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A CRITICAL EXPOSITION
OF THE ARGUMENT OF [✓]KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS [✓]
AND CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

A Thesis

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by

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I INTRODUCTION

Though the Danish philosophic theologian Søren Kierkegaard has been dead over one hundred years (he lived from 1813 to 1855) it has been only in the last twenty-five years that he has come to be known very extensively on this continent. The pioneer work of translating his works into English was undertaken by three men, David Swenson of the University of Minnesota, Walter Lowrie of Princeton, and Alexander Dru of Great Britain (See the Bibliography for the names of the works which each has translated.). During the same time, especially during the Post World War II period, the name of Kierkegaard has become known to North Americans as somehow associated with the, at first very mysterious, philosophy of Existentialism.

Though I had once heard the name of Kierkegaard used in a derogatory way as a youth (Kierkegaard's "Attack Upon Christendom", his terminal writings, were the first to be translated into other European languages, and presumably were known by reputation to Lutheran clergymen on this side of the Atlantic), I really began to be interested in him through hearing of the philosophy of Existentialism. In the early 1950s, being able to say something about Existentialism became rather faddish among those university students who wished to be a bit "avant garde". Unfortunately for most it was only a fad. I myself became curious, not to be able to say something about Existentialism but to know

something about it. Queries to German-born theological students brought the answers - though they too did not pretend to understand it - that the philosophy of Existentialism was not like other philosophies but involved wishing to "realize (i.e., make real) what you think", and the advice to read Kierkegaard.

The advice was easier to receive than to carry out. Libraries, in 1954, had few if any of Kierkegaard's works in English. Finally I obtained from a bookstore the Anchor publication of Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling and Sickness Unto Death. A diligent search of libraries revealed here and there one or two of the Swenson or Lowrie translations - and though reading them did not necessarily make me any wiser - by 1956 I felt sufficiently confident, or rash, to undertake a B.D. thesis on what Kierkegaard works I had been able to find. Postgraduate work with the Philosophy Department of the University of Saskatchewan followed some years later - including a course on Existentialism from Dr. Robert Paton (since retired) - and here the suggestion was made that for my M.A. thesis I do some work on Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript. The reason for the suggestion - which I did not agree with then, but do agree with now - was that these books, especially the latter, contained the central argument of Kierkegaard and his distinctions between philosophy and religion.

A person who wishes to read Kierkegaard or even to read

about Kierkegaard in English does not find this the easiest task. This is so for two reasons: Insufficiency in the commentaries and the variety of the writings themselves. Regarding the former, it used to be true that the English commentaries about Kierkegaard's life and works fell into three categories: first, that of the translators, who as admirers, had the same things to say about the same subjects, and tended to become a bit monotonous; secondly, those who approached Kierkegaard from the point of view of Existentialism, whose philosophers for the most part have adopted only a small portion of his ideas and set these in a context entirely foreign to Kierkegaard's own purpose in presenting them; and thirdly, those who, through insufficient reading largely influenced by the Existentialist writers, presented a shallow and misleading picture of Kierkegaard's works. This situation has been changing rather rapidly during the last few years. It is now possible to get commentaries by writers independent of both the pioneer translators and the Existentialists and at the same time thorough in their study of the bulk of Kierkegaard's works. I have found especially helpful W. H. Auden's Kierkegaard (1955), Reidar Thømtø's Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion (1948), and the symposium, A Kierkegaard Critique, edited by H. A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (1962) (See Bibliography.). Kierkegaard study has become so popular in English that it will soon be necessary to search for the best of commentaries where a few years ago it was necessary to search for any commentaries.

The difficulty arising from the variety of Kierkegaard's works is one which a student encounters when he begins to read in the translations of the works themselves, rather than in the work of other students of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard wrote some thirty books over a period of thirteen years (Either/Or, the first, was published in 1843.). In many of these he imitated Plato's method of the presentation of many different characters. However, where Plato's characters were representations of real persons, Kierkegaard's were imaginary persons, representing various attitudes towards life which he believed to be prevalent among his contemporaries. And whereas the character of Socrates is fairly constant throughout all of Plato's dialogues, the characters in Kierkegaard's books change. Some of these characters are pseudonymous authors of the books, and others appear as writers or speakers in the books. Some of the earlier pseudonymous authors appear as characters in the work, Stages on Life's Way, published in 1845.¹ These pseudonymous characters do not always represent Kierkegaard's own attitude toward the contents of the productions, and it is therefore very dangerous to read a little of Kierkegaard. It is especially dangerous to read the earlier works without reading at least some of the later ones; this is true even

1 An outline of the publication dates, and of other significant events in Kierkegaard's life during these years, is to be found in Alexander Dru's edition of The Journals of Kierkegaard, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1958, 1959, pp. 33-35 (The Journals, ed. Dru, were earlier published by Oxford University Press, 1939.).

if one has read the introductions which Lowrie and Swenson included with many of their translations. It is true, however, that as the works continue, their point of view more closely approximate Kierkegaard's own. For guidance in this respect a student does well to read either The Point of View for My Work as an Author, published posthumously in 1859, or the short article appended by Kierkegaard to his Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846) titled "A first and last declaration". In this respect - of representing a progress in Kierkegaard's presentation - the pseudonymous author of the Fragments and Postscript, Johannes Climacus, is close to Kierkegaard's own position at the time he wrote these books.

