Kierkegaard and Belief

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KIERKEGAARD AND BELIEF

by

James Joseph Dagenais, S.J.

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

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LIFE

James Joseph Dagenais was born in Blue Island, Illinois, June 12, 1928.

He was graduated from St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1946, and entered the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio, in September of the same year.

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At present, the writer is pursuing the study of theology at West Baden College in preparation for the priesthood.
PREFACE

Several years of association with the subject-matter of the thesis has taught the author that he is presenting only a brief introduction to Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion. In spite of this limitation, however, the thesis may appear to the reader to be too lengthy. It was thought best, therefore, to omit an expanded treatment of Kierkegaard's life and the background of the times in which he lived. The interested reader may find this information in the following works: E. L. Allen, Existentialism From Within, (London, 1953), pp. 3-7; Walter Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard (Princeton, New Jersey, 1944), pp. 1-16; H. V. Martin, Kierkegaard, The Melancholy Dane (London, 1950), pp. 24-33; Denzil Patrick, Pascal and Kierkegaard (London, 1947), pp. 1-40; Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (Princeton, New Jersey, 1948), pp. 3-7.

The word "Belief" is used in the title to signify that the primary occupation of the thesis is with the psychological and ontological character of human belief, and not with Supernatural Faith.

Very special thanks are due to the Reverend Robert F. Harvensak, S.J., of West Baden College and to the Reverend Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., of Loyola University for their kindness and helpfulness, and to Mrs. C. P. Culhane, of Detroit, Michigan, for undertaking the task of typing the final copies.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 5, 1813, the seventh and last child of Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard and Ane Sørensdatter Lund Kierkegaard. Ane was Michael Kierkegaard's second wife (his first wife having died childless after two years of married life), and had been a maid-servant in his home. The father, Michael Kierkegaard, had risen from the status of a hungry shepherd boy on the West Jutland heaths to a position of wealth as a hosier in the city of Copenhagen. At the age of forty, thirteen years before the birth of Søren, he decided that he had earned enough money to live the rest of his life in retirement. He spent his time thereafter reading and pondering religious and philosophical questions. ¹

Michael Kierkegaard was a man of deep and brooding disposition, given to ceaseless introspection. As a boy, he had cursed God for allowing him, a poor and hungry shepherd to suffer so much without coming to his aid. He looked upon his later prosperity as God's answer to his curse, signifying that his guilt was so great that it could never be atoned for in this life, but would be punished only in eternity. When his youngest child was born, he decided

that the boy was to be the means of reconciliation between himself and God as a kind of sacrifice. He resolved, therefore, to bring up his son to accept from God's hand his mysterious fate.  

The relationship between father and son became intimate and rather unusual. One feature of their companionship was the "indoor walks" which they took together in imagination. During these walks, as they paced back and forth across the room, the elder Kierkegaard would describe vividly and minutely everything they "saw" and everyone they "met" on the way. When he was old enough to do so, the boy joined in the descriptions, and the two would construct a fantasy, in which they followed various routes through the city, met and conversed with friends, and "if they went along well-known ways, they watched each other sharply to see that nothing was overlooked." The father insisted that every detail of the walk be as sharply reproduced and as true to life as possible.

It was during these imaginary walks that young Søren Kierkegaard developed the vivid and forceful imagination which he displays in all his writings, and which, because of its exactitude, conjures up for the reader clear and spontaneous pictures of real life. His father's insistence upon exactness also developed in the boy a remarkable precision in speech and expression, which fills his works with the accents of life.

In addition to joining his father on imaginary walks, Søren was also permitted to be present at conversations on theological topics which his father

\[2 \text{ Ibid.}, 25.\]

often held with others. At these times, said Kierkegaard later, his father "combined with his almighty imagination an irresistible dialectic," which impressed the youth, and upon which he modelled his later writings.

The third, and most important, influence which Michael Kierkegaard exercised upon his youngest son was through training in Christianity. He tried to give the child as early as possible an "impression of Christ." From his father's program of training, Kierkegaard formed two convictions: "First, he felt that he was destined to suffer in this world, that he was a sacrifice who could not expect to partake in what people usually understand as a happy life; and, secondly, he felt offence at Christianity and in revolt against God, because He had made the world as it is, and put such demands on men. . . . He never wholly succeeded in resolving this anomaly."

From his father, then, Kierkegaard received a vivid and meticulous imagination, a passion for dialectics, and a sense of dedication to suffering. In his own words, he "went into life favoured in every way as regards intellectual abilities and outward prosperity," but marred with the inheritance of his father's brooding and introspective spirit. This broodiness was to color his whole production as an author and to influence profoundly his whole life.

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5 Hohlenberg, p. 38.
6 Ibid., 174
8 Ibid.
He entered the University of Copenhagen in 1830, but his study was desultory. He finished the prescribed undergraduate courses, and entered the school of theology out of deference to the wishes of his father and the example of his older brother. He spent most of his time, however, in "a wide assortment of aesthetic studies and read much fiction (especially the German Romanticists)," and his spare hours were occupied in visits to the Student Union, the coffee shops and theatres. His whole conduct was that of the typical rich man's son, for whom study was a bore.

During his stay at the university, his mother, one brother, and two sisters died. (One sister had died many years before.) These deaths did not affect the young Kierkegaard, but they affected his father profoundly; and some time between 1835 and 1837, in a drunken state, he revealed to his son Søren two secret sins which he had committed: first, that he had cursed God in his boyhood; second, that Søren's mother had been pregnant at the time of her marriage to Michael Kierkegaard, and that the wedding had taken place only a few months after the death of his first wife. The shock of these revelations, together with the sudden recollection that he himself had visited a brothel while in an intoxicated state, awakened the young man to the necessity of a moral regeneration. He turned seriously to study; but he studied aesthetics exclusively, and abandoned theology.

In 1838 the elder Kierkegaard died. This event proved to be the occasion for a spiritual regeneration in Søren's life. He returned to the study of

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9 Hohlenberg, p. 45.
theology and passed his examinations on July 3, 1840. There is no record of his being ordained for the ministry at this time, or later.

During the same year, 1840, he became engaged to Regine Olsen, who was seventeen years old at that time; but after the engagement, he found that he could not bring himself to go through with the marriage. His feeling of guilt for his own sins, his supposed sharing in his father's guilt, and his inherited brooding disposition, all hindered him from wishing to share his life with her. Basically, he felt that he had a mission to perform in the world, and that to ask her to share the persecution which he was sure would accompany that mission would be an injustice to her. He resolved to set her free from any attachment to him by acting boorishly and adopting a cynical manner toward her, so that she would come to hate and despise him.

In 1841 the engagement was broken, with much pain on both sides, which Søren for his part resolved not to show. Regine's attachment to him continued until her death, more than sixty years later. He remained faithful to her, though she married another and moved to South America; and many of his writings are cryptic messages of explanation to her.

After Kierkegaard's broken engagement, there followed a fruitful period of writing, largely concerned with anti-Hegelian tracts. This period of Kierkegaard's life will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

In 1840 there was founded in Copenhagen a witty and impudent newspaper called the Corsair. Its editorial policy was to caricature, through articles

10 Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 78.

and cartoons, the political figures of the day, and anyone else who incurred the displeasure of its editors. In 1846, P. L. Møller, a secret and powerful member of the Corsair's staff, began a bitter and derisive attack upon the books of Kierkegaard, writing in the pages of a periodical called Gaea, an aesthetic annual. Kierkegaard answered through a newspaper called the Fatherland. Møller's attack spread to the pages of the Corsair, which, under the editorship of one Meyer Goldschmidt, began a relentless campaign of ridicule and persecution against Kierkegaard. By 1848 the Corsair's ruthless campaign of ridicule had been successful, largely because Kierkegaard's personality, with his peculiar appearance, dress, habits, and speech, was an inexhaustible source of derision. The whole town of Copenhagen turned against Kierkegaard; but Møller was discredited when Kierkegaard made public Møller's secret connection with the Corsair and revealed some unsavory facts about Møller's private life. Møller lost his chance to be considered for the post of Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Copenhagen. Goldschmidt, stricken with remorse at his own part in deriding a man whom he really admired, sold his paper, which soon failed and ceased publication.

His conflict with the Corsair influenced Kierkegaard profoundly. First, he began to realize and formulate more clearly the idea of his "Christian collision"; and the persecution which he suffered from the whole populace seemed to him the proof that his life was consistent with his doctrines. Secondly, he began to see himself as "the extraordinary," one chosen for a special task outside the false "universality" of organized religion.  

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See also Hohlenberg, pp. 185-187
After a brief interlude, during which he studied intently the case of A. P. Adler, a pastor who had been dismissed in 1845 from the State Church of Denmark for claiming to have had a revelation from Christ Himself, Kierkegaard meditated and wrote upon the subject of the teaching authority of the established church, and reached the conclusions which were to guide his thinking for the rest of his life: "The recognition of these three things, the difference between the ordinary individual and the extraordinary, the distinction between the concepts genius and Apostle, and the antithesis between Christianity and Christendom was what Kierkegaard gained from occupying himself with the Adler affair." \(^{13}\)

At this point, he gave up writing aesthetic works, except very occasionally, and became an open champion of what he termed "Christianity" in contrast with "Christendom." He set forth the claims of Christianity clearly, showing that its appeal was a demand for personal commitment on the part of the individual, in *Sickness Unto Death*, and examined the contrast between true Christianity and the meaningless Christendom organized by the State Church of Denmark, in *Training in Christianity*.

In 1854 Kierkegaard began his open attack against the established religion of Denmark, and in 1855 he began publishing a series of pamphlets under the general title, *The Instant*, to carry his polemical opinions. *The Instant* was published over a period of four months, and the last issue was printed on

\(^{13}\) Hohlenberg, pp. 195-196.
September 24, 1855, about two months before his death.

On October 2, 1855, overworked and overwhelmed by this conflict, he fell seriously sick, and was confined to bed in a Copenhagen hospital for a little over a month before he died. On his deathbed he refused to receive Holy Communion unless administered to him by a layman; but he prayed to God to be forgiven for his sins, and to be free from despair at the hour of death. He acknowledged his trust in God's grace through Christ, and he died on November 11, 1855.

At his funeral, his brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard, an ordained minister, conducted the services and delivered the funeral oration. But at the graveside, the ceremony of interment was interrupted by Kierkegaard's nephew, Henrik Lund, who protested in the name of his uncle, and in his own name, against this participation in the worship prescribed by the official church of Denmark, against which Kierkegaard had so passionately fought.

Thus, Søren Kierkegaard, the focal point of conflict even after his death, passed away. He was an extraordinary and profound thinker, a man gifted with the genius of a vivid and forceful imagination, and with outstanding powers of speech and argument, a man of brooding and melancholy temperament. He saw himself as the extraordinary champion of individuality against the functionalization of man, as the spokesman for individual commitment to Christ against the organized Christendom of the Danish church. He became, like Socrates, a sign of contradiction to his contemporaries, and a permanent center of controversy even to our own day.

The literature produced by Kierkegaard is extensive and varied but may be
conveniently divided into three categories, which "follow naturally upon one another, both chronologically and by reason of their contents." They are the pseudonymous, the polemical, and the devotional writings.

The pseudonymous works may be divided into three classes: first, the aesthetic works: Either/Or, Repetition, Fear and Trembling, the Concept of Dread, and Stages on Life's Way. These works trace the progress of the spirit (and of Kierkegaard's own spirit) from an irresponsible preoccupation with sensuous pleasures to the realization of the necessity of religious conversion through a personal act of choice. The second group of pseudonymous writings includes his strictly philosophical works, Philosophical Fragments, which states his theses on becoming, on historicity, and on belief, and the Concluding Unscientific Postscripts to the Philosophical Fragments, which presents, first, Kierkegaard's objections to any attempt to systematize thought, and his thesis that the relationship of man to God is necessarily a subjective one; secondly, his philosophy of religion and his analysis of the concepts of reality and truth. The Postscript was originally intended to be the last of Kierkegaard's writings but it actually occupies the central position in the collection of his works.


15 See Patrick, II, 221-230 for an admirable summary and explanation of the contents of this work. See also Croxall, Commentary, 164-194.


After the attack upon him by the Corsair, which followed the publication of the Postscript, he decided to abandon pseudonymity, but to continue writing in his own name as a champion of true Christianity against the emasculated Christian religion as organized in Denmark. A third group of pseudonymous writings appeared later, however, in the form of polemical tracts. These included Training in Christianity, Sickness Unto Death, and Two Ethico-Religious Treatises.

The second category of his writings, the strictly polemical works, followed the Corsair incident: For Self-Examination, Judge For Yourselves (which was not published until 1876), An Attack Upon Christendom, The Present Age, and the issues of The Instant.

The third, and most interesting, category, the devotional works, include the large number of Edifying Discourses and Christian Discourses, together with three Discourses on Imagined Occasions and The Works of Love. Kierkegaard was careful to issue these devotional discourses in his own name. When one of his pseudonymous works was published, a little devotional work accompanied its publication. Kierkegaard continued this practice throughout the whole period of his authorship, from his first work, Either/Or, until the publication of The Instant. The reason for this was Kierkegaard's anxiety to show, when he finally revealed himself as the author of the pseudonymous works, that he had been, from first to last, a religious thinker and writer, concerned only with the problem of becoming a Christian.

18Kierkegaard, The Point of View, pp. 13, 22, 42-43, 92, 149. See also Patrick, II, 159.
In an additional appendix to his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, entitled "A First and Last Declaration," Kierkegaard formally acknowledged authorship of all his pseudonymous writings, and for the benefit of those who wondered at this strangely involved type of authorship, explained that his pseudonymity was essential to the production of his writings, which "poetically required regardlessness in the direction of good and evil, of contrition and high spirits, of despair and presumption, of suffering and exultation, etc., which is bounded only ideally by psychological consistency, and which real actual persons in the actual moral limitations of reality dare not permit themselves to indulge in, nor could wish to." 19

The reason, therefore, for the pseudonymous character of Kierkegaard's early writings lies in his own literary plan: to present viewpoints consistent with the characters of imagined speakers taking extreme positions with regard to the topics under discussion. These characters, completely determined but imaginary, would present the aesthetic and ethical viewpoints of life until Kierkegaard was prepared to produce his own work, *The Point of View of My Work As An Author*, in which he rendered an account of the plan and cohesiveness of his work, but which was not published until 1859, four years after his death, although a short summary of it was published during his lifetime under the title, *On My Work As An Author*.

Perhaps a more profound meaning of this involved an mysterious method of writing lies first of all in his basic point of view, which demanded that any

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author present himself to his readers as actually existing in his own thought, and living out his ideals in his own life. He complained of the divorce of life and thought in his own day, saying that the philosopher built a beautiful palace of thought, and yet lived in a kennel nearby. Therefore, only the ideas which he himself tried to live out to the fullest extent were to be written in his own name; his reflections on the aesthetic and ethical life were embodied by suitable characters, and he claimed no responsibility for them. He tried even to disassociate himself as much as possible from his work, and even when he was busiest he showed himself for a few moments each evening at the theater, in order to perpetuate the impression that he was a mere idler.

A second reason for the pseudonymous authorship lay in the fact that as a modern Socrates, he was convinced that the truth of his doctrine, as a living and personal reality, could not be communicated directly as a doctrine, but only indirectly, "as an alternative to be chosen, as a possibility to be realized." Thus, the aesthetic way of life, presented without compromise or confusing admixture by an author who himself assimilates it and lives it and exhibits its nature not only in thought but in feeling, is placed before the reader. The same thing is done for the ethical attitude toward life, the religious life as universally conceived, and finally the specifically religious

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21 Ibid.
mode of existence. The reader is thus confronted with a choice between alternatives, and compelled to find the answer to life's riddle for himself."

After the brief exposition of the life of Kierkegaard and of his writings, given in this introductory chapter, there remains the task of presenting the precise problem to be treated in the remainder of this thesis.

The primary object of this thesis is to present and explain Kierkegaard's definition of faith: "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness." In order to explain this doctrine and its significance, three chapters will be necessary. The following chapter will present the sources of Kierkegaard's concept of belief in the theological teachings of Luther and the Philosophical teachings of Kant. Then Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegelian Determinism and to Romantic Aestheticism will be discussed, in order to provide the more proximate sources of his ideas regarding belief. Next, Kierkegaard's own positive solution to the problem of belief will be presented—a solution to be found in the freedom of belief, through a study of the nature of man as Kierkegaard conceived him, and of the necessity of the act of faith as Kierkegaard's expression of man's freedom and fulfilment.

The final chapter will contain a summary of the thesis, a criticism and an evaluation of Kierkegaard's ideas.

23 Ibid., 26.
24 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 182.
CHAPTER II

THE SOURCES OF KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF FAITH

In the preceding chapter, Kierkegaard and his writings were briefly introduced, and the general plan of the thesis was outlined. The task of the present chapter is to present the sources of Kierkegaard's concept of belief. Since Kierkegaard's doctrine of belief is not in accord with Catholic teaching, a brief outline of the Catholic doctrine of Supernatural Faith will be presented, after which Kierkegaard's theological sources for his concept of belief as they are found in Luther will be discussed. The latter part of this chapter will be concerned with the philosophical sources of Kierkegaard's concept of belief in Locke, Hume and Kant.

A presentation of the sources of Kierkegaard's ideas is especially necessary because his doctrines seem to many readers to be completely foreign to traditional modes of thought. The difficulty lies chiefly in his strange terminology. One should not, however, confuse novel terminology with outlandishness; the doctrines of Kierkegaard become intelligible when viewed in the light of a common tradition.

Catholic teaching on the subject of Supernatural Faith differs essentially from that of Kierkegaard in its insistence upon the role of the intellect in the act of faith. According to traditional and universal Catholic teaching,
Supernatural Faith is an act of assent to divinely revealed Truth. According to St. Thomas, this act of assent is essentially an act of the intellect, performed under the influence of the will. The activity of the will is required by the fact that the intellect, in positing an act of faith, is not moved directly by evidence which is intrinsic to the object to which the assent is given. The object of divine revelation (according to its very definition) cannot be penetrated by human reason. But though it completely transcends the understanding, revelation is not altogether foreign to the understanding; and though the object of divine revelation has not that compelling influence over the intellect which first principles, immediately self-evident principles, and objects of immediate experience exercise over it, still the intellect can be scientifically directed to the establishment of the fact of revelation. This fact is established by means of extrinsic evidence, chiefly miracles which accompany the revelation and serve as testimonials to it. Miracles provide motives of credibility sufficient to permit assent, but insufficient to demand it. Thus, in performing an act of faith, the intellect, though it has rational grounds for assent, is not determined by the intellectual clarity of the truth presented; it is rather commanded freely to act by the will, which is


aided by grace and influenced by motives of credibility.

