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Søren Kierkegaard: Faith and the Subjective Individual CHAPTER 3

Kierkegaard had received little attention in philosophy until the recent popularity of the 'existentialist' movement in Europe and the United States. Then, because of the respect bestowed on him by such influential thinkers as Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre, he became generally recognized as the founder of this movement although he preceded it by a full century. Existentialism is often characterized as a break with traditional Western philosophy, taking as its point of departure and as its goal (its Truth) the crisis-ridden isolated existence of an individual. So characterized, this 'movement' is nowhere given a more poetic or more explicit statement than in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard insists on the importance of the individual thinker first of all as a reaction to an attitude which he took to be the mark and the shame of the nineteenth century, a period that he characterized as "essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion."[1]

"Each age has its own characteristic depravity. Ours is perhaps not pleasure or indulgence or sensuality, but rather a dissolute pantheistic contempt for individual man.[2]

It is an epoch in which every human endeavor is marred by an "unhappy objectivity" (an "absence of personality"), and the individual and the personal have become smothered in the mechanical "levelling" processes of the mediocrity of the "masses" (alternatively characterized as "the group," "the crowd," and "the public"). This mediocrity with its stress on the concept of the group and its denial of individuality is at one with the tendency to passionless reflection.

In order that everything should be reduced to the same level, it is first of all necessary to procure a phantom, its spirit, a monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something that is nothing, a mirage—and that phantom is the public. *It is only in an age which is without passion, yet reflective, that such a phantom can develop itself.*[3]

The 'present age' is characterized by the fact that "there are no longer any human beings," for a human being is an individual and this "age has forsaken the individual in order to take refuge in the Collective Idea."[4] (The notion of the "Collective Idea" comes directly from Hegel.) A human being is not an organ of a larger body but a *person;* but, Kierkegaard complains, nothing is *personal* in this age of the "crowd." A human being ought to be passionate and committed, but no one now is willing to commit himself or allow himself to succumb to what Kant called the "pathology of passion." This is an age in which men have given up the dangers of passionate commitment and assertive individuality and have turned to the comforts of 'understanding' and 'reflection.' Men reflect on great happenings, but nothing ever happens. Men understand greatness, but no great deeds are performed. Men have become superbly rational, "Absolutely rational," but they have, in turn, forgotten "how to live."

The age is characterized, or caricatured, by its scholars and intellectuals. They are the embodiment and the culmination of a public dedicated to busy reflection and passionless inactivity. Scholars have mastered the art of reflection and have obtained the Absolute Truth of total lack of involvement and devotion. Scholars *under-*

stand life, but they do not know *how* to live:

Like Leporello, learned literary men keep a list, but the point is what they lack; while Don Juan seduces girls and enjoys himself—Leporello notes down the time, the place, and a description of the girl.[5]

In their writings on Christianity, and their constant apologetics for making Christianity conveniently compatible with the non-religious life, the scholars once again have shown their great ability at reflection, and their greater disability to live. To be Christian, according to Kierkegaard, is to *suffer* before God. The theologians know little of suffering, but a great deal *about* suffering:

The Two Ways. *One is to suffer; the other is to become a professor of the fact that another suffered.*[6]

The intellectual literary giant of Kierkegaard's youth was, of course, Hegel, and the great philosopher as well as his philosophy were the explicit manifestation, the prime example, of the Spirit of the age. With this characterization, Hegel would, of course, be in complete accord. In Hegel, philosophical reflection had become the highest virtue of man, and the present realization of Absolute Spirit viewed through the eyes of the historical past had been shown to be the ultimate in Spiritual development. There was no serious talk or concern for the future in the Hegelian philosophy, only an adoration of the present. There was no mention of the failings of the present, and therefore no attempt to generate ideals according to which we might commit ourselves to a better future. The reflective, rational understanding of the present in view of the past was absolute knowledge; the immediate future was simply not of philosophical concern.

Kierkegaard stressed the importance of the immediate future, however, and conceived of the job of philosophy not as a detached search for knowledge and understanding, but as an involved, even desperate quest to find out what to *do*.

What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, *not what I am to know, except insofar as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes* me *to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true* for me, *to find* the idea for which I can live and die.[7]

Hegel does not mention the individual except for those early portions of the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* where he explicitly rejects the concept of the individual in favor of the Collective Idea—the concept of Spirit.[8] Individual self-realization apart from collective Spiritual self-realization was out of the question for him. The best that one could do was to be the particular manifestation of collective Spirit, and to realize oneself in bringing about the realization of Spirit. This, of course, is precisely Hegel's own role in the development of his system, which is not merely to be considered as the development of *his* philosophy but rather the explicit development of Spirit (God) by Spirit using Hegel as a mere instrument for this realization.

In Kierkegaard, collective self-realization is not realization at all:

The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. . . . The way of objective reflection . . . always leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence . . . becomes infinitely indifferent.[9]

Since Kierkegaard's concept of individual self-realization is entirely "subjective," it carries with it no guarantees of objective truth, no criterion of general applicability or universality.

However, the objective way deems itself to have a security which the subjective way does not have . . . it thinks to escape a danger which threatens the subjective way, and this danger is at its maximum: madness. In a merely subjective determination of the truth, madness and truth become in the last analysis indistinguishable . . .[10]

In other words, self-realization, the search for "subjective truth," is equivalent to personal expression, without regard for "objectivity". Philosophy is *not* the abstraction of universal truths from the idiosyncrasies and errors of any particular individual. Philosophy cannot be separated from the philosopher; one's philosophy is truly "his."[11] However, this repeated insistence on the "personal" aspect of philosophy must not lead us to miss the importance of several truly universal ("objective") truths that emerge from Kierkegaard's philosophy.

Given the embodiment of the depravity of the age in Hegel, it is not in the least surprising that Kierkegaard's rage should begin with a devastating attack on systematic philosophy. Despite the frequently *ad hominem* character of his arguments, Kierkegaard's objections reach far beyond Hegel, as partially evidenced by the enormous influence of Kierkegaard's criticisms on several generations of European thinkers. Kierkegaard objected not just to Hegel's peculiar variety of 'systematic' philosophy, but to the entire Western philosophical tradition which took the medium of philosophical enquiry to be "The Concept" (conceptual thought and analysis) and objective conceptual truth as its goal. This search for universal, impersonal truth was the defining mark of virtually every major Western philosopher from Plato until Kant and Hegel. Only those truths which held for "every rational creature," regardless of situation and psychological peculiarities, were acceptable as philosophical truths. A philosophical truth could be disclosed by a Greek philosopher of three centuries B.C., and, if true, must be valid for a Chinese philosopher of the same period as well as for an American philosopher of the twentieth century. A philosophical truth, for example, the Principle of Universal Causation or the Law of Induction, was not indigenous or peculiar to any particular philosophical style, or to any particularly endowed philosophers. These laws hold for every man, and the philosopher takes it upon himself to do nothing other than to formulate and prove these universal principles. The philosopher is explicitly concerned with these principles, but he has no privileged relationship to them.

Whether the demand for universality manifests itself as the postulation of truths existing in themselves (as in Plato's *Ideas*), or as the demands of pure universal Reason (as in traditional rationalist philosophies), or as the necessary conditions for any consciousness whatever (as in Kant), or as the peculiar notion of universality that accompanies Hegel's notion of Spirit, this demand effectively excludes everything personal or 'subjective' from philosophy. Kierkegaard's objection to this tendency to insist on universality as the mark of philosophical truths is not, as his critics maintain, a result of the desire to include his autobiographical writings in the corpus of traditional Western philosophy. The brunt of his objection is not simply that there should be room for 'subjective truth' in philosophy, but that those central issues which philosophers have been discussing in these 'objective' philosophies *cannot* be resolved in an objective way. Rather, there are truths, "essential philosophical truths," which *cannot* be determined as valid for all men, or even for a group of men, but can only be determined by the "individual subjective thinker." These truths, of which the 'highest' is the realization that the human soul is rooted in God, are expressions of individual commitment rather than of an objective detached truth which can be established by any rational impartial observer. Belief in God, in the peculiar Kierkegaardian sense which we shall discuss, is a matter of passion, not knowledge. Kierkegaard compares this 'truth' to the 'truth' embodied in a lover's declaration. The "truth' of "I love you" is a passionate commitment; a third disinterested party could never 'understand' (that is, feel himself) the intensity of the relationship, and his demand for 'justification' or 'proof' would simply be inappropriate. Similarly, one cannot *prove* that God exists; one must simply commit himself to God in the face of the absence of such a proof:

To stand on one leg and prove God's existence is a very different thing from going on one's knees and thanking him.[12]

For Kierkegaard, it is the *manner* and *intensity* of one's belief, and not the object or objective necessity of belief, which determines truth. In those issues in which no objective (universally valid) solution is possible, it can only be the degree of commitment which is philosophically relevant. From this equivalence between truth ('subjective' truth) and commitment and involvement, we may already understand the basis of Kierkegaard's departure from Hegel with regard to religious questions.

An objective uncertainty held fast in the approximation-process of the most

passionate inwardness is the truth,
the highest truth attainable for an
existing *individual.*[13]

Behind the Hegelian jargon lies a very clear statement of Kierkegaard's objectives in philosophy; to free us from the illusion that certain problems can be finally and disinterestedly settled by use of clear reflection and understanding, and to confront us with the demand that the most important philosophical questions are ultimately choices of commitments. They are problems of what to do, not conceptual dilemmas. Philosophy can clear away the old illusions from these difficult problems, but ultimately, it is only each isolated individual who is capable of supplying philosophically appropriate answers.

Kierkegaard's Life as Related to His Thought

Because of Kierkegaard's personal 'subjective' approach to philosophy, we are forced to suspend the usual insistence that we completely separate the character of the philosopher from his philosophical writings. This does not mean that an adequate psychological explanation of how he came to believe or write some particular thesis is sufficient to invalidate that thesis. Notably, one cannot argue away Kierkegaard's general thesis of the incompatibility of the secular ethical life with the life of religious devotion as a *post facto* rationalization of his youthful unexplained breaking of an engagement to be married. But because Kierkegaard so often insists on the "personal subjective validity" of his works, and because he fails to appreciate just this distinction between validity and personal expression in his frequent use of *ad hominem* arguments (towards his own writings as well as towards the writings of others), some brief consideration of the philosopher himself is necessary for an appreciation of his philosophy.

Kierkegaard was born (in 1813) into a devoutly Pietist family in which religious guilt was considered to be the definitive emotion in life. His father, in spite of considerate attention to his family in its material and intellectual needs, neglected them emotionally because of his nearly crippling state of despair over his sins before God. The despairing confrontation with personal guilt, and the anxiety and suffering accompanying the awareness of personal Sin became deeply engraved in the brooding and unhappy spirit of the young Kierkegaard. From his earliest writings in his *Journals,*[14] it is all too evident that this despair and suffering had become the defining marks of his life and his thought, and that he would never be free from the anxiety and desperation of one seeking salvation from a dread which had no object, a guilt which had no cause. The philosophical concepts of *dread* and *guilt* which play a central part in Kierkegaard's thought are universal extensions of these personal experiences.

The emotional upbringing which Kierkegaard suffered did not, however, interfere with his intellectual life. His father was insistent on intellectual acuity, and Kierkegaard became familiar with the world of scholarship at a very early age. In the University, he first confronted the philosophy of Hegel, largely through his Danish disciples and reacted strongly against the 'reflective' and impersonal attitude of the systematic philosophy. The philosopher Schelling (with whom Kierkegaard studied) also reacted strongly against Hegel, and in the years after Hegel's death he repeatedly emphasized the 'negative' aspects of Hegelianism, that is, the neglect of *existence.*

Kierkegaard became progressively disillusioned with the philosophy at the University and the empty Christianity of the Lutheran church. He dropped out of the University and out of the church and indulged in a youthful spree of sensuousness that he never enjoyed because of the guilt and despair which had never left him from his early home life. Kierkegaard returned to the University and entered the ministry as a Lutheran pastor. He became engaged to Regina Olsen, whom, from all available evidence, he loved very deeply. However, the respectable social life as pastor and husband would not fit the eccentric and troubled genius whose emotional energies were securely tied to the resolution of his religious despair. In the definitive acts of his life, Kierkegaard broke the engagement to marry, left the church, and withdrew himself from public life and began to write dozens of philosophic-religious treatises, many of which were published under pseudonyms. His works often contradicted and even explicitly attacked each other. The insistence on subjectivity and personal expression in all of his works, with his deliberate and frequent use of paradox and a refusal to legislate between two conflicting issues, combine to demonstrate his conscientious avoidance of any interpretation of his writings in the terms of the systematic philosophy so prevalent at the time.[15]

Of course, Kierkegaard's withdrawal from public life did not remove him from the public view. His contempt for contemporary mass-society and church often surfaced in vicious public denunciations of the most powerful institutions, notably the Danish press and the Lutheran church. These attacks made Kierkegaard quite well known, and frequently attacked, so that he spent considerable portions of his secluded life in open controversy.

Kierkegaard on Christianity

Kierkegaard considered his own task to be the explication of what it is *to become a Christian.* "We are all Christians—without having so much as a suspicion what Christianity is."[16] Like his predecessors Kant and Hegel, he felt the present dangers to Christianity in an increasingly secular and mass-oriented society. However, unlike the many defenders of Christianity before him who had struggled to show that the doctrines of the religion were reasonable and that philosophy, as the embodiment of reason, could show these doctrines to be objectively valid, Kierkegaard claimed that such a defense could not be successfully carried out. Christianity, far from consisting of a set of reasonable doctrines, was the paragon of absurdity. Philosophy or Reason and Christianity were absolutely irreconcilable, for the very essence of Christianity was paradox and irrationality.

To be a Christian, according to traditional religious thought, was to accept a particular set of doctrines as true. To justify Christianity, or to justify one's being a Christian, therefore, consisted in the demonstration that these doctrines were plausible and worthy of belief. Kant before him had argued that the central doctrines of Christianity were necessary postulates of (practical) reason, and that the very concept of morality required Christianity as its presupposition. Before Kant, many philosophers and theologians had constructed elaborate logical proofs of the basic tenets of Christianity, demonstrating to their own satisfaction at least that the doctrines of the Christ were defensible by appeal solely to the laws of reason. Following Kant, Hegel had attempted to show that the doctrines of Christianity, in modified form, were the logical consequence of the whole movement of Western thought.

Of course, there was the vulgar conception of "being a Christian," which also accepted the notion that Christianity was a set of true doctrines, but primarily accepted a person as a Christian if he had been born of Christian parentage and occasionally succeeded in barely consciously performing several ritual actions, such as going to church, mouthing the phonetic sequences that constituted the sentences which stated these doctrines and nodding acquiescently to their assertion from the pulpit. All of this was intimately connected, of course, with a warm satisfied feeling of holiness and self-righteousness that one got from the idea of being in the grace of God (or from winning the approval of the community). Thus, for the masses of Christians, to be a Christian was not even so deliberate as suggested by the philosophers, for the doctrines involved were never brought into question, nor were they nor need they be thought about to see whether they even make sense. To be a Christian was to be born into, or laboriously work oneself into, a mass of Christian soldiers, indistinguishable from each other, in a community before God. To be a Christian, ultimately, came to little more than identifying oneself with the Christian public—those who also considered themselves as Christians. All of this was conveniently institutionalized in the concept of the state-Church.

