

FAITH AS DEPTH-DIMENSION:
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SÖREN KIERKEGAARD

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD
OF THE DEGREE OF **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**
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Thesis

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CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that the content of the thesis, **Faith as Depth-dimension : With Special Reference to Soren Kierkegaard**, now submitted for the award of the Ph.D. degree, is the result of the research work done by Shri Edwin S. Langstieh under my supervision; that this research material had not been submitted by him for the award of any degree of this or any other University; that the content of the thesis, to the best of my knowledge, has not formed the basis of a degree to anyone else; that in habit and character Shri Langstieh is a fit person to receive the degree.

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(Edwin S. Langstieh)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study on Faith with special reference to Kierkegaard. Of all the concepts in the philosophy of religion, the concept of faith is so fundamental that often it is equated with religion itself. The equation however is not without a philosophical significance. If religion is taken to mean a fundamental intentionality of the human consciousness to the sacred, faith is what makes for a deeper self-understanding within it. Hence the characterization of faith as the depth-dimension of human existence. Philosophers of religion¹ like Randall Tillich and others owe it to Kierkegaard's reflections on faith, to have made the term 'depth-dimension' current in the literature of philosophy of religion, in ways specific to their own perceptions. Mine is a modest attempt to study the concept, as it finds the expression in the writings of Kierkegaard himself.

Sören A.Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is today acknowledged universally to be the father of modern existentialist philosophy. Whatever be its evaluation in the English speaking countries, it effectively replaced the Hegelian philosophy in the continent. It is still the most popular philosophical mood there along with phenomenology. Nineteenth century philosophy of religion is substantially Kierkegaardian : he brought the insights of philosophy to bear upon Aesthetics, Ethics, Psychology, Metaphysics and, above all, Religion, and through it, upon Reformed theology. Christian theology has not been the same since the appearance of Kierkegaard on the scene of continental philosophy. In a remarkable way he established that philosophy cannot be said to have a positive value to life, if it remained a mere speculative discipline. If it were not to be a mere arm-chair exercise, philosophy must have its deep moorings in the concrete human existence. Therefore it must involve itself in such down-to-earth human situations as care and concern, anguish and dread, decision and despair, faith and freedom, time and transcendence and so on. It is in the express service of interaction between philosophy and religion that Kierkegaard injects the religio-philosophical categories in the interpretation of human existence. In

1. Randall, *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion*, Boston : Beacon Press, 1958. See also Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, New York : Oxford University Press, 1964.

so doing, he liberates philosophy from its cold metaphysical hold on human existence, and this makes the former both responsive and relevant to concrete life-situations. In virtue of this, he is rightly hailed as the harbinger of the existential movement, although he himself called it a 'philosophy of existence or life.' His metaphysics of human being, henceforth, an ontology of human existence, that was to have far reaching influence on the thoughts of Heidegger, Jasper, Berdyaev, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Of the many concepts of Kierkegaard that were to play a pivotal role in the development of existentialist thought, faith is an important, if not the most important, concept that was elaborated both by the subsequent existentialists, both theistic and atheistic.

In my attempt at making a philosophical study of faith in Kierkegaard, I want to be more intensive than extensive. Extensive studies on faith are in plenty, not only in theological circles but also in the history of religions. Even a measure of success in making this study intensive, I tend to believe, will be of immense help to illumine our **existential mode of being**, as Kierkegaard understands it. I shall base my study on the three central problems of faith as depicted in Kierkegaard's masterpiece, *Fear and Trembling*²: particularity of faith, absolute duty in faith and the concealment of the life of faith. These constitute the core of my thesis, purporting to explicate the nature of faith as a depth-dimension of human existence. It is in the above work that Kierkegaard explicates his novel interpretation of, and the insight into, the category of faith as has never been done before by religious philosophers. This is not to suggest that I do not draw from other works of Kierkegaard. As a matter of fact, I will freely visit all those other works, where his views on faith illumine the problems that I have identified. As will be shown abundantly, this constant reference to other works even becomes a necessity to get a better understanding of faith, since faith constitutes the religious sphere of existence, the highest stage of life, in the Kierkegaard scheme. The category of faith is depicted by him as the highest passion, decisive in the determination of both the content and purpose of the individual's existence. As a Christian philosopher, Kierkegaard brings out also the paradoxical aspect of faith in such a way that it at once transcends all the calculations of human understanding. And yet, faith is equally a human category, in so far as it is said to be exercised in the finite it had just transcended. This

2. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Trans. Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1952

excludes faith from being any kind of flight from the world by way of renunciation.

In his explication of a philosophy of faith as the depth-dimension of the believer, irrespective of the problems identified, a few categorical determinants of faith stand out. First of all, faith is a particular relationship to the Absolute. In virtue of the particularity, it may dispense with every form of universal intermediary which may be pressed into the service of mediating the faith-relation. Secondly, the particularity of the relation concerned may also at times involve 'a frightful teleological suspension of the ethical'. Thirdly, it demands 'an infinite resignation' of all that is finite. Fourthly, having infinitely resigned the finite, the man of faith may be required to make dialectically 'the double movement' of the spirit, by which he comes back to live again in the finite. But now, he lives by virtue of the God-relationship, and not with any dependence upon the immediacy of matter or mind. Fifthly, precisely, on account of this conflicting traits, inherent in faith, the man of faith is said to experience an existential anguish and dread, once he is launched on to the movement of faith. Finally, he cannot mitigate his dread by speaking out his faith to others. This only makes him liable to be misunderstood. This makes his life of faith a life of silent interiority; it also makes it deeply paradoxical. These categorical determinants of faith are repeatedly met by us in respect of every problem that we have identified for our study.

In my second chapter, I provide for myself a conceptual framework for faith, into which I can later fit in the Kierkegaardian philosophy of faith. Hence I discuss here generally on faith as a category of religion. This may be said to be a prolegomena for my thesis. Since this will be a conspectus on faith as a generic category, Kierkegaardian formulation of faith is deliberately kept out of its purview. Nonetheless, there are gentle pointers, here, suggesting the areas, wherein lies Kierkegaard's contribution to the chapters to follow. This general conspectus revolves around three points: the distinction between 'belief-in' and 'belief-that'; the relation between knowledge and faith; and the essentials of faith.

It is a fact that the attempt to define faith merely in terms of dogmas has sustained lively debates among philosophers, theologians and social scientists

interested in the study of religion. Interestingly enough, the debates are indicative of the unresolved philosophical problems associated with the category of faith. Thus, even if faith is thought of as an attitude, it seems to be including within itself not only affectivity but also cognitivity; it seems to be admitting within itself feeling and passion, on the one hand, knowledge and dogmas, on the other; it seems to be at once temporal and transcendental, human and divine. Keeping these determinants of faith in our mind, I discuss in the second chapter the relation that obtains between belief, knowledge and faith.

The usual Western epistemological mapping of 'belief and knowledge' turns out to be in the religious context, a discussion on 'belief and faith'. In the history of philosophy of religion, belief and faith are therefore intricately related. They are as often identified as sought to be kept distinctively apart. Hence a distinction is made between belief-in and belief-that. The former is equated with faith, to the extent that it is an affective attitude of trust and commitment to an absolute, conceived of as a person. The latter, on the contrary, is a cognitive attitude directed to the content and the context of faith-experience. It refers therefore to the cognitive aspect of faith: the concept is closely linked with the propositional truth, therefore with a doctrine of faith. A good deal of my discussion will therefore be on the close relation, obtaining between the two types of belief. In what sense can they be said to be interdependent? In what sense can they be said to be independent?

The cognitive content of faith also makes for the problem of the relation between knowledge and faith. Faith is said to admit a doctrine of faith, however inadequately grasped by the believer. How are we to determine the cognitive elements within faith-experience? Can we speak of a knowledge of faith? Can we speak of faith itself as a form of knowledge? Some philosophers of religion have spoken of faith as intellectual 'vision', drawing their analogy from sense experience of seeing; others have spoken of faith as an intellectual 'insight', withdrawing from the analogy of such sense perception. I have addressed myself to some of these problems, and suggested a way of integrating both the cognitive and affective attitudes in the life of the 'faithful' man.

Notwithstanding the dichotomy of cognitive and the affective attitudes within the faith-experience, one will have to face the problem of the nature of

faith: What, in the final analysis, is faith in its essentials? The question, however, is not generic but specific, in virtue of the discussion of Christian faith that Kierkegaard elaborates for us. This specification is further necessitated by my recognition that Kierkegaard's contribution, that is to follow in the next three chapters, lies primarily in the area of the determination of the essentials of faith. Faith is spiritual atmosphere in which the religious man lives, moves and has his being. It is a passionate and personal commitment of the religious man to the person of God. It is a concern of trust, surrender and commitment, on the part of man to God. In this way it is the 'ultimate concern' of the man of faith directed objectively to the Ultimate. At the same time, it is the concern subjectively exhibited by the person, who is said to have faith. Kierkegaard's reflections bear abundantly on the above determinants of faith.

Against this general background of a philosophy of faith, Kierkegaard's own conception of faith is sought to be studied in the next three chapters. Each of them focuses its attention on a specific determinant of faith and the associated philosophical problems. My treatment of them will be such that they illumine the category of faith in Kierkegaard as constituting the depth-dimension of the man of faith. It is to be particularly borne in mind that the next three chapters mark a considerable shift from the generic conception of faith to a specifically Christian conception, as given a radical expression by Kierkegaard.

Thus in the third chapter, I will focus my attention on the **particularity** of faith-relation. Faith is a particular relation with the Absolute. It is a requirement of the faith-relation that the individual exerts himself as the particular *vis-a-vis* the universal; in doing this he becomes higher than the universal. This at once raises innumerable philosophical problems. The givenness of human nature is intentional to the ethical-universal *telos*. Human life, as it is lived within the ambience of a host of relations, has for itself the ethical *telos* which is both absolute and universal. It is generally said that the goal of being human is becoming more and more open to the universal humanity, by way of relinquishing one's particular narrow individuality. But the particularity of the faith-relation to the Absolute is at once an affront to the universal *telos* of the ethical. Hence, first, I need to study the universal teleology of the ethical itself.

Since faith is a personal commitment to the paradox of the God-man in the Christian context, it cannot be a mere devotion to an idea or ideal. It is rather deeply personal, implying a personal relationship with God on the part of the believer. Therefore it is a particular relation, wherein the believer recovers his full individuality, instead of being etherialized in the universal humanity. This may involve at times the frightful teleological suspension of the ethical *telos* itself. Hence, an examination of the 'How' of this relation, the individual bears to the Absolute, becomes inevitable. The enquiry into the 'What' of faith makes for an essentialistic approach to so vital a concern as the faith-relation. It would even rob faith of its passion. The existential, rather than the essentialistic approach to faith does not apprehend faith as a doctrine, but as a movement of the human spirit in a process. But, it is the movement characterized by the paradox of the teleological suspension of the ethical. Since any study of faith to Kierkegaard should be projected, in our understanding, against the dynamic ethical rather than the static aesthetical concept, the suspension of the ethical teleology, that occasionally may be demanded in the life of faith, must be carefully understood with all the sophistication that philosophy of religion is capable of. Otherwise the determinant of the particularity in faith may be dubbed by any one as the 'mean, cramping faith of blind and fanatical particularism'³. Moreover, in so far as this particularism militates against ethical universalism, particularity of faith is liable to be a form of nihilism, an inability to find the world around us significant.

Precisely in virtue of the tension exerted in the life of the man of faith by the significant suspension of the teleology of the ethical universal, the path of escape from faith may open up. Kierkegaard calls it the 'temptation', meaning thereby a trial of faith. I have therefore addressed myself to an elaborate discussion on the concept of temptation as distinct from the 'lure of the immediacy', that generally constitutes temptation. A careful analysis of the concept also makes it possible to argue for the Kierkegaardian position: the particularity of faith is such that a mediation of the tension of the life of faith is not possible. For all mediation of faith-relation nullifies faith itself. In this context, I also discuss the dialectics of the movement of an infinite resignation of the finite; but it also admits the backward movement or, what Kierkegaard calls, 'repetition to the finite' lest faith-relation ends up with asceticism, which

 3. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 129.

can only mediate the particularity of faith. In the realm of ethics, we can always think of mediation in virtue of the gradations in the ethical *telos*. But such gradations are not possible to the man of faith in respect of his religious *telos*.

Continuing the spirit of tension between ethical heroism and the passion of faith in the fourth chapter, I will examine another area where the tension holds good, namely, the **relation between faith and duty**. The thrust of my investigation will be on the concept of duty which is apparently an ethical category. Kierkegaard acknowledges the ethical nature of duty. Precisely because of this he makes an excursion into the Hegelian philosophy of right before he poses his problems. The problem that he poses is this: Can there be an absolute duty to God? If the concept of duty is essentially ethical, in situations of teleological suspension of the ethical all duty would stand suspended. If so, does duty to God, too, stand suspended? Obviously, this is not the purport of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's notion of absolute duty to God will have to be understood in a different way, and not in an Hegelian way. If there is an absolute duty, it can be only in the realm of faith, which is the area of inward growth and subjectivity. The concept of duty then is transformed by Kierkegaard from its ethical context to a religious context.

Is this transformation justified? The answer may be in the affirmative. Kierkegaard, the philosopher of the 'stages of existence', has a marvellous sensitivity to the validity and value of the ethical stage of existence. This sensitivity is poignantly perceptible even when he speaks of the suspension of the ethical *telos vis-a-vis* the religious *telos*, and contrasts the tragic hero with the knight of faith. Whereas the aesthetical stage of existence, Kierkegaard suggests without any remorse, is to be abrogated, the ethical stage is by no means cancelled; it is only 'suspended' for a while under the pressure of a proof of faith, occasionally demanded by God. The pathos of the knight of faith is all the greater, precisely because he has a heightened consciousness of the value and validity of the ethical. The knight of faith is therefore now transformed by Kierkegaard as the knight of absolute duty.

This only suggests that faith, lest it should become abstract and ethereal, is bound to the ethical to make it existential. This is abundantly evident in Kierkegaard's writings in the use of analogies, that he draws from conjugal love

and matrimonial commitment to illumine the trust, love and abandonment, inherent in the state of religious faith. Besides, the knight of absolute duty, when he has made the reverse movement of 'repetition', comes to live in the finite. The realm of the finite revisited is not one of hedonism or intellectualism, but of ethicism informed by his faith-experience. The reverse movement to the finite ethical saves the man of faith from the mortifying asceticism and monasticism, that the first movement of 'infinite resignation' is likely to drive the man of faith into. This at once suggests that the knight of absolute duty cannot escape a life of tension, precisely because he is to live an existence, concretely characterized by a simultaneity of the relative and the absolute duty.

The simultaneity of the relative and absolute duty reflects human existence, which is at once a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, the immediate and the transcendent. Therefore Kierkegaard considers the absolute duty as a sacrifice. The life of absolute duty to God therefore has a rare expression of the pathos. But the 'initial expression', which consists in a verbal aestheticism, is not commensurable with the pathos of faith. However, an 'essential expression', which consists in suffering, may be suggested as bearing on the concrete actions of faith. Hence pathos of faith is not a pathos of passivity but of activity. In this context, I have addressed myself to two important philosophical problems. Is a man of absolute duty to God, because his faith admits an expression of suffering, a masochist? Again, since the pathos of faith, inherent in the simultaneity of relative and absolute *telos*, is of action, how can action, which is generally thought to be oriented outward, conduce to the growth of one's interior life that faith is? I conclude the chapter with a brief comparison of the Kierkegaardian concept of absolute duty to God with a few ethical considerations in Kant.

In the fifth chapter, I will focus my attention on yet another aspect of faith as the depth-dimension of human existence. It is the aspect of **concealment and 'revelation'** of faith in the life of the religious man. Can the believer communicate his faith to others? The problem is once again posed in the context of Hegelian epistemology, that seeks to overcome the concealment of belief in the revealing of knowledge. Kierkegaard strongly opposes the Hegelian language of transcending faith in knowledge. Life of faith is a hidden life that permits no revealing. Silence is the citadel that steels faith. This is because, if

the man of faith were to speak of his faith, it is liable to be misunderstood, although his silence is equally unintelligible to his fellowmen. All understanding proceeds by way of objective representation, but faith is not of the realm of objectivity. It rather belongs to the realm of subjective appropriation.

The man of faith, therefore, opts for the hardest path of concealment. The concealment employs a queer mode: The *incognito* of the man of faith consists in his appearance like all other men. The man who who has made the double movement of faith, comes back to live in the finite, and lives therein like other men so much so that his inwardness of faith is secured by concealment. There is no direct expression of his faith, because he grows only in his hidden religiousity.

The man of faith has to guard his faith assiduously against all temptations of exhibitionism and outward manifestation of his faith, lest he ends up not with faith, but only caricatures thereof. For these caricatures of faith, instead of creating that spiritual atmosphere of faith in which he breathes, may simply mediate faith. One such prodigious manifestation of a caricature of faith is a 'life form' called monasticism, wherein the monk indulges in making himself as a monastic athlete, but not a man of faith with its hidden stress and strain. Kierkegaard therefore thinks that the man of faith lives *incognito*, like the rest of mankind, putting on 'the manifold composite garment of the finite'. Such a life would open the man of faith up to a series of charges, deception being not the least of them. It would be interesting to see how Kierkegaard faces these charges. At any rate, he would not give up his central thesis that faith does not admit revelation, but is nourished by silence. In explicating this truth, he draws upon dialectics: Just like the divine omnipresence is encompassed by God's invisibility, revelation of faith is encompassed by its hiddenness, as a safeguard to all misunderstandings and caricatures.

I also propose to examine in this chapter Kierkegaard's concept of concealment in aesthetics as well as in ethics, so that I can juxtapose them with the concealment of faith in religion. Notwithstanding similarities among conceptions of concealment, Kierkegaard is particular to point out that their moorings are very different. The aesthetical concealment, the kind of which is encountered in Greek poetry and drama, is for conveying a heightened sense of

suggested, hence concealed, meaning. The success of poetry lies in transporting the 'historico- existential' to the 'imaginative-existential'. Even so, in Greek tragedies, the factor of fate produces the maximum effect of concealment. Likewise in romantic love, Kierkegaard argues, aesthetical possibility reveals itself in ethical actuality of the commitment of marriage. Again, the concealment of the ethical reveals itself in the universal. Ethical heroism consists, on the part of heroes, in the universal feats. But, when we come to faith, the man of faith is a solitary 'exister'. He stands at the pinnacle of paradox, but in silence, in the interiority of his subjectivity.

Since silence is the only response available to the man of faith, no communication of faith is ever possible to him. The type of epistemological revelation that usually takes place of objects through the medium of the category of language is not at the disposal of the man of faith. Inadequacy of language is rooted in the fact that it is a system of the universal, whereas faith is a particular relation with the Absolute. Again, as a system of the universals, language is essentialistic, faith, on the other hand, is a state of existing as individual. Again, faith, that is in the realm of the paradox, cannot be fathomed by the categories of language. Kierkegaard is not a philosopher of language, but he relentlessly fights against all the reductionistic attempts of philosophers. It is in this context that Kierkegaard also fights against the Cartesian legacy of making *cogito* prior to all existence. Kierkegaard tells us that for the religious man, 'to be is to believe', for all faith-existence is in the interiority of subjectivity. He draws interesting parallels between the Socratic inwardness in the pursuit of 'know thyself' and the inwardness of faith, but he is quick to point out important difference between the two. I end the chapter on a critical note: The life of faith in concealment may not be consistent with the need to witness to one's faith, but Kierkegaard often speaks of. Yet, philosophically there may be a way out of the difficulty. So, too, there are problems with the extreme form of individualism, inherent in the Kierkegaardian confession of a concealed faith. But, his is a religious individualism that makes a sense in the context of the spirit of Reformed liberalism of the age.

In my concluding chapter, I have two objectives : First, an overall view on faith as a depth-dimension of human existence. What was fragmentarily discussed in the separate chapters is here sought to be

synthesized. Second, in the process of synthesizing, a few **philosophical problems** that have a direct bearing on the theme of this thesis, are also sought to be identified (a) The notion of subjectivity, the arena of the exercise of faith, (b) The notion of transcendence, the intentionality of the movement of faith, and (c) The supposed anti-intellectualism of Kierkegaard that is liable to turn faith into an obscurantism.

The notion of subjectivity is central to the discussion on faith. All exercise of faith is made possible in the arena of the inwardness of the subject, since an encounter with God as the maximum subjectivity can take place only at the level of one's inner freedom. Hence, faith is not a mere subjectivism characterized by feelings and sentiments. It operates at the level of one's being; hence it is ontological rather than psychological. In objectivity one is compelled by the evidence that it musters, but in subjectivity it is a matter of free choice, a 'leap' and a 'venture'. Faith also is not a solipsism, where the movement, being circular, ends up with the self both as its intent and content. It is rather a movement, where the man of faith finds himself as ontically grounded in God. Hence, the faith-movement begins with one's own subjectivity, but it culminates in the maximum subjectivity of God.

This brings us directly to the notion of transcendence as the intentionality of human consciousness. Teleological suspension of the ethical, absolute duty to God, particularity of faith, its concealment, growth in inwardness, dying to immediacy, clinging to the paradox etc. -- all symbolize the spirit of transcendence of human life. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus reminds us that anyone, who aims at perfection in area of pursuits, has a glimpse of this transcendence. Kierkegaard believes that the orientation to transcendence constitutes our humanness. Hence, it ought not to be suppressed. While Kierkegaard was to influence a great many philosophers on this issue, he himself draws from his Greek philosophical heritage, especially Plato and Aristotle. He incorporates this pursuit of transcendence in his philosophy of the 'stages of existence'. His conclusion here is that not even the ethical integralness fills the void of human nature, to say nothing of aesthetical *telos*. Thus, in giving us a philosophy of transcendent teleology, he is careful to distinguish the absolute *telos* of faith from all other absolutized *telos* of the finite.

Closely associated with transcendent teleology, is Kierkegaard's reflections on possibility and actuality. In the context of faith-existence, these co-relates of human personality acquire such significance that merit the attention of students of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Faith is an 'in-between existence' (*inter-esse*), in the sense that the man of faith exists between temporality and externality. Whereas, for Hegel, all actualization is in the 'ideation', for Kierkegaard, it is in the *inter-esse*. In aesthetics, possibility may be higher than actuality, in ethics and religion, however, actuality is the highest. For in the latter there is no flight from the existence of the individual. For all decisiveness takes places in the will of the existing individual. Moreover, faith is also an infinite 'interest' (*inter-esse*) in the sense that the man of faith can never indulge in a disinterested contemplation, but remain infinitely interested in the act of existing.

Finally, is the anti-intellectualism of Kierkegaard final ? If so, the non-rationalistic interpretation of faith, given by Kierkegaard, would suggest only an obscurantism. In answering the above question, we have to bear in mind that Kierkegaard's call is for a radical commitment to God. He wants to free faith of its propositional bondage, that traditional Christian theology had landed it into. With this purpose in mind, he attacks the religious rationalism of Hegel. In the process, he generously makes use of such anti-intellectualistic terms as paradox, absurd, existence, subjectivity, commitment, will, passion, pathos and so on. It is not surprising, therefore, if he gives us an impression of being an anti-intellectual. His is a case of a philosopher, employing new philosophical categories to purge out the deadwood in philosophy. He employs abundantly reasoning to point out the limitations of reason. This is amply evident from the free excursions, that he undertakes in his philosophical heritage, be it Greek or Hegelian philosophy. He, however, does not hesitate to change the heritage at crucial junctures. Hence there is no need either to glorify his 'religious absurdity' or to condemn his existentialism as anti-intellectualistic. He is set on giving us a philosophy of life. His struggle here is to be illumined by the healthy tension obtaining between rationalism and voluntarism of the Western philosophical tradition, possibly because the Western culture is the product of a synthesis between the best of Greek mind and the Semitic heart.

Speaking of the method, my Research will be both descriptive and analytic. Such a method seems to be adopted by Kierkegaard himself. His analytical skill bears primarily in recovering the original sense, in which Greek philosophers used their philosophical categories. Even Heidegger may be said to be indebted to Kierkegaard in this hermeneutics. Yet, existential philosophers, in general, and Kierkegaard, in particular, do a kind of ontology of human existence that makes such studies descriptive as well. Hence, at every stage of the study a constant synthesis, an overall view, of the problems at discussion, becomes necessary. My study is based entirely on the translated works of Kierkegaard. Secondary materials is judiciously used, only to the extent that they support my own interpretation of Kierkegaard. However, its use is without any restriction in my second chapter, where I dwell upon faith as a general category of religion. If any self-imposed restriction can be seen here, I have drawn from the contemporary, rather than the classical, philosophers of religion in the English and German speaking world.

* * * * *

CHAPTER II

FAITH, A CATEGORY OF RELIGION

- I. THE CATEGORY OF BELIEF**
- II. KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH**
- III. FAITH IN ITS ESSENTIALS**
- IV. CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Chapter II

FAITH, A CATEGORY OF RELIGION



There possibly is no other category in religion than 'faith' which is so central to any religion that the latter cannot even be spoken of without the former. Not even the concept of God is as crucial as that of faith. But when we come to determine philosophically the concept of faith, nothing seems to be more elusive. We look in vain in philosophers and theologians, who otherwise speak exhaustively on the concept. Since the concern of my thesis is faith with special reference to Kierkegaard, I need to address myself first to the concept of faith as a category of philosophy of religion. It is only then I would be in a position to speak of Kierkegaard's contribution to the philosophy of faith.

In philosophy of religion the triadic concepts of knowledge, belief and faith are generally clubbed together. This, not without reasons. The relation between belief and knowledge is sufficiently highlighted in Western philosophy. Faith at times is equated with belief. This equation needs be studied carefully. Hence in the first part of this chapter, I shall examine the category of 'belief in' its two dimensions, namely, 'belief-in' and 'belief-that'. The latter opens up immediately to the propositional content of faith, and therefore to problems of religious epistemology. Since belief-that implies a cognitive character, I shall attempt, in the second part, an investigation into the interrelationship between knowledge and faith. In the third part, I shall reflect on what faith essentially is. I tend to believe that Kierkegaard's contribution lies primarily in the area of illumining the characteristics of faith in ways specific to the spirit of his existentialist philosophy.

I. THE CATEGORY OF BELIEF

There is a general tendency in the Western tradition to posit belief as the predicate of faith, as it appears in such definitive expressions, 'Faith is the act of believing'. Is it the case that belief is definitive of faith, or that belief is faith's equivalent? In the area of philosophy of religion, both the answers are entertained. Belief, as a category of religion, seems to be admitting two possible

interpretations, depending on what we affix to it, either the proposition 'in' or the relative pronoun 'that'. The religious claim, 'Faith is the act of believing', makes believing the content of faith, in so far as faith and belief become equivalent. This is 'belief-in', which could readily be identified with 'faith-in'.] But the claim, 'Faith is the act of believing . . .', is open-ended in so far as it is 'belief-that'. The connective of a relative pronoun to it adds a propositional content to faith. Thus belief-in and belief-that make for the distinctive religio-philosophical perspectives, not to be confused. They belong in a sense, to different spheres, though convergence may at times be effected.

(1) **Belief-in :**

It has been generally admitted that belief-in implies a confidence, or trust, in God. This trust in God is essentially an effective attitude, which may or may not be supported by a cognitive attitude. Since belief-in is an affective attitude, it commits the speaker to a certain policy of action with regard to the object believed in. An act of trust is built into it. Belief-in designates the surrender of the believer to God without any precondition. The believer may be an intellectual or a simple man, who may not have the intellectual grasp of the truth about God. They both believe in God. This is an act of faith.

(2) **Belief-that :**

Belief-that, or simply 'belief', as is customarily held in philosophical quarters, inheres in the propositions assented to. Belief is here primarily a mental assent to propositions. It is an intellectual exercise engaged in 'translating' the transcendence into ostensible categories. In this sense, belief can be interpreted as a cognitive attitude to propositional truths, as distinct from the affective attitude. Hence the belief-that is the activity of the mind. The objects of belief here differ from one person to another, from one tradition to another, in the sense that the content introduced by the relative pronoun is diverse. In so far as belief is an assent to propositions, the latter is the basis of faith, rather than identical with faith.

