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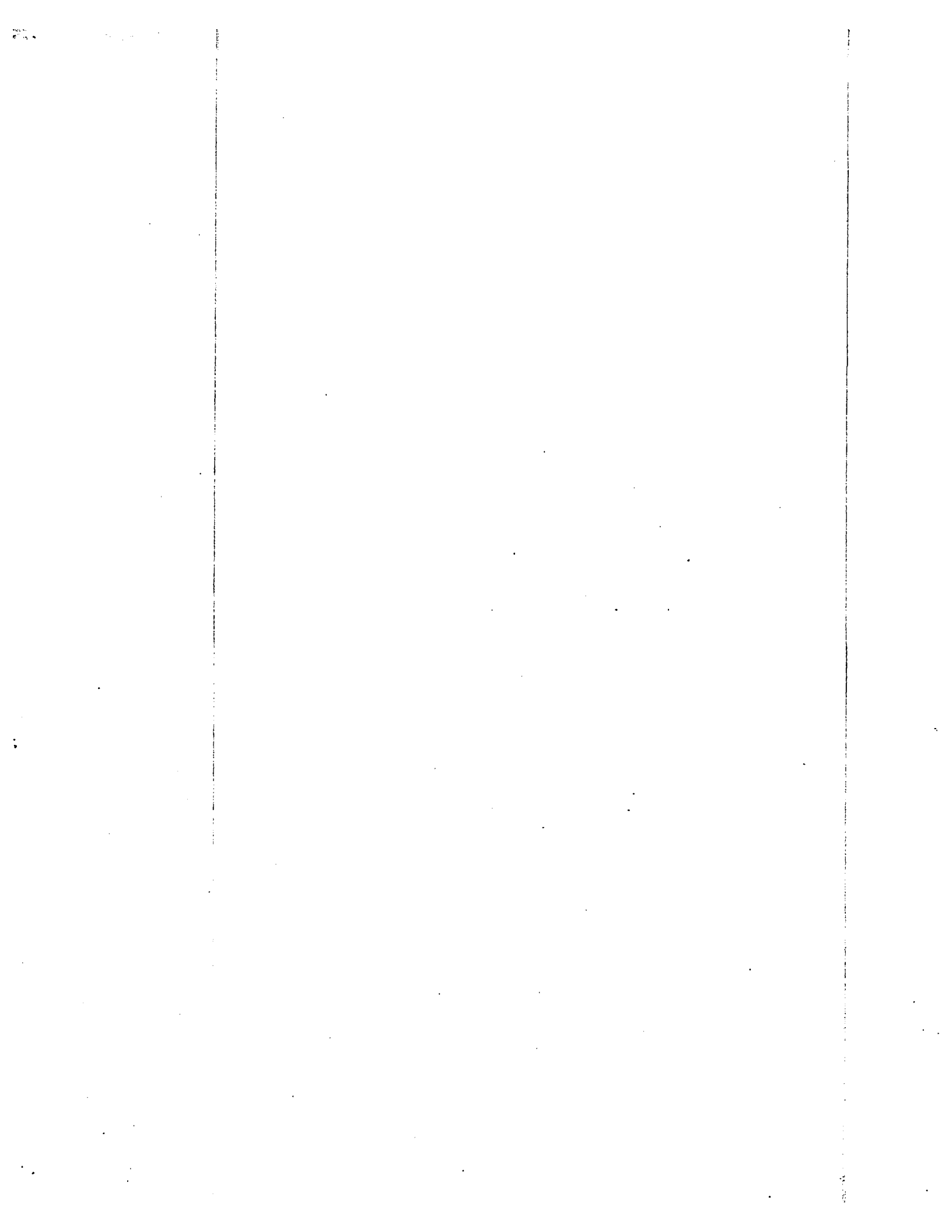
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UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
THESIS No. 22

KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALISM

A THOMISTIC CRITIQUE

by

Gerald F. Kreyche



Excerpt of
Dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy



OTTAWA, CANADA
THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
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PREFACE

The importance of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) can be seen in several distinct yet related areas of influence. One of those is his rejection of the panlogism of Hegel at a time when it was the philosophy in vogue. His penetrating criticism of idealism is so deeply rooted that it eventually marked the beginning of strong anti-idealistic sentiments and the general existentialist movement.

A second area of importance is the reformatory appeal which Kierkegaard made to the Established Church of Denmark, in an attempt to lead its members back to a more primitive Christianity, specifically through becoming contemporary with Christ.

Still a third influence Kierkegaard exerted upon philosophers and theologians, was the emphasis which he gave to the principle of existence in opposition to the principle of essence. Yet his thought here is by no means as clear as it might be.

This excerpt is an attempt to trace these three influences. It is an effort to discover both the foundation for his criticism of idealism as personified by Hegel, and to clarify the meaning and role of existence in Kierkegaardian existentialism.

Grateful appreciation is hereby expressed to Rev. Jacques Croteau, O.M.I., for his personal direction of my thesis.

KIERKEGAARD'S GENERAL APPRAISAL OF HEGEL

The thought of Søren Kierkegaard can never be fully understood outside of the perspective of his anti-Hegelianism, a theme which filters through nearly every work the Danish existentialist ever wrote. Yet one thing should be made clear. The condemnation which Kierkegaard leveled at Hegel's "System"¹ was not really an anathema of the man's thinking prowess, nor an attempt to rectify imperfections in the doctrine of panlogism. Quite the contrary, there is every indication that as far as Kierkegaard felt, there were no imperfections in Hegel's philosophy, as such. Here, thought Kierkegaard, was the very apex of all philosophy. Here was philosophy in its most perfect form; nothing rational escaped its painstaking, thorough-going analysis and synthesis. It would be useless to argue against Hegel on his own grounds, for he was the master philosopher. If anything did escape the System it was not Hegel's fault. Nor was it the fault of the System. The defect lay with philosophy as such. It was fundamentally incapable of dealing with the irrationals of faith. Philosophy, the study of essence as both Kierkegaard and Hegel mistakenly conceived it, could go no further than Hegel, and it seems that Kierkegaard firmly believed this until his dying day.

If Hegel had written the whole of his logic and then said, in the preface, that it was merely an experiment in thought in which he had even begged the question in many places, then he would certainly have been the greatest thinker who had ever lived. As it is he is merely comic.²

But if Kierkegaard believed that nothing rational escaped the Hegelian dialectic, he did not believe that only the rational is real, as did the German idealist. And for the Danish existentialist, the irrational matters more to man than the rational! Thus the truth which Kierkegaard sought was not to be found in Hegel or acquired by a revised Hegelian dialectical method. One can easily understand why, if one realizes that it was not a philosophy or rational truth in which Kierkegaard was interested.

¹ The "System" was a name Kierkegaard used to sarcastically designate Hegel's idealistic philosophy.

² Søren KIERKEGAARD, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. by Alexander Dru, London, Oxford, 1938, No. 497, p. 134.

To seek speculative truth, Kierkegaard believed that he could do no better than to study the German master idealist. What the Dane sought, however, was a truth in the practical and moral order. He sought truth as a way of life, as a doing and not as a knowing. He wanted not an ideal truth but rather truth as an ideal. The ideal truth Hegel could supply, but the truth as an ideal only Christianity could give. A personal truth for which he would live or die was the object of Kierkegaard's search. He could not discover that in objective truth which lacked personal significance for private life. Hence, it had to be found in a subjective truth. Expanding this idea, Kierkegaard declared,

No, truth in its very being is the reduplication in me, in him, so that my, that thy, that his life, approximately, in the striving to attain it, expresses the truth, 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.³

Claimed Kierkegaard, "My duty is to serve truth; its essential form, obedience."⁴ The disagreement Kierkegaard had with Socrates,⁵ i.e. that knowing and doing are not at all the same, was equally applicable to Hegel. This is precisely why Kierkegaard turned to religion to find a truth as a way of life and not as a static, essentially meaningless, and abstract definition which philosophy so well provided. Since Hegel could not be defeated on his own grounds apparently, Kierkegaard had no choice but to turn to religion in order to refute his influence.

Here, of course, Kierkegaard was keenly disappointed. The Established Church of Denmark was found by Kierkegaard to be another form of Hegelianism in ministerial robes. It was this discovery which formed the point of departure for Kierkegaard's subsequent protest and thesis, namely, that Christianity was not to be found in Denmark in the present, nor in the future, but in the past.⁶ Hegelian

³ Sören KIERKEGAARD, *Training in Christianity*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1944, p. 201.

⁴ *The Journals of Sören Kierkegaard*, No. 712, p. 223.

⁵ Yet Kierkegaard admired the Socratic maieutic and tried to duplicate it in his own reformatory movement.

⁶ Sören KIERKEGAARD, *Kierkegaard's Attack Upon "Christendom"*, ed. and trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1944, pp. 32-33.

dialectic in religion was correct only in reverse! In short, this meant that progress and perfection were attainable only by retrogression to a primitive Christianity.

FURTHER INFLUENCE OF HEGEL IN CHRISTIANITY

As Kierkegaard noted, Hegelian speculative knowledge considered the species to the exclusion of the individual from whence it was derived. Quick to grasp the latent idealism here, the Danish thinker pointed out that reality is composed of individuals only and that any statement about the existential order must be one centering around individuality. This latter position excludes the species! Here was an exact reversal of the order of universal cognition as found in Hegel. Said Kierkegaard,

How often have I shown that fundamentally, Hegel makes men into heathens, *into a race of animals gifted with reason*. For in the animal world, 'the individual' is always less important than the race. But it is the peculiarity of the human race that just because the individual is created in the image of God, 'the individual' is above the race.⁷

The speculative order, then, has no positive bearing upon the practical, argued Soren. After all, how many people know what is right and yet refuse to act accordingly? Correct thinking never ensures morally correct action. It only ensures knowledge of the correct moral action. Like an ontological argument for the existence of God, it only establishes the existence of the idea — not the fact. According to the Dane, knowledge and faith are related in inverse proportion. As knowledge increases, faith and action decrease, for faith is essentially a leap into the unknown, into the uncharted realm of existence. It is never a smooth transition, but a qualitative leap as is evidenced by the stages along life's way, so well described by Kierkegaard.⁸

The man of faith is essentially an adventurer, not quite knowing what he will be next confronted with. He is exactly the antithesis of the armchair philosopher. This accent upon knowledge, as entailing

⁷ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 1050, p. 370.