The act of faith induces in the subject a state of mind called "belief." In the scale of the attitudes which the human mind can adopt towards truth, belief stands between opinion and scientific certitude. Belief differs on the one hand from opinion (which is characterized by an act of assent which is accompanied by a fear that the opposite may be true) in the firmness or certainty of its adherence to its object; on the other hand, it differs from strict knowledge in so far as a direct intellectual vision of the object is lacking.

Divine faith is more certain than either opinion or knowledge, however, because "the first Truth which causes the assent of divine faith is stronger than the light of reason which causes the assent of knowledge." 3

This, in brief, is the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding supernatural faith: It is an act of assent to divinely revealed truth, essentially an act of the intellect performed under the influence of the will, aided by divine grace, an act accompanied by the highest certitude.

KIERKEGAARD'S THEOLOGICAL SOURCES

Although orthodox Catholic teachers, under the influence of St. Augustine, had discussed, used, and valued subjective criteria for faith, and had proposed motives of credibility based on the dynamism of the human spirit for God, 4 nevertheless, they had emphasized the fact that faith itself is essentially a...

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3 St. Thomas Aquinas, De Veritate, q. 14, a. 1, ad 7, Parma ed., IX, 228.

rational act. But from the earliest days of Protestantism, its teachers have, on the contrary, emphasized the inability of human reason to penetrate and understand the truths of faith.

We must credit Martin Luther, an apostate Augustinian monk, with inaugurating the fundamental error of Protestantism. From the time of his entrance into the monastery in 1505 he was "troubled by fear of God's judgement, by gloomy thoughts on predestination, and by the recollection of his own sins." As early as 1515 he began his campaign to prove that "justification is by faith alone." This doctrine had its proximate origin in his reaction to Occamism and in his attraction to the mysticism of his German forebears; but a deeper explanation lies in his own tortured mind's search for assurance of salvation and in his conviction of man's radical corruption.

The "Scholasticism" which Luther knew, and against which he reacted violently, was a debased form of Scholasticism—in reality a superficial Nominalism which Luther's contemporaries inherited from the philosophers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Known to history as Occamism, this movement was characterized at first by a critical attitude towards the basic principles of the traditional metaphysics. By Luther's time it had "degenerated into a form of theology showing great signs of decadence." From false speculations concerning the nature of man, the school of Occam was led to an excessive estimate of the

5 Hartmann Grisar, S.J., _Luther_, trans. E.M. Leonard (London, 1915), I, 9. This work, in six volumes, is the authoritative study of Luther in the English language, and will be used in this thesis as the source of information concerning Luther's life, ideas, and writings.

6 Ibid., I, 94.

7 Ibid., I, 120.
powers of nature and an undervaluing of grace. In his search for justification, Luther lost confidence in the Nominalistic theology of Occamism, and "in his exaggeration, he went to the theological extreme contrary to Occamism." \(^8\) Luther complained, at first, of the rationalistic treatment of the truths of faith in Occamism. \(^9\) Later, however, he became an extremist, and rejected all use of man's reason in matters of faith. \(^10\)

From the writings of the mystic Tauler, Luther learned to love the inwardness of faith; \(^11\) and though he later gave up all attempts to lead a spiritual life, he retained the respect for interior religious experiences which he had learned from the mystics.

More profoundly, the doctrine of Luther that "Justification is by faith alone," had its origin in his own search for an assurance of salvation. Indeed, his doctrine has been called merely a "universalization" of his own experiences. \(^13\) His early brooding on predestination and his consciousness of personal sin influenced his denial of man's free will and brought about his theory of arbitrary imputation by God of the merits of Christ "without any cooperation on man's part or any human work of merit." \(^15\)

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\(^8\) Ibid., I, 132.  
\(^9\) Ibid., I, 120.  
\(^10\) Ibid., I, 136.  
\(^11\) Ibid., I, 158.  
\(^12\) Ibid., I, 88.  
\(^14\) Grisar, I, 383.  
\(^15\) Ibid., IV, 433.
Furthermore, according to Luther, human nature has been essentially corrupted by Original Sin, and henceforth man can neither attain any knowledge of the divine nor perform any good act. Thus, if man does perform a good act, this is due to the direct action of God; for nothing in man's nature bears witness to Him.

The only hope for mankind in such a predicament, according to Luther, lay in an appropriation of salvation through blind faith, and in a personal certainty of the assurance of divine favor as the result of such blind faith. Therefore, in the individual, the objective criterion of faith is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul; the subjective criterion (the only one man can verify) is an internal, mystical experience which that testimony begets in us. Faith itself became for Luther nothing more than "an artificially stimulated hope that the merits of Christ obliterated every sin."20

The legacy of Luther, then, was a skepticism, a fundamental mistrust of the intellect, from which subjective experiences alone could save man in his natural ignorance of God. Luther's preoccupation with his own interior states caused the absorption of his whole theology in the doctrine of salvation, and his dogmatic substitution of subjective certitude for objective certitude with regard to salvation transfers to the individual's subjective state of assurance of salvation the certitude once claimed for the intellect alone.

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16 Ibid., I, 98, 110.
17 Ibid., I, 207.
18 Ibid., I, 37; II, 35.
19 Ibid., IV, 438.
20 Ibid., IV, 432.
21 Maritain, 17.
Two dominant themes emerge from this Lutheran anti-intellectualism and merge in the writings of Kierkegaard: voluntarism and emotionalism.

As a Lutheran divinity student, Kierkegaard could not help but be influenced by the strong voluntaristic element in Lutheranism, which substitutes the activity of the will for the activity of the intellect in the perception of and the assent to the object of faith.

But an even stronger element than voluntarism in Kierkegaard's writings is his emotionalism. This, too, was part of his heritage from Luther, as a second substitute, after voluntarism, for intellectual activity in the realm of faith. Evangelism, or emotional religion, has been an important factor in the developing attitudes of Protestantism, and represents "an aspect of the spiritual history of modern Europe which has received scant official recognition, but in fact constitutes its most significant feature." It is hard to overlook the emotionalism of Kierkegaard, especially in view of his continual emphasis upon "passion" in the determination of the true Christian through the act of faith.

The following chapters will attempt to show more clearly the Lutheran elements of voluntarism and emotionalism in Kierkegaard's writings, as they exhibit his Lutheran preoccupation with the inwardness of faith, justification through faith alone, the universalization of personal experience as a rule for faith, the appropriation of salvation through blind faith, and a passionate search for certitude in spite of a fundamental anti-intellectualism.

22 Patrick, II, xi.
Although Lutheran Protestantism, with its overtones of voluntarism and emotionalism, were important sources of Kierkegaard's thought, his philosophical sources were equally important, and contributed much to the formation of his basic anti-intellectualism. A discussion of Kierkegaard's philosophical heritage regarding the notion of belief will therefore be presented in the following pages.

The rise of the natural sciences in Europe and the Empirical philosophies which originated because of them did not affect in any large measure the Scandinavian countries until some time after the upheavals of 1848;[23] but the influence of the Empirical philosophers, particularly through the writings of Immanuel Kant, reached Denmark at an earlier date, and made a profound impression on the mind of Kierkegaard. It will be worth while, therefore, to sketch briefly the non-theological opinions concerning belief current in Europe before 1855. Most non-scholastic philosophers of that period, under the influence either of the rational skepticism of Locke, Hume, and Kant, or the anti-intellectualism of Luther, tended to replace all judgments—even all knowledge—with belief.

The non-scholastic explanations of belief may be traced from the school of Empirical philosophers, since they, more than others, had need of justifying inference and evidence not intrinsically verifiable. John Locke, for example, considered knowledge to be only "the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas,"[24] and truth as belonging only to

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propositions. True knowledge and certitude therefore, according to Locke, are found only in the contemplation of our abstract ideas. We have, to be sure, "knowledge of our own being by intuition;" and the "existence of a God reason clearly makes known to us;" but since, Locke claims, ideas do not connote existence, "the knowledge of the existence of any other thing we can have only by sensation." However, testimony to the existence of anything other than our own being extends only to the actual moment of sensation of an object. For the knowledge of all other things, belief, or "faith" is necessary. Faith, says Locke, "is nothing but a firm assent of the mind."


26 Ibid., IV. vi. 16, Fraser ed., II, 266. See also IV. xii. 7, Fraser ed., II, 346-347.

27 Ibid., IV. xi. 1, Fraser ed., II, 325. Locke offers two proofs for the existence of God, both reflective in character. One is an "ontological" argument, similar to that employed by Descartes and St. Anselm. His proof differs from the purely contological argument, however, in that Locke nowhere deduces knowledge of realities of any kind from abstract ideas, but proceeds from the self-intuition of a contingent intellectual being to the conclusion of the necessity of the existence of God as first cause. The second proof which Locke attempts is that which is called the proof "from contingency." In this he is less successful because his knowledge of the contingent world is only a medium quod. Locke's arguments are given in the Fraser edition, II. 306-324.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., IV. xi. 9, Fraser ed., II, 333-334. See also IV. xi. 1, Fraser ed., II, 325.

30 Ibid., p. 324. Here Fraser comments: "It is curious that Locke holds the existence of God to be within the sphere of our unconditionally certain knowledge, and that he excludes from that sphere the phenomena and laws of nature, and that Kant on the contrary vindicates a pure a priori physics, and denies that the existence of God can be known by pure reason."

31 Ibid., IV. xvii. 23, Fraser ed., II, 413.
Faith and reason although they cannot contradict one another, according to Locke, have distinct provinces. "Reason is the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths which the mind arrives at by deduction made from . . . ideas which it has by the use of its natural faculties; viz., by sensation and reflection." In other words, reason is concerned solely with the truth or falsity of propositions. Faith, "on the other side, is the assent to any proposition not thus made out by the deduction of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer." The ground of probability for our assent to any proposition is determined by the agreement of the testimony of others with our own experience, general testimony, and revelation.

In Locke's estimation, then, certainty is found only in our knowledge of abstract ideas; we must believe in the existence of all other things. Locke's assertion that reason clearly makes known to us the existence of God cannot be upheld, given Locke's presuppositions. His reluctant skepticism with regard to our knowledge of real existing objects was transmitted through Hume and Kant to Kierkegaard, who, it will be shown, continued the empirical error of substituting belief for knowledge in dealing with existence.

David Hume's consideration of belief, an important outgrowth of his fundamental preoccupation with causality, parallels Locke's discussion. Hume's dis-

\[32\] Ibid., IV, xvii. 23, Fraser ed., II, 413.

\[33\] Ibid., This "faith," however, refers only to the miraculous intervention of God in the universe, which is called Revelation.

\[34\] Ibid., IV, xv. 4, Fraser ed., II, 365-366. Thus the notions "belief" and "faith" in the writings of Locke have separate functions. Faith is reserved for our acceptance of truths revealed by God; belief, "the firm assent of the mind" is our attitude towards facts in the realm of sense experience.
tinction between knowledge of "matters of fact" (existential objects) and knowledge through "relations of ideas" (affirmations which are "intuitively and demonstrably certain") is well known. He reached this distinction in his attempt to work out two basic, but contradictory, principles: The first, "that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences," or, in other words, that what we can distinguish in perception is distinct also in reality, is a subjective principle which makes the distinctions in real things depend upon the distinctions of the mind. The second principle, "that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences," is based on the opposite, objective assumption. His whole account of causality depends upon the latter principle, and he affirms that causality is not a relation between the mind's own ideas in such a way that subjective observation or reflection will justify the notion of real causality. Hume admitted that he could not reconcile these two principles, but that he could not renounce either.

In dealing with our knowledge through "relations of ideas," therefore, Hume encountered no problem. He applied his first principle, and concluded with Locke that our judgments are only additions and subtractions of concepts according to the laws of association, and are concerned only with "quantity and number." He further concluded that nothing except "the sciences of quantity and

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
number... may safely... be pronounced the only proper object of knowledge and demonstration."

In dealing with our knowledge of "matters of fact," however, Hume encountered a serious problem. He applied his second principle, and insisted that knowledge of "matters of fact," or real existing things, implies some reference beyond the mind, and is only inferred from "cause and effect observed empirically." Furthermore, in treating of cause and effect, he asserted that "all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than the cognitive part of our natures." Two thoughts are contained in this statement. The first, that we are determined by custom to infer a necessary connection between two impressions and to call the second one an effect, introduces the second thought, that belief is nothing more than a feeling which accompanies our idea of any existing thing.

This doctrine of belief is based on Hume's notion that the validity of our knowledge is found only in the vividness of our impressions. Belief, he insists, is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object than what the imagination is ever able to attain. Since the vividness of our impressions is the only true criterion for reality, and since it is the

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., xii. 3, Liberal Arts ed., p. 171.
only thing which separates fact from fiction, belief must be the attitude of the mind towards all "matters of fact," or really existing things.

Hume, like Locke, credited only mathematical propositions with providing real certitude. He substituted belief for our knowledge of existing things, and reduced belief itself to a feeling. Hume's reluctant skepticism with regard to our knowledge of existential objects was transmitted through Kant to Kierkegaard, who—as will be shown—continued the error of the Empiricists in substituting belief for knowledge in dealing with existence.

Immanuel Kant contributed much to the erroneous substitution of belief for true knowledge of existential things; but his concept of belief was more voluntaristic, and based less on feeling than was that of Hume.

Kant must be regarded as a thoroughgoing empiricist, just as Locke or Hume, in spite of the importance he placed upon intellectual categories; for no more than Locke or Hume could he deal intellectually with anything except objects of direct perception—phenomena, subjectively modified by the categories of space and time. True judgments, for Kant, as for the other empiricists, can deal with nothing but concepts; for not even the synthetic, experiential character of sense perception can yield knowledge of real, or "noumenal" existence.

Kant's treatment of judgment in the speculative order amounted to a repudiation of reason in the speculative order; but his rejection of reason in the fields of morality and religion was equally strong. His avowed purpose was to liberate religion from the rationalistic influence of Wolff. To accomplish

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this, he divorced religion entirely from the influence of speculative reason, giving the religious spirit free scope in the realm of practical reason only. Practical reason and the will were to supply for the failure of the speculative reason to attain anything beyond the objects of immediate experience.

Kant's fundamental moral principle, unconditional and a priori, determining the will absolutely, was: "Act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation." This law is simply "given"; "it is not an empirical fact, but the sole fact of the pure reason, which thereby announces itself as originally legislative." 46

Between this fundamental law of practical reason and the postulates of the existence of God, of the immortality of the soul, and of the life to come, there is a necessary connection, since the fulfilment of the moral law is possible only if such postulates are given. 47

These postulates, it must be noted, are not truths which are known; they are rather practical assumptions. In Kant's own words: "First, in Religion, as regards the theoretical apprehension and avowal of belief no ass\'rtional knowledge is required (even of God's existence) . . . ; rather it is merely a problematical assumption (hypothesis) regarding the highest cause of things that is presupposed speculatively yet with an eye to the object toward which our morally legislative reason bids us strive—an assertorial faith, practical and therefore free, and giving promise of this its ultimate aim." 48

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., II. ii. 5-6, Abbott., ed., p. 211.
49 Kant, Religion, IV. i. 1, Greene-Hudson ed., p. 142.
These postulates, then, are found in human nature, but only as postulates, invested with reality through the activity of the will or the "morally legislative reason." They are believed, with a faith that is merely "assertorial." It is in this way that faith—belief without objective evidence, whether intrinsic or extrinsic—fills the void left when reason abdicates.

The righteous man, says Kant, when faced with the postulates of practical reason, "may say: 'I will that there be a God, that my existence in this world be also an existence outside the chain of physical causes, and in a pure world of the understanding, and, lastly, that my duration be endless; I firmly abide in this, and will not let this faith be taken from me.'" The righteous man may make this "assertorial" act of faith because the pure moral law binds him as a command, and not as a mere rule of prudence; and he is thereby justified in assuming a priori in nature all the conditions necessary for its fulfilment. Clearly, "Kant's philosophy is voluntaristic."51

The act of the will which constitutes man's faith in God, in the immortality of the soul and in the after life, induces in him a state of mind called belief, which Kant distinguishes from opinion and from knowledge. "Opinion," he states, "is a consciously insufficient judgment, subjectively as well as objectively. Belief is subjectively sufficient, but is recognized as objectively insufficient. Knowledge is both subjectively and objectively sufficient."52

50 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, II ii. 8, Abbott Ed., p. 241.


Here he explains that the objective sufficiency of knowledge arises from the presence of phenomena. In the case of belief, this objective sufficiency is absent. In other words, we believe whatever we cannot perceive through the categories of the intellect. The subjective sufficiency, on the other hand, of both knowledge and belief arises in two ways. In the case of pragmatic beliefs, the subjective sufficiency is determined by a feeling of conviction, which may be false, but is not opposed by any known objective facts. In the case of moral beliefs, which can in no way be justified objectively, the subjective sufficiency is determined by the moral sentiments. 53

The truth of the mind, then, for Kant, lies only in the knowability of concepts; real existence lies outside the mind's reach. For knowledge of things as they exist in reality, Kant substitutes an act of belief elicited by the will without the antecedent ministration of the intellect. Kierkegaard studied Kant seriously, 54 and imbibed Kant's empirical anti-rationalism, as he had studied Luther and learned from him the unknowability of God and the need for an appropriation of salvation through the certitudes of blind faith. Spurred on by his inherited introspective spirit, Kierkegaard, will, like Luther, universalize his own inward experiences in his reaction to rationalism; like Kant, he will apply a Lutheran theological concept of faith to the philosophical realm.


54 See, for example, his Journals, pp. 3, 96, 330, 358, 364.
The following chapter will first describe Kierkegaard's reaction to Hegelian Determinism, following the example of Luther's reaction to Occamism and Kant's reaction to Wolff. Secondly, his reaction to Romantic Aestheticism will be studied; and in this collision with Determinism and Aestheticism will be formed his own positive ideas of faith.
CHAPTER III

KIERKEGAARD'S ATTACK UPON DETERMINISM AND ROMANTICISM

In the preceding chapter, the remote sources of Kierkegaard's doctrine of faith were presented. It is the purpose of the present chapter to indicate the positive philosophical elements of his notion of faith which arose in his conflict with Determinism and with Romanticism.

Jean Wahl, in his *Etudes Kierkegaardiennes*, writes paradoxically, "Kierkegaard triumphed over Idealism with the aid of Romanticism, and over Romanticism with the aid of Idealism"; and this statement may well serve as a general outline for the present chapter. Kierkegaard's aim in his double triumph was to indicate that there are two ways of becoming a Christian, both of which are necessary. The first way to become a Christian is to abandon the Hegelian glorification of the intellect in matters of faith. This method was worked out in Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegel's Determinism, an attack made with the weapons offered by the aesthetic way of life. The second way to become a Christian is to transcend aesthetic immediacy in existence. This method was made possible by Kierkegaard's attack upon Romanticism, in which he employed a modified form of the dialectic of absolute Idealism, leading the individual through the stages
of existence from the aesthetic, through the ethical, to the religious stage. Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegelianism will be considered first, together with the positive philosophical elements of freedom, existence, and contingency with which he opposed Hegelianism. Kierkegaard's attack upon Romanticism will then be outlined together with an account of the existential dialectic.