But propositions are our mental constructs. The objectivity of these constructs, in matters of religious belief, is opened to serious question. Even though the object of belief is the transcendent being, in the belief-that, it is

reduced conceptually to a subjective proposition. But the propositional truths are only representational of that transcendent object, rather than the transcendent object itself. In this way belief-that reduces the transcendent being to our mental constructs. Thus, it may be stated that a belief that, 'God exists', has a cognitive status rather than a religious value. If belief-that is a cognitive activity, it is not an affective attitude. It is rather a propositional, or cognitive, attitude to the objects of belief. Therefore knowledge must be prior to belief, otherwise belief would be irrational. The subject must readily have a cognizance of the propositions before belief would emerge in his mind. Needless to say, in the context of religion, in either of the religious sense, knowledge may be a prior condition for the emergence of belief-that. This position is diametrically opposed to the views in Platonic theory of knowledge. Plato, in viewing belief as a mere opinion, distinct from knowledge, makes it prior to knowledge. Belief is a mere evidence of the sense, lacking truth in it. It is to be discarded in favour of the knowledge of pure forms, which bear their absolute truth on our knowledge.

Lastly, belief culminates in the acceptance of, or an assent to, the truth of the propositions. The answer to the question, 'Does assent entail belief?', cannot be in the negative. We would then invite inconsistency and contradiction in ourselves. For, to say, 'It will rain tomorrow, but I believe that it won't rain', would be tantamount to saying what is internally inconsistent. For someone to sincerely assert, 'It will rain tomorrow', implies that he believes that it will rain tomorrow: he believes the truth he is asserting. Similarly, if another says to me, 'It will rain tomorrow', and I assent to his statement, but 'I do not believe it will', then I would have produced once again the same kind of inconsistency. What I had assented to I cannot but believe. Again, suppose I know how to read the computed meteorological data relating to a weather forecast that it will rain tomorrow, and still assert, 'I do not believe it will rain tomorrow', then I would have equally produced a stubborn self-contradiction. Here I acknowledge that I know, but do not assent to my knowledge.

(3) Their Interdependence :

Religious belief is obviously not a mere propositional belief, or a mere cognitive attitude to the truth of a religious assertion. Beyond this

epistemological dimension, it may also be said to have a 'noumenal' dimension, if I were permitted to use Otto's term. Hick writes that belief is, by and large, a 'dispositional word'.¹ This implies those tendencies and dispositions to behave, react, respond to given circumstances in appropriate or certain ways, or range of ways. It is cogent and reasonable to hold that, to be in a state of believing, a proposition, that 'God exists and he is loving', is also at the same time to possess such a tendency or disposition to worship him and to adore him. Here the believing subject acts in ways appropriate to the truth of the proposition, and this constitutes his religious belief. It follows then that to say of someone that he believes 'p', but always behaves on the assumption that 'not-p', would be a misuse and abuse of the word, 'belief'. 'Our actions alone reveal infallibly what we believe'.² Thus, there is a close relation between belief-in and belief-that. Both converge in the realm of religious action. ✓

A sincere and sane believer would not say he believes that God exists without saying that he believes in God. Belief-that is more than an assent to propositions, since the content of religious proposition is more than a mere object of intellect. When the believer, for example, says, 'God who exists in heaven is our loving Father', what he purports to do is not merely to state a putative fact but to express an affective attitude. In the above assertion, the believer not only cognitively believes that God exists, but characteristically commits himself to God whom he believes to be the loving heavenly Father. This becomes even more apparent, if we consider how odd it would be for a believer to say, 'God exists in heaven as our loving heavenly Father, but I do not trust in him'. We should then assume that either he was not sincere or he did not know the meaning of the English words he was using. Thus is brought out the interdependence between belief-that and belief-in. A belief that God exists would have no religious value in itself, if the person, who makes this claim, is also not touched by an awe and affection towards God. A belief that God exists, shorn of an affective attitude, would not be a religious belief.

On the other hand, belief-in implies belief-that, however rudimentary the latter be. Whereas belief-in is a necessary condition of belief-that, the latter, too, may be in some sense present in the former. It would make no sense at all to affirm a belief-that and deny at the same time a belief-in. It is inconceivable religiously how one could believe that God exists, but at the same time have no

1. John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, London : Cornell University Press, 1970, p. 247.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

affective attitude towards God. H.H. Price extends the argument even to an empirical situation : 'I cannot trust my doctor unless I at least believe that there is a person to whom the prescription "being my doctor" applies'.³ When we come to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, propositional attitude and dispositional attitude, or the cognitive attitude and the affective attitude, are so reciprocal that it sees them synthetically as a single category of belief. Exponents of this unitary conception of belief therefore may not envisage such a distinction of belief as belief-in and belief-that. However, to a student of philosophy of religion, the distinction may not be without its own philosophical rewards.

(4) **Their Independence :**

However, it can as well be argued that belief-in and belief-that are conceptually distinct. It is possible to speak of their independence in such a way that we are in a better position to identify the cognitive and the affective content of belief, as belonging to two different spheres of life.

Speaking philosophically, one could believe that God exists, and at the same time display no affective attitude towards God. One can still sustain one's propositional, or cognitive, attitude to the truth of God's existence without being touched by an awe, fear, or reverence towards God. The deist may be said to exhibit such an attitude. The belief that God exists would, in this case, come first, but the affective attitude may not follow subsequently. The belief that God exists would not logically imply any affective attitude towards God. In so far as a belief, that God exists, is a cognitive assent to propositional truth about God, it is an epistemological issue; it is of no religious value. Nonetheless, it invites us to the task of making a purely rational investigation, which pursuit is philosophically disinterested. There is no religious commitment involved in the belief concerned. A philosophical inquiry into this proposition is neither non-religious nor irreligious, but only a-religious. If this is the case, we can safely hold that one could believe that God exists without believing in God; and it would make sense to affirm a belief-that without affectively moved by a belief-in.

On the other hand, a belief-in can subsist, and substantiate itself, without any implied involvement of the belief-that. It seems equally true that religious belief is so essentially a matter of trusting in God that doubts, as to whether it is really the case that God exists, are irrelevant. As a matter of fact, the majority

3. W. Donald Hudson, *Philosophical Approach to Religion*, London : Macmillan Press, 1974, p. 91.

of believers do not seem to raise the question of the existence of God, neither do they feel the need to do so; yet, that has not diminished an iota of their religious belief. The existence of God is assumed by them as a manifest fact without further ado. Doctrinal or theological formulae and propositions may be the ostensible expressions of their inner trust in God, but this is not absolutely true. For example, the belief-that, that a theology is, may be indispensable for communicating the religious belief of the Christian, but an African tribe may have no need for such a dogmatic corpus or propositional formulations. It may even prove fatal to the belief-system of that tribe, that seeks to communicate its faith by way of ritual dance. Simpler and humbler folks have been, and remained, strong believers committing their life to God and still are ignorant of any propositional truths about God. If this were not the case, pre-literate societies would be without a belief-in God, therefore without a religion. This manifestly is not the case.

However, the independence of belief-in from belief-that seems rather tenuous. A believer, lettered, or unlettered, who puts his faith and trust in God, does entertain, however obscurely, in his mind a few basic truths about God. Irrespective of their expressed or unexpressed formulations, he gives assent to these truths. If this were not the case, we would be compelled to say that a deaf, dumb and blind person, cannot have a belief in God. This again is manifestly not true, because his life may have the belief that his God is powerful and loving, and that he can heal him if he so wills. ✓

Thus, there is a sense in which it could philosophically be argued that religious belief, seen either as belief-in or belief-that, is a complex phenomenon. The two orientations of belief are interdependent; but, in a sense, they are also independent. Philosophers have focussed their attention on one or the other. Aquinas may have highlighted on their interdependence, thereby laying the rational foundation for Christian theologies, or theodicies for any religion. Kierkegaard, as we shall see, on the contrary, may have highlighted the independence of the two, often vociferously that he smacks of an anti-rationalistic bias. But, he has thereby laid a Biblical foundation for types of Reformed theologies. There then is a tension between knowledge and religious belief, which we call faith. But the tension is, if anything, philosophically

creative. It now becomes imperative for us to examine the relation between knowledge and faith.

II. KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

Religious belief is an awareness of God in faith; it is a faith-awareness, expressed often in the language that is cognitive in character. Such cognitive pronouncements, as 'God created the earth', 'God loves mankind', are undoubtedly matters of interest to an epistemologist, who would seek to analyse this faith-awareness. Is this awareness, like any other awareness, a form of knowledge? Can we speak of a religious epistemology? Hence, epistemological investigation engages itself in the task of examining, 'whether the kind of cognition claimed is such as might reasonably be expected to occur, if there is a God to be known'.⁴ But the investigation has its own background. For the problematic question here is : What is the kind of knowledge, that we are concerned with, here? If faith is held out to be crucial and decisive in life and living, which as a matter of fact is, the knowledge in and of faith cannot be either discursive or directly given to the senses. If faith is to be authentic, knowledge in faith has to admit a kind of 'infallibility', not usually associated with sensation and conception. If we are still to retain in the idea of knowledge the analogy from our dominant sense of vision, this religio-epistemological vision may be interpreted with Hick as intellectual 'vision'.⁵ Or with Smith as intellectual 'insight'.⁶

(1) *A priori* Knowledge and Faith :

A religious man thinks of faith, if it is ever thought of in terms of knowledge, as absolutely true. It would then appear that, relating to faith, we would have to do with a kind of knowledge that is both self-authenticating and indubitable. So, when we are in the state of mind called 'religious knowing', what we know must be true. That X knows P entails that P is true. Unless we actually possess knowledge in this sense, there can be no certainty of anything, no fixed point upon which to build our experience we call 'faith'. Unless there are at least some items of indubitable knowledge, we are condemned to an endless relativity of shifting and differing opinions, - and this would be fatal for faith that is held to

4. Hick, *op. cit.* p. 2

5. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

6. Willfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 160.

be absolutely true. This is a traditional approach to the relation between knowledge and faith.

But this mode of knowing, though ideal, may not be philosophically rewarding. It represents 'a misleading approach to our field of enquiry'⁷ We are having to do with faith as a cognitive experience, a belief also with a cognitive attitude. The enquiry into it demands that we study the data, facts situation and also the expression of this experience. But the infallibilist mode of knowing implies an *a priori* concept of knowledge. The infallibilist philosophers and theologians, in a spirit of *a-priorism*, view human knowledge from the vantage point outside human nature and its existential situation.

The traditional idealization of the concept of knowledge seeks, in effect, to elevate knowledge to a 'metaphysical pearage in which it loses contact with common human experience'.⁸ It does not occur to use that there is such knowledge in the sense of an infallible acquaintance with truth or reality. There is no state or activity of mind, called knowing, which carries with it an absolute guarantee of freedom from error as long as we are humans. This is conceded, in principle, by the inevitable admission that we sometimes erroneously think that we know; and to allow, that we can mistakenly think that we know, is to abandon the claim that knowledge is infallible and indubitable. This is affirming the skeptic's stance, whose claim is not 'to know' in the ideal sense, but that there is no such occurrence as knowledge in the ideal sense. In this way all our cognitions are dubitable and fallible. If faith then has a cognitive dimension, it cannot be true *a priori*.

(2) *A posteriori* knowledge and faith :

If faith is not an *a priori* knowledge, can it be suggested then, that 'we are in the last resort thrown back upon the criterion of coherence with our mass of experience'.⁹ Briefly, is faith an *a posteriori* knowledge ?

Men of faith have made their religious claim that they know that God is real. They also claim for this knowledge a certainty based on an adequate ground of their religious experience. The position is advocated by John Hick and Terence Penelhum.¹⁰ Recently, Wilfred Cantwell Smith,¹¹ too, has emphasised on religious experience. According to him, faith is an experience of 'personal

7. Hick, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 203

9. *Ibid.*, p. 205

10. Terence Penelhum, *Problem of Religious Knowledge*, London : The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1971, p. 123 ff

11. Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

involvement' of the believer with God. Therefore to have an authentic knowledge and understanding of what faith is, one is to become oneself involved in, and to commit oneself personally to, God. In essence, Smith is pointing to the individual's experience of faith.

It is this experience of God in a dialogue, or communion with God, which is the believer's primary ground for being sure that God is real, and that faith in him is true. In an epistemological testing of such a ground, we must be careful to ask the right question. The question is not : Do accounts of the believer's experience of the divine presence and power provide an adequate reason for an unbeliever to reject the claim that God is real ? Again, the question is not : Can one validly infer the existence of God from the reports of religious experiences ? The answer to both questions is a ready No. But, the proper question is : Does the religious man's awareness of being in the unseen presence of God constitute a sufficient and valid ground for the religious man himself to be sure of the reality of God ? The man of faith considers himself to know certain things which the skeptic holds that he mistakenly believes. We do not readily have any agreed standards in sight, by which the disagreement between the believer and the skeptic can be resolved. This is not to state that they do not each have a set of standards for their respective claims. It only suggests that neither side will accept the sovereignty of the standards accepted by the other.

However, we need to take note of caveat here. We are not inquiring, here, whether there is any such thing as 'knowledge of God'. For an agreement on the question pre-supposes that there be first logically an agreement as to whether there is a God to be the object of such knowledge. These are ontological issues. But, what we are focussing on is the question, whether it is proper for the man of faith, who reports a compelling awareness of God, to claim to know that God exists. The question, being epistemological, calls for the explication of the circumstances in which it is reasonable for the man of faith to claim to have a 'rational certainty that there is a God'.¹² It is not the question whether there is a God. We must then keep the ontological and epistemological questions separated in the concerns of religious epistemology.

It seems that a sufficiently vivid religious experience would entitle a man of faith to claim to know God, and also that God is real. If his sense of the divine

12. Hick, *op.cit.* p. 210

presence is sufficiently powerful, he can hardly fail to make this knowledge-claim. He is certain that God exists, so certain that he does not feel the need for the proof for the existence of God. What is more, the believer would even go to such an extent, as Kierkegaard indeed does, that the demand for proofs for the existence of God would be tantamount to the denial of the existence of God. But, as philosophers, we probably cannot say that religious believers either know or do not know, what they consider themselves to know. But, if God exists, and the 'religious facts', they appeal to in support of their claims about him, are indeed what they say they are, then we do not have any reason to say that their situation does not amount to knowledge. But this is a hypothetical argument. One could deny this *a priori*, only if one could show that no knowledge-claim could be correct, especially in religious matters, unless it was supported by sufficient evidence, which all men, both believers and skeptics alike, could accept. However, the debate between them is not one that can be settled in this way. But this is not enough to show that the believer's knowledge-claims are erroneous. It can only suggest that it cannot be proved correct from the skeptic's premises. Conversely, the negative fact, that a skeptic does not himself have the experience of God, does not authorise him to deny that others do have this experience; or, for that matter, deny that a person, whose life is determined by this faith-awareness, can properly claim to know that God is real.

However, all said and done, any knowledge that appeals to and builds on, experience does not command unquestioned certainty. This is so not because such a knowledge is not possible, but because our sense experience is, in principle, fallible. We lack the means for establishing the necessary truth of any knowledge acquired by sense experience. In order to be absolutely certain, we would have to be able, at least, to show that it is impossible to be false. But the very fact, that our sense experience deals with changing things, and that we ourselves are equally subject to it, suggests that what we believe we know to be true, could be false. How then do we establish an authentic knowledge of faith on the basis of experience ?

(3) Synthesis of Conceptual and Intuitive Knowledge :

Following Trethowan,¹³ I shall suggest here a way out of the difficulty of the knowledge of faith in a synthesis between the *a priori* and *a posteriori*

13. Dom Iltyd Trethowan, *The Absolute and the Atonement*, London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971.

knowledge. I do grant that the solution may have problems, nonetheless, it is philosophically significant, although Trethowan himself proposes it in a different context. The starting point within this scheme is that the knowledge of faith involves a synthesis of the natural and supernatural knowledge. All supernatural knowledge depends upon natural knowledge to the extent that it can arise only on the basis of natural knowledge. If this were not the case, we could not even know it to be knowledge for us. All human knowledge is rooted in natural knowledge. The difference however lies in the fact that it is not an enlargement of the natural knowledge. Supernatural knowledge is a direct intuitive awareness of God. Such knowledge is attested most obviously by the experience of the mystics. Natural knowledge arises from the natural power of knowing God. The power properly belongs to man, in virtue of his being created in God's image.¹⁴

Our knowledge of faith is *a priori*, in the sense that the very capacity for knowledge, on the part of man, is rooted in his being created in God's image. God being the ultimate principle of intelligibility, man's intellectual life is derivative. Granting the existence of this power, man is capable of knowing, not only his environment but also the basis of his being, however, imperfectly the latter be. I am aware, the solution has its own problems. It presupposes a good deal of what it wants to establish. Nonetheless, every epistemology has its own metaphysical matrix, within which it operates. If so, it can be said that the tension observed earlier between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* mode of knowing seems to have been, to some extent, settled in this synthesis of intuitive and conceptual knowledge.

It should now be possible to press for an *a priori* mode of reasoning into the service of making faith reasonable, intelligible and authentic, by using concepts in the building of doctrinal formulations. These formulations, built out of human concepts, legitimately refer to the relation in which we stand to God. The minimum that can be expected here is that 'the concepts are genuine pointers'.¹⁵ The conceptual structures of the doctrine of faith play a positive role : Firstly, they are designed to preserve the faith against such interpretation of faith that do violence to the concerned ontology. Secondly, we stand on need of dynamic conceptual structures, since it is through these we express the faith we profess.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

The advantage of this synthetic approach is that it accommodates both belief-in and belief-that in the single act of faith.

Human mind craves naturally for knowledge. The mind, in quest of a union with God, functions at two interconnecting planes, that of symbols and ideas. The first is the existential, the second, the conceptual plane. Knowledge by means of concepts is a natural process of the human mind. It is in this light that all discursive knowledge, be it in philosophy or theology, is a pointer to the knowledge of faith. It may make use of the ordinary powers of human reasoning in espousing the cause of faith. Moreover, it is the business of philosophical and theological conceptions to organise the truths of faith into a coherent system. Philosophy, in particular, does this by following the laws of human reasoning. Knowledge of faith by means of symbols too is yet another approach to reality. However, it operates on the plane of not so much the concepts as symbols. Symbols are not at the cognitive level, but at the affective level, although the power of symbols may be archetypically immanent to the mind. But it is a depth-level of the mind, hence, they may be said to lie at the existential rather than the essential plane.

More important, however, for our analysis of faith-knowledge, is the direct intuitive awareness of God. This is the supernatural knowledge referred to earlier. This awareness of God's transcendence may be constitutive of the human mind. The awareness concerned is not only authenticated but also enriched in the mystical experience of the believer. In the knowledge of faith, the element of intuition is prior to conceptual knowledge, though it may be said to depend on the latter for its crystallization. The latter is important because the intuitive knowledge is both evaluated, and not allowed to degenerate, by it. For, if intuition and conceptual knowledge both reflect the two aspects of the selfsame divine intelligibility, they ought not to contradict each other. Hence, it may be said that the intuitive knowledge is articulated in universal concepts in the form of doctrinal formulations of faith. This is the significance of the statement that supernatural knowledge depends upon natural knowledge, though it does not grow out of it: 'faith illuminates the intelligence to know the incomprehensible,'¹⁶ Faith, in terms of this intuitive experience, is prior to the concepts and formulations of faith. But faith in the first sense needs the latter

16. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

for its expression. The advantage of this synthesis, again, is the incorporation of the cognitive and affective attitudes to faith.

In the light of what has been said above, it should now be possible for us to equate Hick's intellectual 'vision' and Smith's intellectual 'insight' and Penelhum's 'immediate knowledge' with Trethowan's supernatural knowledge or intuitive knowledge. They all refer to the immediate element of the knowledge of faith. Again, the 'experiential' knowledge, advocated both by Hick and Penelhum, as the proper mode of the knowledge of faith, is not to be identified with the 'empirical knowledge', the datum of which is indeterminate and dubious.

A crucial element within the intuitive knowledge in Trethowan's solution of the problem of knowledge must also be taken note of : This is the gratuitousness of faith.¹⁷ The cognitive content of faith, it may be granted, does not make faith an arbitrary human decision. If faith is totally arbitrary, then, there is no knowledge of faith at all. But, on the other side of the coin, it is equally true that faith is gratuitous, this at least is the case in the Christian context. The supernatural dimension of faith suggests that it is facilitated by the initial movement of God to man, rather than the movement of man to God. It is given by God to man, enabling him to have a communion with God. Man, as the believer, participates in that givenness, involves and engages himself in it, and in this way develops a 'faith-knowledge'. It is the knowledge of faith by involvement. All knowledge of faith therefore is built, not out of the materials at man's disposal, conceptual or symbolic, but of the givenness of faith; and the intuitive awareness, that faith is, crystallizes itself in the act of involvement and engagement. This brings me directly to the essentials of faith, as the divine givenness of self-communication to man.

III. FAITH IN ITS ESSENTIALS

Since my study of faith with special reference to Kierkegaard dwells primarily on the problem of what faith essentially is, I shall be brief, here in this chapter. My three chapters address themselves to one or the other aspect of faith, with a view to highlight the specific contribution of Kierkegaard.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Nevertheless, fidelity to the discussion of faith, as a category of religion, demands, to say the least, a passing mention of the essentials of faith.

One may believe all the propositional truths about God. Likewise one may secure and authenticate that belief by direct, indubitable and infallible certainty, both by conceptual and intuitive knowledge to call it now faith. But what is faith? The simple answer is : Faith is, firstly, an ultimate concern; and secondly, faith is a voluntary act of trust in God. Both the characterizations are explicated in the context of Christian faith.

(1) **Faith as Ultimate Concern :**

Influenced by Kierkegaard, Tillich defines faith as the ultimate concern : 'Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned'.¹⁸ It may be useful to begin with this definition, since it has within itself the generic characteristic of faith in any religion or, for that matter, even in what Tillich calls, 'pseudo-religions'. Faith then is a concern characterized by an ultimacy. When one is concerned with God as the ultimate *telos* of one's life, one may be said to have faith. It is the ultimate, in the sense that one has the strong conviction in the object of his faith, one has arrived at the stage in one's life beyond which it is logically impossible to go. Since the object of the religious faith is the transcendent God, the Beyond, it is logically meaningless to speak of going beyond the Beyond. As the ultimate concern, faith invariably demands an absolute devotion to its object. The individual has a host of human concerns, some of them are vital and urgent, but, when faith claims its ultimacy, all the other concerns are subjugated to it. Tillich thinks that 'the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of ultimate concern'.¹⁹

The characterization given is generic, because Tillich is willing to apply it to human concerns that are passionately adhered to with a religious devotion, even when they are purely mundane concerns. Hence, his concept, 'pseudo-religion', to nationalism, communism etc. Faith in them implies a doctrine in the form of ideology, often a prophet and a 'god' and, above all, a millennium in the concept of ideal nation, society etc. The passionate nationalisms of our century in a way qualify to the nomenclature of ultimate concern, therefore, of faith in a generic sense. For everything is centred in that one and only 'god', the nation, - that clearly shows the unconditional character of ultimate concern. Personal and familial concerns, if any, however urgent and

18. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, London : Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1957, p. 20

19. *Ibid.*

vital, are subjected to the 'nation-god'. But this is an ultimate concern that, while sharing certain generic character of faith, is in reality an usurpation of the rights of religious faith.

At the mundane level, all ultimate concern is of finite significance. But the ultimate concern of faith is of infinite significance, because the content of this concern is the transcendent. Other forms of faith however have put on the garb of the transcendent, while in reality they are mere 'idols'. In the Semitic religions, the ultimate concern, in so far as it is determined by God, can have only God as its object. Hence the element of ultimacy properly belongs to the Absolute, that is constitutive of religious faith.

(2) Faith as a Voluntary Act of Trust :

While religious faith is objectively constituted by the transcendent God as its object, it is subjectively constituted by a voluntary act of trust and surrender, on the part of the man of faith. Here it is a surrender of one's total personality, an act of trust and personal commitment to God. Trust then is recognised as the quintessence of faith. Both in the theological and philosophical writings, the Latin *fiducia* is used definitely of faith as trust and personal commitment, as distinct from *fides*, which is a mere assent to propositions. Faith as *fiducia* therefore is not so much an assent to the truth about God, but an ascent to the God of all truths. The believer looks up vertically, as it were, to God, and commits his life to Him, and trusts Him unconditionally for his life here and hereafter. If we are to relate faith to belief, it is more a belief-in than a belief-that.

But, when faith is said to be an act of trust, it is legitimate to ask, what is the character of this act? A ready answer is that it is a voluntary act. I would like to dwell more on this voluntary affirmation, since it marvellously synthesizes belief, knowledge and faith, as a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Theological and philosophical treatises on faith have got to take into consideration such a synthesis, if they are not to make faith either pure cognitive contemplation or a mere affective sentimentalism. Hence, Hick refuses to view faith as 'a completely theoretic affair,' in spite of the fact that it may have a cognitive content. Rather, 'faith is a "yes" of self-committment', a 'volitional response' which takes us out of the theoretic attitude'.²⁰

20. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 32

For all his rationalistic indebtedness to Aristotle, Aquinas had a strong sense of realism in matters of religion. Hence he described faith as an act of the intellect moved by the will, and, shorn of this volitional commitment, there would be no faith. Here is the distinctive trait of faith, in contrast with mere belief: Faith belongs to the realm of will and action, however, not totally devoid of intellectual apprehension. Faith is not merely an assent that something is true, it is rather our readiness to act on what we believe to be true. Kierkegaard may shift the ground in making an act of will itself, at times even devoid of intellection. If he has been wiser on this account is yet to be seen. Nonetheless, the dynamism of faith is to be grasped in the dialectical play between intellect and will, between the 'being' and the 'good', and, at a particular stage in the history of Western philosophy, between 'essence' and 'existence'.

Christian philosophers, in general, today, take the will 'as the faculty which is primarily operative in the act of faith'.²¹ If they are neo-scholastics, they would also add that the will must always follow the intellect, in the sense that we can will nothing unless we have some knowledge of it. But committed voluntarists are ready to abandon this principle, because for them the freedom of the will is sovereign and superior to reason. Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy of faith must be located at this juncture. Trust and personal commitment are not conceptual, but volitional, in their implication, and these are constitutive of faith as *fiducia*. It is significant that, in the Bible faith appears frequently as *fiducia* rather than *fides*. When faith is posted as trust and commitment, the reality of the divine Being is assumed throughout as the manifest Good. Perhaps, it is only when the religious believer comes to reflect upon his religion and faith, in the capacity of a philosopher, that he is obliged to concern himself with the noetic status of faith.

IV. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

In conclusion, faith is not belief, if belief is understood as cognition based on the evidence of the senses. Here, Plato is right in distinguishing it even from knowledge. But, if religious belief is equated with faith, we need clearly to make the distinction between belief-in and belief-that. Whereas belief-in comes closest to faith, in so far as it is a trust in God conceived as the ultimate concern of one's life, belief-that makes for the cognitive content of faith. But, faith as

21. Trethowan, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

such resides in the innermost being of man. Belief, generally stated, refers to the belief-that. It constitutes intellectual positions, that appear historically in different forms, that are the theologies of a religion at a given time. Contrasted with it, faith is a spiritual phenomenon. It is possible to believe without having faith, for men may recognise intellectually God's existence, yet not surrender themselves to God in an act of trust and commitment. We can formulate propositions necessary for belief, but we cannot formulate a religious faith, since faith precedes, pervades, and often evades all its formulations. Belief however can be a legitimate overt expression of faith, even as a system of symbols can also be an expression. ✓ Clarify

Belief, then, is closer to knowledge than is knowledge to faith. Yet, when philosophers of religion have said that faith is an 'intuitive knowledge', it is not the knowledge of the order of cognitive propositions, the kind of which one meets in the belief-that. Nonetheless, faith is characterized by an inner certitude that in-forms every sphere of human life, cognitive, affective and conative alike.

