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KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF HEGELIAN IDEALISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophical approach of Søren Kierkegaard has for many years been recognized as one of the outstanding attempts within the Lutheran Church to construct and formulate a Christian philosophy. For this reason alone, there is sufficient merit in almost any examination of his works. This study, however, proposes to examine not exclusively the work of Kierkegaard, but also the background of radical rationalism against which he and his theistic existential view was set.

It is obvious from even a cursory reading of Kierkegaard's works that his philosophic formulation was designed to counter-balance the tremendous influence of Hegelian Idealism on the thinking of the Christian Church, and in particular, the Lutheran Church of Denmark during his lifetime. It is therefore quite proper that this study should be devoted to an examination of the doctrines of both philosophic schools in an attempt to clarify the major areas of contention.

We have not attempted within the brief compass of this study to give a summary of the entire philosophical position of either Hegel or Kierkegaard. Rather, we have attempted to explicate several features of both views in an endeavor to point up the immediate disagreement existing between the purely rationalistic and idealistic philosophy of Hegel, and one which aspired to represent Biblical truth.

We have not exhausted the works of either philosopher by any means. Inasmuch as the major work of Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, was directed essentially at Hegelian philosophy, we have confined the evidence adduced in criticism of Idealism to that work, although the quest for a proper understanding must lead one to every other work of Kierkegaard. The source of evidence for the significant features of Hegel's view has been a selection of Hegel's works in addition to secondary sources on which we have found it necessary to rely heavily.

The criticism to be found in the existential philosophy of S. K., as he is sometimes gratifyingly called, of Hegelian rationalism has been considered by many to be one of three important examinations of that system.¹ Though there are some, for example Ramsey,² who have attempted to minimize the divergence of the two schools of thought, it is the burden of this study to elucidate those salient features of each which cannot be reconciled by any similarity in terminology or style of exposition.

It must be remembered when the reader notes the apparent proximity of the two, that Kierkegaard was trained under the influence of the Hegelian system at the University of Copenhagen,³ and that it was an arduous task for the Dane

¹Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (England: Scribner's, 1939), p. 226.

²Paul Ramsey has done this in several articles prepared for philosophical publications.

³David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), p. 136.

finally to break free of the system in which he was so much at home. His terminology and much of his approach still bear the stamp of this early training.

Some mention must be made of one significant aspect of this study. We have endeavored to emphasize those characteristics of each philosophic view which seem to prove an existing opposition between the two. No attempt has been made further to develop those views. Therefore, we have been deliberate in the omission of an exposition of the Hegelian State or Society, and the existential dialectic process of S. K. which was an antithetical "system".

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF REALITY

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was an absolute idealist in the fullest sense, and to understand such an absolute idealism is to understand Hegel. Absolute idealism envisioned the universe primarily as an organically united and related world of ideas, the Idea itself, revealing itself in changing manifestations of lesser ideas. This world-view, therefore, presents two separate, yet integral units of which careful explication is necessary. The first unit of this world-view is the Hegelian concept of the Idea and its components. The second unit is the method by which this Idea or Reason is manifested.

Hegel is principally concerned with the nature and manifestations of ultimate Reality. The whole of Reality he terms the Absolute, and speaks of this Absolute variously as Reason, Idea, Spirit, and Mind.¹ This Reality or Idea is composed of the world of ideas in an organic and inter-related whole, each of which is in itself a part, an entity of the ultimate Idea, yet a complete reflection of that Idea. "For the idealist, the whole world of ideas is essentially one world, one all inclusive experience of

¹Irwin Edman and Herbert W. Schneider (ed.), Landmarks for Beginners in Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1941), p. 648.

an absolute mind. Each finite thing is accordingly regarded as a fragment of the Absolute experience, and each finite mind as part of the absolute mind."² It is apparent then, that finite minds, the minds of individuals, are components of the manifestations of Absolute Mind or Reality as well as ideas. The multitude of ideas which comprise the ultimate Reality are the discoveries of individual mental investigation, discoveries of truths which are in themselves realities. They are realities, however, which no man has created, but merely discovered. These ideas or truths were valid long before any human mind discovered them.³ Individual ideas must not be confined solely to substantial facts in the sense that they have no quality of matter. Time and space are included among the ideas which comprise Reality because finite minds reflect Reality. As the individual mirrors the whole of Reality each moment of the individual's existence mirrors all time and eternity. Each moment has an eternity of experience embodied in it because each moment reflects eternity. Any part of space and time has, like finite mind, the essential qualities of all space and time. Thus, we may deduce from these premises of Hegel that in a sense the microcosm is a mirror of the macrocosm.

Since the Idea is so composed of finite minds and ideas, we can ascribe certain attributes to the Idea itself.

