkegaard remarried after the death of his first wife, who bore him no children. His second wife he felt required to marry as she bore him a daughter only four months after their marriage. She had been a house-servant and Michael's indiscretion now added another sin to the heavy guilt he already bore.<sup>15</sup>

Between the years 1832 and 1834 severe calamities befell the family. In the space of these years the mother and five of the seven children died leaving only the old man, Søren and his older brother Peter to carry on.<sup>16</sup> These events produced a great deal of anxiety and despair within the father. Thus the old man was religiously severe and his deep melancholy infected his two remaining sons.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Elmer H. Duncan, Søren Kierkegaard (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976), pp. 17-18.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>17</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 17.

The father exerted a strong and lifelong influence over Søren to whom Søren felt a real indebtedness. "I owe everything, from the beginning, to my father. When melancholy as he was, he saw me melancholy, his prayer to me was: Be sure that you really love Jesus Christ!"<sup>18</sup>

We can begin to appreciate the melancholy, gloomy Søren as we read his writings. The development of his concept of anxiety and despair came largely out of his background.<sup>19</sup> As Kierkegaard perceived it, "a son is like a mirror in which the father beholds himself, and for the son the father too is like a mirror in which he beholds himself in the time to come."<sup>20</sup>

In the later days of the Father's life (probably around Søren Kierkegaard's 22nd. birthday) a serious break came into the Father/Son relationship. Søren Kierkegaard had become uneasy about his father's faith and his father revealed his own sin of sensuality. He confessed the premartial relations he had with Søren Kierkegaard's mother.<sup>21</sup> For Søren Kierkegaard this event became the "great earthquake" to which he refers throughout his writing. It was because of this event that S.K. went down the road of "perdition" for a time.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way trans. Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 192.

<sup>21</sup>Rohde, op. cit., p. 1.



Reconciliation between the two took place on Søren Kierkegaard's twenty-fifth birthday, when the father confessed his guilt and "secret." The so called "unpardonable sin," was now revealed to his son. This confession caused the reconciliation to take place as Søren Kierkegaard realized the cost to his father of such an intimate revelation.<sup>22</sup> A short while later Søren Kierkegaard's father died. Søren remarked in his journal:

My father died on Thursday, the eighth (1838), at two o'clock in the night. I had so heartily wished that he might live a few years longer, and I regard his death as the last sacrifice his love for me occasioned; for not only has he died from me but died for me, in order that if possible something may be made of me still.<sup>23</sup>

We can see the influence of the father upon Søren Kierkegaard. However, we must be careful not to suggest that Søren's character was fixed. There is no doubt that inheritance and environment had a prodigious influence upon his life, but his own philosophy rejects the "fixing of fate."<sup>24</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard attained an understanding of himself by reviewing his life from early childhood and he had an unusually vivid feeling of solidarity with "the family, the clan, the race"; but on the other hand, the freedom and responsibility of the individual was his most ardent conviction, and therefore he accounted "the individual higher than the race."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong ed. trans., Søren Kierkegaards Journals and Papers, IV (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 122.

<sup>23</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

#### D. Education

Søren Kierkegaard's education followed the usual course of students for that day. He attended public schools from which he graduated at the age of seventeen. He was not regarded as an exceptional student but showed an aptitude for Latin. Although he was the brunt of cruel jokes, because of his odd appearance and physical frailty, he was very able to protect himself with a remarkable wit.<sup>26</sup>

Upon his dismissal from preparatory school his principal wrote that his nature was "very gay and frank." Likely this was Søren Kierkegaard's way of concealing his melancholy as we read in his journal for the year 1837: "I am a two faced Janus: with one face I laugh, with the other I cry."<sup>27</sup>

In the year 1830 he entered the University in Copenhagen and gave himself over to his studies. He found great joy in the liberal arts from which he had been deprived in his father's home. He showed real brilliance in philosophy, physics and mathematics and as a consequence was slower, than his father would have liked, in beginning his theological studies.<sup>28</sup>

It was upon the death of his father that "it became a pious

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<sup>26</sup>David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1941), pp. 6-7.

<sup>27</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., vl. 5 (1978) p. 107.

<sup>28</sup>Lowrie, op. cit., p. 58.

duty" for him at least to take his theological degree, for as he said, "You cannot dispute with a dead man." In 1840 he became a candidate in Theology.<sup>29</sup> He completed this course of study over the next two years. On July 16, 1841 the faculty accepted his dissertation, "The Concept of Irony" for the master's degree.<sup>30</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard completed his formal education with the effectuation of his theological degree. While he never was able to use his theological degree as a pastor, (which he deeply desired to do) much of his writing reflects his theological concerns as we have seen in "Fear and Trembling" and "The concept of Dread," and other works.

#### E. Kierkegaard's Vocation

##### 1. The Individual

Kierkegaard's vehement protest was against Hegelianism, which blanketed Europe. He spent a good deal of time upgrading the individual and downgrading the group or the mass which Hegel's philosophy promoted. While Kierkegaard extended great energy in attempting to overthrow Hegelianism he still respected Hegel's work.

If he had written his whole logic and declared in the Preface that it was only a thought-experiment (in which, however,

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<sup>29</sup>Swenson, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938) Appendix III.

at many points he had shirked some things), he would have been the greatest thinker that ever lived. Now he is comic.<sup>31</sup>

It was the "system" that Hegel promoted to which Søren Kierkegaard reacted. For Søren Kierkegaard existence is much too complex for any system to encompass and any attempt to do so is comic. To fight the battle Kierkegaard directly addressed Hegel.

How frequently have I sworn that Hegel basically regards men, paganly, as an animal-race endowed with reason. In an animal-race "the single individual" is always lower than the "race." The human race always has the remarkable character that, just because every individual is created in the image of God, the "single individual" is higher than the "race."

That this can be taken in vain and horribly misused, I concede. But this is Christianity. And here is where the battle must really be fought.<sup>32</sup>

Central for Kierkegaard is the dignity of the individual. To be an individual, to establish one's own individuality is part of becoming a Christian. Martin Heidegger would declare, "Authenticate yourself," while Søren Kierkegaard saw authenticity as being realized through becoming an individual Christian.

For Kierkegaard the way in which one became an individual was as important as being an individual, for everything was in process. Kierkegaard thus became heavily Socratic. The Greek saying "Know

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<sup>31</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes Climacus], Concluding Unscientific Postscript trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) p. 558. Here is also quoted the longest appreciative remarks Kierkegaard makes concerning Hegel.

<sup>32</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., vl. 2. (1970) p. 224.

Thyself" became important for him and was to be sought with all of ones might. What was done inwardly was infinitely more important than that which was done outwardly.<sup>33</sup>

The Socratic, maieutic art, was immediately claimed by Kierkegaard for his methodology. Thus, through dialogue and indirect communication one may be brought to the same place as Socrates, when he declared that "he knew that he did not know: whereas others thought they knew, but in fact didn't know."<sup>34</sup> It is precisely at this point that one begins becoming an individual, for now one can learn. Learning cannot take place if one smugly thinks he knows. Kierkegaard saw himself as the midwife in the process of ideological birth. Socrates, like Kierkegaard, was convinced that he would cheat others if he did not force them to have a "stinging experience of their own ignorance."<sup>35</sup>

Kierkegaard understood that his assignment was to "make people individuals."

There cannot really be the least doubt that what Christianity needs is another Socrates who could existentially express ignorance with the same cunning dialectical simplicity, or as it should be said: I cannot understand the

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<sup>33</sup>Carnell, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

the first thing about faith, but I believe. But it is all that understanding and conceiving which is the misfortune.<sup>36</sup>

To be an individual is an arduous and demanding thing. Kierkegaard did not attempt to make it any easier but instead realized the responsibilities such an individual must undertake if he was to be a Christian in the true and proper sense.

## 2. The Individual Christian

Kierkegaard desired to make it difficult to be a Christian. He saw himself as a prophet, as the one who had the task of speaking against those of the believing community, those who no longer were experiencing the passion of the gospel.

My purpose is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is, nor to make it difficult for stupid people, and easy for clever pates, but qualitatively difficult, and essentially difficult for every man equally, for essentially it is equally difficult for every man to relinquish his understanding and his thinking, and to keep his soul fixed upon the absurd; it is comparatively more difficult for a man if he has much understanding - if we will keep in mind that not everyone who has lost his understanding over Christianity thereby proves that he has any.<sup>37</sup>

Kierkegaard was determined to rescue Christianity from triviality and make being a Christian a difficult but meaningful thing.<sup>38</sup> Passion and sacrifice must replace the fashion and ceremony

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>37</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 339-340. Kierkegaard discusses his construction of a relation between eternity and time. Christianity as a philosophical doctrine that asks to be understood is the result not the triviality to which it has been reduced.

so prevalent throughout the church. There needed to be a shift from the intellectual task of teaching what Christianity is, to the existential task of proclaiming acceptance of Christianity as a responsible act. Kierkegaard wished to help others "make a transition from complacency to passionate concern, from nonchalance before God to holy fear and trembling."<sup>39</sup>

### 3. The Individual Christian as Witness

The individual as a Christian must also be a witness. A witness is one who proclaims the meaning of Christianity through acting Christianly in daily actions.

What is a witness? A witness is a person who directly demonstrates the truth of the doctrine he proclaims - directly yes, in part by its being truth in him and blessedness, in part by volunteering his personal self and saying: Now see if you can force me to deny this doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

The activity of being a witness was the activity that all Christians were to be engaged in. This is the responsibility of the Christian. Kierkegaard again remarked in his Journal: "What I want is to spur people on to becoming moral characters, witnesses unto the truth, to be willing to suffer for the truth, and ready to give up worldly wisdom."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>40</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., vl. IV, pp. 558-559.

<sup>41</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 42.

## F. Regine Olsen

While Søren Kierkegaard was completing his theological degree he became engaged to a "sixteen year old girl of the Copenhagen bourgeoisie called Regine Olsen."<sup>42</sup> The love that Søren Kierkegaard felt for her was very strong, for often we see him reflect upon it and her throughout his works. Many of his works were stimulated by his affection for her and were written in the form of a reply: as indirect communication.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, and because of the intense devotion Søren Kierkegaard had for Regine, he felt inclined to break the engagement. Many scholars have offered speculation concerning this event and have been led to ask the question, "Why did Søren break the engagement with someone to whom he was apparently so devoted?" Rather than make any rash conjectures we shall allow Kierkegaard to speak for himself.

Immediately I assumed a relationship to the whole family. I turned my virtuosity toward her father in particular, whom I always had liked very much anyway.

But to the central issue: the next day I saw that I had made a mistake. Penitent that I was, my *vitae ante acta*, my melancholy - that was sufficient.

I suffered indescribably during that time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Sontag, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>Some examples in Søren Kierkegaard's writings are: Either/Or, Repetition and Fear and Trembling, pp. 89-101.

<sup>44</sup>Hong and Hong, op, cit., vl. VI (1978), pp. 192-193.



The engagement was broken about two months later on October 11, 1841.<sup>45</sup> Although Kierkegaard struggled tremendously through this time he remained firm in his conviction that he should not marry. His soul continued to be tortured with thoughts of her.

It was his desire to make their separation easier for Regine. To protect her reputation, he decided to act as a scoundrel in the hopes that such behaviour would lessen her love for him<sup>46</sup> and convince others of his moral turpitude.

Approximately a year and half after the break with Regine on April 16, 1843, at evensong, another event occurred between Søren Kierkegaard and Regine that gave a new direction to Søren's life.<sup>47</sup> We read in his journal:

At vespers on Easter Sunday in Frue Kirke (during Myster's sermon) she nodded to me. I do not know if it was pleadingly or forgivingly, but in any case, very affectionately. I had sat down in a place apart, but she discovered it. Would to God she had not done so. Now a year and a half of suffering and all the enormous pains I took are wasted; she does not believe that I was a deceiver, she has faith in me. What ordeals now lie ahead of her. The next will be that I am a hypocrite. The higher we go the more dreadful it is. That a man of my inwardness, of my religiousness, could act in such a way.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Lowrie, A Short Life, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-143. Lowrie presents here a good discussion on the entire relationship between Søren Kierkegaard and Regine. Søren's attempts as a scoundrel were unsuccessful, as Regine immediately saw through them. For additional explanation on Søren's engagement breaking, see Carnell pp. 21-22 and Duncan, Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 22-24.

<sup>47</sup>Lowrie, A Short Life, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>48</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., VI.5, p. 229.