KIERKEGAARD'S ATTACK UPON HEGEL

Before a discussion of Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegelianism is undertaken, some mention of his knowledge of and his relation to Hegel should be made, and his intellectual and religious motives for opposition to Hegel should be mentioned, together with the reasons for his interest in individual existence, and the sources of his romantic outlook.

KIERKEGAARD'S KNOWLEDGE OF HEGEL

During Kierkegaard's lifetime, the ruling philosophy of Denmark, even more than of Germany, was that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who died in the year 1831, the year after Kierkegaard entered the University of Copenhagen. It is known that Kierkegaard, even during his early years at the university, was well acquainted with the Hegelian and anti-Hegelian writings of the 1830's, and that he later read the works of Hegel carefully. Whether or not he misunderstood or misinterpreted the theories of Hegel is not relevant here, since he seems to have been interested in Hegel only as the "fons et origo of a broad intellectual and social movement," against which he waged a bitter one-

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3 Ibid., 105.
Kierkegaard seldom discussed the subtler refinements of Hegelianism in his writings; he concentrated his attack rather upon its fundamental presuppositions—or upon what he thought were its fundamental presuppositions. A study of the caustic anti-Hegelian comments in his work suggests that he considered Hegelianism an objective phenomenological science, in which all being and all knowledge are reduced to abstraction and abstract, general categories. In such a system, he believed, reality becomes nothing more than a system of abstract essences, knowledge and being are identified, being and becoming are mediated into a unity through an abstract, immanent dialectical process which synthesizes all contradictions; and the individual existent, as a mere moment in the unfolding of an abstract idea, loses both individuality and self-determination.

KIERKEGAARD'S MOTIVES

Kierkegaard's protest against the imposing intellectual structure of Hegelian thought was based upon intellectual and religious motives. Intellectually, he found the pretensions of pure thought ridiculous, and his writings, particularly the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, are full of jibes at "The System," as he called Hegelianism, for its failure to account for the individual existing person. As a religious writer, his reaction to Hegelianism has been called by Gilson "the exasperated protest of a religious conscience against the centuries-old suppression of existence by abstract thinking." Hegelianism would have been of little interest to him had it not seemed to be the cause of the lack of religious fervor and ethical responsibility to which

his age was prey through its attempt to reconcile Hegelianism with the teachings of Christianity. 5

His early interest in the individual human soul and its ethical responsibilities arose, apart from his own neurotic temperament and his soul-searing introspective experiences, from three sources: First, his great desire was to save ethics, in which a free individual has a decisive role to play in shaping his own destiny instead of being determined by some inexecrably evolving idea. He therefore insisted upon the highest kind of conduct from each individual:

For in our age it is not merely an individual scholar or thinker here and there who concerns himself with universal history; the whole age loudly demands it. Nevertheless, Ethics and the ethical, as constituting the essential anchorage for all individual existence, have an indefeasible claim upon every existing individual; so indefeasible a claim, that whatever a man may accomplish in the world, even to the most astonishing of achievements, it is none the less quite dubious in its significance, unless the individual has been ethically clear when he made his choice, has ethically clarified his choice to himself. The ethical quality is jealous for its own integrity, and is quite unimpressed by the most astounding quantity.

Secondly, Kierkegaard's early-awakened interest in individual experience and in personal responsibility was sharpened by the great social levelling process which characterized the mid-nineteenth century. In such a levelling process, to be different is unpatriotic. The herd mentality develops, and the individual will is absorbed into the madness of the crowd; the individual

5 Patrick, II, 32.
6 Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 119-120.
loses his sense of individual responsibility, and his fear of personal judgment. According to Kierkegaard, in modern human herds, "that eternal responsibility and the religious singling out of the individual before God is ignored," and he went so far as to say that "the crowd is untruth," and this by reason of the fact that "it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction."  

Thirdly, Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the role of the individual was an attempt to save the world from mediocrity. He sought for heroic men who would be willing to take the first steps toward a rebuilding of personal integrity through Christian heroism; for "Christian heroism (and perhaps it is rarely to be seen) is to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual man, this definite individual man, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and this tremendous responsibility; but it is not Christian heroism to be humbugged by the pure idea of humanity or to play the game of 'marvelling at world history.'"

Thus, inspired by his all-consuming interest in the individual, with intellectual and religious motivation, Kierkegaard began his lifelong war against

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9 Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 112.
10 Ibid., 111.
Hegelian Determinism, which was then threatening to overwhelm the freedom of man.

THE ROMANTIC OUTLOOK

Kierkegaard's battle with Hegelianism in his mature years, as noted above, was fought with the weapons of Romanticism. What, then, were the attitudes of Romanticism which so influenced the mind of this writer? The early part of his career, we know, was spent in purely aesthetic studies, and he read the works of Novalis, Tieck, Hoffman, Wakenroder and the brothers Schlegel, as well as those of the older Romanticists of the Sturm und Drang period, Goethe, Heine, and Schiller. He had a great respect for the pre-romantic philosophers, Hamann and Jacobi, and expressed his admiration for them. He read as a matter of course the works of Oehlenschlager, Denmark's greatest modern poet, and wrote a review of one of the books of another of his contemporaries, Hans Christian Andersen.

All these writers had in common the fact that they broke off relations with rationalism and dwelt in the spirit of subjectivity and individualism. Their romanticism "exposed itself in delicious contemplation or mystic rapture to the influence of the infinite and non-rational, the mysterious and inexplicable, the dark and uncanny forces of the world." They objected to the insufficiencies of the speculative intellect, and espoused "creative imagination or free inspir-

12 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 224, for example
13 Søren Kierkegaard, From The Papers of One Still Living. This work, the first of Kierkegaard's published writings, is not available in English.
14 Patrick, II, 13.
ation, feeling, or passion, reverie or irony, pure intuition or ingenuous spontaneity" in their approach to reality. Kierkegaard from his earliest years was under the spell of this subjective emotionalism; he never wholly escaped from it, although he later transcended mere Romanticism in his existential dialectic. It was this Romantic attitude of mind, however, with its emphasis upon individual experience and with its non-rational approach to experience, when coupled with Kierkegaard's adherence to primitive Lutheran intellectual skepticism, that provided a platform from which to attack the pretensions of Absolute Idealism.

KIERKEGAARD'S ANTI-HEGELIAN THESSES

Kierkegaard based his mature criticism of Hegelian Determinism upon three theses: First, Hegel's world-historical process as the necessary evolution of the Absolute Idea is destructive of the ethical life of man as a responsible individual because it reduces the ethical man to a mere spectator of ethical principles. Kierkegaard opposes Hegel's position on the grounds of human freedom. Second, Hegel does not realize that the existential act as such cannot be included within a system of finite thought, no matter how all-inclusive and systematic. Kierkegaard's objection to Hegel on this score is made from the standpoint of existence. Third, Hegel cannot deal with the basic notions of being and becoming because he confuses the concepts "being" and "becoming" with real

15 Ibid.

16 These three theses were suggested by James Collins in his book The Mind of Kierkegaard, pp. 119-120. They are to be found in substance in the Introduction to Kierkegaard's Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey, 1944); the actual, detailed reasoning is to be found in Kierkegaard's major philosophical works, the Philosophical Fragments and the Concluding Unscientific Postscript.
being and becoming, which are non-ceptual. Kierkegaard's objection to Hegel in this thesis lies in his existential category of contingency. These three theses of Kierkegaard will be treated in turn, together with an exposition of Kierkegaard's positive philosophical doctrine with regard to his own notions of freedom, existence, and contingency.

THE FIRST THESIS

Kierkegaard's first thesis against Hegel emerges from his emphasis upon individual freedom; for he contends that Hegel's theory of world history is inimical to the ethical life of man as a responsible, free, individual, and that Hegel reduces ethics to abstract contemplation. Kierkegaard speaks of the world-historical view as "objectivization," and says:

The objective tendency, which proposes to make everyone an observer, and in its maximum to transform him into an objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost, scarcely to be distinguished from the tremendous spirit of the historical past—this tendency naturally refuses to know or listen to anything except what stands in relation to itself.... For it is regarded as a settled thing that the objective tendency in direction of intellectual contemplation, is, in the newer linguistic usage, the ethical answer to the question of what I ethically have to do; and the task assigned to the contemporary nineteenth century is world history. The objective tendency is the way and the truth; the ethical is, becoming an observer. That the individual must become an observer is the ethical answer to the problem of life—or else one is compelled to assume that there is no ethical question at all, and in so far no ethical answer.17

What Kierkegaard is saying here, in his indirect way, is that the man who espouses "The System" becomes a spectator of the ethical life, and for him knowledge becomes virtue. Kierkegaard objects to this view, maintaining that

17 Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 118-119.
true ethics must thereby perish. He insists:

It is for this reason that ethics looks upon all world-historical knowledge with a degree of suspicion, because it may so easily become a snare, a demoralizing aesthetic diversion for the knowing subject, in so far as the distinction between what does or does not have historical significance obeys a quantitative dialectic. As a consequence of this fact, the absolute ethical distinction between good and evil tends for the historical survey to be neutralized in the aesthetic-metaphysical determination of the great and significant, to which category the bad has equal admittance with the good.  

This means that an attempt to lead the ethical life by becoming "an observer of world history" is immoral. Not good and evil, but the "significant" is for the historical observer the aim of ethics. The observer grows incapable of distinguishing ethical good and evil from the desire of historical stature and the magnitude of his contribution to the course of history.

THE NOTION OF FREEDOM

In place of Hegel's world-historical ethics, Kierkegaard champions the freedom of man's relationship with God, and flatly declares that the truly ethical life is a matter of individual responsibility, whereas a world-historical ethic completely invalidates the essential individuality and freedom of the moral life.

Kierkegaard's great ambition to save ethics was therefore prompted by his conviction that a free individual has a decisive role to play in shaping his

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18 Ibid., 120.
19 Ibid., 120-123.
20 Ibid., 130-139.
own destiny; his relationship to God is a "possibility-relationship," which
must be actualized by a free act of the will. The next chapter will deal with
the free positing of this relationship by the individual in the act of faith.

THE SECOND THESIS

Kierkegaard's second thesis against Hegel contends that Hegel cannot in-
clude the existential act as such within a system of finite thought, and there-
fore must content himself with a purely conceptual, abstract system. To prove
this assertion, Kierkegaard proposes the dual fact that "a logical system is
possible; an existential system is impossible." 21 A logical system, it may be
inferred, is one that is complete and finished. So Kierkegaard seems to regard
it when he says jestingly:

I shall be as willing as the next man to fall down in worship
before the System if only I can manage to set eyes on it.
Hitherto I have had no success; ... Once or twice I have
been on the verge of bending the knee. But at the last moment,
when I already had my handkerchief spread on the ground, to
avoid soiling my trousers, and I made a trusting appeal to one
of the initiated who stood by: 'Tell me now sincerely, is it
entirely finished; for if so I will kneel down before it, even
at the risk of ruining a pair of trousers... '--I always
received the same answer: 'No, it is not yet quite finished.'
And so there was another postponement--of the System, and of
my homage.'22

A logical system, it may also be noted, is one in which real existence,
with its unpredictable, contingent happenings, is suppressed in favor of an

21 Ibid., 99.
22 Ibid., 97-98.
ideal and abstract existence bearing the stamp of necessity. Kierkegaard warns that "in the construction of a logical system, it is necessary first and foremost to take care not to include in it anything which is subject to an existential dialectic," that is, anything which has real existence. Consequently, a logical system, for what it is worth, is, in Kierkegaard's opinion, possible. It is possible to manufacture a completely articulated, fully developed system in purely abstract terms. But an abstract world, a world manufactured of concepts, is by no means the real world, the world in which responsible individuals work out their salvation in fear and trembling. A system of purely abstract thought, therefore, which pretends to explain reality is comical; and this is "The System" which Kierkegaard unceasingly ridicules.

On the other hand, the impossibility of an existential system, that is, a completely developed and fully determined system of real existence, is indicated by Kierkegaard when, first, he challenges "The System" to make the immediate beginning which it claims; and secondly, when he challenges it to proceed without presuppositions. In other words, Kierkegaard maintains that if one takes into account the conditions of real existence, it is impossible to carry out the abstract speculations of "The System," since real existence cannot be known in an abstract, conceptual way. He warns: "Let us then proceed, but let us not try to deceive one another. I, Johannes Climacus, as a human being, neither more nor less; and I assume that anyone I may have the honor to engage in conversation with, is also a human being. If he presumes to be speculative philosophy in the abstract, I must renounce the effort to speak with him; for in that case he instantly vanishes from my sight, and from the

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23 Ibid., 99.
The first proof, therefore, of the impossibility of an existential system
is found in the impossibility of what Kierkegaard thought was the "immediate
beginning" of Hegel—the "Pure Being" described in Hegel's Logic. 25 Kierkegaard
sees in the Pure Being of Hegel rather the term of an entire process of abstrac-
tion and reflective analysis, and not an immediate beginning at all. 26 The pro-
cess of abstraction which terminates in the Absolute Idea is necessarily, in
Kierkegaard's view, an infinite one; hence Hegel cannot make a beginning.

Kierkegaard's second proof of the impossibility of an existential system is
concerned with the possibility of progressing philosophically without presuppos-
positions, that is, of neglecting the primary presupposition of real existence.
James Collins has noted that "attempts at founding an entirely presupposition-
less philosophy have always ended—from Hegel to Husserl—in the disappearance
of the empirical human self." 28 It was precisely on this ground that Kierke-
gaard objected to Hegel's presuppositionless philosophy. It was his concern to
save at all costs the empirical human self when he said:

And how are the individual participants related to the joint
effort, what are the categories which mediate between the

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27 Ibid., 105.
28 Collins, Mind, p. 127.
individual and the world-process, and who is it again who strings then all together on the systematic thread? Is he a human being, or is he speculative philosophy in the abstract? But if he is a human being, then he is also an existing individual. Two ways, in general, are open for an existing individual: Either he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual, by which he becomes a comic figure . . . Or he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual. It is from this side, in the first instance, that objection must be made to modern philosophy: . . . not that it has a mistaken presupposition . . . but that it has a comical presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten . . . what it means that you and I and he are human beings, each one for himself.25

The foregoing may be summarized by saying that the attack of Kierkegaard against Hegel's revocation of existence was based on the thesis that an existential system is impossible because existence cannot be included within a fully complete and fully articulated system of human thought, but only in the mind of God.30 A logical system is possible as long as the systematiser is aware that he is dealing only with concepts and not with reality. If only Hegel had regarded his system as an experiment in thought, then "he would be the strongest thinker who has lived"; for in spite of Kierkegaard's admiration for Hegel's genius, he saw that Hegel's system, imposing as it was, had to remain a system.

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29 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 109. In order to avoid confusion, it should be noted that Kierkegaard is not here attempting to save at all costs the empirical human self merely as the "self of common sense," the subject of intuitive, non-reflective, non-metaphysical knowledge. His interest lies deeper. He is attempting to show that the human self is not connected with a transcendental or absolute ego; and his efforts are aimed at vindicating the human self as the subject of finite, individual consciousness and self-determination.

30 Ibid., 107.

of concepts. It could not explain the real world; for the real world is an existential world, and as such cannot be systematised.

THE NOTION OF EXISTENCE

It is the notion of real existence, therefore, which Kierkegaard proposes in order to destroy the pretensions of Hegel's conceptual world. What, then, does Kierkegaard mean by the term "existence"?

A full treatment of the special meaning of this notion of existence will be reserved for the next chapter, where Kierkegaard's concept of the nature of man will be discussed; but it will be profitable to note here that existence, for Kierkegaard, does not mean a mere actuality, a standing-outside-of-causes; for "not for a single moment is it forgotten that the subject is an existing individual, and that existence is a process of becoming." That existence is primarily a process of becoming is indicated by the statement that "God does not think, he creates; God does not exist, he is eternal. Man thinks and exists." God is immutable; but man, as different from God in an infinite, qualitative way, is a constantly changing creature. The difference between man and God, as expressed by Kierkegaard, must not be imagined as a complete "otherness:" for, when speaking of the true "systematic thinker," Kierkegaard says that "it is he who is outside of existence and yet in existence, who is in his eternity forever complete, and yet includes all existence within himself --it is God." From this statement, it may be inferred that, in spite of

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\[32\] Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 176. Also pp. 74, 79, 273. (Italics added.)

\[33\] Ibid., 203.

\[34\] Ibid., 108.
Kierkegaard's repeated warning to remember that God is completely "other" than man, man's existence may still be viewed as a kind of participation in eternity, especially when Kierkegaard maintains that "existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal..." The real difference between finite beings and the infinite God is that finite beings come to be what they are, and God "is in his eternity forever complete."

The notion "coming to be" is an important one here, for "coming to be" is considered a process—a process of constant striving. Kierkegaard expresses himself most clearly when he says, "The principle that the existing subjective thinker is constantly occupied in striving, does not mean that he has, in the finite sense, a goal toward which he strives, and that he would be finished when he had reached this goal. No, he strives infinitely, is constantly in process of becoming... This process of becoming is the thinker's own existence." The existence of the finite individual, then, is a process of becoming; and coming-to-be is a process of constant striving. Since all becoming takes place with freedom," it unconditionally excludes the Hegelian dialectic of the necessary evolution of the absolute idea. Kierkegaard's coming-to-be constitutes a discontinuity in nature, a gap in existence which cannot be bridged by a process of mediation, but only by the leap involved in a free decision. Kierkegaard's doctrine of becoming will be seen more fully in the next section of

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35 Ibid., 85.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 81.
this chapter; the means by which the individual becomes will be discussed in the following chapter.

**THE THIRD THESIS**

The third of Kierkegaard's objections against Hegel is expressed in the thesis that in the metaphysical order, Hegel cannot deal with the basic notions of being and becoming, since he cannot distinguish between these concepts, precisely in their status as concepts, and the reality which they represent. Kierkegaard objected that Hegel ignored completely the fact that man is contingent, and, moreover, made being and becoming eternal and necessary realities.

Kierkegaard speaks slightly of the "frivolity with which systematists concede that Hegel has perhaps not been successful in introducing movement everywhere in logic," when the whole system is supposed to be a completely self-evolving principle. If the transition from one stage to another in the system is inexplicable in one case, it is entirely inexplicable. Kierkegaard maintains further that "Hegel's unparalleled discovery, the subject of so unparalleled an admiration, namely, the introduction of movement into logic, is a sheer confusion of the logical science." Kierkegaard complains that Hegel's theory of mediation, whereby two contradictory elements can be synthesized into a new and different element, cannot explain real movement or change: "In our times no explanation is forthcoming as to how mediation comes about, whether it results from the movement of the two factors and in what sense it already is contained in them; or whether it is something new which supervenes, and if

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If the new element is already present in the synthesizing elements, there cannot be any real change, any actualization of something not in existence before—for be change Kierkegaard means "the change involved in becoming ... a transition from not being to being, of from possibility to actuality." If the transition from possibility to actuality is effected by something not present in the two previous elements, then Hegel cannot name the causing element, and his positing of movement is irrational: "the word transition is a mere chimera in the sphere of logic and its true place is in the sphere of history. For transition is a state, and it is actual." In other words, Hegel's dialectical movement is the conceptual unfolding of a plan; it is not, and cannot be, a real movement.