⁸ In this respect many regard Kierkegaard as more of a psychologist than a philosopher.

the corresponding loss of faith and action, so typified the times that Kierkegaard was prompted to declare in bitter satire,

Nowadays not even a suicide kills himself in desperation. Before taking the step he deliberates so long and so carefully that he literally chokes with thought. It is even questionable whether he ought to be called a suicide, since it is really thought which takes his life. He does not die *with* deliberation but *from* deliberation.⁹

We should act then, not because of thought and knowledge, but in spite of it. There can be no consolation in the position that our knowledge had justified this or that way of acting. Hegel had shown, and better than any before him, that if we set our mind to it, anything can be rationalized. And this precisely was what the clever dialectician had done with the order of religion. *He rationalized faith!* And the hierarchy of the Established Church did not see through it. The havoc it could and was causing was totally unseen. "For intelligence has got the upper hand to such an extent that it transforms the real task into an unreal trick and reality into a play."¹⁰

KIERKEGAARD'S CRITICISM OF PANLOGISM ✓

There are strong indications that Kierkegaard was at least implicitly aware of the emergence of Hegelian thought as a form of pantheism. But, be that as it may, there is one thing that he did see for certain. That was this; there never could be room in such a speculative system for, individually considered, what is the most important thing in the world — myself and my subjective, individual existence. The ethical order has been universalized and objectivized. As such, it was completely helpless to aid me in my ethical, subjective, and individual problems. For, after all, each moral problem is indisputably unique, despite its having been presented to a million other men before me. It can never have the same circumstances, nor can I have the identically same disposition and attitude of conscience in regards to it. It must always consist in an unreachable transcendent relation to a personal God. This failure of the German idealist came under sharp criticism by Kierkegaard. "Hegelian philosophy, by failing to

⁹ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, trans. by Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie, London, Oxford, 1940, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

define its relation to the existing individual, and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."¹¹

It confounds existence because it ignores it. And it ignores it because it is unable to cope with it, for in the real order, existence is the very root of an incommunicable personality and therefore, also the root of subjectivity. Natures can be viewed as universal and communicable, but personality can not.

Unable to reach the individual and subjectivity, Hegelian philosophy was doubly unable to reach their radical basis. "An existential system is impossible."¹² As Kierkegaard saw it, a system of its very nature, is a closed book and a finished product. When human existence becomes a finished product, it no longer remains a human existence. It is now dead!

Truly human existence consists in a striving for perfection, and one might qualifiedly say with Kierkegaard, that it consists exclusively in the striving and not in the perfection. For when it has the perfection, it will no longer be human but supra-human, raised to a higher level by grace in the vision of God. "Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and of the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore a constant striving."¹³ Clearly, the Dane is referring specifically to human existence, and this is usually the case in his writings. For man, although a finite being, is intended for an infinite destiny. Consequently, he must gather up all his anguish and dread and suffering which go hand in hand with human existence, in order to use the temporal order as a bridge for the eternal.

The consequences of man's life are unquestionably more important than life itself, for the consequences lead to an eternity of a supernatural living, or dying. There is no easy way out; our destiny is an either / or. Christianity provides the only way to attain this end. But it is a desperate way. We cannot allow ourselves to be disillusioned by Hegelian philosophy or tricked by a philosophical Christianity into thinking that we have already triumphed in this life.

¹¹ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David Swenson and completed by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1941, p. 275.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Now, Kierkegaard was unquestionably right in rejecting Hegelian philosophy, but the reason for rejecting it went too far in applying it to philosophy as such. That is, the fault lay not intrinsically with philosophy, but with the philosopher in this case. The impossible task which Hegel set up for himself, and whose impossibility was seen by the Danish reformer is admirably summed up by Maritain. "The panlogism of Hegel was the supreme effort of modern philosophy to absorb all the realms of the spirit into the absolutism of reason."¹⁴

Existence and subjectivity are the only things which really matter, repeated Kierkegaard, and everything else is diminished in value in exact proportion to its ability to ascend to the existential and subjective plane. Religion should be all important and all that matters, then, and philosophy should be classed as completely unimportant. Here is Hegel's thesis boldly contradicted by Kierkegaard. On radically different planes, philosophy and religion should never, and if one does not succumb to the other, will never converge. In Kierkegaard's eyes, when Christianity in Denmark became philosophical, it was forced to become unchristian. For subjectivity cannot be reached by both, and to repeat Maritain on this point, "Subjectivity marks the frontier which separates the world of philosophy from the world of religion."¹⁵

Philosophy, as Kierkegaard erroneously knew it, is necessarily restricted to the order of essence. True religion, on the other hand, was construed to find its place in the order of the concrete, the individual person, the subjective, and the existential. The unity of both in the real order, as implied by Hegel, was a sure sign that something was amiss, a sure sign that he had confused the real for the ideal or logical. The criticism of Kierkegaard is never clearer and never more to the point than when he refutes such a position. It is to

prostitute oneself by supposing that the logical is the existential, and that the principle of contradiction is removed in the realm of existence since it is undeniably removed in the realm of logic. Existence is exactly that separation which frustrates the mere logical stream.¹⁶

¹⁴ Jacques MARITAIN, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. by Lewis Galantiere and Gerald Phelan, New York, Pantheon, 1948, p. 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁶ Quoted by Reider THOMTE, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University, 1948, pp. 10-11.

And again Kierkegaard wrote,

In logic no movement can come about, for logic is, and everything logical simply is, and this impotence of logic is the transition to the sphere of being where existence and reality appear.

. . . The eternal expression of logic is that which the Eleatic school transferred by mistake to existence: Nothing comes into existence, everything is.¹⁷

Seizing this vantage point of existence over essence, Kierkegaard clung tenaciously to it and realistically brought himself and later, others back to the order of real being. The thought of Kierkegaard is basically a position in which existence (human) battles essence to emerge the sole victor, sharing its laurels with no other principle.

Hence, almost out of necessity, Kierkegaard was just as exclusive as Hegel in his own way. Whereas Hegel was concerned with essences entirely to the omission of existence, Kierkegaard committed himself to the opposite extreme. The order of existence was to be the only real principle and all else was to be rejected on one ground or another. As Hegel rejected the irrational as unreal, in contrary fashion, Kierkegaard rejected the rational abstract order as unreal.

KIERKEGAARD'S TASK

A rationalized Christianity which the followers of Hegel had introduced in Denmark was, for Kierkegaard, an impossible contradiction. It could not be a true Christianity intricately tied up with suffering and sacrifice. Accordingly, Kierkegaard dubbed it a "Christendom" to signify its reality only on the abstract level. "Precisely, Christendom is the apostasy from Christianity."¹⁸ Grasping the whole picture, he summed up his task, "Christendom has done away with Christianity, without being quite aware of it. The consequence is that if anything is to be done, one must try again to introduce Christianity into Christendom."¹⁹

Christendom was sheer sophistry as it existed in the time of Kierkegaard in Denmark and that is why he often compared himself

¹⁷ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1944, n., p. 12.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard's *Attack Upon "Christendom"*, p. 168.

¹⁹ *Training in Christianity*, n., p. 39.

to Socrates. "My task is a Socratic task, to revise the definition of what it means to be a Christian."²⁰

As Kierkegaard knew philosophy, it was unreal because it left out existence, subjectivity and faith. But the Christendom of Denmark was a religion that turned out to be a philosophy in disguise, and so was all the more guilty of the crime of unreality. The opposition between knowledge and faith and a system of essences and a truly religious existence was thought so great that "Christianity and philosophy cannot be reconciled."²¹ One cannot choose both, and if forced to make a decision, one must militantly fight the alternant of the embraced. Radically different, these two ways of life, the philosophical and the religious are described by Kierkegaard in no uncertain terms. "The Two Ways. One is to suffer; the other is to become a professor of the fact that another has suffered."²² The irony of it all is such that the professor and not the sufferer is the one who receives the acclaim. Thus the Hegelian theologian received all honors in the Church.

Christ did all the suffering for us in the hopes that we might follow Him in His Way which was a way of living truth. What had happened was that the ministers were capitalizing on that act of suffering through preaching it, yet themselves paying little or no heed to it. This is but the philosophic Christendom of universals, thought Soren, and not only is it unimportant but actually misleading. For many were misled like the students of the sophists into thinking they had a real Christianity instead of only its outward appearance. What had to be sought above all was the primitive Christianity of individuals, and it is in a sense beyond the realm of mere importance. It is Life itself!

For Kierkegaard there was a world of difference between a panlogism and true Christianity and their diametric opposition was more than the product of the imagination. Knowledge, certitude, comfort, recognition, and forward-looking are the distinguishing earmarks of the former. Faith, anxiety, suffering, humility, and backward-looking are the unimpressive characteristics of the latter. To describe the

²⁰ Kierkegaard's Attack Upon "Christendom", p. 283.

²¹ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 32, p. 22.

²² Ibid., No. 1362, p. 528.

movements of faith and to perform those very movements are not at all the same. And, "To stand on one leg and prove God's existence is a very different thing from going on one's knees and thanking Him."²³

The sooner the strangling bonds which linked philosophy and Christianity were severed, thought Kierkegaard, the sooner will Christianity be seen in its own proper perspective. The truth of objectivity so raucously proclaimed by philosophers is but limited to the learned few. The appeal of Christianity is not and was never meant to be for the few. It was meant for all, and its truth as subjectivity, as leading man to a personal and real God, can be had by all. Such a thing as Christian apologetics has no meaning in such a Kierkegaardian context. "To make Christianity plausible is the same as to misinterpret it."²⁴ It is not a case of the blind leading the blind, but of the sightless (philosophy) leading one possessed of full vision (faith). After all, faith is concerned with individual existence and philosophy, whose concern is universals, can never hope to reach it. The individual existent is unintelligible for the Hegelian philosopher, both because it is singular and because it is on the existential plane. As unintelligible, it was unreal, for the real is rational and conversely for Hegelians.

A MISUNDERSTANDING OF EXISTENCE

Despite the bitter struggle waged by Kierkegaard against panlogism, to some extent the Dane fell under the influence of Hegel. For instance, Kierkegaard declared that existence must always be a given, and accordingly, it cannot be the object of any science, but the presupposition upon which that science rests. "I do not for example prove that a stone exists, but that some existing thing is a stone."²⁵ From these premises Kierkegaard concluded that it would be impossible for philosophy to help Christianity by offering to prove the existence of God, man's end, etc. It appeared to him that this was nothing short of a contradiction.

²³ *Ibid.*, No. 366, p. 51.

²⁴ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *On Authority and Revelation (The Book on Adler, or A Cycle of Ethico-Religious Essays)*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1955, p. 59.

²⁵ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by David Swenson, Princeton, Princeton University, 1936, p. 31.

As regards idealism, Kierkegaard was entirely correct. Likewise, any ontological argument of St. Anselm or Descartes proves nothing. No matter how religious or Christian these might sound, Kierkegaard would have no traffic with them. Here, at least, we can praise the Dane's philosophical astuteness, even though he would resent the compliment. For to posit premises in the logical order is but to beget a conclusion in the same logical order, and not in the real order of things. Technically we term this a fallacy of supposition.

Thomistically speaking, the reason for rejecting the ontological arguments²⁶ is basically this. Existence cannot be made a concept, pure and simple, for the proper object of the intellect of man in his present state is the natures of sensible (material) things.²⁷ This means that whatever is grasped by the intellect exclusively under its act of simple apprehension comes to it under the formality of sensible *quiddity*. (This is not to deny, of course, that the adequate object of the intellect is being.) Hence, in order to have a concept of existence as the product of simple apprehension only, it is necessary to essentialize existence or to reify it. But existence in creatures is a really distinct principle from essence, and to reduce one to the other is, in effect, to have neither.