²E. G. Bewkes et al., Experience, Reason and Faith: A Survey in Philosophy and Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 531.

³William Kelley Wright, A History of Modern Philosophy (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), p. 327.

Because finite ideas are eternally valid, the Absolute which is mirrored by these ideas is also timeless, a comprehensive eternal truth. This absolute Reality is the organic, unified world. It is rational and knowable in its organic relations. It is what may be figuratively called God. Above all, it is concrete, as distinguished from the Platonic Ideas, the very nature of which was abstract. In Hegel's formulation, concreteness is a matter of degree. The more the ideas are related with other ideas, the more concrete they become, until ultimate concreteness is reached in the world-soul of the Absolute Reality.⁴ Thus also, the experiences of finite mind, as they are multiplied, become more conscious of the nature of the whole structure of the Absolute Idea or Reality and so more concrete. In its least conscious, least substantial form, Hegel calls the finite mind subjective mind. Even subjective mind, however, has content and form, and is to some extent actual and concrete since it, too, mirrors the whole of Absolute Mind or Reality.

When anything is thought merely in the form of 'being-in-itself', or as not self-contradictory, it is called potential (possible). Everything in so far as it is determined as a Being-in-itself which is only a posited, is called merely potential. Such a Possibility, isolated from the Actuality, has an individual content.

Truly potential is somewhat as a totality of its in-itself-existent determinations. Whatever possesses this internal perfect potentiality is not merely a posited-Being, but in-and-for itself and immediately actual. The potentiality of substance is, therefore, its actuality.⁵

⁴Ibid., pp. 318 ff. See also Hegel Selections, edited by J. Loewenberg (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 20 f.

⁵Ibid., p. 115.

More concrete is Objective Mind because it is more conscious of the order of relation with other minds. Finite mind, as an individual and actual fact, is dependent upon and determines to some extent every other fact. As the finite fact becomes aware of its relationship with each and every other fact or mind, Objective Mind is reached.⁶ We can see from this organic theory of truth and reality that everything is internally determined by its relations, positively and negatively, to everything else, since negation as well as its opposite is a form of relation. Objective Mind is a partial realization of this relationship of the whole to its parts, of Reality to realities. Thus Hegel pictures this realization of the relationships of finite minds,

. . . The concrete return of me into me in the externality is that I, the infinite self-relation, am as a person the repulsion of me from myself, and have the existence of my personality in the being of other persons, in my relation to them and in my recognition of them, which is thus mutual.⁷

So we see also that a greater degree of concreteness results from a greater realization of finite relationships. This process continues until the finite mind becomes aware of the complete interdependence of all things or ideas finite with each other. It is then that Absolute Mind or Reality is reached, the culmination of concreteness, the zenith of

⁶Wright, op. cit., pp. 319 and 324.

⁷Hegel, op. cit., p. 222.

Reality. But it is only reached through the nature of Mind which is that the individual knows his individuality to be free, an absolutely free will. Only through this nature of freedom can the finite mind even begin to realize the interrelationships of each and every other mind and thus arrive at the concreteness of Absolute Mind.⁸

The Idea or Absolute Mind may also be called Reason and is concisely described by Benjamin Rand:

The Idea may be described in many ways. It may be called reason (and this is the proper philosophical signification of reason); subject-object; the unity of the ideal and real, of the finite and the infinite, of soul and body; the possibility which has its actuality in its own self; that of which the nature can be thought only as existent, . . ."⁹

As we have mentioned, an attribute of the Idea is also that it is completely rational. In point of fact, the Idea as ultimate Reality is the most knowable thing since every idea and finite mind reflects that Reality and gives to it the element of concreteness. As Russell observes, "Hegel asserts that the real is rational, and the rational is real."¹⁰ Hegel defined the Absolute Idea as "Der Begriff der Idee, dem die Idee als solche der Gegenstand, dem das Objekt sie ist."¹¹ Or better, as Russell states, "The Absolute Idea is pure thought thinking about pure thought."¹²

⁸Hegel, op. cit., pp. 221 f.

⁹Modern Classical Philosophers, compiled by Benjamin Rand (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), p. 611.

¹⁰Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 731.

¹¹Ibid., p. 735.

¹²Ibid., p. 735.

This, of course, gives to the highest form of reality the greatest amount of perspicuity, providing that through a realization of individual freedom finite minds can arrive at the point where the negative and positive relationships of all ideas, including the "I" and "non-I" can be seen.