Hegel cannot claim, says Kierkegaard, that necessity is a synthesis of possibility and actuality; for "nothing ever comes into being with necessity; what is necessary never comes into being; nothing becomes necessary by coming into being." In these three statements can be found Kierkegaard's own philosophical doctrine of change.

THE NOTION OF BECOMING

First, "nothing ever comes into being with necessity." This statement has a partly negative, partly positive, value in Kierkegaard's doctrine. Negatively, it is directed against the Hegelian dialectic of the necessary

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2. Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 60.
evolution of the idea; for "nothing that comes into being does so by virtue of a logical ground, but only through the operation of a cause." Positively, it is Kierkegaard's introduction to his thesis that "all becoming takes place with freedom," that is, the ultimate cause of the change from possibility to actuality is not an immanent evolutionary principle but a free cause.

Secondly, "what is necessary never comes into being." By this statement, Kierkegaard denies Hegel's absurd principle that necessity can be a synthesis of possibility and actuality.

Thirdly, "nothing becomes necessary by coming into being." To characterize contingent beings, that is, those which have come into being, Kierkegaard employed the term "historical," and insisted that "historical becoming comes into being by the operation of a relatively free cause, which in turn points ultimately to an absolutely free cause." That something happened, therefore, is certain, and in a sense necessary; that it had to happen is simply not true. The Thomist would say that history is necessary only with "consequent necessity;" and Kierkegaard, in agreeing with this terminology, would still insist that "the past did not become necessary by coming into being, but on the contrary proved by coming into being that it was not necessary." In speaking this way, Kierkegaard is emphasizing the contingency of the event itself, and

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 62}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 62-63.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 63.}\]
insisting that our knowledge of the past does not confer necessity upon a historical event. The certainty of existence and the contingency of coming into existence must therefore be distinguished from one another.

This curious insistence upon the contingency of "historical" facts seems disproportionate, until one realizes that Kierkegaard's insistence has an ulterior motive. His doctrine of contingency must be understood in the light of his notion of philosophical belief, which he is seeking to justify. In the person of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard writes:

The historical cannot be given immediately to the senses, since the elusiveness of becoming is involved in it. The immediate impression of a natural phenomenon or of an event is not the impression of the historical, for the becoming involved cannot be sensed immediately, but only the presence of some content. But the presence of the historical includes the fact of its becoming, or else it is not the presence of the historical as such. Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive. This is by itself enough to show that the historical cannot be the object of either, because the historical has the elusiveness which is implicit in all becoming. As compared with the immediate, becoming has an elusiveness by which even the most dependable fact is rendered doubtful.

To explain the significance of his statement, Kierkegaard uses the example of our seeing a star. That we see a star, and that the star really exists, is certain; but we cannot know from this that it has come into being. For our knowledge of becoming, we need some form of knowledge which is both certain and uncertain like history itself. The uncertainty of becoming, or of the historical, is twofold: "the nothingness of the antecedent non-being is one side of it, while the annihilation of the possible is another, the latter being at the same time the annihilation of every other possibility." In other words, a
thing which becomes has before it "antecedent non-being"; it was not fixed and certain, it was only a possibility. In the "annihilation of the possible," the thing became a reality; and in so becoming, "annihilated" every other possibility which could have been actualized. For Kierkegaard, then, to come into existence is to emerge—not from a continuously developing necessity, as Hegel would have it—but from possibility. But "the possibility from which that which became actual once emerged still clings to it and remains with it as past, even after the lapse of centuries," and therefore, within every existing thing there is a fundamental uncertainty, as Kierkegaard chooses to name it.

BELIEF AS CORRELATIVE TO EXISTENCE

The only faculty which can abolish all the uncertainty involved in becoming is belief, or faith; for faith believes what it does not see. Faith "does not believe that the star is there, for that it sees, but it believes that the star has come into being." Kierkegaard insists upon the certainty of our belief, although we cannot know that the fact which we believe actually came into existence. How is our doubt overcome? Through resolution of will! When faith resolves to believe that some fact is the effect of a free cause (and the fact must be such if it is truly historical), "in that very instant the indifference of doubt has been

\[\text{Ibid., 71.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 67.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
dispelled and its equilibrium overthrown, not by knowledge, but by will.\(^{58}\)

Furthermore, "belief is not a form of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will."\(^{59}\)

Two conclusions pertinent to this thesis may be drawn from the discussion of Kierkegaard's doctrine of becoming and belief. The first is that, in company with Locke, Hume, and Kant, Kierkegaard finds a fundamental uncertainty in reality, an uncertainty which can only be overcome by the substitution of belief for knowledge. Like the Empiricists, Kierkegaard offers no other determinant for belief but the will; the uncertainty of the intellect is too strong when faced with the incomprehensibility of the real.

The second conclusion pertinent here is that Kierkegaard does not really abolish the use of the intellect in dealing with reality; he merely treats our intellectual knowledge of reality as unimportant. We know that this or that thing exists; our belief is directed only to the fact that it has come into being. The Empiricists, especially Hume, placed belief in the same position. Hume's treatment of causality is much like Kierkegaard's in that Hume fails to find a true cause either in immediate cognition or in inference. But Kierkegaard's problem at this point is somewhat different from that of Hume. Kierkegaard is, in the Philosophical Fragments, constructing a philosophy of belief which he will later apply to the religious realm. In religious belief, he will contend, the content of our religion, its doctrines and creeds, may be taken for

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 69.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 68.
It was thus with three theses—first, that Hegel's Determinism destroys the freedom and responsibility of the individual existing man; secondly, that Hegel's world is a world of abstract concepts and not the real world of existence; thirdly, that Hegel's dialectic cannot justify the production of real contingent beings—and with the help of Romanticism, that Kierkegaard triumphed over Determinism. Fighting with the weapons of Romanticism—regard for individual, subjective experience, especially in its non-rational phases—he waged his battle against Determinism on the grounds of human existence, of human contingency, and human freedom. Thus, he indicated philosophically the first way of becoming a Christian—away from speculation.

KIERKEGAARD'S ATTACK UPON ROMANTICISM

The second way of becoming a Christian—away from aesthetics—was a battle against Romanticism; and Kierkegaard waged this battle with the weapons of Idealism, primarily the methodological dialectic.

Kierkegaard, in attacking Romanticism as a way of life did not intend to destroy the Romantic viewpoint in man. His object was rather to make it something better, to give form and purpose to the aesthetic aspects of life. This re-evaluation of the aesthetic way of life was to come about through the existential dialectic of the three stages of existence, a dialectic which is
All dialectic springs from contradiction. Generally speaking, it is a method of making progress through opposition. Etymologically it originates in dialog, that is, in assertion and contradiction. Dialectic, therefore, begins in conversation, and through conversation and discussion, by comparing opposite viewpoints, becomes a means of knowledge. When knowledge and thought adequately mirror reality, dialectic becomes apparent in things themselves, in the hierarchical ordering of reality. The real source of dialectics is the human person, who advances in various ways by opposing or assimilating contradiction.

HEGEL'S DIALECTIC

Kierkegaard viewed Hegel's philosophy as a purely logical system based upon a dialectic of immanent development whereby the apparent contradictions on one level of being are overcome in a synthesis upon a higher level, until the supreme height of a world view of reality was reached. Kierkegaard's correction of Hegel's dialectic was based upon the postulate that actual existence cannot be explained in a logical system. "Logic," says one commentator, "deals only with thought and not with existence, and all thought is of the same quality of being. But where we are concerned with an absolute difference in quality as we are in dealing with thought and being, and with man and God, only a qualitative dialectic is feasible." If, then, the dialectic of life is truly

existential, that is, if it really produces qualitatively different beings, there is clearly no place in the life of man for a logical dialectic in which all being is qualitatively identical in an ideal order of concepts. But Kierkegaard saw that Hegel was right in insisting that some kind of dialectic is essential. Therefore, Kierkegaard constructed his dialectic with a careful eye on the basic faults of the Hegelian dialectic.

KIERKEGAARD'S DIALECTIC

Thus, though Kierkegaard opposed the immediacy of the Romantic way of life, he still clung to his original aesthetic position that individual existence is to be safeguarded at all costs. Consequently his dialectic is constructed to lead the existing individual "from the aesthetic through the ethical, to the religious," 61 in such a way that the Hegelian identification of thought with being, and Hegelianism's consequent inability to justify dialectical movement, is corrected. 62

Kierkegaard's dialectic is of a different sort from all others. Other systems offer a dialectic of thought; Kierkegaard offers to the individual a dialectic of life. Other systems employ a methodological dialectic aimed at the increase of knowledge; the existential dialectic is a spiritual movement in the direction of decisive choice and religious commitment. The existential thinker is faced, not with a closed system of thought, but with open possibilities for good and evil.

61 David Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, p. 117. See also Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 116.
THE STAGES OF EXISTENCE

Against Romantic aestheticism, with its emphasis upon immediate experience and spontaneous feeling, Kierkegaard proposed a dialectic which would lead the individual through the various levels of existence to the peak of religious commitment. His doctrine, like Luther's before him, was a universalization of his own life's experiences. The first stage mirrors his own youthful phase of cynical and uncommitted observation of life; the second stage reveals the motivation in his moral regeneration in 1836; the third stage marks his own spiritual reconversion in 1838.

The three stages of existence—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious—are viewed by Kierkegaard as being each the concrete embodiment of a total way of life, and at the same time as stages on the road of purposeful living. Each stage has its own particular outlook, each has its natural culmination, each has its moment of decision. They are not mere moments in an evolutionary process, linked together in a well-articulated totality. Kierkegaard conceives the stages as exclusive and enclosed worlds; each is an independent area of life, isolated in its aims and its activities. The stages are discontinuous in the sense that one does not develop from another.

At the same time, however, the stages of existence are not so isolated that they are completely independent and can be lived in their entirety independently of one another; otherwise there would be no means of transition between them. It must be kept in mind that the three stages constitute an existential dialectic, one which progresses through a series of contradictions. Each higher stage is constituted not through the abrogation of the lower, but through the subordination of the lower. The religious man is still possessed by aesthetic
passion and ethical righteousness, but his whole existence is reconstituted, or repeated, on a higher level. Where Hegel, through a process of mediation, would synthesize the aesthetic stage and its opposite ethical stage into the higher unity by a smooth transition of thought, Kierkegaard attempts to embrace all contradictions in one spiritual "leap."

This doctrine of the three stages serves as a framework for a discussion of Kierkegaard's doctrine of belief, which may be considered as the crown and culmination of the whole existential dialectic constituting the stages.

THE AESTHETIC STAGE

The first of these three stages is that of aesthetic enjoyment of life. It has three levels: that of sensual immediacy, exemplified by the character of Don Juan, that of skeptical doubt, exemplified by the character of Faust, and that of true despair, as found in the character of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew. These three levels of aesthetic existence exemplify the major sensibilities of the aesthetic way of life. It would seem that Kierkegaard thought them almost indispensable as starting points for the existential dialectic, for he writes, "The three great ideas (Don Juan, Faust, and the Wandering Jew) represent, so to speak, the threefold tendency of life outside religion, and only as these ideas come alive in the individual human being and become mediate, only then comes the moral and the religious; so my view of these three ideas stands in relation to my theological position." 63

In the first level of aesthetic existence, that of sensual immediacy, Kierkegaard's analysis reveals that the person whose whole interest is sunk in the sensual living-for-the-moment which characterizes the lowest form of aesthetic-

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cism cultivates imagination and practical knowledge at the expense of reason and volition. This stage of aesthetic existence is characterized by boredom, which can only be overcome by the "rotation method," in which, to avoid disappointment, the aesthete must taste the enjoyment of successive moments, but remain uncommitted to any human relationships.

Boredom soon gives way to the second level of aesthetic existence, which is characterized by a state of doubt. The human spirit cannot be satisfied merely in the flow of immediate pleasure. The individual in this situation doubts; he does not yet despair. Kierkegaard warns that it is important to note from the start that despair is not to be confused with doubt. It can be said, it is true, that doubt is the despair of thought. But despair in this case is only partial and relative. It does not attain the depth and breadth of a despair which is the expression of a complete personality and relates to the absolute.

It is the third and highest level of aesthetic existence that is reserved for the state of unrelieved despair. The aesthetic personality comes to this state when the impossibility of "repetition" becomes apparent. The young man in Kierkegaard's book Repetition, like Kierkegaard himself, makes a journey to Berlin, tries to repeat exactly every experience he had there, and despairs of being able to recapture the original feelings he had. What the young man seeks is an aesthetic repetition. He knows neither the nature nor the necessity of repetition, although he knows it must take place to insure his happiness; but he is powerless to affect it, and thus he despairs. Kierkegaard does not

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explain repetition in the aesthetic sphere of life, for it is essentially a
religious category, and any explanation of it is reserved until the religious
stage is reached.

THE TRANSITIONAL LEAP

The individual who finds himself unsatisfied in the aesthetic stage, as
was Kierkegaard himself in 1836, is faced with the problem of how to transfer
his mode of existence to a higher stage, the stage of the ethical. The problem
is present because of the complete discontinuity between the spheres of exis-
tence which precludes a smooth transition from one to another. The passage
from one stage of existence to another is effected only by a "leap." Kier-
kegaard calls it a "qualitative leap"; for it is a transition from possibil-
ity to actuality, a true change, a coming-into-being. More important, the
leap is the category of decision and choice. The leap which bridges the gaps
between man's states of existing is, therefore, a choice—a free act by which
a man chooses to become, that is, to exist on a new and higher plane. Choice
as such is not present on the aesthetic level; for there choice is either wholly
immediate and unreflective, or fundamentally indecisive. One cannot even
choose to remain on the aesthetic level; for such a decisive choice would imply

65 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 231.
66 Ibid., 310.
67 Ibid., 306.
68 Ibid., 91.
69 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, 141.
full reflection, and to choose reflectively is to enter the sphere of the ethical. Kierkegaard therefore advises the despairing aesthete, "So then choose despair; for even despair is a choice; for one can doubt without choosing to, but one cannot despair without choosing. And when a man despairs he chooses again—and what is it he chooses? He chooses himself, not in his immediacy, not as this fortuitous individual, but he chooses himself in his eternal validity."

To "choose oneself" in this connection is similar to the ancient Greek adage, "know thyself." "It signifies that the ethical individual is to know himself not in the sense of mere contemplation but in the sense of coming to himself as an inward action of the personality." Choosing oneself in one's eternal validity means coming to true self-consciousness, and accepting oneself as "a task with manifold elements." It means that the man who has made the leap to the ethical plane has freely undertaken responsibility for re-making himself upon a new and ethical pattern. By his leap he has bridged the gap which separates him from moral living, and by his act of choice he begins to exist anew.

70 Ibid., 177.


72 Kierkegaard, Either/or, II, 216.
THE ETHICAL STAGE

The ethical man has thus chosen good and evil, and now has morality as the chief principle of his conduct and the ultimate end of his activity. Obedience to duty becomes the aim of the ethical man; for Kierkegaard's ethical man is a Kantian. The ethical law is both immanent and universal. It is immanent in the sense that it is an autonomous ethic, in which the individual follows the absolute will in all cases, and refers to no norm outside of himself; it is universal in the sense that it applies to him in the same way that it applies to everyone else, and his task is to realize the universal law. Sin is the contravention of this universal law. 73

But the ethical life, too, has its limitations, and soon becomes unsatisfactory. It founders when confronted with the fact of sin, and with the ethical impossibility of finding forgiveness for sin. Sin, on the one hand, deprives the ethical life of its universality, and places the sinner outside the universal norm; the impossibility of forgiveness for sin, on the other hand, is apparent; for the categorical imperative makes no provision for any breach of general laws.

In any case, to remain in the ethical stage would be impossible, even for the just man; for there are situations in which the ethical is inadequate, situations in which the ethical, or general, rules for conduct cannot apply. This was the case with Abraham, when bidden by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. For Abraham to do God's bidding would be to sin against the universal laws of the ethical life; to refuse obedience to God would be a sin directly against God.

This situation poses the three problems of Kierkegaard's book *Fear and Trembling*.

In this book, the story of Abraham and its significance, is, unfortunately, somewhat cryptic; but Kierkegaard, speaking as Johannes De Silenlio, intended it to be so. In his *Philosophical Fragments* and in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*—and particularly the latter, which he called "the turning point of my work as an author"—he explained more fully the meaning of his cryptic doctrines. The cryptic story of Abraham must be reviewed here, in order to present the final philosophical elements of Kierkegaard's doctrine of belief.

**TRANSITION TO THE RELIGIOUS STAGE**

*Fear and Trembling* describes the transition between the ethical stage and the stage of absolute religious faith; and in writing the book, Kierkegaard followed his usual style of presentation. Speaking pseudonymously, as Johannes De Silenlio, he describes the religious faith not abstractly or logically, but psychologically, studying Abraham in the throes of an ethico-religious dilemma. Two observations pertinent to this thesis may be drawn from the study of Abraham.

First, in Abraham's action, there was what Kierkegaard calls a "teleological suspension of the ethical." The ethical as such is universal; it is duty conceived as universally obliging for self-determining beings. It does not refer to individual particular cases, to chance, or to expediency. The ethical law is revealed to man in the *Categorical Imperative*. This revelation of ethics is a revelation of purpose: man's actions must tend toward the good of the community. The man who follows this dictate of the ethical law is called the "tragic hero," but not a "Knight of Faith." Agamemnon, when he sacrificed

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7* Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 41.
Iphegenia for the good of the whole Creek race, is to be considered a "tragic hero." But Abraham is the "Knight of Faith"; for his action was that of an individual acting individually.

Now, Abraham's ethical duty was to love and protect Isaac; but the higher goal of faith commanded the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham abandoned the universal commandment; and therefore he began to exist as an individual—a "Knight of Faith"—in opposition to the universal. He placed himself, through faith, "in an absolute relation to the absolute"; and when he bowed to the will of God, he reduced ethics in his own life to a relative position. Rising above mere ethical universality, he entered into a particular, direct relationship with God, abandoning all mediation of church or society.

Secondly, the means by which Abraham entered into this relationship with God are the means by which any individual existing ethically must relate himself to God. In Kierkegaard's terminology, Abraham made an "infinite double movement" of faith. The "first movement" of faith was Abraham's infinite resignation of Isaac, that is, his donation of Isaac to the infinite God. The "second movement" of faith took place when Abraham believed "by virtue of the absurd" that God would again restore Isaac to him.