Thus it was established by the state as a kind of eternal principle that every child is naturally born a Christian. As the state obligated itself to furnish eternal bliss for all Christians, so, to make the whole complete, it also took upon itself to produce Christians. . . . so the state delivered, generation after generation, an assortment of Christians: each bearing the manufacturer's trademark of the state, with perfect accuracy one Christian exactly like all the others, . . . the point of Christianity became: the greatest possible uniformity of a factory product.[17]

From our introduction to Kierkegaard, it should be evident how he reacts against

this state-Church (the Lutheran church of Denmark). First, there is his recurrrent insistence on individuality, which permeates his religious writings and becomes the very foundation of being a Christian:

'The individual'; now that the world has gone so far along the road of reflection, Christianity stands and falls with that category.[18]

Secondly, Kierkegaard's childhood confrontation with the despair and suffering inherent in his father's Christianity leads him to reject, with a bitterness excessive even in his works, any notion of "being a Christian" which provides men with happiness and self-satisfaction. "Christianity is suffering,"[19] and to be a Christian is to be forever conscious of the unhappy passions of dread and guilt.

Thirdly, Christianity, because it is defined by suffering and the feelings associated with Sin, is not a set of doctrines to be accepted or rejected except insofar as some minimal doctrine is required in suffering and feeling. In short, Christianity is not a mode or a body of knowledge, but it is a way of life.[20]

Fourthly, Christianity is not to be achieved easily by the individual who sets himself off from the masses, as if any man who decides to become a Christian might do so. Because of the overwhelming demands of suffering, a Christian could be only the most spectacular of men. One could not lead a successful secular life *and* be a Christian. One could only be a Christian. In fact, Kierkegaard takes as his model of Christianity the asceticism of the monastery.

Back to the monastery out of which Luther broke—that is the truth—that is what must be done. . . . The fault with the monastery was not ascetism, celibacy, etc.; no, the fault was that Christianity had been moderated by making the admission that all this was considered to be extraordinarily Christian—and the purely secular nonsense to be considered ordinary Christianity.[21]

Kierkegaard takes it upon himself to change the conception of Christianity. In the face of eighteen hundred years of attempts to change Christianity to make it reasonable, Kierkegaard responds that what must be changed is not Christianity but only our conception of Christianity, that is, what it is to be Christian.

My only analogy is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task—to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian.[22]

In the traditional interpretation of Christianity as a set of purportedly true doctrines, the problem of justification of Christianity, that is, of justifying one's own Christianity, consisted in proving that these doctrines were plausible. Unfortunately, the rise of science and the resultant sophistication of thought had cast serious doubt about the truth, even the intelligibility, of several central Christian doctrines. To meet this challenge arose the science of *apologetics*, whose task it was to amend the Christian doctrines so as to be compatible with secular belief. "If one were to describe the whole orthodox apologetic effort in a single sentence, but also with categorical precision, one might say that it has the intent to make Christianity *plausible.*" Christianity is not plausible, and its doctrines can be made convenient only at the sacrifice of Christianity.

if this effort [to make Christianity plausible] were to succeed, then would this effort have the ironical fate that precisely on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.[23]

Insofar as Christianity involves doctrines at all, becoming a Christian is accepting a set of essentially absurd doctrines, particularly the doctrine that a man was God, which Kierkegaard insists is absolutely paradoxical.

Because of the essential absurdity of key Christian doctrines, one cannot possibly bring Christianity into alignment with reason (that is, with philosophy). Acceptance of Christianity is not at all reasonable, and belief in Christ can never constitute a piece of *knowledge.* "The problem is not to understand Christianity, but to understand that it cannot be understood."[24] What this means is that although Christianity contains a set of doctrines as its foundations, to be a Christian cannot be merely the acceptance of these doctrines. The doctrines of Christianity are absurd, and an absurd doctrine is not one

which one can accept as true. Since Christianity is not something that can be known at all, "acceptance" is not appropriate to it. "Christianity is not a doctrine."[25] What is required is *passion*—the passion of *faith.*

Faith is traditionally (and somewhat cynically) characterized as believing anyway what we have insufficient evidence to know. Faith, so conceived, is cognitive. It purports, if not to give us knowledge, at least to provide us with hopefully true belief in spite of a lack of warrant for that belief. But Kierkegaard relates faith to what is *absurd,* to what *cannot* be known not simply because of lack of warrant but because it is unintelligible. For Kierkegaard, faith is passion, and so he is using the notion of 'faith' in a very special sense.

Shortly after his famous definition of his peculiar notion of truth as 'passionate inwardness',[26] Kierkegaard tells us that "The above definition is an equivalent expression for faith."[27] This means that the central doctrine of Christianity is not to be *believed* in any literal sense at all, but is rather to be used as a foil, as a cause for passion, for feeling. The 'acceptance of Christianity' is in fact an acceptance of a way of life, a life of suffering, but suffering, *from a secular* (*third person*) *standpoint,* for no reason whatsoever. At the basis of this suffering is the doctrine of one's relationship before God, as signified by Christ. This doctrine is not something true or known or even literally believed. It is a *feeling* one has of constant guilt and despair, but whose object (one's Sin before God) must forever remain, not only a "mystery," but simply incomprehensible. To be a Christian, therefore, is to embark upon this 'irrational' way of life.

One might well wonder how this conception of Christianity aided Kierkegaard in overcoming his childhood suffering of dread and guilt. The obvious answer is that it was not meant to *overcome* his suffering, but that it rather constituted a *meaning* or *justification* for that suffering.

Christianity is certainly not melancholy; it is, on the contrary, glad tidings—for the melancholy.[28]

One must not conclude from this plausible explanation of Kierkegaard's acceptance of Christianity, of this dreadful life of suffering, that his philosophy is simply "subjective" in the sense in which he so often insists. Kierkegaard's own acceptance of Christianity may well be for these very personal and even pathological reasons, but he quite consistently emphasizes the irrationality of this choice, and never, in all of his writings, misleads us by claiming that there are plausible and objectively valid reasons for making such a choice. Kierkegaard never argues or forces Christianity upon his readers, for he realizes his position could not allow such argument. Rather he simply *presents* to us the Christian way of life, considering himself only an *"occasion"* to allow others to find in themselves the faith which he has found.

With this conception of Christianity, it is clear why Kierkegaard so adamantly rejects all attempts at apologetics—all attempts to make the doctrines of Christianity "plausible." A plausible doctrine can be simply accepted, one need expend little passion in assimilating a belief that is reasonable and has been proven to him. On the other hand, it takes great emotional expense to maintain an absurd belief.[29] Because Christianity is a way of life, and its essence lies in feeling, nothing could be more inimicable to it than the success of apologetics. If one could accept the doctrine of the Trinity as one could accept, for example, the law of universal gravitation, one would have a true or at least plausible belief, but hardly a way of life. The attempt to rationalize Christianity is nothing other than the attempt to make being a Christian emotionally empty. The many attempted proofs of the faith are nothing other than aids to digestion for the emotionally lazy and the passionless.

When faith . . . begins to lose its passion, when faith begins to cease to be faith, then a proof becomes necessary so as to command respect from the side of unbelief.[30]

Of all of the follies of traditional theology, the most damaging and the most insulting is the long sequence of attempts to prove the existence of God. Kierkegaard lauds Kant's refutation of the traditional arguments, complaining only that Kant himself should not have gone on to attempt to prove in a different way that belief in God was rational. On the one hand, because God (the Christian God of the Trinity) is an absolute paradox, the very notion is antithetical to Reason, and therefore clearly not conducive to proof by Reason. However, Kierkegaard's favorite objection

to the notion of a 'proof' of God's existence lies not in the contradictoriness of key religious doctrines, but in the impossibility of any proof of *existence:*

Generally speaking, it is a difficult matter to prove that anything exists; and what is still worse for the intrepid souls who undertake the venture, the difficulty is such, that fame scarcely awaits those who concern themselves with it. The entire demonstration always turns into something very different from what it assumes to be, and becomes an additional development of the consequences that flow from my having assumed that the object in question exists. Thus I always reason from existence, not towards existence, whether I move in the realm of palpable sensible fact or in the real of thought. I do not, for example, prove that a stone exists, but that some existing thing is a stone.[31]

Kierkegaard is arguing an important logical point, one which is taken more or less directly from Kant's refutation of the ontological argument. The claim of those who seek to prove the existence of God is that one can get an existential conclusion (one asserting the existence of some 'x') from a set of premises which do not include the assertion of the existence of 'x'. The problem is that one cannot derive existence unless that existence is already given, for there is no valid inference to the existence of 'x' from any set of statements, no matter how complex, about 'x' (for example, no set of statements about the nature of unicorns, or of God, is sufficient to show that there are unicorns, or God). The Kantian defense of this argument lay in the claim that "existence is not a predicate"; it is not one of the properties which can be named in the characterization of a thing and therefore the existence of 'x' cannot be concluded from the characterization of 'x' (as, for example, the whiteness of 'x' might be concluded from the characterization of 'x' as white). One cannot say "x exists" or "x has the property of existing". One can only say, of some existing x, that it has certain properties.[32]

However, Kierkegaard's usual lack of regard for logical points leads him to attack the attempted proofs in a far less rigorous but, it must be admitted, far more touching manner. He argues that such proofs of God's existence are nothing less than impudent blasphemy.

So rather let us mock God out and out, this would always be preferable to the disparaging air of importance with which one would prove God's existence. For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront. . . . The existence of a king or his presence is commonly acknowledged by an appropriate expression of subjection and submission; what if, in his presence, one were to prove that he existed.[33]

We have emphasized that the basis of Kierkegaard's reformulation of the conception of what it is to be a Christian is his rejection of any attempt to prove the rationality of Christianity. However, we must note that Kierkegaard, like Hegel, distorted the concept of Reason virtually beyond recognition, and used this concept to refer simultaneously to a faculty of the mind and to the providing of *good reasons for* something. When Kierkegaard claims that Christianity is irrational and incompatible with Reason, he is claiming that there are *no good reasons* for being a Christian. (We shall see that even this claim must be amended, however). He does not claim that the *faculty* of Reason is antithetical to the paradox of Christianity, but to the contrary insists that paradox is the very essence of Reason (a view clearly taken from Hegel's notion of 'dialectic').

the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling; a paltry mediocrity. . . . The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think. This passion is at bottom present in all thinking, even in thinking of the individual, in so far as in thinking he participates in something transcending himself. . . . The paradoxical passion of the Reason is aroused and seeks a collision; . . . But what is this unknown something with which the Reason collides when inspired by its paradoxical passion, with the result of unsettling even man's knowledge of himself? The Unknown.[34]

Thus, Reason is not only relevant to Christianity, but is *necessary* for an adequate acceptance of the faith.

Kierkegaard's defense of Christianity, as the whole of his thought, firmly rests on his celebration of the Individual and his rejection of collectivity and the "crowd." To be a Christian, as to be an authentic human being, is to isolate oneself and *choose* one's own mode of life with a passionate commitment, as Kierkegaard himself felt that he had done. It is this celebration of the individual and the emphasis on commitment and subjectivity that marks the major breach between Kierkegaard and Hegel and the whole of traditional Western Rationalism.

The Attack on Hegelianism

The central concerns of Kierkegaard's writings are not precisely what many would consider philosophy so much as social criticism and (anti-)theology, for he was more concerned about the degradation of society and religion by the Church and philosophers than about the problems facing the Church and philosophy. However, it must never be forgotten that Kierkegaard is very much a philosopher. The subject matter of his writings consists of traditional philosophical problems (though couched in an unusual philosophical style), and the most frequent target for attack is the rampant Hegelianism which tyrannized the philosophical world of the early nineteenth century. Taking Hegelianism to be the expression of the spirit of these times, Kierkegaard's attacks were directed towards philosophical as well as social and religious reforms. Kierkegaard simply cannot be appreciated fully unless he is studied within this philosophical context.

The reformulation of the concept of Christianity and the unnerving denunciation of the mediocrity and bourgeois complacence of a pseudoreligious pseudomoral society depended on a revitalized conception of the individual, and this in turn depended on a rejection of the foundations of German idealism and rationalism. Of course, Kierkegaard did not propose to change the spirit of the times by attacking the symptoms of Hegelianism, but he did feel that the Hegelian contempt for the individual was so deeply engraved in the institutions he was attacking that his ultimate purposes required a philosophical polemic. Apart from his concern with Hegel, Kierkegaard was very much an intellectual, never losing contact with current scholarship no matter how 'passionate' his writings. Much of the obscurity in his works can be traced to his attempts to be unscholarly, anti-intellectual and 'impassioned' while writing what cannot be considered other than very scholarly treatises.

In his frequent and often *ad hominem* attacks on Hegel, Kierkegaard never loses respect for his antagonist, and it must be remembered that in spite of his radical break with Hegel, he was yet deeply indebted to him philosophically. To begin with, his fundamental purpose was the same, the defense of Christianity. Kierkegaard's 'existential dialectic', while in many ways a repudiation of Hegel's historical dialectic, derives many of its insights and even its basic categories from Hegel. In his straightforward philosophical essays, Kierkegaard's vocabulary and philosophical manner are strikingly Hegelian,[35] although always with the addition of the sarcasm, stylistic flair, and conscientious lack of system ("fragmentation") which established Kierkegaard's fame as a writer long before his acceptance as a serious philosopher. Kierkegaard is known to display openly his admiration for Hegel, although always with characteristic reservations:

If Hegel had written his whole Logic *and in the Preface disclosed the fact that it was merely a thought experiment (in which however at many points he had shirked something), he would have been the greatest thinker that has ever lived; as it is he is merely comic.*[36]

Most importantly, Kierkegaard credits the great system builder with the culmination of all previous attempts to rationalize Christianity, enabling him to show the absurdity and inappropriateness of *any* such attempt.

Kierkegaard's opposition to the Hegelian system does not take the form of a scholarly critique, and there is not the least bit of "internal" criticism in his scathing attacks. Kierkegaard objected to the very idea of the systematic philosophy, and his attacks were lodged against the presuppositions and not the detail of the system.

Kierkegaard repeatedly guards against any interpretation of his work as one more attempt to "go beyond" or to improve upon Hegel, the widespread philosophical challenge of the day (for example, as manifested in the work of Kierkegaard's contemporary, Hans Martensen).[37]

Kierkegaard's opposition to the system can be simply summarized; philosophy, under Hegel, had left no room for *wisdom*, for *'ethics'*. "One thing has always escaped Hegel," and that is how to live." Hegel may have achieved absolute knowledge of reality, but,

The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality. What would be the use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy . . . to construct a world in which I do not live *but only hold up for the view of others.*[38]

Hegel, in his occupation with the backward-looking world-historical point of view, had completely ignored the living human being, who lives in a world in which history is not yet completed, and in which personal decisions yet to be made *will* be history.

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over that proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time, simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting place from which to understand it—backwards.[39]

Hegel gives us a system of 'Absolute Knowledge' only at the cost of excluding *practical* wisdom, the 'ethical', as part of philosophy. Yet this practical wisdom, knowledge of how to *live* and what to *do*, is precisely what Kierkegaard demands of philosophy ("thinking").[40] If Hegel's philosophy (that is, "philosophy") cannot give us this wisdom then it is of no use. This philosophy can be substituted for ethical or practical wisdom only as a *distraction* from the need to make ethical or practical decisions. The general disagreement between Hegel and Kierkegaard is thus Kierkegaard's demand that philosophy provide us with just those edifying 'truths' which Hegel explicitly denies that it is the business of philosophy to give us.

Because this disagreement about the very purpose of philosophy is so basic, there is little communication between Kierkegaard and Hegelianism on specific issues. Much of Kierkegaard's critique takes the form of parody and *ad hominem* argument against those people who would expend the effort to do systematic philosophy:

Usually the philosophers (Hegel as well as the rest), like the majority of men, exist in quite different categories for everyday purposes from those in which they speculate, and console themselves with categories very different from those which they solemnly discuss. That is the origin of the mendacity and confusion which has invaded scientific (philosophical) thinking.[41]

Hegel's failure, as the failure of all of traditional rationalistic philosophy, was its avoidance of the 'subjective viewpoint', the "existence of the individual."