Now, the essence of God is immaterial, not material. Furthermore, it is His very existence.²⁸ Thus, there is a double reason why we cannot comprehend it through simple apprehension. Therefore in any attempt to seek a proof in the existential order, we must begin with that same real and existential order, and not with the logical order of essence.

Still, despite a basic agreement here, there is a big difference between Kierkegaardian doctrine and Thomism. It is implicit in the Danish thinker's view that since existence cannot be made a true concept without giving it an essence which it is not and has not, neither it, nor the individual whose existence it is, can be reached by any intellectual act. The heritage is obviously Kantian and it is truly a wonder that the Dane did not see it for what it was. But the source of the error is perfectly clear to one acquainted with the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor.

²⁶ St. Thomas AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

²⁷ *Idem*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 3, a. 4.

There is besides the intellectual act of simple apprehension which but attains the nature of material things, still another act of the intellect called judgment. This is the act which raises the intellect to its highest level of perfection. This is the act to which the other intellectual acts are subordinated. Now, while it is certainly true to say that no concept of existence as such may be had through simple apprehension, it is not on that account true to say that the intellect can in no way reach the existential order or demonstrate it. It can and does through the intellectual act of judgment whereby the intellect pronounces upon the identity or non-identity, not of two ideas, but of two real objects in the existential order re-presented by ideas. It is as though through simple apprehension we abstract the essence from the existent thing to view and consider it. Then, the judgment restores the essence back to the existent thing to check its conformity. This known conformity, pronounced by the intellect between the object and itself is the conformity in which truth is firmly rooted. If the judgment were unable to reach existence, truth would be impossible.²⁹

So it is that the order of existence, although inaccessible to the logician (for his science is of ideas, not reality), is very much accessible to the metaphysician. Not only is it accessible, but the area in which he should spend all of his time! That is why, in order to attain the object of the first two orders of abstraction typified by classical physics and mathematics, only simple apprehension is necessary. However, in order to attain the object of the genuine metaphysician, not the panlogist, the object of being as essence and existence, the judgment is an absolute prerequisite.

THE POSSIBILITY FOR A DEMONSTRATION OF EXISTENCE

In the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God, since the conclusion sought is in the existential order, there must be the place to commence. And St. Thomas does just that; for the five ways³⁰ each proceed from what is most manifest and evident in existence to us. They continue to what is less evident to us, but more evident in itself, namely, the existence of God. Hence, the philosophical proofs begin

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 85, a. 3, ad 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 2, a. 3.

where Kierkegaard says that they should, that is, with existence as given or posited. What is given, however, is not the existence of God, for this is the end sought by the proofs. They begin with the existence of material effects caused by Him.

It is most apparent that the Danish reformer never understood or cared to grasp the distinction between a *propter quid* and *quia* method of demonstration. If Kierkegaard meant that the demonstration of God's existence was impossible by us as a *propter quid* demonstration, i.e. through the cause, he could find no stauncher ally than the person of St. Thomas Aquinas.³¹ But Kierkegaard never stopped to consider any further possibility for demonstration.

It is not at all difficult to see that the epistemological problem which Kant raised is at the root of the differences between the essentialism of Hegel and the existentialism of Kierkegaard. Thomistic realism provides the solution which enables philosophy to embrace both essence and existence, but with its point of emphasis decidedly upon the latter. Thus, far from ignorant of the important role of existence, which was the characteristic fault of Hegel's panlogism, St. Thomas declared, "What I call *esse* is the actuality of all acts, and for this reason it is the perfection of all perfections."³²

Existence, instead of being unintelligible as it was for Hegel and for all pure logicians, is the very ultimate source of intelligibility in things. And further, the sensible particular is unintelligible, not of itself, but only accidentally, as it were. For the individual in the sensible world is directly unintelligible only by virtue of the matter in which it is immersed, and which *materia signata* is its principle of individuation. It follows accordingly, that individuals which are immaterial are *per se* intelligible, although due to our limited mode of understanding, not to us.³³

Kierkegaard's error, one might add, was not the failure to see Hegelian philosophy for what it was, a pure logic devoid of existence. His mistake lay, as did Hegel's, in confusing logic for metaphysics, Hegelian speculation as the apex of philosophy instead of the corruption of it.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

³² St. Thomas AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

³³ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 86, a. 1, ad 3.

THE SPECIFIC PROBLEM OF THE CHRISTIAN

The specific problem which Kierkegaard set out to solve was to discover that which Christianity demands of us and the means of accomplishing these demands. As he saw it, Christianity asks us to be contemporary with Christ³⁴ Who lived over nineteen hundred years ago as man, and yet Who, as God, is forever present to us in both time and eternity. No Hegelian meliorism, Christianity leads us backwards to Christ, and by so doing leads us forwards to God. The past must be made good by the present for our entire future depends upon it. The paradoxical problem which Christianity presents to the man of faith is precisely this:

Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a mere historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?³⁵

The problem restated is this. How is it possible to have a transcendent and other-worldly Christianity concerned solely with eternity when Christianity came into being in time, and in the past at that! In other words, would it not be correct, as some Hegelians thought, to regard Christianity in a philosophical light as a pure historical phenomenon and so to treat it as such? How can the Christian of today be contemporary with Christ, which is exactly the prerequisite of faith?

Kierkegaard found the solution to these vexing questions by considering the natures of the God-man, Christ. As man, Christ had an historical interest and a temporal setting. This was for our exemplification, shocking us by showing us His humility. But, as God, Christ was in the moment of eternity, and so properly speaking, outside the realm of the historical and the philosophical. Whence it follows that to speak of Christ as God, there is but one tense to employ—the present—the eternal present. Accordingly, all men, no matter when they did exist and whether they exist now or at a future time, can be contemporary with God and so possess the essential prerequisite of faith. That is why past and future really have no meaning as such for the true Christian who seeks merely to be contemporary with Christ. The

³⁴ Indeed, this is the main theme of Kierkegaard's *Training in Christianity*.

³⁵ *Philosophical Fragments*, Title Page, iii.

historicity of Christ is merely accidental to Him as eternal God, and to dwell upon the historical instead of the eternal in Christ is to wholly misunderstand His message. To keep Christ eighteen hundred years in the past, as did the dialectic of Hegel, is to understand Him only as man, and not to grasp Him as God.

It is well known that Kierkegaard regarded such an attitude as blasphemous for, in effect, it denies the nature of God in Christ. Yet this historicity of Christ was exactly what the Established Church was dwelling upon, stressing, and rationally preaching in the name of Christian faith. It was small wonder that Kierkegaard regarded the hierarchy as hypocrites and the opposition of faith and reason as incapable of reconciliation. Since man reaches God through being contemporary with Christ, Kierkegaard could explain the dividing line between the realm of faith and that of reason, between the religious person and the philosopher.

God is really the *terminus media* in everything a man undertakes; the difference between the religious and purely human attitude is that the latter does not know it—Christianity is therefore the highest union between God and man because it has made this union conscious.³⁶

The age in which every man lives can be compared to a moment in the eternal duration of God—the same moment! It is the same moment by virtue of the character of eternity as indivisible. It is this moment that permits us to be joined with Christ and all of the faithful. This moment, the instant, is the springboard from which we can leap into eternity.³⁷

Answering his own question about the temporal leading to the eternal, Kierkegaard said,

It is well known that Christianity is the only historical phenomenon, which in spite of the historical, may precisely by means of the historical, has offered itself to the individual as a point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has assumed to interest him in another sense than the merely historical, has proposed to base his eternal happiness on his relationship to the historical.³⁸

³⁶ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 487, p. 133.

³⁷ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Either/Or*, trans. by David and Lillian Swenson, Princeton, Princeton University, 1944, vol. 2, pp. 75-76.

³⁸ *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 92.

Because speculative thought left out temporal existence which is the one and only bridge to eternity, Kierkegaard deemed it worthless in what is really important to man, his salvation. Now, faith is contemporaneousness with Christ,³⁹ and to leave out temporal existence is but to omit the contemporary, and therefore faith. Further, speculative thought dealt with essences and knowledge, but, "faith does not have to do with essences, but with being."⁴⁰ To put it baldly, "faith is not a form of knowledge."⁴¹ All the more reason then, thought Kierkegaard, to reject a Christendom which had become purely speculative as philosophy. With the rejection of Christendom came the rejection of its cause, the order of essences. Kierkegaard proved so intent on emphasizing the real existential order, that he succeeded only at the expense of essence, which, Thomistically speaking, receives existence and limits it as potency limits act.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE IN THOMISM.

It is perfectly obvious to all men that existence is limited in different beings, for there are many existences. In the light of Thomistic principles, it is also apparent that to account for this real limitation, there must be within each finite being a principle responsible for it. This principle of limitation of existence in finite things is the principle of essence. It accounts for multiplicity among creatures, and therefore indirectly, that is, coupled with existence, it accounts for their individuality, personality and subjectivity.

Having thrown out essence, as Hegel so did to existence, Kierkegaard was at a loss to explain subjectivity, although he could point to it and was fully aware of its importance. And this is why Kierkegaardian existentialism does not and can not stand by itself apart from its polemical environment of Hegel's panlogism. An exaggerated corrective can stand only as long as its correlative, what is to be corrected, stands.

The complementary character of essence and existence, the proportion of one to the other was simply never grasped by the Dane. Consider the following:

A fly, when it exists, has as much being as God. . . . Factual existence is wholly indifferent to any and all variations in es-

³⁹ Training in Christianity, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Philosophical Fragments, p. 72.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 50.

sence, and everything participates without petty jealousy in being, and participates in the same degree. Ideally, to be sure, the case is quite different. *But the moment I speak of being in the ideal sense, I no longer speak of being, but of essence.*⁴²

Now, although not explicit to the point of actually saying the same words, there is certainly implied here the univocity of being, both on the level of creatures and that of the Creator. What else are we to gather when he says that "things participate in being in the same degree."⁴³

Although in Thomism it is true to say that whatever is participates in being, still creatures do not all participate in the same manner, but according to the capacity of their essences which differ with different species. Here is exactly the meaning of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy according to proportional similitude. That is the reason why the term "being" in its existential connotation, should be according to an analogy of this kind. What is similar is not the amount of existence which any being has, but the similarity lies in the proportion of the principle of existence to the essence which it actuates. Thus, the proportions between the act of existence and the essence of a plant, between that of a man, and between these same principles in an angel are all similar. But similarity does not mean sameness! That is why the plant, the man, and the angel all differ in the fullness of existence according to the capacity of their respective essences which receive existence. The existence of the angel is higher and less limited than man's, for the angelic essence is simple and possesses greater unity and perfection. Man's essence, being composite, is limited from within by matter or potency.

Now, it is certainly true to say that whatever is, is a being, and completely a being. After all, there is no such thing as half a being. If a being is in existence, it is fully and completely in existence, and if it is not, then it is fully and completely out of existence. Whether a potency be proximate or remote, it is still potency and not the actuality of existence. Hence, there was some truth in Parmenides.

⁴² Ibid., n., pp. 32-33.