Lastly, while faith is not identical with knowledge, we can still speak of a knowledge of faith. It should be possible to employ concepts readily available in our culture and philosophy to explore the possible meanings of religious faith. Conceptual structures, in respect of faith-experience, are necessary for knowing and understanding faith, to the extent that it is a human experience. But, to the extent that it is a human experience of transcendent realities, the understanding may not be exhaustive. But this should not inhibit the philosophical venture of the human mind. The little that we know here does indeed contribute to the apprehension, if not the comprehension, of these realities. Thus a philosophy of religion makes for a genuine and legitimate knowledge of faith, in spite of Kierkegaard's invectives here. ✓

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CHAPTER III

PARTICULARITY OF FAITH-RELATION TO THE ABSOLUTE

- I. UNIVERSAL TELEOLOGY OF THE ETHICAL**
- II. THE PARADOXICAL SUSPENSION OF THE TELEOLOGY
OF THE ETHICAL**
- III. TEMPTATION AGAINST THE PARTICULARITY OF FAITH**
- IV. PARTICULARITY OF FAITH UNMEDIATED**
- V. CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Chapter - III

PARTICULARITY OF FAITH-RELATION TO THE ABSOLUTE

In this chapter, I propose to investigate into the dynamism of faith, opened for every existing individual. A key feature of the dynamism is the particularity of faith. I will attempt, firstly, to make an enquiry into the teleology of the ethical and its dynamism, in the Kierkegaardian scheme. I shall also discuss here the contradiction, implicit in the possibility of the individual becoming the particular *vis-a-vis* the universal. Secondly, I will discuss the paradox of suspending teleology of the ethical itself in the particularity of faith-relation. A question, then, posed before us is: Whether the man of faith has succumbed to 'temptation', when he suspends teleologically the ethical? I will therefore examine the concept of temptation itself, not from the point of view of Christian theology, but from that of the Kierkegaardian philosophy. Thirdly, I will address myself to the problem of mediation in ethics and religion for establishing the incommensurability between mediation and faith-particularity. This incommensurability makes for the solitariness of the man of faith. This too needs to be discussed. I will end the chapter with a critical appraisal of the salient features of the particularity of faith.

I. UNIVERSAL TELEOLOGY OF THE ETHICAL

(1) The Ethical as Man's Highest *Telos* :

In Problem 1 of *Fear and Trembling*¹, Kierkegaard posits the ethical as man's highest *telos*. He, as a philosopher and a theologian, cannot conceive for the individual at the ethical stage² of any other higher goal. It is logically absurd to think of anything higher than the highest. The ethical 'reposes immanently in itself', it has nothing outside itself which is its *telos*'.³ Thus construed, the ethical is an autonomous and sovereign authority, which encompasses the individual into its jurisdiction and influence. The ethical, therefore, is the absolute and, as the absolute, it is infinitely valid in itself. It cannot be a means to an end, precisely because it is an end in itself. As an end in itself, it may be interpreted as the highest and ultimate aim, both dominant in, and determinant of, the individual's life and existence. As man's highest aim and calling in life, the ethical constitutes

1. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Trans. Walter Lowrie, New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1954.

2. Following his '*Stage of Existence*' viz., the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious.

3. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 64.

a veritable *raison d'être* for his life. We cannot therefore, conceive for the individual to have another *telos* outside the ethical, because such a *telos* is ^{un}known outside. As a matter of fact, the individual expresses himself in and through it. That the ethical is man's highest calling serves also as an expression for the fact, that there is a rational order of things in that sphere of existence, in which every man fills his place.

The dynamics of the ethical are also the dynamics of the individual's ultimate concern, as such the ethical claims ultimacy for the individual's life. If it claims this ultimacy, then, it also rightfully demands an unconditional surrender. In the light of this, the ethical assumes upon itself a dignified predicate, which Kierkegaard calls the 'divine'.⁴ But, to Kierkegaard, this characterization of the ethical as 'divine' is not intended to convey a religious import. All that Kierkegaard wants to understand by it is that the ethical has within itself a universal nobility. Within the compass of the ethical the individual performs his duty. Since there are various gradations within the ethical itself, the individual may be required sometimes to **sacrifice** one ethical obligation in favour of another higher one. But, even in this act of infinite sacrifice, he still remains within the fortress of the ethical and its *telos*. This is exemplified by the tragic hero, who, at the behest of duty, makes an infinite sacrifice, yet remains within the ethical without crossing its threshold. At the ethical stage, Kierkegaard argues, the ethical itself is the 'divine' and the highest *telos*. This divine attribution of the ethical in the Kierkegaardian conception is indicative of the strong tie between morality and religion in Kierkegaard's philosophy.

In addition to this attribution, Kierkegaard bestows yet another characterization on the ethical: 'the ethical is the breath of the eternal'.⁵ This too must be interpreted in the above spirit. Even as in the Kantian sense, the categorical moral command implies a supreme author, for Kierkegaard too, the ethical seems to be bordering on the religious. He affirms that the 'the religious sphere . . . lies so close to the ethical that they are in constant communication with one another'.⁶ The ethical individual peeps continually into the religious sphere; therefore, he cannot but every now and then gaze into the eternal. In other words, as the ethical lies so close to the religious, the ethical individual virtually has a consciousness of the eternal which, it may be argued, inspires him for moral action. Kierkegaard admits that action 'only in the ethical is your

4. Fear and Trembling, p. 70.

5. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Trans. David F. Swenson, London: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 136.

6. *Postscript*, p. 145.

eternal consciousness'.⁷ Thus the 'divine' and the 'eternal' are admitted as predicates of the ethical, and this is sufficient ground for the proposition that the ethical is the highest *telos*. It makes an absolute claim upon the individual. Immanent and infinite is then the teleology of the ethical. Such a *telos* is to be desired for itself, and everything else for the sake of it.

(2) The Ethical as the Universal :

Kierkegaard also holds that the ethical is the universal.⁸ For it is **applicable to all**, barring none, and **at all times**. The ethical-universal is not subject to man's option: He cannot opt himself out of it today, and be in it again tomorrow. There is no moral holiday for man. In other words, as the ethical is the universal, it has *eo ipso* a universal applicability and relevance, not circumscribed by any spatio-temporal limitations. That it applies to every one at every instant everywhere is a *fait accompli*, not subjected to any pugnacious contention. Kierkegaard often hyphenates the ethical and the universal into one single concept. It may be argued that it is this universality, inherent in the ethical, which accounts for its absolute claim on man.

Kierkegaard holds in high esteem the ethical-universal as the province, which alone gives authenticity to the existence of the individual. The individual discovers his content and significance of his life only in and through the ethical-universal. Kierkegaard's view of the ethical appears Kantian, in the sense that it is identified strictly as a universal imperative. Both for Kant and Kierkegaard, any moral obligation is an unqualified imperative. Outside the ethical-universal, the individual is a mere unethical abstraction.

The problem that Kierkegaard addresses himself to is this: Is there a possibility to evacuate oneself from the ethical-universal, and then, to become superior to it? If the possibility is admitted, it is unimaginable what form of life, in the normal sense of the term, holds beyond the pale of the universal sphere of reference, that serves as the 'basis of all understanding between man and man'.⁹ The whole spectrum of inter-personal relations can be conceived to exist only in the ethical-universal, and outside its boundary no relation can be perceived. What is it like to be a polarized individual, or to have a particularized existence, in the domain of the universal?

7. *Postscript*, p. 134.

8. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 6.

9. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*, Trans. David F. Swenson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952, p. xviii.

(3) The 'Individual-Universal' Co-relation :

Hegel is the philosopher-spokesman for the universal par excellence. In his *Philosophy of Right*, he convincingly construes a correlation between the universal and the particular, and the latter has 'value and dignity in so far as its insight and intention accords with the (universal) good'.¹⁰ For Hegel, the individual's existence can be conceived of only within the domain of the universal. The particular individual is what it is, and can be what it ought to be, only as it situates and actuates itself in the universal. There is an ethical teleology set for the individual, and it is the universal. Kierkegaard aptly summarises the Hegelian view:

The task which the ethical individual sets himself is to transform himself into the universal man. Only the ethical individual seriously renders an account of himself and is therefore honest with himself, only he has paradigmatic grace and decorum which is more beautiful than any other.¹¹

The ethical task for the individual is that he is accountable to none other than the universal. He is responsible to himself to live ethically, thereby expressing the universal in and through his life. For he, who lives ethically, has also the task to 'become the universal man'.¹²

Kierkegaard observes that, for Hegel, the individual and the universal are not externally polarized. Instead, Hegel argues in favour of a co-existence of the two in a dialectical context. The Hegelian synthesis is always in favour of the universal. The individual is 'annulled',¹³ in the sense of being absorbed in the universal. If the individual is said to have 'risen' to a different level of existence, it is only at the felicitous annulment of his particularity. But, while admitting the method of Hegelian dialectics, Kierkegaard holds a view here diametrically opposed to that of Hegel. As an existentialist, he would never allow the annulment of the individuality in the dialectical opposition between the universal and the particular. He writes :

10. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Trans. T. M. Knox, London : Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 15. Hegel employs the term 'good', construing it as the universal. Kierkegaard interprets this as the 'moral', and we may assume this to be synonymous with the ethical-universal.

11. Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. II, Trans. Walter Lowrie, London: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 265.

12. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 260.

13. 'Annul' is only a poor approximation for Hegelian *aufheben*.

For this universal can very well coexist with and in the particular without consuming it; it is like the fire which burned in the bush without consuming it.¹⁴

Whereas for Hegel the individual is to divest his concretion to find his universal goal, for Kierkegaard, too, the universal is not outside the particular individual. It co-exists in the individual. It 'lies deepest in the soul'.¹⁵ It is in this sense that the ethical-universal may be said to reside in the particular individual. It is inherent in his inner being. Ethical consciousness enables the individual for great and noble undertakings in the world, when the occasion demands. True ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost limit of one's power the disinterested accomplishment. Ethicists have duly recognised and cheered the spontaneous and self-imposed discipline in the cause of a desired well-being of the society. Such a selfless and communitarian individual is the universal man. The difference in Kierkegaard's thinking here with the Hegelian consists in this, that the dialectical process is in favour of the particular individual. Particularity is not to be annulled at any cost, rather the universal should come to be co-related with the individual.

Kierkegaard argues that, if the ethical-universal is posited as being externally related to the particular individual, 'then one has abandoned everything, then one has fallen into despair'.¹⁶ For without the commitment to the ethical-universal, one has fallen into the mere possibilities of the aesthetical. Kierkegaard is concerned to show that the particular individual loses all his concretion, if he does not have the universal within him. The individual, devoid of the ethical-universal, is abstract; he has nothing by which his existence can be concretized. Devoid of the universal, there is nothing by which his existence can be authenticated. Hence the more the universal, the more 'extraordinary man is'.¹⁷ The less universal he is, the more imperfect he is. Hence it is a noble task for the individual human to express the universal in his life. Therefore, in this coexistence of the universal and the particular, the individual is not consumed in the **flame** of the universal; he is not reduced to a mere cog in the universal machine, but in and through the universal, the individual gains his authentic existence. But the Hegelian assertion of the universal over the particular creates serious philosophical problems for Kierkegaard in the explication of faith.

14. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p.266.

15. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p.261.

16. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 258.

17. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 333. Being extraordinary in Kierkegaard's argument means 'perfectly ordinary'.

(4) Assertion of Particularity :

In an overwhelming manner, Hegel opines that the meaning and significance of the particular individual is obtained in the ethical-universal. But at the same time, we find in Hegel an impressive case for maintaining the universal at the cost of a total annulment of the individual. The ethical-universal, so long as it remains abstract, cannot hope for accomplishment, and to be accomplished 'it must acquire in addition, the character of particularity'.¹⁸ Hence particularity is a necessary condition of the universal. On the other hand, Hegel holds that the particularity of the individual over against the universal is an expression of moral delinquency. For the assertion, that the particular can exist outside the universal, is the reverse image of things; this is a form of moral evil, which must be vehemently discountenanced. Hegel locates the source, from which springs forth the moral evil, in the mystery of freedom of the particular individual. Particularity then is 'sin' to the Hegelian idealists.

Ethico-religionists and ethico-humanists alike are acutely aware of the damaging effect of the assertion of particularity against the universal. History of human civilization is an eloquent witness to the havocs wrought by this unbridled individualism, where one has too often become a law unto oneself. Hence ethically conscientious men have strained their nerves to abrogate their individuality to become selfless universal man. Hence their pursuit for the righteousness of self-realization has been to abrogate the self and thus find its fulfilment in cosmic consciousness. In that bid they withdraw themselves from the empirical world, and sacrifice their self for the universal goal. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, is opposed to this merger of the individual, in the context of faith-relation, with the universal.

II. THE PARADOXICAL SUSPENSION OF THE TELEOLOGY OF THE ETHICAL-UNIVERSAL

(1) The Paradox Exemplified :

Fear and Trembling, as Kierkegaard himself says in the subtitle, is a lyrical poetry on faith. It brings out as the problemata an unfamiliar and extraneous category of relationship which holds outside the ethical-universal. It is the faith-relation to the Absolute. In it one may be required to extricate oneself |

18. Hegel, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

from the ethical-universal, and to transcend it for the sake of an absolute relation to God. To exemplify this concept of faith, Kierkegaard picks up from the Bible the classical story of Abraham. The story is too well known to merit repetition. Abraham, like any father, loves his only son Issac dearly. The more so, because he has received the promise that, through Issac, his progeny would multiply on the earth, to say nothing of the fact of Isaac being the child of his old age. And, now, Abraham is called upon by God to demonstrate his faith by sacrificing his only beloved son. To love and protect his child is an ethical duty to which a father is obligated. But, he goes to carry out the divine command, not out of a pusillanimous and fearful spirit, but in a spirit of religious dread and courage, bearing all the anguish of a personal loss. Abraham believed in God. At the awesome moment of raising the glittering knife God intervenes. His faith is demonstrated in this dreadful exercise, and Abraham gets his son back into his bosom. The episode itself needs to be carefully analysed to understand the dynamics of the particularity of faith.

Abraham has his ethical obligation towards his son, and, at that, he is perfectly in tune with the universal. That Abraham has perfect ethical sensibility, far exceeding that of his neighbours, is stated unmistakably. Indeed, the ethical consciousness itself is a source of anguish to him. But, for the sake of the absolute relation to the Absolute, Abraham, as the individual, asserts his particularity over against the universal; the particular now becomes higher than the universal. The Hegelian dialectics is turned topsy-turvy. To Hegel this is tantamount to moral evil, but, to Kierkegaard, the horrifying act is supposedly faith.

For, the story illustrated contains a teleological suspension of the ethical. In other words, the *telos* of the ethical-universal, which was stated to be categorical, may at times be suspended, if the occasion so demanded in faith. For Kierkegaard, this is a towering paradox that evades all human understanding. In consonance with the principles of understanding, it is by virtue of one's subordination of one's particularity to the ethical-universal that the individual essentially becomes the universal man. But, in accordance with the principle of the paradox, be it noted, it is not this **subordination** to, but the **suspension** of the *telos* of, the ethical-universal that constitutes the basis of faith, and thus gives authenticity to the existence of the 'exister' as a believer.

Moreover, it is ironical that faith is said to sanctify such a sacrilegious act of violating the ethical. This is a paradox par excellence, and is supposedly faith, exercised by virtue of the 'absurd'; and faith, as it were, requires for its qualification the constancy of this absurd. The absurd is a new category, introduced in *Fear and Trembling*, to denote the paradox of faith. This category calls for some philosophical reflections.

(2) The Category of the Absurd :

The concept of the absurd is synonymous with that of paradox. While the former is etymologically negative, the latter is positive, but both are what they are so intensely in virtue of their judgement on the limitations of rational understanding. Absurd thus is suggestive of what cannot be grasped intellectually. The paradox, on the other hand, is suggestive of any two ideas that are parallel but apparently contradictory. In either case, reason and understanding, before the absurd and the paradox, are rendered powerless; they cannot read in them either sense or non-sense. Supposing reason has the wit to establish that the absurd and the paradox of faith are nonsensical, such a verdict is an ample demonstration of its limitations; in them reason confronts its own frontiers, beyond which it cannot stretch. In other words, reason cannot comprehend faith. The absurd is at once a symbol, and a riddle, about which reason, to be free, fair and frank, must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood. But it does not follow thereby that the absurdity of faith is nonsense. Thus, it is absurd that, for the sake of faith-relationship with God, a believer should be compelled to suspend teleologically the ethical-universal as well as infinitely resign the relative and the finite, wherein he has his life rooted as an existing individual. Faith is inexplicable to reason; the objective observer from outside cannot understand it, and the believer has to be **alone** with the absurd to appropriate it subjectively. This again is a peculiar characteristic of the particularity of faith-relationship.

Furthermore, the absurd is the 'expression of despair',¹⁹ because, humanly speaking, it is not possible to assert one's particularity over against the ethical-universal; it is rationally incomprehensible that the individual should become superior to the ethical-universal, in order to become a believer, and seek a *telos* outside the universal. All the same, necessarily, the absurd has to

19. *Journal and Papers*, Vol. 3, Edts. and Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong, London: Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 6.

be there as a negative criterion of the faith- relationship to God. There is an intrinsic inter-relationship between faith and the absurd, faith and the paradox. They are decidedly the inseparables. Otherwise there is no Christian faith, but only what passes for a belief in something, not known however, now, but not the unknowable and the mysterious in its religious sense. The *Journal* uses an analogy :

Love makes one blind. Yes, but it nevertheless is a cursed thing to become blind -- well, then, you can just diminish the blindness a little so that one does not become entirely blind. But take care - for when you diminish the blindness, you also diminish the love, because love makes one entirely blind.²⁰

An attempt at mitigating the blindness entails in love the cessation of love. Even so, analogically, true faith is said to breathe healthily and blessedly in the absurd. Weaker faith, by its very nature, must have to peer and speculate, just like a weaker love does, since it does not have the courage to become entirely blind. The analogy then between the life of love and of faith is a close one. Both need the element of risk as integral to them.

Therefore it is in virtue of the principle of the absurd that the knight of faith is called upon to undertake the improbable and the unthinkable enterprise of faith. He practises faith, relinquishing the rationality and the comfort of every form of universal intermediary, be it the moral or the social ethos of his community, the state and the church. This is not to suggest that faith is a licence to moral bankruptcy. For Kierkegaard, the dynamics of faith are such that it is not in reality what it appears to be. It is the principle for him in faith relationship that **nothing seems what it is and nothing is what it seems to be**. Faith is a passion which is both structured and sustained by virtue of the absurd and the paradox.

III. TEMPTATION AGAINST THE PARTICULARITY OF FAITH

In faith-relation the particular is pitted over against the universal. Even so, there may be a demand for the paradoxical suspension of the teleology of the ethical-universal. Kierkegaard points out, the ethical-universal may present itself as the 'temptation' against the exercise of faith and its particularity. It is expedient at thus juncture to investigate into this concept of temptation. This I

20. *Journal*, p. 7.

intend to do, not in general, nor with reference to Christian theology, but with specific reference to Kierkegaard's philosophy of faith.

(1) **Interpretation of Temptation :**

Both *Fear and Trembling* and the *Postscript* employ the German *Anfechtung*,²¹ which is indiscriminately translated in English as 'temptation'. This has occasioned a lot of confusion, although one can contextually be led to construe the meaning of Kierkegaard's statements. *Anfechtung* implies a transgression of a set of norms and values, generally accepted and observed in the society as institutionalized standards for life and conduct. Thus conceived, *Anfechtung* is essentially either a 'civic' or a 'moral' offence. The latter however comes to be interpreted as 'sin' in religious circles, since the source of law is considered to be God. In *Fear and Trembling* one meets with a juxtaposition of the categories of sin and moral offence, both the meanings captured by *Anfechtung*. When Kierkegaard wants to highlight the Hegelian concept of moral offence, he invariably refer to *Anfechtung* :

As soon as the individual asserts himself in his particularity over against the universal, he sins, and only by recognising this can be reconcile himself with the universal. Whenever the individual after he has entered the universal feels an impulse to assert himself as the particular, he is in temptation (*Anfechtung*), and he can labor himself out of this only by penitently abandoning himself as the particular in the universl.²²

Hegel regards the assertion of particularity in the universal as a 'moral form of evil'. He asks for its annulment in the teleology of the moral-universal. If the particular individual remains in this state of assertion of his particularity, it is said, then, he is 'either sinning or subjected to temptation (*Anfechtung*)'.²³ Therefore, *Anfechtung* is, we may suggest, in *Fear and Trembling*, a moral weakness, which renders the individual vulnerable to the inducement and temptation to deviate from the path of what is right and good.

The *Postscript*, however, interprets the concept of *Anfechtung* in terms of an ordeal or suffering, coming in the way of the godly and the righteous. Here one might prefer to translate *Anfechtung* as the 'trial of temptation', a situation in which the believer is put to a trial in trying circumstances to test and prove his faith in God. The assumption here would be that there are temptations and

21. Walter Lowrie prefers to retain the German term in his translation. The Danish word, *Anfaegtelse*, is equally multifaceted in meaning.

22. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 65.

23. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 65.

temptations. There is temptation that lures and attracts,²⁴ leading to moral offence and sin. There is also temptation that appals the individual on the path of faith, either strengthening or causing the loss of faith. The first type of temptation is discussed by theology, in general, but the second type is specifically discussed by Kierkegaard :

Within the sphere of the religious suffering there lies a special type of religious conflict the Germans call *Anfechtung*, which category finds its determination only in this connection . . . As soon as we leave out the relationship to absolute *telos* and let this exhaust itself in relative ends, *Anfechtung* ceases to exist. *Anfechtung* is in the sphere of God-relationship what temptation is in the ethical sphere.²⁵

Therefore, *Anfechtung* implies a conflict and a tension the believer experiences in the sphere of a God-relationship. Thus to illumine the lyrical poetic spirit of *Fear and Trembling*, we must make the idea of the *Postscript* bear upon those of the former. If we do so, we can perhaps capture the meaning of *Anfechtung* even in such terms as *Fristelse* in *Fear and Trembling*.²⁶

Once we take note of the two meanings involved here we need not make a distinction between *Anfechtung* and temptation. The following passage must be read in the light of our above discussion :

When the ethical relationship to reality is the maximum for the individual, then temptation is his greatest danger. Hence it is quite in order that *Anfechtung* is left out, and it is only an instance of slovenliness that it is identified with temptation. But it is not only in the manner just described that *Anfechtung* differs from temptation, but the orientation of the individual is also different in the two cases. In temptation, it is the lower that tempts, in *Anfechtung* it is the higher; in temptation, it is the lower that allures the individual, in *Anfechtung*, it is the higher that, as if jealous of the individual, tries to frighten him back. *Anfechtung* therefore originates first in the essentially religious sphere, and occurs there only in the final stage, increasing quite properly in proportions to that of the religiosity, because the individual has discovered the limit, and *Anfechtung* expresses the reaction of the limit against the finite individual.²⁷

Thus temptation is a situation confined to the stage of the ethical, but *Anfechtung* is a problem exclusively confined to the stage of the religious. Temptation assails the weaker individual. To Kierkegaard, the ethical

24. Swenson develops this idea in a footnote to his translation of the *Postscript*. see p. 569.

25. *Postscript*, p. 410.

26. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 70.

27. *Postscript*, p. 410.

individual is still weaker in comparison with the religious. *Anfechtung*, on the other hand, is the 'nemesis upon the strong moment in the absolute relationship to the absolute'. The greater the religious faith, the greater the trial of faith.

Although the above distinction is not made with clarity in *Fear and Trembling*, it now suffices us to examine which type of temptation is referred to. In the context of Kierkegaard's knight of faith, temptation in question is one which has a repellant rather than an attractive effect; it clearly is not an enticement to pleasure. The knight of faith is sandwiched between the horns of a dilemma: Either a refuge in the ethical-universal or the risk of faith. Is it possible for him to suspend and transcend the ethical-universal, which is within its own sphere the highest telos with the predicates, 'divine' and 'eternal'? Is it possible for him to absolutize his faith-relationship with God at the cost of his moral obligation and, then, be consigned consequently to 'divine madness'? Is it possible for him to absolutize his faith-relationship, an enterprise against all categories of understanding? Or should he relativize his faith-relationship, thus making room for his deference of, and obligation to, the ethical at the intermediary level? The last of the disjunctive is the temptation for the man of faith. A nonplus situation for the believer, a 'trial of temptation' proper, effecting an agonizing tension as its property; such a tension is of a religious character. This religious tension is typical of faith. For as soon as faith is destroyed, its tension too ceases; and if the religious tension does not exist, temptation is a mirage.

(2) The Knight of Faith in the Trial of Temptation :

It is this trial of temptation which is conveyed by *Anfechtung* in the *Postscript*, but as *Fristelse* in *Fear and Trembling*. In Greek, however, we have *perasmos* to denote the temptation inherent in religious faith, which is sought to be conveyed by German *Anfechtung* and Danish *Fristelse*. It means the trial of temptation, the believer, in Kierkegaard's philosophy, faces within the tense moments of the teleological suspension of the ethical. This is the point of extremity in the life of the believer in the faith-relation to the Absolute.²⁸ Why does the individual undertake this awkward task? If he does it for his own sake, we would suspect him to be anything but sane; if he does it for God's sake, he would be apparently nothing less of a religious bigot. Ironically, he does it both

28. *Postscript*, p. 410.

for God's sake and for his own sake; for God's sake, because God requires it as a trial and proof of his faith; and for his own sake, in order that he might perfectly furnish the proof.²⁹

In the tense moment of the excruciating trial of temptation, the individual is absolutely **alone**. He can neither shared nor communicate this experience to others. He is also not willing to do it, because he knows that he will be misunderstood, if he does so. In this situation he is alone with himself before God. He adheres to this situation, not merely as the individual human being, but as the **particular** individual, having isolated himself from the universal in order that he may be in an absolute relation to the Absolute. Despite the crisis, he does not submit himself to the tempting relief, offered by any type of mediation. This brings me to the unmediated particularity of faith.

IV. PARTICULARITY OF FAITH UNMEDIATED

Faith is a particular relation of the individual to the Absolute. Particularity then is the essential feature of faith. Paradox and absurd both constitute and sustain the particularity of the absolute relationship. It is therefore repugnant to think that this absolute relationship can ever be subjected to a process of mediation by means of any category higher and other than the absolute. Mediation is foreign to the particularity of faith, because all mediations are homogenous with the universal, which faith is not.

What is mediation ? In the Hegelian context, mediation is the process through which the internal opposition between thesis and anti-thesis is overcome by way of a synthesis. Can this conflict and tension of faith be overcome in a higher synthesis ? Kierkegaard poses the question before us. In the religious sphere, mediation, to him, is the process in which a faith-relation to God is sought to be forged through an idea or an institution or a person or any other media, serving as an instrument, or a middle term. Thus a conceptualization, monasticism, a church, a teacher etc. can serve as the middle term. All the media are items of the finite realm. Hence Kierkegaard's answer is emphatic **No**, since faith is characterized by particularity. Since it is an absolute relation to the Absolute, mediation would be an attempt to 'bring the

29. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 70.

absolute to the level of everything else'.³⁰ All attempt at mediation would relegate faith to the realm of the universal.

Moreover, the principle of mediation may have a valid application in the ethical sphere, but not in religion. Within its compass, the ethical-universal has various gradations, where mediation becomes legitimate. In order to drive home the truth, Kierkegaard compares and contrasts the tragic hero with the knight of faith. The tragic hero is a perfect example of the universal man. He is a paragon of the ethical virtue. King Agamemnon of Greek Epic is one such hero, and a tragic one at that, because he heroically sacrifices his beloved daughter, Iphigenia, in order to propitiate the angry goddess Artemis, who had stalled the movements of his fleet. He suffers his personal anguish, bemoans his fate, nonetheless, does not hesitate to sacrifice his daughter, thereby ensures the security and welfare of the whole nation. Another example cited is from the Roman history. The valiant consul Brutus performs an unprecedented, yet valorous, act of issuing a verdict of execution of his own beloved son, caught in the act of treason against the State. The sanctity of the State is greater than the love for his own kith and kin.