Through Søren Kierkegaard's inwardness this event became significant for him, and his ideas began to spill over in literary production. "The ideas stream down upon me - healthy, happy, plump, merry, blessed children, easily brought to birth, and yet all of them bearing the birth marks of my personality."<sup>49</sup>

The works were now done for Regine with whom he hoped for some kind of platonic reunion. These hopes were dashed when he returned to Copenhagen from Berlin where he had been working, to discover that Regine was engaged to one Fritz Schlegel.<sup>50</sup> Sometime later he again attempted to establish a platonic relationship with Regine and her new husband but was rebuffed. Kierkegaard was now released to "seal his engagement with God." With incredible fecundity Kierkegaard wrote volume after volume.<sup>51</sup> Although his love for Regine remained strong he was now free to do that for which he was meant. He was free to declare the church apostate and defend the individual in the face of the mass.

#### G. The Corsair

Kierkegaard had intended to give up writing and seek country living after completing his long list of Philosophical-Literary Works.

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<sup>49</sup>Lowrie, A Short Life, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>51</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 22.

He was, however, an established and acclaimed author and so it could not be. One of his greatest admirers was a young man named Aaron Goldschmidt who published a political journal called the Corsair. While Søren Kierkegaard regarded this publication as "gutter press," Goldschmidt looked up to Søren Kierkegaard. The intent of the Corsair was to attack, from a liberal standpoint, the Autocracy, conservatism, and anything that smacked of reaction.<sup>52</sup>

Many prominent people of the day felt that the journal should be confronted. They requested Søren Kierkegaard to do so as thus far he had escaped the "acid pen" of Goldschmidt. As soon as Søren wrote his first article in criticism of the Corsair, Goldschmidt attacked Søren in his paper, in text, as well as in caricature. This attack hurt Søren deeply and he never fully recovered from it. Often he suffered derisive and cruel remarks because of this event as he walked the streets of Copenhagen. The event yielded some positive results for Kierkegaard. His feelings for the individual and his contempt for the masses found clear expression. Kierkegaard thought that truth was always in the minority. The minority was stronger than the majority because the majority consisted of those who had no opinion while the minority consisted of those who had an opinion. The strength of the majority was entirely illusory.

No one wants to be that strenuous being - the single individual. But men everywhere are in the service of that

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<sup>52</sup>Rohde, op. cit., p. 22.

deceitful substitute - a group. Let's a few of us join together, form a group - then we can surely do something. This is the most profound demoralization of the human race.<sup>53</sup>

#### H. The Attack Upon Christendom

All of the conflicts of thought and event in Søren Kierkegaard's life were preparing him for what would be his final text and his strongest argument. The general attack upon Christendom came about as a result of Søren Kierkegaard's reaction to two particular individuals: His father's pastor and now Bishop of the Church, Bishop Mynster and Professor Martenson, a man Kierkegaard knew from his university days, who succeeded Mynster in the Bishopric.<sup>54</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard respected Bishop Mynster as a Churchman and knew him to be a man of deep piety. Nonetheless, Søren also realized that Mynster was inextricably bound up with the established, institutional church and was a symbol of "state-religion" which Søren saw as a falsification of Christianity.

Bishop Mynster's service to Christianity is essentially, that, through his outstanding personality, his culture, his superiority in distinguished circles, he has created the fashion or more solemn way of regarding Christianity as something no deep and earnest person (how flattering to the persons concerned!) could do without.

However, this service, eternally and Christianly understood, is dubious, for Christianity is something much too distinguished to need patronage.

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<sup>53</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 422.

<sup>54</sup>Lowrie, A Short Life, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

And yet in his earnestness there is something of a milange - so touched, so profoundly moved by the thought of those glorious ones - and so sensitive when it comes to the part where this should be made earnest by minimizing oneself just a little bit.

And yet I love Bishop Mynster; it is my only wish to do everything to reinforce the esteem for him; for I have admired him and, humanly speaking, do admire him; and every time I am able to do anything for his benefit, I think of my father, whom it pleases, I believe.<sup>55</sup>

Kierkegaard did not begin publishing his polemics until Bishop Mynster had died and Martensen had assumed the role of Bishop. Following the funeral of Mynster at which Martensen had given the eulogy; Søren Kierkegaard wrote his first polemic. He chose Martensen for the brunt of his attack because of Martensen's funeral oration over Bishop Mynster. Martensen called Mynster "one of the witnesses for the truth who, like a sacred chain, stretch down the ages from the days of the Apostle."<sup>56</sup>

Kierkegaard could not keep his pen silent any longer. To him this was a terrible offence to true Christian values and so he wrote. It was not until almost a year later that Kierkegaard's discretion allowed him to publish this first article in the "Fatherland."<sup>57</sup> He continued to publish articles of the same nature in the "Fatherland" until he was able to publish his own little pamphlet which was called the "Instant."

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<sup>55</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit. VI 6, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup>Sontag, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>57</sup>Lowrie, *A Short Life*, p. 241. Lowrie describes in detail the reasons why Søren Kierkegaard did not publish immediately. He also outlines the reactions of the public and other points of interest. The "Fatherland" was the local newspaper.

The gist of what Søren Kierkegaard was trying to say can be found in a separate tract he called "The Cry." His anger was with the Church as he saw it in Denmark at the time. He said,

Whoever thou art, whatever in other respects thy life may be, my friend, by ceasing to take part (if ordinarily thou doest) in the public Worship of God, as it now is (with the claim that it is the Christianity of the New Testament), thou hast constantly one guilt the less, and that a great one: Thou doest not take part in treating God as a fool by calling that the Christianity of the New Testament which is not the Christianity of the New Testament.<sup>58</sup>

Kierkegaard's little pamphlet the "Instant" became a good success and allowed him to become popular once again in the eyes of the public. He produced several editions of the magazine and was furiously working on his last when he collapsed and was taken to the hospital. It was 40 days later that Søren Kierkegaard died on November 11, 1855.<sup>59</sup> In the words of Edward J. Carnell, "Thus God's faithful hound, heated from the chase, lay down to his eternal reward."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Attack Upon Christendom trans. Walter Lowrie (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), p. 59.

<sup>59</sup>Lowrie, A Short Life, op. cit. pp. 253-256.

<sup>60</sup>Carnell, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN INDIVIDUAL AND THE MEANING OF HIS EXISTENCE

Kierkegaard's concept concerning the unique importance of the individual person was one of his most important contributions during his mature years. Another, equally important contribution, was his critique of the ecclesiastical establishment in Denmark.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the individual as a category lay at the very heart of Kierkegaard's thought. It reflected the radical departure from Hegelianism for which Kierkegaard strove. It was within this category that modern existential thought found its "raison d'être." For Kierkegaard the foundation of his entire viewpoint was "the individual before God,"<sup>2</sup> which he defended with all of his dialectical genius.

Kierkegaard did most of his defending and uplifting of the individual in two major works. The first of these works he published

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<sup>1</sup>James D. Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1953), p. 175. S.K. expended a good deal of energy in criticizing the ecclesiastical establishment of Denmark. The polemics written in this vein in his later life have been collected into one volume called "The Attack Upon Christendom." While this critique of Christendom was extremely important it is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

was called The Concept of Anxiety,<sup>3</sup> while the second was The Sickness Unto Death which also considered the anthropological aspects of freedom.<sup>4</sup>

S.K. never intended that man should be understood in an objective or ontological manner. Instead he asked that man be interpreted functionally or existentially.<sup>5</sup> He set out to do this by placing man in a synthesis.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard made clear what he meant by such a synthesis.

That anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit.<sup>7</sup>

There appeared to be an attempt by S.K. to convert Hegelian terms and concepts into existential acceptability. When positing the tripartite theory of three simultaneous elements in man, Kierkegaard moved from Hegel when he suggested that spirit is not merely the third

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<sup>3</sup>Modern scholarly opinion seems to suggest that the title "The Concept of Anxiety" conveys more the sense of Kierkegaard's intention than the more traditional "The Concept of Dread," as used by Walter Lowrie in his translation. For a discussion of both points of view see, Reidar Thomte, ed. trans., The Concept of Anxiety, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. vii-xviii, and Walter Lowrie, trans., The Concept of Dread, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. ix-x.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Lowrie, trans., The Concept of Dread, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. viii.

<sup>5</sup>E.J. Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), p. 43

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Vigilius Haufniensis], The Concept of Anxiety, ed. trans. by Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 43.



moment in the dialectic of soul, consciousness and spirit.<sup>8</sup> Instead S.K. proposed that Man should be defined as "a synthesis of soul and body supported by spirit," whereupon the synthesis received the emphasis being supported by spirit.<sup>9</sup>

#### A. First Synthesis - Body, Soul and Spirit

Kierkegaard realized that freedom was the critical distinction between man and animal. By freedom he meant the ability to make correct ethical choices.<sup>10</sup> S.K. did not see man as purely body. Man was able to decide, able to accept or reject. The moral qualities in Man made it possible for him to be an individual and a Christian.<sup>11</sup>

Actually it is the conscience which constitutes a personality; personality is an individual determinateness confirmed by being known by God in the possibility of conscience. The conscience may sleep, but the possibility of it is constitutive. Otherwise the determinateness would be a transitory feature. Not even the consciousness of the determinateness, self-consciousness, is constitutive, inasmuch as it is only the relationship in which determinateness relates itself to itself; whereas God's shared knowledge [Guds Samviden] is the stabilization, the confirmation.<sup>12</sup>

For Kierkegaard man's moral character is the work of spirit.

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<sup>8</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>11</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, ed. trans., Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers III (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 483.

He saw spirit as a psychological moral entity rather than a metaphysical one.<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaard's concept of spirit is not intended to rule out the soul and body, rather it is S.K.'s intention to emphasize the distinction between what man is, as a natural thing, and what man makes of himself as a responsible agent. A man does not find himself in a spiritual condition, until he has placed his powers in the service of God or the devil.<sup>14</sup> But what is the role of spirit in the nature of man?

In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming. Inasmuch as it is now present, it is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between soul and body, a relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first receives the latter by the spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation. What, then, is man's relation to this ambiguous power? How does Spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

Spirit, while it works through the soul, is not soul. Spirit makes it possible for man to experience a personal transformation through a shift from ethical possibility to ethical being.<sup>16</sup> "Thus, if body and soul go far in explaining the descriptive essence of man,

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<sup>13</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Concept of Anxiety, pp. 43-44.

<sup>16</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 46.

spirit goes far in explaining the imperative essence."<sup>17</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr described spirit as an expression of freedom that allows man to stand "outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."<sup>18</sup> He also made clear that man was a problem unto himself and was thus limited by his nature. Kierkegaard also realized this and saw that even though man was limited by his nature, he was rationally and spiritually free to stand outside this limitation by his ability to imagine possibilities that terminate only in eternity.<sup>19</sup>

#### B. Second Synthesis - The Temporal and Eternal

The second synthesis is rather confusing. No sooner did Kierkegaard posit the synthesis than he negated it. For Kierkegaard anxiety is the element by which man is driven to God.

As for the latter synthesis, it is immediately striking that it is formed differently from the former. In the former, the two factors are psyche and body, and spirit is the third, yet in such a way that one can speak of a synthesis only when spirit is posited. The latter synthesis has only two factors, the temporal and the eternal. Where is the third factor? And if there is no third factor, there really is no synthesis, for a synthesis that is a contradiction cannot be completed as a synthesis without a third factor, because the fact that the synthesis is a contradiction asserts that it is not. What, then, is the temporal?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid. -

<sup>18</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), VI. 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>20</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, p. 85.

Kierkegaard suggested that the second synthesis is not really a synthesis but a new expression for the first synthesis. Of course, S.K. does not concern himself with the confusion this may have caused the reader for he merely exercised the privilege of one who interpreted man functionally and existentially rather than scientifically or objectively.<sup>21</sup>

The synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is not another synthesis but is the expression for the first synthesis, according to which man is a synthesis of psyche and body that is sustained by spirit. As soon as the spirit is posited, the moment is present. Therefore one may rightly say reproachfully of man that he lives only in the moment, because that comes to pass by an arbitrary abstraction. Nature does not lie in the moment.<sup>22</sup>

Man's nature consisted of body, soul and spirit, the spirit being that which united the body and soul. The second synthesis merely gave expression to the first synthesis when it described man as functionally able to unite eternity in time. For Kierkegaard this meant that man must be approached as a creature who has the existential responsibility to mediate eternity in time.<sup>23</sup>

The Kierkegaardian phrase, "Truth is Subjectivity," began to take on real meaning when the eternal was ethically perceived and thus brought into time "whenever a concerned human being undertakes the

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<sup>21</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>22</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, p. 88-89.