⁴³ In the context, Kierkegaard is battling Spinoza's treatment of ideal vs. real being. The Dane holds that in the ideal order there are degrees or shades of being, but not in the real order. It seems that Kierkegaard is right only in reverse. Idealistically, being seems to carry a flavor of univocity, and that is why it cannot cope with real being which must always be understood analogously.

Yet this is not to say, as Kierkegaard seems to imply, that one being is not a greater being, existentially, than another. Greater appreciation of a painting may be had by an artist, than by a layman, although each truly appreciates it, and to the extent of their capabilities. Certainly, life, which is a mode of existence in any animate thing, is a higher type of existence and a fuller existence than the mode of existence which an inanimate thing possesses. And to use a limping analogy, although a four ounce glass and an eight ounce glass are both full of water, the latter nevertheless, and in a manner of speaking, is "fuller" than the former, that is, it has greater actuality. Relatively, it is true, one is as full as the other in their respective capacities.

Were not the above the case, and were it true that everything participates in being in the same degree, it would be extremely difficult to see how diverse species among creatures would be possible. The capacity of a finite being, that is, its essence, determines in the negative sense that it limits what the thing will be and the degree of actuality it may possess. The essence of a stone, for example, simply does not have the capacity for receiving the living existence which the essence of a plant receives. Hence, the reason why eight ounces of water cannot be held by a four ounce container, is due fundamentally to the limiting capacity of the receptacle to hold but four ounces of water.⁴⁴ All this serves to point up and illustrate the unquestionable truth of a basic Thomistic principle, namely, act of itself is a formally unlimited and perfect principle. Wherever limitation is discovered it is due to potentiality.⁴⁵

ATTAINMENT OF EXISTENCE BY THE INDIVIDUAL

Despite the fact that being signifies primarily human existence for Kierkegaard, he was no humanitarian, as moderns have misused that term. Quite the contrary, he advocated that men suffer and undergo anguish, for only in such manner can man strive to perfect his existence and truly realize it. "Suffering is posited as something decisive for a religious existence, and precisely as a characteristic

⁴⁴ Two things should be understood regarding the above analogy. Essence is not a constituted receptacle or container, and existence is not measured quantitatively by amounts.

⁴⁵ St. Thomas AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentes*, I, c. 43, and II c. 52.

of the religious inwardness—the more the suffering, the more the religious existence.⁴⁶ Man's goal is not to be human, for this is a given; his aim is to be above the human, for he seeks to imitate the divine paradox, Christ.

Despair must enter into the picture when man realizes that by himself he cannot perfect his existence. Nonetheless, he must keep on trying. The perfection of human existence can only come from above. But it can come, and that is why Kierkegaard's thought could never be called a nihilism, as is true of some modern existentialists.

One must grasp a picture of what is the Ideal Existent, Christ, and then strive earnestly to attain it. But we must suffer to do so and it becomes increasingly unbearable when we realize its impossibility and our obligation.

Then there comes a moment when everything becomes clear to him; he understands that this hope of help and of better times was a youthful hope, he understands now that there is no chance of escaping suffering, and that it will increase with each forward step he takes. Now existence has racked him as hard as it can rack a man; to live under or hold out under this pressure is what may be called emphatically to exist as a man. If existence had done this at once, it would have crushed him. Now he is able to endure it—indeed he must be able to, since it is governance that does this to him, governance which is love. And yet he shudders at it.⁴⁷

In such a context, being can be reduced to becoming but with a far different meaning than it had for Hegel. Instead of a dialectical resolution it necessitates a perfecting of human existence in the practical order, a striving for religious subjectivity on an individual basis with God. It means earnest striving for the impossible which one fully recognizes as impossible. Here is existence to be found for Kierkegaard, here in the depths of despair and with an eye to the future, the present of eternity. Here in the inner recesses of man's soul lay his subjectivity and anguish, his dread and inwardness, here in his unique relation with God. No man can touch it, no man can grasp its significance except in the personal ordeal of living, which only the individual can experience. The universal has no meaning now. No wonder it is that few people really exist as humans thought

⁴⁶ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 256.

⁴⁷ *Training in Christianity*, p. 189.

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Kierkegaard. They merely are, without ever plumbing the depths of their existence seeing whither it leads. Thus Kierkegaard could say,

It is true that in a strange way—and that not precisely by reason of my virtue, but rather of my fault—I have become very thoroughly acquainted with the mysteries of 'existence', and also with its mysteriousness, which for many persons certainly have no existence.⁴⁸

The impersonal Absolute Mind, the God of Hegel's panlogism, simply cannot be reconciled with the suffering God-man, Christ, Who urges us to follow Him. No philosophy can reach the personal torture of subjectivity as found in an individual relationship with God, between sinner and all good Creator.

It is something to know that God is a transcendent and sovereign Self; but it is something else again to enter oneself and with all one's baggage—one's own existence and flesh and blood—into the vital relationship in which created subjectivity is brought face to face with this transcendent subjectivity and, trembling and loving, looks to it for salvation.⁴⁹

And this last quote from a "paleo-Thomist"!

Kierkegaard saw by closing his eyes and reflecting, what Hegel failed to perceive with his wide open. Namely, idealistic philosophy has no place within its folds for the individual and all pertaining thereto. The only thing which truly is, the individual, must remain in such a setting within the realm of the noumena, the unknowable. To objectivize and universalize the individual existent is to lose him. That is why Kierkegaard urges us to follow a different path than that of speculative reason. He urges us to follow the path of faith, but somewhat in the manner of a Protestant individualism.



THE METHOD OF FAITH AND THE METHOD OF REASON

The problem of the dualism of faith and reason has been presented to us from the earliest of times. Broadly, there are three possible positions one can hold regarding this problem, although the variations of each are many indeed.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴⁹ *Existence and the Existent*, p. 73.

The first position maintains that faith gives us everything and leaves absolutely no room for reason. The second is that reason is omniscient thereby permitting no room for the order of faith. The third and last position is that the dualism of faith not only can be reconciled, but that they actually complement each other.

The absolutism of faith is evidently the view which Kierkegaard favored. The second position striving to establish the undisputed supremacy of reason is clearly the Hegelian attitude. The third view, with some minor qualifications, is espoused by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Before we examine these in closer detail, a word of caution would first be in order. It has already been suggested that Kierkegaard, somewhat but not completely inadvertently, mistook Hegelian logic for the very apogee of metaphysics. Consequently, his arguments against the order of reason must be understood in that light. That is to say, his position has as its point of departure, a polemic against the extreme rationalism of Hegel. To take and place his arguments in another context would be academically unfair, for such simply was not the case. However, notwithstanding, it must be added that Kierkegaard's polemic did not stop at the destruction of panlogism but continued against philosophy as such. And here, no apologies are either made or intended.

Sören Kierkegaard was never a man to take half-way measures against an opponent. The only method he knew to combat the absolutism of Hegelianism was by his own absolutism of an irrational fideism. All of his writings are characterized by the definite and cryptic alternatives of either / or, intending thereby to leave no room for one to waver inbetween the poles of opposition. This is probably why one of his favorite gospels was the one propounding the dictum that no man can serve two masters.⁵⁰ This sums up exactly how Kierkegaard saw the opposition between faith and reason. We must love the one and despise the other! No inbetween was admissable. Having set his sights on the destruction of the Hegelian colossus, Kierkegaard began to effectively set it tottering by choosing the personal weapons of faith, namely, dread, despair, and anguish.

The methods of faith and reason were exactly contradictory according to the Dane. The method or way of reason was one of

⁵⁰ The Journals of Sören Kierkegaard, No. 1128, p. 405.

caution and due contemplation, yet all the while admitting of flexibility in the final choice of decisions. A careful consideration of all principles and facts and circumstances must be made before any action could be sanctioned, must less actually posited by the thinker. And even then, should the one course appear unfruitful, an alternative must always be borne in mind to permit and expeditious changeover. Action was the very last thing to be accomplished, if it was to be accomplished at all, and it should rest as much as possible on absolute certitude. Indeed, the longer action and existence could be evaded, the more successful was the method of reason. This is why Hegelianism was a crowning success in the field of rationalism, for it could talk itself right out of the sphere of action and the existential. And it was beginning to do the same for religion. Reason was, then, always discursive, laborious, and deliberate.

The almost intuitive method of faith, on the other hand, was to begin with the actual and the existential, to commence with the engaged man who lives and acts out his truths of faith. The point of departure for the man of faith was the blind plunging into the crevice of his existence and once there, to explore and exploit that crack so that its weakness could be discovered and we could realistically apprehend our being's contingency.

The aim of the existentially engaged man is not so much to resolve the crisis of his existence, as it is to raise that very crisis and make it evident to himself. And it can be raised if we leap into it wholeheartedly, throwing all caution to the winds. It is a very different thing to be a passive spectator at a bull fight, freely cheering from the safety of the stands, for example, than to be the torreador in the ring who is flirting with sudden death. No spectator can share in the experience of the bullfighter unless he plunge into that very experience himself. The crisis in which man must engage himself and grapple with death, facing the moment of truth, is continually trying to split him asunder. That crack in man's existence always threatening to overcome him, threatening to engulf the spirit, is sin. Here is the bitter anguish of man's existence, rooted in original sin. Here is to be found that defect of existence which all men share in a common yet unique and personal way. And each time we sin it is like placing a crowbar in that crack of existence and striking it with a sledgehammer. The reverberations are carried to

the very hollow of our being and we knowingly weaken the foundation upon which our being rests. Through sin, we consciously destroy ourselves, for sin is nothing else than slow and agonizing moral suicide. The more frequently we commit it, the more insensible we become to the fact of our own self-destruction. So it is that the aesthetic person⁵¹ lives on the plane of the pure sensory, in the shadow of and reaping the corruptible fruits of the tree of hellenism.

The diametric opposition of faith and reason for Kierkegaard are summed up;

'I', says the worldly mind, 'I stick to what's certain; I don't believe anything, not the least thing unless I can take hold of it and feel it; and I don't believe anybody, not ~~by~~ my own wife, not my best friend. I believe only what can be proved — for I stick to what's certain. I stick to what's certain, and therefore I have nothing to do in the remotest way with all those high-flown notions about other-worldliness, about eternity, and all that which the parsons (not for nothing) make women and children and simple folks believe; for one knows what one has, but not what one is going to get — this is what I stick to.'⁵²

Faith is forced to take a risk and it should not even be a calculated one. It should first plunge into the cold and refreshing waters of the existential. It is as when a man learns to swim. He can do this only by going into the water, never by staying on dry land. And if through contemplation, he decides only to wade, instead of plunging under, with each step he takes he will find a thousand more excuses why he can put off learning how to swim at this time and forever. No! He must take the plunge if he wishes to swim.

When faith resolves to believe it runs the risk of committing itself to error, but it nevertheless believes. There is no other road to faith. If one wishes to escape risk, it is as if one wanted to know with certainty that he can swim before going into the water.⁵²

Here it is that the man of faith, like the swimmer in deep water, suddenly discovers his individuality, his personal subjectivity, his

⁵¹ For a description of this stage of existence, cf. *Either/Or*, vol. 2, p. 150 and p. 162.