It is to be noted here that Kierkegaard opposes faith to reason. Abraham believes only in the face of an "absurdity." His intellect contributes nothing to the act of faith but the realization that knowledge is pitifully inadequate when we are dealing with God.

75Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 92.
SUMMARY

It will be the task of the following chapter to explain more fully the act of belief here presented as the means by which an individual leaves the ethical stage, with its dependence upon reason, to exist in the religious stage in the face of intellectual absurdity.

In this chapter, generally speaking, Kierkegaard's attacks upon Hegelianism and upon Aesthetics have been reviewed. It was stated that Kierkegaard fought Hegelianism with the weapons of Romanticism, and Romanticism with the weapons of Hegelianism. The weapons he chose were a passionate interest in the individuality and responsibility of man, and the methodological dialectic of existence.

More particularly, this chapter has dealt first with Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegelianism in three theses: First, Kierkegaard asserted, Hegel's world-historical process is inimical to man's ethical life as a responsible individual; this idea of world-historicity Kierkegaard opposed on the grounds of human freedom, positing the necessity of man's free relationship to God. Secondly, Kierkegaard showed that Hegel's system cannot include real existence; for the System is merely conceptual. Kierkegaard counters Hegelian conceptualism with his own doctrine of existence, explaining existence as a process of becoming, a continual striving to exist. Thirdly, Kierkegaard pointed out that Hegel cannot explain becoming; for the conceptual dialectic cannot justify movement. In opposition to this, Kierkegaard proposed his own philosophical doctrine of becoming, and its correlative, belief.

The second part of this chapter has dealt with Kierkegaard's existential dialectic, tracing the progress of the individual through two of the three stages of existence: the aesthetic, and the ethical. Finally, the cryptic story
of Abraham was discussed, in preparation for a fuller discussion of the religious stage of existence and the act which constitutes the individual in that stage, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

KIERKEGAARD'S SOLUTION: THE FREEDOM OF BELIEF

The preceding chapter dealt with Kierkegaard's attack upon Hegelian Determinism, and the philosophical notions of existence, of freedom, and of contingency, together with belief, the correlative of contingency, which he developed in the course of that attack. Kierkegaard's dialectic was also discussed, as it led the individual, by means of the "leap of choice," through the aesthetic and ethical stages of existence to the peak of the ethical stage, the point at which the "leap of faith" placed Abraham in the higher religious stage.

Throughout this whole dialectic, Kierkegaard's preoccupation with existence is apparent. For Kierkegaard, it was explained, finite existence, or "the historical," is a process of coming-to-be, a process which is effected through free choice on the part of the existing individual, a process by which the individual, as it were, "makes himself anew" as he passes through the stages on life's way. It was also noted that Kierkegaard's doctrine replaced knowledge of finite existing beings, if that knowledge was to be significant, with belief.

Some care was taken in the preceding chapter to separate Kierkegaard's philosophical from his strictly religious doctrines; but the philosophical notions which were outlined previously must, in the present chapter, be invested with religious significance because the whole dialectic of existence, as Kierkegaard presented it, is the movement of the human spirit towards a vital
intercommunication with God in a religious mode of existence.

It is, therefore, the purpose of the present chapter to outline Kierkegaard's doctrine of the religious stage of existence, together with the act of choice, or faith, by which the individual, in bringing the existential dialectic into his own life, bridges the gap which separates him, as an ethical man, from the religious state. More particularly, therefore, Kierkegaard's basic problem, "becoming a Christian" will be discussed, together with his denial of any "objective" relationship of man to Christianity, and his insistence upon "subjectivity" as the mode of the individual's appropriation of the relationship. Under the heading of subjectivity will be discussed, first, the nature of the subjective thinker as an existing individual who must further become subjective to a pre-eminent degree through the freedom of faith. Next, the need for man's subjective relationship with God will be discussed, together with both the object of the relationship as a historical fact meriting belief, and the means of effecting the relationship through the category of religiousness. The difficulty (the "absurdity" or "paradox") involved in positing this free relationship will be explained, and the occasion upon which the difficulty presents itself will be briefly stated. Finally, the act of faith by which the individual freely posits the relationship, and the nature of the religious state which is the immediate result of the act of faith, will be analysed.

THE PROBLEM: BECOMING A CHRISTIAN IN CHRISTENDOM

Kierkegaard's whole effort as a writer—from his first book to his last—was directed, as he himself insists over and over again, to the task of becoming
Christian. Why is becoming a Christian a problem? The problem, in Kierkegaard's opinion, arises, first, from the fact that people presume that they are Christians as a matter of course, and, secondly, that they think knowing Christianity is the same as being a Christian.

When people presume that they are Christians as a matter of course, he contends, Christianity has no meaning in their lives. He explains his own view best, when he contrasts true Christianity with the Christendom he knew, and labels the latter "a prodigious illusion":

Every one with some capacity for observation, who seriously considers what is called Christendom, or the conditions in a so-called Christian country, must surely be assailed by profound misgivings. What does it mean that all these thousands and thousands call themselves Christians as a matter of course? These many, many men of whom the greater part, so far as one can judge, live in categories quite foreign to Christianity! People who perhaps never once enter a church, never think about God, never mention His name except in oaths! People upon whom it has never dawned that they might have any obligation to God, people who either regard it as a maximum to be guiltless of transgressing the criminal law, or do not count even this quite necessary! Yet all these people, even those who assert that no God exists, are all of them Christians, call themselves Christians, are recognized as Christians by the State, are buried as Christians by the Church, are certified as Christians for all eternity!  

Kierkegaard's complaint against Christendom, therefore, is found in the fact that Christian fervor was at a low ebb in the Denmark of his time, and this by reason of the fact that becoming a Christian was made too easy. It was Christian baptism that constituted those thousands and thousands as Christians; but baptism, although Kierkegaard admits that it "may for all that be

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1 For example, Kierkegaard, The Point of View, pp. 13, 22, 42, 92, 149.
2 Ibid., 22-23.
both justifiable and praiseworthy, partly as an expression of the well-meaning interest of the Church, partly as a defense against fanaticism, and partly as expressing the beautiful care and forethought of devout parents,"³ should not be looked upon as one's passport into the community of believers. It is merely a matter of convenience, "in view of the existing police regulations,"⁴ to have a baptismal certificate to present when one wishes to enter the university or to get married. In Kierkegaard's doctrine, one does not become a Christian merely by being baptized; the actions of nominal Christians, as Kierkegaard observed them, proved that. Rather, in agreement with Luther, he insists that the responsibility rests with the individual to become a Christian by means of a personal appropriation,⁵ that is, by a free and passionate commitment of one's whole being to that transcendent fact which is the heart of Christianity—the Incarnation of Christ.

The second difficulty in becoming a Christian, according to Kierkegaard, arises from the misunderstanding of speculative philosophy, and particularly, of course, the Hegelian philosophy, that religion is a thing to be known, and not a thing to be lived. He complained that the Hegelian principle of "objectivization" was taking control of religion, and that speculative knowledge was usurping the place reserved for faith.

His condemnation of the objective approach to the truths of faith was a

³ Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 325.
⁴ Ibid., 328.
⁵ Ibid., 325, 327.
sweeping denial of all abstract thinking in religious matters, including the extremes of objectivity as found in the Idealistic thought of the Hegelian "System" on the one hand, and the more realistic conceptions of the Empirical schools on the other. His rejection of both extremes is based on his consistent doctrine that all conceptual knowing necessarily excludes the notion of real existence. Objective knowledge, therefore, is of its very nature only an "approximation" or a "hypothesis." It is an approximation because the existing knower, who must come into contact with truth according to his own mode of existence, cannot come to know anything of another subject existing as such. It is hypothetical because it does not refer necessarily to any existing subject, but only to some imaginary subject-in-general, who need not exist at all.

While Kierkegaard objected violently to the abstractions of Hegel's thought, he saw nevertheless some value in abstract thinking; for the value of abstract thought is that it presents a "possibility of actuality" which Hegelian Idealism can never attain. "Abstract thought," Kierkegaard admits, "embraces the possible... pure thought is a phantom. The real subject is not the cognitive subject, since in knowing he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject." Here, Kierkegaard indicates that abstract thought presents to the ethically existing individual a possibility which he, through his subjectivity, can bring to actuality. He also indicates,

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6 Ibid., 169-170
7 Ibid., 25, 26, 31, 278.
8 Ibid., 515.
9 Ibid., 281.
however, that abstract thought of itself is disinterested, and that contemplation does not lead to action without some higher motivation. For the existing individual, however, the motivation for existential progress is found in his own existence, which is his highest interest; and in this sphere disinterested speculation fails him. To know the doctrines of Christianity, to know God as an object of thought, is, for Kierkegaard, insignificant. His problem arises when a subject—a "subjective thinker"—attempts to know God subjectively as a Subject. He best expresses his own rejection of all speculative knowledge in becoming a Christian and his own adoption of subjectivity when he remarks, "Speculative philosophy, as abstract and objective, entirely ignores the fact of existence and inwardness, and inasmuch as Christianity accentuates this fact paradoxically, speculation is the greatest possible misunderstanding of Christianity." 11

To summarize the foregoing, it may be said that for Kierkegaard to know a thing objectively is to know it abstractly; to know a thing abstractly is to prescind from existence; but to prescind from existence is to ignore the fact of existence entirely, since, in Kierkegaard's opinion, concepts do not even connote real existence. Thus, abstraction amounts to the annihilation of the real object of thought. Therefore, the existing subject must come to know the Truth of Christianity—Jesus Christ—as an existing subject. To explain how this "knowledge" can come about through subjectivity is the present task.

10 Ibid., 278.
11 Ibid., 507.
SUBJECTIVITY AS THE TRUTH

Logically, one would imagine, if Christianity cannot be known objectively, then it must be known subjectively. This is Kierkegaard's contention when he maintains that Christianity does not lend itself to objective observation precisely because it proposes to "intensify subjectivity to the utmost." What, then, does he mean by subjectivity?

The common meaning of subjectivity, as given by Reidar Thomte, a thorough student of Kierkegaard, "refers to that tendency which seeks the organ or the criteria of religious truth in the intimations of the individual's inner consciousness rather than in history and objective revelation." This, says Thomte, is the meaning which Schliernacher and Ritschl attribute to the term. Basically, it is also Kierkegaard's doctrine; but he develops the notion in his own way, beginning with an analysis of truth.

In his great philosophical work, the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he propounds the thesis that "truth is subjectivity." In his analysis of truth, he finds that truth is commonly defined either empirically, as the correspondence of thought with being, or it is defined idealistically as the correspondence of being with thought. He rejects both definitions, insisting that, as an abstraction, "being" corresponds only with itself, and either of the definitions of truth given is only tautological. He insists that for "the existing spirit who is now conceived as raising the question of truth, presumably in

12 Ibid., 55.
13 Thomte, pp. 113-114.
order that he may exist in it," both the empirical and the idealistic doctrine of truth are devoid of significance for life; for such doctrines are totally abstract and have significance "only for the abstraction into which an existing spirit is transformed when he abstracts from himself qua existing individual." 

His own positive doctrine of truth culminates in the view, expressed in his work, Training in Christianity, that truth has nothing whatever to do with thought; for truth, "in its very being is not the duplication of being in terms of thought . . . No, truth in its very being is the reduplication in me, in thee, in him, so that my, that thy, that his life, approximately, in the striving to attain it, is the very being of truth, is a life, as the truth was in Christ, for He was the truth." Subjectivity is the truth, therefore, in the sense that there is no truth for the individual except in so far as he creates it in his own life. Truth is an ethical and religious appropriation of the ideal, an active practice and realization rather than knowledge. It is a "process of appropriation."

There is a second sense in which truth is subjectivity in the doctrine of Kierkegaard. In dealing with "essential knowledge," that is, knowledge which has an essential relationship to existence, he says that such knowledge has a relationship to the knower as an existing individual, and that this relationship

15 Ibid., 170.
16 Ibid.
18 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 182.
as a vital intercommunication in existence between man and God, is precisely
the truth.\textsuperscript{19} Kierkegaard's terminology is novel; it must always be kept in
mind, therefore, that when Kierkegaard speaks of the "subjective thinker," he
does not intend to treat of "thought" in the usually accepted sense of the term
but in the sense of one's active appropriation of, or personal commitment to,
Eternal Truth. "Knowledge," for Kierkegaard, is not knowledge as we usually
refer to it; but rather it is the active realization in one's own life of the
Christian Ideal.

It is for this reason that in Kierkegaard's writings, attention is drawn
rather to the nature of man's living relationship with God than to his knowledge
of God. The question for him is not whether the individual is related to
something which is objectively true, but whether the relationship of the indi-
vidual is a true relationship.\textsuperscript{21}

Truth, therefore, is subjectivity; and the converse is also true: "Sub-
jectivity is the truth;"\textsuperscript{22} for "at its maximum, this inward 'how,' that is,
the truth of man's relationship with God 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."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Kierkegaard, \textit{Postscript}, p. 182.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 177-178.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 178.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 181.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
The significance of the notion that subjectivity is the truth becomes clear when Kierkegaard equates "truth" with "faith." Existential truth is the personal, passionate appropriation of man's relationship to Christianity; and Kierkegaard's definition of truth, "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness," is identical with his definition of faith. Thus, the truth-relationship is identical with the faith-relationship for the existing individual, and what is said of truth is said about faith.

The act by which the individual seeker for truth, in his striving to attain eternal happiness, relates himself in his existence to God is a complex act, comprising a number of essential elements. Although these elements all converge simultaneously upon that "instant" in time when the individual gathers together all his powers to commit himself to God in an act of faith, they cannot, unfortunately, be explained simultaneously. The remainder of this chapter will therefore treat in turn the essential elements of the "appropriation-process" which is Kierkegaard's act of faith: the subject of faith, the need for faith, the object of faith, the means by which faith may enter the life of the individual, the difficulties involved in the act of faith, the occasion of faith, and the act of faith itself, together with the result of that act.

THE SUBJECT OF FAITH--THE INDIVIDUAL

Kierkegaard presents a portrait of the subjective thinker, "his task, his form, his style," in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript. The subjective

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Ibid., 182.

Ibid.

Ibid., 312-322.
thinker is "an existing individual," and a "dialectician dealing with the existential." His equipment includes "imagination and feeling, dialectics in existential inwardness, together with passion. But passion first and last."

The task of the subjective thinker is that of "understanding himself in his existence," a project which has nothing to do with thought; for understanding, in Kierkegaard's interpretation, is rather "existing" in the fullest sense. The subjective thinker must "transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses whatever is essentially human." The scene of his activity is "inwardness as a human being," and his method is that of subjective reflection.

First of all, then, the subjective thinker is an existing individual. This means that his existence is a process of becoming, a constant striving, by means of his free choices, to be something better than he is, to remake himself in a higher realm of existence. The individual who thus has himself as his task will be infinitely and genuinely interested in himself and in the realization of his destiny. Such infinite interest is called "the passion of human freedom." 27

Passion, therefore, plays a vital role in the development of man and in his exercise of freedom; for the subjective thinker, says Kierkegaard, needs "passion first and last." In his explanation of the exact nature of human perfection, he states that the natural man is made up of feeling and passion, and that passion is therefore an essential element of human nature. 28 It is pas-

27 Reinhardt, 42.

28 Kierkegaard, The Journals, pp. 102-103; Fear and Trembling, pp. 184-190.
sion, therefore, which makes a man what he is. Now, when humanity is defined according to sensibility rather than reason, human perfection must culminate in the most energetic exercise of feeling. Passion is accordingly considered by Kierkegaard as the apex of subjectivity and it is therefore characterized by inward activity directed toward self-integration through the existential dialectic. It is for this reason that "feeling" is distinguished from "passion." Feeling is mere emotion; passion, or inwardness, is true religious feeling.

EXISTENTIAL PATHOS

Existential passion, or "pathos," as Kierkegaard terms it, manifests itself on three different levels: The Initial Expression, The Essential Expression, and The Decisive Expression.

The initial expression of existential pathos is "the absolute direction toward the absolute telos expressed in action through the transformation of the individual's existence," that is, the necessary development of the individual spirit in the direction of a relationship with God through his passage, by means of free choice, through the various levels of existence. It is passion which provides the motivating force for action, in Kierkegaard's doctrine; knowledge has no part to play in the existential dialectic.

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29 Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 177.
30 See Thomte, p. 86.
32 Ibid., 347.
33 Ibid., p. 59 n.
The essential expression of existential pathos is suffering, whether aesthetic or ethical. Suffering is characteristic of infinite resignation, the first movement of the infinite double movement of faith, which marked the dialectical leap of Abraham into the realm of faith.  

The decisive expression of existential pathos is guilt. It must be noted here that for Kierkegaard "guilt" is not the same as "sin." "Guilt" in its fullest sense is a term which is usually reserved to describe man's state of "untruth"—the state of Original Sin, the state of alienation from God. This concept of guilt is understood in its fullest Lutheran sense. "Sin," on the other hand, is not viewed as the opposite of "virtue," but rather as the opposite of "faith." This is also basically a Lutheran concept; for Luther claimed that salvation comes through faith alone. The reader does not find in the writings of Kierkegaard any discussion of good and evil acts in the sphere of religion, but only in the sphere of ethics, with regard to the moral law. Kierkegaard, the Lutheran, considers the only meritorious act, the only act by which our eternal salvation is determined to be the act of faith; no other purely "moral" act can have significance for eternity. Kierkegaard sometimes marks a sharp distinction between the concepts "guilt" and "sin"; sometimes he uses the terms interchangeable. But he always means either man's natural state of alienation from God or a consequent state of unbelief.

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34 See above, Ch. 3, p. 60.
35 Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 185-186.
36 See above, Ch. 2, p. 18.
37 Ibid., See also Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 132.
It is this decisive expression of existential pathos—a state in which man finds himself estranged from God by the mere fact of his existence—which is of significance for the religious stage of existence. Man's consciousness of total guilt, or otherness from God, in the primitive Lutheran sense, forces him to think of this otherness or separation from the Eternal in connection with his essential relationship to the Eternal as his ultimate goal. Guilt, says Kierkegaard, in attempting to explain this strange ambivalence, "is the expression for the relationship by reason of the fact that it expresses the incompatibility or disrelationship." In more intelligible terms, guilt is an expression for man's radical separation from God; but it is in the realization of his actual separateness from God that man realizes the necessity of espousing a relationship to God. The decisive expression of existential passion, therefore, continually forces the individual to choose decisively the infinite; for, on the one hand, man's infinite passion can find correspondence only in the Infinite; and on the other hand, neither aesthetic choice (which is pseudo-choice, since the aesthete does not truly choose, but drifts) nor ethical choice (which is finite, since it deals only with the universal) can fulfill the requirements of an infinite passion. The resulting decision of the individual, as Kurt Reinhardt, one of Kierkegaard's astute commentators, remarks helpfully, is "for or against the infinite, an absolute either/or, all or nothing; it is a choice

38 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 472.
39 Ibid., 473.
40 Ibid., 181
which makes or unmakes the individual, a choice in which he either truly 'becomes what he is' or utterly fails to realize his authentic existence. Therefore, Kierkegaard concludes, 'Truth is subjectivity,' that is, the highest degree of personal self-realization."