<sup>23</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 49.

task of existence so seriously that his very selfhood is at stake."<sup>24</sup>

Kierkegaard became more pleased as he saw the individual pushed closer to the brink of paradox for it was here that man became an individual and a Christian. Anxiety and despair were necessary ingredients to drive one towards God. Despair and anxiety reveal paradox which demonstrated to man his naked need for God, driving him towards God.

The torment of despair is precisely this, not to be able to die . . . the hopelessness in this case is that even the last hope, death, is not available. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one becomes acquainted with an even more dreadful danger, one hopes for death. So when the danger is so great that death has become one's hope,<sup>25</sup> despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die.

But in the last resort, that is, when the point is to believe, the only help is this, that for God all things are possible.<sup>26</sup>

The final hope of Kierkegaard was that man would be driven to God. Kierkegaard's men, however, could be utterly opposed to each other. The most sharply defined individuals are the sinner and the man of grace. But the saint is the richer individual because he realized to the utmost, the possibilities of existence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Anti-Climacus], The Sickness Unto Death trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1941), pp. 150-151.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>27</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 207.

Herein lay the fundamental characteristics of the nature of Kierkegaard's man - the possibility of being an individual Christian standing before God, with Christ as the model individual.<sup>28</sup>

Only as an individual can a man ever relate himself most truly to God, for he can best have the perception of his own unworthiness alone; it is almost impossible to make this really clear to another person; besides, it could easily become affected.<sup>29</sup>

### C. Existence

Kierkegaard's concern for the individual did much for his understanding of the nature of man. The existence of man was also a concern of S.K. In particular he wished to delineate the ingredients of existence for the individual. Authentic existence<sup>30</sup> was to be "a living condition in which spirit, having soared to eternity, arouses man to such a state of ethical and passionate decision that the atoms of eternity are mediated in time instant after instant."<sup>31</sup> Every moment has infinite value for the individual in time and yet ten thousand years are but a trifle, when considered in

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<sup>28</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>29</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., vl. II (1970), p. 405.

<sup>30</sup>Authentic existence is a term used to describe the existence of a true individual as opposed to the "in-authentic" existence of one who has not realized his individuality existentially or functionally. Martin Hiedegger more or less popularized the terms authentic as in "authenticate yourself," but did not share S.K.'s desire to goad people into becoming Christians or into standing before God.

<sup>31</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 53.

in relation to eternity.<sup>32</sup>

Existence must encompass the full understanding of both the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal.

Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore a constant striving . . . the thinking subject is an existing individual. It is only systematists and objective philosophers who have ceased to be human beings, and have become speculative philosophy in the abstract, an entity which belongs in the realm of pure being. . . . however much the subject has the infinite within himself through being an existing individual, he is in the process of becoming.<sup>33</sup>

Kierkegaard concluded that existence is by nature historical and must be grasped by faith.<sup>34</sup> In this fashion S.K. dispensed with Hegelian historical determinism and replaced it with his own concept: "historical becoming."<sup>35</sup> Man was the center of history and so through his becoming history likewise becomes. Man was not merely a being to which something from the outside affected him. Rather he was a being in time able to recall and reflect upon the past in order to come to a reasonable estimate of the uncertain but determinable future.<sup>36</sup>

Authentic existence took place when eternity and time were

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<sup>32</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes Climacus], Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 84-85.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>34</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 166. Heidegger and Barth are representative of the several tendencies to which S.K.'s thought have given rise.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>36</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 169.

mediated by love; spirit became active through hope and the more active spirit was, the more love was realized. "Spirit, in other words, fills the instant (an atom of eternity) with works of love."<sup>37</sup>

In sum, whenever a human being rejects the responsibilities of love, he becomes spiritless; and being spiritless, he is only a potential person, for he had failed to complete the sythesis which forms the substance of genuine selfhood - i.e., he has not taken seriously his God-given duty to mediate the absolute quality of eternity in the relativity of time. Such a human being continues to occupy space on this planet, to be sure, but this does not make him either an individual or a Christian. Unless spirit rises to its true heights, potentiality does not convert to actuality.<sup>38</sup>

#### D. "Existence-spheres" - The dialectic of Inwardness

Kierkegaard has stated that truth is subjectivity. By this he meant a condition of passionate, ethical inwardness which involved the very being of the whole self. Therefore the more passionately one decides to be, the more perfectly he becomes truth.<sup>39</sup> With these thoughts at the fore of this thinking, Kierkegaard developed a concept we may call the "dialectic of inwardness," whose purpose was to help

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<sup>37</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. Heidegger used the term "Dasein" to indicate what existence implied. The English translation may be "thereness." S.K. used the term "interest" to indicate our involvement in the objective world is so intimate that it cannot be regarded objectively, i.e. disinterestedly. Heidegger also used the term "angst" to describe the "dread" or "anxiety" that S.K. saw as driving one toward God and Heidegger saw as driving one towards authentic existence.

<sup>39</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 39.



one discover his position within the "stages"<sup>40</sup> on life's way.<sup>41</sup>

S.K. outlined three spheres through which one's life preceeded.

There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction, there is no man who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, ontology, is but it does not exist; for when it exists it is in the aesthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is it is the abstraction of or the "prius" for the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. The ethical sphere is only a transitional sphere, and hence its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The aesthetic sphere is that of immediacy, the ethical that of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious sphere is that of fulfilment, but note, not such a fulfilment as when one fills a cane or a bag with gold, for repentance has made infinite room, and hence the religious contradiction. . . .<sup>42</sup>

### 1. Aesthetic Sphere

The aesthetic sphere was stated most clearly in "Either/Or" originally, and finally presented in his "Stages on Life's Way." S.K.'s other works such as the "Postscript" refine the point of view while the "Repetitions" criticize the aesthetic way of life. The book "Either/Or" came to no conclusions. The first volume dealt with the aesthetic sphere and the second volume with the ethical sphere.

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<sup>40</sup> Stages does not appear to be the best term to use here, but S.K. does use it in the title of his book. However, a better term and one S.K. used more frequently is "spheres" or "existence spheres." We shall use this term from here on. Duncan in his book "Søren Kierkegaard," discusses more completely the problem of the terms, pp. 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> Carnell, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Stages of Life's Way ed. Hilarius Bogbinder, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1940), p. 430.

Because there was no conclusion we must assume that S.K. had some other resolution in mind. Of course, this came about in his religious sphere.

The aesthetic sphere was largely characterized by pleasure. In the diary of the seducer in *Either/Or* it was remarked of the aesthetic man that "his whole life was motivated by enjoyment."<sup>43</sup> This mode of existence may be said to be "psychically determined."<sup>44</sup> The characteristics of such a mode were stability, order, and objectivity and so a way of life, but it lacked the individual awareness of the possibility of being a self.<sup>45</sup>

For Kierkegaard one of the greatest travesties committed by man was committed by the aesthetic man. He has not involved himself in the task of living. Inwardly and essentially he remains uncommitted person because he did not have an existential fear of the eternal.<sup>46</sup> To be an aesthetic man meant that one attempted to avoid all suffering and all paradox and replace it with immediacy. An aesthetic man just is; he never is becoming,<sup>47</sup> nor does he desire to.

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<sup>43</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* 2 vols., ed. Victor Eremita, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), p. 301.

<sup>44</sup>Jerry H. Gill, "The Ethical - Religious," *Essays on Kierkegaard*, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis; Burgess Pub. Co., 1969), p. 151.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>Carnell, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

The aesthetic choice is either entirely immediate and to that extent no choice, or it loses itself in the multifarious. Thus, when a young girl follows the choice of her heart, this choice, however beautiful it may be, is in the strictest sense no choice, since it is entirely immediate. . . . and because when one does not choose absolutely one chooses only for the moment, and therefore can choose something different the next moment.<sup>48</sup>

The critical thing that the aesthetic man did not do is make a decision, at least in the strictest sense. The aesthetic man followed his inclinations rather than weighing the possible alternatives and making a decision between them. In this manner the aesthetic man continued to live statically. He existed on the basis of what he is already, taken immediately.<sup>49</sup>

The choice itself is decisive for the content of the personality, through the choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen, and when it does not choose it withers away in consumption.<sup>50</sup>

While Kierkegaard did find the aesthetic sphere to be the lowest expression of individual existence he did recognize it as an essential element in existence. Kierkegaard had learned upon leaving his father's home to enjoy the aesthetic elements of life. Often he attended the opera, appreciated fully the glories of nature and many of the pleasures the Danish culture afforded.<sup>51</sup> His vocation also had

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<sup>48</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup>David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1941), p. 127.

<sup>50</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 167.

<sup>51</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 47.

some aesthetic overtones. He saved some of his sharpest comments for the philosophers, the writers etc. S.K. was able to extricate himself from any aesthetic accusations by demonstrating that he approached his vocation with true inwardness, addressing the problems functionally and existentially rather than scientifically or objectively as was the Hegelian approach.<sup>52</sup> The aesthetic is not evil in and of itself until one no longer desires to "leap" into another sphere because of despair and eternal fear, the end result of an aesthetic life style.<sup>53</sup> The aesthetic values were redeemable for S.K., once the claim to absoluteness had been rejected.<sup>54</sup>

a. Transition of Spheres

The transition from the aesthetic sphere to ethical sphere was important for the individual. The movement from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical mode of existence placed exhausting demands upon the individual.

To escape the pathos of the aesthetic sphere one must have experienced the cleansing despair which accompanied the melancholy of boredom.<sup>55</sup> "There comes a moment in a man's life when his immediacy

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<sup>52</sup>Paul Tillich, A Complete History of Christian Thought (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1968) part II, p. 169.

<sup>53</sup>Justo L. González, A History of Christian Thought (Nashville Abingdon Press, 1975) Vol. III, p. 337.

<sup>54</sup>Collins, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>55</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 65.

is, as it were, ripened and the spirit demands a higher form in which it will apprehend itself as spirit.<sup>56</sup>

To pass from one sphere to the next required a leap. Kierkegaard seemed to imply that the leap from the aesthetical to the ethical was not of the same significance as the movement from the ethical to the religious. Certainly it was not as demanding upon the individual. However, Kierkegaard felt that a leap was necessary to move from the aesthetical to the ethical.

The transition from eudaemonism to the concept of duty is an leap, or, assisted by a more and more developed understanding of what is most prudent, is one finally supposed to go directly over to virtue? No, there is no pain of decision which the sensuous (the eudaemonistic), the finite (the eudaemonistic) cannot endure. Man is not led to do duty by merely reflecting that it is the most prudent thing to do; in the moment of decision reason lets go, and he either turns back to eudaemonism or he chooses the good by a leap.<sup>57</sup>

The leap from one sphere to another was necessary for there was a chasm between the two. One was not able to simply blend or slide into the next sphere. A radical decision had to be made to cross that chasm. Kierkegaard would not allow for an easy arrival; one must agonize with a decision to do the seemingly impossible.

(The leap) . . . is an act of isolation, which leaves it to the individual to decide, respecting that which cannot be thought, whether he will resolve believingly to accept it by virtue of absurdity.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Vol. 2, p. 193.

<sup>57</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., (1975), Vol. 3, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 92. Within these pages S.K. spars with Lessing, Jacobi and Mendelssohn concerning the leap. pp. 90-97.

We must make it clear that the different stages are not entirely left behind as a result of the leaps. Rather, there are aesthetic elements in one's existence even though he may live at the ethical level. The primary consideration for Kierkegaard was that one was living within a particular stage and that there was movement directed towards the religious taking place.<sup>59</sup> This did not mean that the "leap" from the ethical to the religious put the existential choice between the two, behind forever. The three spheres of existence remained constant possibilities.<sup>60</sup>

## 2. Ethical Sphere

Kierkegaard has already stated that man is a synthesis between the finite and the eternal. If this is so, then it may be said that the aesthetic viewed himself as within the finite and the ethicist viewed himself as within the eternal,<sup>61</sup> ". . . because the ethical is the very breath of the eternal, and constitutes even in solitude the reconciling fellowship with all men."<sup>62</sup> It was this understanding

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<sup>59</sup>Robert Bretall, ed., A Kierkegaard Anthology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 174-175. There appears to be some discrepancy in the various interpretations of how the different spheres are actually related or interrelated. The difficulty seems not to lie in Kierkegaard's concept of the sphere but rather in his ambiguity regarding the definition of the leap. He has left almost all of his discussion of the leap to his journals save for a few remarks previously referred to, in the "Postscript."