Before proceeding to the method by which this process of realization of relationship operates, it is necessary to mention in some detail one other characteristic of the Absolute, since especially this was of much concern and evoked much criticism from Kierkegaard. Hegel equated the Idea with Truth. When the process of finite minds realizing their interrelationships is at work, it is called objectivity. This objectivity in correspondence with the notion may then be called Truth. According to Hegel,

The Idea is Truth; for Truth is the correspondence of objectivity with the notion:- not of course the correspondence of external things with my conceptions,- for these are only correct conceptions held by me, the individual person.¹³

Hegel views the Absolute Reality as being Truth in its highest form, the result of the free relationship and synthesis of finite minds and ideas.

In my view -- a view which the developed exposition of the system itself can alone justify -- everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance but as Subject as well.¹⁴

Hegel envisioned the Absolute as an evolving body of truth

¹³Benjamin Rand, op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁴Hegel, op. cit., p. 14.

which was in its parts already mirrored in toto, but only after its final evolution did it have the ultimate characteristic of truth. This evolution of truth takes place through the process of reflection and leads this self-development to the end result, namely Truth.

The truth is the whole Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only at the end is it what it is in very truth; and just in that consists its nature, which is to be actual, subject, or self-becoming, self-development

It is reflection which constitutes truth the final result.¹⁵

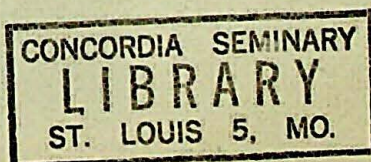
This Absolute Truth is the result of reflection, but not merely finite, personal, or intimate reflection. It is not the result of a particular thought-process, or an individual mental discovery. Rather, it is the result of the synthesis of subjective realization, the awareness of self, and the awareness of the relationships of self to its own negation and other selfs.

The knowing of Reason is therefore not the mere subjective certitude, but also TRUTH, because Truth consists in the harmony, or rather, unity of certitude and Being, or of certitude and objectivity.¹⁶

It is plain that through a gradually increasing knowledge of one's relationship with others, and of the ideas with each other, through this process of growing objectivity on the part of the individual, Truth, the Absolute Reality is the result. This result is a synthesis of its affirmation and its negation. It is a completed whole, in harmony with

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 16 f.

¹⁶Hegel, op. cit., p. 79.



itself. Hegel avers,

But this result arrived at is itself simple immediacy; for it is self-conscious freedom, which is at one with itself, and has not set aside the opposition it involves and left it there, but has made its account with it and has become reconciled to it.¹⁷

¹⁷Hegel, op. cit., p. 18.

CHAPTER II

THE DIALECTIC OF OBJECTIVITY

The principle on which Hegel constructs the nature of the Absolute evidently is that in its own complete and fully realized condition it is totally harmonious and not self-contradictory. If it were contradictory to itself, or if the Absolute could be further related to other negations, it would not be fully realized and could not then be formally and completely TRUTH. The very essence of the Absolute is unanimity and total realization. The result of Subjective and Objective mind is Absolute mind. Russell observes, "It is thought by Hegel that the nature of Reality can be deduced from the sole consideration that it must be not self-contradictory."¹ The process by which Truth is realized must proceed from the premise that Truth in itself and by itself is harmonious. This harmony can be seen through the modus operandi, which is called dialectic. Apart from the former consideration we must keep in mind that to Hegel the Truth can only be realized through a rational system since its nature is rational. He states, ". . . knowledge is only real and can only be set forth fully in

¹Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 731.

the form of science, in the form of system . . .²

The dialectic begins with subjective mind. The existence of finite mind is intrinsic, passive indifference. The nature of finite mind is naive immediate sense-consciousness and subjective certainty. The awareness of its own existence is almost all that an individual has to begin his long development through the dialectic. But there is something more intrinsically to be found in subjectivity besides sense-consciousness. There is the desire to externalize and realize itself. It is more, in fact, than a desire. It is an impulse, a demand emanating from the very essence of subject itself. Hegel terms it a spiritual substance or Weltgeist.³ Any given moment of an individual's existence must find external expression and become objective. It must leave its own sense-consciousness and return again to be at one with itself. This desire or impulse, which is in fact the effect of the presence of Weltgeist in the world, is the cause and motivating principle of increasing objectivity. It is the volition of the Absolute itself in its evolution through history.

Having a motive for the evolutionary process, it is possible to discern the meaning of "dialectic". In essence

²Hegel Selections, edited by J. Loewenberg (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 19. See also Modern Classical Philosophers, compiled Benjamin Rand (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), p. 573.