Such, then, is the nature of the subjective thinker, the existing, finite, individual. His task in life is to "become what he is"—a Christian, an individual "existing" in the fullest sense of the word. Since becoming always takes place with freedom, this individual must make himself by a free act on his own initiative. This act is one in which he relates himself to Christianity; and "Christianity," says Kierkegaard, "is spirit; spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness." The inwardness of subjectivity, therefore, is merely Kierkegaard's way of describing intense religious feeling. Such religious feeling, or passion, is the essence of man as man; and therefore it is the property of every finite individual. But Kierkegaard's intention is to actualize this religious feeling to such a degree of intensity that it will impel the individual, in the face of all the contradictions of reason, to appropriate his relationship to himself and to God, and to himself before God, in the "highest degree of self-realization"—in an act of free choice which is at the same time the act by which he exists as a responsible, Christian individual.

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\[1\]
See Reinhardt, p. 42.

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Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 33.
THE NEED FOR FAITH—REPEITION

Why is it that existential passion impels the individual to choose the infinite? Basically, it is due to the need for what Kierkegaard calls "Repetition," a renewal of self, a re-birth of self on a higher level of existence, a re-integration of one's whole life, personality, and activity in the direction of a newly-appropriated ideal. 43 It was noted in Chapter Three of this thesis that the young man in Kierkegaard's book *Repetition* sought for this in the aesthetic stage of existence, knowing that it was necessary for him but that he could not attain it in a life devoted to the immediacy of sense impressions and artistic pleasures. Aesthetics cannot bring the individual to the "highest degree of self-realization" of which he is capable, since the aesthetic stage is a state of unreflective and uncommitted existence. Repetition is therefore a religious concept, and the question remains, "why is it necessary?"

It is necessary in view of man's very situation in existence. "Existence," Kierkegaard says, "is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, and the existing individual is both infinite and finite." 44 This is another way of saying that man finds within his own finite consciousness a relationship to an infinite, eternal goal as his ultimate end.

Finite man, however, is not only a composite of finitude and infinity; he is also separate and consciously distinct from all other existing beings. Most

43 T. H. Croxall, in his *Kierkegaard Commentary*, p. 128, offers an etymological analysis of the Danish word for "Repetition," linking the term with the Christian notion of "re-birth," the sense in which Kierkegaard uses it.

of all, as noted above, he is separate and distinct from the Eternal, and this precisely in virtue of his finite existence. On the one hand, Kierkegaard maintained with true Lutheran grimness, "the existence of an existing being is characterized as standing in opposition to the truth," and "to come into being is to become a sinner"; and therefore to be a man is to be apart from the Eternal. On the other hand, the truth is precisely his relationship to the Eternal. Man is therefore divided against himself and against God. Hence arises the need for repetition; and it is in this context that Kierkegaard speaks of man's being his own task: Each individual man must accept this personal, spiritual dichotomy as a starting point for that dialectical process of becoming what he is—namely, a Christian. He has need of a personal, spiritual reintegration—repetition—of himself in a relationship to the Eternal, a relationship which is de facto constituted by his being a finite individual; but which must, if it is to have significance for his eternal happiness, be appropriated anew.

The relationship of the finite individual to the Infinite is therefore both necessary and free. It is necessary because it is found in the nature of man as an existing individual (hence the need for repetition), and free because it is a relationship which must be appropriated by the existing individual. The full meaning of man's rebirth through the act of faith will become clearer when the object of the relationship is explained in the following paragraphs.

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45 Ibid., 186.

46 Ibid., 517.
THE OBJECT OF FAITH

The object of man's truth-relationship has already been referred to in general terms as man's absolute end, the Eternal, which, when subjectively appropriated, means for him his own eternal happiness. Kierkegaard speaks of this highest end of man's existence as "the absolute telos" which "must be willed for its own sake," and in an absolute and unqualified manner; for "to will absolutely is to will the infinite, and to will an eternal happiness is to will absolutely." Beyond this, the individual does not wish to know anything about the absolute telos other than "that it exists." 49

That the relationship of the individual existing subject to himself cannot be defined without reference to the eternal is a fact which is accepted by Kierkegaard with full realization of the difficulties involved. It is easy to see that the true reality of the individual can be found in interested self-activity, or coming-into-existence. But when it becomes clear that the passionate striving which constitutes authentic existential becoming is not directed towards purely temporary or secular goals (for example, mere growth in person-

147 Ibid., 353.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
as to exclude in its composition that which by virtue of its essence cannot become historical, and must therefore become such by virtue of an absurdity? In other words, Kierkegaard conceives of the object of the truth-relationship of the individual as not merely an absolute, eternal end, but as something historical. It was explained in Chapter Three that by the "historical" Kierkegaard means a contingent fact—something which comes into existence, and shares all the uncertainty and contingency of temporal existence. The reaction of the individual to a historical fact, furthermore, is not one of knowledge, but of belief. The significance of these two statements becomes apparent when Kierkegaard further specifies the object of Christian faith as being "the reality of the God-man in the sense of his existence." That God became man is certainly the object of Christian faith. But according to the philosophical principles outlined in Chapter Three, the fact of this event, even if it is taken for granted, is not significant. What is significant for Kierkegaard is the fundamental contingency of the event. Merely to know that Christ was born is not significant for salvation; but the transformation of one's life through faith in accordance with a living relationship to the Christ who was born is man's best and greatest task—a task involving the highest exercise of personal interest. The difficulty involved in thus relating oneself to Christ rests upon the fact that the birth of Christ was a contingent event; and whether the individual attains a true spiritual rebirth or not depends upon the way in which the individual approaches the fact of the Incarnation. The ways in which he may come into contact with this event will next be discussed.

50 Ibid., 345.
51 Ibid., 290
RELIGIOUSNESS A AND RELIGIOUSNESS B

The problem of relating oneself to the fact of God's existence is, according to Kierkegaard, "pathetic-dialectic." It is, first of all, "pathetic," that is, it deals with the existential passion of the individual as it is directed to the "what" of the truth-relationship, to the thing which constitutes the individual's eternal happiness. The problem is also "dialectic," that is, it deals with the "how" of positing such a relationship.

The pathetic element, explains Kierkegaard, consists in a more and more energetic and intense cultivation of inward passion, or religious feeling, in the direction of the eternal; it is thus the existential condition for the latter exercise of the existential dialectic of faith. The three "expressions" of the existential pathos—the Initial Expression as the development of the individual towards the appropriation of the absolute relationship to God through the lower stages of existence, the Essential Expression as the suffering involved in renouncing the world's attractions in the first movement of the infinite double movement of faith, and the Decisive Expression of existential pathos as guilt, man's consciousness that he is in a state of total guilt and estrangement from God—these three expressions of existential pathos have been explained in connection with the existential thinker himself. This "pathetic" element of the pathetic-dialectic movement of becoming a Christian (Kierkegaard calls it "Religiousness A") can exist in paganism; for it is only a dialectic of inward transformation. Religiousness A is the religiosity of immanence in

52 Ibid., 345.
53 Ibid.
which subjectivity, or inwardness, is accepted as the truth. As the religiosity of immanence, it is indeed a dialectic by which the individual is inwardly transformed; but not because of anything outside the individual. Kierkegaard says of Religiousness A that "the individual does not base his relationship to the eternal upon his existence in time, but the individual's relation to the eternal, by the dialectic of inward appropriation, determines him in transforming his existence in accordance with this relation and expresses the relation by the transformation." In other words, the man who is content to exist in the state of Religiousness A does not base his eternal happiness upon the Eternal in time, although his relationship to the Eternal in itself is a determining factor in the transformation of his existence. This kind of religiosity brings a man, in his quest for eternal happiness, to an attitude of complete renunciation of worldly goods in an effort to attain that goal, and to an attitude of unqualified repentance for his total guilt—but it is not Christian, because it lacks the necessary relationship to the temporal fact of the Incarnation.

True Christianity (Kierkegaard calls it Religiousness B) has, indeed, an inner, devotional, subjective side in common with the religion of immanence; but it also has an outer, transcendent, objective side, concerned with a real, historical person—the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. The religion of immanence rests upon the supposition that truth is immanent in human subjectivity and that the re-integration of the human subject can take place through

54 Ibid., 185.
55 Ibid., 508-509.
56 Ibid., 185.
an inner effort or concentration of the personality. In the state of Religiousness B, however, the individual reaches the conclusion that "subjectivity is untruth," in the sense that the more he concentrates inwardly the more he becomes aware of his estrangement from God, and of his need for a revelation of God in history. He must face the absurdity, the contradiction, that he is then basing his eternal happiness upon some temporal, contingent, event.

THE DIFFICULTY FOR FAITH--THE PARADOX

Kierkegaard posed the problem in the words already quoted: "The eternal happiness of the individual is decided in time through the relationship to something historical, which is furthermore of such a character as to include in its composition that which by virtue of its essence cannot become historical, and must therefore become such by virtue of an absurdity." And, lest his readers imagine that the absurdity facing the seeker for eternal happiness is only an apparent contradiction, he says explicitly:

Suppose Christianity never intended to be understood; suppose that, in order to express this and to prevent anyone from misguidedly entering upon the objective way, it has declared itself to be the paradox. Suppose it wished to have significance only for existing individuals, and essentially for existing individuals in inwardness, in the inwardness of faith; which cannot be expressed more definitely than in the proposition that Christianity is the absurd, held fast in the passion of the infinite. Suppose it refuses to be understood, and that

57 Ibid., 509.
58 Ibid., 185.
59 Ibid., 194.
60 Ibid., 345.
the maximum of understanding which could come in question is to understand that it cannot be understood. Suppose it accentuates existence so decisively that the individual becomes a sinner, Christianity a paradox, existence the period of decision.61

The problem which Kierkegaard here presents poses a triple contradiction: The first of these contradictions constitutes the individual's breach "with the understanding and with thinking and with immanence."62 It is paradoxical, it is absurd, it is contrary to reason, that a man should expect his eternal happiness to be presented to him in time through a relationship to some other temporal reality.63 The individual exists; therefore he is contingent; and therefore he exists in time. He comes in time into a relationship "with the eternal in time, so that the relationship is within time; and this relationship conflicts equally with all thinking."64 This is a problem which does not exist in Religiousness A; for in that sphere, the individual's relationship is to the Eternal as Eternal, and not to the Eternal in time.

It is, secondly, a contradiction to imagine that eternal happiness is based upon something historical, or temporal, at all.65 The subject of truth and of faith is Eternal in its very nature; the processes of truth and of faith are temporal, as is the subject. Hence there is a gap between eternity and

61 Ibid., 191-192.
62 Ibid., 505.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 506.
65 Ibid., 508.
time which must be explained or transcended before the subjective thinker can integrate them within himself. Moreover, the "historical" of its very nature is always contingent and temporal, necessary only with consequent necessity, and always fundamentally uncertain. Religiousness A does not face the contradiction of basing its eternal happiness upon an uncertainty, although it does indeed seek the Eternal in immanence; for it only urges the individual to transform his own inner existence in accordance with his de facto relationship with Eternity. Religiousness B, on the other hand, must base the individual's eternal happiness upon a relationship to something historical, something outside himself. The contradiction here arises in view of the fact that the individual is obligated to direct his supreme passion for the Infinite towards an historical fact of which he can have only approximate knowledge, and approximate knowledge is clearly not commensurate with the infinite passion with which the individual must assert his relationship to the historical fact in question.

The third contradiction inherent in man's relationship to the Eternal is found in the fact that this historical event, namely, the appearance of God in time as a contingent being, is "not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd." It is an absurdity, for Kierkegaard, that God "should come into being at a definite moment in time as an individual man," precisely

66 Ibid., 505, 509.
67 Ibid., 512.
68 Ibid.
because coming-into-existence is the exact opposite of God's being as Eternal.

Kierkegaard finds that the first two of these contradictions, or paradoxes, are, of themselves, not sufficient to repel the intellect with "sufficient intensive inwardness" because the Eternal is not of itself paradoxical, but only becomes so when viewed in its relationship to the individual. Therefore, these two contradictions are not sufficient to demand a full existential-dialectical movement of the individual in the direction of God through the act of faith; they are only sufficient to establish the individual in the state of Religiousness A. There is needed an "absolute" paradox; and "that God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox sensu strictissimo, the absolute paradox." It is this absolute paradox which is the condition for positing the truth-relationship, as it is the object of that relationship. The absolute paradox is demanded by the "infinity" of man's religious passion "for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the reason to seek a collision, although this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think. This passion is at bottom present in all thinking."
Paradox is, indeed, present in all the thinking of the individual; for, in thinking, he participates in something transcending himself. Thus, truth itself must be a paradox. And so it is, if truth is subjectivity; for, on the one hand, the Truth is Eternal, yet on the other hand it has an essential relationship to the existing, finite, individual. Reason, when it seeks the truth, is trying to discover something that thought cannot think—namely, something which really exists. Thus, reason actually seeks the paradox, the contradiction, which is its downfall. It finds an ordinary paradox in the "historical"; it finds an absolute paradox in the "existence" of God through the Incarnation—a thing which cannot be proved by reason, since reasoning is conceptual in character and always ignores real existence. While we dally with concepts, says Kierkegaard, "existence does not come out"; when we leave the "proof," we leap immediately to existence, commit ourselves to it, appropriate it for ourselves. Thus, through faith, we establish a temporal relationship to the Eternal, and it is thus that the Eternal enters time.

THE ACT OF FAITH

The occasion upon which the relationship between the individual existing man and Eternal Truth—in-time is constituted is called by Kierkegaard "The Instant." The Instant, though a moment in time, is a synthesis of time and eternity; and in The Instant, the believer becomes subjectively contemporaneous with Christ—for, due to the nature of our knowledge of contingent existence, according to Kierkegaard, we are not less contemporaneous with Christ than were the Apostles. Only in The Instant, where time and eternity meet, does

73 Ibid., 33.
Eternal Truth come into being for man in his temporal existence, as he responds to it in the act of faith.\(^7\)\(_4\)

Finally, the act of faith itself must be explained. It is best explained in the way that Kierkegaard himself presented it, as identical with existential truth. For Kierkegaard, the definition of truth is, "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness;" and, as shown above, the truth-relationship of the individual to Christ is identical with his faith-relationship. There are three elements to be considered, therefore, in dealing with the act of faith: first, an "objective uncertainty"; secondly, an "appropriation-process"; and thirdly, a "passionate inwardness."

The "objective uncertainty," as has been shown, is the fact of the Incarnation. This fact is the absolute paradox, the absurdity from which the intellect recoils. Yet it is this fact which must be believed. Belief, however, is an act admirably suited, in Kierkegaard's philosophy, to assert the reality of this fact, since the function of belief is precisely to supply for the failure of the intellect to understand any process of becoming. That this particular process of becoming is unique—even absurd—does not change the attitude of the subject toward the Incarnation as the object of faith; the absolute paradoxical nature of the Incarnation, however, does provide a worthy object for the absolute infinity of the individual's passionate inwardness, that is, an intense religious feeling.

\(^7\)\(_4\) Kierkegaard discusses this point at length in his book, The Concept of Dread, pp. 71-86.

\(^7\)\(_5\) Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 182.
The process by which the individual subject appropriates the paradox in the moment of supreme religious feeling is the same process by which Abraham reached the religious stage of existence, namely, "the infinite double movement of faith." The first movement is the movement of resignation; the second movement is the act of faith by which the appropriation is accomplished. Both movements result in the state of "immediacy after reflection," a synonym for "Repetition."

When the individual subject makes the first movement of faith, "resignation," he renounces, first, a dependence upon the temporal world and its attachments; but the renunciation cannot be externalized except by entering the monastic life. If this is impossible, the desire for the world is accentuated, and the inner tension already existing between faith and reason is increased. A tension of this kind is not unwelcome to the existential believer; for it forces him at every instant to renew his absolute relationship to Christ. And while he struggles to maintain this relationship, "resignation will make its inspection early and late to see how he preserves the lofty solemnity with which he first acquired the absolute direction to the absolute telos." 77

In the first act of the infinite double movement of faith, the individual also renounces his dependence upon human reason; for "faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off." 78 For Kierkegaard, as for Luther, faith is contrary to reason, and not merely above reason. Faith is the death of reason. 79

76 Ibid., 362, 386, 433.
77 Ibid., 367. See also p. 364.
78 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 78.
After the first movement of faith, resignation, the individual makes the second movement, the movement of adherence to the paradox. Kierkegaard clearly outlines this movement in his Philosophical Fragments:

But how does the learner come to realize an understanding with this Paradox? We do not ask that he understand the Paradox, but only that this is the Paradox. How this takes place we have already shown. It comes to pass when the Reason and the Paradox encounter one another happily in the Moment; when the Reason sets itself aside and the Paradox bestows itself. The third entity in which the union is realized (for it is not realized in the Reason, since it is set aside; nor in the Paradox, which bestows itself—hence it is realized in something) is that happy passion to which we will now assign a name, although it is not the name that so much matters. We shall call this passion: Faith.

Since the paradox is a historical fact meriting belief, the individual's adherence to the paradox will have the quality of belief; fundamentally, a free decision on the part of the subject, an act of the will commanded by the feelings—and not an act of the intellect commanded by the will. Such a free decision is a "qualitative leap," according to Kierkegaard, an act by which something becomes, since all becoming takes place through an act of free choice.

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80 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 47.
81 Ibid., 50. It is important to note that on the same page he says that this act is not an act of the intellect, Kierkegaard also says that it is not an act of the will. The question of the meaning which Kierkegaard attaches to the term "will" awaits further study. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it seems valid to remark that he is only denying the name "act of the will" to this act while the individual is yet "in error"; for when he is "in error," man cannot make any true act of the will in the direction of God, and God must bestow the conditions for this act. Thus Kierkegaard considers faith ultimately a gift of God. See Kierkegaard, Fragments, pp. 51-52. It has also been suggested that by "will" Kierkegaard means Kant's "autonomous will" of the order of ethical law and obligation, and thus of the order of essence and essential operation. In his denial of "will" in this sense, Kierkegaard is insisting upon existential faith as belonging to an order anterior to the "will" and the "intellect," in the same way that Pascal's "heart" or St. Augustine's "memoria" or "inquietudo" are anterior to scientific knowledge.
It is thus that the individual renews himself, by re-creating himself, as it were, before God. And when man casts reason aside and rejects objective experience in order to join himself to the absolute paradox of the Incarnation by an inward act of appropriation which is a free decision, he is indeed a "new man." His very existence is re-integrated, and he exists in a new relationship of faith. His act of faith is a decisive, subjective act of his whole being, and is therefore truly existential in character.