<sup>60</sup>James C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., Inc., 1971), p. 314.

<sup>61</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>62</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 136.

of universal obligation that caused man to enter the ethical sphere.

A person enters the ethical stage the moment he perceives serious relation between (1) the essence of self, (2) the necessity of moment-by-moment choosing, and (3) a sense of duty which is nourished by the eternal.<sup>63</sup>

To enter the ethical sphere was not to leave ones self behind. Instead, "He does not become another man than he was before, but he becomes himself, consciousness is unified, and he is himself."<sup>64</sup> Where the aesthete was irresponsible the ethicist became responsible.

The ethical individual, to be sure, may venture to use the expression that he is his own editor, but at the same time he is fully conscious that he is responsible - responsible to himself personally, inasmuch as what he chooses will have decisive influence upon him, responsible in view of the order of things in which he lives, and responsible in the sight of God.<sup>65</sup>

The ethicist becomes what he becomes.<sup>66</sup>

The leap to the ethical stage was characterized by the imperative "Choose thyself," that is, affirm an absolute choice.<sup>67</sup> "He who chooses himself ethically has himself as his task, and not as a possibility merely, . . ."<sup>68</sup> However, it was not the content of ones

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<sup>63</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>64</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 181.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>67</sup>Livingston, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>68</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 262.

choice that was significant, rather it was the fact of the choice that had significance for the ethicist. The correctness of such a decision or choice was determined by the passionate inwardness or energy used by the ethicist.

I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. Therefore, even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by the reason of the energy with which he chose, that he had chosen the wrong. For the choice being made with the whole inwardness of his personality, his nature is purified and he himself brought into immediate relation to the eternal Power whose omnipresence interpenetrates the whole of existence.<sup>69</sup>

Kierkegaard felt that the "ethical demand (was) that one became infinitely interested in existing."<sup>70</sup> The aim of the ethical life, therefore, was to become the truth by transforming oneself.<sup>71</sup> The concern of the ethicist no longer was centered in his own personal enjoyment. Rather:

The ethical is concerned with particular human beings, and with each and every one of them by himself. If God knows how many hairs there are on a man's head, the ethical knows how many human beings there are; and its enumeration is not in the interest of a total sum, but for the sake of each individual, and when it judges, it judges each individual by himself; only a tyrant or an impotent man is content to

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<sup>69</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 171.

<sup>70</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>71</sup>Livingston, op. cit., p. 715.



decimate. The ethical lays hold of each individual and demands that he refrain from all contemplation, especially of humanity and the world; for the ethical, as being the internal, cannot be observed by an outsider. It can be realized only by the individual subject, who alone can know what it is that moves within him.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, the ethical sphere, unlike the aesthetic, involved the recognition that other lives also have a claim upon one's life.<sup>73</sup>

S.K. regarded the ethical life with real esteem. It was the sphere in which many people lived; they were good citizens, good parents, responsible employees, and the only basis upon which society was possible.<sup>74</sup>

Kierkegaard has defined the ethical "as duty, and duty in turn is defined as congeries of particular propositions,"<sup>75</sup> thus demanding that the ethicist do his duty. The ethicist has responded to the call but found he was unable to do his duty because:

Ethics is still an ideal science, and not only in the sense that every science is ideal. Ethics proposes to bring ideality into actuality. On the other hand, it is not the nature of its movement to raise actuality up into ideality. Ethics points to ideality as a task and assumes that every man possesses the requisite conditions. Thus ethics develops a contradiction, inasmuch as it makes clear both the difficulty and the impossibility. What is said of the law is also true of ethics: it is a disciplinarian that demands, and by its demands only judges but does not bring forth life.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 284.

<sup>73</sup>González, op. cit., p. 338. <sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op. cit., vl. II, p. 258.

<sup>76</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Concept of Anxiety, op. cit., p. 16.

As in the aesthetic sphere the ethicist was confronted by anxiety and despair at his inability to do that to which he had committed his life. "A spiritually honest person will forthrightly acknowledge that the self has failed to close the gap between what it is and what it ought to be."<sup>77</sup> Only in the sphere of the religious can the ethicist be a "becoming Christian." The ethicist takes the leap of faith out of the ethical "when one perceives the ethical no longer as one's guide for action, but as the temptation to trust in one's moral rectitude rather than in God - or in universal principles rather than in individual vocation."<sup>78</sup>

### 3. Religious Sphere

The religious sphere was the result of the normal ascension of a striving existing individual.

The normal life movement for an existing individual is from the esthetic, through the ethical to the religious. But this movement is not completed once for all, since existence poses the task of its incessant renewal. The existing thinker has esthetic passion enough to give his life content, ethical enthusiasm enough to regulate it, dialectic enough to interpenetrate it with thought. The esthetic is the raw material; the ethical posits the requirement and constitutes the principle of regulation; the religious is the fulfillment, but again not once for all, but as renewal reinstatement, and impulsive energy for the forward movement of existence.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>78</sup>González, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>79</sup>David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg, Pub. House, 1941), p. 77.

The religious sphere went beyond the aesthetic and the ethical,<sup>80</sup> and was exposed in relation to that which interests us infinitely.<sup>81</sup> Between the ethical and religious there was no continuity,<sup>82</sup> but rather a dreadful gap crossable only by a leap of faith. The religious sphere was ruled by absolute rules whereas the ethical by the universal. The person who lived at the religious level knew that God was above his commands, that God gave the commands but was above them. Therefore, faith in God for the religious man was critical. Faith in God meant that the religious man was willing to risk all for the sake of God. The universal laws were generally binding, but the absolute grasped the individual in a unique concrete situation and there made its singular demand. The religious man knew that God stood above his own law. Forgiveness of sin became the theological element in the third sphere.<sup>83</sup>

Faith is related directly to God, and not to his law. For this reason, the ethical person knows of the commandments of God, but not of his forgiveness. The religious person, on the other hand, knows both that God commands and that God forgives. Whereas the ethical person lives in despair and knows nothing but good and evil, the religious holds to faith which overcomes despair. Faith is indeed the opposite of despair, and therefore the only real sin is despair.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>The religious sphere is not the synthesis of the aesthetic and the ethical the way spirit is the synthesis of body and soul. Rather the religious is a separate sphere rejecting contingency upon the others.

<sup>81</sup>Tillich, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>82</sup>Hegel's system would have offered a mediation between the two but, of course, S.K. saw this as inconsistent with true human existence.

<sup>83</sup>González, op. cit., p. 339.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

This demanded that the religious man have absolute trust in God, which was the mark of the "Knight of Faith."<sup>85</sup> Faith characterized the life of the religious man because the Christian religion was a religion of faith.<sup>86</sup> God was the object of Faith as Kierkegaard saw it because we do not come to Him through objective knowledge but rather He came to us through our inwardness, thus making Him an object of Faith. Kierkegaard was not interested then in offering proofs for God, for "To defend anything is always to discredit it."<sup>87</sup> Kierkegaard detested the way contemporary philosophers and theologians had offered "proofs" for God's existence. This kind of logical exercise brought no internal suffering but resulted in an intellectual arrogance because of their cerebral calisthenics which lead to scholastic recognition rather than a fear of God.

So rather let us sin, sin out and out, seduce maidens, murder men, commit highway robbery - after all, that can be repented of, and such a criminal God can still get a hold on. But this proud superiority which has risen to such a height scarcely can be repented of, it has a semblance of profundity which deceives. So rather let us mock God, out and out as has been done before in the world - this is always preferable to the disparaging air of importance with which one would prove God's existence. For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront, since it is an

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<sup>85</sup>The "Knight of Faith" is a term coined by S.K. to describe the epitomy of Kierkegaard's philosophy. S.K. describes this individual thoroughly in "Fear and Trembling." Abraham emerges on these pages as the true "Knight of Faith." S.K. never became one because he lacked the courage. (Fear and Trembling, p. 82).

<sup>86</sup>Duncan, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>87</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p. 218.

attempt to make him ridiculous; but unfortunately people have no inkling of this and for sheer seriousness regard it as a pious undertaking. But how could it occur to anybody to prove that he exists, unless one had permitted oneself to ignore him, and now makes the thing all the worse by proving his existence before his very nose?<sup>88</sup>

It was S.K.'s contention that philosophy and religious faith were not able to be united. This was central to his criticism of the rationalistic excesses of Hegelianism that were developed by professional systematizers.<sup>89</sup>

Kierkegaard felt no need to defend God's existence. Man's response to God was to be one of absolute trust or faith. This meant for the religious man that while he was aware of the universal commands there may be particular situations that may be overcome by a higher command given by God. This "teleological suspension of the ethical" by the divine was unique to the true "Knight of Faith" which was exemplified by Abraham in relation to his son Isaac. Kierkegaard found the incident of Abraham about to kill his own son under the command of God, critical to his understanding of the religious, the ethical and the "religious." He wrote his "Fear and Trembling" in an attempt to answer the questions of both a theological and a philosophical nature, raised by this incident.

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<sup>88</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 485.

<sup>89</sup>Charles J. Kelly, "Essential Thinking in Kierkegaard's Critique of Proofs for the Existence of God," The Journal of Religion, 59 (April, 1979), p. 133. See the rest of this article for an analysis of Kierkegaard's rejection of proofs for God. It is the author's contention that Kierkegaard did not reject all proofs but the criticism comes from the perspective of essential thinking.

Kierkegaard stated;

If faith does not make it a holy act to be willing to murder one's son, then let the same condemnation to be pronounced upon Abraham as upon every other man. . . . The ethical expression for what Abraham did is, that he would murder Isaac; the religious expression is, that he would sacrifice Isaac; but precisely in this contradiction consists the dread which can well make a man sleepless, and yet Abraham is not what he is without this dread.<sup>90</sup>

There was no outward sign to indicate that one really did act under the "teleological suspension of the ethical" which intensified the dread the religious man felt when he acted. It was precisely through the dread that the "Knight of Faith" knew he had acted according to faith and not on the aesthetic level. His only recourse was to faith - and faith was always complex or problematic.<sup>91</sup> "Faith is always related to that which is not seen in the context of nature (physically contracted) to the invisible [unsynlige], in the spiritual context (spiritually) to the improbable [usandsynlige]."<sup>92</sup> For this reason, to be a Christian was difficult.

Anxiety, paradox and other elements of the Christian's experience were beneficial because they caused the individual to turn inward and through these elements realized ones need for faith which went beyond the objective to the belief in God. One had to believe

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<sup>90</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>91</sup>González, op. cit., p. 338. S.K. suggested that the "teleological suspension of the ethical" was the necessary result of heeding absolute obedience to God. This contravened the "categorical imperative" which rose up out of the universal as described and established by Kant.

<sup>92</sup>Hong and Hong, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 10.

in God because God was an object of religious faith rather than philosophical or rationalistic apprehension. God needed to be experienced rather than simply perceived. It was Kierkegaard's feeling that those with philosophical and theological proofs for God were really interested in having the paradox eliminated and having everything brought to a synthetic reconciliation.<sup>93</sup> Kierkegaard defended paradox;

One should not think slightingly of the paradoxical, for the paradox is the source of the thinkers passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity.<sup>94</sup>

There was a right way to prove God's existence, "for one proves his presence by an expression of submission, which may assume various forms according to the customs of the country - and thus it also proves God's existence by worship . . . not by proofs."<sup>95</sup> Kierkegaard gave no special advantage to those of great intellectual ability. All needed to remain submissive to the paradox. Thus, he felt that he had made men equally able to stand before God. To stand before God was to stand before the absurd, that which cannot be fully comprehended.

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<sup>93</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>94</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes Climacus], Philosophical Fragments, trans. David Swenson, Intro. and commentary by Niels Thulstrup, trans. revised and commentary translated by Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>95</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 485.