Kierkegaard's purpose in his whole literary production was to combat what he considered to be false understandings of Christianity common in his time and to lead at least some of his contemporaries to what he considered to be true Christianity. For this purpose he wrote a series of "Edifying Discourses" (religious, but not yet specifically Christian) published parallel with the pseudonymous works. These two streams of publication lasted from 1843 to 1846 after which they tend to be merged, though three works were published with pseudonymns in 1849 and 1850. The pseudonymous works began with Either/Or, representing a contrast between a view of life which finds the reason for living merely in enjoyment (called "aesthetic") and one which is ethical but not yet religious. From then on a progress is demonstrated in the

sharpening of awareness to ethical and religious views of life until the point of view of Christianity is presented in the Postscript (1846), which was at the time intended to be the last of Kierkegaard's works. After the Postscript Kierkegaard's writings were generally intended to be specifically Christian. The pseudonymous author of the Fragments and Postscript represents a young man, "Johannes Climacus", enquiring how he may become a Christian, and aware of both the content of Christian doctrine and the commitment required of a Christian, but who is not yet a Christian. (The pseudonym "Anti-Climacus" - with "anti" meaning "on the other side" - given as the author to two works published in 1849 and 1850,¹ represents a Christian position higher than that in which Kierkegaard believed himself to be living.) In this literary production the Postscript presents the intended last step necessary to lead a person to a confrontation with Christianity, while the earlier Fragments (1844) presented in philosophical dress the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

The false understanding of Christianity which Kierkegaard saw in his generation he ascribed to two causes: a society where, from infancy, all were regarded as Christians but where few were concerned with commitment to Christianity, and the post-Hegelian philosophy which followed Hegel in identifying speculative philosophy with Christianity. The first factor was a result of the State-Church connection, especially

1 Sickness Unto Death (1849) and Training in Christianity (1850).

following the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century and, Kierkegaard says, of a misuse of Luther's teaching on justification through faith. Persons were baptized as Christians as infants, and were thus acknowledged to be Christians. Few bothered to concern themselves with what Christianity was all about, so as to live in it, while many considered that, as "Christians", anything they said or did was a "Christian" thing. On the other side, the philosophy of Hegel presented Christianity as equivalent to the final stage of the dialectic (the Absolute Religion in the development of the Idea as Spirit¹). Hegel's point of view was continued by successors in many countries, including contemporaries of Kierkegaard who were leaders in the Danish Church². This philosophic attitude produced a transformation of Christianity through purported intellectual appropriation. At the same time the attitude of the common citizen changed Christianity through carelessness. The two factors combined gave a careless Christian a pretext of understanding Christianity while remaining personally uncommitted to it. These factors in the misunderstanding of Christianity which Kierkegaard ascribed to his generation are described in the Postscript most succinctly in the following three statements:

Modern speculation seems almost to have done the trick of going further than Christianity, on the other side, or of understanding that Christianity had gone so far that it had about got back to paganism.³

1 Cf. Stace, W. T., The Philosophy of Hegel, a systematic exposition, Dover Publications Inc. edition of 1955.

2 Cf. Thømtø, Reidar, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, 1948, Princeton, Introduction.

3 S. Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton. 1944. p. 323.

Hegelianism claimed to go further than Christianity by understanding its doctrines in a philosophical light. Kierkegaard claimed that in so doing this philosophy robbed the Christian doctrines of that which made them specifically different from the religious ideas of paganism.

It seems quite clear to me that the confusion in which Christianity has become involved derives from the fact that it has been set back an entire stage in human life. The circumstance that we have all become Christians as children, has led to the assumption that we are, without further qualification, that which we have merely anticipated as a possibility.¹

Under such circumstances in Christendom (the misunderstanding of speculative philosophy on the one hand, and the presumption that one is a Christian as a matter of course on the other) it becomes more and more difficult to find a point of departure, when it is desired to determine what Christianity is.²

The Fragments and Postscript endeavour to present an argument for Christianity which takes cognizance of the position of Hegelian philosophy while opposing it. In writing the two books, Kierkegaard tried to destroy the popularity of Hegelianism, both through irony and by reversing the approach to the subject-matter. As a great admirer of Socrates, Kierkegaard tried to imitate his irony: Socrates, while knowing more than his contemporaries, represented himself as knowing less. Kierkegaard, through "Johannes Climacus", represents himself as not being a Christian, while endeavouring to remove false ideas of Christianity. Kierkegaard's irony is shown also in the titles of these two books: the "Philosophical Fragments" - as opposed to the Hegelian "system" - and the "Concluding Unscientific Postscript". In treatment of the subject matter, the Fragments present a "thought-experiment" which describes