³Ibid., pp. 23 ff.

it is the on-going work of the Absolute realizing itself. It is through this process, self-willed, by which Truth becomes concrete and actual. As Swenson has observed, dialectic

. . . is no mere subjective process, but the form taken by the self-evolution of the Idea as a logical system, and is ipso facto embodied as the work of the objective reason in the historical process.⁴

The Absolute in realizing itself through history performs the function of dialectic. It realizes itself according to a logical pattern of increasing reality. We must, however, distinguish between the total dialectical process and reflection. Reflection takes place outside the predicate of a given thing. Hence, reflection gives to that thing a sphere of reference, relates it to similar phenomena, and yet leaves the thing valid in its own right. On the other hand, dialectic is the tendency within a thing which drives outside itself and in the process recognizes the limitations of those predicates. Therefore, dialectic summons the negation of its predicates, and eventually provides their synthesis.⁵ Hocking describes the process summarily when he points out that finite mind must in some way abrogate itself, in order to realize or appreciate itself, "wander in a world alien to its nature", and finally

⁴David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augusburg Publishing House, 1945), p. 118.

⁵Rand, op. cit., p. 580.

return to itself once more.⁶

Dialectic is composed of three separate but closely related phases. It is a dialectic of triads each with its own thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Wright explains,

In the thesis a certain aspect of reality is revealed, in the antithesis a contrasting aspect appears, and the two are then aufgehoben in a higher synthesis. This synthesis gives rise to a new triad, and that to another in turn. . . . Every member of every triad is the Absolute.⁷ . . . The order of the dialectic is purely logical.⁷

This triadic construction can be explained with reference to the citation above⁸ concerning sense-consciousness.

Sense-consciousness recognizes simple predicates, for example, "This is a table." In addition, such consciousness recognizes the moment of existence in the predicate which is an implied "now", or, with reference to place, a "here". But such implications of space or time change since moments in time are in motion and one place may in practice be many places of smaller size. Therefore, this moment is at once that moment. A moment in time is its own negation, as well as its assertion. Yet the "now" can be identified as an "abiding now" or as a "general now". Sense-consciousness is also sensuous. It has the capacity for perception. But through perception it can only determine a given sensation.

⁶William Ernest Hocking, Types of Philosophy (Chicago: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 311.

⁷William Kelley Wright, A History of Modern Philosophy (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), pp. 327 f.

⁸Supra, p. 10.

Since sensation is the property of an existent thing in a given moment, and both the thing and the moment change, perception must be general. Perception is " . . . a mingling of sensuous determinations with those of Reflection."⁹ Since the properties of perception belong to a changing thing, they are themselves changing and are accidents. Consciousness in general, then, is also understanding, a synthesis of the abiding present (thesis) and accident (antithesis).

This consciousness in general is a thesis. But this has within itself its own negation or antithesis. This antithesis is a consciousness of something other than perception of self. In sense-consciousness one perceives one's self. The object of that consciousness is self. But the antithesis to that is the knowledge of others. Hegel declares that it is desire which synthesizes the object of consciousness (self) and the feeling of otherness.¹⁰ This synthesis is self-consciousness and corresponds to objectivity. Therefore, mind becomes objective when it is " . . . in the process of becoming other to itself . . . and in transcending this otherness."¹¹ The characteristic of objective mind is no longer consciousness in itself, but for itself. Absolute mind is achieved by another union of

⁹Hegel, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 73 f.

¹¹Ibid., p. 31.

subjective and objective mind. Absolute mind is consciousness in and for itself. This synthesis of consciousness is Absolute or Reason. Hegel states, "It (Reason) is just as well the certitude of itself (subjectivity) as being (or objectivity), and this, too, in one and the same thinking activity."¹²

Seen as a complete process, the dialectic of Reason is a threefold movement in which there is a necessary sequence of logical order. From a given fact the antithesis to that fact must necessarily be drawn since the fact contains in its essence that antithesis. The fact is subjective. The synthesis becomes another fact to which there is antithesis. The reconciliation of these two is a synthesis of objectivity. That objectivity, because of its contradictions, results in an absolute. When the distinction between the subject and the object is lost in the process of objectivity, Absolute mind or Reason is reached.¹³

The Absolute Idea is reached by this dialectical process which finds its necessity in the pervading and all-embracing Idea. This dialectic must proceed from thesis to antithesis to synthesis because this is the nature of the Idea as it realizes itself.

From the foregoing evidence it is clear that Truth is the synthesis of temporary opposites. It is achieved by

¹²Ibid., p. 78.

¹³Russell, op. cit., p. 734.

a method which has necessary logical categories within it which are imposed by the nature of the Idea itself. The method is speculative¹⁴ and rational, and is achieved by the use of reflection and the logical categories of dialectic. The dialectic of objectivity inheres in the nature of the Absolute and finite mind.

¹⁴Rand, op. cit., p. 581.

CHAPTER III

THE EXISTENTIAL CRITIQUE

The existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard presented a destructive critique to the salient features of Hegelian absolute idealism. Our inquiry is confined to those features which were the object of special criticism.