To keep his soul fixed upon the absurd; it is comparatively more difficult for a man if he has much understanding - if one will keep in mind that not everyone who has lost his understanding over Christianity thereby proves he has any. . . . Every man, the wisest and the simplest, can qualitatively . . . distinguish just as essentially between what he understands and what he does not understand . . . and he can discover that there is something which is, in spite of the fact that it is against his understanding and way of thinking.<sup>96</sup>

As an individual moved toward Christianity the goal Kierkegaard set out for him was "eternal happiness."<sup>97</sup> This goal, while in the highest realm of the religious sphere, was to be strived for through the transformation of the individual by pathos.<sup>98</sup> "In 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."<sup>99</sup> Kierkegaard proposed three conditions for the transformation of the individual by pathos.<sup>100</sup>

Resignation was named as the first condition. Through resignation the single individual liberated himself from finite goals and confronted the eternal. "But if, as a result of the inspection, resignation finds nothing in the way, it is a sign that in the moment

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<sup>96</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>98</sup>Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 293.

<sup>99</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 347.

<sup>100</sup>Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 293.



of inspection the individual does have a relationship to an eternal happiness."<sup>101</sup> For the religious man it meant, "the dying away from the life of immediacy while still remaining in the finite."<sup>102</sup> This cannot be enough for the religious man. He not only chooses the absolute but inwardly appropriated the absolute as his own.<sup>103</sup>

When the individual began to appropriate the absolute he discovered he was still bound to his relative goals. When he tried to extricate himself from this immediacy, suffering became the consequence and he realized his attachment of the temporal was the foundation of his suffering.<sup>104</sup> The realization that the infinite and the temporal cannot be mediated was true to the individual's experience, but fell short of the ideal. This realization produced suffering for the existing individual, and so religious suffering remained inevitable. The inevitability of religious suffering served as evidence to the existing individual and to God that the self was aware of its guilt (the result of inability to mediate the infinite and the temporal) and its determination to come to grips with it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 354. Resignation, while little recognized as the first condition, is spoken of by S.K. more extensively in his "Fear and Trembling" as "infinite resignation" in relation to Abraham. S.K. again refers to resignation in the Postscript but only marginally (p. 497).

<sup>102</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 386.

<sup>103</sup>Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 294. <sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Carnell, op. cit., pp. 133-135. Suffering, in a religious sense, has meaning only when it is experienced in daily life. See Concluding Unscientific Postscript, pp. 386-393.

Resignation was the first condition of transformation, suffering the second, and guilt the third. Guilt became critical for the religious sphere because it was a concrete expression of existence.<sup>106</sup> Guilt was not thought of in terms of quantity, (that is, the more you are guilty the more guilt you have) but guilt was present for the individual upon the first offense, the experience of dread. The experience of dread was the discovery of one's guilt and loss of innocence.

For human justice pronounces a life sentence only for the third offense, but eternity pronounces sentence the first time forever. He is caught forever harnessed with the yoke of guilt, and never gets out of the harness. . . .<sup>107</sup>

Kierkegaard saw admission of guilt as crucial to the religious stage but felt that the admission of "essential guilt" was necessary to bring into actuality authentic existence for the individual. Essential guilt is that guilt which one experiences and continues to experience as the result of his realization that he was not able to mediate the eternal. The standard by which one knew he was guilty did not stand outside the exister (as it did in the comparative consciousness of guilt) but was within inwardness.<sup>108</sup> "The consciousness

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>107</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 475. See also pages 471-473 for a detailed description of "totality - qualification" of guilt in the religious sphere.

<sup>108</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 473.

of guilt is the decisive expression for existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness."<sup>109</sup>

The Kierkegaardian concept of essential guilt took one a long way into the sphere of the religious. However Kierkegaard felt that the consciousness of essential guilt still lay in immanence, distinguishing it from the consciousness of sin. Immanence was regarded by Kierkegaard as an expression for Hegel's affirmation that thought and being are one, that the objective was the subjective and that thought or reason permeates all things. For Kierkegaard, this notion of immanence excludes all thoughts of transcendence.<sup>110</sup> This concept of immanence does not truly reflect reality, for human existence contains paradox and thought cannot penetrate paradox. The consciousness of essential guilt lay in immanence because while it lay in relationship to eternal happiness it was not decisive for the individual. Thought was able to penetrate essential guilt and bring it into understanding. Thought cannot penetrate the absurd or the paradox, therefore paradox is decisive for the exister. Only when the self is in relation to the paradox/absurd can the individual not escape the responsibility of seeing itself in relation to God, the absolute.

That is to say, the consciousness of sin still lies essentially in immanence, in distinction from the consciousness

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>110</sup>Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938) Appendix VII - "transcendence."

of sin. In the consciousness of guilt it is the selfsame subject which becomes essentially guilty by keeping guilt in relationship to an eternal happiness, but yet the identity of the subject is such that guilt does not make the subject a new man, which is the characteristic of the breach. But the breach, in which lies the paradoxical accentuation, cannot occur in the relationship between an exister and the eternal, because the eternal embraces the exister on all sides, and therefore the disrelationship or incompatibility remains within immanence.<sup>111</sup>

It was immanence within guilt that corrupted and limited the self. Even though the self may be fraught with guilt he was able to avoid the responsibility of seeing itself in relation to God, the absolute.<sup>112</sup> Essential guilt was not decisive for the individual.

Kierkegaard felt required to fulfill his responsibility to his vocation; that is to cause man to become an individual Christian. Therefore he pushed man into accepting the responsibility of coming into a relation with God the absolute. He used dread, dread of the good to fulfill this mission. Dread of the good was discovered in the consciousness of the religious when the religious realized it's ethical duty<sup>113</sup> was love. The self shrank from the responsibility of love because love called for the "non-judgemental sharing of life with life" which removed the self from the center.<sup>114</sup> The result of

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<sup>111</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 474.

<sup>112</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>113</sup>Kierkegaard made use of Kantian duty in his ethical concepts to describe the obligation of the individual Christian.

<sup>114</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 78.

shrinking away from the responsibility of love was dread of the good. When dread of the good appeared in the consciousness the exister had evidence within him that he was a sinner. Again the religious individual was confronted with the exhausting task of mediating the eternal in time.

Kierkegaard has helped the existing individual realize he was a sinner. Sin was linked to two existential concepts: (1) that finitude issues in moral ethical despair, and (2) that "Truth is subjectivity."<sup>115</sup>

Sin is this: before God, or with the conception of God, to be in despair at not willing to be oneself, or in despair at willing to be oneself. Thus sin is potentiated weakness or potentiated defiance: sin is the potentiation of despair.<sup>116</sup>

The first concept to which sin was linked generally accompanied flagrant transgressions of the law or universal while the second accompanied the more subtle arrogance of self-righteousness,<sup>117</sup> or was an offense to the absolute.

S.K. made it clear in his little book "The Sickness Unto Death" that the sickness of the sinner is despair and is "unto death."

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>116</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>117</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 79.

He had already stated that "despair is sin;"<sup>118</sup>

So also we can demonstrate the eternal in man from the fact that despair cannot consume his self, that this precisely is the torment of contradiction in despair. If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair; but if despair could consume his self, there would still be no despair.

Thus it is that despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death.<sup>119</sup>

The experience of despair for man was grounded in his "essential failure to live with singleness of mind toward that which is absolute.

Relief from despair comes only when the self is so governed by eternity that a radical transformation of the self results."<sup>120</sup> This transformation took place through love.

That which really makes a man despair is not misfortune, but it is the fact that he lacks the eternal; despair is to lack the eternal; despair consists in not having undergone the change of eternity by duty's "shalt." Consequently despair is not the loss of the beloved, that is misfortune, pain, suffering; but despair is the lack of the eternal.

For when it becomes impossible to possess the beloved in the temporal existence, then eternity says, "Thou shalt love," that is, eternity saves love from despairing just by making it eternal. . . . And when eternity says, "Thou shalt love," then it assumes the responsibility for guaranteeing that it can be done.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, op. cit., p. 240. Carnell in his book, *Burden of Søren Kierkegaard*, recapitulates three elements of sin important to S.K. 1. Sin is located in a defiant will 2. Sin is an existence - determinant 3. The possibility of sin increases the possibility of intellectual offence, p. 80.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>120</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>121</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 34-35.

a. Religiousness A and B

There remained one more mode of existence between the experience of despair and the "specifically Christian" religiousness which was characterized by the paradoxical and the absurd concept of God in time.<sup>122</sup> This barrier or element Kierkegaard called religiousness A while the ultimate or absolute religiousness was labeled religiousness B. The term immanent (A) and transcendent (B) indicated the distinctives existant between the two different forms of the religious.<sup>123</sup>

Religiousness A was characterized by immanence. The individual within religiousness A was "inwardly defined by self-annihilation before God,"<sup>124</sup> and thus acknowledged his total impotence. The individual within religiousness A was not far from the kingdom but he did fall short of true Christianity as exemplified by religiousness B.

While it was possible for religiousness A to exist in paganism;

For of religiousness A one may say that, even if it has not been exemplified in paganism, it could have been, because it has only human nature in general as its assumption.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>123</sup>Swenson, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>124</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 496.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 497.

It is also possible for it to be the "religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether he be baptized or no."<sup>126</sup> "Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before there can be any question of becoming aware of the dialectic of B."<sup>127</sup> Religiousness A was considered as a preparatory step to Christianity<sup>128</sup> (or religiousness B).

Religiousness A was dominated by the ethical-religious demands of Christianity. Religiousness B was "dependent upon the saving work of Christ, offered to the person who has exhausted his own possibilities."<sup>129</sup>

The defective element in religiousness A was its inability to go far enough. It remained a "heartfelt expression of a sense of God," but was not "conditioned by a definite something."<sup>130</sup>

Religiousness A makes the thing of existing as strenuous as possible (outside the paradox-religious sphere), but it does not base the relation to an eternal happiness upon one's existence but lets the relation to an eternal happiness serve as basis for the transformation of existence.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>128</sup>Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>130</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>131</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 509.



Kierkegaard thought that Socrates' ignorance, and the Socratic practice of gazing off into space as a form of communication with the divine was the best example of religiousness A.<sup>132</sup>

But how was one to bring himself to the place where he would be ready and successful in going beyond religiousness A? For Kierkegaard the answer was to be found in the biblical doctrine/account of the incarnation. This was evidenced in S.K.'s concept of the paradox. "The paradox consists principally in the fact that God, the Eternal, came into existence in time as a particular man."<sup>133</sup> Kierkegaard called this paradox the "absolute paradox" because he felt that through it, he had established: (1) the uniqueness of Christianity (2) the necessity of the "leap" of faith and (3) the want of any advantage in being rationally clever.<sup>134</sup>

Simply stated, the absolute paradox was the fact that God became man. This was an impossibility yet it occurred. To exist

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<sup>132</sup>Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 135. Religiousness A can also be thought of as the religion of Socrates while religiousness B as the religion of Jesus. Both are existential in their approach to God. They both are maieutic in methodology and their significance lay in their ability to do something to or bring about transformation in persons. However Socrates assumes that truth is present within every human being. It is simply the duty of the teacher (Socrates) to evoke it from man with maieutics and irony. Jesus is the only one able to transform in totality the being of another person. God (truth) is not in man but rather comes to man through Christ. Jesus is the teacher and Saviour who transforms man. Tillich, op. cit., pp. 171-172 and Livingston, op. cit., pp. 316-320. These concepts are addressed by S.K. primarily in the Philosophical Fragments.

<sup>133</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 529.

<sup>134</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 83.

Christianity was to live in relation to the absolute paradox.

Whenever one reasons in this fashion: "One cannot stop at the paradox because this is too small a task or too easy and indolent," then one must reply: "No, on the contrary, it is exactly the opposite, it is the most difficult thing of all, day in and day out, to relate oneself to something upon which bases one's eternal happiness, holding fast to the passion with which one understands that one cannot understand, especially as it is so easy to let this go in the illusion that now one has understood it."<sup>135</sup>

Religiousness B was the greatest mode of existence the individual could acquire. Because of its transcendent nature it bound man to it as he was no longer in the realm of the immanent. Although S.K. said he never attained this level he wished it passionately for his reader.<sup>136</sup>

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 the paradoxical religiousness. This paradoxical inwardness is the greatest possible, for even the most paradoxical determinant, if after all it is within immanence, leaves as it were a possibility of escape, of a leaping away, of a retreat into the eternal behind it; it is as though everything had not been staked after all. But the breach makes the inwardness the greatest possible.<sup>137</sup>

The transition between religiousness A and religiousness B occurred for the individual when he moved from one type of guilt consciousness. The first type of guilt consciousness was described in

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<sup>135</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 496 (n.)

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 495. S.K. stated here that he felt he had only attained the level of religiousness A but that he found this difficult enough.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 507.