It is not unnatural that King Agamemnon and Brutus should experience an anguish, deep in their heart, at their personal loss. Nevertheless, they should rise above their narrow self, magnanimously conceal their pain and anguish within, and carry out the tragic act that saves their nation. The whole nation is cognizant of their pain, but it is also cognizant of the great exploits these heroes performed for the sake of the nation's welfare and honour. They have mediated one expression of the ethical by a higher one. In the act they may have suffered, but they are, precisely in virtue of their acts, heroes in the ethical realm.

Agamemnon and Brutus are the tragic heroes by virtue of the marvellous ethical feat they performed and, in performing the heroic act, they bury their particularized self in deference to the higher expression of the ethical-universal, be it in the form of fidelity for the welfare of the nation or the sanctity of the laws of the State. The virtue of their act is not **private**, but **public**, in so far as their act has a redeeming value to the nation and the State. These heroes are tragic, because, in doing what they did, they were constrained to suffer an irredeemable personal loss; yet, they conceal heroically their anguish within

30. *Postscript*, p. 375.

their spirits. They restrain their tears, and act royally, though they may bemoan their fate privately. Their greatness is indisputable. The safety and security of the nation and the State are intact, because of the sacrifice they made, and the generations to come will sing the tragic saga.

But, the principle of mediation does not apply to the particularity of faith. Being *sui generis*, faith, by its very nature, is an unmediated relation. Unlike the tragic hero, the knight of faith cannot seek any mediation of faith, for there is no going beyond the conflict and tension of faith for an existing individual. Unlike Agamemnon and Brutus, Abraham cannot seek graded expressions of faith, so that, in the event of conflicts, he can replace one expression of faith by another. Either you have faith or you do not. Abraham too has his anguish and dread associated with the personal loss and, to that extent, his case too is tragic. But, he is not a tragic hero, but a knight of faith. Now, the knight of faith is great, not in virtue of his public virtue, not in virtue of his ethical heroism. He is great in virtue of the absurd and the paradox, therefore, in virtue of his faith. Whatever he achieves in his faith-relation cannot be understood within the ethical matrix, for, within it, he is a transgressor of the moral law; he is simply a murderer. Yet, the Christian tradition has justified it as an act of faith: Abraham has become a prototype of faith. The knight of faith cannot mediate his conflict in faith, he has to endure it, live in it, and be sustained by it. Hence, the immediate particularity of faith. What are its dynamics ?

The principle of mediation may hold good in the ethical- universal, but it is a precise opposite in respect of the particularity of faith-relationship. It militates against the concept of personal appropriation of faith-relation with God. Therefore to resort to mediation is to avoid all personal responsibility, and without this personal element, there is no faith. Tragic hero indeed relinquishes his particularity in favour of the universal but the knight of faith, on the other hand, asserts his particularity over against the universal in faith. Therefore, the particularity of faith-relation to the Absolute excludes totally the principle of mediation. The paradox in the life of the knight of faith, by the same token, can never be mediated.

Particularity of faith-relation to the Absolute is characterized by a 'dialectical movement'. Kierkegaard identifies in it a double movement of the

spirit.³¹ The movement is not an event in the chronological order, but is a process in constancy. For Kierkegaard, there are two constituent directions, making for the dialectical movement concerned. The first is the forward movement, also called the 'Infinite Resignation'. This calls for some explanation.

(1) **The Forward Movement of Infinite Resignation :**

The initial direction in the dialectical movement of faith consists in an infinite resignation. It is a pre-requisite for faith.³² Only when the heart is turned away from the relative, can there be room in it for the Absolute. Infinite resignation signifies a complete severance of the individual's relationship from his immediacy. Immediacy is not only of the realm of the aesthetical, it may occasionally include the frightful teleological suspension of the ethical as well, as it was the case with Abraham.

Infinite resignation leaves the individual with his back on the finite and the relative, but, at the same time, with his face turned towards the infinite and the Absolute. Hence it is a forward movement. At the stage of resignation, the man of faith gains a sense of transcendence by freeing himself from the claims of the finite. It constitutes an abandonment of the world in an attempt to escape from its oppressive mastery, and a renunciation of the temporal in a bid to gain a sense of the eternal. Such an enterprise is truly a knightly defiance of all the finite. Here his courage is similar to that of the tragic hero, who, too, is an adept in infinite resignation. The difference however lies in the fact that, whereas the tragic hero resigns infinitely in the service of the ethical-universal, the knight of faith does it in the service of his particularized relation with the Absolute

Kierkegaard's focus in infinite resignation is not so much on resignation as on its orientation to the infinite. Whereas, to the tragic hero, the resignation itself is infinite, to the knight of faith, resignation is towards an orientation to the infinite. It is not a backward-looking asceticism, but a forward-looking faith. Hence, in spite of its negative ring around it, it is intensely positive. It is to be understood in terms of an **infinite interest** in God, without which one cannot take the first step of faith. By virtue of this infinite interest in the Infinite, the individual will be enabled, firstly not only to scoff at the aesthetical, but also, secondly, to suspend, if need be, his ethical obligation at the intermediary level.

31. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 15.

32. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 57.

Thirdly, by virtue of an infinite interest in the Infinite, the individual snaps his fingers at the speculative systems, because thought cannot comprehend the movement of faith. Thus, infinite resignation makes for a **breach** with all relations of immediacy, however, not without its own dread and anguish.

(2) The Backward Movement of Repetition :

The first movement of infinite resignation is only an initial stage in the dialectics of faith. Now, faith waits for the second movement, so that faith comes a full circle, lest the initial movement ends in asceticism rather than faith. Whereas the first movement is a forward movement to infinity, the second movement is a backward movement to finiteness. Kierkegaard names it 'Repetition'.

The movement of repetition is essential to the dialectical structure of faith; for a movement to infinity is fully realized, only when it comes back to the finite. The first movement of infinite resignation may put the individual on the path of faith, but the second movement of repetition confirms him as the knight of faith. The individual, then, having resigned the finite to cling to the infinite, comes back to the finite realm, because he is an **existing** individual. Paradoxically, it is here that he is approved as the knight of faith. Kierkegaard strongly argues that the man of faith cannot 'cease to be a human being',³³ when he embraces the faith-relationship with God. His faith is validated by the fact that 'his life has, like all other human beings, the various predicates of human existence'.³⁴ If this were not the case, Abraham should have been the most unhappy person, when he received Issac back. The man of faith is not an ascetic, or a masochist, not even a mystic,³⁵ but an existing individual with a transcendental orientation in his life. What are the determinants of this life ?

Firstly, the knight of faith, when he has returned to the finite, he no longer craves for the finite because of his infinite interest in God. Nor does he hate the finite, which has been sanctified by God for him. He is in the world, but not of it. Secondly, he must maintain his relative relationship to the finite, only by virtue of the faith-relation. His infinite resignation and repetition are not at a definite point of time, but constant. Thirdly, he lives in the finite, but without using it as an instrument of mediation for his absolute faith-relation. Kierkegaard sums up:

33. *Postscript*, p. 367.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *In the Kierkegaardian analysis, faith is not so much a mystical as an existential experience*

The existing individual who has once received the absolute direction toward the absolute *telos* . . . is . . . like any one of the other aldermen. He may possibly gain the whole world, but he is not as one who desires it. He may be a king; but every time he holds his sceptre in his outstretched hand, resignation looks first to see whether he expresses existentially the absolute respect for the absolute *telos*.³⁶

In virtue of the movement of infinite resignation and repetition, faith is a double movement, in which it comes full circle. Hence it has both the transcendental and immanent dimensions. Precisely because of this feature, faith has the structure of the paradoxical-dialectic, operating continuously within it. The man of faith, who lives in it, is therefore a particular individual, and not a universal man.

(3) Dialectical Movement, Continous and Strenuous :

The double movement of faith is not at all easy. It 'becomes exceedingly strenuous, since there is always a double movement to be executed'³⁷. Such an existence is characterized by tension and stress; and the task of existing in faith is therefore stupendous.³⁸ In so far as faith is a struggle, the *Fragments* maintains, 'faith is always militant'.³⁹ Since the militant struggle of faith is a process, Kierkegaard adds, 'faith never arrives'.

V. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

By way of a critical appraisal, I must take note of the following : Faith is the absolute relation of the particular individual to the Absolute. The *telos* of faith is outside the ethical-universal, because the individual is to assert his particularity *vis-a-vis* the universal, and also because there may even be a teleological suspension of the ethical. Its object is the paradox or the absurd. Moreover, it is unmediated relation; hence the knight of faith is different from the tragic hero. Against this backdrop, I would like to raise three problems for an appraisal of the particularity of faith-relation :

First of all, in the particularity of faith-relation, there is implicit an existential dread or anguish. It is borne out of the situation of the individual,

36. *Postscript*, p. 366-367

37. *Ibid.*,

38. *Ibid*, p. 364-365.

39. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 91.

standing in a particular relation to the Absolute. The philosophical merit of Kierkegaard consists here in redeeming the notion of faith, as a *sui generis* category of the good life. The Hegelians has made it something less than knowledge. The practice of faith takes the individual, on the other hand, to the realm of the religious, an independent and the highest stage of life to an existing individual. The anguish inherent in it is primarily on account of the individual's responsibility to establish and sustain the faith-relation. It is ultimately rooted in one's own freedom.

Again, anguish is constituted in the life of the man of faith in the inner tension exerted between the ethical and the religious. Man of faith has a high degree of ethical consciousness. Precisely because of this consciousness, when the command comes to suspend the *telos* of ethics, his anguish is all the more. He apprehends very well the ultimate claim, of and the obligation to, the ethical *telos*. But, on the other hand, he apprehends clearly in his spirit an inner voice for his absolute devotion to God. The command to sacrifice his son puts to test the faith of Abraham. This is symbolic to us today in the practice of faith. It is not uncommon that divine voice to sacrifice something, held dear to our heart, can come in innumerable ways, and we may be ground to dust and ashes in the mill of anguish. The significance of this anguish is that ultimately we are dreadfully responsible to recognize and sustain the absolute *telos* in a faith-relation, at any cost.

The stupendous task involved applies also to infinite resignation. Infinite resignation makes the man of faith to orient his heart's desire to the absolute *telos*. Anguish, again, consists in this that the infinite resignation will have to be made, without mediating faith by way of asceticism. To add to this complexity, one has to make the double movement of faith, and reside in the finite that was originally resigned infinitely, lest one be a kill-joy and a masochist. All these call for considerable skill in the exercise of faith.

If particularity of faith-relation to the Absolute sometimes demands a suspension of the ethical, how are we to recognise it is God's voice, and not the caprice of the subject concerned ? Kierkegaard, I am afraid, has given us nowhere a hint to this dreadful task of right recognition. The great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, in his essay, "The Suspension of Ethics", asks a

straight-forward the question: 'Are you really addressed by the Absolute or by one of his apes' ?⁴⁰ The question is an outcome of our reflection of the fact that we are today surrounded by a plurality of false and perfidious absolutes. Men claim to be obeying the voice of God, yet to do the most heinous and terrible things. In God's holy name most unethical crimes have been perpetrated. Kierkegaard's emphasis on anguish of the life of faith may also be extended to this problem of discernment. This only goes to suggest that there is a need, for all his anti-intellectualist stand, to temper his radical philosophy of faith with the divine light of reason.

Secondly, the particularity of faith-relationship is also on account of the fact that faith is an intensely personal relation with the Absolute. This too goes to the credit of Kierkegaard to have highlighted at a time, when Hegelian philosophy provided the rational forum for intellectual debates in the continent. Hence, common to the usual philosophico-theological understanding, religiosity was sought to be construed in terms of certain objective determinations like doctrines, creeds, and theological propositions. From this stand-point, faith had become a matter of intellectual assent to these objective formulations. Kierkegaard would call it noumenal faith, as distinct from existential faith. He introduced the element of intensely passionate commitment to the paradoxical person of God-man in Christ. This way he made it a personal relation to the paradox.

Kierkegaard refuses to admit the 'objective approximations' into the sphere of faith, because, for him, faith is a matter of 'personal appropriation', hence a person-to-person relationship. In the language of Buber, it is an 'I-Eternal Thou' relationship. The personal relationship necessarily involves the highest passion in the subjective spirit of the believer. As an Existentialist, he places passion higher than knowledge. He is never tired of maintaining that 'faith is the highest passion in the sphere of subjectivity'. Therefore it may be said that Kierkegaard transformed faith from its 'cerebrality' to 'cordiality'. Particularity of faith-relation to the absolute highlights conspicuously the status of faith as a personal relationship, obtaining between God and man. Since speculative thought seeks continuously to disprove this claim, Kierkegaard dwelt at length on the bounds of reason, even at the cost of being branded as an anti-intellectualist. It is salutary for us to remember that his reflections disprove the brand, but his

 40. Martin Buber, "The Suspension of Ethics", in *Four Existentialist Theologians*, Edt. Will Herberg, New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1958, p. 227.

anti-intellectualism would still linger, when it is the case of the vital relation of faith. He may not be wrong, here, since to disprove anything that is not understood is a bad logic. The most decisive element in faith is that it is a personal commitment of the existing individual to the Absolute.

Finally, the analysis of the particularity of faith, by way of comparing and contrasting the tragic hero with the knight of faith, is unparalleled in the history of Western philosophy. The comparison clearly suggests the depth of grounding that Kierkegaard has in his own Western culture, a fusion between the Greek mind the Semitic heart. The Western spirit is a synthesis of the dialectics between the two. Within this dialectics, we have the opposition between the tragic hero and the knight of faith, ethics and religion, universal and particular, reason and faith, and above all relationalism and voluntarism.

Since the works of Kierkegaard, any study on heroism, in the Western context, has not been the same. Ordinarily, the hero is one who, by virtue of the metagames that he plays, has become the universal man. His action is the highest expression of the ethical ideal, for, having overcome the personal *hubris*, his action becomes a paradigm for the generations to come. Kierkegaard, in opposing the ethical heroism *vis-a-vis* the religious knighthood, draws our attention to the existence and the relevance of another type of heroism, the religious heroism, which seemed to have been largely buried under the debris of rationalistic ethics. It is an invaluable service, rendered by Kierkegaard to philosophy of religion and theology in resuscitating the voluntaristic aspirations of the Western culture.

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CHAPTER IV

ABSOLUTE DUTY IN FAITH

- I. DUTY AS AN ETHICAL CATEGORY**
- II. DUTY IN THE KIERKEGAARDIAN CONCEPTION**
- III. ABSOLUTE DUTY AS A CONCOMITANT OF FAITH**
- IV. ABSOLUTE DUTY AND PASSION**
- V. TENSION BETWEEN ABSOLUTE AND ETHICAL DUTY**
- VI. EXISTENTIAL PATHOS IN ABSOLUTE DUTY**
- VII. CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Chapter IV

ABSOLUTE DUTY IN FAITH

The spirit of the previous chapter, namely the dynamic tension between the ethical and the religious sphere of existence, will continue to blow in this chapter too. But, it is here sought to be studied with special reference to the concept of absolute duty. Duty is an ethical concept : Can it be applied in the religious sphere without any contradiction ? To understand rightly the concept of absolute duty to God, Kierkegaard introduces us to its paradoxical dialectics. Faith makes for a simultaneity of the ethical and religious duty on the plane of existence. To elucidate the concept of absolute duty to God, Kierkegaard brings in the commitment of conjugal love as a passion, without overlooking the limitations of the analogy. The introduction of the passion of love is intended to show that the absolute duty to God is not merely a subjective attitude of devotion, but also an existential pathos of action.

I. DUTY AS AN ETHICAL CATEGORY

In Problem I of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard posits a contrast between the ethical and the religious from the perspective of the particularity of faith. In Problem II, the same objective is sought to be achieved, the perspective however is that of **absolute duty** in faith. But duty is an ethical concept. What is the ethical, making it what it is ? Kierkegaard says, "The ethical is defined as duty".¹ In the light of this definition, we are emboldened to hold that duty is the core and quintessence of the ethical; the significance of the ethical life consists in the fulfilment of duty.

At this juncture, Kierkegaard may be in perfect consonance with many a moral philosopher. Kierkegaard is characteristically Kantian, in so far as he cannot conceive of the ethical devoid of duty. Kierkegaard however does not construct a moral philosophy of his own, nor does he feel any need for formulating one. For Kant duty, as an ethical category, is construed as a moral obligation, and the notion of obligation implies the idea of moral necessity.

1. *Either / Or*, Vol. II, p. 258.

Moral necessity, in the Kantian framework, or duty, for that matter, is innate and can not be derived from experience.

What follows as a corollary is that ethical duty is also, by interpretation, a universal duty, since the ethical is necessarily the universal. Therefore duty is duty, if it has the characteristic of universality. This is implicit in Kant's categorical imperative : Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to become a universal law. The argument is consistent in so far as we hold that a moral obligation, or duty, has two intrinsic elements : The action must be specified, and it should have the universal applicability. Hegel rightly says, 'Duty is hardly duty without this element of universality'.² What does Hegel mean by this assertion ? Hegel takes the individual out into the realm of the manifold, from the realm of possibility, for an involvement in the arena of actuality. Therefore that universality is not to be achieved by a process of estrangement of the self from reality, or by withdrawing from the world of stark reality, but by presenting itself to what is universal³, is truly real.

II. DUTY IN THE KIERKEGAARDIAN CONCEPTION

This Hegelian excursion of moral philosophy makes duty an ethico-universal category. But Kierkegaard identified certain problems in the above proposition.

(1) Duty as 'inward relation' :

Firstly, if duty is an ethico-universal concept, then, it also follows that duty is a 'congeries of particular propositions'.⁴ There has to be an authority to prescribe a series of do's and don't's. If one is to realize one's duty, one has to go to the catalogue of these prescriptions. This strand of thought is a firm conviction of many a deontologist, who employs this catalogue of do's and don't's to compute the standard of one's ethical life. Duty is what is required of me to do, as it is required for everyone else. Conceived thus, personality is outwardly related to duty. Kierkegaard points out that the problem here is that duty lies outside of personality : 'the individual and duty stands outside one another'.⁵ Now this cannot at all be duty in the Kierkegaardian framework. Duty is not what is required of, or imposed on, the individual from outside, but what is incumbent upon him from within. One performs his duty, not because it is imposed upon him, but primarily because one feels obliged by an internal

2. Jonathan Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's Phenomenology of mind*, Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1929, p. 31.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

4. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 258.

5. *Ibid.*

necessity to perform it. Such a conception discountenances the thought that duty and the individual are mutually exclusive. If the two are mutually exclusive, a way is paved for the personality to become absolute, because personality can outright reject these prescriptions of duty. Kierkegaard in clear terms refutes this claim that duty implies an outward relation. As a counter claim, he states with vehement accentuation that the concept of duty indicates an inward relation.⁶ It is this insight that forms a substratum for his development of the conception of duty. He therefore states that duty is not an imposition (*paalæg*) but a composition of the individual; it is what is incumbent (*paaligger*).⁷ Viewed thus, we have a new noetic awareness of duty : Duty is not a congeries of particular propositions or definitions; but, instead, it is the expression and hallmark of his inmost nature : it is the clothing that his inner nature clads itself in. Now, individual has duty, not outside of himself, but in himself.

The individual comes to the world duty-bound. It is not the case that he is ascribed duty later. Such an estimate of duty puts the individual in a right orientation towards an absolute duty. He does not lay his hands upon statute books or societal norms to discover his duty, since he has duty in his inmost being. He performs duty, not because there is an external pressure, but because of an internal requirement. If the ethical is essentially duty, and if duty lies inside one's personality, it necessarily follows that the ethical lies not outside, but inside one's personality. Kierkegaard writes :

If one views the ethical as outside the personality and in an external relation to it, then one has abandoned everything, then one has fallen into despair . . .⁸

So personality has not the ethical outside it but in it and out of this depth it breaks forth . . . Since then, the ethical lies deepest in the soul, it is not always visible to the eye, and the man who lives ethically may do exactly the same things as the man who lives aesthetically, so that for a time this may create a deception, but finally there comes an instant when it is evident that he who lives ethically has a limit which the other does not recognise.⁹

. . . for the ethical, as being the internal, cannot be observed by an outsider. It can be realised only by the individual subject, who alone can know what it is that moves within him. This ethical reality is the only reality which does not become a mere possibility through being

6. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 261

known, and which can be known only through being thought; for it is the individual's own reality.¹⁰

(2) Duty as subjectively concrete *vis-a-vis* abstract concept of duty :

Secondly, when duty is understood as a congeries of definite and particular propositions, Kierkegaard argues, such a concept of duty becomes abstract. For duty appears now as an objective law. There is a deduction of an objective corpus of law, morals and customs from the correlative of the world-historical; it is deduced by means of an abstract thought-process. Can this outward and objective corpus of prescriptions constitute an ethical reality ? Kierkegaard's answer is in the negative. Performance of duty implies for him a decision, and all decisiveness inheres in subjectivity. Likewise passion for duty exists in subjectivity, or in an existential inwardness. It is here that the ethical assumes the form of concreteness. Kierkegaard consistently maintains all along that anything pertaining to the realm of objectivity and outwardness is abstract, and is irrelevant to the growth of the existing individual.

III. ABSOLUTE DUTY AS A CONCOMITANT OF FAITH :

This construction aims at serving as a basic framework for our understanding the relation of the individual's duty to God. If there is duty, in the sense of an absolute duty to God, it cannot be conceived elsewhere other than in the domain of the inwardness and subjectivity. To hold this view is to suggest that absolute duty to God cannot be conceived apart from faith. For it is in faith that one is in one's full subjectivity. As faith is the highest passion in the sphere of subjectivity, duty is the unique and affirmative expression of that faith. Thus faith and duty are inseparable, they exist in an inextricable relationship; they are the two sides of the same coin. In other words, all categories, subsumed under faith, pertain necessarily to duty as well. Therefore, in my analysis of an absolute duty to God, I may have to draw upon the characteristics of faith explicated in the preceding chapter.

The ethical individual is the individual who performs his duty. The ethical, qua ethical, is essentially the universal. Therefore, he who lives ethically lives universally. In this way, the existing ethical individual is not the particular, but the universal, and he is the paradigmatic man. Unless the individual succeeds in

10. *Postscript*, p. 284.

the task of becoming the universal, it is impossible for him to realise the ethical; but, he who lives universally expresses the ethical. Only such an individual can truly be spoken of as the incarnation of the Kantian ethics of categorical imperative. So he who lives ethically has himself a task of becoming the universal.

The process of the individual becoming the universal may be elucidated in the following manner : The primary duty of the individual is to transform himself into the civic life, as is ordinarily required of a citizen. Kierkegaard has in mind the higher form of personality which can be actualized by transporting the personal life from the state of isolation to that of the civic life. So long as the personal life of the individual is still fettered in isolation, it remains imperfect. Perfection to it is 'through the civic life',¹¹ which is constituted by the structures of status and role playing in the society. Kierkegaard rightly recognises the temptation the individual oftentimes falls into. The individual may be tempted to condition and conduct his life by his personal predilections, in direct opposition to social goals of the society. He is suggesting here a legitimate *telos*, a lifestyle, which is commensurable with the universal norm and pattern. He contends that, in the ethical,

. . . the task of the individual is to divest himself of the inward determinants and express them in an outward way.

When ever he shrinks from this, whenever he is inclined to persist in or to slip back again into the inward determinants of feeling, mood, etc., he 'sins', he is in a temptation (*Anfechtung*).¹²

(1) The Individual's relation to Duty :

The phrase, 'express them in an outward way', is shaded with a fair amount of fuzziness. One may have to go back to the *Postscript*¹³ for elucidating the phrase. Kierkegaard, with great insight, employs the terms for exhibiting a spatio-temporal dimension of existence, namely the world-historical, the finite realm of the relative ends and the manifold. These are the determinations, denoting the 'outward' aspect of existence, a great deal of which flows out into a civic life. Kierkegaard holds that the particular individual expresses himself as the universal via these determinants of the spatio-temporal outwardness.

But, in talking about an absolute duty to the Absolute, we are entering into a zone, where we have a totally different conspectus and interpretation of life.

11. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 267.

12. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 79.

13. *Postscript*, p. 365.

It is the spectrum of the transcendent, which however has profound psychological and ontological implications for the subjective life of the human spirit. It is precisely here that Kierkegaard takes us beyond the Kantian and Hegelian moral philosophy.

Absolute duty implies the individual's infinite relationship to the Absolute, borne out by an infinite passion. This infinite relationship, however, is decided in time and space through the relationship to something finite and historical. The spatio-temporal costume is the sine qua non of this transcendental mode of expression. This does not mean that the spatio-temporal, in other words, the ethical-universal, is instrumental in mediating this infinite relationship. It rather means conversely that the ethical-universal may be held in abeyance, only to be re-interpreted from this transcendental perspective of human life.

The paradox of faith comes once again to the fore in the treatment of an absolute duty to God : in faith the individual becomes the particular, and , as the particular individual, he is higher than the universal. It is the paradox of faith that the individual concretizes his self as the existing individual, by transcending the ethical-universal sphere of reference, which ordinarily is the basis, providing for an understanding between man and man. In common parlance, the ethical-universal is the determinant for any relationship between human beings. But faith- relation is sustained on the paradox, where the individual determines his relation to the ethical-universal. Herein lies the dynamics of absolute duty to God. In this relationship of duty, the particular, as an individual, stands related absolutely to the Absolute. One might now ask : What becomes of all other duties ? In the Kierkegaardian scheme, all ethical duty is rightaway relegated to the position of the relative. All the former ethical relationships and obligations are now reduced to the relative and secondary significance, not for the sake of any higher ethical *telos*, but for the sake of an absolute *telos*. *Fear and Trembling* observes :

From this however, it does not follow that the ethical is abolished, but it acquires an entirely different expression, the paradoxical expression that, for example, love to God may cause the knight of faith to give his love to his neighbour the opposite expression to that which, ethically speaking, is required by duty.¹⁴

14. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 80.

It follows from this that the ethical-universal is not abolished, when the absolute duty is performed. The ethical is not abolished, because it cannot be done so without risking a grave jeopardy to the absolute duty to the Absolute. Absolute duty does not designate an annihilation of a relative duty of the ethical-universal, for the latter is the substratum of human existence, which is divinely ordered. Removed this substratum, and there is no existence. Faith is what it is, especially in the Christian sense, only when it is being spoken, not only in terms of the beyondness of a space-time component, but also in concrete terms of space and time, therefore in the concrete terms of the ethical-universal. Therefore, the knight of absolute duty to God must, as a prerequisite, continue to exist in the relative realm, performing the ethico-universal duty, precisely in order to realize and exercise his absolute duty to God. The ethical is never abrogated, but may have to be, if God so demands, suspended teleologically. The *Fragments*, commenting on the significance of the temporal, says, 'the moment in time must have a decisive significance' for the man in absolute duty.¹⁵

(2) 'Continuity' in Absolute Duty :

The mode of existence for the knight of absolute duty consists essentially in a continuous movement. There must be certain factors, which can give both sustenance and continuity to the movement, for otherwise there is no movement at all. These efficacious factors, which sustain the movement, are 'resignation' and 'repetition'. In 'resignation', one **repudiates** the ethical-universal for a moment, but in 'repetition', he **returns** to the ethical-universal, precisely to repudiate it for the sake of the absolute duty to God. This goes on in a circular manner, so long as the individual is an existing individual and simultaneously a knight of absolute duty; the life of faith is not a finished product but a continual process. As a process it is characterized continuously by the absurd. Since continuity is immanent in faith movement, in the movement of absolute duty, too for that matter, the movement cannot but be an involutorial one.

Continuity must be perceived as being indispensable to the movement, for without it existence is nothing more than a vacuous rhetoric. It is interesting that philosophers of religion painstakingly labour to discover the genesis of continuity of faith-movement. Kierkegaard, exhibiting his own genius, says, 'the eternal is the factor of continuity'.¹⁶ What kind of an 'eternalness' is conceived

15. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 8.

16. *Postscript*, p. 277

here? Mathematical truth, e.g. 'two plus two equals four', is an eternal truth, for we cannot as yet conceive what it is like having two plus two equalling something other than four. Geometrical truth, e.g. 'a triangle is a three-sided figure', is an eternal truth, for we cannot as yet conceive a situation where we have a round-shaped triangle. It is not such eternalness, that is entertained by Kierkegaard, here. In the first place, we need only to be reminded that Kierkegaard, as an existential thinker, abhors 'pure' thought, does not entertain any form of 'abstract eternity'. Abstract thought is antipodal to his thesis; abstract thought is arrived at by abstracting from existence. To him, pure or abstract, thought is a sphere, in which the existing individual finds himself therein only by virtue of a mistaken beginning, and this error makes the existence of the individual insignificant.