⁵² Søren KIERKEGAARD, *For Self Examination and Judge for Yourself*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1944, pp. 113-114.

⁵³ *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 67-68.

desperate loneliness and complete independence from the help of all men and yet his total dependence upon God. To plunge into the existential category of faith is to rediscover oneself and to comprehend oneself in a true and entirely different perspective never before viewed. It is to see oneself in a terrifying and all embracing glance as a sinner before an all just, but all merciful and loving God. Here is the supreme paradox. We exist in a state of absolute tension, simultaneously dreading God's justice and loving His mercy.

As Kierkegaard saw it, the paradox is the distinguishing earmark of faith, for reason is unable to circumscribe it and must back away from it in utter absurdity. The paradox is an insoluble mystery in the Kierkegaardian context, and the more one examines it, the more ridiculous it appears (to reason). It positively defies reason and the order of rationality. We are obliged either to shrink away from it entirely, or simply to accept it without question. The test and measure of faith for Kierkegaard was always its irreconcilability with reason. "The problem is not to understand Christianity but to understand that it cannot be understood."⁵⁴ "It is true to say that to see God or to see miracles happens by virtue of the absurd, for reason must stand aside."⁵⁵

Since Christianity cannot be understood, advises Kierkegaard, its appeal must be made not to universal reason, but to the personal experiences of the individual. Its appeal must be taken as a step to positive action, as an engaging of oneself in the moral existential order. The beginnings of faith are rooted in that which reveals our pitiful existence to ourselves. This is in the consciousness of sin which "is the *conditio sine qua non* of Christianity."⁵⁶

But though its beginnings are here, its term is certainly not, for it blossoms out into sheer love of and for God. Let us see if we can follow the difficult path of Kierkegaard's Christian dialectic and trace the categories of dread, guilt, and anguish to their conclusions. These are means which lead us to a firmer grasp of the object of faith.

⁵⁴ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 813, p. 261.

⁵⁵ Ibid., No. 498, p. 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid., No. 479, p. 131.

THE CATEGORIES OF DREAD, GUILT, AND ANGUISH

Choice
If we reflect upon the time of Adam and Eve prior to their being cast out of Paradise, we see that they were given the possibility of freedom by God so that they could accept or reject the forbidden fruit. But concomitant with the possibility of freedom given them, dread was posited, for with freedom comes the law and its sanctions. In a manner of speaking, dread is a correlative of and inseparable from the very possibility of freedom. The reason is that with this possibility (but not with the actuality), one can not only choose the good, but may also choose the evil and consequently, one's own perdition. Dread arrives when we become aware of this possibility of both alternatives to our choice, at once recognizing the fact that we are responsible for our own actions.⁵⁷ It is as Kierkegaard shows, through this ordeal of the consciousness of sin, the possibility for doing wrong, that man sees the barrenness in his own being, the crack in his existence. He grasps that by himself he is nothing, that he is totally dependent upon another, that he is other-directed, that his being points not to himself but to another, God. This realization of the emptiness of his being shakes him into a state of fear which momentarily paralyzes him.

It is now that he fully apprehends this possibility of freedom, this state of infinite dread. He wishes he had never known it, and yet at the same time realizes that without it he would be lost. This sympathetic antipathy makes him realize that he must choose and that he must act, for the shock of paralysis is only temporary. Having seen this view of existence, he can find no longer any position of neutrality open to himself, where he might bide his time studying the decisions of others.

He may take a qualitative leap into revolt against God and sin, or he may leap helplessly into the providence of God and candidly admit his nothingness. He may reject himself. Either way he is bound to risk all, to either renounce God or himself. Should he take the qualitative leap of sin, the dread breaks forth into guilt. Consequently, the actuality of freedom has been annulled for it has succumbed. But when freedom is posited in its actuality and the right

⁵⁷ This especially seems to be the preoccupation of the French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre.

course is chosen, dread, and not freedom is annulled. To say it in the Dane's own words,

Innocence is ignorance. . . . In this state there is peace and repose; but at the same time there is something different, which is not dissention and strife, for there is nothing to strive with. What is it then? Nothing! But what effect does nothing produce? It begets dread. This is the profound secret of innocence, that at the same time it is dread.⁵⁸

Dread necessitates reflection, and accordingly, a consciousness of sin, an awareness of a gaping hole in one's being which cannot be accounted for by oneself. This dread, Kierkegaard declared, is "the reflex of freedom within itself at the thought of its possibility."⁵⁹

Thus dread is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs. . . . When freedom rises again it sees that it is guilty.⁶⁰

Since we are all guilty of sin, we all have but two alternative choices facing us. One is to despair of our sinful action and lose hope and our personal existence by falling into the aesthetical life. The other alternative is to let the despair break forth into guilt and this in turn break forth into a higher type of dread called anguish. It is a purposive and reflective consideration of our guilt and the punishment it deserves. From this contemplation (not a purely intellectual activity) of our action of casting ourselves off from God, from this vain attempt to transform our contingent existence into a necessary and self-sustaining Existent, emerges the suffering of forlornness and anguish. By this castigation of self, we are paradoxically moved back to the threshold of possibility and so again become eligible for God's forgiveness.

Thus, there is a dread which precedes sin (one might almost say anticipates sin) and a dread that is posterior to sin. The latter, termed anguish, must be freely chosen to be beneficial.

Besides the above distinctions, Kierkegaard also differentiated a subjective and an objective dread. The subjective dread is essentially

⁵⁸ *The Concept of Dread*, pp. 37-38. Cf. also, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, No. 402, p. 105.

⁵⁹ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 50.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

identified with reflective subjectivity and, as already mentioned, is correlative with the possibility of freedom itself. "By objective dread, on the other hand, we understand the reflection in the whole world of that sinfulness which is propagated by generation."⁶¹ i.e. original sin. "By the fact then that sin came into the world it acquired significance for the whole creation. This effect of sin in the non-human sphere of being I have called objective dread."⁶² In short, this is why the world in which we live is not like the Garden of Eden.

Strictly speaking, since dread is both the presupposition and the effect of sin, it is caused by man having been elevated to a supernatural plane of existence. Consequently dread can only be overcome or removed by a supernatural solution. Such a solution is either faith or death.⁶³ The latter, although it belongs to the natural order in itself, nevertheless enables the person to enter the supernatural domain. Faith overcomes dread for it makes use of it through existing in the tension of the opposites of dread and love. Thus is dread annulled.

THE OPPOSITION OF KIERKEGAARDIAN FAITH AND HEGELIAN REASON

The object of faith must forever be the irrational paradox, for Kierkegaard, the God-man, Jesus Christ. This is why, when seeking entrance to its domain, reason must be set aside. For it is of the very nature of faith to offend reason in order to shake us from our complacency attitude. Thus we are prepared for believing. The only certitude found in the realm of faith is based strictly upon authority, that of the authority of God. Before this supreme authority all rational demonstration crumbles and becomes meaningless. As taken in the anti-Hegelian context, we can sympathize with Kierkegaard here. Thus he says,

The best proof for the immortality of the soul, that God exists, etc., is really the impression one gets in one's childhood, and consequently the proof which, in contradistinction to the learn-

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶² Ibid., p. 52.

⁶³ The thought of Sartre and Martin Heidegger, that man is a being unto death, becomes slightly more intelligible when we see that they have rejected spiritual help.

ed and highfalutin proofs, can be described thus: it is quite certain, because my father told me so.⁶⁴

Once faith shocks us we must be prepared to accept anything put before us within that realm. We achieve this preparation through a complete resignation of self, through a completely candid admission that before God we are nothing. Since faith has to set aside reason, it can have no traffic with the object of reason, namely, essences, but lies purely on the existential plane. "Faith does not have to do with essences, but with being."⁶⁵ And since it exists in a state of tension hovering between dread and love, partaking of both, it is never sure of itself.

Thus, we must be careful not to confuse the certitude we possess of the object of faith for the doubt that we must have as to the real possession of faith itself. The very possession of faith must always be doubtful and we must be anxious about it. To claim otherwise would be an affront to Christian humility. Hence, "a faith that celebrates its triumph is the most ridiculous thing conceivable."⁶⁶ To be fully able to describe this faith in a wholly meaningful way is an impossibility, for it is intimately woven into one's subjectivity. And since subjectivity is unique, so also is faith both in its nature and its expression. Each individual must seek it in an individual way.

Faith, for Kierkegaard, then seems to be an act of the entire and whole man giving his all to God. For this reason he does not limit its expression to any single faculty as its immediate principle, even though a cursory reading may make it appear so. Thus he declared, "Faith is not an act of will."⁶⁷ Again, "Belief is not a form of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will."⁶⁸

Actually faith involves both intellect and will for Kierkegaard, but neither one exclusively. This is evident when he terms faith "not the first immediacy but a subsequent immediacy",⁶⁹ an immediacy

⁶⁴ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 785, p. 250.

⁶⁵ Philosophical Fragments, p. 72.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁹ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton, Princeton University, 1940, p. 125. Note the satirical manner in which Kierkegaard mimics the Hegelian dialectic.

after reflection. It is a leap we must take after we realize that life as presented in the aesthetical stage of existence has no more meaning.

In short, through the acquisition of faith we are immediately confronted with a universal ethical principle. But what we must do is to personally appropriate this principle to our unique human condition. Hence, to speak of the universality of faith merely means its acceptance by many, but in many individually different ways.

Once possessed of faith, we must pass from the realm of the outside admirer, who always stands apart from the order of activity, to the realm of active engagement. With and through the light of faith everything becomes intelligible but in a far different way than the rational intelligibility of the philosophers. All is seen in the light of the divine love of the Father.

Reason and faith then, are opposed in both method and content. The content of the order of reason is nothing more than problems, whose solutions will eventually admit of discovery. The content of faith, however, is always a mystery, a paradox, and in virtue of its absurd character it will never be grasped by finite human reason.

The problem is limited to the plane of essentiality and points away from us to the other. Its natural tendency directs us to the objective. The mystery or paradox, on the other hand, lies on the existential plane and centers around the self and subjectivity. The "other" enters into consideration only insofar as it attempts to explain our being, as for instance our being owes its entirety to God.⁷⁰

The appeal and value to the individual, of faith over reason, is such that it alone provides the security in its protective folds that will quell the restlessness of man's spirit in his eternal search to justify his being.

The order of reason, then, was conceived by Kierkegaard to be merely a distracting influence which sometimes led man to erroneously believe in his own omnipotence. The agony of modern existentialism with the religiousness of Kierkegaard left out is well phrased

⁷⁰ The noted French existentialist, Gabriel Marcel, seems to re-echo Kierkegaard on this point when he distinguishes between "being" and "having".

in the pitiful question, "If there is no God (and we have declared Him dead), then what of man's soul?" The superman of Nietzsche can rise from his grave and walk the well trodden philosophical paths once again.

The differences of faith and reason are well summarized by Kierkegaard in his delineation of the apostle and the genius, representative of both respectively.