"The Concept of Anxiety." This type of guilt caused the individual to see his own possibilities in the face of the guilt of the whole race. The second type of guilt-consciousness was set forth in the "Concluding Unscientific Postscript" where man saw his own impotence in the face of the eternal ethical requirement which resulted in his own inward acknowledgment of his own absolute guilt.<sup>138</sup> To become part of religiousness B required the single individual to "understand what it means to break thus with the understanding and with thinking and with immanence, in order to lose the last foothold of immanence, eternity behind one, and to exist constantly on the extremest verge of existence by virtue of the absurd."<sup>139</sup>

When one had reached the realm of religiousness B and was existing within it he was able to experience the expression of authentic faith because the self passionately and existentially believed in opposition to his own understanding and thereby came into relation with the absolute paradox.<sup>140</sup> Kierkegaard has made it clear that once one has reached religiousness B he had not arrived but still is constantly becoming, for the most difficult thing man could do was to exist in relation to the absolute paradox. It was through the activity of existing only, that caused one to become eternal.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Malantschuk, op. cit., p. 299.

<sup>139</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 505.

<sup>140</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>141</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 508.

The existence of the self within religiousness B was determined by the confrontation of the self with the absolute paradox. The possibility of an expression of faith was raised through the confrontation, and the awakened self enthusiastically leaped into the mysteries of the eternal.<sup>142</sup> The leap into the eternal had some risk attached. However, "without risk there is no faith."<sup>143</sup>

Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.<sup>144</sup>

And such was the task of the individual in religiousness B. Kierkegaard felt that it was a task attainable and performable by all: "First of all, everybody can become a Christian."<sup>145</sup>

The existence spheres have been important to Kierkegaardian understanding. He recapitulated the spheres so that the reader would be able to see the task clearly before him.

Immediacy, the aesthetic, finds no contradiction in the fact of existing: to exist is one thing, and the contradiction is something else which comes from without. The ethical finds the contradiction, but within self-assertion. The religiousness A comprehends the contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, although within immanence, but by

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<sup>142</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>143</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 520.

ethically accentuating the fact of existing it prevents the exister from becoming abstract in immanence, or from becoming abstract by wishing to remain in immanence. 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.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 507-508.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TRUTH IS SUBJECTIVITY

The concept of absolute paradox was central to Kierkegaard's thought. The counterpart to that theme was Kierkegaard's concept, "truth is subjectivity." This phrase was not intended to imply that there were not truths outside of the knower.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Kierkegaard was concerned with religious truth (faith) and it was this truth that was subjectivity. Kierkegaard wished to avoid any misconceptions that would make of religious truth an object of empirical knowledge. To suggest such a thing would remove the existing individual from his existential task, the appropriation of religious truth.

#### A. Objective/Subjective

Kierkegaard felt that the best way to recognize the positive was through the negative.<sup>2</sup> The objective therefore became the negative mirror by which Kierkegaard could reflect the subjective. It was against objectivity that Kierkegaard reacted because of its lack of passionate inwardness. The objective was thought of as out there,

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<sup>1</sup>James C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. Inc., 1971), p. 320.

<sup>2</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes Climacus], Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 474.

and was perceived without the interplay of feeling as opinion.<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard's distaste for the objective lay not in the reality of objective fact but rather with the ease by which one may appropriate the objective in the absence of any personal involvement. The objective was obvious all around, but when objectivity replaced the subjective in Christianity (a religion of faith) Kierkegaard's anger was kindled. Christianity was not an object for science to dissect but was a religion of faith that demanded the existing individual believe against his understanding and exist in relation to the absolute paradox which required his full being.

The absolute paradox or the incarnation was an objective fact. Kierkegaard accepted this, but insisted that the objective remained meaningless until it impacted the individual. The impact was the individual's responsibility, for "the subjective acceptance is precisely the decisive factor."<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard's concern with the objective rose out of his observation of Christendom in which man became dispassionate because of objectivity. "Objective thinking does not care at all about the thinker and finally becomes so objective that, like the customs clerk, it thinks that it merely has to do the writing, that the others have to do the reading."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>E.J. Carnell, The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit. p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, ed. trans., Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers IV (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 347.

S.K.'s singular use of the term objective differed somewhat with the contemporary usage. Objective, especially in the realm of thought, was abstract, that is, it was able to be completed and was about things in the world and not oneself. The subjective by contrast, could not be completed but was always becoming, true to its existential nature.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard illustrated the manner in which he meant the word objective.

The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation-process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness.<sup>7</sup>

To be objective meant to be disinterested "infinitely, personally and passionately," with that which happens to individuals.<sup>8</sup>

Kierkegaard freely admitted that Christianity was based on a series of objective historical events,<sup>9</sup> but he did not concede Christianity to the objective.

It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence. If its truth happens to be in only a single subject, it exists in him alone; and there is greater Christian

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<sup>6</sup>Groff and Miller, The Shaping of Modern Christian Thought, (Cleveland and New York: The World Pub. Co., 1968), p. 371.

<sup>7</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 508-512.



joy in heaven over this one individual than over universal history and the System, which as objective entities are incommensurable for that which is Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, to validate the historical data (through science, archaeology, etc.) of Christianity was useless in establishing the essential truth of Christianity. A Christian was able to rest in the objectivity of the historical facts and not mediate the truth of Christianity in the self.<sup>11</sup> He was able to live his life as usual and do nothing about the objective facts, remaining unchanged in their presence.

The answer to this tranquil but meaningless mode of existence was to come through the transformation of the existing individual. The transformation of the individual was contingent upon the re-orientation of the self in its relation to the truth.<sup>12</sup>

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 focused 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.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>11</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>12</sup>Kierkegaard felt the reason why man did not presently understand the "right" (subjective) concept of the truth was the fault of speculative philosophy, the result of Hegelian systematic. Speculative philosophy and objectivity are used synonymously, the latter describing the former. Thus, while speculative philosophy may technically be another category for the discussion of truth, a discussion of the objective adequately addresses the issue. See Postscript, pp. 49-55.

<sup>13</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 178.

It was made clear by S.K. in the footnote for this passage, that the truth he was speaking about was essential or eternal truth which was "related to existence."<sup>14</sup>

While objectivity failed for Kierkegaard because it did not engage the individual passionately through inwardness, it also failed because it did not confront the absolute. Objective, historical information, no matter how much, could never come to an absolute certainty or provide irrefutable proof. All it could do was come to an approximation and no more.<sup>15</sup> The historian or objective thinker was able to suggest Christianity as a problem of thought but could not address its truths, for "Christianity on the contrary is subjective; the inwardness of faith in the believer constitutes the truth's eternal decision. . . . Christianity is inwardness."<sup>16</sup>

Kierkegaard felt that those who espoused objectivity as a methodology by which one was to arrive at the (eternal) truth had confused knowledge with faith.

In this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith, the *ubique et nusquam* in which faith can come into being. Has anyone who previously had faith gained anything with respect to its strength and power? No, not in the least. Rather is it the case that in this voluminous knowledge, this certainty that lurks at the door of faith and threatens to

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 201.

devour it, he is in so dangerous a situation that he will need to put forth much effort in great fear and trembling, lest he fall a victim to the temptation to confuse knowledge with faith. . . . For if passion is eliminated, faith no longer exists, and certainty and passion do not go together. Whoever believes that there is a God and an over-ruling providence finds it easier to preserve his faith easier to acquire something that definitely is faith and not an illusion, in an imperfect world where passion is kept alive, than in an absolutely perfect world. In such a world faith is in fact unthinkable.<sup>17</sup>

Objective reality, for the individual, was not to be desired.

Kierkegaard asked him simply to respond to the action required by objective realities. The proper response was not "What is this?" but should be "What may I do about this?"<sup>18</sup> The objective did not pre-determine what the action of the subjective should be. The two are entirely distinct. The objective merely required that action be taken. The subjective decided through passionate inwardness what that action would be. Decision could only rise up out of freedom which necessarily existed in the subjective only. Objectivity became secondary as a result to subjectivity.<sup>19</sup> The individual must become aware of his freedom and his total responsibility for his own actions. When the individual possessed this awareness then he knew that the objective had dropped off and that he was gripped with the decisiveness of subjectivity.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>18</sup>Louis Mackey, Kierkegaard, A Kind of Poet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 173.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Becoming subjective suggested that one was on the way to the discovery of truth. The desire to enter subjectivity was to rise up out of the individual's realization that one's illusion of self-sufficiency was entirely false. The resultant despair caused the individual to become dependent upon God.<sup>20</sup> It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists.<sup>21</sup>

The question S.K. wished to confront in his "Concluding Unscientific Postscript " asked: "How can eternal truth be appropriated by one who exists and thinks in time?"<sup>22</sup> The first thing he rejected as a solution was the Hegelian<sup>23</sup> resolution (synthesis) of the thesis and antithesis. The only answer was to become subjective in one's search for the truth. Because the individual was finite, he was not able to conform his temporal existence to the eternal idea. Kierkegaard felt, however, that the existing individual could appropriate

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<sup>20</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>21</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 116. S.K. also argued with objectivity and its exponents concept of I-am-I which proposed that man step outside of the self to discover through empirical observation the objective reality of his being. Postscript, p. 176.

<sup>22</sup>Mackey, op. cit., p. 180. This question was really formulated and addressed on one level in the Philosophical Fragments. In the Postscript, S.K. continued the discussion carrying it deeper into the life of the individual. He stated "The subjective problem concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity," wherein is the truth (Postscript, p. 20). It is, of course, S.K.'s pseudonym that addressed the problem (Johannes Climacus).

<sup>23</sup>Hegelianism, speculative philosophy, objectivity, while all inter-related were the three enemies or detractors of the truth and thus suffered the polemical attacks of S.K.

the eternal truth. The constant striving for and dedication to the eternal truth allowed the exister to live the idea by allowing the idea to live within him.<sup>24</sup> There was to be no other truth that man could know. Moments of passion within the individual caused the truth to be realized, thus; "truth is subjectivity." "It is only momentarily that the particular individual is able to realize existentially a unity of the infinite and the finite which transcends existence. This unity is realized in the moment of passion."<sup>25</sup>

### 1. Passion

Passion for Kierkegaard was ". . . the highest expression of subjectivity."<sup>26</sup> If an existing individual had passion he had removed the stain of objectivity. "In absolute passion the individual is in the very extremity of his subjectivity, as a consequence of his having reflected himself out of every external relativity."<sup>27</sup> The depth of the passion cannot be determined by a third party. He may "understand him only generally with respect to the object of his passion,"<sup>28</sup> but the third party cannot understand him in the absoluteness of his passion.

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<sup>24</sup>Mackey, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>25</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 455.

The experience of passion was not greater than the discovery of eternal truth but was the expression of inwardness whereby eternal truth could be realized. "In passion the existing subject is rendered infinite in the eternity of the imaginative representation,"<sup>29</sup> and is closest to the eternal truth for "God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness."<sup>30</sup> Man can only know the truth through himself where passion and inwardness must abound, for "subjectively the truth exists for them [man] in inwardness, because the decisiveness of the truth is rooted in the subjectivity of the individual."<sup>31</sup>

Subjectivity culminated in passion. Christianity was paradox. "Paradox and passion are a mutual fit."<sup>32</sup> The question was not which gave rise to the other, but: "what was the relationship between them?" "The existing individual has by means of the paradox itself come to be placed in the extremity of existence [passion]."<sup>33</sup> The relationship between the two became more intensive through the inwardness of the existing individual. When passion became an expression of the eternal the passion of the infinite was itself the truth. By virtue of the

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<sup>29</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

passion involved; the truth could not be found objectively.

## 2. Faith

While passion was an inward expression of the eternal truth, Kierkegaard felt that one must move beyond passion. Passion signified the contradiction of one's existence, especially those felt emotionally between freedom and nature within the self. Paradox, which was in relationship with passion, indicated the contradictions experienced in thought.<sup>34</sup> Truth was the relation between passionate inwardness and paradox.