To answer the query, we would have to turn to the *Postscript* for possible clues. Kierkegaard here affirms, 'Existence is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite'.¹⁷ In effect, it may be argued that the existing individual is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite. Whereas the finite is commensurable with the relative and the transient, the infinite is homogenous with the absolute and the eternal. It follows then that the aspect of 'eternity' cannot but be immanent in the existing individual. It can be concluded that the immanent eternalness within the existing individual is the factor of continuity. To corroborate it, Kierkegaard opines that this 'concrete eternity' within the existing individual is 'the maximum degree of his passion'.¹⁸ The passion of the eternal and subjective spirit of the existing individual is an essential ingredient in the task of faith appropriation. This appropriation is not a momentary event. It is a continual process, as long as this element of eternity is the animating principle in the life of the existing individual. Absolute duty to God cannot be devoid of the passion of the eternal and subjective spirit of the existing individual.

IV. ABSOLUTE DUTY AND PASSION

Passion plays a crucial role in the realization of the absolute duty to God. Passion does not exist objectively, precisely because 'passion is subjectivity'.¹⁹ It is generally said that the fullest passion is obtained in love, which can exist only in subjectivity: 'Being a lover . . . is precisely a prerogative of subjectivity; for one does not become a . . . lover objectively'.²⁰ In other words, love is a

17. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

20. *Ibid.*

prerogative of passion, since passion is essentially subjectivity. Kierkegaard is not only concerned about passion in respect of absolute duty, but also introduces the concept of functional correlation, subsisting between love and duty. Of course, the category of love referred to here in the *Postscript* is the conjugal love. However, love, be it *eros* or *storge* or *philia* or *agape*, has indisputably an element of passion. Kierkegaard substantiates this truth by way of an analogy of marriage.

(1) Analogy of Conjugal Love :

Discussing the validity of marriage, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous Judge William lays bare the inter-relatedness between love and duty. Judge William thinks of an organic relationship and a functional interdependence between the two. He asserts, 'duty is not one climate and love another, but for me duty makes love the true temperate climate and for me love makes duty the true temperate climate, and perfection consists in this unity'.²¹ He insists that love is what duty enjoins and vice versa. He maintains that there is no other duty but love :

Duty is only one to love truly with the inward movement of the heart; and duty is as protean in its forms as is love itself, and it pronounces everything good when it is of love, and denounces everything, however beautiful and specious it may be, if it is not of love . . .
Duty constantly chimes in with love. If you separate them . . . and make one part the whole, you are constantly in self-contradiction.²²

In a matrimonial vow, one assumes the responsibility for transforming love into a duty. For the aesthetic man, however, to make love is neither a duty nor a responsibility; he cancels both in love. On the contrary, for the ethical man, to make love a duty is to crown that love with all the required fulfilment. Duty would be too austere and terrible without love, and love, in turn, would be spineless without duty. The ethical man gives vitality to love through duty: 'Duty is the divine nutriment love stands in need of.'²³ Marriage may be purely mundane, if we think of it as an aesthetic aspect of life. But the sense of duty raises it to the ethical level, even as the sense of love takes it to the borders of the religious region. We may venture to say that marriage is 'divine' in virtue of its touching the fringes of the religious stage of life. Its validity does not depend on the externals, but on the internal, sacred and passionate ties, binding two persons in marriage together. Love and duty provide both validity and continuity to the relationship between husband and wife. The essential part in marriage is

21. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 150.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

inwardness, and the concise expression of this is love, and the salient manifestation of this love is duty.

(2) Passion of Love in Absolute Duty :

In the light of our analogy, it can be reiterated that the passion of love is incommensurate to the absolute duty to God. For duty is a matter of subjective decision. Even as love is the animating principle of a lover's duty, 'love is a determination of subjectivity',²⁴

In an attempt to bring out the close relation between duty and the passion of love, Kierkegaard enters into a hermeneutics of the scriptural passage : 'If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and of his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'.²⁵ He interprets the passage in a manner that suggests at once the inner tension in the faith-relation :

God, it is he who requires absolute love. But he, who in demanding a person's love thinks that this love should be proved also by becoming lukewarm to everything which hitherto was dear . . . and he who would demand such love signs at the same time his own death-warrant supposing that his life was bound up with this coveted love.²⁶

Kierkegaard hopes to accentuate the tension involved by way of referring to his analogy of marital relation :

Thus a husband demands that his wife shall leave father and mother, but if he were to regard it as a proof of her extraordinary love for him, and that she for his sake became an indolent, lukewarm daughter etc., then he is the stupidest of the stupid.²⁷

The purpose of Kierkegaard is to corroborate the contention that absolute love necessarily underlies absolute duty. Going by the views of Judge William, we may state that there is a constant conjunction between love and duty. Though the Kierkegaardian characters are not always the spokesmen for him, Judge William however represents to him the perfect ethical man, and, we know, ethical to him borders on the religious.

24. *Postscript*, p. 118.

25. *Luke* 14 : 26.

26. *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 83-84

27. *Ibid.*

V. TENSION BETWEEN ABSOLUTE AND ETHICAL DUTY

Kierkegaard, in his discussion of the ethical and the religious categories, is cautious of not being entangled in speculative thought; this he abhors as an existentialist. What he is acutely concerned, in the context of absolute love and duty, is the element of the paradoxical absurd which abides in absolute duty. It is paradoxical and absurd that the knight of absolute duty should become non-committal and lackadaisical to his wife and children, or all his relative duties for the sake of an absolute duty to God. This state of familial indifference is said to have been called for. Absolute duty seemingly causes one both to commit to what ethics prohibits, and at the same time to omit what it prescribes. Therefore the commitment to absolute duty to God seems to be moral bankruptcy. But, if one were to think that such a love and duty, so demanded, be proved and propped by a tepidity and laodiceanism towards everything else, which was dear hitherto, one would have to think of God as revealing Himself as a superlative egoist; such a God would be held responsible for all the moral chaos and decay. Kierkegaard obviously does not intend to suggest such conclusions.

If the individual withdraws his love from his parents or wife and children, such an individual is not worthy of an absolute duty. Absolute duty is a sacrificial act of faith, and for absolute duty to be a sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God, the knight of faith must love his dear ones even more dearly at the call of absolute duty. It is this loyalty to, and love for, his people, juxtaposed by its paradoxical opposition to his love for God, which constitutes his act a sacrifice. The individual is here utterly 'boxed' within the sphere of dread and distress, and the anguish in this paradox is that, humanly speaking, he cannot make himself intelligible even to his most intimate friends in the finite realm. The knight cannot save himself from this excruciating anguish, because he has no higher expression in the ethical-universal for his act. As long as he is the knight of absolute duty, he remains in this conflict and tension. It is however possible for him to evade this agonizing tension, and repose himself in the universal, by abandoning his absolute duty. But if he does that, he ceases immediately to be the **particular** individual, whose religious status consists in being the knight of faith. He can also extricate himself from this existential mortifying agony by fleeing into the cloister. But in so doing, he might be the best monastic athlete,

but he is nowhere near faith, nowhere near absolute duty; for to be in absolute duty is to be in the tension and strenuosity of this dual consciousness of the infinite and the finite.

The dual consciousness is not suggestive of any confusion in one's reasoning. The gravity of the predicament of the knight of absolute duty consists in the fact that he cannot mediate his act, for, the moment he mediates, absolute duty vanishes. The knight of absolute duty, as an existing individual, is clear of his task in the realm of the finite, he is clear of his status and role, rights and duties as a member of his family and society at large. He knows it to be a great honour to be the universal man, he has a clear understanding of his obligations towards his family. He is equally aware that to become a particular individual for the sake of something beyond the realm would virtually be anathemic to the societal norm-package, which is the foundation of his civic life and existence. He has a clear conviction of his calling to be a paradigmatic man, as a man of stature deeply yearns to be. He is aware that as a paradigmatic universal man, he can have a large following, walking with and beside him on the great and glorious road of the universal. He could not countenance the fact that people could not understand and misunderstand a good and noble individual.

But the situation radically alters, where the individual is greater than the universal. He is no more the ethical but the religious man. The knight of faith knows that greater and higher than all this is another realm of the infinite, which can make its ultimate claim on, and absolute demand of, him. He senses for the first time that this demand has ambivalent effect : On the one hand, it is **repellent**, but it is also **redeeming**, on the other. The encountering with the absolute demand of absolute duty makes him restless. The response to it is a radical disjunctive : **either** a surrender-to or a sundering-away. If he chooses the former, he knows, he is alone to walk the solitary path outside the universal, and that is terrible.

To be sure, he was not arbitrarily dragged into this precarious sphere, for the 'or' of the disjunctive was always there. He however **chooses** to expose himself, where peril and danger stare at him ceaselessly. This is the bondage of freedom. In treading this path, the knight of absolute duty not only knows that he accomplishes nothing whatsoever for the universal, but he also knows that he may become everlastingly the insolvent of the ethical.

Kierkegaard's tragic hero, Agamemnon, can still rest secured in the universal, because his act of sacrifice expresses the higher ethico-universal. Kierkegaard's knight of absolute duty, Abraham, on the contrary, cannot rest assured in the ethical-universal : to the ethical he is lost. This is because he chooses to be the particular over the universal, he chooses to be condemned to be free in relating himself to the absolute duty. The knight of faith realises that his renunciation and sacrifice of the relative duties are an unqualified obedience to, and faith in, God. The tragic hero suspends teleologically one expression of the ethical for the other, but he is not lost, rather he becomes more conspicuous and significant in the universal by virtue of that act. The knight of faith, on the contrary, suspends teleologically the whole of the ethical; therefore he is lost to the universal, being consigned by that act to the solitary state of existence; he struggles all alone in the great tension, but he is reborn to the religious state of faith.

The knight of absolute duty is a solitary self. It is true that the individual, by virtue of his freedom, chooses to commit himself to absolute duty, and that the form, this choice assumes, is 'complete isolation'²⁸. Yet, in that solitary state, the individual is not passive, but vibrantly active. The activity is inwardly directed, and has no correspondence whatsoever with the surrounding world, because the individual has reduced himself to nought with the universal, but exists only as a particular. The renunciation of the immediate and the instant does not amount to the individual's absorption in the haze and maze of some metaphysical ruminations. Rather this infinite resignation and renunciation constitute the imperative for an intensive inwardness. The inward action is his great task, an absolute duty to God.

This isolation is not homologous to that of monasticism. It is not a withdrawal from the world of civic life. For the knight, by virtue of the movement of 'repetition', is in the multifarious relationship with the mundane world, precisely because a constant contact with, and presence in, it, is a **necessary condition** for making the renunciation a perpetual activity; otherwise absolute duty comes to an end. This dialectical principle must be constantly present in the life of the knight of absolute duty. But, again, the paradox is that this civic life, of which he is a part, has no ultimate significance for him. He is the knight of absolute duty, not because he cultivates civic virtues, but private or personal

28. *Either/Or*, Vol. II, p. 244.

virtues, courage, temperance, devotion to the absolute, -- all kept intact, even as the individual maintains his relation with the surrounding environment. Thus, the individual, who commits himself to absolute duty, by sheer paradox, is both foreign to, and friendly with, the world.

Kierkegaard is particular in maintaining the distinction between the ethical duty and absolute duty. For, this way, there is a clear awareness of the conflict, or tension, between the two in the life of the individual. Even in the midst of this conflict, the knight sees that the ethical mandate is not cancelled, but receives a relativized status. It is the conviction of Kierkegaard that the religious stage does not abolish the ethical stage, but only gives it a new garb :

So when . . . it is said that it is a duty to love God, something different is said from that in the foregoing; for if this duty is absolute, the ethical is reduced to a position of relativity. From this however, it does not follow that the ethical is abolished.²⁹

The ethical command vis-a-vis the absolute imperative, though not abolished, is no longer the *telos*. In other words, the ethical command is no longer an ideal to be realized, but itself a temptation,³⁰ that is constantly there because of the simultaneous presence of the ethical and the absolute duty.

VI. EXISTENTIAL PATHOS IN ABSOLUTE DUTY

The 'simultaneous maintenance' of the two relationships, or the 'dual consciousness', constitutes the tension in the life of faith. Tension cannot be done away with, for it cannot be rationally elucidated, it can however be borne with in deep pathos. Kierkegaard believes that pathos is immanent in tension. The man, who has an ethical duty, has to do with another human being, and, if at all he has to undergo some pain or problem in the fulfilment of duty, he has always with him the external to lay hold of. But the knight of absolute duty has to do solely with himself in an intense inwardness and, there, all alone he has to bear the pathos of the deadening weight of tension. He is all the time being misunderstood and, from the point of view of the universal, he is an eccentric and queer creature. Kierkegaard says :

The essential existential pathos in relation to an eternal happiness is acquired at so great a cost that it must from the finite point of view be regarded as simple madness . . .³¹

29. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 80.

30. See foot note No. 24 in Chapter III.

31. *Postscript*, p. 346.

The existential pathos, spoken of by Kierkegaard, is essentially a pathos of action. But there is a problem here. Action seems to be the precise opposite of **inward** pathos. Action implies an **outward** activity. The life of an existential man is concretized in an activity out there, hence, in the realm of the universal. The individual, laden with tension, may repose in action as a medium of catharsis. Action therefore may be said to release all his psychological strain and stress. Action produces, therefore, a needed therapeutic effect in the pressurized individual, flattened by despair and anguish. Seemingly, then, a pathos of action is a sheer contradiction in terms. Kierkegaard hopes to overcome the contradiction by redefining his concept of action in the context of absolute duty. Firstly, action is what is inwardly directed in the realm of subjectivity, where crucial decision takes place. Secondly, we do well to comprehend Kierkegaard's category of action as relevant only to the sphere of the religious. Therefore the concept of 'pathos of action', consisting in inwardness and subjectivity, may be readily maintained.

We may further supplement the truth of the 'pathos of action' by way of an appeal to the 'paradoxical-dialectic' in Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard the test of the religious sphere of life is the paradoxical. Initially, he gives it the form of the dialectics : 'The positive is the index of the negative'³². He shows that happiness comes by mean of suffering, certainty of faith by uncertainty, the truth by absurdity. The paradoxical-dialectic reverberates throughout his understanding of absolute duty and, for that matter, of faith as the depth-dimension of human existence. His pathos of action too may be said to lend itself to a dialectical understanding.

(1) Expression of the Existential Pathos :

How does the knight of absolute duty express his pathos ? The expression of pathos is so central to Kierkegaard that he devotes a quarter of the Postscript for its treatment. He draws our attention to the two modes of expression, namely, (i) the initial expression and (ii) the essential expression.

(i) Initial Expression :

Initial expression pertains to pathos in aesthetics. It finds expression only in words, and cannot go beyond language. But the pathos, which exists in the realm

32. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

of the absolute duty to God is not a matter of mere words. Language, being a mere abstract medium, is utterly unable to express the pathos of the relationship borne out by the absolute duty. Theology and poetry may stake their claim that they are able to enact pathos in the medium of language, but the truth of the matter is that the initial expression cannot express the existential pathos. By its nature, the latter relates to existence, and not to any abstract medium. Existential pathos can only be expressed in the concrete life-situations of the existing individual. Kierkegaard thinks that existential pathos is best effected in the context of a 'reconstruction' of the individual's mode of existence.³³

Kierkegaard considers that reconstruction is a desired effect of the pathos of absolute duty to God. If reconstruction does not take place, the God-relationship is not there. Existential pathos is therefore synonymous with 'religious pathos'. Kierkegaard asserts that religious pathos does not consist in doctrinal propositions, for, in that case, religious pathos would be a mere speculative reflection. The individual then may be said to be luxuriating himself only in the medium of the 'ideality of the possible'. The implication is that such a man is outside of himself, and not within himself, existentially. Kierkegaard is not interested in this. It then follows that the existential pathos consists primarily in 'existing', as validated by the reconstruction of the individual's mode of existence in the 'ideality of the actual'.

The reconstruction consists in the accurate **orientation** of the life of the knight towards the absolute duty and, simultaneously, towards the relative duty. Substantially the crux of reconstruction is the 'simultaneity of existence', sought to be maintained by the existing individual in the absolute *telos* and the relative *telos*. The individual finds an occasion where to authenticate his existence as the knight of absolute duty. He performs the absolute duty to God by way of infinitely resigning the relative duty to his family, and at the same time, having performed the absolute duty to God, he returns to his relative duty. Thus, he must exist in both realms. He must simultaneously maintain a dual existence -- that of absolute duty and that of relative duty.

Why does Kierkegaard arrive at such a conclusion? One would have to examine Kierkegaard's basic assumption of existence to know the reasons. In a manner peculiar to his existential-theological assumptions, he states that

33. *Ibid.*, p. 347. Kierkegaard uses such alternate terms for 'reconstruction' as 'transformation' and 'orientation', - all however have the same breadth of meaning.

existence is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite.³⁴ This postulation involves an inescapable conclusion that the existing individual has a paradoxical constitution of the infinite and the finite. As the infinite, he has the unbounded capacity for an absolute relation, exemplified in duty and devotion to the Absolute, at once transcending all the spatio-temporal conditions and limitations, in short, the finite. As the finite, he is subject to the contingency of existence, to the transient and the perishable. Conceptually, the infinite and the finite are mutually exclusive. But, the paradox is that in the context of faith-relation, or absolute duty to the Absolute, the finite is circumscribed by what it excludes. What is more, the finite presents itself as a substratum for the 'infinite relinquishment' of all relative duties. The infinite relinquishment is not supposed to take place once in a life time, but constantly. Hence the reconstruction of life can be achieved by no other means than the dialectical principle, whereby the existing individual can have such a delicately synthetic existence.

The existing individual in his immediacy is firmly rooted in the finite, which is the medium of existence. But, to qualify himself to be a man of faith, he is bound to yield all his finite realm to the authority of infinite resignation. It is only after this that he can establish an absolute relationship with God and to be able to perform an absolute duty to Him. This implies an exit from the existing world and, seemingly, an entrance into a cloister. But Kierkegaard is quick to add that, if the enterprise were to stop with the interiority of the cloister, there is no pathos which can be understood in the existential sense of the term. Nor is there any possibility of making an existential expression of that pathos. Since faith is existential, the believer, by virtue of the 'double movement', comes back to live in the finite, though he does not have his life in the latter. In communion with other human beings, he establishes his life in the predicates of human existence. But he is careful not to mediate his faith at any time through the finite telos. Existence for him therefore becomes exceedingly strenuous because of this double movement.

Therefore his reconstruction consists precisely in the energetic task of striving to maintain the **simultaneity** of absolute relationship to the absolute telos with the relative relationship to the relative ends, without any mutation whatsoever.³⁵ It is not an easy task to absolutize a relationship in one direction,

34. *Postscript*, p. 350.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

and relativize another relation in the opposite direction, and yet, simultaneously, continue to live in the latter. The profundity of this strenuous exercise lies in the inviolate stillness of the inner life, but, at the same time, in an existential expression of pathos, devoid of any distinctive outwardness. Absolute duty is not a matter of an instant, but of a continual process. Thus, in the striving for the dual maintenance of existence, consists the transformation of the individual's mode of existence.

(ii) **Essential Expression :**

Whereas the initial expression of a pathos is aesthetic in nature, in so far as it is what is captured in words, 'essential expression' of a pathos is what is expressed in suffering. The question now is : Can absolute duty to God have an essential expression ? Kierkegaard answers in the affirmative : The pathos of absolute duty must express itself essentially in suffering.³⁶ 'Essential' here then means what is fundamental. Suffering in the Kierkegaardian scheme is immanent both in the ethical and the religious stage of existence. It originates on account of the need for infinite resignation. Not only the knight of absolute duty but also the tragic hero suffers. Yet, there is a qualitative difference between their suffering. The suffering of the tragic hero terminates in the ethical telos; suffering here is adventitious. But the suffering of the knight of absolute duty persists essentially in the maintenance of the simultaneity of the dual relationships to the infinite and the finite. It lasts so long as the life of faith lasts, hence it is essential. Therefore the man of faith has the dialectical within him. The pathos of the absolute duty to the Absolute expresses itself in essential suffering.

Religious suffering is contrasted with the life of immediacy, which is the content of all forms of aestheticism. The latter too, may imply at times suffering; but it is said to 'expire' in suffering. But the life of absolute duty, on the contrary, is said to 'exhilarate' in suffering. Kierkegaard reiterates that it is precisely in suffering that the religious life exists. The Kierkegaardian concept of suffering is not merely physical, hence it does not mean the presence of misfortune and the absence of comfort, it is not psychological either. It is rather 'psychic', provided we understand by it the 'pneumatic' or 'spiritual' in nature. What does it imply ? To begin with, it involves a 'dying away from immediacy'³⁷ a recurring

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 387, 396.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 412, 414, 432, 446 etc.

theme in the Postscript. The concept calls for our special attention.

Speaking of immediacy, Kierkegaard says :

Immediacy is fortune, for in the immediate consciousness there is no contradiction; the immediate individual is essentially seen as a fortunate individual, and the view of life natural to immediacy is one based on fortune. If one were to ask the immediate individual whence he has this view of life he would have to answer in virginal naivete, 'I do not myself understand it'. The contradiction comes from without, and takes the form of misfortune. The immediate individual never comes to any understanding with misfortune, for he never becomes dialectical in himself; and if he does not manage to get rid of it, he finally reveals himself as lacking the poise to bear it. That is, he despairs, because he cannot grasp misfortune.³⁸

From what is stated, here, we are led to infer that, firstly, immediacy is essentially the realm of the relative end, or the 'world-historical', in conjunction with the immediate consciousness. The meaning is even more transparent in *Either/Or*, Vol. II, where immediacy denotes the sensual propensity towards the transient and the finite, say, wealth, honour, pleasure, etc.³⁹ Kierkegaard speaks of the immediate life as the life in the 'moment', or the 'instant', which however cannot reach beyond itself. Further, the immediate individual cannot transcend himself, because he cannot become dialectical in the life of the moment. In his immediacy, the individual is absolutely transfixed to the relative ends. On the contrary, the absolute duty demands that the individual submit his entire immediacy to the authority of infinite resignation. It calls for a death of immediacy, hence its extricable bond with suffering.

Secondly, for Kierkegaard, the 'dying away from immediacy' is not synonymous with a flagellation, or a self-torture. Faith is not an asceticism of the monastic life. Flagellation is a feature in the life-style of the monk. How are we to say that a man, shorn of all the aesthetical determinants, is not a monk but a knight of faith? Ordinarily, dying away from immediacy involves the extinction of the individual. Like a consuming fire, it burns the individual to cinders; he is reduced to a mere nothingness. Kierkegaard advocates, in the absolute duty to God, anything but a sordid state of self-annihilation. We then have to grasp the positive content, inherent in suffering in the dialectics of Kierkegaard. The dying away from immediacy is not for the self-annihilation, but for the reconstruction

38. *Ibid.*, p. 388

39. *Either/Or*, Vol. II p. 149. It is also to be noted that for Kierkegaard even a theoretical cognition is a form of immediacy.

of the life of the existing individual. If the death away from immediacy is to result in the self-annihilation, rather than the enhancement of the existing individual, we have only the monastic movement, and not the double movement of faith. Unlike the former, the latter expresses itself in an inward action. To Kierkegaard, 'action in inwardness is suffering'.⁴⁰ In other words, the locus of this suffering is inwardness, for inwardness is 'the relationship of the individual to himself before God, his reflection into himself, and that is precisely from this that the suffering derives'.⁴¹

Thirdly, in this intense examination of himself before God, the individual discovers the claim of ultimacy, God makes on him. God, before whom he stand, may require of him an absolute duty. But, at the same time, the same God requires of him that the individual exist in the finite, which he had infinitely resigned. What follows from this is that the individual cannot yield an absolute duty to anything relative, and yet, he must return to the relative duty, as sanctified by God. The individual finds himself sandwiched between these two claims: This simultaneity of life's orientation constitutes his suffering. Take away the religious component from this hypertension, the category of suffering is a mere monasticism. Take away the religious suffering, it is a mere aestheticism.

Fourthly, Kierkegaard also shows that suffering, the essential expression for existential pathos, is not repellent to the individual. The man of faith invites it upon himself by way of a free choice : the individual decides for himself to enter into the sphere of God-relationship. This however does not mean that the individual bathes himself in a state of euphoria. On the contrary, the life of faith is a struggle. The more so, because the struggle of faith is not periodic; absolute duty to God is not events taking place at intervals. The persistency of suffering constitutes the existential pathos.⁴² Indeed, the 'persistence of the suffering guarantees that the individual remains in the correct position and preserves himself in it'.⁴³

It would now apparently suggest that the knight does rejoice in suffering. Is he a masochist ? Does he ever transcend suffering ? Is it the case that, finally, suffering is transmuted, in some strange manner, into a rejoicing, and then the knight would be able to transform his status of an existing individual to some 'pure eternal being' ? In answering these questions, Kierkegaard reminds us

40. *Postscript*, p. 388.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

43. *Ibid.*

that firstly the knight is not a masochist. If he were one, he would not be a knight, but a monk. Secondly, suffering ceases, when the faith requires no longer an expression of an existential pathos. Thirdly, and this more importantly, the existing individual cannot be etherialized into a pure eternal being : suffering would remain the essential expression of the faith of the existing individual.

(2) **The dialectical element in the pathos :**

At the back of these answers, however, there is the Kierkegaardian dialectics between suffering and rejoicing. The problem here is this : Can we say that it is not suffering which is the essential expression for the existential pathos, but the rejoicing ? If suffering, the essential expression of the pathos in absolute duty, is annulled at rejoicing, then the religious is correspondingly nullified. But if suffering, as held earlier, is the essential ingredient of the religious, then rejoicing at suffering cancels the essential expression of the pathos, and thereby the religious is nullified. In either case the absolute duty, or faith, is destroyed. One is caught between the horns of a dilemma. Kierkegaard escapes between the horns of the dilemma dialectically : He suggests that both suffering and rejoicing are the mainstay in the existential pathos of absolute duty of God. Since suffering and rejoicing are the polarized categories, they are the two antipodes required for the dialectical solution :

. . . that the existential relation to the absolute . . . is for an existing individual determined only through the negative -- **the relation to an eternal happiness only through suffering**, just as also the certainty of the faith which sustain a relationship to an eternal happiness is determined through its uncertainty.⁴⁴

The basic assumption in the above solution is that suffering cannot be an attribute of **eternal happiness**. But, when an **existing** individual establishes a relationship thereto, this relationship is quite rightly expressed through suffering. The joy, the knight experience, is veritably a joy grounded in the consciousness that the suffering signifies that relationship. Apart from this negative way, we do not have for an existing individual the assurance that he is in absolute duty to God. But this assurance is always in fear and in trembling.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 407. Emphasis is mine.

VII. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

We may conclude this chapter by way of a critical reflection. We may take note of the identity that Kierkegaard effects between the life of faith and the life of absolute duty to God. The knight of faith, of our preceding chapter, is also the knight of absolute duty. The knight of faith becomes the knight of absolute duty by the exercise of his freedom of choice into faith, the most anquishing of all undertakings of human existence. Hence, absolute duty is not a matter of divine coercion, but a 'volitional concentration'⁴⁵ on the part of the existing individual. That there enter into it the categories of the absurd and the paradox is specific to the Kierkegaardian conception of faith, as a depth-dimension of human existence. Faith and absolute duty are spontaneous in the movement towards God- relation, and they are preserved through thick and thin by the volitional concentration. In virtue of the prominence of free choice and autonomy of the will, in his philosophy, Kierkegaard may rightly be called a voluntarist. The autonomy of the free will runs throughout the life and existence of the knight of faith. For an existing individual, to exist is not a mere Cartesian cogito, but an exercise of free will to authenticate his existence; faith-existence is no exception to the voluntaristic law: it is a free surrender.