The theistic existentialism which contended with the nature and method of idealism rebelled against Hegel's concept of reality. Reality was for Kierkegaard far more than knowledge about history or about the method in which it evolved as the realization of the life of the Absolute. Reality is not the unified whole which realized itself by logical, bloodless categories. Reality is rather existence, and that which exists. Kierkegaard attacked logic, therefore, an abstract science outside the realm of existence, as a characteristic of Reality. He insisted that concreteness is only concrete in existential reference and cannot be attained by reason. He objected that reality does not by its own nature necessarily reveal itself.

Whereas Hegel had maintained that finite minds increased their concrete actuality by their awareness of relationship to other minds, Kierkegaard objected that this knowledge or awareness of self in relation to others was merely a thought process in the abstract which did not by its own

method include existence, but annihilated it. Swenson observes that the thought of an existential thinker is a concrete thought

. . . in that it has essential reference to the thinker. . . . Abstract thought, on the other hand, proceeds by way of abstracting from the thinker and from all concrete particularity; it contents itself with seeking to explain reality in general.¹

Against the conception of Hegel that the return of the individual into himself by means of the thought process constituted increasing reality, Kierkegaard sought to demonstrate how impossible such an abstract process was in producing a measure of concreteness. The system which supposedly increases concreteness is by its own nature beyond the sphere of existence and therefore cannot take existence into account. If this be the case, the results of such a process would be quite unreal and non-existent; anything but concrete. Kierkegaard formulates the objection:

Reality itself is a system -- for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen, from a purely abstract point of view, that system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing.²

The basic problem here is one of logic. For Hegel it is through the process of logical relationship that

¹David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), pp. 112 f.

²Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 102.

concrete reality and ultimate truth are achieved. But Kierkegaard contends that logic does not in itself reveal existence. A logical system cannot include existence. Existence is never a predicated thing. Therefore abstract thought ignores, in fact, the temporal, existential process. Finite mind to become real and concrete in the fullest sense must, according to Hegel, pass through successive phases of self-realization, and this by the process of speculation. Kierkegaard points out that this finite mind is existing. It is a definite something, and therefore existence is the basis which is left and forgotten once abstract thought begins to speculate in a futile effort to increase the reality of that finitude. He declares,

This definite something is just what abstract thought abstracts from. But the difficulty lies in bringing this definite something and the ideality of thought together, by penetrating the concrete particularity with thought. Abstract thought cannot even take cognizance of this contradiction, since the very process of abstraction prevents the contradiction from arising.³

It is simply by default that the logic which Hegel employs fails to give any degree of concreteness to reality. By failing to define the relation of logic to the existing individual, existence is confused. Hegel maintained that the individual became concrete through the thinking of a subjective mind about its existence. This is precisely where the error lies, for to think existence in the abstract

³Ibid., p. 267.

terms of reason is the same as abrogating it. Therefore, reality cannot be thought about. Kierkegaard explains, "Abstract thought can get hold of reality only by nullifying it, and this nullification of reality consists in transforming it into possibility."⁴ This being the case, to follow the laws of a logical system for the discovery of reality would be to make life unreal because logic can only be a statement about life and not living itself. As a result of such a condition it would be foolish to add to the amount of knowledge about life because no amount could make reality living or concrete. It was for this very reason that Søren Kierkegaard proposed to abandon the abstract dialectic of Hegel and in its place describe the almost synonymous connection of reality to personality, and to existential thinking.

The logical categories which Hegel constructed were the implicit functions of the Worldspirit that made reality rational. It was for that reason that he could say that the real was rational and the rational, real. To the contrary, Kierkegaard could visualize no purely rational system which could resolve the tensions and contradictions which in fact exist in life as a part of reality. Hegel held that reality, ultimate truth, was the final synthesis of subjective certitude and objectivity. Kierkegaard asserted that through this objectivity the individual passed out of reality or the sphere of existence, and therefore

⁴Ibid., p. 279.

could not explain existence from an unrealistic position. He objected to Hegel's attempt in this way to introduce movement into logic. Abstract thought cannot have within itself any motion since in abstracting from the existence of time, the moments of time are lost and the progression from one moment to another is only an illusion. A synthesis of two contradictory propositions is movement because there is a transition from possibility within the contradictions to the actuality in the synthesis. In abstract thought, however, time and space, which presuppose movement, are not implicit, and therefore neither is movement. Kierkegaard states, ". . . abstract eternity is extraneous to the movement of life . . . pure thought either abrogates motion altogether, or meaninglessly imports it into logic."⁵ It is clear from this principle that a rational synthesis of contradictions is impossible existentially. Moreover, abstract thought prevents such a synthesis of certitude and being or objectivity.