As a new man, having undergone the rebirth of himself, man remains finite. He does not escape time and merge with the absolute; and at the same time, the eternal becomes immanent in him within his own existence through his new relationship to the eternal. Man has begun to enjoy his eternal goal in time.

SUMMARY

The present chapter has been concerned with the problem of the passage of the individual from the ethical to the religious sphere of existence. The problem itself was presented as Kierkegaard's problem of "becoming a Christian": we must "become what we already are," because, first, Christianity is a matter of personal responsibility and not of group practice; secondly, because to know Christianity is not the same as to be a Christian.

The solution of Kierkegaard's problem is to be found in his doctrine of the freedom of belief. The basic concept of Kierkegaard's theory of belief was seen to be that of "subjectivity," the active relationship of man to Christ through a personal appropriation of one's de facto relationship to the Eternal, and through an active, personal realization of the Christian ideal in one's own life.
Furthermore, man's subjectivity, his relationship to Christ, was seen to be a truth-relationship which is identical with the faith-relationship.

Man, the subjective thinker, was then discussed, and his essential characteristic—passion—was explained in its various "expressions," or manifestations, culminating in the expression of guilt, man's realization of his estrangement from God and from his own true self. Man's need for faith was then presented as his need for "repetition," or regeneration from that state of total guilt to a state of vital intercommunication with God in existence.

The object of faith, the Incarnation of Christ, was then discussed. It was seen that Kierkegaard's explanation of the Incarnation of Christ presents that fact as an "historical" event, an event subject to all the uncertainty of contingent beings. It is, therefore, absurd, contradictory to reason, and paradoxical, that man must base his eternal happiness upon a matter so unreasonable; but nevertheless, the Paradox is the determining factor for that eternal happiness.

Possible reactions to this "Absolute Paradox" were then explored, and the state of "Religiousness A" was found to be a state of non-Christian commitment to God, because, although it forces the individual to a renunciation of worldly ends in favor of the Eternal, it does not demand Christian appropriation, since it does not face the Paradox that Christ has really "existed." The state of "Religiousness B" alone can be termed Christianity, because it seeks the paradox in spite of the necessary crucifixion of the intellect involved in accepting such an "absurdity," and reorganizing one's whole existence in favor of a fact so intellectually uncertain.

Finally, the act of faith itself was analysed, in its infinite double move-
ment. The first movement, an act of infinite resignation, is the act by which man renounces both the world and the demands of the intellect. The second movement, the act of appropriation itself, is the act of faith, by which a man blindly, but freely, chooses to believe in spite of all contradictions. This act has the effect of placing man unreservedly in the religious stage of existence, adrift from intellectual moorings, but blindly and passionately reaffirming at each successive instant his absolute relationship to Christ. A second effect of the act of faith is to produce the man's own existence. Since any transit from potentiality to actuality must be the result of an act of free choice, the act of free choice which is the faith-act is thus the act by which man exists in the fullest realization of his human potentialities. Thus belief is an act directed toward "existence," and, at the same time, an act affecting "existence."

Kierkegaard's own view of the situation of the true Christian is best given in his own words to conclude this chapter: "Without risk there is no faith. 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."

82 Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 182.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

There are many worthwhile elements to be found in Kierkegaard's doctrines of belief, but much, too, that is questionable. The purpose of the present chapter is, after a synthetic review of the thesis in the light of Kierkegaard's sources for his doctrine of belief, to present in a positive way his contributions to the study of philosophy in the elaboration of the notion of belief and in the sphere of Christian action, after which a few negative criticisms will be attempted, particularly the questionable Kierkegaardian doctrines involving his denial of the validity of reason in matters of faith, and his denial of the validity of objective truth and objective certitude.

SUMMARY

The primary object of this thesis has been to present and explain Kierkegaard's definition of faith: "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness." The explanation of this definition has yielded the following particularizations:

The core of Kierkegaard's treatment of belief, as outlined in this thesis, was found in his problem of "becoming a Christian," and in his solution of the problem by his denial of the validity of objective knowledge and his defense of the subjectivity of truth, and therefore the subjectivity of faith. In a wider
frame of reference, through his conflict with Hegelian Determinism on the one hand, and with Romantic Aestheticism on the other, he gathered the materials with which he was to solve his problem. From his conflict with Hegelianism were developed the concepts which Romanticism suggested to him—his notions of existence, of human contingency and human freedom. From his conflict with Romanticism was developed the existential dialectic which his studies of Hegel suggested to him.

When viewed in the light of the sources of his doctrine of belief, the doctrine itself becomes more intelligible. It was proposed in the thesis that, influenced on the one side by Lutheranism, which substituted the will or the emotions, or both, for the function of the intellect in dealing with religious belief, and influenced on the other side, through the writings of Kant, by Empiricism, which substituted acts of belief for true and scientific judgments in dealing with human knowledge, Kierkegaard came to his great conclusion that "truth is subjectivity."

Indeed, most of his important doctrines, when understood in the light of the two-fold source in Luther and Kant of his notion of belief, become remarkably clear. His revolt against Hegelian Determinism in the religious sphere seems nothing more than a re-assertion of Lutheran anti-intellectualism, a re-statement of the opposition between the difficulties of speculative or rational knowledge and the need for a subjective assurance of salvation—which both Luther and Kierkegaard experienced strongly in their lives. Again, Kierkegaard's concept of guilt, the consciousness of need, the painful realization of human sinfulness, echoes the Lutheran teaching concerning the origin of religious faith in the depravity of man's nature.
Kierkegaard's description of revealed mysteries—especially the Incarnation of Christ—as paradoxical and absurd seems merely to reflect the theological skepticism of Luther and the philosophical skepticism of Locke, Hume, and Kant; while his response to the incomprehensible, the leap of faith, reflects the Lutheran non-rational explanation of belief as an appropriation of salvation on the part of the believer. In so far as the leap involves choice, or decision, on the part of the subject, it is linked with voluntarism and empiricism; in so far as it reflects a passionate inwardness, an exhilarating sense of risk induced by the possibility of choice in the face of objective uncertainty, it shows a close affinity with the emotionalism which is a major factor in the Lutheran doctrine of assured salvation. So dependant was Kierkegaard upon the emotional factor in religious belief that the only discernible motive for the act of faith in his writings seems to be a feeling of tension between the demands of faith and the testimony of reason, a feeling that now, in an "instant," the choice for God must be made.

Kierkegaard's own definition of faith as "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness," sums up his own doctrine, that of his Lutheran fore-fathers, and that of his philosophical companions. In his definition of faith, the "inwardness" of the act of faith stands forth as a skeptical protest against all objective knowledge; the "appropriation-process" is the voluntaristic substitution for this knowledge; "passion," as the sustaining force of the decision of faith, is the emotionalistic substitution for reasonable certitude in the act of faith.
EVALUATION

Kierkegaard's doctrines are intelligible, not only in the light of his sources, but also in the light of the story of philosophy as a whole. His contribution to the historical elaboration of the notion of belief has not been entirely original; but it has been a powerful voice raised in agreement with the work of philosophers of all times.

The foundation of his doctrine of belief, the thesis that truth is subjectivity, has not been without precedent in the history of thought. Assuredly, the common-sense view of truth (and the attitude of early Greek philosophers points out this fact) is that truth is simply "what is," that is, fundamentally, an object—real or conceptual—of thought, reflection, or speculation. But by the time of Plato's more sophisticated treatment of truth, the view was being proposed that, although truth is considered an object of contemplation whose immutability and universality serves as a norm for the changing and particular existing objects of experience, yet truth—or the highest truth, The Good—serves its most important function as a basis for action.

Aristotle, who treated "speculative" truth as distinct from "practical" truth, thereby gave support to the notion that truth is related to an existing subject as a basis for decision and action.

After Aristotle, it was chiefly the Skeptics who called attention to the subjectivity of truth when they "withheld assent" from all propositions. In doing so, they unwittingly proved that the act of assent is really distinct from perception or from contemplation. This, of itself would have been of little value, had they not at the same time shown, again unwittingly, that the act of assent itself involves the will and signifies freedom. They gave, in this
manner, impetus to the notion of subjectivity as truth by linking knowledge with freedom of the will, and thus with reality, and thus, too, with action. As the same time, in bringing knowledge into closer union with volition, they laid the groundwork for future studies of the act of assent itself.

Thus the contribution of the Skeptics to the notion of truth as subjectivity is merely implied from their general position. St. Augustine, on the other hand, although his writings destroyed the skeptical position, gave a positive impetus to the notion that truth is subjectivity when he founded knowledge and certitude upon an initial state of doubt. He did not, like Kierkegaard and the modern Existentialists, try to reach certitude through despair of doubt; he rather chose a state of doubt as a starting-point for certitude because in spite of its negation of knowledge and of certitude, doubt still contains within itself some core of knowledge. Thus, subjectivity, that tendency to seek the criteria for truth within the individual's inner consciousness, gained ascendancy in the world of thought.

If the influence of St. Augustine had remained as strong in the modern world as it had been in the ancient world, present-day philosophers would probably not be faced with the problems involved in accepting subjectivity as truth, since the resurgence of Aristotelian intellectualism after the time of Augustine tended to break the preoccupation of thinkers with states of inner consciousness. Subjectivity is basic to the question of belief, and after the time of Augustine, it was to be discussed in the context of judgment and belief. The problems arose, it seems, from later misinterpretations of the doctrine of Aquinas.
St. Thomas, in his massive synthesis of thought, incorporated an Aristotelian theory of judgment (which is concerned with true and certain judgments elicited by the intellect, moved by its proper object) and an Augustinian theory of belief (which deals psychologically with the act of faith, in which the object is not directly or fully apprehended by the intellect, and in which the intellect must be influenced to act by the will and the affective powers).

The treatment of Scholastic philosophers, from the time of Scotus until the end of the seventeenth century, of the doctrines of St. Thomas led to the elaboration of two separate theories—one a theory of judgment, the other a theory of belief. The theory of judgment was concerned with true and evident judgments only, and no special problem is encountered in the doctrines of these philosophers; for their analysis of the act of judgment was undertaken solely in an attempt to explain how and why truth could be formally attained in the intellect alone.¹

In their analysis of judgments of belief, however, they noted that the apprehension of divine mysteries does not disclose to the human mind such intrinsic evidence as to cause spontaneous assent. Consequently, they recognized in the act of faith an assertiveness attributable to the influence of the will and

¹Francis Martin Tyrrell, The Role of Assent in Judgment: A Thomistic Study (Washington, D.C., 1948), pp. 72-73. This published doctoral dissertation has been of great assistance in the elucidation of the nature of belief. Furthermore, this work, together with an unpublished manuscript, "The Kierkegaardian Thesis of the Subjectivity of Truth" by Robert F. Harvaneck, S. J., has served as an outline for the historical comments on the notion of subjectivity in the present chapter. The latter work has also been helpful in the evaluation of Kierkegaard's doctrines.
the affective powers—an element distinct from perception or from apprehension—and a certitude not dependant upon the clarity of the evidence presented.  

This recognition is not surprising, in view of the fact that the difference between belief and opinion is not a difference in knowledge, but rather a difference in certitude. The certitude which follows the judgment of belief is caused by the act of assent, which is the formal element of the essence of belief.

In the judgment of belief, the act of apprehension may be clearly distinguished from the act of assent. This distinction between apprehension, the material element of judgment, and assent, the formal element, seems to hold true of all judgments. The apprehensive element of judgment is conceptual; but concepts, whether they have the non-complex character of simple apprehension or whether they attain the complexity of a synthesis of concepts, are only representations of the essences of things, and merely connote—but do not assert—real existence. Existence, on the other hand, cannot be conceptualized, and therefore cannot be the object of an act of apprehension. Existence must be the object of the act of assent.

Apprehension, then, the material element of the essence of judgment, corresponds to the essence of the object of judgment; while assent, the formal element, corresponds to the existence of that object. The act of assent itself,

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2 Tyrrell, pp. 72, 93, 153.

3 Ibid., 159, 164.
considered in itself and in its relation to real existence, seems to possess the following qualities: first, assent is an active operation of the intellect. It is not an intuition or an apprehension, but a commitment on the part of the assenting subject, influenced less by intellectual apprehension of the objective evidence than by the motives of credibility surrounding the evidence. Secondly, the act of assent therefore implies some form of decision on the part of the subject, and points to the activity of the will and the affective powers. This is most clearly evident in judgments of belief. Thirdly, the act of assent is cognitive in the sense that it is an act of the intellect; but it also fulfills the requirements of subjectivity, in that it provides an engagement of the assenting subject with real existence.

The Thomistic philosopher may therefore regard truth as subjectivity in this qualified sense without abandoning the Thomistic position on the primacy of the intellect in man's nature.

This same notion of the subjectivity of truth is supported by thinkers outside the Thomistic school, even those whose general positions are widely divergent in other respects.

While the Empirical schools were losing contact with reality in their support of subjectivity, subjectivity received important clarification from the resurrected schools of Realism. Realism has been re-asserted in modern times in doctrines of "intentionality" by the late nineteenth century schools of psychology, which liberated truth from the exclusive control of the will, and attempted to bring it once more into the province of the intellect.

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\[\text{Ibid., 155, 167.}\]
Franz Brentano is a typical example of this modern trend toward realism. He expressed the newer views on human knowledge in a psychological context, and most profoundly influenced the more modern theories of judgment and belief.

In his study of judgment, Brentano maintained that judgment does not consist merely in a composition of concepts, as the Associationists like Hume and the Empiricists like Locke had contended. Brentano affirmed, on the contrary, that composition merely precedes actual judgment, and is only part of the process of the representation of reality. The act of judgment is in itself unique, an operation differing wholly from representation, which affirms or denies the content of the representation for reality. Further, the content represents the objective structure of reality; the judgment accepts or rejects their correspondence.  

Attempts to explain the character of this act of judgment in the realm of belief by philosophers after Brentano has resulted in the typical present-day attitude of philosophy toward belief, which will here be briefly reviewed.

Pursuing a common conviction that judgment is "an attitude of mind towards suggested fact," distinguishing from "thinking-about" or simple awareness of the suggestion, ("inasmuch as in the act of judgment there goes with the pre-


6 Mair, p. 459.
presented suggestion acceptance or rejection on the part of the subject, 7) Baldwin, for example, concluded that "belief is the subjective side of judgment." That is, as far as the act of judgment is concerned, it may be identified with the act of belief; for in that act, "the subject orientates himself towards reality," 9 but reality does not press itself upon the subject. It would seem that Realism has contributed to the modern view only the conviction that existence is involved in judgment and belief; for the typical present-day attitude still retains the old Empirical suspicion that belief is indeed a subjective reaction to reality, but that its intellectual moorings are weak. Indeed, in modern minds, "belief is antecedent to knowledge;" 10 but modern thinkers are following in the footsteps of St. Augustine, whose faith sought understanding, with less assurance of success than Augustine enjoyed.

In spite of the limitations which modern realism places upon the function of the intellect in the act of belief, however, realism still acknowledges the presence of the cognitive factor in belief, and does not give over the apprehension of reality entirely to the will, and admits at least that cognition serves as the "immediate point of reference" 11 for the act of belief. Still, it is the conative factor--the will--which is given the primacy, as the most

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 460.
11 Ibid.
important determinant of belief; and in this context, we "orientate ourselves this way and that according to need, by means of the power of attention, which involves selection, self-determination. In brief . . . 'we will to believe,'" as William James announced.

The extent of agreement with respect to the basic elements proper to the concept of belief may be briefly indicated by reference to standard authorities. St. Thomas distinguishes four senses in which the term "belief" may be used, each of which is regularly employed to modern philosophers. In its widest sense, belief "comprehends every assent of the human mind, whether it be given in virtue of intrinsic or extrinsic evidence." This usage, employed by St. Thomas, is confirmed by Harent, and by Alexander Mair, who ascribes it to J. S. Mill in his attack upon Hamilton. Secondly, belief is also defined as "strong opinion" by St. Thomas. This use of the term is described by St. Thomas Aquinas, In III Sent., d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, Parma ed., VIII, 247. Harent, col. 236a. Mair, p. 459.

12 Ibid., l62.
14 Tyrrell, p. 91.
16 Harent, col. 236a.
17 Mair, p. 459.
by both Harent and Lalande as current in modern times. Thirdly, belief, con-
considered in a restricted sense, is customarily referred to as "faith," and "is
primarily intended by St. Thomas." In this sense, belief is defined as "the
firm assent of the intellect which is given under the influence of the will on
the basis of extrinsic evidence." Harent adds here that we are indebted to
Bossuet for the observation that this type of belief may be either "human" or
"divine" faith, depending upon the origin of the testimony.

Fourthly, and most apt for the present purpose of this thesis, is the use
of the word "belief" to indicate "a sure assent which is placed under volitional
influence because the object is not so distinctly perceived as to compel assent
of itself." Harent indicates this usage most clearly, asserting that it is
remarkable how philosophers of the most heterogeneous schools agree in placing
belief somewhere between knowledge and opinion. In this final sense of the
term "belief," the "belief of knowledge" (that is, belief which carries with it
a fear that the opposite may be true), is characterized by philosophers ancient
and modern as depending upon a less distinct perception of the object, and re-
quiring the influence of the will. The role of the affective faculties in be-
lief is precisely to supply—in the production of certitude—for the insuffi-
ciency of the intellectual light which should proceed from the object. La

\[19\] Harent, col. 2364. Lalande, p. 190.
\[20\] Tyrrell, p. 91.
\[22\] Harent, col. 2364.
\[23\] Tyrrell, p. 91. See St. Thomas Aquinas, S.T., II-II, q. 2, a. 1, Parma
\[24\] Harent, col. 2364.
describes this popular use of the term "belief" in modern times to the influence of Kant; and Alexander Mair discusses the problem of belief almost entirely in this context.

What pertinent conclusions can be drawn from this discussion? It would seem that the problem of subjectivity arises in the sphere of belief, and finds its solution in the judgment of belief and in the act of assent which is the formal element of belief. It is apparent that, generally speaking, all philosophers agree that belief lies somewhere between knowledge and opinion. It is apparent, too, that belief is endowed with a certitude which opinion can never possess, and that, on the other hand, it is not to be confused with apprehension. In consequence of this, belief must be determined by some other elements of human nature, the will. In the determination of belief, scholastic philosophers will insist upon a sufficiency of rational motives for assent (extrinsic objective evidence in the case of supernatural faith, both extrinsic and intrinsic evidence in the case of natural belief), and will maintain that the act of belief must be elicited by the intellect. Others will emphasize personal need as a motive for belief, or stress environment and education as influences in the act of belief, and look upon the whole personality or the will as the primary subject of the act. All will agree that belief represents a personal attitude toward reality, because beliefs are accepted by man in a personal decision—for, in belief the evidence of known truth does not demand the assent of the intellect—in an act which is unique, not an intuition or an apprehension, but an act which expresses the definite attitude of the personality towards experience, and which is characterized by a personal endorsement of reality. This altogether unique act of assent, which is the essence of the
judgment of belief, has been shown to be considered by philosophers in the
terms stated above; but basically, there are only two positions: either the act
of assent is an act of the intellect, commanded by the will and influenced by
the other affective faculties, or it is an act of the will alone, influenced by
the other affective faculties. The latter view is that of the Voluntarists,
and it is also Kierkegaard's view. His terminology differs; his concept of the
act of belief differs slightly, in that his act of belief is identical with the
act of true existence; but all the characteristic elements of belief are pre-
sent in his explanation of subjectivity, especially the element of personal,
free decision and the involvement of the total personality in that decision.