Volition to Kierkegaard is a distinct category. He goes on to add, 'All relative volition is marked by willing something for the sake of something else, but the highest end must be willed for its own sake'.⁴⁶ If there is something that is to be willed for its own sake, then it must be willed absolutely, and everything else may be sacrificed for its sake. It is this contraposition between the relative and the absolute, the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal that is reflected in Kierkegaard's concept of duty, directed to relative and absolute ends.

The volitional concentration, which is a matter of radically free choice, is seminal of absolute duty. This is so, because absolute duty is not on account of a congeries of prescriptions, but on account of free choice inherent in the individual. If an existing individual performs an absolute duty to God, because he is moved or caused by something other than himself, then the autonomy of the will is terminated. In asserting the freedom of will, Kierkegaard is only speaking the mother-tongue of existentialism.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 353

46. *Ibid.*

In advocating the autonomy of the will, Kierkegaard is, in a sense, Kantian. Kant believed that the autonomous will, which is crucial in playing a decisive role in moral action, is the 'good will'. But Kierkegaard's point of departure from Kant must also be noted. Kantian ethical voluntarism, while emphasising the autonomy of the will, ultimately reduces will to the sovereignty of reason, by emphasising its rational character. But the existential voluntarism of Kierkegaard emphasizes the role of the free spirit of the existing individual. Hence human passion replaces human reason in Kierkegaard; and human passion is a function of the will, and a valid ethico-religious system can be built on the premise of the primal autonomy of the will.

The Kantian good will can be brought to play a significant role in the framework of Kierkegaard. It is the good will, and none other, which can overcome obstacles on the way of performing the absolute duty. The autonomy of the will energizes the human spirit in the task of performing an absolute duty to God. Kierkegaard says that, if there are impediments over which the autonomous will cannot claim the victory, then 'absolute relationship cannot be there'.⁴⁷ In the Kierkegaardian scheme, the impediments may be associated with the death of immediacy or the suspension of the ethical. Impediments are neither imaginary nor of the possible realm only, but are existential and of the actual that pose a potential threat to absolute duty. The knight wills the absolute duty for its own sake in the face of the impediments. It is the good will of the individual that serves as the motive force that overcomes all hindrances.

This insistent voluntarism of Kierkegaard is vibrant throughout his discussion on absolute duty. The existing individual has to say freely either 'yes' or 'no' and make the 'leap of faith'. If a teleological suspension of the ethical is demanded, he has to exercise his autonomous and radical freedom. Only a radically free moral agent can make a creative choice for an absolute duty.

There is a certain conceptual problem that we may take note of. For Kierkegaard, duty is essentially an ethical concept, before it is applied to the sphere of religion. The ethical is built into the personality; the ethical therefore is innate. If so, going along the Kantian thinking, moral obligation may be suggested as not derived from experience. Then, duty, as the conceptual form of moral necessity, becomes an *a priori* concept.⁴⁸ However, it is equally true

47. *Ibid.*, p. 352

48. Brandan E.A. Liddel, *Kant on the Foundation of Morality : A modern Version of the Grundlegung*, London : Indiana University Press, 1970, p. 53.

that, during the process of socialization duty is derived empirically. Could it then be said that the individual has duty without reference to God? The answer seems to be in the affirmative. Likewise, duty, being essentially an ethical category, it would seem, cannot be so absolutized as to warrant a suspension of the ethical, as Kierkegaard would have us believe. Absolute duty to God then is not an ethical, but a religious, concept. But in doing this, Kierkegaard has wrenched it away from the realm, to which it properly belongs. For the absolute duty cannot be commensurable with the ethical. If it is heterogenous with the ethical, then it must be of an extraordinary category. In a similar vein, the characterization of the ethical as 'divine and internal' as done in *Fear and Trembling*, lands one into conceptual muddles. It is not clear how Kierkegaard would answer these conceptual dilemmas.

However, to be fair to Kierkegaard, he is primarily a philosopher of religion, and not a moral philosopher. This is amply borne out from the context of his discussion on absolute duty to God. His knight of absolute duty, Abraham, performs the duty to God in the gruesome act of sacrificing his only beloved son, Isaac, when God demands that sacrifice as a proof of his faith. This act of unconditional obedience is duty to God. The knight of faith arrives at this stage only by virtue of a blatant violation of the ethical. If this duty is constituted by its opposite, namely, the violation of the ethical obligation towards his son, the absolute duty is constituted by the paradox and the absurd. It now goes to suggest that the absolute duty does not belong to the category of the ethical, but to the realm of faith proper.

As a student of Kierkegaard, I would like to suggest only an orientation to the solution of the conceptual dilemma. The dilemma concerned is real. It makes for the tension inherent in the commitment to the absolute duty. It is the same individual, who is committed to both the ethical and the religious sphere of existence. Kierkegaard has a tender sympathy to the ethical stage of existence. Whereas the aesthetical is abrogated by the man of faith, the ethical is retained by the religious man. He may occasionally be called upon for a teleological suspension of the ethical. But at any rate, having made the leap of faith, the religious man is to make the reverse movement to the ethical. The conceptual dilemma then only makes for the healthy tension in the life of faith.

It may be concluded that, while duty is an ethical concept, we can still speak of an absolute duty to God, provided that duty is no more seen as congeries of commands from outside, but a demand of human nature from within. Such a duty can only be an absolute duty to God. It persists in relative duty simultaneously. This simultaneity of existence in the relative and the absolute makes for the dynamics of faith. It is in the healthy tension between the two telos that the man of faith exists and practises faith. Whatever insight we obtain here once again illumines the depth-dimension of human existence.

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CHAPTER V

CONCEALMENT AND REVELATION

- I. THE CATEGORY OF CONCEALMENT
- II. CONCEALMENT AESTHETICS
- III. REVELATION OF THE ETHICAL *Versus* THE CONCEALMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS
- IV. KIERKEGAARDIAN AND SOCRATIC INWARDNESS
- V. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Chapter - V

CONCEALMENT AND REVELATION

Concealment and revelation are concepts opposed to each other. In knowledge one seeks a revealing. If faith is a kind of knowledge, even if it be the highest kind, it should culminate in a supreme revelation. Traditionally, Christian philosophy and theology had gone in this direction. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, thinks that faith is substantially a concealment. Why is faith incommunicably a concealment? How does the man of faith guard his faith against all attempts of revelation as well as exhibitionism? These questions lead me inevitably to a discussion of the antithesis obtaining between faith and understanding; and also to the thesis that the manner of faith's concealment is of being innocuous. The peculiar mode of concealment is being *incognito* of the man of faith. To accentuate the role of concealment in faith, I will also juxtapose it with the concealment and revelation that one usually comes across in the sphere of aesthetics and ethics.

I. THE CATEGORY OF CONCEALMENT

One of the problems, associated with faith in Kierkegaard's philosophy, is **concealment** and **revelation** of faith. The problem is projected against the backdrop of Hegelian philosophy. Hegel is concerned with the problem of belief and knowledge. What is concealed in belief should reveal gradually in knowledge. By implication, belief is less than knowledge, the former indeed is to transform itself in knowledge. Hegel is only a spokesman for a large essentialistic, or idealistic tradition, that has highlighted the dichotomy between belief and knowledge. But, for Kierkegaard, faith admits only concealment, and not revelation. Why should this crucially dominant factor of religion be so concealed? How does the man of faith manage to sustain himself in such a concealed faith?

(1) Silence as constitutive of Concealment :

Kierkegaard's knight of faith, exemplified in Abraham, is in dread. The situation is precisely this: If he speaks out to communicate his faith to others, he

would merely be **misunderstood**; if, on the contrary, he does not utter a word, and chooses to remain silent, again, his silence too will **not be understood**. People may want to understand him; and he for himself would wish he were understood. But, either way, the man of faith is an enigma. Hence, he, by virtue of a free and sovereign act, makes an equally hard option to keep himself under a perpetual silence. This is a well-thought out course of action lest he be responsible in precipitating a damaging effect of misunderstanding of faith: Better be **not understood** than be **misunderstood**. In such a situation, silence is preferred, for silence appears to be a bit of heaven come down to earth.

From the preceding two chapters, four chief determinants of faith may be gleaned : (a) the particularity of absolute relationship to God, dispensing with every form of mediation, (b) the infinite resignation of the finite and the relative. (c) a possible teleological suspension of the ethical, and (d) a double movement of the spirit, by which, after the infinite resignation, the individual lives again in the finite, but now only by virtue of a faith-relation. All these determinants of faith at once make the believer totally unintelligible to others. There is no human language for the knight of faith to describe what goes on in his depth on account of faith. The anguish and the distress of the believer are concealed in this stunned silence; his silence is not extraneously imposed, but is his own responsibility. Silence constitutes his concealment.

(2) Faith versus understanding :

It transpires from the foregoing that faith can be held intact, so long as silence is not broken by the intrusion of understanding. The implication is that incomprehensibility is the basic ingredient of faith-relationship. Incomprehensibility of faith is not a problem to the man of faith as such. But, it is a hard crust to any speculative understanding; hence, faith remains concealed to objective representation. Kierkegaard has an elaborate treatment of the conflict between faith and understanding. The *Postscript* develops the tension and polarization, subsisting between faith and understanding. In a vivid manner, it states that faith is 'a martyrdom of believing against the understanding'.¹ It is likened to the peril of launching upon the unfathomable deep, beyond the pale of all epistemic probability, and there is to find God. So long as there remains any trace of probability, calculations of understanding are brought into the fore and, here,

1. *Postscript*, p. 208.

faith is shipwrecked. To believe with the understanding is a contradiction. Kierkegaard writes in a somewhat satirical manner :

... he who believes with the understanding speaks only of livelihood and wife and fields and oxen, and the like, which things are not the object of faith.²

In order to highlight the opposition between faith and understanding, I will dwell upon the antithesis of probability -- improbability, developed in the *Postscript*. Whenever probability is admitted, calculations of understanding are posited, since probability is a logico-epistemological category that facilitates our understanding. The speculative thinker, using all the categories of understanding, undertakes his journey into the realm of the probable, and may find his 'God' where probabilities are the most favourable. This will enable him to communicate directly to us in clearly intelligible terms God's existence and nature, and his own doctrine of the God-relationship. In his case concealment is ruled out. But with the knight of faith, it is a different story. He keeps himself at a safe distance from probability, for he knows that, when he entertains probabilities in his heart and mind, and therefore, all the categories of understanding, it is the destruction of his faith.

Faith may be said to have before it two tremendous tasks : first, to discover every moment that the improbable is the breath of faith, because faith breathes by the paradox; and , second, to hold fast to it with the infinite passion of inwardness. If faith, shunning the improbable, embarks upon probability as its spring board, then, a faith-relation to the Absolute is arrived at by means of a speculative understanding, and this inevitably entails a negation of all the ingredients of subjectivity, such as infinite interest, passion, paradox, -- in short, the inwardness of the spirit. As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, passion is eliminated; then infinite interest is eliminated : there is ultimately no decision at all in the faith-paradox. In this manner, if concealment is eliminated, everything become exhibitiv and displayful. At this point, objectivity has supplanted subjectivity, and outwardness has supplanted inwardness. But all decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity, and faith is the highest form of subjectivity. Hence faith is incomprehensible to the parameters of objective understanding. In other words, concealment is the core of faith. Faith, being such, is therefore self-active in its relation to the improbable and the paradoxical. The improbable

2. *Ibid.*

and the paradoxical cannot be reached by the quantitative calculation of understanding. Kierkegaard perceives in this context the limits of understanding itself. But, when understanding confronts its limits and despairs, only then faith makes its appearance to overcome that despair. Even when a description of the double movement of faith is given, it is not done so within the bargaining sphere of the understanding.³

What is it for faith to disparage all categories of understanding? Is faith a 'higher understanding',⁴ acquired by the believer? Kierkegaard answers that, first of all, when faith embarks upon sheer improbability, throwing all the categories of understanding down the gauntlet, it does not become a higher understanding, since, after all, even a higher understanding, is also an understanding.⁵ The knight of faith cannot arrogate to himself a glittering distinction within the total compass of understanding. His need for understanding however is imperative, so that he can exercise his faith against it. Secondly, he needs understanding to become aware of the incomprehensible and the improbable, and therefore to hold fast to them, so that faith is concealed from all objective approximations. There is a dialectical aspect to the problem: not wanting to understand it, yet wanting to understand what it means to break thus with the understanding.⁶

The knight of faith cannot speak out a word for the explanation of his dreadful demeanor, be it the infinite resignation or the teleological suspension of the ethical. This inability steels and seals his concealment. Even when a philosopher of faith seeks an understanding, the inexplicable 'essence' of faith and the paradox of faith cannot be exhausted by any speculative probe. The understanding here is to be distinguished from the truth it seeks to understand. One can understand **that** a rose is beautiful, but **how** it is beautiful is an epistemological hard nut to crack. Likewise, it is not the case that, merely because understanding has understood all the ingredients of faith, *eo ipso* the truth of faith is also understood. Rather it is the case that, when the potential truth has been understood, as the speculative thinker understands it, the speculative thought has not arrived at a true understanding, but only at the superficial truth. Therefore to understand faith is to be outside of it, and an understanding of it from without is shady and fallacious.⁷ Faith remains then concealed forever to understanding.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 209

4. *Ibid.*, p. 501

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 505

7. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

(3) *The Incognito of Faith* :

Even as faith is antithetical to understanding, the man of faith remains concealed in his hidden inwardness. Concealment is homologous with the *incognito* of the man of faith. There however is a contradiction in his hiddenness:

The contradiction does consist in his being different from all others ... but the contradiction is that with all this inwardness hidden within him ... his **appearance** is precisely like that of other men -- whereby his inwardness is **concealed by the fact that he looks like other men.**⁸

The form of concealment is constituted by the raw fact that the man of faith 'looks like other men'. From a common parlance, a religious man is held to signify indisputably a spiritual state, supposedly legitimized and authenticated by rare virtues in life, marking at once his life as distinct from the mundane life of the commonality. As being thus determined, by virtue of the state of God-relationship, his relationship with the world must be marked by a **differentiated heterogeneity** : his life must virtually be different from that of the rest. But Kierkegaard reminds us that the man of faith looks like other men, he steps into the shoes of the man-in-the street, he has no heterogeneity whatsoever. On the contrary, he puts on an ordinary and secular look. Is this a sheer compromise of the sacred with the secular ? Such a compromise seemingly deteriorates, as a matter of course, into a blasphemy. Certainly such a blatant secularization and temporalization of faith cannot be countenanced.

But, strangely there is not to be found an iota of blasphemy in this worldly appearance, or the secular look, of the man of faith. By virtue of the double movement of the spirit in the dialectics of faith, the man of faith, after making an infinite resignation, lives again in the finite, not by any worldly determinants, but by virtue of the God-relationship. Quite naturally therefore, we expect that the God-relationship must emblaze the whole appearance of the man of faith, even while he is still here. But the man of faith looks like other men. Is the secular look an adroit attempt of subterfuge, by which the man of faith cleverly seeks to sneak out, evading the hypertension of faith in inwardness ? The answer is in the negative. For it is implausible, since the existential faith should make an existential expression.

The knight of faith has this burden, *viz.* to express existentially the God-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 446. Emphasis is mine.

relationship in the finite realm; and this existential expression facilitates the look. As the man of faith looks like other men, it would appear that he is himself only as he is a pure reference to the other. If this is true, then his consciousness of himself is interlocked with his consciousness of others and, specifically, with their consciousness of him. Is a God-relationship a point of reference for his appearance or the mundaneness of other man? In so far as he looks like other men, he bears the stamp and the **existential impression** of the finite and the relative. A critic may now agree that the God-relationship is supplanted by the existential impression of the relative; if this is not the case, there is a contradiction.

Kierkegaard maintains that the God-relationship is not supplanted. However, the contradiction pointed out inheres in the sphere of existential faith. But the point of variance is that the contradiction does not consist in the believer's being different from the mundane men. Rather it consists in the fact that his distinctiveness, hidden in his inwardness, is concealed in his secular appearance.⁹ The contradiction of the concealment is that the knight of faith **does not appear to be what he is, and he is not what he appears to be.** This constitutes his *incognito*, whereby he is to look like everybody else. This dimension of concealment cannot be revealed to speculative understanding, since it is concentrated in the category of the absurd. Precisely because of this reason, Kierkegaard finds it apt to borrow such terminologies from the Greek drama as the **comical** and the **humorous** to designate this contradiction of the *incognito* of the man of faith. Kierkegaard admits that, where there is a contradiction of this sort, the comical is also present. The comical exists for the religious individual and humour is his *incognito*.

The concealed identity, the *incognito*, of the man of faith has absolutely nothing to mark him off from others, or even to serve as a hint for his secret inwardness. The secret inwardness, being a psychical characterization of faith-life, admits of no positive display. Such a religious inwardness is essentially a relationship of the individual to **himself before God**, hence, a reflection into himself while in this reflection, he is also conscious of being existentially in the process of maintaining his secret inwardness, the hallmark of true religiosity. This way he ensures the God-relationship against any shipwreck. The religion of this secret inwardness is tremendously strenuous, requiring the individual to

9. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

employ all his art, in order that no one shall notice anything special or distinctive in his demeanor. For 'just as the criterion of God's omnipresence consists in his being invisible', so too, the criterion of true religiosity is its invisibility.

(i) **Secular Appearance *vis-a-vis* Outward Difference :**

It now follows that faith-relation to the Absolute, being a secret and hidden inwardness, excludes all possible direct expressions. It forbids any outward display or difference, by which a revelation could be effected. For, if outward difference is observable, the principle of mediation is already at work, and thereby the *incognito* is negated : and, if *incognito* is annulled, concealment turns out to be its opposite, namely, revelation, and thereby faith in all its depth-dimension is at last dissolved. The man of faith exercises a tremendous strain to insure himself against the damaging effect of outward difference; hence he maintains his faith by looking like other men. His *incognito* consists in his being here in the world, and at the same time, in holding fast to the conviction of faith that true ^{religiosity} is secret inwardness secured by concealment. Any display of faith would infect his faith with the toxicity of worldliness. In the absolute passion of the God-relationship, one is 'at the farthest possible distance from any form of externality'.¹⁰ The form of externality makes for the outward difference, which is utterly incommensurable with faith-relation. While the outward display reveals, the appearance of being like everyone conceals the hidden inwardness. Between the two however are variant external forms which make faith vulnerable.

Thus faith might lose itself in a very subtle manner : One such subtle manner is when faith is given a prodigious manifestation. In this manifestation, the caricatures of faith are produced in terms of its external forms. The overt manifestation of faith may seek to convey a certain 'life-form' in the sphere of religion. Monastic movement, where faith receives its publicity, is a universally accepted external form. Monasticism is a conscious effort, on the part of religion, to attract attention to itself. For this reason some social scientists perceive monasticism as an 'impression management'. This characterization is indeed felicitous, because, by means of a cloister, the monk impresses upon the whole world that he is a saint, hence, distinct and different from the generality of mankind. Outward difference here has found its habitat, but faith as a secret

10. *Ibid.*, p. 455.

inwardness is supplanted by a blatant **puritanist outwardness**. The monk succeeds manipulating a surrogate for faith. Many are such surrogates.

Monasticism is only one such intervening external form, making for an outward difference. Kierkegaard contraposes it to outward **appearance**, a mode of concealing one's faith. Monasticism is an easier form of life than the mode of existence in faith. Hence, unlike the monk, the knight of faith experiences fear and trembling in the simultaneity of his existence in the absolute and the relative. Kierkegaard conceives monasticism as an ideal form of mediation, for the cardinal principle of mediation here is the requirement of a finite, or relative, **middle term** being pressed into service for effecting a God-relationship. Mediation is an intervention, nay more a rebellion, of a relative intermediary against the majesty of the Absolute; it is an 'attempt to bring the absolute down to the level of everything else'.¹¹

(ii) **Paradox of Secular Appearance as 'Unmediated' Relation :**

Moreover, if no mediation is admitted, does it amount to suggest that a God-relationship is immediate or direct ? Such a conclusion is seemingly entailed in the negation of mediation. If unmediated relationship between God and man is heterogenous with any form of argument, positing a middle term as its indispensable component, one may be tempted to subscribe to an inference, drawn in favour of the directness of the faith relation. But Kierkegaard is vehemently opposed to this conclusion as well. He writes in the *Postscript* :

Nature is indeed the work of God, but only the handiwork is directly present, not God . . . And why is God elusive ? Precisely because he is the truth, and by being elusive desires to keep men from error. The observer of nature does not have a result immediately set before him, but must by himself be at pains to find it, and thereby the direct relationship is broken. But the breach is precisely the act of self-activity, the irruption of inwardness, the first determination of the truth as inwardness.¹²

An interpretation of the above is possible within the framework of Christian worldview. To Kierkegaard, an immediate, or direct, relationship to God suggests a pejorative theological formulation of God. In it God is reduced to a tangible thing, immediately and directly apprehended by the senses. Description

11. *Ibid.* , p. 375.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

of God and of faith-relationship in terms of the immediate and sensible makes for an anthropomorphic, not Christian, theology and faith.

(iii) **Divine Elusiveness, a Typology for Secular Appearance :**

On the contrary, faith-relation is essentially a spiritual relationship, which is conditioned by a prior irruption of inwardness heightened by the **divine elusiveness**. What is purported by the divine elusiveness is the fact, that God has absolutely nothing obvious in the physical sense. His existence is neither immediate nor direct, because his invisibility is his omnipresence. Conversely, his visibility would annul his omnipresence. Here is a seeming contradiction: An omnipresent person is elusive and invisible. The contradiction between omnipresence and invisibility is only a fraction of the contradictory relationship between revelation and concealment, manifestation and mystery, in religion. The paradigm is applicable to faith as well.

Paradoxical to thought, unmediated God-relationship both excludes immediateness and constitutes concealment. Faith, at once unmediated, yet not immediate, can then be understood only as the depth-dimension of the believer. Kierkegaard thinks it as a personal appropriation, exercise strenuously with the pathos and passion in inwardness, a personal relationship in the sphere of subjectivity, which excludes all manifestation of outward difference.

When it is said that God's omnipresence is in His elusiveness, Kierkegaard means that 'He is in the creation, and present everywhere in it, but directly He is not there'.¹³ The dialectical logic implicit in the statement is of a heuristic value to our present hermeneutics of the concept of concealment in the man of faith. Faith does not terminate his existence, but educates him how best to put on the 'manifold composite garment of the finite'. It does not make him different from others, but educates him to look like other men. But this secular appearance of the sacred profession of faith makes for the concealment of faith. In the irony of things, the outward appearance of the knight of faith hides the real. This constitutes his elusiveness, or the concealment, of his faith. The elusiveness of the knight of faith is his *incognito*. Even as the value of divine elusiveness consists in the fact that it keeps men from error, -- the error of apprehending God immediately and directly in the creation, likewise, the valuable significance of the elusiveness of the knight of faith consists in the fact

13. *Ibid.* *Emphasis is mine.*

that it keeps men from error, -- the error of apprehending faith by means of cosmological deductions. For faith cannot be deduced from the cosmological structure of the outward distinctiveness in the finite world.

As long as faith is unmediated through the cosmological structure, faith retains its essential concealment. The man of faith is constrained by this high calling to safeguard his faith, by not being able to communicate its essential secret. The moment he resorts to reveal it by assuming an external form, he has thereby resorted to outward difference. In the same act, he mediates his faith through either the immediate or the universal order. The worldly order is constituted of both, and the knight of faith has infinitely renounced it for the sake of an absolute *telos*, call it the particularity of faith or absolute duty, over against the universal. The knight of faith therefore is bound by his freedom to be alone in a practised silence, and a chosen concealment, looking like other men.

In making secret inwardness axiomatic to true religiosity, the knight of faith opens himself to a serious charge: he lives **outwardly** as any member of the commonality, but simultaneously, he lives **inwardly** as heterogenous with the commonality. Would not the life of the knight of faith be a 'double-facedness'? Can anything be more repulsive to religious life than a sham and a sophistry? In the face of the above charge, it would appear that faith is counterfeit. Kierkegaard rejects these charges by upholding the apparent contradictions. He argues that the inner contradiction in faith is its sustenance and nutriment. No sooner is contradiction removed than faith is revoked. For, faith is sustained and nourished in the category of the absurd. Existential faith-relationship to God is determined only through the negative. In much the same way as the certainty of faith is determined by its uncertainty, happiness by suffering, truth by its absurdity, concealment of the man of faith is signalized and determined by his appearing like other men.

It will be noticed that the problem of identity of the knight of faith has been too palpable to escape our attention. which one among the mortals in the commonality is the man of faith? How is the conformist at the same time the transformed man of faith? We may suggest that the principle of identity in this regard is the other side of the principle of contradiction; the principle of identity

is precisely the opposite of what it seems to be. Yet the problem of identity of the man of faith cannot be investigated by the yardsticks of speculative understanding. Neither can the problem of conformity of the man of faith be delved into outside this paradoxical-dialectic. Hence, the secular appearance is the criterion of a secret inward passion and of concealment. | how?

(iv) **An element of Tension in the *Incognito* :**

If revelation is the factor of relief and relaxation, concealment is the decisive factor of acute tension. Tension is also the highest expression of subjectivity. The subjective problem does not exist for an objective inquirer, since for the latter there is no decisiveness, but decision is inconceivable without passion. It follows that, whenever a passionate decision is to be made, it demands a strenuous movement of the spirit and an infinite concentration; this is faith's self-activity.

Since concealment and appearance are conceptually opposed to each other, there is an abiding tension in their juxtaposition, but tension is inherent in faith.¹⁴ But this must not lead us to conclude that contradiction *per se* is determined only by passion. Kierkegaard only suggests that, if passion is taken away from the contradiction, a passionless contradiction becomes a 'mere pleasantry, a bon mot'.¹⁵ In that case a contradiction, subsisting between concealment and appearance, is a mere aesthetical problem. An existential problem, on the other hand, cannot but be personal, and, therefore, passionate. Hence an apprehension of the pathos is essential to grasp the dialectical difficulty, 'because the task is to exist in it'.¹⁶

Thus, concealment of faith is extremely strenuous. The finite medium of existence places stringent demands upon the believer. To facilitate concealment, first of all, he naturalizes in and adapts himself to, 'the manifold of existence', and thus has an appearance like other men, governed by the universal. But in his being like other men, he also runs the risk of compromising his faith, by doing the things he should not, and not doing the things he should. But even when he is in the finite, he has a structure of consciousness that is deeply ethical, since it is so very contiguous to the religious. But, even here, he may be equally vulnerable to the ethical itself serving as the temptation, because the ethical-universal can lead him to display an outward difference, which at

14. *Ibid.*, p. 345

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

once cancels concealment. Secondly, concealment in faith implies a life of acute stress and strain. This is not only because of infinite resignation demanded, but also because of the teleological suspension of the ethical, that may be sometimes demanded.

II. CONCEALMENT IN AESTHETICS

Concealment is not necessarily a category of religion. Kierkegaard admits that there can be aesthetical concealment, and its co-relate revelation. But the moorings, however, of the two types of concealment are entirely different. To this we may now turn.

In the realm of Aesthetics, say, poetry and drama, concealment plays an important role. Poetry, in particular, exhibits its unique character by way of initial concealment, and thereafter by a revelation of suggested meanings. Thus concealment is artfully employed in poetry to convey a certain aesthetical feeling in life. The poet freely moves in the realm of possibility and imagination. For this imaginative task he draws materials from the historico-existential. But poetry marks the point of departure from the historical to take a flight into an 'imaginative existence'. Poet's success consists in changing the historico-existential into an imaginative-existential. He lives in aesthetic passion, so long as he embarks upon a poetic contemplation. It is asserted that the richness of his production consists in the fact, that poetry reveals the reality of the world by means of aesthetic concealment.

Likewise, in Greek plays, Kierkegaard reminds us, the importance of concealment cannot be denied. It is precisely in the factor of concealment that a play receives its beauty and elegance. Kierkegaard specially singles out Greek tragedies, where concealment is 'an epic survival grounded upon a fate'. In the concealed fate the dramatic action itself disappears from view, but the play derives its origin and sustenance from the obscure and enigmatic fate. It does not therefore seem unnatural, if drama has something to hide. By concealment it creates a curiosity, and the more the dramatist can create concealment, the greater is the aesthetical passion.