. . . existence itself . . . keeps the moments of thought and being apart. . . . For an objective reflection the truth becomes an object, something objective, and thought must be pointed away from the subject.

The way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads away from the subject, whose existence . . . becomes infinitely indifferent.⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 277.

⁶Ibid., pp. 171 ff.

The result of such an abstract rational process is total unreality in a sphere beyond existence. Therefore, a logical system, or better, a rational system presents no more to the existing individual than a number of possibilities which are no existential qualities.⁷ Reality, however, exists between thought and being. Knowledge about reality results solely in possibility.

Reality is an inter-esse between the moments of that hypothetical unity of thought and being which abstract thought presupposes . . .

All knowledge about reality is possibility. The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation that is more than cognitive, is his own reality . . .⁸

A further result of Hegel's view of the nature of reality or truth is that it excludes the content of ethics in Kierkegaard's estimation. This is the approach that he used in criticizing the Idea as Truth. Hegelian Truth excludes ethics for the reason that contradictions which exist are reconciled in the abstract which is above and beyond existence, and therefore above reality. If in the realm of reality there are no true opposing and irreconcilable propositions, there can be no choice, no will to choose, and ethical action is then denied to the individual. Such a denial of choice is the annihilation of individuality and existence itself. When true and existing contradictions are superficially resolved, Truth becomes a figment of the

⁷Ibid., p. 285.

⁸Ibid., pp. 279 f.

imagination and no more. Swenson says,

. . . Such contemplation abstracts from the process of becoming as it is in real time, merely viewing the event as given in the abstract form of time. It therefore neglects, as immanent contemplation, the unrealized possibilities which were present in the real process of coming-to-be, and which constituted alternatives for the wills of the participants.⁹

Kierkegaard maintained that a reconciliation of contradictions was impossible. Taking existence into account, it does the very opposite of synthesizing thought and objectivity into reality. It holds them apart. The union of subject and object, of eternity and time, of sin and righteousness, is thwarted by the fact of their separate existence and their opposing forces. These are unalterably opposed, with but one exception in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, in whom time and eternity met.¹⁰ Hegel, in attempting to resolve contradictions, had to incorporate movement, the transitional action, into thought. This incorporation of movement was illusory, but because it was there, Hegel could see no permanent disjuncture between antithetical propositions. Kierkegaard unmasked this illusion and preserved the existence of permanent contradictions. These contradictions could only be resolved in the sphere of logical, bloodless categories. With the permanent existence of contradiction, ethics are mandatory.

⁹Swenson, op. cit., pp. 120 f.

¹⁰Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (Great Britain: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 243.

He avers that when the attempt is made to bring thought into relation with another thing

. . . interest begins to play a role in the matter. The instant this happens the ethical is present . . . It forbids me to draw a conclusion that is ethically deceitful and metaphysically unclear, by imposing upon me the duty of existing.¹¹

Hegel asserted that thought thinking about itself was reality. Kierkegaard points out that if this were so, the perfect or nearly perfect anticipation of an action would be the action, but in fact no action would have taken place and the ethical consideration would disappear. If existence is treated, abstract thought cannot produce real action. Existence alone can do that, and thus the ethical action is preserved. We can say then that reality is ethical reality and the only reality for the individual. This existentialistic view does not result in a series of possibilities forever unrealized. No possibility is understood or realized until it is first an actuality. The ethical principle involved " . . . results in the condemnation of every posse which is not an esse . . . in the individual himself."¹² The ethical principle must be understood for an appreciation of the existentialist critique of idealistic truth. Hegel viewed truth as the correspondence of objectivity with the notion. But this is exactly untruth to the existentialist, for in the area

¹¹Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 282 f.

¹²Ibid., p. 288.

where truth can be viewed objectively there is no reality, no existence. Therefore, the truth which can be seen can have no existence. It is therefore untruth. Truth can only be found where there is ethical choice and existence. Existence cannot be reasoned, for in being so it is abroated. Existence can only be found in one's self, in an individual's subjectivity. Here alone is where truth lies. In the subjectivity and inwardness of the individual, the person meets the cold contradictions of existence, for example, sin and righteousness. He has an ethical choice. He can only meet that choice in the immediacy of the moment. He can only make that choice through movement. That movement is not inherent in the alternatives presented to him. It is not necessitated by the nature of the contradictions themselves or by the presence of some Worldspirit in operation. It is necessitated by an act of will arising out of despair which is born in the inwardness of the individual. Therefore Kierkegaard can define truth in opposition to Hegel as "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness. . . the highest truth obtainable for an existing individual."¹³

According to Hegel, the presence of the Absolute is implicit in finite mind. It is the nature of both to realize themselves. This is the very nature of self-realization. Of necessity it must realize itself. This is the principle of

¹³Ibid., p. 182.

idealistic ethics. Hocking observes, "Our highest ethical law is, Identify thyself with objective Reason, as found in the institutions of mankind."¹⁴ In contrast to this necessity of self-realization Kierkegaard described the motive for the movement of the individual in terms of despair. Despair was not the nature of permanent antitheses, but in the subjectivity of the individual as he faced these antitheses despair was created. An overwhelming sense of sin and guilt was born.