*A genius and an Apostle are qualitatively different, they are definitions which each belong in their own spheres: the sphere of immanence, and the sphere of transcendence. . . . Genius is what it is of itself. . . . An Apostle is what he is by his divine authority. Genius has only an immanent teleology; the Apostle is placed as absolute paradoxical teleology.*⁷¹

The sphere of immanence is the realm of thought, that of transcendence is in the order of faith. Since thought is an immanent activity, its worth is no more than the worth of the individual thinking it. Revelation through an Apostle, however, is as good and worthy, not as the Apostle, but as God operating transcendently through him.

The effects of confusing faith with reason and trying to identify the two have been most harmful to Christianity. This was Kierkegaard's protest to Hegel. As a matter of fact, Kierkegaard stoutly held that exegesis and philosophy "have simply forced back the sphere of paradox-religion into the sphere of aesthetics."⁷² Reason turned faith into a sort of curio, something to be marvelled at, perhaps even admired, something fine for people of the past, but now as having no other value. Like other curios it should be placed in a museum of natural history and be locked up there.

The opposition between the two is not capable of reconciliation for philosophy's whole concern is with the universal, and this is exactly the opposite case with Christianity. Said Kierkegaard, "The whole development of the world tends to the importance of the individual; that, and nothing else, is the principle of Christianity."⁷³

Perhaps the thing which most galled the Danish thinker was the Hegelian attempt not to fight Christianity, but to absorb it into

⁷¹ *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, p. 141.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷³ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, No. 632, p. 193.

the "System", to explain it—away! "It is obvious that modern philosophy makes the historical Christ into a sort of natural son, or at the most an adopted son."⁷⁴ The philosophical attempt to explain all of the dogmas of Christianity, to translate mysteries into problems, to substitute essence for existence, only served to so befuddle people that the order of faith and reason became indistinguishable. The respectable pagan and the traditional Christian could not be differentiated. Wrote the Dane.

Every Christian concept has been so sublimated, so completely volatilised into a sea of fog that it is impossible to recognize it again. To such concepts as faith, incarnation, tradition, inspiration . . . it has seemed good to philosophers to give an entirely different general meaning whereby faith becomes immediate certainty . . . tradition has become the summary of a certain world experience, whilst inspiration has become nothing but the result of God having breathed the spirit into man, and incarnation nothing else than the existence of one or other ideas in one or more individuals—and still I have not mentioned the idea which has not only been reduced to nothing, but even profaned, the idea of salvation.⁷⁵

For Kierkegaard there was but one real choice open between faith and reason as he understood it in the Hegelian context. That choice was a blind faith, for Christianity came into the world as the absolute, and to be absolute, all must give way before it. Never meant to be a compromise, or for that matter a consolation, Christianity was intended to be a demand, a rigorous demand. And this demand that it alone be absolute was meant to shock and to be offensive. Was not Christ the very symbol of offense, argued Kierkegaard? Christ was the very symbol of a double offense, one of lowliness and one of loftiness. The offense of lowliness was made by God claiming to be man, that of loftiness of man claiming to be God.

Summing up his case against the rationalism of Hegelian philosophy, Kierkegaard declared what advance had been made; "We have assumed a new organ: Faith; a new presupposition: the consciousness of sin; a new decision: the Moment; and a new Teacher: God in Time."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 217, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 88, p. 35.

⁷⁶ *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 93.

So it was in the eyes of the Danish existentialist that the sooner faith renounces reason and severs all connections therewith, the better off it will be and the purer will its strain become.

A THOMISTIC EVALUATION

Now there are many things in the above Kierkegaardian explanation with which a Thomist could well agree, at least in a qualified way. But there are many things also with which we must take issue, for if we are true disciples of St. Thomas, we must also be men of moderation. Let us consider the scope or content of reason and in particular, its high point of metaphysics and its method as St. Thomas considered it.

First of all, we must remember that although St. Thomas' works are both philosophical and theological in character, nevertheless there is a sharp division made between what be be demonstratively established by reason alone, and what must be accepted on the grounds of faith.

Although a quick glance at the *Summa Theologica* and its various divisions might tempt the uninitiated to think otherwise, a closer inspection of it will reveal a firm upholding of this distinction. The main reason philosophical and theological treatises are put together under one heading is due in part to the tenor of the times in which the Angelic Doctor lived. It is also due in part to the strong conviction of St. Thomas that faith and reason should be and are in harmony. There is never to be found a genuine conflict between them in St. Thomas' works.

It is obviously true that philosophy is an all embracing science for St. Thomas because it studies all things in their ultimate causes. But this does not mean, as it did for Hegel, that its extension was such as to bring a supernaturally revealed religion down to the level of natural reason. Far from it, for as we shall shortly see, one of the roles of philosophy is that of subordination to supernatural theology. Hence, although its contents are all embracing, still metaphysics and philosophy are strongly limited and confined to what can be investigated and established with the aid of the natural light of reason alone.

Basically what this means is that philosophy should have a well defined and a limited method, designed to keep it within its own

proper sphere, expressly stated by its formal object. Therefore, anything supra-rational (to human reason but not absolutely), anything which is a true mystery, or to use Kierkegaard's expression of paradox, simply does not come under its scope for explanation or demonstration.⁷⁷

Should philosophy insist upon infringing in a domain ruled by a science higher than itself, it will suffer the loss of its own autonomy and will simply cease to be philosophy. In short, the Angelic Doctor would be the very first to agree on the principle and its strict enforcement that philosophy should stay in its own backyard. Else we would affront the dignity of faith and make ourselves appear ridiculous to non-believers we would think that we believe truths of faith on such basis.

One method of philosophy is to proceed from first principles whose self-evidency is immediately apparent to rational man. By a consideration of these first indemonstrable principles and a procession therefrom, we are able to discursively grasp that various conclusions are implicitly contained within them.

Or too, we can first consider conclusions and then see if they are reducible to these immediately evident principles. If they are, we accept them; if they are not, we must reexamine the steps we have taken and seek the possibility of error in transition. If we are certain that these conclusions conflict with the first self evident principles, we are then forced to reject the conclusions. There is then, the way of discovery and the way of resolution.

One thing must be borne in mind at this point. That is this. The mysteries of supernaturally revealed religion do not fall under the scope of philosophy. Hence, it is not the business of philosophy to judge of them and either gratuitously accept or summarily reject them. "We must not attempt to prove what is of faith."⁷⁸ It is not because these mysteries are incapable of intellectual explanation, absolutely considered, but because our limited intellects are incapable of reducing them to truths self evident to natural reason.

Negatively, however, the philosopher may undertake to show that if the truth of the mysteries is taken for granted, they do not

⁷⁷ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 46, a. 2, and q. 32, a. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 32, a. 1.

conflict with human reason, that is, they contain no intrinsic contradictions. If philosophy is to be kept autonomous, then the philosopher as philosopher, must say that regarding these divinely revealed mysteries, he is in a state of ignorance, neither able to confirm or deny.

Now supernatural theology, although it deals with many things common to natural theology, or to consider it in the broader Aristotelian sense as first philosophy, nevertheless formally distinguishes itself from the latter. And although it is true to say that both proceed from first indemonstrable principles, it is not true to say that these principles are the same. There is a similiarity but not a sameness.

The principles of first philosophy are constituted by truths which are immediately evident to unaided natural reason. They neither need nor seek any further verification. The beginnings of the divine science of God, however, proceed from principles which are divinely revealed, given by God. Therefore, while the basis of philosophical truth rests upon evidency to human reason, the basis of theological truth and the truths of faith, rests upon the authority of God Himself, Who canst neither deceive nor be deceived. Since God cannot err all truth based upon His authority must be absolutely the highest truth.⁷⁹

At this point one thing which might confuse should be made clear. We are not setting up two standards of truth which oppose each other in any way, a position erroneously held in the past. Something may not be true in philosophy and false in theology or conversely. Here, apparently, was where Kierkegaard was grossly mistaken, for it seems that he accepted the double standard of truth, at least implicitly, either because he was unable to refute Hegel on his own grounds, or because he did not deem it worth while to do so.⁸⁰

Although Kierkegaard knew that an existence-less panlogism could not deal with genuine reality, he placed the blame upon the

⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that the very first article of the first question in the *Summa Theologica* concerns itself with whether besides the philosophical disciplines, any further discipline is required. Article five of the same question then illustrates how sacred doctrine is the highest of all disciplines.

⁸⁰ *Training in Christianity*, p. 178.

wrong cause, putting it squarely upon philosophy instead of upon the philosopher where it belonged. It is similar to discrediting an airplane engine for not working properly, instead of blaming the mechanic who overhauled it incorrectly.

Once having decided upon this, Kierkegaard never stopped to look back and reflect upon the prudence of his initial decision. Instead, he struck out for new territory, namely, that of faith. Hence the conflict between faith and reason for Kierkegaard, was, in the last analysis, an *a priori* postulate possessing no foundation in the real order.

Now St. Thomas examined and reexamined that postulate as it was phrased by men both before him and in his own times. He found it lacking! The whole of his own works is a synthetic monument to the unity between the order of faith and reason, keeping each autonomous yet closely related as they are in fact.

Regarding the Thomistic position on the nature of religion and faith, there are many points of agreement with the views of Kierkegaard, although by no means is there complete accord.

First of all, the content of faith is constituted by all of the divinely revealed truths. The articles of faith are concerned with the mysteries of God, but these are not irrational as Kierkegaard maintained.⁸¹ Rather are they suprarational to us. It is thus that they are not capable of being demonstrated by us. To put it differently, we are not able to prove them by reducing them to principles self evident to reason in its natural state. Yet we have certainty of these truths of faith, although not from natural reason. Now, science is concerned with demonstrable matters. "Consequently, faith and science are not about the same things."⁸²

But the articles of faith can analogously be compared to theological reason, as the self evident principles are to the natural reason. Implicitly, they contain all of the truths of faith. Hence, any truth of faith can be reduced to one of the articles of faith. The contents

⁸¹ In modern Protestant circles there are considerable variations of opinion as to the exact meaning of Kierkegaard's position on the irrationality of faith. Witness the interpretations of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and the extremist, Emil Brunner.

⁸² *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 5.

of faith are grasped with absolute certitude based upon the authority of God. Yet the method whereby we grasp them is quite different from the way we grasp truths accessible to unaided natural reason. We apprehend the truths of science through natural reason, by reason "being moved to assent by its very object."⁸³ In other words it is the *object* forcing and compelling us to accept its truth, and the intellect assents to this.

The truths of faith, however, are received by us from God and surpass human reason. Therefore, the assent of the intellect must be caused, not by the object compelling us so much, as rather from an act of choice, whereby we will to believe without any fear or doubt concerning the data of faith. And yet this act of assent "which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace."⁸⁴ Without this grace moving us we could never possess faith. So it is that faith involves both faculties of intellect and will, although faith itself is an act of the intellect, presupposing an act of the will and the grace of God.

Now precisely because faith involves an act of the intellect, if we probe deeply enough into it we are bound to discover a certain kind of extrinsic evidence for its acceptance. It will never be found as totally lacking motives for credibility for they are intimately tied in with it. Hence, a practical judgment grounded on an intelligible basis should be one of the preconditions of faith. Accordingly, faith should possess partially, at least, a vision of reason, no matter how inadequate, rather than commit itself to complete blindness.