Yet another area of aesthetics, namely, romantic love can assign a significant role of concealment. Kierkegaard explicates it in his *Either-Or*, the disjunctives

in it representing the aesthetical and the ethical stage of existence respectively. The aesthetical represents only a possibility, hence it is captured in the forms of a melancholy, which cannot win through to existence. Melancholy is autopathic, but it can also deceptively occupy itself with the suffering of others. It deceives by 'concealing itself under the cloak of pleasure, rationality, demoralization. . . , concealment being at one and the same time its strength and weakness.'¹⁷

Its strength lies in the realm of imagination, and weakness in winning through to existence. Aestheticism hence is characterized by a potential eroticism, the individual indulges himself in aesthetic imagination. Aesthete's sphere of existence is imaginative-existence, lived in aesthetic passion. The sphere is not devoid of the aesthetical paradox: Imagination, which is a mere possibility, is hyphenated with existence, which is an actuality. Being thus aesthetically paradoxical, it collides with time : the result is 'maximum despair'. Kierkegaard perceives that such a life of concealment is a fearful plight. The Or of the disjunctives, however, represents the ethical, concretized, in the context of romantic love, in marriage. In the ethical the melancholy and despair are greatly overcome by the commitment: Romantic love commits itself to marriage, inaugurating the 'ethical-existential'. Revelation of the aesthetical possibility results only in transforming it into ethical actuality. This brings us to the ethical-existential, in which the man of faith too lives.

III. REVELATION OF THE ETHICAL *Vrs.* THE CONCEALMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS :

By virtue of the dialectical movement, the knight of faith lives in the finite, though as a stranger. He is virtually in the sphere of the ethical.¹⁸ Problem III of *Fear and Trembling* posits the ethical-universal as the manifest; the ethical is the revelation. This contention may appear to us as a tautology, since the universal *per se* is the basis of understanding and communication between man and man. Communication then accounts for revelation. In the universal, he is known for what he is and is not. Revelation becomes a matter of necessity, since there exists a necessary connection between the universal and revelation.

The universal is the revealed, but the individual, as the physical and psychical being, is essentially the hidden, or the concealed.¹⁹ The great task of the ethical is to lead the individual out of his concealment, and to reveal himself

17. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

18. Note, again, a paradoxical category : Teleological suspension of the ethical breaks him off the ethical. However, once the suspension concerned is felicitously abrogated, the knight is back to the ethical-universal.

19. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 91.

in the universal. If the individual remains in the concealment of particularity, he is virtually a moral offender. The heroism of the great men consisted in revealing themselves in the universal.

Can this position be held in respect of faith ? Kierkegaard says :

If there is not a concealment, which has its ground in the fact that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal, then Abraham's conduct is indefensible, for he paid no heed to the intermediate ethical determinants. If on the other hand there is such a concealment, we are in the presence of the paradox which cannot be mediated . . .²⁰

We are back to the central problem of the chapter. Faith is not amenable to the category of the understanding, therefore, of the universal. The knight of faith has no other mode of existence than that of concealment, a delving into his own depth of subjectivity and, at the same time, appearing like others. The passage above highlights two issues : First, if the life of faith, which is essentially a secret and passionate inwardness, is revealed in terms of the universal, then such determinants of faith has infinite resignation and teleological suspension of the ethical, concealment and particularity of the knight are nothing short of a moral offence against the ethical-universal. Second, if revelation is negated forever in respect of faith, as an intense passion of subjectivity, then we are standing on the pinnacle of the paradox and the absurd, which all along constitute and sustain faith. Faith is therefore concealment, and is incommensurable with revelation.

(1) **Inadequacy of Language in the Revelation of Faith :**

How does an epistemological revelation take place ? Obviously, through the universal categories of language, something is made intelligible to us. Revelation, then, consists in linguistic intelligibility, Does the essential character of faith admit itself of being rendered intelligible through the medium of human language ? Kierkegaard's answer is in the negative. His reasons are worth looking into.

Firstly, revelation of faith by means of a verbal communication is impossible due to the inadequacy of language. Faith is a paradoxical existential category, it cannot be made intelligible in human language. The *Postscript* speaks of the

20. *Ibid.*

impotency of language in this respect :²¹ Language is a 'more abstract medium than existence'.²² Faith cannot be abbreviated, or substituted, by letters.

It may be noted here that Kierkegaard is not alone in this view of language. There is a convergence of opinion among a great many philosophers of the Wittgensteinian tradition on the limited role of language.²³ Language is a system of symbols, and as symbolic, it stands for some thing (or function) but not the 'thing' itself. The syntactical structure of language is not the same as what it represents. Language is commensurable only with abstract thought and logic. Thought is representational in character, therefore it can be far removed from concrete existence.

Kierkegaard contends that an explanation of faith, in terms of language, is to explain it away. Language cannot fathom the depth of the paradox of existence, encountered in faith. Language, is what is 'spoken', whereas faith is what is 'lived.' What is lived in and by the paradox of faith cannot intelligibly be either explicated or communicated through the abstract form of language. It may be noted, Kierkegaard is not a philosopher of language. He is intent only on fighting a reductionism of faith to the finite. Faith cannot be reduced to a phenomenon, that yields itself to 'explaining what it means'. The principle of all rational knowledge is the understanding of 'what a thing is'. The principle is admissible to faith, if the latter is taken to mean a propositional corpus. But faith, not being a proposition, is not revealed by a speculative understanding. Kierkegaard says, 'the understanding is thus to be distinguished from the truth it understands; here it is not the case that only when the understanding has understood everything contained in the truth, is the truth understood'.²⁴

 21 Kierkegaard does not, in principle, negate the role of language. Language has a function. The individual is born and brought up in the universe of the immediate aesthetic world by means of language and reflection. Likewise, the assertion of self-identity begins to dawn, when the infant acquires the capacity to use language. 'That which annuls immediacy therefore is language (*sproget*) . . . immediacy therefore is reality and language is ideality' (See Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, A study of Time and the Self. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 157.) Language opens up a new world for the individual. As long as one remains within the immediate aesthetic, language and thought are exotic to him, language and thought are the two sides of the same coin. With the use of language, the ability to articulate possibilities, or to specify goals, develops. The possibility for ethico-religious decision presupposes the capacity for language.

22 *Postscript*, p. 398

23 Jerry H. Gill, 'Langer, Language and Art', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1994, pp. 422-423. Suzanne K. Langer believes that language is an indirect, representational symbol system. We formulate through it logical and factual relationships, obtaining between the physical world and conceptual thought.

24 *Postscript*, p. 200

Secondly, the plea for revelation is made for the sake of providing a proof for faith. But faith neither admits nor needs it. On the contrary, faith regards proof as its enemy, because proof destroys it completely. Speculative thought expects faith to emerge from the proof, but what emerges from the proof is the extinction of faith. It is only when faith loses its categories of the paradox, the absurd, inwardness and passion, that proof becomes necessary to command recognition and respect for unbelief. Kierkegaard remarks that clergymen, and speculative philosophers alike, have expended so much of rhetorical niceties, trying to explain what faith is; but they have succeeded only in portraying, not faith, but its caricature. Such an objective, speculative representation of faith, by means of linguistic explanations, robs faith of its meaning. So, what is revealed and understood in their representations is the 'explanation of faith' rather than faith itself. Explanation invariably tends to assume the character of speculation, and its method is invariably objective. But, 'objectively there is no truth for existing individual, but only approximation; for the existing individual is precluded from becoming altogether objective by the fact that he exists'.²⁵ But faith, being the highest form of subjectivity, does not yield itself to any intelligible communication through language.

Thirdly, to ask for a revelation of faith is to demand for its intelligibility. In a mordant sarcasm, Kierkegaard retorts that a demand for an intelligibility, and an authentication of its existence, is as nonsensical as asking a living human being to prove that he exists.²⁶ Even if the question of existence were not to be raised, intelligibility itself of faith is inadmissible, since it has no reciprocity with faith. In demanding for an intelligibility in respect of God-relationship, one is smuggling faith into the market of speculative thought.²⁷ But, then, we have robbed faith of all its essential decisiveness. If decisiveness is abrogated, subjectivity is equally annulled, because all decision is rooted in subjectivity. Where there is no subjectivity, faith simply does not exist. A contemplative spirit, the kind of which an 'objective' subject is, finds nowhere near any decision. Again, if faith were to consist only in an objective corpus of creedal propositions, our approach to it would necessarily be speculative. The speculative approach uses all thought categories, through the medium of language, to explain what faith is. This implies a 'result statement', which faith clearly is not. Kierkegaard finds such pragmatism and utilitarianism in respect of faith obnoxious. He

25. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

26. This becomes a cardinal thesis for Existentialism : Existence is prior to any demonstration of existence.

27. *Postscript*, p. 49.

complains that people 'flirt aesthetically with the result',²⁸ but result is incompatible with faith. Faith rather is a process, lasting as long as life lasts. Kierkegaard therefore holds that the man of faith 'absolutely cannot make himself intelligible to anybody'.²⁹ Faith is not 'an immediate and extremely free-and-easy relationship between and immediate consciousness and a sum of propositions'. It does not consist in the objectified revelation, which may be manipulated in whatever form or in the objectivity of doctrinal proposition.

(2) Faith is Existential :

Faith is an existential inwardness of the concrete reality of man, as an existing individual. Kierkegaard is careful to safeguard the existing individual, and his faith etherializing into the abstract 'cognitiveness', afforded by language. 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, and it is impossible to exist without passion, more properly, an infinite passion for an absolute relation to the Absolute, is primordial. To any reality other than faith, the existing individual stands in a cognitive relationship. He however can stand cognitively related even to faith, if the latter were to be spelt out in language. In the process, however, there would be a movement (*kinesis*) from the 'real' to the 'possible', since his own existence as the real fades into insignificance, as the possible comes to the forefront. This is the case of the retreat into the speculative undertaking. The rule of the game here is to infer existence from essence, or thought. This is the legitimate sequel, precipitated by the plea for the revelation of faith.

But this legitimization is a Cartesian legacy, concretized in the celebrated *cogito ergo sum*. The legacy makes essence precede existence. For Kierkegaard, this is a curious contradiction. It is even ridiculous, since the individual, *qua* 'exister', tries to prove his existence by the fact that he thinks. Abstract thinking is at once an abstraction from one's own existence. But one's existence is not the conclusion of a syllogism, it is a fundamental datum. If you try to prove it, you end up disproving it '... existence is revealed as a presupposition . . ., but the act of abstraction nevertheless becomes a strange sort of proof for his existence, since if he succeeded entirely, his existence would cease'.³⁰ The Cartesian *cogito* already implies the existence of the 'I', as the subject of *cogito*. If the 'I' is the individual human being, then the proposition, *cogito ergo sum*, proves nothing.³¹

28. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 74.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

30. *Postscript*, p. 281.

31. *Ibid.*

If the Cartesian 'I' were to be interpreted as the particular human being, who exists, the proposition would only be preposterous, because the *ergo* would take us to a purely conceptual existence of the 'pure ego'. Hence the Cartesian doctrine, in the existentialist framework of Kierkegaard, is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Conversely, if the 'I' in the cogito is the pure ego having a conceptual existence, and if the 'I am' in the *sum* were to be interpreted as the concrete 'I', then the ideal 'I' has given rise to the actual 'I'. This is equivalent to one's success in producing a rose by thinking it, which is ridiculous. Likewise, the construction of religious faith by means of an abstract language, demanded by the plea for revelation, is equally ridiculous.

(3) Possibility *vs.* Actuality :

Cartesian legacy in philosophy has evacuated actuality from its legitimate position in favour of possibility. Speculative enterprise takes existence away from the real, and indulges in abrogating its actuality. With respect to every reality, other than the individual's own reality, the principle obtains that one can come to know it by thinking it. But, with respect to one's own reality, as the man of existential faith, it is highly questionable whether his thought can succeed in abstracting from existence completely. Philosophically, possibility may be higher than actuality, but this is an intellectual and a poetic standpoint, constituting only an aestheticism. Kierkegaard argues, aestheticism is disinterested in the actuality, for 'disinterestedness is an expression for indifference to reality'.³² But, from the point of view of existential faith, the order is reversed: Actuality is higher than possibility. Faith proposes to do away with the 'ideality of the possible', for the sake of the 'ideality of the actual'³³ by making existence a matter of passionate and infinite interest. Hence faith, by its very nature, is an existential faith, which cannot be expressed, communicated or revealed through the medium of abstract language. A faith, that comes to be revealed through the expression of abstract language, is the noumenal faith that has no relevance to the existing individual.

The man of faith has an enormous task of thinking and understanding himself. But he has to do it, not *out of* existence, but *in* existence. Thus, while the speculative thinker seeks to speculate and understand the concrete in an abstract manner, the religious believer thinks and understand the abstract, if

32. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

33. Ideality here refers to the ideal.

any, in a concrete manner. The task for the religious man is to exist in faith, and also to understand the difficulty of existing in it.

The difficulty for the man of faith is that of the contradiction of living in faith, like the rest of human beings. He lives in the finite, without having his life in it; he however does not derive the meaning of his existence from the finite. This contradiction makes him a stranger to the world, but he is prohibited to manifest his heterogeneity with the finite by any extraneous and exotic demeanor. It is difficult to make an infinite resignation and, yet, live in the finite, 'to be crushed in spirit and yet free from care'.³⁴ Hence the life of faith is an uphill task, a difficult enterprise.

(4) Faith a Matter of Interiority :

Another danger implicit in the plea for revelation is the attempt to externalise one's religiosity, which is a matter of interiority. Kierkegaard says, 'true religiosity is the religiosity of secret inwardness'.³⁵ Religious individual is conscious to jealously guard his secret inwardness against any temptation of publicizing it.³⁶ Thus unintelligibility and invisibility are the features of faith. Visibility and intelligibility are factors of externalization of faith, hence criteria for its revelation. But, externalization of faith, demanded by the plea for revelation, by way of visibility and intelligibility, ruins faith totally. The knight of faith therefore 'keeps silence on his own responsibility'.³⁷ He steels his faith in the citadel of silence, wherein he meets his God:

... what ruins so many is ... this wretched tittle-tattle between man and man about what should be suffered and matured in silence, this confession before man instead of before God, this hearty communication between this man and that about what ought to be secret and exist only before God in secrecy, this impatient craving for intermediary consolation . . . but he exists before God and exhausts the suffering of being human and at the same time existing before God . . . from God he must derive his consolation, lest his entire religiosity he, reduced to a rumor.³⁸

Man of faith is entitled to talk about his inner life only with God. But he is tempted to communicate and explain his faith to his fellow men. He craves for

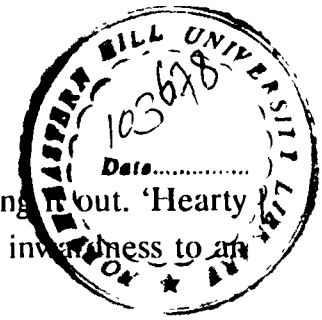
34. *Ibid.*, p. 317

35. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 120.

38. *Postscript*, pp. 437-438. `



a relief from his hypertension of the paradoxical by speaking it out. 'Hearty communication', the 'craving for gossip', reduces his secret inwardness to an 'intermediary consolation', while destroying faith itself.

IV. KIERKEGAARDIAN AND SOCRATIC INWARDNESS

Existential faith is the subjectivity that is, for Kierkegaard, at once truth. Subjectivity is truth. The accent of objectivity is on the objective 'what', but of the subjectivity, on the subjective 'how'. The How refers to the manner of relationship sustained by the believer to the object of his faith.³⁹ The How of the inwardness 'is the passion of the infinite'.⁴⁰ Subjectivity is nothing other than the passion of the infinite; thus subjectivity becomes the truth. Hence a conceptual determination of the truth necessarily includes an expression for the antithesis to objectivity. Hence truth, as subjectivity, is defined : 'An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth'.⁴¹ Because of the radicalness of this definition, truth of faith admits only the 'venture', a 'leap', involving at once the virtue of 'risk': 'Without risk there is no faith'.⁴² The *Postscript* comments on the radicalness as follows :

If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this, I must believe.⁴³

To highlight on the inwardness of faith, Kierkegaard draws upon Socrates. In so far as Socrates, too, may be said to be a philosopher of inwardness and subjectivity, in virtue of his principle of 'know thyself', he, too, may be said to oppose objective certainty. There is an analogue between Kierkegaardian notion of objective uncertainty and the Socratic ignorance, since the 'Socratic ignorance gives expression to the objective uncertainty'.⁴⁴

Now, the Socratic ignorance is essentially an ignorance of the truth. Man is ignorant of the truth, that is implicit in him. Since all knowledge is only a remembrance, a teacher is required only to occasion a remembrance. The teacher helps the subject by reminding him that he has forgotten the truth. 'The Socratic principle holds, that the teacher is merely an occasion whoever he may be, even if he is God'.⁴⁵ To the extent that Kierkegaard too focusses his

39. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

45. *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 9.

attention on the subject rather than the object, he has much in common with Socrates. But there are important difference between the two.

In the first place, a point of departure between the two is that, whereas all knowledge is only remembrance to Socrates, therefore, ignorance is only forgetfulness, to Kierkegaard, ignorance is not a mere forgetfulness, even as knowledge is not an act of pure remembering. Consistent with his Christian principle, ignorance consists in the state of Error, or Sin.⁴⁶ Due to this, truth is not implicit in the individual. It rather has to be introduced *ab extra*. To introduce this truth, unlike in Socrates, the teacher here is absolutely necessary. To Kierkegaard, such a teacher is Christ, who is at once the teacher and the object of faith. Christ, being the God-man, becomes the paradoxical object of faith. The core of faith is not a belief in a proposition, but a commitment to the person of the paradoxical God-man. Hence, the truth, that is 'injected' from outside, will have to be inwardly appropriated in the depth of one's own subjectivity. This then is the significance of Kierkegaard's assertion, 'Subjectivity is the truth'.

The teacher, in giving the truth to the learner, must also give the 'prerequisite condition' for learning it, for, if this is lacking, the learner cannot do anything. *Philosophical Fragments*, going along this fundamental principle of Christianity, tells us that the teacher will, not only transform the learner but also, recreate him before beginning to teach him.⁴⁷ But this is something that no human being can do, it is the prerogative of God, therefore only God can be the only object of religious faith. Thus, in faith, the eternal truth is brought into a relationship with the finite, temporal, in short, existing individual. This too is yet another aspect of the paradox of faith. The process of recollection, implicit in the Socratic inwardness, Kierkegaard fears, can serve as a mediation of faith-relation.⁴⁸ Hence, the Socratic subjectivity also can be understood as a speculative enterprise. On the contrary, when the eternal truth and existence of the individual are placed in juxtaposition with one another, the paradox emerges.⁴⁹

Secondly, the Socratic ignorance is a nescience, characterized by a sheer lack of positivity and certitude of knowledge, referred to speculatively.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

48. The proposition, 'All knowledge is recollection', *per se* is an instance of speculative enterprise, and in that sense, it becomes essentially a Platonic principle. Since Kierkegaard concentrates essentially upon the task of accentuating existence, which Plato both ignores and submerges in speculation, Kierkegaard is suspicious of its resulting in self-knowledge.

49. *Postscript.*, p. 186.

Essentially speaking, Socratic ignorance is an 'objective uncertainty'.⁵⁰ Here, too, there is a parallelism between Socrates and Kierkegaard. In faith, too, there is an objective uncertainty. One believes, not because there is an objective certainty, but precisely because it is improbable, which at once makes for its paradoxical nature.⁵¹ 'Faith is self-active in its relation to the improbable and the paradoxical . . . holding it fast in order to believe'.⁵² The radicalness, asserted by Kierkegaard, is aptly captured: Faith is 'the crucifixion of believing against the understanding'.

But, once again, the Socratic ignorance and objective uncertainty are dissolved in the self-knowledge, through the mediation of the knowledge of the 'essences' or 'forms'. It is the revelation of knowledge. But in Kierkegaard, faith stands in an inverse relationship to the category of revelation: faith is not communicated through the medium of the universal, therefore of language as well.

V. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

In concluding this chapter, we may take note of some intriguing problems.

Firstly, Kierkegaard vigorously champions the cause of faith as an essential concealment, that makes no allowance whatsoever for any form of revelation. Revelation is the antithesis of faith, without any hope for Hegelian synthesis, because one cannot go beyond faith. Therefore, the commensurable mode of existence for the man of faith is that of absolute concealment, isolation and particularity. Being alone without any 'connection or pretension' he cannot guide or teach others what faith is. But, in spite of all these individualistic determinations, *Fear and Trembling* asks him to be a witness.⁵³ Now, the necessary concomitant of witness is communication; communication however is a revelation. The positing of witness in the context of concealment bespeaks of an inherent inconsistency, in Kierkegaard. If concealment of faith is to be kept intact, how does the man of faith bear witness to his faith?

However tentative, I suggest a way out of the problem, while making use of a Kierkegaardian concept, used in a different context though. Kierkegaard gives up neither concealment nor the demand for the witness of faith. Witness can be, not of a direct form through the mediation of language. Rather it is of an 'indirect form'.⁵⁴ The indirect form of communication may be interpreted as a

50. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

54. *Postscript*, p. 216.

'concrete existential communication'.⁵⁵ The knight of faith bears witness to his faith, not as a teacher or a preacher or a monk, who employs the abstract language for direct communication, but by **existing** as a religious man without any pretension. He lives **in** the world without being **of** it. It is then an indirect communication in so far as it is the witness of life, lived plainly externally, but nourished constantly in its inwardness.

But, we cannot bypass the problem of inter-personal relations, in the wake of this particular relation to the Absolute and the need for being a witness through the indirect mode of communication. The task of existing authentically itself may be seen as the witness of faith in the Kierkegaardian philosophy. To him, 'to exist is to believe', or 'to be is to be faithful'. The man, who is set on the path of appropriating faith into his subjectivity, does not flee from the world. Rather, having made the infinite resignation, by way of repetition, he returns to the finite, the realm of the manifold relations. It is the realm of inter-subjectivity and personal communication. Since the ethical is intricately associated with the religious, he lives in the finite, participating with his fellowmen in the common enterprises of the ethical. But the source of his activity is the depth of his own being, suffused with the fullness of faith. If there should be a frightful teleological suspension of the ethical, once again, what sustains him is neither the finite nor the ethical, but the strength of his inner being, not without its own fear and trembling however.

Secondly, implicit in the concealment of faith and its inability to lend itself to any form of revelation, is an extreme form of individualism. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard thinks that a basic feature of faith-relation is an 'absolute isolation'.⁵⁶ In the terrible solitude and isolation, the knight of faith is committed to safeguard and sustain the particularity of faith. Can we maintain the type of individualism that Kierkegaard advocates ?

To be sure, there are serious difficulties in maintaining such individualism, we may have to be sympathetic to Kierkegaard, especially taking into consideration the times, at which Kierkegaard's philosophy became necessary in the Continent. For one thing, his individualism is not a licentiousness or foot-looseness. It is not an expression of the wantonness of an atomized individual. It is rather a call for responsibility for man to stand before God. Even this

55. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

56. *Fear and Trembling*, P. 89.

transparency before God, though religious in itself, is inextricably ethical. This makes for a heightened consciousness in the fulfilment of the relative duties, deriving their significance only from the absolute duty to God. For another, the resuscitation of the individual from the debris of all forms of collectivism, witnessed during Kierkegaard's time, is a positive contribution of Kierkegaardian Existentialism. It is not without reason that, in the Existentialist literature, Kierkegaard is referred to as 'the philosopher of the individual'.

The problem of individualism, however, was not keenly felt during the pre-Reformation and pre-Renaissance era. But, remarkably, with the advent of the Reformation,⁵⁷ the sluice gate of individualism was opened. The individual, was, so to say, liberated from the fetters of institutional totalitarianism, be it the church or the state. The Italian Renaissance of the 15th century witnessed first this great emancipation of the individual. It produced such great men as Leonardo, Machiavelli and others. It liberated men from the narrowness of the Medieval institutionalism. It made of them scholars, scientists and artists, who asserted their individuality in forms of individual creativity. The impact of the Reformation was to have a lasting influence on almost all walks of life, religious, social, cultural, economic and political. It may not be far from the truth to say that the success of the French Revolution is greatly indebted to the spirit of reformation. Economic capitalism of our own times may be greatly attributed, following Weber, to the Reformation. It may also be urged that individualism is the kernel of liberal movement, which originated in England in the 17th century, that spread rapidly throughout the continent, and soon even outside with all its broad ramifications. It was primarily Protestant in character, but of a latitudinarian, rather than a fanatical, kind. It valued commerce and industry, favoured the rising middle class rather than the monarchy and the aristocracy; it had immense respect for the right to property, especially, when accumulated by the hard labour of the individual. Kierkegaard, we must not forget, is a product of the same spirit of Reformation. He too continues the spread of individualism in his area of study, namely, religion and theology. At times, however, one is surprised at his radicalness in the campaign for individualism.

To be sure, alongside the merits of individualism, are also evidenced its demerits. The post-Reformation era also witnessed a significant conflict of social cohesion and individual liberty. Individualism ushered in individual

57. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974, p. 510 ff.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 483 ff.

ethics, which threatened to supplant social ethics; established institutional moral norms came to be challenged and, as a matter of course, subjectivism in its extreme form came to be precipitated by individualism. Subjectivism, once let loose, could not be contained easily until it had run its course. It is therefore not an exaggeration to state that individualism is often synonymous with anarchism.

Underlying the development of individualism is a strong philosophical underpinning, encapsulated in the Protagorean anthropological postulate: 'Man is the measure of all things'. This is often narrowly interpreted by many, as meaning that each man individually is the measure of all things; and that, when men differ, there is no objective truth, in virtue of which one is right or wrong. This is a form of subjectivism gone haywire. But the Kierkegaardian individualism is anything but the Protagorean type. For all his categories of the individual, particular and concealment, his is a religious individualism, in which one, who stands in transparency before God, is the truly existing individual. Since this is the only way we can exist authentically, we do form a community of individuals, characterized by the paradoxical attributes of finite and the infinite, temporal and eternal, mortal and immortal.

In conclusion, contrary to conventional discursive philosophy and theology of faith, life of faith is nourished in silence. It originates and is nurtured in the inwardness of subjectivity. Faith is communicated by the categorial mode of language; hence universal concepts of language break down to express it. The paradoxical revelation of faith is in concealment, even as God's omnipresence is revealed only in its invisibility. Contrary to common understanding, silence, far from suffocating it, strengthens it to make it more vibrant. It cannot seek any mediations to reveal faith, for all mediations turn faith into a caricature.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Chapter - VI

C O N C L U S I O N

In this concluding chapter, I propose to synthesize my results on faith as depth-dimension of man. The conclusion arrived at in each of the chapters is that faith is a constitutive element of human existence. The conclusion however was reached by way of analysing one of the characteristics of faith, such as particularity, absolute duty and concealment of faith. It should be of considerable philosophical interest to us to probe, how deep is the depth-dimension of faith. Hence, I tend to believe that, instead of merely summing up my results, an exploration of further philosophical problems, that emerge from this study, may be attempted. It may afford tentative projects of thought for further scholarship, either to me or anyone else, looking for a theme for investigation in the Kierkegaardian studies. The nature of this exploration, I admit, is sketchy and groping, nonetheless, forward-looking.

Emerging from the previous chapters, there are a number of interesting philosophical issues that would engage the attention of a student of Kierkegaard's Existentialism: subjectivity, transcendence, teleology, kinetic movement from possibility to actuality, anti-intellectualism etc. I shall however focus my attention on only three issues: On subjectivity, because it is the arena of faith's exercise. On transcendence, because it is the intentionality of faith. On anti-intellectualism, because of a need for exonerating Kierkegaard of irrationalism and faith, of obscurantism.

Subjectivity is the realm, where faith is constantly practised. It is the underlying current, flowing steadily in the last three chapters: Faith is not possible outside the realm of subjectivity. The category of subjectivity therefore can be seen, as playing silently the role of a common denominator, explicating the depth-dimension of faith. Subjectivity is central, not only to his analysis of faith, but also to the whole of human existence. Subjectivity constitutes the very hub of human reality. This larger context of subjectivity, however, is not the focus of my attention at this juncture. Rather, since God is said to be the maximum

subjectivity, faith in God is possible only in the inwardness of subjectivity; religious faith is an exercise in subjectivity.