Kierkegaard's contribution to the elaboration of the concept of belief has
not, therefore, been entirely original. His doctrines have had their chief ef-
fect through their timeliness in re-activating Protestant religious fervor.
His contribution to the sphere of Christian living has been of the same charac-
ter. His contention that knowledge is not virtue has long been common coin in
the realm of religious activity.

That beliefs are perhaps the most effective and important foundations of
activity is universally admitted by all writers—Protestant and Catholic alike
—both on the natural and on the supernatural level. It is assumed that our
activities are based upon our certitudes of belief as well as upon our certi-
tudes of knowledge; but explicit studies of the character of belief as related
to activity are rather infrequent.

That there is a difference between "speculative" and "practical" assent
cannot be denied. Preachers of all faiths inveigh against a sterile acceptance
of creeds without the translation of creed into action.
It is to Cardinal Newman that we are indebted for a detailed explanation of this distinction between speculative and practical assent. His discussion of notional, or speculative, assent and real, or practical, assent is well known. Notional assent is concerned with abstract propositions. It is merely an intellectual acceptance of truth, and need have no bearing upon life and conduct. Real assent, on the other hand, is not merely intellectual; it has for its object 'not only directly what is true, but inclusively what is beautiful, useful, admirable, heroic; objects which kindle devotion, rouse the passions and attach the affections; and thus it leads the way to actions of every kind, to the establishment of principles, and the formation of character, and is thus again intimately connected with what is individual and personal.' In short, it is the total personality, greatly influenced by affective factors, which is the true subject of assent. Perhaps Newman best summed up his idea of real assent when he wrote, "Many a man will live and die upon a dogma; no man will be a martyr for a conclusion."

A similar attitude of mind, not developed into a philosophical doctrine, is suggested by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. This attitude may be briefly indicated as an example of the use of practical assent. The exercitant is asked by St. Ignatius to consider basic religious principles and their general application to life and conduct. When assent is achieved

26 Ibid., 93.
here (and only speculative assent is demanded), the exercitant is then led to bring to bear all his faculties of imagination, and all the personal motives of repentance and gratitude to an affective state which culminates in the Election—a moment of decision—based upon his speculative convictions, but demanding a complete reorientation of thought and activity, bolstered by all the powers of will and imagination. The object of the real assent is surely no different from that of the notional assent which preceded it; for the subject knows no more than he did before. But his assent is now not merely intellectual; it is also practical. It involves a decision, a personal commitment to a way of life.

This is the aspect of belief which is emphasized by Kierkegaard, and by other authors of modern times. "Belief," they insist, "expresses the definite attitude of the personality towards its experience." 26 "We believe with the whole, many-sided self." 29

This is the character of Kierkegaard's act of faith. It is a personal dedication to Truth, in an act which is really the act of existence, the act by which one "becomes" what he freely chooses to be, a Christian in the fullest sense of the word.

CRITICISM

But to find echoes of Kierkegaard's own ideas in the common traditions of thought and of Christian activity is not the same as recommending Kierkegaard's doctrines without qualification. While there is much good in Kierkegaard's writings—for example, his devastating critique of the "idea-theory" of truth, his emphasis upon the role of the existing individual in the problem of know-

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28 Mair, p. 462.
29 Ibid.
ledge and being, his exploration of the character of ethico-religious truth in terms of subjectivity, his analysis of the nature of personal conversion and personal commitment to being and to God—there is much also that destroys the value of his finished work. His denial of the validity of human reason in the sphere of faith, his denial of the validity of objective truth, and his skeptical resolution of objective uncertainty by an act of the will are fundamental errors.

The first of the Kierkegaardian doctrines which vitiate his contribution to the elaboration of the notion of belief is his denial of the value of reason for faith. While he was justified in proclaiming the incompatibility of religious truth and the absolutist reason bequeathed to his own time by Hegel, and although his complaint that doctrinal knowledge largely fails to arouse a response in the practical order was legitimately made, still he erred basically by neglecting to note that theology can be, and is, both speculative and practical. It is true that theology is concerned primarily with man's knowledge of God; but theology is also concerned with directing human actions toward God, thereby fulfilling perfectly the demands of true wisdom—that virtue which judges and orders all things toward man's final end. Once it becomes clear that theology is both speculative and practical, one may pursue theological speculation without implying that such speculation is due to a weakness of belief on the one hand, or that there is a compromise to be made between supernatural assent and man's human faith.

St. Augustine's faith sought understanding in order that faith might be strengthened, not in order that understanding might abolish faith in this life. Kierkegaard's faith flees understanding, embracing religious mysteries in all
their incomprehensibility. Kierkegaard failed to realize that not all revealed truths are unknowable; some religious truths are penetrable by human reason, but have also been revealed because of their importance for our salvation. His refusal to consider these truths intellectually is merely the reaction of an anti-intellectual Lutheran Minister to revelation, and does not honor the facts of the situation as they are presented to the intellect.

Secondly, a more basic error on Kierkegaard's part is found in his denial of the validity of objective truth. The object of our knowledge may, of course, be considered "uncertain" when we are dealing with perception. In all cases in which the intellect is not bound to assent, because of a lack of intellectual clarity of the object presented the mind can be drawn, through distraction, through further questioning, or through unwillingness to face the issue, to turn aside from the objective evidence presented. Such evidence is "uncertain" only as long as assent is withheld. The uncertainty therefore lies in the subject; it is not true to say that the evidence is of itself uncertain in all cases. To speak of "objective uncertainty" in the realm of faith it to undermine entirely the significance of the content of faith.

Even if it were to be conceded that the "uncertainty" of objective evidence, as present in some cases, is sufficient justification for generalizing that fact into an all-inclusive doctrine, Kierkegaard's presentation of belief would still flounder in its most fundamental aspect: namely, his resolution of objective uncertainty by an act of the will. Such a position completely sever the connection of the intellect with certitude, and must end in intellectual skepticism. Kierkegaard is correct in maintaining that the contact of the subject of thought with its object, existing not as object but as subject, is un-
attainable in the ideal order; for it is true that judgment is necessary to effect an engagement of the subject with its object as an existing subject. It is not, however, true to say that the intellect itself can in no way apprehend existence, and that therefore decision must substitute for intellectual judgment.

One argument to refute Kierkegaard when he says that intellectual uncertainty can be resolved into certitude by an act of the will is found in the fact that such a proposition involves a vicious circle. The uncertainty of intellectual evidence cannot become certain through an act of the will if it is assumed a priori that the will is the faculty which makes the uncertain a certainty through its decision, or, on the other hand, if it is assumed that Kierkegaard's proposition is not a priori, but is given in reality.

If the proposition is assumed a priori, it may be as gratuitously denied. On the other hand, the proposition is definitely considered by Kierkegaard as actually given in reality. He accepts without question the fact that it is really true that the will is the ultimate faculty in the resolution of intellectual uncertainty. If Kierkegaard's proposition is accepted at its face value, then, that proposition itself must be certified by an act of the will; it cannot be accepted as true, or as given in reality— for truth is not found in reality, but only in decision. Thus, Kierkegaard introduces a vicious circle into his reasoning, and invalidates his fundamental principles. Consequently, Kierkegaard's voluntaristic theory merely perpetuates a gratuitous skepticism, and contributes nothing to the solution of the real problem of belief.

Thirdly, suppose, on the other hand, that Kierkegaard is willing to accept this criticism, but answers that the uncertainties of the presented object are
not resolved at all and that the subject proceeds with the existential leap, embracing passionately all the contradictions through the decision of faith, and thereafter lives bravely for God in spite of the contradictions presented to his reason.

The answer to this type of skepticism is two-fold: first, Kierkegaard's voluntarism is unwarranted; secondly, it is dangerous.

Kierkegaard's voluntarism is unwarranted, since, when skepticism withholds assent because of the presumed uncertainty of the evidence, it calls attention only to the fact that assent is under the control of the will, not that assent is the act of the will alone. Skepticism ignores the inter-causality of the will and the intellect (which is due to their reflectivity as spiritual powers), and fails to realize that whether assent is given or not will depend, not wholly upon the will and the feelings, but, in large measure, upon the quality of the apprehension of the evidence, and upon the direction of the act of assent by the specification of the intellect.

Secondly, Kierkegaard's skepticism and voluntarism are dangerous, since they deprive man of both goal and guide in his acts of assent. Kierkegaard cannot escape the aimlessness of irrational commitment to some unapprehended "truth" merely by asserting that his interest is focussed not upon the "what" of Christianity, which he takes for granted as known intellectually, but upon the "how" of man's relationship to it. He is so interested in man's subjective relationship to "truth" through the blind activity of the will and the feelings, that he is willing that man be related to something which is not in itself true, as long as man posits the relationship with the required intensity of feeling.

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Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 178.
This is anti-intellectualism in its highest degree, and cannot but undo whatever good Kierkegaard has produced by his thesis that "truth is subjectivity."

CONCLUSION

The most fitting conclusion for this thesis is not a negative one, however, and the judgment that Kierkegaard's basic position is anti-intellectual cannot serve as a sweeping negation of his whole philosophy. He has presented much valuable evidence for his position, which deserves honest attention. He has provided new insights into the psychological life of man; and these likewise ought to be tested for validity before judgment is made. Kierkegaard's great contribution is that he has enriched the philosophical lexicon with significant elaborations, and has revived and re-presented important but half-forgotten truths. In particular, his great concepts of "existence," of "contingency," and of "freedom," which served as the basis for the whole body of his thought and that of the Existentialist movement of which he is the acknowledged founder, are of considerable importance for philosophy and for life.

Kierkegaard and the Existentialists have been accused of dressing up old ideas in dramatic and mysterious language and of presenting these disguised commonplaces as original creations. The accusation is not entirely fair. It may be true to say that these philosophers are enunciating commonplaces in the sense that they are advancing propositions which tell us, in solemn and frequently obscure language, what we already know—for example, that we are finite, contingent, unstable, and free—but their dramatic treatment of these truths is justified in view of their desire to attract our attention, by means of tragically tortuous verbal display, to significant truths which are indeed known by all, but are, in fact, often ignored.
It would seem that their concern is well founded; for both in philosophy and in life, human finitude and instability and dependence are generally not treated with anguished and passionate interest. Perhaps they should not be so treated; perhaps a detached view of philosophical problems is the surest means of achieving an unclouded vision of the truth. Kierkegaard did not think so; and perhaps his notion of passionate interest in human existence, human contingency and human freedom is a laudable and legitimate approach to the problem. For example, it is clear from the foregoing pages of this thesis that Kierkegaard's concern with these notions (although his concern had been characteristic of his thought from the start) developed significantly during his attack upon the Determinism of Hegel. He objected that Hegel had ignored the true notions of man's contingency and freedom because he had ignored the pre-eminent importance of the existing individual, and that Hegel had replaced the reality of the contingent world with the notion of an inexorably-evolving idea. Students of Kierkegaard remind us that in his attack upon philosophy as a whole, he was attacking only this Hegelian brand of absolutist thought; for that was the only system with which he was well acquainted.

But is not the same kind of over-simplification and over-abstraction the curse of all systematic systems—even those systems of moderate realism which profess to find their problems rooted in reality and their solutions applicable to reality? Systems of thought tend to become doctrinal; and succeeding generations of philosophers find it more and more difficult to proceed inductively when facing perennial problems. Original problems, once solved, become simplified and tailored for use as stereotyped "examples" to be used as pedagogical illustrations in classrooms, where the doctrine is transmitted to
students to begin the history of philosophy anew by struggling with problems which have already been solved in the history of philosophy, still the doctrine itself tends to become more and more abstract and theoretical as the original problem tends less and less to be a real problem. As more and more illustrative "texts" are consulted, philosophy tends more and more to become a project of thought rather than a search for real causes of reality and of really existing beings, or the application of real principles to real problems.

A corrective must be applied from time to time, calling attention once again to real existence as the origin and touchstone of philosophy, to man's contingency as the radical source of his instability and confusion, to man's freedom as the subjective source of his salvation from instability and confusion. In short, we must be reminded from time to time, as Kierkegaard reminded the thinkers of his day, that we need philosophies of life, not philosophies about life. Kierkegaard and his intellectual heirs have applied this corrective to philosophy in modern times, and we are indebted to them for attempting to revive in the minds of philosophers, and even of casual readers, an interest in the human situation.

Not only in philosophy is the lack of interest in human existence and human individuality and human freedom apparent. The same lack of attention to "authentic" existence and individuality is found in society generally. Our twentieth century has witnessed a great revival of the "herd mentality" against which Kierkegaard raged in the nineteenth century; and man's loss of individuality is apparent in many spheres of human activity.

Politically, totalitarianisms of various kinds have waxed and waned, each taking its toll of human individuality, freedom, and dignity. Nazism, Fascism,
Communism, Socialism and the Welfare State have all, each in its own way, contributed to the formation of featureless "masses;" and the strong individual has today become a rarity, to be admired but not imitated.

Even in free democracies, such as our own country, responsible individualism has become a quality to be avoided. "Public Opinion," an attempt to create a universal will through modern man's desire for conformity at any cost, is only a minor manifestation of the social and intellectual leveling process which is now at work.

Socially, modern man's perfection has come to consist in his conformity in all things with his fellows in every activity of life; and even the "newsworthy" exceptions, the heroes and heroines of the motion pictures, seem identical with one another, and individualized only in their possessing more or less of the same thing.

Modern man is now defined in terms of his functions in society—biological, economic, or social. Do we not speak of our friends and acquaintances in terms of the services which they render to society, when we describe them to others? At one time, not so long ago, a man could be identified by ascertaining from what neighborhood or parish he came; he acquired his characteristic features at least from the small group of people with whom he associated. Today, a man is individualized only according to his social, economic, or biological function as a member of a faceless group.

What corrective can be applied to recall to modern man the circumstances of his human existence? Twentieth-century man must learn anew the lessons of individual and social responsibility through intelligent use of his precarious treasure of free self-determination. He must do this in order to counteract
the sense of his contingency and insecurity, a lesson which he has learned only too well.

Will Kierkegaard prove to be the saving corrective for the over-abstraction of philosophy, and for man's preoccupation with his immediate social needs? Emergency correctives, like the old-time leech and the purge, are apt to be drastic and extreme. For this reason, Kierkegaard's unqualified existentialism may be looked upon by some as the only answer; but Kierkegaard has been dead just over one hundred years, and perhaps it is time for a more modified approach, in which a solution for the problem of human existence, of human contingency, and human freedom can be found through a moderate realism which takes advantage of the invaluable insights of Kierkegaard's original protest, without committing itself to his intellectual despair.

The problem confronting such a moderate realism is wide and complex. We are dealing with extremes: Essentialism versus existentialism; the view of man's perfection and happiness as contemplation versus the view of man's perfection as effected through some kind of action; the primacy of the intellect versus the primacy of the will. These problems, of course, are too wide and too complex for treatment in this thesis; but a few remarks concerning Kierkegaard's basic concepts of existence, contingency, and freedom, can be valuable in the application of correctives to modern philosophy and modern society.

Professor Etienne Gilson, a brilliant philosopher and historian of philosophy, has made it the object of his book, Being and Some Philosophers, to point out that in the age-old vacillation of philosophers between the extremes of essentialism and existentialism, the adherents of neither extreme can be successful for long, since neither extreme is a complete answer for the problem
of philosophy, the problem of being. Thomistic philosophy, on the other hand, as the moderate fulcrum between the two, always maintains an easy balance between essentialism and existentialism. For the Thomistic philosopher, created being is neither essence nor existence, but a synthesis or composite of essence and existence, transcendentally related to each other as act and potency, each incomplete in itself, and needing the other for completion.

It is in this context that Kierkegaard’s contribution of the notion of existence, though in itself greatly exaggerated, and requiring the application of a corrective, provides an unbelievably rich elaboration of the notion of existence. His contribution serves, first of all, as a permanent and necessary reminder of the claims of real existence upon the philosopher. Secondly, his description of the human situation in existence, with all of its uncertainty, its anguish and insecurity, its contradictions and its demands, points dramatically and tragically to the radical instability of human existence which is only implied in a detached and disinterested analysis of the essential composition at the heart of the nature of man.

The contribution of Kierkegaard’s concepts of contingency and freedom to the platform of moderate realism cannot be so readily assessed; no reputable spokesman has yet indicated what Thomistic philosophy has to learn from Kierkegaard’s analysis of human contingency and freedom. However, it seems to be correct to say that the Thomistic philosopher has, on the whole, made better use of the notion of contingency than Kierkegaard; for the latter has been unwilling to make the rational inference from effect to cause in demonstrating the existence of God, and has preferred gratuitously to maintain that intellectual certitude is impossible, that mystery is preferable to demonstration.
Kierkegaard's notion of freedom and free choice, however, can be of service to the Thomistic philosopher in the modern world; for he calls attention to the necessity of choice, and to the responsibility of the individual for his choice. He has stated and analysed the conditions for authentic choice. He has pointed out in vivid terms what we mean when we say, "We make ourselves what we are" by our choice, and what we mean when we speak of our "true" selves. The first should signify that our choices are the determinants of our character, and the resultant character is the determinant of future choice; the latter should mean that we recognize in ourselves possibilities for progress and development which call for energetic and resolute action on our part. Kierkegaard's followers, Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger, have ignored the object of choice which he so carefully described, and to which he demanded unconditional commitment.

It is the duty of the Christian philosopher to insist again upon Kierkegaard's fundamental postulate: It is God alone who is the goal of our choice and our dedication, the only source of human personal reintegration, the only completely worthy ideal.

In general, it may be said that Kierkegaard can make a significant contribution to Thomistic philosophy by providing a new perspective and a new insight into facts of which we are already aware. He directs our attention again to limits which may be only marginal in our philosophical considerations or in our daily living. But he focusses our attention dramatically upon human finitude, human limitation, and human potentiality, and thus he can be of service in the construction of a Christian philosophy of religion; for he also insists upon considering man, not as a member of the crowd, absorbed in social, biological, or economic functions, but rather as an individual existing subject who
discovers himself in existence as a pilgrim on the way to God, striving after the realization of his ideals in God through his tendency toward God by means of a free dedication to God in a relationship which at once constitutes his highest duty and his greatest happiness.
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The thesis submitted by James Joseph Dagenais, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

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

[Signature]

Date: Jul 16, 1957

Signature of Adviser