Here is where Kierkegaard most basically erred, in thinking that to make faith connected in any way with the order of intelligibility, would automatically place it in the realm of science and discursive reasoning. It should be apparent by now that such a conclusion is totally unwarranted, for the assent required is not compelled by the object itself, as it is in the case of science.

Having viewed the method and content of metaphysics and religion, or reason and faith, we can see the value and appeal of the latter to the individual and the manner in which it surpasses without ruling out the former. Faith can only come on an individual

⁸³ Ibid., IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., IIa IIae, q. 6, a. 1.

basis, but come it will to all who truly seek it. And when we reflect the struggle that the philosophers from time immemorial have had in attaining truth there can be no question as to the value and superiority of faith over reason. Faith is truly transcendental and the road to the greatest of all truth. It elevates man to the supernatural order, a feat he is totally incapable of doing by himself.

Both the Danish existentialist and the Angelic Doctor are in fundamental agreement as to the necessity of Revelation, for both are fully aware of the frailty of human reason in matters divine. As St. Thomas pointed out,

For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers, in their inquiry into human affairs by natural investigation, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves. And consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for divine truths to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie.⁸⁵

The role of faith then is a key factor of supreme importance in the truly human, the truly religious existence and both Kierkegaard and St. Thomas saw it.

The problem which Kierkegaard now faced was that of how he could introduce to the individual the necessary means whereby he could find religious existence for himself. This end the Danish reformer sought to accomplish by particularly emphasizing the appeal of existence to the order of action, and to some extent, to the order of knowledge itself.

THE APPEAL OF EXISTENCE TO ACTION AND KNOWLEDGE

Soren Kierkegaard well knew that the success of his movement would ultimately depend upon its appeal to the order of action. If he could shake men free from their state of complacency in a comfortable Christendom and awaken them to an active role in a suffering Christianity, he knew his cause would prevail. The appeal could only be made in terms of existence, for the medium of essences served only to lull men to intellectual slumber and inactivity on the

⁸⁵ Ibid., IIa IIae, q. 2, a. 4.

practical plane. But here was where the real difficulty lay. Existence was not something to admit of universalization. It could scarcely be the theme of a sermon preached to others. Just how could the importance of an existential life be gotten across to those, who like Hegel, forgot what it means to live and to be?⁸⁶

Kierkegaard had been studying the problem for some time, but it was not until 1847 that he found the courage to go all out in putting his plan into operation. As he summed it up in his diary,

I wish to make men aware of their own ruin. And if they will not listen to good then I will compel them through evil—understand me, or at least do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that I am going to strike them (alas, one cannot strike the masses); I mean to make them strike me.⁸⁷

This was one of the reasons why the Dane's writings became ever more sharply critical after that year. The Hegelian-influenced "Christendom" represented the masses, where somehow the individual tended to lose all self identity in the merger. It was Kierkegaard's aim to dissolve the non-existent, yet all corrupting universal of Christendom and change it into a true Christianity where individuals stood alone responsible before God as individuals, and not as an amorphous part of an abstract whole.

With a keen psychological insight Kierkegaard saw that what men do or do not do as a group, they would not do or would do as individuals. It is a natural tendency for men to take safety in numbers, to shy away from responsibility. It was obvious that acting with and in a group setting definitely tends to lessen the feelings of responsibility by the participant. This rebellion against personal responsibility is exactly what Kierkegaard fought against. For he wished all to see themselves as individuals before God, as some day they must, so that now they would experience the dread and anguish of their unworthiness and so mend their ways. If they could be separated from the mob, from the masses, they could be made to see that they and they alone are responsible for their actions. Thus would men have a greater inclination to be doing God's will.

⁸⁶ The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, No. 610, p. 175. "One thing always escaped Hegel—what it was to live. He could only give a representation of life, and though a master in that art he is quite certainly the most striking contrast to a maieutic thinker."

⁸⁷ Ibid., No. 638, p. 195.

For Kierkegaard, then, it was a case of divide and conquer, of breaking up the universal into the individuals comprising it.⁸⁸ The appeal therefore was not being made in terms of objective essence, but in terms of subjective existence which belongs to the individual as such. What had to be done was to turn inwards and to reflect, not in any Cartesian sense, but to reflect in the sense of an examination of how we stand before God. This reflection upon our relationship to an infinite being, one of pure and utter dependency, begets dread at the possibility of our own freedom, and thus does it provide the point of departure for the truly Christian life. It is not yet the Christian life, for we may recoil at the sacrifices it imposes upon us. It is, however, the only true point from which we can initiate a pattern of Christian living.

According to Kierkegaard, the beginnings of Christianity and subjective existence coincide, for Christianity is inwardness. That is where one must plumb the depths of being, in the inwardness of subjective existence. What Kierkegaard advocated then, was our actual living of an examination of conscience. Here is where he was vigorously opposed to Hegel, for Hegel, as the Danish thinker viewed it, treated "conscience and the conscience-relationship in the individual, 'as a form of evil'."⁸⁹

To do that was to sound the death knell for Christianity and the individuals within it. The reason is this. Conscience, love, existence, and subjectivity are all intricately tied up with personality. To omit one, in effect is to do injustice to the other. Now to treat Christianity in terms of abstract essences (via the Hegelian dialectic) is to be concerned only with the possible and thus to be impartial to the real order of action and existence. And here Kierkegaard steadily warned us, "But the moment I speak of being in the ideal sense I no longer speak of being but of essence."⁹⁰ It might be added that I no longer am concerned with being a Christian but simply with knowing what Christianity is all about. Now, held Kierkegaard, "life's examination is this: to become and to be a Christian."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Hence, Kierkegaard made ferocious literary attacks upon the primate of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bishop Mynster, and upon his successor, Professor Martensen.

⁸⁹ *Training in Christianity*, p. 88.

⁹⁰ *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 32-33.

⁹¹ *Training in Christianity*, p. 190.

To be impartial in the order of individual action is an impossibility. As St. Thomas shows,⁹² human acts which are indifferent do not exist in the real practical order, they must be either good or bad. Love is not and can never be something impartial, for of its very nature it is intrinsically personal. Both the subject and the recipient must be persons. For Kierkegaard, "Love is a matter of conscience, and hence it is not a matter of impulse and inclination; nor is it a matter of emotion, nor a matter for intellectual calculation."⁹³

Now our subjective existence is nothing else than a reflection of Divine love, and it is utterly dependent upon that love. Hence, it should reciprocate and direct our whole being to the love of God. This is why Christianity is essentially a religion of love, for Christ loved us so much that He died for us in order that we might be redeemed. Therefore, to consider and treat of Christianity as the mere synthesis of contradictory, abstract, and impartial essences, and to treat of conscience as a form of evil is to seek the destruction of that religion. For if Christianity is a religion of love, and love is a matter of conscience, and conscience is a form of evil, the Hegelian conclusion is inescapable. It was to Kierkegaard's credit that he saw it and therefore dubbed it a mere meaningless "Christendom". True Christianity was being ruled out of Denmark without the Church hierarchy even knowing it, and worse yet, even abetting the movement. That is why Christ made love a duty, for, "only when love is a duty, only then is love eternally secure."⁹⁴ After all, the commandments may be summed up as imposing two obligations upon us. Love God and neighbor.

The importance of existence can never be underestimated in Kierkegaardian existentialism. As we have seen, it provides the springboard of action, for it is the person who acts, and personality is rooted in reflective subjective existence. Existence also clearly marked the dividing line between what is important and what is unimportant in the way of existential truth and essential truths. To repeat Kierkegaard here, "Christianly understood, the truth consists not in knowing the truth but in being the truth."⁹⁵

⁹² *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 18, a. 9.

⁹³ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Works of Love*, trans. by David and Lillian Swenson, Princeton, Princeton University, 1946, p. 116.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ *Training in Christianity*, p. 201.

The contemplative life is all but ruled out for the Dane because its point of emphasis is again placed upon knowing (the domain of essence), rather than upon doing (the domain of existence). There is simply no room for the order of reason in religion, because in the context from which Kierkegaard saw it, thought leads naturally to excuses for inactivity and "the strictly religious man is one whose life is essentially action."⁹⁶ After all, thought but leads us to the ideal good on that ideal plane, while action enables us to obtain the real good on that existential plane.

Unfortunately, the primacy of existence over essence in the doctrine of Kierkegaard is so overwhelming that it does away completely with the order of essence. This makes Kierkegaard as guilty of an anarchism as was Hegel. To the opposite extent of Hegel's sheer rationalism, the Danish existentialist pleaded for a complete irrationalism. Neither extreme fares well under concerted attack. That is why the doctrine of Kierkegaard could never be promulgated as such, but would have to undergo modification. Thus, and only thus, could it exert influence in later times.

Since the essence or what a thing is, has no importance in the thought of the Dane, he was forced to consistently argue that only the relationship which one bears to an object sought is of real concern. The object itself is relatively valueless, except insofar as it moves us to the order of action. This is why he insisted, "only the truth which edifies is the truth for you."⁹⁷

On such grounds it is extremely doubtful as to which common truths Christians must agree upon in order to be Christians. It would seem that only the earnestness with which they strive, and only the sincere relation they bear to an object to be attained, would be had in common. But if such were the case, it would be difficult indeed to distinguish Christianity from refined paganism. The overemphasis upon an existential striving⁹⁸ has a strong tendency to rule out the end of our action and striving. To rule out the end of action, how-

⁹⁶ For Self Examination and Judge for Yourselves, p. 37.

⁹⁷ Either/Or, vol. 2, p. 294. Actually, this is not as pragmatic as it appears to be. The Dane is simply stressing the necessity for a personal appropriation of existence.

⁹⁸ This is precisely the meaning of existence, "a constant striving". Cf. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 85.

ever, is not only to make the action unintelligible, but also to rule out the action itself. As St. Thomas observed, "Now in human acts ends are what principles are in speculative matters."⁹⁹ That is to say, in human acts, what is to be done must first and in some way be known before any strictly human action can be posited by the doer. This knowledge of the end is the starting point of the action, for human action proceeds from knowledge as one of its principles. Therefore, some room must be left in an existentialism for the order of essence and reason, for without one and other cannot prevail.