The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing, . . . It leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds, and always it leads away from the subject whose existence or non-existence, and from the objective point of view, quite rightly, becomes infinitely indifferent. Quite rightly, since, as Hamlet says, existence has only subjective significance.[42]

This failure comes not from an oversight on Hegel's part, or from a conscious attempt to ignore the subject and to neglect 'subjective truth', but comes from a basic "flaw" in the very conception of the systematic philosophy. The medium of the system is *The Concept*, and, in its development every aspect, every conception, of human existence is given expression. Isolated individual human existence, that is, the *concept* of individual existence, is included as one of the stages in the conceptual development of spirit. However,

What confuses the whole doctrine about being in Logic is that people [i.e. Hegel] do not notice that they are always operating with the concept *of existence . . . the difficulty is of course whether existence can be reduced to a concept.*[43]

Kierkegaard complains that it cannot be so reduced. A concept is a mere possibility (or in Kant's terms, a rule), but existence requires an instantiation of that possibility (an application of that rule). The Hegelian system does attempt to capture individual existence in the logical development of concepts, but it captures only the *concept* of the individual, and not the individual. "Subjectivity" (the existence of an individual human being) can never be captured in logic for it is forever "irreducible to a concept."

According to Kierkegaard's (and Schelling's) critique, the system can speak of only what is logically *common* to all 'existents', that is, all instantiations for x in the ill-formed formula, 'x exists' (Heidegger's *Being* and not actual *beings*). Thus, Kant's *Transcendental Logic* exposes those concepts which are necessary conditions for "consciousness in general" while Hegel's *Logic* traces the development of the concepts of a literally 'general consciousness' which are necessary for Spiritual self-consciousness in "The Idea." In both of these philosophies, the concern is only for the Universal, the a priori, and the analysis of those fundamental concepts or Categories in logic. Logic, however, cannot capture the peculiarities of an individual person—his feelings, particular thoughts, emotions, dispositions—in short, all of those nonuniversal aspects of a person to which we refer as his *personality*. The kind of 'understanding' Kierkegaard demands of philosophy is just this sort of understanding, of psychological differences rather than logical similarities. The business of philosophy is the recognition of oneself as unique and peculiar, and not the recognition of oneself as an instance of the concept of 'humanity'. It is on the basis of such self-knowledge that we base our most fundamental commitments, and it is the understanding of the nature of such commitments which constitutes the central problem for Kierkegaard's philosophy. Philosophy for him is primarily concerned with the individual and his way of life, not with concepts and conceptual knowledge. This objection to logic, however, is typically expressed as a logical complaint. As we have seen in the previous section, the argument begins with the point that there is a crucial distinction between the actual existence of something (for example, a human being) and the concept of that thing ("human being"). In fact, we shall see, Kierkegaard's own philosophy can be best understood as a kind of conceptual analysis ('logic') no less than the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. This logical rejection of 'logic', or, more properly, the rejection of certain claims of *a* logic in a *meta*logical analysis, will be a point of continuous confusion in those twentieth-century philosophers most influenced by Kierkegaard.

To exist, according to Kierkegaard, is not to be a knowing subject but to be a moral agent, and philosophy is not to answer the question "How or what can we know?" but the question "What should I do?" To answer this latter question, however, one must bring into philosophy just those nonuniversal factors which logic cannot include—one's personal fears, desires, crises, neuroses, and personal commitments. Philosophical "truth," at least the "truth" sought by Kierkegaard, is the truth of a commitment ("a wife who is true") rather than anything like knowledge ("truth" and "knowledge" are virtually interchangeable in Hegel and Kant).

In contemporary terms, one might wish to compare Kierkegaard with J. L. Austin.[44] To find the *truth* in philosophy for Kierkegaard is to make a commitment, just as to say something for Austin might constitute *doing* something (for example, promising, committing oneself) rather than describing something. Austin argues that to say "I promise you that . . ." or "I pledge allegiance to . . ." or "I love you" is not to describe some state of affairs (whether this be a worldly state or some state of mind) but to perform an action the nature of which is to be committed or pledged. Thus, "I promise . . ." does not describe a state of affairs which corresponds to the swearing of the oath: saying "I promise . . ." is itself the act of promising. We might reinterpret Kierkegaard's "objective" as contrasted with "subjective truth" as the difference between "truths" that describe some state of affairs and are thus true or false for different speakers at different times and "performative" or "sub-

jective truths" which hold only for a particular individual just because they do not describe but rather constitute an action by the individual. Thus "I love you" or "I commit myself" are subjective truths because they are performances of the agent and not descriptions of states of affairs. There is no point in pushing this comparison at this stage of our discussion, but it may succeed in making somewhat plausible some of Kierkegaard's superficially most unpalatable claims.

Philosophy, as practiced by Kierkegaard, is directly contrary to Hegel's warning against using philosophy for edification:[45] philosophy must be edifying: "only the truth that edifies is the truth for thee."[46] Its criteria for success are not its objective validity (conformity to fact or rules of logic) but rather its ability to incite our passions. Appropriately, Kierke gaard sees his own philosophy as far more akin to religious pornography than to the cool-headed philosophical search for universal truth.

Kierkegaard distinguishes between a "cognitive reality," to which logic is appropriate, the reality *known* by men, and the very different "ethical reality" of a *moral* agent. In doing so, Kierkegaard leaves the company of Hegel (and Fichte) for a return to Kant. Reaffirming the practical-theoretical distinction in a form even more rigid than that of Kant, Kierkegaard bases his entire attack on Hegel on the claim that all systematic philosophy (and the bulk of Western philosophy) is *merely* theoretical. There is no indication, however, that Kierkegaard even once considered the reasons behind Hegel and Fichte's rejection of this very distinction. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that Kierkegaard's affirmation of two different 'realities'—one known and one acted on —is to be taken literally. (Although, as we indicated in Chapter 1, there is reason to suppose that Kant sometimes held a similar thesis. However, Kant's 'two-world' thesis had the virtue of being sufficiently obscure so as not to obviously commit him to what is *prima facie* an absurd thesis; that the world we know is ontologically not the world in which we live.)

Kierkegaard's objections to the detached and 'collective' nature of Hegel's system may be illuminated by contrast with the unsystematic philosophy of Socrates, to whom Kierkegaard frequently appeals. Wisdom, and not indifferent truths—practical guides for living and not reflective understanding—are the goals of Socratic inquiry. Wisdom, however, is not a property of a group or a society, but that of an individual, a property which manifests itself in wise *reaction to* the group. Nowhere in history is such wisdom better displayed than in the individuality of Socrates' own life and thought. Of course, Socrates (at least the Platonic Socrates) differed from Kierkegaard in believing these ethical guides to be objective and universal and virtue to be a form of knowledge. However, the Socratic virtues were not merely "abstract universals" (that is, mere principles) but were dispositions to act virtuously in the few men who would attain such wisdom. Kierkegaard has no use for Hegel's "Universal in action," which he (misunderstandingly) claims is a purely conceptual notion. The only universal (principle) of importance is that which is manifested in action and, Kierkegaard adds, that need not be universal at all in the sense of holding for all people at all times. (Kierkegaard adopts a formal notion of universalizable principles in his characterization of the "ethical mode of Existence." His attack on the universal in Hegel is thus an attack upon Hegel's rationalizing method and not universal principles as such.) Philosophical inquiry for Socrates and Kierkegaard has its beginnings in an individual's confrontation with an ethical dilemma. Knowledge is knowledge only with reference to the demand of that individual to know what to *do*. Socrates, like Kierkegaard (and unlike Plato and Kant) considers mathematics and the abstract sciences as pointless; to know *thyself* is the end of all inquiry. Hegel, quite to the contrary, left no room for the future in his system, and therefore no room for the question "What should I do?" The concept of the individual, for him, was an inadequate and outmoded concept which had been surpassed (*aufgehoben*)[47] in the dialectic of the system, and preserved only in the abstract notion of "Spirit," which, according to Kierkegaard, is the very negation of the concept of the "existing individual." For Hegel, Socrates could only represent an inferior sort of knowledge, and possess an inadequate conception of himself; that is, the conception of himself as an individual *alienated* from his society. A modern day Socrates would not require hemlock, but only a copy of the *Phenomenology* (or the *Philosophy of Right*) to

make him realize that the truth lies not in individual rebellion, but in reconceptualizing one's self-image as an integral part of the group. The moral conflict facing Socrates could arise only with an inadequate conception of oneself, and could be resolved only by a reflective mediation of this conception. Of course, Socrates, as an expression of his age and the group against which he rebelled, could not have conceived the matter so. The reflective Hegelian perspective shows that Socrates' sacrifice was only an historical necessity, and that no Hegelian could be faced with the same irresolvable dilemma today.

In Hegel's *Logic*, no paradox was absolute, that is, unresolvable. A paradox or contradiction, an opposed set of ideas, could always be resolved by finding a "higher synthesis" or a further idea which embraced the central principles of the opposed theses. According to Hegel, such "oppositions" were not always literal contradictions, but included such oppositions as his earlier "disharmonies," between God and man, between the individual and society, and between morality and inclination. It may be that these various oppositions could be stated in the form of logical contradictions, for example, "Morality is duty for duty's sake" and "morality is not duty for duty's sake but a satisfaction of inclinations," but Hegel himself did not take the notion of contradiction in this strict form. Thus, the contradiction between man and transcendent God is not a breach in logic but rather a source of spiritual discomfort for the Christian believer, who feels alienated from his God and imposed upon by His moral laws. *Paradox* ("contradiction," "opposition"), thus broadly conceived, exists between various conceptions—the conception of God as transcendent and of man as separated from God. Conceptions could be *mediated* in Logic in the movement of conceptual thought to the resolution of such oppositions. Thus, the contradictory conceptions of God and man are mediated in the 'higher' conception of 'Immanent God' or 'Spirit'. Similarly, the contradictory conceptions of morality as reason and duty and the conception of man as a creature of passion, can be mediated in the conception of *Sittlichkeit*—the morality which is rational, but according to reason embodied in the customs and mores of a particular society. In Hegel, all such paradoxes or contradictions, including those of morality and religion as well as those of traditional Logic (narrowly conceived) could be so mediated.

It is important to note that Kierkegaard agreed with Hegel that such mediation of paradox was possible, and that Hegel had succeeded in doing so in his *Science of Logic*. However, such mediation was possible only between concepts, and Kierkegaard complains that Hegel once again has confused concepts—that is, what is universal—with existence—that is, what is particular to an individual. Logic, properly conceived as the science of concepts, was amenable to Hegel's treatment, but existence proper, namely, the existence of the individual, was not reducible to a concept, and the paradoxes which existed for an individual could not be mediated. Kierkegaard is referring not to the logical paradoxes which might plague an individual studying Logic (for example a student who is not able to understand the "liar" paradox). These can be mediated—solved without reference to that particular individual. However, the paradoxes of morality and religion, and here 'paradox' refers not to an opposition of concepts but an opposition of courses of action, are not part of logic and so cannot be mediated. These paradoxes are *Absolute*, and cannot be resolved through the reflection of logic.

The paradoxes of ethics—the paradoxes of 'living'—consist in the daily confrontation of the individual with *choices*, with alternative courses of action. A paradox of ethics is a crisis in living, and truth, in ethics, is the resoluton of crisis through action and commitment. A choice of one course of action, however, is not only that but is also a choice of an entire way of life implicit in that choice. For example, to choose a moral course of action over a selfish amoral course of action is to choose a moral way of life over a selfish way; it is to tacitly adopt a *general* principle that one should choose the moral over the selfish. Similarly, one who acts in the name of God instead of in the name of society or personal desire has implicitly committed himself to a religious way of life and tacitly adopted a general principle regarding the ultimate importance of God's word. Of course, one can change principles and ways of life, frequently perhaps, but one can never make a choice against the personal and for the moral without endorsing morality. One cannot act in God's name without endorsing piety. One does not act morally because he is moral; one is moral

because he acts morally. Kierkegaard's notion of committing oneself to principle in acting, as opposed to acting strictly on the basis of principle, will become, in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, a cornerstone for a revolutionary theory of value.

The claim that ethical paradoxes are *absolute* is the claim that ethical decisions are ultimately based on a choice between incompatible ways of life. It is the view that ultimate ethical choices—the choice of ultimate standards or a way of life—are choices "either/or"; one cannot compromise to have the best of both ways or 'mediate' between choices as Hegel believed one could in the realm of logic. As Kierkegaard states the problem, concepts are mediatable, courses of action are not. This does not mean, of course, that one can *never* find a way of compromising between alternative courses of action or that *any* two courses of action are incompatible. Clearly my choice 'between' wanting to run for parliament and wanting to get my opponent out of government are not only compatible but complimentary. It is commonly supposed that Kierkegaard proposes that all choices are of the crisis sort and that every choice is directed to a choice of a way of life. As we shall see, this is a serious misunderstanding. The absolute paradoxes of ethics arise in one important context, in the choice between ultimate principles, or between the choice between courses of action in which different ways of life are uniquely implicit.

Choice of a way of life must always involve a *commitment* to act in certain ways in the unknown future (in the face of *"objective uncertainty."* This is the "ethical paradox"). In a choice of immediate action, one cannot wait until the crisis of the moment is passed to gain Hegelian reflective insight. Action requires immediate decision, and cannot wait until the outcome of the action is known. Action is always 'objectively uncertain'; it is always 'projected toward the future'. Ethical wisdom, unlike 'absolute knowledge', always requires *risk.* In ethics one must act before the results are in, for it is the action itself that brings about the results. Thus, the paradoxes of practical wisdom cannot be viewed reflectively and disinterestedly. They always must be viewed in the 'passion' of crisis, and their solution always demands commitment to a way of life. Only later, perhaps, can the luxury of reflective understanding of what one has done be enjoyed.

The notion of choice in Kierkegaard cannot be separated from his notion of 'freedom', for it is the freedom of the existing individual to make choices, together with the demand that he make choices, which define the 'paradoxical' nature of ethical existence, that is, the continuous confrontation of the individual with alternative and exclusive possibilities of action. Freedom is also one of the key notions of Hegel's system. It is the concept of 'freedom' that has developed and 'realized' along with "The Idea" in *Logic* and "Spirit" in the *Phenomenology.* Hegel's Spirit is freedom (as Kant's moral ego "is Freedom"), and the development of Spirit is the development of freedom, that is, the continuous opening of new possibilities from the inadequate conceptions of the past. The progression of the dialectic has been considered as a breakdown of imposing conceptual systems—imposing in that they posit some opposition for Spirit—and the system culminates in absolute freedom, that is, a conception of (absolute) Spirit which recognizes no limitations other than those which it imposes upon itself.

For Hegel, *freedom* is not merely the *negative* freedom *from* constraint or imposition, however, and his notion of 'freedom' does not exclude the notion of 'necessity' to which the concept of freedom is ordinarily opposed. Hegel's doctrine of freedom was emphatically a doctrine of *positive* freedom, the freedom of Spirit *to* realize itself. Freedom thus requires constraint, the constraint of the senses, the constraint of the understanding, and finally the constraints of reason which are self-imposed, for example, the constraints of the moral law, and ultimately, the constraints of religious belief.