The inwardness that is the core of the ethical and ethico-religious individual understands suffering on the other hand as something essential. . . the religious individual has suffering constantly with him. He requires suffering . . . and he requires and has suffering even in the absence of external misfortune.¹⁵

This suffering is essential because it is the product of inwardness in which one confronts the endless antitheses of existence. As he confronts them he has an ethical choice. The choosing is an act of decision and it is this decision which is truth for the existing individual.¹⁶ This decision is prompted by the despairing of one's self as he confronts the contradictions, by his own inner consciousness of sin and guilt.¹⁷ This being the motive for an act of volition, the individual makes a decision, and this is movement, a

¹⁴Hocking, op. cit., p. 357.

¹⁵Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 389.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁷Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 236 ff.

leap "which breaks entirely through the circle of self and sets the agent fully on the side of an Other person . . ." ¹⁸
 Thus the goal of existential movement is not self-realization but quite the opposite, namely, decision to leap beyond the confines of one's own inner nature into belief, and to do this in each fleeting moment with the greatest passion of subjectivity. ¹⁹

This evokes the ethical problem present in the contrast of idealism and theistic existentialism. The highest ethical law was for Hegel the finite identity with the absolute. If the microcosm were the mirror of the macrocosm there was, for Kierkegaard, no room left for ethical action because the individual was a law unto himself. Yet in the sense of idealistic ethics the individual's greatest concern was for an identity with the absolute, figuratively called God. This was regarded by Kierkegaard as the grossest idolatry. ²⁰
 This is what happened. In the depths of subjectivity the finite mind sought relentlessly to abrogate itself and find in itself its negation, the total otherness of the absolute. But at the same time this finite mind was complete in its own right, a mirror of the absolute. Thus in the union of subject and object, the goal of the subject was itself. The object of its worship was within itself, and so its worship

¹⁸Paul Ramsey, "Existenz and the Existence of God," The Journal of Religion (July, 1948), p. 171.

¹⁹Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 277.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 178 ff.

was projected beyond itself only to return and find within itself its object. This, as has been poignantly described by Ramsey,²¹ corresponds to the Old Testament concept of idolatry set forth in Isaiah 44, 14-17. The result of such a self-realization ethics is to find in the self the prime interest, and through the self to find the good of the masses. By this method God was manifest in the ethical conduct of men. Kierkegaard stressed the absolute paradox existing between God and man, excepting the person of Jesus Christ as has been noted above. God does not reveal himself in the ethical actions of man. Rather, man, through his subjective inwardness, confronts an ethical choice, an unresolved paradox, and in the act of decision he makes a leap of faith into something totally other than himself. Man's role then is not the absolute realizing itself, but obedience to something other than himself. God is that Other Who is not revealed qua God in man's action. Says the melancholy Dane, ". . . no one is so resigned as God; for He communicates in creating, so as by creating to give independence over against Himself."²²

If in an idealistic ethic God is communicated to man by man, God can be known simply by observation and the objective processes of reason. Therefore, He can be the subject of an interchange of thoughts in the form of logical expression -- language. He can be communicated to other minds at any time. In the existentialistic view God

²¹Loc. cit., p. 167.

²²Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 232.

cannot be so communicated because God exists and this condition cannot be predicated. That is to say, even while these words convey the abstract thought that God exists, in reality they annihilate His existence because these words say only something about God and do not experience Him. God can only be communicated in existence, in experience, in the immediacy of the moment of decision by the individual himself. It follows from this that reality or God cannot be the subject of an exchange of ideas. No one beyond the individual can experience reality through such a means. In the words of Kierkegaard,

The ethical lays hold of each individual and demands that he refrain from all contemplation, especially of humanity and the world; for the ethical, as being the internal, cannot be observed by an outsider. It can be realized only by the individual subject, ²³ who alone can know what it is that moves within him.

From this existential position objectivity cannot be the source or form of communication at all. It can do nothing but carry the hearer into a similar realm of unreality. This position, of course, presents a serious problem. If God cannot be communicated in this way, how can He be? Kierkegaard alludes to this problem with the example of a teacher who teaches that he should have no disciples. Yet when those whom he teaches have taught likewise, the teacher finds himself in the embarrassing position of having done the very thing he set out not to do.²⁴ God can only be

²³Ibid., p. 284.