Of course, Kierkegaard made his appeal as strongly as he did in order to overcome an inertial paralysis and stifling of action. It was his intention to bring back Christians to the order of reality. To accomplish that end, he deemed no measure too extreme. He gave us a good descriptive portrait of the times when he wrote,

The same thing has happened in the scientific world as in the world of trade. First of all people bartered real goods, later money was invented. Nowadays the form of exchange in the scientific world is paper money, and nobody bothers about it except the dons.¹⁰⁰

And in a discouraged moment he wrote, "In the end physics will displace ethics just as metaphysics displaced theology. The modern statistical view of ethics contributes towards that."¹⁰¹

Our age is little different. For example, one can get so obsessed with making and saving money as to forget the purpose it was meant to serve. Analogously, that was where Hegel erred. He became so involved in the realm of thought that he lost sight of it as a means to an end, and viewed it as an end in itself. Essence, which has its true meaning only in relation to the existential, was set apart from the latter and made to reign in its own right. It shared its laurels with nothing else. But when this was accomplished, it became meaningless. Essences are naturally oriented towards existence as what is perfectible has a natural tendency towards its perfection. To regard essences as separated from their lifeline of existence for too long a time, as was the case with panlogism, is to miss seeing essences in their true perspective, as complementary to the existential. Since

⁹⁹ *Summa Theological*, Ia IIae, q. 57, a. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, No. 410, p. 107.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, No. 562, p. 151.

thought was something complete in its own right, it sought no traffic with the order of action. Actually then, although Kierkegaard retained the sharp dichotomy between the orders of thought and action, it was not he who introduced it, but Hegel.

A FINAL APPRAISAL

There are then two extremes to avoid; the extreme of essentialism which Hegel nurtured, and the extreme of existentialism advocated by Kierkegaard. There is a fallacy connected to each. If we insist upon understanding being exclusively in terms of essence, we rule out the order of action, for essences are immutable. We are bound to ignore the importance of the individual, for essences are universal (as considered by the mind, to the extent that they are the common element among diverse members of the same species). The real order becomes increasingly unimportant and eventually unknowable when only essences are considered as abstracted from reality. And this is a rather natural tendency, for essences as universal, are best known in the intellect. They are obscured in the real order by the conditions of matter in the individuals possessing them. Likewise, we are forced to cast aside the subjective element in human beings because of its tie-in both with individuality and existence. As Kierkegaard sarcastically put it, "Objective thought takes no account of the thinker and finally becomes so objective that like the clerk, it thinks it is only concerned with writing, the others with reading."¹⁰²

In short, because the essentialist is driven to a sheer rationalism, he is forced to substitute the part of reality for the whole. Because he has restricted himself to a very limited view of reality, he is obliged to miss a good deal of what is important about it.

The extreme existentialist, on the other hand, who interprets being exclusively in terms of existence, finds himself faced with a radical irrationalism. From this there results two major errors. The first is that even though the ultimate root of intelligibility is existence, still for that intelligibility to be brought to light, it is necessary that essence be given a place in the scheme of things. For in a certain sense, it is through the essence that the intelligibility of existence is made

¹⁰² Ibid., No. 530, p. 142.

known. The second error is that because existentialism insists upon an irrationalism, even though it advises action, it must be action without purpose. As a matter of fact, such action could not occur! It is with small wonder that one is bound to discover anguish in modern existentialism, when it is so utterly bereft of reason.

Just as essentialism is guilty of ignoring the subjective element in things, existentialism is guilty of doing away with all objectivity. Each position commits the opposite error in regards to selfhood and otherness. Complete subjectivity falsely sees the other as a self, and not as it really is, as other. Complete objectivity falsely sees the self as other, and not as it really is, as self.

What the existentialist conveniently wishes to forget is that the universal is grounded, not in mind (although it can only be formally present there), but in the individual existent. Hence, to do full justice to the individual, one must take into consideration everything that is present there, including essence, even though it be the basis for universalization. Ironically, the failure to do so is the failure of not even being true to oneself. True and complete knowledge of reality must consider not only the sameness of things which essentialism dwells upon, nor only the otherness of things which existentialism so well points out. A true and complete knowledge of reality must regard both aspects. While sameness is rooted in essence, otherness is rooted ultimately in existence. But both the same and the other are rooted in being, as a reflection upon the transcendental character of being reveals. Both one (a unity or lack of division, not a mathematical one) and something are convertible with being, hence convertible with each other.

It follows then, that that by which a thing is itself and a unity, is the same principle by which it is other than anything else, for to be something means to be some other thing. Accordingly, to do justice to sameness and otherness, objectivity and subjectivity, it is necessary to view being under both aspects of essence and existence.

Due to the artificial basis upon which a panlogism rests, and due to the irrationalism upon which extreme existentialism is founded, neither can be of long philosophic duration. They must pass with the age of their promulgation. The perennial resurgence of the philosophy of St. Thomas, on the other hand, can be attributed

to the fact that it takes into its scope both the essential and the existential features of being in due proportion and perspective.

Despite Kierkegaard's utter contempt for the philosophies of Hegel and Kant as idealisms, the Dane never really shook himself free from the greatest error of those idealisms. Kierkegaard never really cleared the Kantian hurdle of how thought could reach existence without destroying it. Kierkegaard knew perfectly well that reality cannot be conceived for "to conceive reality is to reduce it to possibility."¹⁰³ Now to reduce the actual to the possible is to proceed backwards and not forwards. What he did not know, however, was that even though existence cannot be "conceived" it can still be *known and reached intellectually*.

Unfortunately, because Kierkegaard subscribed wholeheartedly to the Kantian error that metaphysics is impossible, because reason cannot reach the order of existence without destroying it, Kierkegaardian thought was bound to an irrationalism if existence was to be reached at all. It is indeed a pity that the Danish reformer was unable to refute Kant, because like Kant, he was certainly aware of the problem of knowledge and the existential order. Consider the following,

What confuses the whole doctrine about 'being' in logic is that people do not notice that they are always operating with the 'concept' existence. But the concept existence is an ideality and the difficulty is, of course, whether existence can be reduced to a concept. . . . But, existence corresponds to the individual thing, the individual, which even Aristotle teaches lies outside, or at least cannot be reduced to a concept. For an individual animal, plant, or man, existence (to be — or not to be) is of quite decisive importance; and individual man has not after all a conceptual existence.¹⁰⁴

At first glance, one might think that a Thomist made that statement, but after making such a penetrating analysis, Kierkegaard went back to his peculiar brand of irrational fideism. For the Dane, the object of all knowledge is necessarily the essential and never being in both its essential and existential aspects. Accordingly, thought and knowledge are unable to penetrate to the riches of being as existence.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, No. 1054, p. 375.

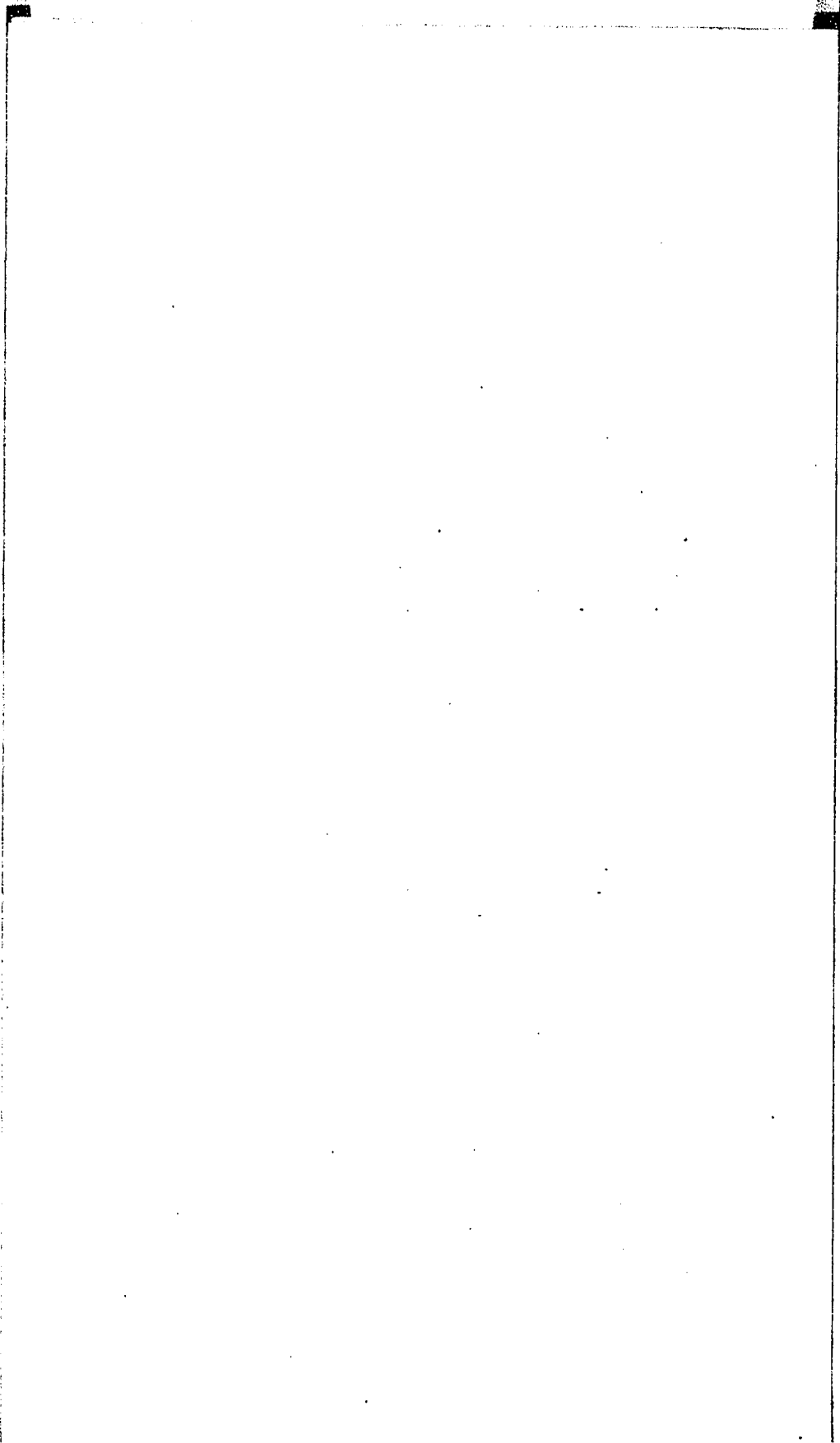
¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 1027, pp. 357-358.

If existence is to be reached at all, reasoned Kierkegaard, it must be reached where it is found, namely, as a starting point. This can only be accomplished by turning inwards to our own subjectivity. This inward turning is not made by any thought process as such, for then we have made no progress since Descartes. Instead, this inwardness is meant to be a concrete action, a reflective experience by which we rigorously undergo a self examination and thereby penetrate to the roots of our existential being. We grasp it here for we come face to face with the radical contingency of our personal existence. Here reality is as stark as it can be and it makes us fear and tremble.

Despite all the ridicule which Kierkegaard heaped upon the mediaeval ascetic and his abstracting from the world, there is a strong affinity between himself and the mediaeval. For the monk and the hermit sought reality by an interiority, and because the exteriority of the world distracted them from this, they withdrew from the world. While Kierkegaard does not advocate a withdrawal from the material world as such, he does press for a consciousness of our human condition within it.

* So it is that an authentically human existence for Kierkegaard can only be discovered in a religious becoming. And because it is a becoming, existence is not static but dynamic; it is never had, but always being striven for.

Although Kierkegaard approached the metaphysical in his search for truth and existence, he quickly receded from that order to discover the meaning of a personal human existence. His whole life was an attempt to live out that meaning and to communicate it to others. In so doing, he believed we could again place ourselves on the path to a true Christianity.



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