Freedom, as Hegel develops it through the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on History* is not the freedom of an individual, but the freedom of Spirit developed over the course of human history. Of course, individuals of any single period manifested the conception of freedom of that particular age, but freedom is ultimately the conforming of the individual to the rational ideals of his age. His freedom consists only in this and not in the freedom to escape from these constraints. Freedom of the individual is not freedom to choose between alternative possibilities, such as to obey or not to obey the laws of one's state or church. Here, it is clear that Kierkegaard must once again reject a basic

conception of the Hegelian system. Whereas Hegel insists that freedom is a property of the collective idea and freedom for the individual is the freedom to act according to the ideals of the group, Kierkegaard would insist that this is just the antithesis of individual freedom. Freedom has meaning *only* with regard to the individual, and freedom to submit one's will to the dictates of the group is the very opposite of an expression of freedom, not a manifestation of it.

In Hegel's treatment of positive freedom as a property of the group and only derivatively of the individual, the notion of choice is clearly not essential or even relevant. The individual is free only insofar as he acts with the group, and therefore it does not even make sense to speak of his freedom to rebel from the group and go his own way. Similarly, the notion of *responsibility* plays a small role in Hegel's philosophy, for a man can be held responsible only for his failure to conform to society's dictates, because one has the freedom ("positive freedom"), to make only one set of choices, that is, to go along with the group. Although Kierkegaard is not often involved in politics, his few political writings make it unmistakably clear that he is opposed to any such group evasion of responsibility through a notion of 'collective freedom'. Thus he criticizes the tendencies towards democracy and socialism in Europe at mid-century on the basis that these are essentially manifestations of this escape from responsibility.

Along with the responsibility of one's choices, without any idealization of the group to give one a safe standard from which to choose, comes the personal equivalent of Hegel's feared 'reign of terror'—*despair.* With the responsibility for one's choices, without the group to comfort one that he did the right thing, freedom of choice becomes the *despair* of freedom, and then the *guilt* of responsibility—an unhappy combination well-suited to the morbid demands of Kierkegaard's suffering-ridden conception of Christianity.

Kierkegaard's personal contempt for Hegelianism lay in the system's treatment of Christianity. For Hegel, as for a long tradition of European thought, Christianity consisted of a set of doctrines to be believed by Christians; to be a Christian was to believe these doctrines. In its attempts to make Christianity palatable, philosophers (that is, Hegel) had removed everything Christian about it. Philosophers had given new and totally alien meanings to central Christian concepts, and replaced the need to have faith with the need to read philosophy:

No human being can ever have been in such distress as Christianity of late . . . The entire Christian terminology has been appropriated by speculative thought to its own purposes, under the assumption that speculative thought and Christianity are identical. . . . The concepts have gradually been emasculated and the words have been made to mean anything and everything.[48]

According to Hegel, the contrast between faith and reason is in our time a contrast within philosophy itself, but faith has nothing to do with reason or philosophy.

"The idea of philosophy is mediation: Christianity is the paradox,"[49]

and proof and reflection have no part in the conception of Christianity.

Faith does not need it; aye, it must even regard proof as the enemy.[50]

Christianity is not a set of doctrines, and therefore not a set of doctrines that can be proved to be true or made reasonable. The problem of Christianity is not the truth of Christianity, but the relation of the individual to Christianity, the concern of the "infinitely interested individual."

Becoming a Christian is not a result of philosophical ('scientific') inquiry, but a question of deep personal involvement or "faith":

Faith does not result simply from scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in this objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestness which is the condition of faith.[51]

In Hegel, Christianity is the *result* of his system; that is, it is the absolute knowledge consisting of realization of oneself as Spirit. Argues Kierkegaard,

If inwardness is truth, results are only rubbish with which we should not trouble each other.[52]

The doctrines of Christianity are not important, except as objects of *faith,* not knowledge. Faith, as subjectivity,[53] can

not be had by a doctrine, or by a religion, or by a church, but only by an individual who "chooses the path of faith." Hegel's understanding of Christianity as a doctrine of the Spirit, that is, spirit's conception of itself ("making 'God' a public word"), is fundamentally at odds with Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity as a way of life which is chosen not because it is true or even plausible, but simply because one *personally* commits himself without appeal to reasons or Reason at all.

The Meaning of Existence

Although Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel's treatment of "existence" begins with a point of Logic borrowed from Schelling—namely, that actual existence can never be reduced to a concept which signifies only the possibility of actual existence—it is quite clear that Kierkegaard is concerned only with a particular kind of existence, namely, individual human existence. His attack on Hegel's 'negative philosophy' (Schelling's characterization) for its neglect of actual existence is merely an initial support for his more personal concern for Hegel's failure to value the individual human being standing apart from the 'crowd'. In actuality, Kierkegaard is as worried about the *concept* of human existence as was Hegel, for in spite of all his insistence on subjectivity, it is the *defining* characteristics of individuality which he seeks to disclose in his writings. His attack on 'negative philosophy', along with his overreaction to the notion of *objective truth,* therefore, can be considered somewhat of a facade. Kierkegaard's true objection to Hegel is simply his failure to appreciate the seriousness of ethical dilemmas facing the individual, that is, to appreciate that the concept of 'individual existence' involves the notions of 'choice', 'individual freedom', 'responsibility,' and, with these, the concepts of 'commitment', 'despair', and 'guilt'.

This is a point rarely appreciated by defenders of Kierkegaard's notion of 'subjectivity', that Kierkegaard is blinded by his insistence on valuing the subjective or personal individual so as to thoroughly confuse (as he accuses Hegel of confusing) existence with the concept of existence. Kierkegaard, as much as Hegel, is concerned to show the nature of the concept of 'individual existence', but he differs radically in his *analysis* of 'existence'. Accordingly, much of what Kierkegaard claims, for example, the (logical) *necessity* of choice and commitment, is to be interpreted just as much as a conceptual claim as Hegel's discussion of the concept of 'Being' in the beginning of the *Logic.*

This is not to deny, however, that it still makes sense, in a way, to speak of Kierkegaard's writings as 'subjective'. While he endeavours to show us what the concept of 'existence' means ("the meaning of existence"), unlike Hegel and the rationalists before him, Kierkegaard leaves the correctness of the ways of life to which one commits himself an open question to be settled only by the individual. In other words, Kant and Hegel had attempted to prove the objective necessity for believing in God, and, as such, to prove that every rational being ought to believe. Kierkegaard denies that any such objective necessity can be demonstrated, and then, in the face of this 'objective uncertainty' (the existence of God neither proven or disproven), it is the choice of the individual whether to believe or not. This is the subjective truth of which we hear so much—that some decisions cannot be made rationally. This notion of 'subjectivity' is very different from the doctrines attributed to Kierkegaard to the effect that he rediscovered or 'rescued' the 'subjective individual' from the 'concept'. If this is supposed to mean that Kierkegaard ceased to talk about the *concept* of *individual existence,*[54] then it must be an incorrect interpretation of Kierkegaard. Whether Kierkegaard *admits* that he is doing conceptual analysis or not, nothing can be clearer from his writings than the claim that the very *concept* of 'the individual' entails the notions of 'passion', 'choice', 'commitment', and 'freedom'.

The idea that Kierkegaard dispensed with the concepts in favor of a renewed attention to the individual can only be a gross misunderstanding of his philosophy (one which even he shares with his commentators). Kierkegaard does construct a conceptual system and does conceptual analysis; it is *on this basis* that he makes room for subjectivity. If the emphasis on 'subjectivity' seeks only to stress the ultimate necessity to settle these philosophical issues of ultimate criteria on a strictly personal level, it must be understood that this claim of subjectivity cannot be extended to Kierkegaard's writings as a whole; otherwise the 'objective' framework within which he proves the subjectivity of choices

of ultimate values collapses. One can say "all values are arbitrary; I choose 'x'." One cannot say "I choose that all values are arbitrary," and expect that he has done anything intelligible. On the other hand, it has often been supposed that Kierkegaard argues that "all values are arbitrary for me," but nothing could be further from Kierkegaard's intentions; how much of his writings are the demonstration of his personal *necessity* for belief in God; how much is the purpose of his writings (as stated in his *Point of View*) an attempt to get others to see *the truth,* that is, the *necessity* of commitment.

It is not sufficient, however, to characterize Kierkegaard's approach as an analysis of the ordinary concept of 'individual existence', for Kierkegaard was not particularly concerned with stating what it is to be a man (what is involved in the concept of 'man' if this means a humanoid more-or-less conscious creature). Kierkegaard speaks of 'individual existence' in a very special sense, a sense in which a man is not simply a biological, psychological, or social animal, but in which a man is a *'human being'* an *'existent'* which is something far more exciting than the 'mere' existence of a particular organism. This notion of 'existence' is reserved for those who live as individuals, not biologically, but individually in their thought and their values. It is a term specially designed for those who are personally committed, who feel their freedom in despair, who recognize their responsibility for their actions (which for Kierkegaard means resultant guilt more than pride). The *human being,* who merits this special designation of his life as *existence,* is the passionate anti-social or at least asocial individual who is master of his own life, the author of his own values.

It is impossible to exist without passion, unless we understand the word 'exist' in the loose sense of a so-called existence.[55]

And it is just this that it means to exist, if one is to become conscious of it. Eternity is a winged horse, infinitely fast, and time is a worn-out jade; the existing individual is the driver. That is to say, he is such a driver when his mode of existence is not an existence loosely so called; for then he is no driver but a drunken peasant who lies asleep in the wagon and lets the horses take care of themselves. To be sure, he also drives and is a driver, and so there are many who—also exist.[56]

This play between two senses of 'exists' and 'existence' (and occasionally 'being') permeates all of Kierkegaard's writings (as well as the writings of later 'existentialists'). Kierkegaard, unlike the many philosophers after Descartes for whom personal existence was simply self-evident, insists that *existence* is something *to be striven for.* In this sense, therefore, the standard and worn existentialist cliché "existence precedes essence" does not apply literally to Kierkegaard (or to Heidegger). Given Kierkegaard's special use of "existence," a man *exists* only after a despairing struggle to separate himself from the 'so-called' existence of the collective idea. If one wishes to consider one's essence those defining roles or commitments which he accepts (which is the characterization used by the later existentialists), then we might say that "existence comes only with essence" for Kierkegaard, for it is only by passionately committing, or defining oneself that one can *exist* at all.

The meaning of *existence,* therefore, is the significance which one provides for his own life, through realization of one's personal freedom and autonomy, through passionate commitment, through responsibility and the feelings accompanying freedom and responsibility. The unthinking bourgeoisie and even the reflective professional philosopher (for example, Hegel) have only a 'so-called' existence in the uninteresting sense that they take up space, breathe, digest, excrete, and perform sufficiently sophisticated behaviors that we might call them 'men'. This humanoid, "so-called" existence is distinguished by the capacity for abstract thinking, but this, according to Kierkegaard, still leaves man far from *true existence.* The problem of philosophy for Kierkegaard is how to transcend this *mere existence;* and the starting point of his philosophy must be, therefore, the analysis of real or *authentic*[57] existence.

Kierkegaard complains that Western philosophy (after Socrates) has ignored 'individual existence,' but this objection at first must appear grotesque in the light of the almost fanatic attention philosophers of "modern" times have focused on Descrates' *"Cogito, Ergo sum."* On the contrary, it would seem more likely that

the crucial problems in Western philosophy *began* with Descartes' unfortunate starting point—his own personal 'subjective' existence. Affirmation of personal existence has dominated philosophy from Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," as reiterated with modifications in Kant's notion of the "I think" which must be capable of accompanying all our representations, and once again in Fichte's initial positing of the ego, in Schelling's Absolute, and even Hegel's system—in Spirit. It is clear, therefore, that Kierkegaard cannot be intelligibly interpreted as simply complaining that it is the idea of the subject that has been ignored in philosophy.

The subject that has been the starting point of philosophy from Descartes through Kant and Fichte has not been the subject from which Kierkegaard demands philosophy begin. For Descartes, as for Kant, the subject of philosophical inquiry is the "I think," the 'cognitive subject' whose reality is a 'cognitive reality'. The reality of the "I think" is that which it thinks—and the starting point of modern Western philosophy has been—"I think; I have thoughts; now what is the reality to which these thoughts correspond?" The subject of philosophical inquiry is the thinking subject; Descartes claims that the subject is a thinking substance that has thoughts, and Kant argues that one must presuppose a thinking subject (although not a thinking substance) and that this subject is the real (as opposed to the empirical) subject. For Kierkegaard, however,

The real subject is not the cognitive subject, . . . the real subject is the ethically existing subject.[58]

The Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian "I Think" (as well as Hegel's "Spirit") provide us with only the *idea* of a subject—the 'mere' understanding of a concept yet to be instantiated. Kierkegaard's emphatic separation of 'the Concept' and 'existence' is nowhere more important than in our alleged 'knowledge' of our own existence. The individual subject is not an idea, he tells us, and thus is not something 'merely' known:

A particularly existing human being is surely not an idea, and his existence is surely something quite different from the conceptual existence of the Idea. An existence as a particular human being is doubtless an imperfection in comparison with the eternal life of the Idea, but it is a perfection in comparison with not existing at all.[59]

The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* is confused, according to Kierkegaard, because the *cogito* presupposes one's existence and does not prove it.

"Because I exist and because I think, therefore I think that I exist . . . I must exist in order to think.[60]

It should be evident from this critique of the *cogito* that Kierkegaard has misunderstood or at least ignored the role of the *cogito* in traditional philosophy. That personal existence is a *presupposition* of thinking is just what Descartes and Kant wish to establish. Moreover, if Descartes and Kant (and Hegel) treat the *cogito* as a piece of propositional knowledge in their philosophies, this does not in the least indicate that they consider the *cogito* to constitute all of one's personal existence. Once again, we see that Kierkegaard's attack, although apparently focusing upon a specific philosophical claim, is an attack on an entire attitude towards philosophy, not on specific claims.

Kierkegaard again scores the traditional stress on knowledge, and then insists that the *cogito* has been wrongly construed as a piece of (a priori) knowledge. We do not simply *know* that we exist:

The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation that is more than cognitive is his own reality, the fact that he exists: this reality constitutes his absolute interest. Abstract thought requires him to become disinterested in order to acquire knowledge; the ethical demand is that he became infinitely interested in existing.[61]

Kierkegaard's attack on the "I Think" presupposes a sharp distinction between the theoretical and the practical,[62] and argues that there is only a practical (living or *existing*) self and no theoretical (transcendental) self. Kant had postulated two selves, a transcendental and a moral (willing) self, but had argued that only the former could be known. Why this emphasis upon the *knowing* self?, asks Kierkegaard. Why not begin with the willing, striving, living, existing self, "I suffer, therefore I am" or "I get married, therefore I am?" Why are these not considered the self-evident truths of philosophy instead of the celebrated *cogito?* In reaction to this traditional starting point, Kierkegaard diametrically opposes traditional Cartesian viewpoint by denying the existence of the thinking subject altogether:

But if the "I" in the Cogito *is interpreted as meaning a particular existing human being, philosophy cries: "How silly; here there is no question of yourself or myself, but solely of the pure ego." But this pure ego cannot very well have any other than a purely conceptual existence . . ."*[63]

To attempt to infer existence from thought is thus a contradiction.[64]

As we have seen, a "purely conceptual existence" is no existence at all.