²⁴Ibid., p. 70.

found in the leap of faith which is found in the inmost subjectivity. This is an act that can only be perpetrated in the isolation of total inwardness. If this is the case, then God cannot be taught. He instead must do the teaching. To the problem then, of how one can become a believer, Kierkegaard answers,

A believer is one who is infinitely interested in another's reality. This is a decisive criterion for faith, and the interest in question is not just a little curiosity, but an absolute dependence upon faith's object.

The object of faith is the reality of another, and the relationship is one of infinite interest. . . . The object of reality is . . . God's reality in existence as a particular individual, the fact that God has existed as an individual human being.²⁵

The communication of existing reality or of God-man can therefore not be done by symbols. For this reason doctrines fail to communicate the life of God. They are the negation of life. The Church does not in its history or content communicate this life for both are mere abstractions of reality beyond the sphere of existence. God is communicated only indirectly when the individual, in the depths of fear and trembling, finds an infinite interest in the reality of God Who exists.

We may ask here what possible purpose language can serve in this function if it fails to convey the religious message. Language, though it fails to impart any existential reality, functions as indirect communication without which man could not possibly come to an existential knowledge of

²⁵Ibid., p. 290.

God in the first place. Throughout the Postscript Kierkegaard has made those who would "orate" Christianity the butt of much venomous invective and parody. Only, however, for the reason that these orators have convinced themselves that God can be directly communicated.²⁶ A sharp line of distinction must here be drawn between direct and indirect communication. Neither the Church nor society could function without the aid of language. God could never become a living reality for anyone without its use. But the would-be orator who is wont to use it should take careful note that language serves the purpose of indirect communication only. Through this method God can be witnessed and praised and thereby introduced to the knowledge, however abstract it might be, of the unbeliever. From this point on the individual must in obedience bow to the will of God as He makes it known in the subjectivity of the man. God and reality are not ". . . directly communicable . . . and cannot be understood immediately, but must be understood indirectly through indirect signs."²⁷

This argument served to criticize the conclusion derived from the Hegelian synthesis that if the individual were a reflection of the Absolute (a necessary conclusion in Hegel's logic), rational exchange of thought between individuals which imparted increasing degrees of concrete

²⁶Ibid., pp. 91 ff. As in the case of Jacobi.

²⁷Ibid., p. 289.

reality was not only possible but essential to the realization of the Absolute in history. Without the element of existence in communication, none was ample enough to carry on the awareness of God or reality. All it could do was indirectly, and very necessarily, communicate that reality so as to enable the individual to appropriate reality in his inmost inwardness. Swenson summarizes,

For a real understanding, as distinct from an illusory appearance of knowledge, there is here required a 'double reflection.' In the first stage of reflection, the thinker finds a universal principle; in the second stage, he discovers a particular application of this principle to his own individual person and situation. . . . This last reflection, which clears the road for action, is not and cannot be a cooperative enterprise but is rather something which each individual has for himself -- an essential secret. By this reflection the individual isolates himself, since it makes the truth into something that belongs to him and to him alone.²⁸

²⁸Swenson, op. cit., p. 114.

CONCLUSION

The philosophic position of Kierkegaard was perhaps one of the most basic attacks which could be leveled against a purely rationalistic idealism like Hegel's. His attack was pointed precisely at that point where ultimately all forms of rationalism must be weak, namely, the failure of a pure, abstract system to encounter, deal with, or comprise the element of being or existence. Though much may be said in favor of a pseudo-system which attempts to embrace this significant area, it lies within the scope of this paper only to demonstrate the effectiveness with which Kierkegaard used this element of existence to attack the idealism of Hegel. This has been done, we believe, in the evidence adduced.

We have pointed to the salient features of Hegel's pantheistic and rationalistic idealism which were areas of contention in the position of Søren Kierkegaard. It may be observed from the evidence that his critique regarding concreteness in Hegel's system, his attack upon the possibility of an existing rational system for the acquisition of truth, and his condemnation of the motive for such a system, the ethics of such, and the possibility of the communication in the system, were all based upon the necessary inclusion of existence into any search for philosophic or religious truth. This is the reason for

calling Kierkegaard's position a theistic existential one. It was broad enough to include the oft overlooked dimension of existence, and narrow enough to regard the truth as an end in the long struggle of moral man with moral and contradicting phenomena. For this reason, Kierkegaard was a moralist above all. He replaced functions of mind with moral considerations, objective rationalization with subjective examination, and in so doing provided us with one of the most erudite criticisms ever adduced against Hegelian philosophy.

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