For Kierkegaard, subjectivity has nothing to do with subjectivism, especially, if it were sought to be understood in terms of one's feelings and emotions. This would make subjectivity a pure psychological experience. On the contrary, since faith represents an aspect of human being and existence, it is ontological. This is one of the reasons, why faith is equated with the depth-dimension of human existence. Its exercise therefore calls for its continual personal appropriation in one's life, as against any impersonal assent to, or contemplation of, the object of faith. As such, subjectivity implies that I have personal interest in, or 'passion' towards, the object of faith; that I value it, as being 'the one thing necessary' for my life; that therefore, I make a personal commitment to it. This last element Kierkegaard is never tired of repeating since, whereas the objects of reason necessitate our assent by their evidence, the object of faith requires that we, in the depth of our subjectivity, freely choose it. It is only in the realm of subjectivity that there is a scope for 'risk', 'venture' and 'leap'.

Even as Kierkegaard's subjectivity is not subjectivism, it is also not solipsism. There is a sense in which both subjectivity and solipsism may be said to be self-directed. But the self-direction of solipsism is a circular movement, in which the self becomes both the content and the criterion of truth. It is a bootless flitting with oneself at either terminus. On the contrary, the direction of the movement in subjectivity is a depth-movement. If the man of faith, in the choice of faith, encounters himself, more precisely, his own dreadful freedom, it constitutes only the starting point of the movement. He encounters his self, as ontically grounded, in God. Hence, the movement does not end with his own self. Rather it finds its fulfillment at the other terminus, namely, God as the object of faith.

Subjectivity of faith therefore has an objective datum, unlike in solipsism. Its starting point is the individual existent, as against the general and the universal, as it is in Hegel's idealism. It is only the individual existent that can exhibit an infinite interest and passion for the faith-movement. Kierkegaard unmistakably rules out the self-direction of the movement, ending in the self

itself, affirming that 'a believer is one who is infinitely interested in **another's** 'reality'. Obviously, this reality is that of the teacher, who is also the paradoxical object of faith. This is a decisive criterion for the subjectivity of faith.

Again, in the Christian context, the object of faith is typically paradoxical,¹ since it is Christ as God-man who is the object of faith. Thus the two terms of faith-movement are persons, the man who seeks faith, and the God-man who serves as the object of the seeking. This observation clearly rules out faith to be merely propositional: Faith is not **faith-that**, but **faith-in**. Hence, the movement concerned begins with subjectivity and consummates in maximum subjectivity. To jealously guard the subjective character of faith, Kierkegaard goes to the extent of precluding faith from the relation of immediacy, that we have to the finite objects. Buber was to benefit from this insight in conceiving of faith- relation as a relationship of 'I-eternal Thou'. Faith-movement is not the objective movement to doctrines or propositions, but the subjective movement in the inwardness of the individual with an infinite passion to the appropriation of another centre of subjectivity, more specifically, of the Incarnate paradox of Christ.

The ground of all propositional faith is the theoretical reasons, or understanding, as Kierkegaard would have it. The proposition, as constituting the doctrine, is what we understand by our intellection, the power of reasoning. The more detached we are, the more objective we become; and the more we do understand a doctrine. Not so, in respect of subjectivity, that is at once the existential truth and faith. For it is ultimately the **will**, that posits any act of subjectivity. In the Kantian terms, it is an act of the practical reason, however distrustful of 'reason' that Kierkegaard is. The act of the will is prompted by the infinite passion, which constitutes the inward '**how**' in the life of the believer. We may not be wrong in interpreting the infinite passion as the passion for the infinite. It culminates itself in the stupendous act of making a decision, and decisions is an inseparable category in Kierkegaard's analysis of faith.

The knight of faith, as seen from the last three chapters, is a man of infinite passion. The passion for the infinite is so overwhelming that, for its sake, he forgoes not only the finite aesthetical but also his ethical duty and obligation, if so demanded sometimes. This great enthusiasm and passion would remain a

mere possibility, if the knight were not to arrive at the movement of decision. Needless to say, the decision does not come about by means of approximative calculations and objective determinations, but by a sheer act of free will. It is the will that is capable of the leap of faith. Decision can be arrived at, only by the individual, who has inwardness of subjectivity, for 'only in subjectivity is there decisiveness'. It may thus be said that the hallmark of subjectivity is the infinite passion, and the supreme task of subjectivity is the making of a decision of faith, essentially an act of free will.

Likewise, only where there is passionate decision can there be the experience of pathos. The infinite resignation, and more so, the teleological suspension of the ethical, implies a crisis and pain. Kierkegaard calls pain, inherent in the decision of faith, as pathos, as an essential characteristic of the life of faith. But the believer does not extricate himself from the pathos by way of reversing the decision, for he knows that that would make him all the more miserable. For, he who deliberately wills to be less than what he can and should be, in this case, by way of standing outside the paradoxical and the absurd, becomes the most miserable. Therefore the man of faith decides to abide in the absurd and the paradoxical, and cling on to the stress and strain of his faith. He even cannot communicate this subjective pathos of faith to other person. But his faith is strengthened in the silence of an interior life. For all appropriation takes place, not in knowledge, but in concealment. Faith then admits only a depth-dimension in its growth and development. Thus there is a close link between subjectivity, truth and faith. Their development is in concealment. My thesis has merely touched on this point, but the relation will have to be worked out in greater detail by the Kierkegaardian scholars.

The second theme, which prompts further philosophic interest, in the context of this thesis, is the idea of transcendence. Intentionality of human consciousness to the transcendent is palpably felt throughout my chapters. While explicating in them one or the other aspect of faith, with all its limitations, it should be possible to construe a radically transcendent interpretation of life. The knight of faith constantly transcends human predicates for the sake of an absolute relation to the Absolute. The spirit of transcendent interpretation of

life, as exemplified in the case of Abraham, offers a unique heuristic value for an interpretation of life and existence within the Kierkegaardian hermeneutic.

In the Kierkegaardian exegesis of faith, the terms that one regularly meets with are teleological suspension of the ethical, infinite resignation, absolute duty, growth in inwardness, dying to immediacy, leap, venture, commitment, clinging to the paradox of God-man etc. All these categories are the symbolization of the spirit of transcendence in human life. What is more, as categories, illuminating the spirit of transcendence in human existence, they also bear upon faith as its depth-dimension. The element of transcendence is not a mere bubbling sentimentality, to be equated with the passion of the human organism. For Kierkegaard, it is the grasp of the human spirit that human life is made for a state of existence that is ageless, painless and deathless. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous Climacus captures it in the Christian *telos* of 'eternal happiness'. This is a transcendent state of existence, posited by Climacus as the highest good for human life. Thus it occurs in Climacus's conception that man is not merely a physical being, nor merely a social or political animal, but also a spiritual being, who alone is capable of transcending the finite. It is significant that Kierkegaard puts this perception of the orientation of human nature, through the eyes of one who knows the 'climax', *summum bonum* of human destiny.

Man, *qua* existing individual, stands in conscious relation to the Eternal, since as a physico-psycho-spiritual being, he is a complex of body, mind and spirit. Hence the hankering in his soul to transcend the world around him, however beautiful it may be, is a constituent of his yearning spirit. He can never be satisfied with anything less than the eternal. He walks in the empirical, but his spirit yearns to reach forth towards the transcendental. He has the roots in the finite, but he passionately longs to transcend the finite. Everyone, who aims at perfection in any field, has caught a glimpse of the eternal, as it were, howsoever briefly it might have been. Man is akin to the beast by his body, but, if he were not also akin to God by his spirit, then he would be the most base and brutish of all creatures. It is perfectly natural and intelligible that human beings find themselves immersed in dreaming of an existence other than their given existence. They long for a supra-human existence, free from all contingency, chance, pain, grief and death. Kierkegaard identifies this longing for the eternal

in all such predicates of human existence as love, hate, fear, hope, melancholy, anxiety, joy, grief, pleasure, danger, despair, dread, disappointment and so on on. This openness to transcendence, on the part of human nature, in the many human predicates too needs to be studied closely by the students of philosophy of religion.

Is it the case that the passion to transcend humanity is a passion constitutive of our humanness? The answer seems to be in the affirmative, because, as far as we know, only human beings can both wish and have the capacity to become other than they are. The lure of transcendence over the human seems to be in two directions: **upward** towards the divine, that is, by moving Platonically upward towards the state of self-sufficiency of the divine and **downward** to the demonic, that is, towards the insatiability of the beast. Both the cases imply the cessation of humanness. Kierkegaard repeatedly warns us that, since both movements release tremendous energy, our will should be rightly oriented in transcendence. At any rate, the question, if the cessation of humanness, implicit in its transcendence, is not detrimental to human existence, is philosophically pertinent. Any attempt to **suppress** this passion, inherent in human nature, in the Kierkegaardian schema, would be treated as an attempt to **repress** our humanness. It is the *repression* of humanness, and not the transcendence thereof, that Kierkegaard fears. For the repression, being negative, makes for the sickness of the human spirit. But transcendence, on the contrary, being positive, is the total flowering of the freedom of human nature, finding its fulfillment in the depth of its being. Jaspers, Marcel, Barth, Buber, Tillich, Niebhurs and Pannenberg are not the only philosophers, who were deeply influenced by the thought of Kierkegaard, in respect of transcendence.

While Kierkegaard's influence here on modern philosophers is substantial, he is also himself a child of his Western culture. The passion for transcendence figures quite prominently in the Greek culture. For example, there is in the *Phaedo* a clear allusion to this passion. Plato in his *Dialogues* searches for a form of 'the Good' without the deception of appearance, as the adequate object of the *consuming* demands of the appetite. This Platonic desideratum in the *Phaedo* is essentially the human aspiration to live such a life, that at once transcends the human life to a god-like existence, beyond the reach of the

travails and traumas of human existence. This intentionality to the divine is equally present in the Aristotelean *eudaimonia* also.

In Kierkegaard's exegesis of faith, we have one of the finest expressions, a radical one at that, of human transcendence. It however is explicated from the lowest level. In the *Stages of Existence*, there is enough to show that man, as an existing individual, has this fundamental intentionality to the divine. The aesthetical stage, the concern with the immediate, admits several layers from hedonism to intellectualism. But even in its finer layers, it is a constant reminder that man is more than mere 'flesh and blood and bone'. He enters the ethical stage, characterized by the commitment to the universal. The stage marks already a transcendence of the aesthetical stage. But even the ethical stage seems to have settled far too less, on the scale of the depths of human longing. There is a longing, which can be adequately described as the infinite passion of the individual *qua* 'exister'. Man experiences in ultimate situations the utter inadequacy, or futility, of even the ethical-universal. For the ethical-universal too is a finite realm. He feels deeply a sense of deficiency at the depth of his being. It is the unrealized dimension in his inner being, even though he has arrived at an ethical maturity. It is not the moral integrity, but the religious paradox, that can finally fill the void in human nature. The aesthetical despairs of making the transition to the ethical, but the ethical too despairs of making the leap of faith. Man's highest ethical *telos*, too, cannot offer any solution to his insatiable thirst for transcendence.

The infinite passion for the infinite, that moves the soul from within, makes him restless. It is the restlessness of the spirit, that is naturally intentional to the eternal. Enflamed by the infinite passion, man constantly gazes upward. It is the movement upward, because it is the higher that pulls the lower to itself. The movement marks the transition from the *homo ethicus* to *homo religiosus*. The transition may mark an opposition between the two orientations, the kind of which is exemplified between the tragic hero and the knight of faith, between Agamemnon and Abraham. For the transcendence of the finite, encapsulated not only in the aesthetic but also ethical attitude to life, may demand not only the abrogation of the former but also the suspension of the latter. And, this, for the sake of **actualizing** the eternal happiness, that Johannes Climacus places before us, as the destiny of man. Hence faith is the unique remedial response to

the aspiration of the existing individual, as the *homo religiosus*, to the transcendent *telos*.

Finally, the idea of transcendence, that one meets with in faith, implies a paradoxical movement, if it is to have meaning and content for, the existing individual. This observation too needs deeper exploration.

There is already in the Platonic aspiration for the divine and the immortal a strand of the paradox, though weak. For Plato, the passion to transcend human existence cannot be effected without undoing the human context. The undoing must be radical, since the aspiration is to leave behind all the constitutive conditions of our humanity. Transcendence of life would then mean a life of another sort of being, the god-like life. But, as philosophers, we need to note that the wish to transcend humanity is also the wish, constitutive of our perfect humanness, so much so that the aspiration of our passion for transcendence cannot entail the contraction, nay more, the annihilation, of humanity itself. Plato would say that to cease to see and feel this inner urge for transcendence would be, in some way, to cease to be human. But the transcendence, if realized, is equally ceasing to be human. How are we to overcome this contradiction ?

In Kierkegaard's philosophy, however, this contradiction may be said to be overcome, without destroying the paradox involved. For transcending the human has meaning and significance only in the context of humanity, and not at the expense of its obliteration. The paradox is strengthened in the Kierkegaardian context: Transcendence, as demonstrated by the knight of faith, is not only a paradox, but has within itself the dialectical structure; it has the character of the paradoxical-dialectic . This makes transcendence a **constant** process of appropriating the God- relationship, without ceasing to be human, by virtue of the dialectical movement of faith. The knight of faith, after making the infinite resignation, is back in the finite, so as to live his life in the finite, as illuminated by the light of infinite in constancy. In this process, faith, as a transcendent movement of the spirit, is a continuous movement, and it lasts as long as life lasts.

The concept of transcendence precipitates another problem for philosophical thought, which is too significant to be given a go-by. This is the problem of transcendent teleology. Transcending the human need not

necessarily imply a movement to the divine, as it is the case with many a humanistic programmes and ideologies. There are examples of such transcendence of the human, without the element of the divine in both Marx and Nietzsche, to name randomly. To Kierkegaard, however, the infinite passion for transcendence involves a transcendent goal, positively divine, to be achieved at any cost. Kierkegaard too acknowledges an ethical *telos* in the **here and now**, as the full flowering of humanity in its manifold relations, a 'humanity beyond man', as it were. But, over and above this ethical *telos*, there is a religious goal for man. Evidently man cannot be silenced, or satisfied with the mundane, he longs for the eternal **Beyond**, the beyond the here and now, beyond himself. This eternal Beyond, which makes him both restless and enthusiastic, may be characterized as the animating principle, and the controlling purpose, of his life.

In view of this, it is legitimate to speak of a transcendent teleology. Only against this backdrop, Kierkegaard's philosophical reflections on an absolute *telos*, absolute duty, absolute commitment, makes sense, if any. Both his existentialism and protestant theology are made to fully bear on his transcendent teleology. Kierkegaard is careful to distinguish his absolute *telos* from all other *telos* of the finite order, be they *telos* of aesthetic sensibility, intellectual contemplation or ethical commitment. This is to suggest that the absolute *telos* is the transcendent *telos*. But transcendent teleology may sound equivocal, if we do not adequately qualify it. Unless we make a specific reference, it will remain a neutral concept to admit a free applicability. For example, we can think of a cosmic teleology, as having a transcendent content; and therefore, we can accordingly say that the changes and development in the physical world has a transcendent purpose and goal. Hence, we have to be specific, when we speak of Kierkegaard's transcendent teleology. Kierkegaard's conception of transcendent teleology does not share the nature of cosmic teleologies. Rather, what is envisaged in his conception is the kind of teleology, that concerns the purpose of human life both here and now and hereafter. Man, as an existing individual, has a goal and a purpose which transcends the temporal. We may not lose sight of an important philosophical thrust, that Kierkegaard gave a philosophy of life, that was to be known as Existentialism, namely, an ontology of human existence.

Therefore, it will be interesting to ask : What is man in the Kierkegaardian conception ? What is the purpose of human existence ? What is the human destiny ? I believe, all these questions constitute, what may be considered as the Kierkegaardian philosophical anthropology. But it is an anthropology, that is at once transcendental. It must be of immense philosophical interest to students of philosophy. As far as my knowledge goes, so far in the Kierkegaardian scholarship, a rather one-sided importance is placed on a single concept of his anthropology, namely, the individual, but the element of transcendence seems to have not merited the attention of the scholars. Yet, it is so very crucial to Kierkegaard. If the problem of transcendent teleology within this anthropology were to be investigated, the attempt will be a step forward in the Kierkegaardian scholarship.

Closely associated with the transcendent teleology, we also discern two forces at play, possibility and actuality. A study of the interplay of these categories, in the context of faith- relationship in Kierkegaard's philosophy, may be yet another fruitful exercise in metaphysics. Kierkegaard begins with the assumption that faith is an essential possibility for man; as possibility, it is in the realm of the ideal. Here, Hegel is right. But, from the existential viewpoint, faith is a life that is lived; it is an actuality, and not a mere idealized possibility in the realm of imagination and thought. Hegel erred here in keeping it confined to the realm of the ideal: The best, that we could do for it, was to transform it into knowledge by the magic wand of synthesis in his dialectics, but faith is still in the realm of possibility. Kierkegaard argues that faith is ultimately actualized. We would never have faith, unless the God- relationship and all its characteristics, after being apprehended ideally, are also actualized. The task of faith is not of ideation, but of actual appropriation. Faith is not thinking, but being and becoming.

The two dynamic factors of possibility and actuality belong to two different realms of personality. Possibility resides in the mind, or thought, but actuality belongs to the will, or freedom. Between these two coordinates of personality there lies the phenomenon, that Kierkegaard calls an inter-esse. It is interpreted as admitting two meanings, distinct but inextricably linked. Firstly, it is 'being-between'. This is the concrete existence of the human individual. It is an existence, characterized by temporality and eternity. It is an 'in- between'

existence, hence admitting a dynamic process of becoming. By virtue of a process of becoming, a *posse* (possibility) is translated into an *esse* (actuality). The ability to be is turned into the act of existing through becoming. For Kierkegaard, the human actualization takes place by the constant exercise of the individual's will. In the realm of possibility there is no decisiveness. The exercise of free will, it has been observed, is decisive to Kierkegaard's subjectivity. It may be said here that, while, for Hegel, thought is the means by which possibilities are actualized, to Kierkegaard, however, through thought they are merely apprehended, but they are actualized by and through the will.

A question that I am prompted to ask is: Is possibility higher than actuality? In the *Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard posits possibility as the educative element in the life of the individual. Only the man, 'educated by possibility is educated in accordance with his infinity'. In the light of this statement, we have to construe meaning for Kierkegaard's admission that possibility is 'the heaviest of all categories'. Thus there is a sense, which it may be stated that possibility is greater than actuality. But, if we make this the final answer in Kierkegaard's metaphysics, we will have definitely missed the crucial message that he wants to give us. For this would not make him then any different from Hegel. What then is his final answer? To know this, we have to take into consideration the second meaning of human existence - as *inter-esse*.

Secondly, human existence, understood as an *inter-esse* is an infinite interest. Human existence is intentional, in the sense that it has within itself a fundamental openness, or orientation, to the infinite. This brings us back to the transcendent teleology, the moorings of the dynamic movement of human being from all possibility to actuality. It is this second meaning of *inter-esse* that takes us from a cold metaphysics to a philosophy of religion in Kierkegaardian anthropology. In the light of this meaning, we need to have a fresh look at the two categories of possibility and actuality, and also their inextricable relation, in the dynamic movement of one into the other. Kierkegaard argues that, if human existence, or actuality, is 'interest', possibility is disinterested of existence. But, the ethical stage of existence, unlike the aesthetical one, proposes to do away with the disinterestedness of the possible, by making existence the infinite interest. It represents the first attempt at opposing the contemplating of humanity and existence, because, by means of contemplation, we arrive only at

the possibility. For Kierkegaard, the ethical, by virtue of the exercise of will and freedom, is concerned with the existence of the particular. It is the actuality. The ethical is realized only by the individual subject from within, since he alone can know what it is that internally moves him. Whereas the ethical is only the first stage in the actuality of the human existence, its culmination is met with in the religious stage of existence, in particular, in faith- relation. For it is only in faith, being the passionate and infinite interest, that human existence is actuality in the full sense of the term. Hence, the Kierkegaardian motto would be 'to be is to believe', 'to exist is to be faith-full'.

In the realm of Aesthetics, be it art, poetry, or philosophical contemplation, possibility is higher than actuality. Aristotle remarks in his *Poetics* that poetry is higher than history. In stating this, he has rated possibility to be higher than actuality. In some cases, particularly, in poetry, *posse* does not even admit of being translated into an *esse*. In the realm of speculative thought, the case seems even more stringent; there is no scope for *esse*, precisely because speculative contemplation is a pure *posse*. Therefore, Kierkegaard thinks that it is misunderstanding to be concerned about reality, or actuality, from the aesthetic, or intellectual, point of view. If actuality can be reduced to thought by the aesthetic and intellectual principle, what is obtained is a temporary flight from existence to contemplative forgetfulness. All aesthetic enjoyment is such that the actual is temporarily suspended. But, in ethics and religion, a precise opposite of this is sought to be built into a principle, namely, that all possibility is sought to be translated into actuality. Hence, faith is one actuality, wherein the passionate and decisive interest takes literally possession of the existing individual. He begins to have faith, but ends up being possessed by faith. Here, actuality is higher than possibility.

Moreover, in the realm of aesthetics, Kierkegaard thinks that art and poetry have been called a mere anticipation of the actual. But, from an existentialist's viewpoint, art and poetry are not essentially related to an existing individual; for their contemplative enjoyment, the joy over what is beautiful, is disinterested. Aesthetic joy is experienced by being detached from oneself. The connoisseur of art is contemplatively **outside** of himself. On the contrary, to Kierkegaard, the real, which denotes the actual, is of infinite interest to the existing individual. Such an existing individual is not a contemplative, but one who is decisively

interested in his transcendent *telos* by way of the commitment of faith. Thus a deeper study of the interplay between possibility and actuality, in the context of transcendent teleology, may not be without its rich dividends.

Finally, I must address myself, however briefly, to the charge against Kierkegaard's anti-intellectualism. This too is relevant to the study undertaken here, since, if Kierkegaard's anti-intellectualism is final, the non-rationalism of faith would become thereby a sort of obscurantism.

Placing Kierkegaard within the contours of a Western philosophy of religion, especially, reflecting on a central religious category of faith, we cannot but acknowledge his genius and originality. He is readily acknowledged as the 'father of existentialism', but what is often missed is the point that he is an eminent philosopher of religion of his standing, who brought about revolution in Christian theology. He awakens man to the need of an unconditional and radical religious commitment, and spares no effort in jolting men out of their self-conceit, complacency and conventionality. His is a call for a realization of the need for the task of choosing vitally for themselves individually, and for making a decisive leap of faith. It is through him that religious belief came to be separated from its propositional contemplation, and becomes a personal commitment of faith. Perhaps, it is for this reason that his style is marked by rhetorical exaggeration, paradox and irony. Faith as the depth-dimension of man, in particular, is illuminated as the subjective life of the human spirit. For this he fully employs the psychological and ontological determinants of that life, namely, passion, emotion, anguish, agony, dread, despair, doubt, hope, pathos, will, subjectivity and so on. It is true that in bringing into sharp focus these subjective elements of human existence, Kierkegaard has appeared hostile to some of the traditional philosophical categories and approaches, often sanctified by the systems. His vocabulary is harsh, ironical and even condemnatory towards reason, detachment, dispassion, objectivity, utilitarian calculations etc.

It is a fact that the subjective elements of human existence are generally and largely ignored, and almost conveniently neglected, by philosophers, especially in the post-Enlightenment philosophies. Even if a subjective phenomenon is pursued by them, it is done half-heartedly, perhaps, on the plea that it evades

speculative examination and scrutiny. But Kierkegaard chooses specially these subjective elements of the human spirit for his philosophical reflections. This is amply exhibited in his interpretation of faith. He does not hesitate to introduce in it the paradoxical and the absurd, as the categories of Christian religion, by which alone faith is appropriated as the depth- dimension of human life. Perhaps, it is this undertaking that marks every now and then Kierkegaard's departure from the traditional and conventional trends in modern Western philosophy of religion.

It is because of his conviction of the significance of the subjective side of life that his thought was elaborated, largely as a reaction against the idealistic system of Hegel. In countering the supposed extravagance of Hegel's religious rationalism, Kierkegaard was led into an anti-rational extravagance, on his part. The swing of the pendulum moves now to the other extreme. He counters Hegel's rationalism with the exaltation and the celebration of the irrational, the absurd and the paradoxical. This has appeared, as if Kierkegaard has nothing to do with the rational and the intelligible. If we take Kierkegaard's thought on the relationship between philosophy and religion, at its face value, we would be tempted to see only an opposition between the two, so much so that the very phrase 'philosophy of religion' would be a contradiction in terms. It is as if they are mutually exclusive. Against this background, his reflections on faith would appear nothing short of an exercise in rank obscurantism. We would be tempted to dismiss his interpretation of faith as a deliberate denial of reason, and a perverse glorification of the irrationality and absurdity of religious faith. Kierkegaard lends credence to such a conclusion by his many statements, such as, because religious faith is absurd that it is believable.

But, it is indeed surprising that both ill-meaning and well-meaning Kierkegaardian scholars have interpreted him and his thought along this line. They have argued that, since reason is flouted, he does no philosophy. Others, like Karl Barth, have gone to the extent of justifying his religious absurdity. I tend to believe that both the orientations are unfortunate, if not, also misleading.

Firstly, the charge, that Kierkegaard does no philosophy, is to be rejected outright. On the contrary, he does a philosophy with the skill of a master-thinker. He has left a characteristic mark on Western philosophy. The trouble however

with him is that he is at once a metaphysician, a philosopher of religion, and aesthete, a moral philosopher and an epistemologist, without binding himself or his reader to a philosophical system. He vehemently opposes the nomenclature of a system to his thought. He would not call the new trend, that he sets in philosophy, even as existentialism, although he was to be hailed as the father of modern existentialist movement. His concern with life, as it is lived in its concrete situations, was so great that he called his reflections only a philosophy of life or existence.

Secondly, Kierkegaard is deeply rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. His mastery over the Greco-Roman philosophies and the continental literature is to be matched only by his familiarity with the Judaeo-Christian theology. When a master-thinker does his philosophy, it becomes difficult for us to draw the boundaries between discipline and discipline. His employment of the Greek philosophical categories, especially from Socrates and Plato, is remarkable. So, too, the literature of the Continent. But the creative philosopher that he is, he does not hesitate to change the nuances of philosophical categories to purify the deadwood in the history of philosophy. Because he sets new trends in philosophy, he has to reject so much in order to create new philosophical categories. It is in this light that we have to read meaning in his terms like faith, paradox, absurd, teleological suspension of the ethical, duty, concealment, subjectivity, inwardness and so on.

Now is there any need to glorify his religious absurdity. Since his concern was a scathing attack on Hegel's glorification of essentialism, in particular, the reduction of faith to knowledge, he had to deliberately bring to the forefront of the philosophical debates on religious categories the existential categories. His vituperations against objective knowledge, reason, revealing of faith, mediation that takes place at the level of thought and reasoning, are only in the service of safeguarding the sanctity of existence, faith-relation, decision, freedom, passion and so on. In the history of Western philosophy, the sea-saw battle between rationalism and voluntarism has contributed positively to the development of philosophy as such. Enlightenment philosophies were effectively countered by Romantic philosophies. In the same spirit, Hegelian rationalism is countered by Kierkegaardian existentialism, representing the efficacy of voluntarism once again.

Far from being an anti-rationalist, he employs reason to fight against reason, being fully aware that it is precisely in such dialectics that one is transparent before God, the *telos* of human life. The limits of reason, when acknowledged, is the act of self-transcendence through reason. This is the only way that religion can guard itself against blind irrationalism and obscurantism. In Kierkegaard, what one meets with is an enlightened and philosophical non-rationalism rather than a naive irrationalism, when he discusses such categories as faith, as constituting the depth-dimension of human life. Hence, I must end my thesis with a quotation from Kierkegaard :

All honour to philosophy, all praise to everyone who brings a genuine devotion to its service. To deny the value of speculative would be, in my opinion, to prostitute oneself. *Postscript*, p. 54.

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