As Kierkegaard draws apart the *cogito* or transcendental ego and the moral or ethical ego, the *cogito* becomes lost altogether. Kierkegaard tells us that only our ethical reality is reality, that the "abstract thinker," the *cogito,* does not even exist:

What is abstract thought? It is thought without a thinker.[65]

An abstract thinker exists, to be sure, but this fact is rather a satire on him than otherwise. For an abstract thinker to try to prove his existence by the fact that he thinks is a curious contradiction; for in the degree that he thinks abstractly he abstracts from his own existence. Insofar his existence is revealed as a presupposition from which he seeks emancipation; but the act of abstraction nevertheless becomes a strange sort of proof for his existence, since if it succeeded entirely his existence would cease.[66]

Behind the attack on Cartesianism, we can clearly discern the very significant agreement with Hegel which leads Kierkegaard to these extreme conclusions. Hegel had argued that the concept of Spirit could not be adequately understood in terms of *individuals;* Kierkegaard agrees with this claim, but so much worse for the conception of Spirit. Kierkegaard is interested in the *concept of the individual,* and if neither the *cogito,* nor Kant's "I think", nor Hegel's Spirit provides us with such a concept, then they must all be rejected. It is not just these concepts which must be rejected but rather the way of thinking which leads to them. We recall that Hegel attacked Kant's critique of knowledge with the objection that it led to an unrecognized skepticism at least as insidious as the skepticism growing from Descartes' *Meditations.* Kierkegaard also sees the problems of a critique of knowledge in the style of Descartes or Kant, but disagrees with them as well as with Hegel that such an enterprise is even possible:

A skepticism which attacks thought itself cannot be vanquished by thinking it through, since the very instrument by which this would have to be done is in revolt. There is only one thing to do with such a skepticism, and that is to break with it.[67]

Kierkegaard's "break" is a return to 'subjectivity', a refusal to even ask the question about our *knowledge* of our world and focus attention only on our intentions and attitudes towards this world. For Kierkegaard, the traditional problems of epistemology and metaphysics are dismissed out of hand; the commonsense answers to the questions that had plagued Descartes and Kant are simply and naively assumed without doubt.

Subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality.[68]

The meaning of human *existence* according to Kierkegaard lies in its constant and conscious inner striving *(strebend),* parallel to the fundamental notion of *conatus* in Spinoza and the *Will* in Schopenhauer. However, these latter two philosophers took the task of philosophy to be the *suppression* of this irrational force through the contemplative calm of philosophy. Kierkegaard took as his philosophical task the glorification and maximization of this striving (at the expense of contemplation). For Kierkegaard, as for most philosophers of the Western tradition, to exist as a man is to desire, to fear, to be, if not the slave of one's passions, at least passionate. Few philosophers would adopt Hume's doctrine that "Reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions," for the great philosophies of the West have

had a prominent goal, the victory of reason over the passions through philosophical reflection. Kierkegaard would go further still, and Reason for him cannot even occupy the degraded status afforded it by Hume, namely, to direct the will to the fulfillment of the passions. According to Kierkegaard, the ultimate demands of the passions must be outside the scope of Reason. One's choice of a way of life, as opposed to one's choice of a specific course of action within a well-established value framework, has no reasons to support it. Departing from nearly every philosophy in the Western tradition, therefore, Kierkegaard has Reason play virtually no role whatever in answering the most pressing question of philosophy, that is, "What is the good life for man?"

Paradoxically, this is not to say that Reason plays no part in coming to the conclusion that Reason has no part to play in answering this question. To the contrary, Kierkegaard's arguments to the effect that ultimate choices are 'irrational' constitute the central contribution of his philosophy to the existentialist movement. It is his doctrine of 'choice' and 'freedom of choice', and his analysis of these concepts, which sets the stage for the entire existentialist movement away from traditional rationalism.

To achieve authentic individual existence is to commit oneself, deliberately and passionately, to a way of life. Existence is a continuous confrontation with emergencies, competing desires, situations in which choices must be made. The ultimate meaning of existence is not an a priori *given*, but one's ultimate commitment, the choice not of *this* or *that* course of action, but of a "mode of existence" within which all more particular choices may be determined.

A young student wishes to know whether to heed his father's advice and study business in college or whether he should "drop out" altogether with the encouragement of many of his friends. Assuming the student is not willing (as Kierkegaard demands that he not be) to simply follow advice or encouragement of others, what he seeks is a criterion or standard by which to choose. What is clear in this now-familiar case is the enormous 'gap' of irreconcilability between the two choices and the 'styles of life' consequent with them. Now if the student ultimately wants the community respectability consequent on a business career, his choice is clear. Similarly, if he has no sympathy for the often grueling demands of the bourgeois business life, his choice is also clear. In other words, once the style of life is known, the particular choices follow from certain rules concerning what is needed within that life.

Given a "mode of existence," the decision can be made by appeal to what Kant called a *hypothetical* imperative; given that one ultimately wants 'x', then the choice between 'y' and 'z' can be made strictly on the grounds of which best leads to 'x'. Given that one knows what he ultimately wants, all more particular choices can be made more or less mechanically, by appeal to the efficacy of one alternative over another in obtaining the desired ultimate end. Thus, if one has chosen a way of life (for example, has chosen to be a respected member of the community), his choice between business studies and 'negative freedom' can be made easily. The only *arbitrary* decision within such a framework is in those cases in which it really does not matter for purposes of one's ultimate goals, whether 'y' or 'z' is chosen.

How does one come to have an ultimate set of goals or a way of life? Because these are ultimate, one cannot appeal them to some more ultimate consideration. These are what Kant referred to as *categorical* imperatives, those which cannot be defended on the basis of some further imperative. Kant attempted to justify one set of these ultimate values by an appeal to pure practical reason; by showing that these values are (transcendentally) *necessary* for any morality. However, one can still ask, as Hegel sometimes points out, why one ought to be moral. In a Kierkegaardian vein, even if one were to agree that those principles Kant identifies as categorical imperatives are necessary for any morality, any particular individual might ask why *he* should have to follow Reason's dictates. In other words, even if we grant that certain principles can be defended by appeal to Reason, one can then turn about and challenge the value of Reason itself. "Granted I *ought* to do 'x' because it is the moral thing to do, but why should I do the moral thing? If I ought to do the moral thing because it is the reasonable thing, why should I be reasonable?" What can the Kantian answer to this?

Kierkegaard claims that no answer can be given, for the value of Reason can be challenged as any more particular ethical

principles might be challenged. How then, does one decide whether to be reasonable, to follow the dictates of reason and be moral? There is no way, for any further suggested criterion, for example, "living reasonably will result in living more happily," "living reasonably is necessary for a stable society," or "living reasonably is necessary for mental health," can be challenged in precisely the same way. "Why should I be happy?" "Why should I care about society?" "Why should I want to be healthy?" can always be raised in reply, as can similar challenges for any suggested 'ultimate' ethical criterion.[69]

We now face a serious problem, if the choice of ultimate criteria, of a way of life, cannot be made by appeal to some set of criteria, how can we go about choosing at all? Kierkegaard's answer is that we simply have to choose, without appeal to further standards, without reasons, without justification. We simply have to decide, 'irrationally'—that is, without Reason—how we are going to live, by what ultimate standard we are going to make decisions.

Reason, that is, the capacity to give reasons and justify our choices, can play no part in this ultimate decision, for here we have the need for 'pure' commitment, without appeal to any supporting principles, and therefore without reasons or Reason. "Choice is ultimately *irrational*," means that one cannot ultimately give reasons for his choices, as all choices are founded on one's fundamental choice of criteria and that ultimate choice is itself unjustifiable.

Because our fundamental criteria are unjustifiable, all our choices, which depend on these criteria for their justification, are also ultimately unjustifiable. Yet, we must choose, must "leap to" a way of life if we are to *exist*, for the only alternative (apart from suicide or a total retreat to inactivity) is to refuse to acknowledge the absence of ultimate justification (what Sartre later refers to as "bad faith") or, what is worst, to abstain from choice of existence altogether and simply follow the 'crowd.'[70] Because our ultimate choices are unjustifiable, an unhappy spirit such as Kierkegaard can easily find that the demand for choice becomes a crucifying demand; for the burden of choice is entirely on one's own shoulders; no other support, whether it be from society, from one's religious teachings, or from Reason itself can be made responsible for one's decisions. Because no criteria can be used in ultimate decisions, one cannot blame these criteria for the choice that one makes. The incredible responsibility of having no one and no value to which to turn leads Kierkegaard to cite *despair* as an essential ingredient in freedom of choice, to cite *guilt* as an essential component of responsibility, and to identify *dread*, the dread of an indefinitely large range of possibilities which it is one's own responsibility to choose between, as the defining passions of human existence.

There is a great deal said of the 'irrationalism' which lies at the core of Kierkegaard's philosophy and the existentialist movement as a whole. However, from what we have said thus far, it should be evident that such bandying about of terminology must be carefully guarded. Kierkegaard is an irrationalist in at least one important respect, he claims that Reason is inappropriate as an aid to the most important choices of our lives. However, the *reason* for this inappropriateness is the absence of any objective standard for making these choices, by virtue of the fact that they themselves are ultimate. Irrationalism refers simply to this absence of ultimate standards of value. However, overzealous enthusiasts of modern existentialism have delighted in stretching this irrationalist claim even beyond Kierkegaard's too-liberal use of it. They say that Kierkegaard dispenses with Reason altogether, and his writings are writings of pure passion. However, from what we have said, it is clear that Kierkegaard does not deny Reason its place in human thought, but denies only its relevance to the specific problems of *existence;* a choice of values. Moreover, it is only through a more or less carefully reasoned argument that Kierkegaard is able to conclude that ultimate objective standards for value are not available. It is only through an impressive exercise of Reason that Kierkegaard comes to the conclusion that Reason is inadequate in certain contexts.

The most horrifying misinterpretation of Kierkegaard's doctrine of irrationalism is the too popular thesis that all values, and therefore all decisions, are arbitrary. Therefore, it *does not matter* which value system, which way of life one chooses. However, if there is any feature of Kierkegaard's philosophy which cannot be missed by the most distracted reader, it is Kierkegaard's almost pathological concern with how much the choice of ultimate values *must* matter to us. It may well be the case that these choices are ultimately unjusti-

fiable, but they are our responsibility, and the "arbitrariness" of choice, far from alleviating us from concern, imposes on us the most terrifying burdens.

It would also be a serious mistake to leave the reader with the impression that these ultimate choices are *totally* without reason or justification, even though this is the strong claim that Kierkegaard often stresses. The absence of ultimate justification is, in fact, an absence of ultimate *objective* justification; in other words, an absence of any justification which would justify a single way of life for *all men.* However, this is where 'subjectivity' plays its most important role in Kierkegaard's philosophy, for there are *subjective* considerations which do argue for one way of life rather than another. These considerations are the personal desires, hopes, fears, eccentricities, and habits of the individual person. There is no ultimate justification for leading a moral life, that is no justification which would show that anyone at any time ought to be moral (in Kant's terms, "any rational creature"); however, some people are simply morally inclined. For these people, the justification, the *only* justification available to them for living morally, is the fact that they are so inclined. However, not everyone is so inclined, and some people find that they desire the life of pleasure, or the life of art, or, with Kierkegaard, the life of religious passion. "Truth is subjectivity," in the last analysis, means that the choice of a way of life can be made only by and on the basis of the person who has to live it.

The Dialectic and the Spheres of Existence

Kierkegaard's breach with Hegel is nowhere better exemplified than in his own 'existential' version of the dialectic. Like Hegel's 'historical dialectic', the existential dialectic is the formulation of various opposed *conceptions,* and the "stages on life's way" or "modes of existence" in Kierkegaard's dialectic are in many ways identical to the "forms of consciousness" found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Both consist of opposed conceptions of 'life', of oneself and of different systems of values. In Hegel, the most primitive forms of consciousness are mere "consciousness" and then consciousness of oneself as an individual opposed to other individuals. In the stages of Reason, one recognizes one's oneness with others, first through ethics, and ultimately through religion and philosophy, which are the highest conceptions of Spirit, the Absolute Truth, the rational goal of human existence. In Kierkegaard, we first meet the "aesthetic stage," in which man is already self-conscious and opposed to, or at least independent of, other men. (Kierkegaard is simply not concerned with the epistemological forms of Hegel's "Consciousness.") We then meet the "ethical stage," which, as in Hegel, constitutes a societal and 'moral' way of life. Finally, we are introduced to the "religious stage," in which Christianity is introduced as a crowning conception of life.

The difference between the two dialectics is not their content, but rather the relations between the various stages or forms of life. Kierkegaard and Hegel agree approximately on the same delineations of conceptions; and they order them the same. For both, the aesthetic life is unsatisfactory and Christianity is the most adequate conception of life. How are these dialectics ordered? In Hegel, they are ordered according to the "movement of reason," according to the sophistication of these concepts in rectifying conceptual inadequacies. The various forms are opposed to each other, but only because each gives a 'one-sided' view of life. A reflective mediation of the opposition can absorb what is true from each and find a new, and therefore 'higher' form in which opposition and one-sidedness do not occur. By means of such 'mediation', the inadequacies which develop in the conception of oneself as an individual are corrected in the conception of oneself as a rational and moral being, as a member of society. The inadequacies with such 'ethical' conceptions of self are corrected in the religious stages in which the conception of oneself as Spirit, as part of the Absolute (God) becomes fully explicit. At the completion of this stage—the conceptual reformulation of Christianity without its pictorial myths—one's conception of oneself is 'absolute'; it is without inadequacies, for it opposes oneself to nothing.

Although Kierkegaard accepts the validity of such a 'system' of concepts with its mediation of 'paradox' (by which Kierkegaard liberally designates any apparently opposed ideas), he insists that such systematization can be applied *only* in logic, in the study of concepts, and not to *life* itself. Logic aside, such a system is of absolutely no use to the "ethically existing individual," who wants to know *how* to live. This individual faces 'paradoxes', that is, opposed ways of life or alternative courses of action which *cannot* be 'mediated', but have to be chosen between. These 'paradoxes' are unresolvable by Reason; they are *absolute paradoxes,* and one can choose *either* one *or* the other, but not have the best of both. These choices are beyond the scope of Reason, for the mediating powers of Reason have no use in an absolute paradox. Choice is here not guided by rational principle but by a *leap of faith.* Reason plays the part of disclosing these choices for us and showing us that they are uncompromisingly opposed; in other words, Reason shows us that we have a choice, but not what to choose. Here Kierkegaard is in the company of both Kant and Hegel in his insistence that the production of paradoxes is characteristic of Reason, and on the side of Hegel, but not Kant, in his insistence that the production of paradoxes is not a problem of Reason but its chief virtue. In this sense, therefore, Kierkegaard is very much a rationalist. Where he ceases to become a rationalist is in the resolution of these paradoxes, in which reason is impotent and 'passion' or 'subjective truth' or 'faith' (in a religious context) or, more straightforwardly, individual logically-gratuitous choice provides the only possible resolution.

Kierkegaard's development of the dialectic is often couched in characteristically misleading language. He speaks of his dialectic as "qualitative" as opposed to Hegel's "quantitative" dialectic of "pure being" (that is, conceptual truth) and claims that his dialectic is the dialectic of "actual existence" rather than the "concept of existence." As we have argued, however, Kierkegaard is equally concerned with *conceptions* of existence, and his difference with Hegel lies in the value he places on the conception of oneself as an individual over the conception of oneself as "collectivity" (Spirit), and in the manner in which one moves from one conception to another.

In the existential dialectic, we confront three alternative ways of life, three fundamental commitments, or as Kierkegaard elsewhere titles them, "views of life," "existential categories," "spheres of existence," "modes of existing," and "stages on life's way."[71] These three different conceptions of life, each with its own value system and principles, are fundamentally incompatible in that one can only choose among them, not compromise between them by use of Reason. Because each "sphere of existence" contains its own system of values, there can be no further criterion for choosing between spheres, and, therefore, the choice must be made without a criterion, without a guiding principle, without Reason, by a "leap," a commitment which cannot be further defended. Thus, there is no *rational* way of life, no one conception of life style which is more reasonable than others. One's choice of fundamental values is "irrational" because there is no reason for choosing one style of life rather than another, nor is there the possibility that one can compromise to find the best of each. Kierkegaard, like Hegel, will celebrate the religious life as the "best" form of life, but, for Kierkegaard, the adoption of this life is not the Absolute Truth but his own unflinching *commitment.* It is not chosen because it is most rational, but chosen *in spite of* its lack of defense by Reason.