When subjectivity is truth, the conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis to objectivity, . . . this expression will at the same time serve as an indication of the tension of the subjective inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual. At the point where the way swings off . . . there objective knowledge is placed in abeyance . . . The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.<sup>35</sup>

Kierkegaard converted his definition of truth into a description of faith. As he had previously stated, subjectivity is truth. "By virtue of the relationship subsisting between the eternal truth and the existing individual, the paradox came into being."<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup>Mackey, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>35</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

paradox occurred when the eternal truth came into being in time. When the individual is confronted with the truth as paradox then he is "gripped in the anguish and pain of sin, facing the tremendous risk of the objective insecurity, [then] the individual believes. But without risk no faith."<sup>37</sup>

Kierkegaard believed there was a God but he was not knowable through objective uncertainty. Instead the existence of God was a subjective certainty because of the absurdity; "and this absurdity, held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith. . . . The absurd is - that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth."<sup>38</sup>

It was within and because of the absurdity that faith took on an incredible sense. Faith was to believe in that which was not understandable. "For the absurd is the object of faith, and the only object that can be believed."<sup>39</sup> Faith was in response to that which was beyond the objective, thus Johannes De Silentio remarked that "Faith is a miracle, and yet no man is excluded from it; for that in which all human life is unified is passion, and faith is a passion."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes De Silentio], Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 77.



It was precisely at this point that passion was related to faith. The "authentically human factor is passion . . . the highest passion in man is faith."<sup>41</sup>

Kierkegaard defined faith in a subjective fashion: "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."<sup>42</sup> He also equated his definition of truth with the expression of faith. While truth was defined as "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation - process of the most passionate inwardness."<sup>43</sup> . . . "faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty."<sup>44</sup>

The existing individual was not able to verify the existence of his faith through objective means. Since faith was equated with truth and truth was subjectivity, so was faith also subjective. To be able to verify one's own faith objectively required that one set aside his subjectivity in order to gaze inward upon his own understanding of faith. But the object of faith was the absurd, and since the absurd could, by nature, not be understood he learned that he no

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>42</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Anti-Climacus], The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954) p. 131. Kierkegaard felt that in order to define anything related to existence it must be defined subjectively. To offer an objective definition is to actually do less for the subject than no definition at all.

<sup>43</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

longer believed for he "almost knows, or as good as knows."<sup>45</sup>

The character of faith suggested that the absurd was the proper object for faith because the improbable requires belief while objective reasoning could reject it. "To believe against the understanding is something different, and to believe with the understanding cannot be done at all."<sup>46</sup> The nature of faith was to be seen in it's activity.

Faith always gives thanks, is always in peril of life, in this collision of finite and infinite which is precisely a moral danger for him who is a composite of both. The probable is therefore so little to the taste of a believer that he fears it most of all, since he well knows that when he clings to probabilities it is because he is beginning to lose his faith.<sup>47</sup>

Kierkegaard again wished to elucidate the nature of Faith by providing a description of its opposite or negative; sin.

But too often it has been overlooked that the opposite of sin is not virtue, not by any manner of means. This is in part a pagan view which is content with a merely human measure and properly does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as is affirmed in Rom. 14:23, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And for the whole of Christianity it is one of the most decisive definitions that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 208-209.

<sup>48</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p. 213.

This was the relationship between faith and sin. Kierkegaard defined sin as: "before God, or with the conception of God, to be in despair at not willing to be oneself, or in despair at willing to be oneself."<sup>49</sup> Faith was thought of as that condition of the self which frees from despair, was able to cast off speculation and objectivity to discover its essence in the absoluteness of God. Through this condition of faith the self became higher than the universal, a paradox.<sup>50</sup>

Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior - yet in such a way, be it observed, that it is the particular individual who, after he has been subordinated as the particular to the universal, now through the universal becomes the individual who as the particular is superior to the universal, for the fact that the individual as the particular stands in an absolute relation to the absolute.<sup>51</sup>

As has been stated, Kierkegaard had no quarrel with the universal (objectivity) so long as it remained within the appropriate disciplines of formal logic, mathematics etc. The polemical nature of S.K. sprang forth when the objective/universal swallowed up reality and thus reduced the existing individual to objective material. "Truth is subjectivity" was denied and disinterestedness set in for

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>50</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>51</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, op. cit., p. 66.

the individual.

Faith, the type of which Abraham possessed, rejected the universal in favor of living in relation to the absolute, for it was in such a relation only that faith can survive and increase. It was precisely the risk of living in such a relation that caused faith to increase.<sup>52</sup> It was the eternal character of "truth is subjectivity" that caused faith to break away from finitude and express itself towards the absolute paradox. Abraham was able to take Isaac up upon the mountain for a sacrifice because his faith was not limited to the universal but stood in relation to the absolute.

What a tremendous paradox faith is, a paradox which is capable of transforming a murder into a holy act well-pleasing to God, a paradox which gives Isaac back to Abraham, which no thought can master, because faith begins precisely there where thinking leaves off.<sup>53</sup>

Abraham did not understand the reasons for taking such an action for he knew that doing such a thing stood in opposition to the ethical. But it was precisely at this point that faith could become active, when the understanding had given way. Abraham realized that God, the absolute, had given the command and he had nothing to gain and everything to lose by a disputation with God. "He knew that it was God the Almighty who was trying him, he knew that it was the hardest sacrifice that could be required of him; but he knew also that no

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<sup>52</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>53</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, op. cit., p. 64.

sacrifice was too hard when God required it - and he drew the knife."<sup>54</sup> Because of his willful submission of the self to the absolute, Abraham was able to experience the peace of passionate, inward faith.

Since faith was a passion, the self committed everything to the absoluteness of God. The self will become more willing to trust all, thus the more constant and productive faith became. No longer was he to be simply a member of a group or some superficial element of the universal.<sup>55</sup>

Once the quality and the nature of faith was established, S.K. began to outline the task of faith. "Faith has in fact two tasks: to take care in every moment to discover the improbable, the paradox; and then to hold it fast with the passion of inwardness."<sup>56</sup> S.K. was not concerned particularly with the final activities of the existing individual that resulted in faith. Rather, it was the decisiveness of passionate inwardness, the affect that the passion of faith had upon the individual. The activity of the individual would be right if the self was purified through faith. The tasks of faith would insure that the self would continue to be "becoming" and thus truth too would be "becoming" subjectively.

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>55</sup>Carnell, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>56</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 209.

Not for a single moment is it forgotten that the subject is an existing individual, and that existence is a process of becoming, and that therefore the notion of the truth as identity of thought and being is a chimera of abstraction, in its truth only an expectation of the creature; not because the truth is not such an identity, but because the knower is an existing individual for whom the truth cannot be such an identity as long as he lives in time.<sup>57</sup>

The acquisition of faith was no small matter for it required the surrender of understanding. The surrender came about through the existential situation, the confrontation with the infinite in time. To have faith one needed to first exist then "if you do not have faith, then at least believe that you will indeed come to have faith - and then you do have faith."<sup>58</sup> God presented the existing individual with the promise of eternal life (which he needed). It was the believer who could experience the eternal happiness promised.<sup>59</sup> "It is precisely as a believer that he is infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, and it is in faith that he is assured of it."<sup>60</sup>

#### B. Truth is Subjectivity: The Essence

What has thus far been discussed may be thought of as the methodology by which one may come to the truth. Kierkegaard thought

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>58</sup>Hong and Hong, Journals, op. cit., (1970) Vol. 2, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

of the way by which one came to the truth as important as the arrival, for the individual was constantly "becoming" along with the truth he unwittingly possessed through his own subjectivity. It was the task of bringing the existing individual to that realization in which S.K. was engaged. But what was the essence of the concept: "truth is subjectivity?"

"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."<sup>61</sup> Being was not to be thought of as the ideal, essence etc. that are of an objective form. Rather being implied becoming, existence etc.: Thereby moving being into the realm of the subjective, existential. "Every qualification for which being [vaeren] is an essential qualification lies outside of immanent thought, consequently outside of logic."<sup>62</sup>

Thought and being were not able to come to conformity in reality.

As soon as the being which corresponds to the truth comes to be empirically concrete, the truth is put in process of becoming, and is again by way of anticipation the conformity of thought with being. This conformity is actually realized for God, but it is not realized for any existing spirit, who is himself existentially in process of becoming.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>62</sup>Hong and Hong, Journals, op. cit., (1967) Vol. 1, p. 80.

<sup>63</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 170.

All existence was in the process of becoming. Kierkegaard regarded "becoming" as part of his "subjective reflection" which also was an empirical approach. That is, the empirical approach of personal experience.

In subjective reflection the truth became a question of inwardness, of subjectivity.<sup>64</sup> "For a subjective reflection the truth becomes a matter of appropriation, of inwardness, of subjectivity, and thought must probe more and more deeply into the subject and his subjectivity."<sup>65</sup>

Objective reflection and subjective reflection were the two options for the existing individual as to how one might regard the truth. Simply because of the fact that it was an existing individual who posed such a question the objective was rejected for the objective laid outside of existence. The "subjective reflection turns its attention inwardly to the subject, and desires in this intensification of inwardness to realize the truth."<sup>66</sup>

The truth was never final and complete. It would have been if the individual were able to transcend himself. The individual was caught in time and was able to realize the eternal only momentarily through a union of the infinite and the finite in a moment of passion.<sup>67</sup> The individual was still in existence but had glimpsed the

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<sup>64</sup>Groff and Miller, op. cit., p. 371. S.K. also regarded objective thought as synonymous with abstract thought.

<sup>65</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 176.



truth as potentiated through the passionate inwardness of the self.

"It is 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."<sup>68</sup>

"At its maximum this inward "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."<sup>69</sup>

Because "subjectivity is truth," paradox became a reality for truth objectively which in turn demonstrated that indeed subjectivity is truth. Kierkegaard often used this technique of the negative to bring about the affirmative and he used it to describe the paradoxical character of truth. "The paradoxical character of the truth is its objective uncertainty: this uncertainty is an expression for the passionate inwardness, and this passion is precisely the truth."<sup>70</sup> "The truth is a snare; you cannot get it without being caught yourself; you cannot get the truth by catching it yourself but only by its catching you."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>71</sup>Hong and Hong, Journals, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 503.

The paradoxical nature of truth was the result of man in time while the truth was eternal. It was a tension between the infinite and the finite. God was the absolute paradox because of the incarnation and God was the eternal truth.<sup>72</sup> Man encountered the truth through the subjective experience of faith, but God directly gave the believer a full sense of certitude that he has encountered the truth. "God is the object of the truth, and the medium by which the truth is known."<sup>73</sup>

S.K. thought it was ridiculous to attempt to observe one's way to God, the truth. Natural theology brought one no closer to God for God does not exist within his creation. "Nature is, indeed, the work of God, but only the handiwork is directly present, not God."<sup>74</sup>

In like manner, it was ridiculous to approach God through theistic proofs. "To attempt to think one's way to God is the supreme case of thoughtlessness."<sup>75</sup> These sort of approaches to God result in nothing but paganism. The pagan thought he could approach God without any inwardness or subjectivity and it was precisely here that the truth lay.

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<sup>72</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>73</sup>Bernard Ramm, Varieties of Christian Apologetic (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 59.

<sup>74</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>75</sup>Ramm, op. cit., p. 60.

God remained elusive, "precisely because He is the truth, and by being elusive desires to keep man from error."<sup>76</sup> Man was forced to seek for God. While he sought for God he reflected upon the reasons for such a search. This reflection caused him to realize that his own depravity was the barrier or the reason for God's elusiveness.<sup>77</sup> Once man has made this first admission or realization he has made his first step of inwardness, for "God is a subject and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness."<sup>78</sup>

God was able to be known only by the individual "stripped naked" of all his previous thoughts and standing "precisely in his isolation before God."<sup>79</sup> It was not the community that brought the truth, rather the individual found it through passionate inwardness in isolation, apart from the community. "In order to become aware of the truth it is necessary to have apartness ("Christ took him aside"), apartness from the crowd. And this alone is sufficient to make a man anxious and more afraid than he is of death."<sup>80</sup>

The individual who desired God, the truth, suffered great pain because he realized the dialectical difficulty of such a task. It was at that very instant that he had God "by virtue of the infinite passion of inwardness."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>77</sup>Ramm, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>78</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>80</sup>Hong and Hong, Journals, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 503.