We have already mentioned that Kierkegaard's objection to Hegelianism is based not only on philosophical grounds, but on personal and moral grounds as well. He objected to Hegel's glorification of the possibilities of reflective reason not only because he felt that Reason was not adequate to rationalize ultimate choices, but because Reason gave the illusion that choice and commitment were unnecessary. If Reason could systematize and order all forms of life, then the *rational* way to live could be discovered in the system. Reason, because universal, would therefore dictate that every rational creature choose a single mode of existence, the moral Christian life (for Kant), the reflective intellectual Christian life (for Hegel); in other words, there would be no room for choice. Once Reason is given ultimate authority, the dictates of Reason are absolute and it makes no sense to ask whether one should be reasonable or not. If reason is not given this authority, and is open to challenge by the individual (who can ask "Why follow reason's dictates?" "Why be rational?"), then choice is reintroduced, and the 'rational' way of life (that discovered by the system) is just *one* conception of life among others. The system is not only philosophically inadequate because of its glorification of Reason, but is morally insidious as

well; it gives men the illusion that the choice and therefore responsibility for a system of values is out of their hands.

It is evident from Kierkegaard's attack on Reason that he glorifies freedom of choice in precisely the same way that Hegel glorifies Reason:

The most tremendous thing which has been granted to man is: the choice of freedom.[72]

For Hegel, as for Aristotle, man is essentially rational; for Kierkegaard, man is essentially the chooser of his own values. For Hegel, everything lies in being rational, objective, and reflectively understanding; for Kierkegaard, everything lies in the act of choosing, in being subjective (passionate and committed). This freedom of choice is itself the most basic of values, what makes a man a *human being* or an *existent individual,* and the recognition and use of this freedom is far more important than the *object* of choice.

According to Hegel, freedom consists simply in following Reason; but for Kierkegaard, *following* anything is to give up one's freedom.

In making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses.[73]

Of course, there is a serious problem in the use of "right" (and "wrong") here, and Kierkegaard frequently uses these terms. Once he has argued the 'objective uncertainty' of all 'existential' decisions—the impossibility of justifying any one value system—he cannot then refer to any of these as "right" or "wrong." However, Kierkegaard's point, although once again misleadingly stated, is quite clear: *how* one chooses—that is, whether he has chosen freely and passionately committed himself to his choice—is all-important.

The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said.[74]

What particular sphere of existence has been chosen is not important, for all are equally unjustified. A man has exerted his freedom and proven himself an *individual* by virture of his choosing, not by virtue of the object of his choice.

The spheres of existence are alternative value systems or ways of life which are mutually incompatible. The choice among these spheres cannot consist in compromise, but yet there is no further criterion for choice. Thus, unlike Hegel's dialectic, there is no transition from one sphere to the next, no compromise or 'mediation' between spheres, and no rational resolution with their 'opposition'. However, these spheres do represent stages in a *hierarchy* of values in Kierkegaard's writings, with the religious or Christian stage the chosen ('highest') sphere. Similarly, Kierkegaard sometimes treats the ethical and religious spheres not as incompatible, but as a single system to be contrasted only with the aesthetic sphere. These ambiguities persist throughout Kierkegaard's writings, and the consistency of the existential dialectic thus becomes a key issue in the interpretation of Kierkegaard.

The spheres are often presented as equally valid (invalid) possibilities for choice, and as such, Kierkegaard can show no preference among them. His favorite technique employed to maintain this neutrality is the use of dialogue and pseudonymous characters to represent alternatives without the need to resolve the conflict between them. This is illustrated in *Either/Or,* in which two figures of an old man (Judge Wilhelm "B") and a young Aesthete (Johannes the Seducer "A") for whom the pleasures of life have soured[75] argue the virtues of the ethical and aesthetic spheres, exposing the values and problems of each. There is no attempt at resolution, and the alternatives are presented only as alternatives; the choice between them is left entirely to the reader.

However, at other times, Kierkegaard presents the stages as an actual progression from aesthetic to ethical to religious, and argues in almost Hegelian fashion the inadequacy of each stage which leads us to the next. The aesthetic sphere leads to despair, and then leads to the ethical sphere, which also ends in despair, which in turn leads one to the religious sphere. In his later and most religious writings (*Philosophical Fragments, Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* and *Sickness unto Death*), Kierkegaard leaves no doubt that he thinks the aesthetic and ethical spheres are inadequate and inferior while the religious way of life is, in some sense, the 'right' way of life.

These very different uses of the dialectic can be resolved, we shall suggest, because Kierkegaard, unlike Hegel, never argues that the movement from stage to stage is *necessary* or that it can be demonstrated systematically (that is, by reference to Reason alone). The movement of the dialectic always requires a *leap,* and, regardless of the inadequacy of any sphere, the transition to another sphere must be *chosen.* Yet, in a sense, we shall see that Kierkegaard's critique of the aesthetic sphere does constitute some *reasons* for abandoning that sphere and adopting a new mode of existence.

The Aesthetic Sphere

The aesthetic mode of existence is the life of pure 'immediacy'. The aesthetic is sometimes presented as a life without principles, but this is misleading; its ultimate maxim is not a 'reflective' or a 'rational' principle, one of duty, obligation, or self-discipline. The aesthetic life can be the life of whim, of immediate satisfaction and gratification. It has no *moral* principles, there is no *good* and no *evil,* there is satisfaction and dissatisfaction, fulfillment and frustration, pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering, ecstasy and despair. The aesthetic existence is the life of the Romantic, as celebrated by Byron and Rousseau, and captured by Hegel as the Romantic spirit in the *Phenomenology.*[76] The aesthetic mode's luminary example is Don Juan[77] in his unending quest for "sensual faithless love." Sensual love (unlike "psychical love," which passes into the ethical sphere) is purely "for the moment, in the same moment everything is over, and the same thing repeats itself endlessly." There is no question whether the union will be a happy one, for it is a union with no possibility of lasting. Don Juan does not know the anxiety of developing a relationship, for "he makes short work of it, and must always be regarded as absolutely victorious." Every woman is simply "woman in the abstract"; at most there is a sensual difference between them, not a *personal* difference. Don Juan is without principle, or faithless, in that there is only an arbitrary difference between his loves. He *seduces* women, which means that each is to be enjoyed for the moment, and, in that moment, is indistinguishable from every other woman, and that "moment is indistinguishable from all other moments."

The principle of the aesthetic is satisfaction with the immediate, with whatever is arbitrarily chosen as an object of immediate concern.

The whole secret lies in arbitrariness. People usually think it easy to be arbitrary, but it requires much study to succeed in being arbitrary so as not to lose oneself in it, but so as to derive satisfaction from it. . . . You go see the middle of a play, you read the third part of a book. By this means you insure yourself a very different kind of enjoyment from that which the author has been so kind as to plan for you. You enjoy something entirely accidental; you consider the whole of existence from this standpoint; let its reality be stranded thereon. . . . You transform something accidental into the absolute, and, as such, into the object of a wager, and so forth. The more rigidly consistent you are in holding fast to your arbitrariness, the more amusing the ensuing combinations will be. The degree of consistency shows whether you are an artist or a bungler; for to a certain extent all men do the same. The eye with which you look at reality must be constantly changed.[78]

The aesthetic life need not be confined to the seduction of women, of course, but, as the above passage indicates, will consist in the enjoyment of the moment regardless of what that moment consists. One can enjoy good health or beauty, in himself or others, or riches and honor or talent in the arts as well as sensuous pleasure. The aesthetic life, although essentially unreflective, need not be unintelligent, for it may consist in the enjoyment or even creation of music (Mozart) or poetry, or even philosophy, as long as these are enjoyed purely for their immediate satisfaction.

There is, however, a negative component to this attractive Dionysian life; there is not only pleasure, but the constant threat of pain and suffering; not only satisfaction but frustration, and, what is worst of all, *boredom.* For the aesthete, nothing is more damaging than being bored, or recognizing the *repetition* of his life of the 'immediate'. The aesthetic life, once it first recognizes the threat, becomes obsessed with escaping boredom and repetition, and

subsequently becomes a slave to the demand for new experience. Don Juan comes to live not for pleasure and gratification, but to escape boredom and the staleness of repetition.

The aesthetic life is essentially the life of the immediate, and as such, rejects any reflection concerning the *significance* of that moment. One does, however, come to reflect on his life and the significance of his actions, and this is disastrous to the aesthete. On reflection, the immediate loses its value, and the life of absorption in the moment is seen as a mere 'emptiness', a series of repetitions which are ultimately meaningless. One becomes increasingly restless, attempting to find continuous novel experiences to suppress the feeling of meaninglessness. The presence of reflective Reason stultifies this attempt, for the moment can never again regain its spontaneity and autonomous importance.

With reflection, an *aesthetic dialectic* is initiated. Don Juan represents the first stage of this dialectic, that in which the aesthetic life can be said to be satisfying. As one reflects on the futility of trying to satisfy the human spirit through immediate gratification, he tends to become skeptical about all gratification and about all desires. At this stage of the aesthetic, typified by Faust, one refuses to seek gratification for his desires and comes to deny those desires themselves. His existence is pure *pride*, coupled with cynicism for the worth of anything. From this lack of self-assertion, passionless cynicism lays the foundations of the anonymous character of modern life.

In the third stage of aesthetic dialectic, exemplified by Ahasuerus—the wandering Jew—the once happy aesthete falls into total despair.

So it appears that every aesthetic view of life is in despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair, whether he knows it or not.[79]

Facing the prospect of death and the meaninglessness of life, the aesthete, in silent despair, desperately attempts to escape from reflection altogether. The natural way of doing so, Kierkegaard suggests, is to stop all self-appraisal and self-assertion, and to lose oneself in the crowd and the hustle and bustle of everyday Collective life. Or, for those few who are sufficiently strong to maintain their individuality, there is the ethical life. The aesthetic sphere has degenerated to a life of meaningless despair; can the ethical sphere provide the meaning that the aesthetic life lacks?

The Ethical Sphere

Kierkegaard's presentation of the ethical sphere is not as much the formulation of an ethic as such as the contrast of a life lived according to ethical (secular) standards with the whimsical personal life of the Aesthetic and the religious life whose highest ideals are not of this world or of Reason. The basic feature of the Ethical would be expected to be the employment of universal rational principles that transcend and leave no exception for the individual but yet remain secular principles. The ethical life is the societal life, the life of a man who considers himself part of a community of men and lives according to principles which treat every man as an end in himself and subsume self-interest to moral duty. The ethical life, with its emphasis on universality, rationality, and duty, in short, *morality*, signified for Kierkegaard, as for Hegel, the ethics of Kant. Although Kierkegaard does not deny the inclusion of a non-Kantian ethics within the ethical sphere, it is clear that the system of values which concerns him is that of the *Critique of Practical Reason.* The ethical sphere thus consists of living for the good of men in community (in a "Kingdom of Ends"), and personal interests are always to be subsumed under the interests of morality.

The central feature of the ethical is universality (rationality), and a necessary condition for a set of principles to be ethical principles is the impartial applicability to every person at every time:

The ethical as such is the universal; and as the universal it applies to everyone, which may be expressed from another point of view by saying that it applies every instant.[80]

It should be clear that the ethical life with its value on community is *not* equivalent to 'crowd morality', and 'social concern' does not imply anti-individuality or unquestioning obedience to society. Kierkegaard, like Kant, considers morality to be *autonomous* and *rational.* Every man produces these principles for himself, and must, insofar as he is moral, uphold these principles even against the opposition of society.

Of course, Kierkegaard does not fully adopt Kant's moral philosophy to his dialectic, because the thesis from which Kant maintains that every rational creature will recognize these principles (that is, the categorical imperatives) in himself is identical to his characterization of Reason (that is, practical Reason). Because Kierkegaard rejects this characterization in his denial that Reason can give us justification of ultimate moral principles, he cannot hold with Kant that the principles of morality can be autonomously derived by every 'rational creature'.

However, we can separate this Kantian thesis regarding the justification of moral principles from those moral principles themselves. Kierkegaard's ethical sphere consists in the acceptance of the categorical imperative(s) as ultimate values (as "dictates of practical reason"), but acceptance of these moral values as ultimate does not entail their ultimate justifiability. (Thus, according to Kierkegaard, to demonstrate the *rationality* of a moral principle is not sufficient to justify it.) It is the requirement of universality that is central to the ethical life, and not the claim to justifiability of these universal principles. The ethical life takes individual interest to be subservient to the demands of principle, but the origins or justifications of these principles, or even the specific content of these principles, is not provided by the existential dialectic.

Although the ethical stage is distinguished from the religious stage, it might be suspected that Kierkegaard's acceptance of Kantian ethics will lead him to favor the religious support that Kant gives for his ethics. Kant and Kierkegaard's ethics are both Christian ethics, and the sanctions of Damnation and Paradise are implicit in them. It is in Kierkegaard's acceptance of Kant's arguments to the effect that morality cannot be justified without the postulates of Christianity that we find the tendency to speak of the ethical life as a transition to and part of the religious life. Yet the two stages are importantly distinct, for the two central religious concepts of Sin and Faith do not appear in the ethical conception of life. These two concepts mark a drastic difference between the two "spheres", so drastic that any attempt to treat them as a single system of values must end in confusion.

The model for the ethical life, however, is not the formality of Kant's ethics, but the historical example of Socrates. In Socrates, we find a clear representation of not only the values but the living adherence to the values of morality. Where could we find a clearer example of the subordination of personal interest to the demands of principle and the interests of community? It is Socrates who not only taught, but *lived* the principles that man is of the highest value, that "the good is in every man," and that love of man is the ultimate good. Again, we find Kierkegaard carefully distinguishing between the life and principles of Socrates and his justification of those principles. Socrates, like Kant, argued that the good which is in every man has absolute justification and that subjectivity does not serve as justification of these principles. It is the self-reflection and life of principle which marks Socrates as the paragon of ethical existence.

It would follow from the Socratic example that the virtues of the ethical life would be *social* virtues, and one need only turn to either Plato or Aristotle to get an enumeration of these. Friendship and ("psychic") love are all-important, and finding one's proper place in the social order is an ethical necessity. To this end, courage, temperance, kindness, and generosity acquire the status of virtues. Marriage is of central importance to the ethical life, for it contains within it all of the central demands of morality, commitment to others, acceptance of duty and obligation, submission of personal interest to community (family) interests, the stability of community through stability of the family. One can, of course, trace Kierkegaard's emphasis on the importance of marriage to his own experience with Regina Olsen, but what he has to say about the decision to marry has far more than 'subjective' (biographical) importance.

Unlike the aesthetic life, the ethical life is characterized by reflection and self-appraisal, and with reflection one can appraise the meaningfulness of his life. Deliberate and principled choice, as opposed to action on whim, is the mark of the ethical, and actions have significance not

according to immediate gratification, but with regard to their accordance with moral principle. This long-term significance and regard for principle rather than satisfaction, allows the ethical life to give a *meaning* (a coherence to (moral) principles) to existence that the Aesthetic cannot give; but is the ethical life therefore adequate?

According to Kierkegaard, the secular reflection of the ethical life is adequate to disclose the meaninglessness (lack of principle) of the aesthetic life and disclose the moral principles which define and give meaning to this life. As long as one remains in this secular state of reflection, guilt is a result of failure to fulfill ethical demands and can always be overcome by the performance of good acts. If one's self-reflection moves from the secular to the religious and one just once perceives the revelation of his personal, yet nonethical *Sin* and its unavoidable personal guilt, the despair of the aesthetic dialectic returns, for the good ethical life is not sufficient to escape the despair of the revelation of Sin. (We find the same despair in Camus' character Clemence, as soon as he sees his "public service" and "good character" from a quasi-religious perspective.) Once one has this terrifying revelation, which it is the business of Kierkegaard's writings to produce in him, he has little recourse but to "leap into the arms of God."

The Relationship Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical

In our descriptions of the aesthetic and ethical stages, we have already indicated the nature of the differences between the two and the 'existential dialectic' that brings us from one stage to the next. However, we have also indicated that there is a serious problem in the movement of the dialectic from one stage to the next; if the choice between spheres of existence is really 'irrational' or 'arbitrary', then there cannot be any *movement* of the dialectic at all. Yet the aesthetic dialectic does give us *reasons* for moving to the ethical stage, namely, the despair confronting the aesthete as soon as he comes to reflect on the ultimate meaningless of his existence. Given that both the dialectic, with its progression to the religious life, and the ultimate 'irrationality' of choice are central doctrines in Kierkegaard's philosophy, must we conclude that his philosophy is fundamentally inconsistent? Does Kierkegaard claim there are no reasons for committing oneself to a way of life which he then proceeds to give us reasons for adopting?

This question most often arises in the transition from the ethical to the religious sphere, primarily because Kierkegaard's claims regarding the 'leap of faith' to Christianity is the best known and most influential of his doctrines. However, Kierkegaard's very personal concern with Christianity often leads him to drop his insistence on merely presenting positions and, when he speaks of Christianity, makes it impossible for us to distinguish between *his* reasons for accepting Christianity and *the* reasons (valid for anyone) for choosing Christianity. In addition to this problem, there is the already mentioned question concerning the distinctness of the religious and ethical stages. We shall, therefore, concentrate our efforts to defend the 'existential dialectic' in the more clear-cut distinction between the aesthetic and ethical stages.

To begin the defense, it must be clear that Kierkegaard never claims that the reasons he gives for the transition are *logically sufficient* conditions, and denies, therefore, that the transitions are logically *necessary*. (He claims this as a central difference between his dialectic and Hegel's dialectic. However, we have seen that this is a misinterpretation of Hegel, who is not claiming *logical* necessity, but rather *teleological* necessity for the transitions of his dialectic.) The reasons which Kierkegaard gives for moving from one stage to the next are not logical but *psychological;* they are not logically compelling, but they may be compelling for some individual. One might compare this sort of reason to an argument by appeal to sympathy, or fear, or anger. The argument itself makes no claim to validity—to the contrary, such arguments are often the clearest cases of fallacious reasoning—yet they may be persuasive nonetheless. If someone argues that we ought to accept social inequality by appealing to our fear of social unrest, the question of validity may not come seriously into question, but the argument may be successful nonetheless.

Kierkegaard is thus not claiming to be giving us a valid argument for accepting one stage over another, and, therefore, the question of the logical compulsion of the choice of one stage rather than another does not arise. Kierkegaard is appealing to our feelings, primarily our feelings of despair and guilt. If one feels these emotions as Kierkegaard does, he will feel attracted to Kierkegaard's conclusions, independent of any logically compelling arguments (of which there are none, according to Kierkegaard). Kierkegaard is not giving *reasons* in the sense of *logically compelling reasons,* therefore, but reasons only in the degenerate sense that they are personal *considerations* which might persuade us to accept his position. Furthermore, it should be clear that no claim for universality need be made for these reasons either, for Kierkegaard, like Nietzsche and very unlike Kant and Hegel, writes for "the Few" who can "understand him." "Understand" in this context refers to sharing feelings—for Kierkegaard, the feelings of dread, despair, guilt, and suffering—and not to the more intellectual understanding appealed to by Kant and Hegel in their claims that they are writing truths holding for "any rational creature."

The 'movement' of the existential dialectic does not constitute an inconsistency in Kierkegaard's philosophy, for his denial of rationality is of a very different category than the reasons he offers for moving from stage to stage. The 'reasons' of despair that push one from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere are not logically compelling reasons but personal or 'subjective' reasons, and because these consist of feelings and not of propositions, one might argue that these 'reasons' are not even relevant to considerations of rationality.

Kierkegaard's apparent inconsistency stems from the ambiguous use of "reason" and "rational" that he inherits from Hegel. On the one hand, 'reason' and 'rationality' are strictly logical notions (although Hegel's notions are broadened to include the notion of 'teleological necessity' as well), and it is this sense in which Kierkegaard denies that one can demonstrate the rationality or give reasons for choice of one sphere rather than another. There is another sense of 'reason', also utilized by Hegel, in this other sense a 'reason' is anything (a feeling as well as a consideration) that makes one more likely to accept some conclusion. In Hegel, this use of 'reason' and the use of 'reason' in the sense of 'logically compelling' are joined together in the central notion of teleological explanation so that the senses need not be distinguished. In Kierkegaard, the play on "reason" and "rationality" becomes impossibly confusing, and failure to distinguish these very different uses threatens his entire philosophy with confusion.

However, we again find Kierkegaard much closer to Hegel than his intense anti-Hegelian instincts would allow. If we return to the operation of Hegel's dialectic, we see that the transitions between stages in the *Phenomenology* are sometimes identical in kind to Kierkegaard's 'existential' transitions. For example, the transitions in the stage of "Self-Consciousness" come about not as a result of any *logical* inadequacy, but because the persons who hold certain conceptions of themselves find they cannot *live* with these conceptions (compare the transitions to Stoicism and Skepticism). Similarly, the rejection of Kantian *moralität* depends upon the inability of real people to live in accordance with merely formal doctrines when their passions are ignored. The difference between Hegel and Kierkegaard is not, therefore, a difference between logic and choice; rather, Hegel looks back and reflects over the ultimate purpose of such transitions (resulting in his conception of teleogical necessity), while Kierkegaard asks what justification one can adduce for making certain choices *now*.

The relationship between the aesthetic and ethical spheres is best illustrated by the example to which Kierkegaard himself gives much weight. In *Either/Or,* Judge Wilhelm argues that only the man who is married can "thoroughly fathom the depths of life" and that marriage is the greatest end of human existence. Marriage, (the culmination of 'psychic love') is contrasted with mere 'sensual love' or infatuation; it is not for the moment, but a commitment for the future; it is not aimed at personal gratification, but the interests of others. Sensual love requires only a given momentary feeling; psychic love and its culmination in marriage requires a decision to commit oneself.

Suppose one is deciding whether to commit himself to a relationship; that is, commit himself to an ethical mode of existence. He might go about weighing all the immediate satisfactions and dissatisfactions to be derived from a union, and, according to the criteria inherent in the aesthetic life, the decision would be made on the basis of the greatest personal satisfaction. One might also weigh the moral principles and good for society and other people, and decide, on the basis of purely universal 'rational' principles, whether he ought to marry or not. Given these two very different sets of considerations, how does one make a decision, that is, to decide which kind of consideration is the more important (assuming that they are

in conflict)? According to Kierkegaard, (like Kant) considerations of personal inclination are totally independent of moral (ethical) considerations. Unlike Kant, the choice between the two does not necessarily go to the Ethical, but, in the absence of any further criterion, one has no (logically compelling) reasons for choosing either the Aesthetic or the Ethical.

However, this is not to say that there are no reasons in the less-than-rigorous psychological sense. If the aesthete begins to reflect on the repetition of love affairs he has had and gets the feeling of despair at the pointlessness of it all, this may well move him into marriage, that is, into the ethical life. However, there is no (logical) necessity for this move, unless the psychology of that particular individual happens to be such that he *feels* compelled to grasp at a new way of life. Despair is capable of pushing one to change his way of life, but there is no (logical) necessity that it do so, nor is there any necessity that one feels despair when reflecting on his present way of life. Thus, the claim in Kierkegaard that everyone who leads the aesthetic life is in despair does not entail or even causally necessitate that everyone leading an aesthetic life will move to the ethical life. It is possible that one remain indefinitely in the aesthetic sphere in spite of his despair, and it is even possible that he be immune to Kierkegaard's indirect preachings and stay indefinitely in the Don Juan stage, successfully resisting the reflectiveness that would push him through the rest of the dialectic.

Kierkegaard's dialectic and his analysis of despair are more akin to a selectively directed psychoanalysis than to a logical analysis. He attempts to find those who can be made to feel the despair that he describes, and to lead these people to tell them how to find the way to escape this despair;

Becoming a Christian—The Religious Way of Life

A man who cannot seduce men cannot save them either.[61]

The religious stage is that sphere of life defined by the conception of the individual *in relationship to God.* There is no doubt that Kierkegaard personally considered this his chosen mode of existence and that the central purpose of his writing, as he admits in his *Point of View of My Work as an Author,* is to arouse the religious view of life in his readers. "Religious" for Kierkegaard is to be taken in a very restricted sense—to be religious is to be a Christian, but a Christian in Kierkegaard's very special sense.[62] To be a Buddhist, a Jainist, or a Jew, or to be a worthy, non-suffering Church-going doctrinaire Protestant is not to be religious in this sense. In fact, the sense of religious here is so restricted that it is questionable whether anyone who has not had a background in Kierkegaard's pathologically guilt-ridden Lutheran upbringing could qualify as the religious "Knight of Faith." Membership in the Christian church is the very antithesis of being a Christian. In fact,

it is easier to become a Christian when I am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one.[63]

Hegel and Kierkegaard (and more subtly, Kant) take the Christian conception of existence to be the 'highest', but yet Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity is diametrically opposite to the rationalist conception. For Kant, Christianity was rationally justified by its necessity for practical reason, and God is a *postulate* in support of morality. Christ enters into Christianity as a corollary of belief in God, for belief in Christ can be rationally justified only so far as this belief is necessary for morality. For Hegel also, belief in God is rational, but the Hegelian God is of a radically different sort, and the *rationality* of this belief is defended in a very different way. For Hegel, God is not transcendent as for Kant, but *immanent.* God for Hegel is that subject which is common to all men, and Christ is the symbol of that 'incarnation', that is, the fact that God or Spirit is man, and man is God. Kierkegaard rejects not only the reinterpretation of the Christian conceptions of God, Christ, and the incarnation by Hegel, but the entire rationalist approach to Christianity. God is not immanence—such a concept is 'hypocritical atheism'—but transcendence, in Kant's terms, *noumenon,* and essentially unknowable and incomprehensible. God is not only separated from man, but forever unknowable by man. God cannot be an object of knowledge, but simply an object of faith, and here Kierkegaard is in complete agreement with Kant. He also shares some of Hegel's views, for he insists that God must be viewed as a *subject,* and therefore Kant's

notion that we must have *faith that God exists* is inappropriate. What is needed is faith *in* God, for the question of His existence, once one is within the religious viewpoint, cannot be intelligibly raised.

The central tenet of Christianity is the historical existence of God in the form of man. In rationalist thought, this doctrine had been variously interpreted in order to make it reasonable, for the literal interpretation of a transcendent eternal God existing and dying as mortal man seemed absurd. Hegel is typical of such attempts in his interpretation of Christ as a symbol for the doctrine of the immanence of God. Kierkegaard, however, complains that such imposed plausibility is the destruction of the very doctrine to be rescued. The notion of God as man is not that sort of paradox which can be resolved through the mediation of the Hegelian dialectic. Here we have an *Absolute paradox,* one which cannot be resolved. The idea that God is at once eternal and temporal, is like a man but not at all like a man, is utterly and fundamentally absurd. Because this doctrine is *the* central doctrine of Christianity, the religion is absurd and paradoxical at its very foundations.

As we stressed before, Christianity is not a set of doctrines, but a way of life, a set of values. The absurd doctrines of the Incarnation, the Trinity, and so on are not important in themselves; it is the *attitude* of the religious toward these that is important. The appropriate attitudes for Kierkegaard are fear, dread, and even terror, before an almighty yet unknowable God, despair and suffering at one's personal weaknesses, and overpowering guilt in the face of Sin before God because of these weaknesses.

Yet, Christianity is also the love of this God, confidence in His goodness and justice, as well as the fear and despair of Him. The life of a Christian is to be totally and passionately *before* God, and to be the Christian "Knight of Faith" is to drop every vestige of skepticism and rationality with regard to religious questions and simply exist in the presence of God.

The believer differs from the ethicist in being infinitely interested in the reality of another.[64]

One can be rational only to the extent of recognizing the absurdity of the doctrines of Christianity and discovering the utter irrationality of accepting the Christian way of life. Reason thus having completed its functions, what is left is the choice, the unquestioning acceptance, the *leap* to Christianity.

It by now must be evident that there are two senses in which Christianity can be said to be 'irrational' for Kierkegaard, and these senses must be kept distinct. First, the choice of the Christian way of life is irrational because, as one of the autonomous spheres of existence, there are no external standards for choosing it, and the choice must be a simple leap of faith. However, in this sense, the religious way of life is no more irrational than the ethical way of life which is also autonomous and requires a leap for its acceptance. In the sense that Christianity is irrational here, all ways of life are equally irrational. The too-common interpretation of Kierkegaard's plea for the irrational acceptance of Christianity—that one not attempt to prove its truth—is highly misleading if it is taken as a contrast to the rational acceptance of the other spheres. The choice of Christianity as a way of life is irrational only so far as any choice of a way of life is irrational.

In another sense, however, we may say that Christianity is irrational not only because Reason is incapable of determining choice, but Reason cannot even comprehend the doctrines of Christianity. God, as necessarily unknown, cannot be reasonable understood, and the basic doctrine about God, namely, that "in his timelessness he existed in time on earth as man," is incomprehensible.

Knowledge of God is past the limits of Reason, but yet a product of Reason insofar as it results from Reason's being pushed to its ultimate limits. Christianity is irrational in the sense that it is absurd, in the sense that it must be accepted even though it cannot be understood. In this sense, Kierkegaard is a strict antirationalist, in that he attacks any possibility of *rationalizing* Christianity. Contrary to Hegel, Christianity cannot be grasped by the development of Reason, for Christianity is not a set of doctrines to be understood, but only to be accepted and lived by. This is in sharp contrast to the ethical sphere, in which the use of Reason is sufficient to derive ethical truths, for Kierkegaard accepted Kant's notion of a priori ethical truths attainable by Reason alone. Being moral consisted not simply in acting in accordance with morality, but with *understanding* morality as well. In the re-

ligious stage, no comparable understanding and no comparable employment of Reason is possible. In this sense, Kierkegaard does speak of the ethical sphere as rational (in that it depends upon the employment of Reason), but the religious sphere is not. The ethical life is the life of Reason; the religious life is the unreasonable life of faith.

Because the doctrines of Christianity are paradoxical or absurd, acceptance of Christianity comes about in a manner somewhat different from acceptance of the other spheres. Once one has committed himself to the ethical mode of existence, Reason is capable of telling him what is good and what is evil. Kierkegaard's appeal here is again to Kant but perhaps more directly to Socrates. The teacher of good and evil, as Socrates in the *Protagoras,* acts only as an "occasion" to bring out the knowledge of good and evil. In the *Philosophical Fragments,* Kierkegaard refers to Socrates' dialectic method of teaching and the ethical aspect of the Theory of Recollection as the defining characteristic of the ethical or 'rational' way of life. The doctrines of the ethical sphere are comprehensible and acceptable to any rational creature who is brought to recognize them; once one is within the ethical sphere, he needs no external source to explain or to justify these 'rational' principles.