The paradoxical finite and the infinite, the incarnate Christ the God/man, the eternal truth in time all made up "subjectivity is truth." Kierkegaard realized that man would never understand this, and that was good for it drove man to God. God, the absolute ideal, could understand for "it is he who is outside of existence and yet in existence, who is in eternity forever complete, and yet includes all existence within himself - it is God."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### A. Søren Kierkegaard: The Father of Existentialism

The impact of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy was little felt in his lifetime outside of his immediate influence in Copenhagen. It wasn't until the very early years of the twentieth century that Kierkegaard began to have his impact. It was directly after the first world war that Kierkegaard's philosophy became known throughout Europe.<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth contributed largely to this interest in S.K. through his incorporation of Kierkegaardian philosophy into his theological method. When Barth dropped his "bombshell" commentary on Romans in 1919<sup>2</sup> on the theological community, the movement commonly known as Neo-orthodoxy was born and an interest in Kierkegaardian thought was sparked.<sup>3</sup>

The force with which S.K.'s thought hit the twentieth century was obvious when one realized the influence Neo-orthodoxy had on this

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<sup>1</sup>Livingston, James C., Modern Christian Thought (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 311-312.

<sup>2</sup>Hordern, W.E., A Laymans Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1955), p. 130.

<sup>3</sup>Tillich, Paul, A Complete History of Christian Thought (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1968), see pp. 172-173 for a short summary of the thought relationship between S.K. and Karl Barth.

century. Some of the greatest contemporary theological thinkers were part of this movement. Such men as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, Reinhold Niebuhr and others represented Neo-orthodoxy and were responsible for its prominence in modern thought and life. Kierkegaard largely shaped the spirit and basic motifs of dialectical theology by which Barth and other Neo-orthodox theologians expressed themselves and did their work. Kierkegaardian dialectics became the *sine qua non* of Neo-orthodoxy theology.

Kierkegaard has been regarded as the "Father of Modern Existentialism."<sup>4</sup> Existentialism permeated German, French and other European philosophies. Kierkegaard would have appreciated the fact that existentialism first found expression in theology. However, the contemporary existential scene has used existential thought in atheistic secular philosophies as well as theological thought. Martin Heidegger largely secularized Kierkegaard's thought. The contemporary existentialists, Jean Paul Sartre<sup>5</sup> and Camus, popularized existentialism through their writings and novels which really resulted in a philosophy of despair and meaninglessness, far from S.K.'s hopes and intentions. It was Kierkegaard's intention that through existential interpretation Christianity would become meaningful for the believer.

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<sup>4</sup> Rohde, Peter, "Søren Kierkegaard: The Father of Existentialism," Essays on Kierkegaard ed. Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess Pub. Co., 1969), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Copleston, F.S.J. A History of Philosophy, Vol. 7, part II, (Garden City: Image Books, 1965), pp. 207, 210.

Kierkegaard's thought has resulted in both positive and negative effects in philosophy, theology and ultimately in life as lived by the individual. It would appear that much of what Kierkegaard thought has been misinterpreted. Certainly it has been perverted from the original intent Kierkegaard had which was to bring man into relationship with God; not to deny the essential existence of God. While Kierkegaard may be faulted for some of the misinterpretation and perversion of his thought because of his insistent use of indirect communication and obscurity, much of the fault falls at the feet of those who would first deny God's existence and then come to Kierkegaardian existentialism. Kierkegaard made God his first presupposition and moved forward from there. If man did not find God it was because he lacked the passionate inwardness by which God was discovered subjectively.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this was Kierkegaard's strength as well as weakness. We can say "yes" to some elements and "no" to other elements of his thought.

#### B. Yes

1. Kierkegaard sought to return the individual to a position of importance. Hegelian systematics had placed society above the individual, thus reducing individual responsibility and making anonymity in the world desirable.

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<sup>6</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, [Johannes Climacus] Concluding Unscientific Postscript trans. D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 485.

S.K. saw only the individual and felt this was a primary category. The mass removed the uniqueness of the individual and thus destroyed Christianity.

Why did I make such a great, great fuss about the category of individuality? Very simply, through this and by this stands the cause of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual superiority sees only single individuals. Alas, generally we human beings are sense-dominated - therefore, as soon as there is a gathering of people, the impression changes and we see an abstraction, the mass - and we become changed.

But for God, the infinite spirit, all these millions who have lived and are living do not form a mass - he sees only single individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The group had become the primary category. If there was to be a reformation in category the individual had to become the primary emphasis. People do not become Christians simply by belonging to a particular group. One can come to God only by a personal appropriation of faith. This would insure the individual's responsibility for his own spiritual well being. Christianity was not an all inclusive cloak that covered up sin and swept the unbeliever under its protection. Rather, faith was a decisive act of the will, brought to fruition through passionate inwardness.

Much of S.K.'s category of the individual may be regarded as positive, for it has swung the pendulum away from an easy, nominal

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<sup>7</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers ed. and trans. H.V. & E.H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), Vol. 2, p. 399.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Vol. 1, (1967) p. 414.



Christianity that made no difference in the life of the believer. The pendulum swung towards the responsible individual decision by which one becomes a Christian and lives as a Christian: a dramatic transformation in the life of the believer.<sup>9</sup>

2. Kierkegaard developed the response of faith as the necessary or essential response of the believer. He offered Abraham of the Old Testament as the prime example of faith and dubbed him the "Knight of Faith." The response of the believer prior to S.K. was no response at all. The church assumed the responsibility for the individual, thereby making the individual response of faith completely unnecessary.

Kierkegaard was right in asserting that without a personal response of faith, the individual is not in possession of true Christianity. The real contribution of Kierkegaard at this point was his insistence upon the existential nature of faith. The book of James declared that faith without works is dead. Kierkegaard made it clear that this was so. Faith that lay outside of the individual ceased to be faith, for faith found its expression through the life activities of the believer. Faith, to be regarded as faith, must be part of the believers existential situation, else it is useless.

Faith, rather than virtue as stated by Kierkegaard, was indeed the opposite of sin. Sin is the cause of the broken relationship between man and God. The activities of virtue, while good and

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<sup>9</sup>It is true that Kierkegaard has been accused of swinging the pendulum too far in favor of the individual. This question will be addressed first under Yes item #3 - Truth is Subjectivity. It will also be addressed under No item #1 - Exaggerated individualism.

commendable, are important in reconciling man to God. Reconciliation is possible only through faith for "by grace are you saved through faith." (Ephesians 2:8).

Because of his insistence in this regard Kierkegaard wrested the legalistic notion that "virtue gains righteousness" from its moorings and set decisive faith in its place. Kierkegaard pointed out that the believer's response must be one of faith in order to be a believer.

3. One of Kierkegaard's major contributions to thought has been in regard to his primary thesis, "truth is subjectivity." While one may disagree with some of Kierkegaard's conclusions, he has clearly pointed out the differences between the objective and subjective.

Kierkegaard is right when he emphasizes the subjective nature of religious knowledge. While we may not go all the way with Kierkegaard, we must understand that there is a place in our understanding of God where objective knowledge drops off and subjective faith brings one into relationship with God. Contemporary Christianity seems to feel an obligation to defend the elements of faith in Christianity in an objective fashion to a society which worships science and deplores the paradoxical, the mysterious. However, as S.K. has so ably pointed out, the objective proof for God's existence can only end in approximation. The final step must be subjective through faith. Therefore, at least in this sense, truth is subjectivity.

Because, for Kierkegaard, truth is subjectivity, he has been

accused of leading theology into radical subjectivity and advocating irrationalism. That Kierkegaard's position can lead to these things is absolutely true. That Kierkegaard himself was guilty of these is doubtful. In Book One of the Postscript S.K. made clear that religious truth can be known objectively but that it is totally inadequate. True Christianity moves much further, demanding that the believer appropriate the truths for himself and live in relation to those truths.

Kierkegaard does have irrational elements in his thought. However, this is not because of his dislike for reason. He was fully aware of the capabilities of human reason and appreciated reason's abilities. His concern was with the limits of human reason. The pretensions of the rationalists caused him to be aware of the limits of reason and the need to avoid the pride of intellect. Real understanding is that which understands there are things in the world that defy rational explanation. Paradox exists only for the existing individual, but in God "the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself a paradox."<sup>10</sup>

#### C. No

1. While one of the great contributions of Kierkegaard was the emphasis upon the individual in the face of the mass, an exaggerated individualism began to emerge. The individual was a solitary

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<sup>10</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Postscript, op. cit., p. 183.

individual who was to stand alone before God.

This individualism is too extreme for it does not take into account the doctrine of the church, the universal priesthood of all believers etc. One reads Kierkegaard in vain to discover any discussion of corporate worship, Christian fellowship, discipleship of the new believer by the body, or the Church as the body of Christ as described in Ephesians. As Kierkegaard admitted, man is a social creature. Instead of isolating oneself, involvement with others is the Christian ideal. One need not become part of the mass to involve himself with others. Individualism may be maintained despite the efforts of the mass because one is in true relationship with God. The fulfillment of Matthew 28:19-20 cannot come about in isolation.

Exaggerated individualism also altered S.K.'s perception of reality. While he did accept some objective reality it was always inferior to subjective reality. The unimportance of objective reality resulted in the symbolic Christianity of Schweitzer, Bultmann and others. Subjective reality must be dependent upon the foundation of objective reality. If this is not so then Christ's death upon the cross need not have really happened so long as we have the symbol of his death within Christian theology - a house does not need a foundation so long as we have the symbol of a foundation within our being.

Kierkegaard's inwardness distorted reality by causing the elements of reality to be stretched out of proportion. S.K.'s inward reflections upon even the most minuscule reactions of Regine

frequently resulted in unrealistic assumptions concerning motives and intentions. The reality that is only inward is inadequate. The subjective and objective should serve each other, establishing a creative tension between the two, resulting in a balanced perception or reality. Reality becomes existentially meaningful but is not distorted beyond recognition.

2. Kierkegaard's ethical theory suggested a teleological suspension of the ethical as the "Knight of faith's" response to the absolute or God. Teleological suspension of the ethical was intended to accentuate the absoluteness of God but instead reduced God the absolute, to god the relative.

Kierkegaard regarded Abraham as the true "Knight of faith." When Abraham willingly intended to kill his own son, he was acting in what Kierkegaard called the "teleological suspension of the ethical." However, if God is absolute as Kierkegaard admitted, then God is also perfect. He established his ethical laws as the ethical absolute by which to govern man. While God may be above his own law, his law is not inadequate for man, for he does not create or establish inadequate things, only man's willful perversion can destroy the perfect. Therefore, for God to suspend His own ethical laws demands that God admit to His own inadequacy and renege on his established law and temporarily establish a new law dependent upon the human, temporal situation. Therefore God was subservient to His own creation, and even the absolute became relative.

Teleological suspension of the ethical has left the door open for situation ethics. All the standards by which one measures the

rightness or wrongness are relative. As Kierkegaard suggested, one may be in the truth and yet be related to an untruth. In this sort of ethical relativity one is not so concerned with the what of a decision but rather the how of a decision. Did the decision to do a particular thing come about through passionate inwardness involving the whole being? - if so, then one is in the truth.

While one should be existentially involved with a decision, the subjective process of decision should be consistent with the objective reality of the decision to determine the wrong or right. When an ethical law or absolute is violated then situation alone determines the ethical decision governed by a relative interpretation of the law of love.

3. Kierkegaard had many brilliant insights on the subject of faith, already alluded to. However, he was content with a most inadequate relation between faith and objective/public evidences for the Christian religion. He asserted that faith is based on risks and the more risks the more faith one is exercising. Faith is therefore founded not in the objective reality of the object of faith - God, but instead desires to heighten the risk or absurdity of the object of faith, - God, who is the absolute paradox.

If we use this reasoning then the imagination can surely conjure something up besides the absolute paradox, the incarnation, which demands more risk. Perhaps we should assert that Christ possessed two heads and flew airplanes. This would indeed increase the absurdity and thus the risk of faith, but it is preposterous and is unbelievable

because it is contrary to the sufficiency of the evidences.

The Christian may respond passionately with faith regarding the element of Christianity but this does not raise the sense of certainty. The Christian should believe passionately but the belief is founded in the sufficiency of the evidences for the Christian faith. The act of living a Christian life is existential proof that one is experiencing a state of certainty. The passion of faith is the result of observing the sufficiency of the evidences and the object of faith.

Fortunately Kierkegaard has contributed much more to the life of faith than he has detracted from it. He has called man to a type of existence that few have the courage upon which to embark. Kierkegaard knew that the easy was not worth having.

Kierkegaard was a genius in his ability to bring man closer to God, and God closer to man. His guiding rule was that an absolute devotion should be given to an absolute telos, and a relative devotion to a relative telos. With the help of this rule, Kierkegaard succeeded in defining an existential approach to the existing individual. This approach is exciting, to say the least.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Carnell, E.J., The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: 1965), p. 172.

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