In the religious sphere, however, Reason cannot show us the Truth, nor can it even allow us to comprehend the Truth. The teachings of Christianity, therefore, *cannot* be based on Reason but must be based on *authority.* Kant and Hegel's insistence on *natural* religion is, according to Kierkegaard, to reject what is fundamental to the religious way of life. *'Positive'* religion is the only possible religion.[85]

Because religion rests on authority, the teacher, namely Jesus, is not simply an 'occasion' for learning, but himself constitutes the Truth that "God exists in and with his own Existence."[86] In other words, it is not a matter of indifference that Christ is the teacher of religion, for he himself is the 'truth' which he is teaching. Again, there is the emphasis on Christianity as a *relationship* between oneself and God, and not as a set of doctrines. To 'learn' Christianity, one must feel himself *confronted* with God, and this confrontation is not the sort of 'learning' which could be prompted by an 'occasional' teacher. Similarly, the 'Moment' of learning, that is, the time of revelation, is all-important, in contrast with the Socratic method of teaching. It is the historical existence of Christ-in-time which constitutes the miracle (absurdity) that is the Truth for Christianity, and the Moment of his existence is the Moment of God's revelation to us. Of course, those of us who were not present at this original presentation of the Truth are forced to learn it "second-hand," but the Moment of revelation is still vital to religious faith. It is only by feeling oneself in the actual presence of God that one can become a Christian.

At that Moment, the Eternal, which hitherto did not exist (for us), came into existence.[87]

It is this conception of the eternal which most clearly differentiates the religious sphere from the other two. In the aesthetic sphere, "time" refers only to the immediate; in the ethical, "time" refers to more than the immediate, but only to secular (worldly) existence. In the religious sphere, however, there is no concept of time; our recognition of God places us "beyond the this-worldly and the temporal."

In Christianity, everything rests on the *authority* of God and His presentation of Himself in the person of Christ as the Truth of Christianity. Acceptance of the teacher is acceptance of His teachings but, more importantly, it is the recognition of the teacher as a personal God (the Truth). Being in the presence of God unavoidably brings one to the recognition of his own relative "incompleteness," which Kierkegaard, attempting to carry on a parallel with Socrates, refers to confusingly as "error":

The teacher is then the God himself, who in acting as an occasion prompts the learner to recall that he is in error, and that by reason of his own guilt. But this state, the being in error by reason of one's own guilt, what shall we call it? Let us call it Sin.[88]

The central teaching of God, therefore, is that man is in Sin; acceptance of God is the acceptance that one is sinful. Facing this Sin, which need involve no specific transgression, feeling guilty about it, despairing at the impossibility of erasing it, and earnestly repenting is the Christian way of life,

the way of suffering, of fear and trembling, of infinite resignation.[89]

Christianity begins with the doctrine of Sin, and therefore with the Individual.[90]

It is the presence of Sin that distinguishes the religious from the ethical, for Sin is "irrational." In ethics, a man feels guilty (justifiably or needlessly) because he believes he has transgressed some specific moral principle. In religion, the Believer feels guilty for a transgression against no principle in particular. By his very being he has Sinned against God where no amount of reasoning could disclose how such a Sin is possible. In ethics, one is responsible for his own errors, but this is not true of the doctrine of Original Sin. Moral transgressions, even if not remediable, can be absolved by God Himself, Who, because He is not concerned with the temporal but with salvation, makes it a point not to provide such absolution during a man's worldly existence. Rather, this existence must be one of continuous guilt and suffering—the permeating recognition that one is basically incomplete and as such constitutes a virtual insult to God. Therefore, Sin is not one of the corollary doctrines of Christianity, but is the inevitable consequence (not logical consequence) of recognizing oneself in God's presence.

The breach between the religious and the ethical is best illustrated in the story of Abraham and Isaac.[91] In his choice between obeying the command of God and saving his son, Abraham was faced with an unenviable choice between the central precepts of the religious and the ethical. What could be more blasphemous for a religious person than to fail to obey a direct imperative of God? Yet what could constitute a more heinous crime in the moral sphere than the murder of one's own son? The choice itself shows beyond any doubt that secular morality and religious duty may be in Absolute conflict in that there is no criterion for making this horrible choice; one must simply choose between God and morality. Kierkegaard, of course, encourages a broader conception of morality in which one's first duty is to God, the "teleological suspension of the Ethical"[92] or the "individual (before God) becoming higher than the universal."[93] However, few of us are confronted with such a direct imperative in religion, and for those people (including Kierkegaard, who in spite of his "mystical" tendencies, never claimed that his confrontation with God included the Lord's speaking to him) who do not have such direct access, the religious way of life consists basically in the adoption of religious attitudes of "inwardness" and suffering, guilt, and the like. In the absence of a Divine countermand to morality there is no normal contradiction between the religious life[94] and the ethical life, in that the latter does consist in part in following the Lord's Commandments. Abraham provides a special case (showing him to be a true *knight of faith*) just because he confronts even his grotesque test with unflinching faith in God. In these Commandments, the ethical can be considered God's expression of His commands to all men, and it is belief in God that gives sanction and ultimate meaning to morality (an obviously Kantian point). However, the Abraham example should be sufficient to keep us from ever attempting to deny the distinctness of the two spheres.

Freedom and Subjectivity

We have presented Kierkegaard's philosophy as he develops it with the conceptions of the "existent individual," the "freedom of choice" of the individual, the absence of ultimate justification of values, the importance of 'subjective truth' in accepting a set of values, and Kierkegaard's own choice of Christianity (in his special sense) as a way of life. These central notions have all been subjected to severe criticism, but, unfortunately, not always well-informed criticism. Kierkegaard's philosophy is developed into a well-protected system (although he would not like this characterization) which is difficult to penetrate critically from the outside because of the safeguarding concept of 'subjective truth'; yet the system is equally difficult to criticize internally because of the slippery employment of its key terms, for example "Reason." Most of the criticism that maintains its grip on this viscous philosophy is simply criticism concerning Kierkegaard's failure to defend crucial philosophical positions on which his entire philosophy depends.

Most notably, we find no defense in Kierkegaard of his central value of *freedom*. Hegel's glorification of Reason is unjustified in his system; it is the presupposition of the powers of Reason which is the basis of the system. It is this presupposition that is attacked by Kierkegaard, who replaces it with a glorification of freedom of choice and 'irrationality'. Suppose we were to question this presupposition as Kierkegaard has challenged that of Hegel: Why is freedom a value? Why even suppose that there is any such freedom of choice?

It is the "existential value" of freedom which determines the worth of one's actions, that is, an action is of "existential value" if it is the result of a freely chosen commitment. Free choice is the mark of the "truly existent individual," setting him off from the "crowd," a clearly derogatory term in Kierkegaard's writings. Why is it valuable to be a truly existent individual as opposed to a member of the crowd? Why should it be better to suffer the despair and anxiety which accompanies one's recognition of freedom than to be secure and settled in the comfort of an uncritically accepted set of crowd-derived "reasonable" values? Kierkegaard does not fairly consider this question, and he never seems to feel discomfort at holding at one and the same time the denial of any ultimate criterion for evaluation and the positing of a single ultimate value according to which every human being is to be measured. Of course, freedom is not a measure of the value of one course of action as opposed to another, but a measure of the value of a *person* in choosing some course of action. Why should we take freedom to be a value at all?

This question of the value of freedom is to become, in later existentialist thinkers, the central problem of their philosophy. Sartre, for example, sees, as Kierkegaard does not, that there is at least an apparent inconsistency in denying the existence of absolute values and maintaining that the only value is freedom. Where Sartre attempts to dispel the problem, Kierkegaard does not even recognize that there is a problem. Similarly, there is a multitude of well-established doctrines in philosophy which would deny that there is even a single case of freedom of choice. Kierkegaard makes virtually no mention of the "free-will problem," but simply *assumes* the reality of the individual freedom he values. Kierkegaard's most sympathetic interpreters have suggested that his concept of freedom does have a basis in his phenomenological description of our experience of freedom, and that this description establishes both the actuality of this freedom and the value of it. No doubt this is a fitting description of the use to which several later existentialists have put Kierkegaard's brilliant analysis of the dreadful experience of freedom, but Kierkegaard himself does not present a "phenomenological analysis"[95] in this context. This is not in the least to deny that Kierkegaard's analyses of "dread" and other passions are among the most perceptive essays in psychology in the nineteenth century. However, the problem of whether one actually has free choice is fully distinct from the question of how we feel when we believe that we have free choice, and Kierkegaard has virtually nothing to say about this problem, nor does he seem to be the least bit interested in it. Similarly, the analysis of one's feelings of freedom might and often do incite similar feelings in others, but this does not constitute a justification of freedom as a value any more than Kierkegaard's religious writings constitute a justification of Christianity in their ability to incite the Christian temperament in readers.

Kierkegaard simply avoids these crucial philosophical objections to his system; but again, he can make himself immune to criticism by claiming that he is not attempting to *justify* any philosophical position, but merely to describe a position from within and attempt to draw the reader into that position as well. By insisting on the "subjectivity" of his writings, Kierkegaard is capable of simply ignoring the charge that he has begged certain questions, or has failed to justify the position that he apparently defends. This sort of 'subjectivist' hedging is bound to be a source of annoyance to philosophers, and it explains both the occasional hostility to and the frequent neglect of Kierkegaard among contemporary nonexistentialist philosophers. Freedom, for Kierkegaard, is simply 'suggested' as a value in a "persuasive definition" of the "truly existing individual" or the "authentic human being" as one who recognizes the ultimate value of freedom, choice, and passion.

Despite the apparent immunity Kierkegaard's philosophy enjoys against attacks from without, there has been a long series

of charges from within claiming that his philosophy is simply inconsistent. However, such charges can rarely be fully substantiated because of Kierkegaard's slippery ambiguity in his use of key terms. For example, we have already argued that the objection against his notion of the 'irrationality of choice' on the grounds that he does provide reasons can be avoided once we become clear about Kierkegaard's unannounced use of several different notions of Reason.

There is a long-standing objection to Kierkegaard's defense of Christianity which focuses on his insistence on the 'absurdity' or 'paradoxical nature' of Christian doctrines. First, it is argued that Kierkegaard fails to distinguish between paradox and absurdity, on the one hand, and flat logical contradiction and utter nonsense on the other. This objection is assuredly valid, but loses its force as a criticism when we find that the "paradoxes" discussed by Kierkegaard inevitably fall into the first category. "Paradox" refers to any notion for which the explanations of Reason do not suffice, and his 'paradoxes' of ultimate choice and of Christianity are 'absurd' only in that they cannot be 'rationalized'; they are not logical contradictions in any sense. We may agree with Kierkegaard that the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation is absurd or incomprehensible without insisting that it violates any laws of logic. It is true that Kierkegaard fails to use logical terms in their accepted ways and that he fails to draw important distinctions; yet it does not follow and is not the case that his paradoxes make his philosophy explicitly inconsistent.

Kierkegaard insists that faith is necessary in religion because of the absurdity of its doctrines, and moreover that it is absurdity which makes faith possible ("there cannot be faith where there is proof"). It often has been argued that there are doctrines other than those of traditional Christianity that are a good deal more absurd than the doctrine that Jesus was God-incarnate, for example, the doctrine that Pontius Pilate was God-incarnate. It is concluded that the absurdity of Christianity does not constitute its justification, for there are other doctrines more absurd.

However, this objection once again misses the force of Kierkegaard's insistence on 'subjective truth'. Kierkegaard does not argue that the justification of Christianity is the absurdity of its doctrines, but rather that the absurdity of its doctrines is a necessary condition for it to be a *religious* way of life. Kierkegaard insists that Christianity is not a set of doctrines, absurd or not, but a life of suffering and religious passion. Christianity is this way of life, and Kierkegaard claims that as such, it cannot be justified at all. The objection that there are more absurd doctrines is therefore to simply miss the point of Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity; it cannot be justified and is not defined by a set of doctrines.

The concept of 'subjective truth' has held a central position in our discussion of Kierkegaard and has been the main defense against standard objections to his philosophy. However, it has often been claimed that this notion is itself incomprehensive, that truth is necessarily objective if it is truth at all. To speak of the 'subjective truth' of mathematics or science is to speak utter nonsense; to speak of the 'subjective truth' of moral or religious commitment is not to speak of "truth" at all.

'Subjective truth' does raise these problems if interpreted as a *general* conception of truth. However, Kierkegaard did not so present it, and reserved talk of "subjective truth" only for cases of 'objective uncertainty'. It is true that in these cases, namely those cases in which choice and commitment are required, we should be hesitant of speaking of Truth and speak rather of "intentionality" or "personal choice." However, this reduces the objection against Kierkegaard to his unfortunate and perhaps misleading choice of words. Whether this choice is a manifestation of a deeper philosophical confusion or an attempt on Kierkegaard's part to deliberately muddy the issues of Hegelianism is open to debate. Kierkegaard evidences the traits of the philosophical sophist and the confused philosophical novice as well as the traits of genius and sincerity which make him one of the great religious philosophers of modern times.

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Friedrich Nietzsche: Nihilism and the Will to Power

CHAPTER 4

When Nietzsche was thirty-five years old, he left the University and the philosophy of the university, and went into the mountains of Switzerland and Italy. For ten years he suffered in body and spirit, pushing himself to a frenzy of philosophic and literary creation. The resultant writings are terse and unsystematic explosions of brilliance, more akin to the ancient teachings of religious leaders than to the scholarly tomes of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, Nietzsche found a spiritual ancestor in the prophet Zarathustra, who becomes the spokesman for Nietzsche's most treasured doctrines. In *Zarathustra,* we cannot help but perceive Nietzsche's projections of his own solitude in this 'wanderer' who is forever distant from the mankind he claims to love, who sought to "teach mankind" but feared that he would be pronounced "holy" for it, and who was never quite certain himself whether he was or would rather be a saint or a buffoon.

Nietzsche's interpreters have not agreed on his significance either; much of his considerable 'influence' has been due to the gross misrepresentation and misinterpretation of his philosophy by the Nazis, who dealt him the ultimate insult of accepting him as their philosopher. He has been worshiped as a saint for the worst of reasons, and celebrated for defending doctrines which he in fact found repulsive. In reaction to the resultant ill-founded enthusiasm for Nietzsche, many serious philosophers have tried to cleanse philosophy of his name altogether, and dismiss him, not even as a buffoon—the fruits of his 'influence' have been far too disastrous for such light treatment—but rather as a madman. Thus, it should not be surprising that Nietzsche is more often the subject for psychoanalytic than serious philosophical investigations, and his ideas are often dismissed as manifestations of the illnesses discovered in his biography. His vicious attacks on the church are diagnosed as a reaction to his strict Christian upbringing; his sarcastic and sometimes silly attacks on women are attributed to his early life in a family of women and his subsequent sexual failures; his glorification of power and strength is said to be the reaction to his persistent ill health, and the celebration of the *Übermensch* the imaginative projection of his own *Unter*-manly life. His philosophy as a whole has not infrequently been discounted as the product of the tragic madness which ultimately caused his death.

No doubt the origins of many of Nietzsche's most radical ideas can be better understood by appeal to his biography (as we found in our study of Kierkegaard), and his dreadful influence can be understood only if we go beyond his writings to the techniques and prejudices of his interpreters. In our survey, however, we shall be concerned only with Nietzsche's philosophy. The gruesome details of his unhappy life are sufficiently well-known that they need not be reviewed here. We shall discuss Nietzsche's notorious 'influence' only as a preliminary to understanding what Nietzsche really did believe.

So distorted were Nietzsche's doctrines that any adequate historical treatment of Nietzsche as philosopher would perhaps require two separate studies, one of his writings, and the other what he has been said to have written. The two lists would have little in common except for familiar catch phrases. Nietzsche despised politics and nationalism and referred to himself as "a good European"; yet his editor-sister celebrates his great love for Germanism