1 Ibid., p. 325. 2 Ibid., p. 329.

the Incarnation (of the Son of God) as a way in which a "Teacher" may give the learner possession of the "Truth" in a way that presents an advance upon Socrates' maieutic method (the mid-wifery of removing the obstacles to discovery of truth). The Postscript argues that "Subjectivity is the truth", and that this "subjectivity" finds its greatest fulfillment in the individual's personal commitment to Christianity. In its argument, the Postscript discusses the Hegelian position and shows that Christianity as a way of life is in direct opposition to the Hegelian (or similar) objective treatment of Christianity as a body of doctrine to be understood objectively. At the same time the Postscript gives discussions of several philosophical concepts which are involved in the Hegelian treatment of Christianity. These philosophical concepts are also some of the basic ideas of Western Philosophy, and Kierkegaard's discussion of them presents some new points of view regarding ideas with which we are likely to be too familiar.

The Postscript centres on the question of what Kierkegaard means by "subjectivity" and how this relates to his view of what Christianity is or should be. His earlier pseudonymous works, as well as the later Sickness Unto Death, gives material helpful to an understanding of personal existence - which is related to his concept of "subjectivity" - as they describe concepts related to Kierkegaard's theory of the three spheres of existence (the "aesthetic", the "ethical" and the "religious")

and their proper "categories". Thus in treating the argument of the Fragments and Postscript I have found it necessary to refer also to many of the other works. But the Postscript is central for deducing what Kierkegaard means by "subjectivity", though clues are given in the earlier works and especially in the order in which they came.

Finding the key to what Kierkegaard means by "subjectivity" and the "truth" as subjectivity is a very difficult task. Unless one finds this key, the Postscript appears as either another piece of Christian apologetic (but more dogmatic and difficult than most) with a great deal of philosophical chaff, or, philosophically viewed, as nonsense. The greatest difficulty as I see it now is that the whole climate of modern thought is so objective that it is almost impossible to grasp the viewpoint which Kierkegaard presents as a relevant distinction within philosophy. In the chapters which follow I shall present what I believe to be the key to Kierkegaard's principle that "subjectivity is the truth" and then go on to discuss how the distinction thus made applies on the one hand to objective knowledge and on the other to the various attitudes which an individual may have in respect to his own personal existence.

II WHAT IS "SUBJECTIVE TRUTH"?

In this chapter I shall begin the discussion of Kierkegaard's idea of "truth as subjectivity". The reader is warned, however, that this chapter is only the beginning of the discussion: "subjective truth" is an attitude; key to the elucidation of Kierkegaard's notion of subjective truth is the ethical approach to existence, but the truth as subjectivity is most fully developed (according to Kierkegaard) in Christianity, and is also present in other patterns of life. By "subjective truth", therefore, is meant something quite different than what is meant generally by "the truth", "truths", etc. The reader is also warned that in The Philosophical Fragments "The Truth" is used to refer to God as the object of a Christian's devotion (consideration of this use of the phrase will be deferred until a later chapter).

Though some references will be made here to Kierkegaard's attitude towards the objective approach to truth, I shall leave the most part of the discussion on objective truth to the subsequent chapter. Later chapters will be concerned again with subjective truth in its various applications to life.

In Kierkegaard's Postscript, Book II, Part Two, Chapter II, titled "Truth is Subjectivity", the following outline of a distinction between objective and subjective truth is found:

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.¹

A note says further:

The reader will observe that the question here is about essential truth, or about the truth which is essentially related to existence, and that it is precisely for the sake of clarifying it as inwardness or as subjectivity that this contrast is drawn.²

The distinction described above is of extreme importance for understanding all that follows in this thesis. The approach is quite different from what we are used to. According to the way we usually think about truth, that is, as something which can be known - or which builds knowledge - and as some statement which is true, regardless of who discovers it or knows it, the latter part of the first statement quoted above is nonsense. We, in fact, are completely accustomed to consider truth in the objective manner, and if, for purposes of religious devotion, for instance, we consider something else as "truth", we follow one of two courses: either we separate a religious truth from our conceptions of objective

1 Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, tr. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1944, p. 178 (Italics in original).

2 Ibid., p. 178.

truth altogether or else we make objective formulations about what we consider to be the object of our religion and call the body of these objective formulations a body of "truth". Kierkegaard made the attempt to reinterpret both the devotional and the doctrinal approaches to religion through an examination of the human subject as he lives and knows. In the course of this examination Kierkegaard drew the distinction between the objective and the subjective approaches to truth. To make any sense out of the second half of his distinction, we must try to see in what other way he considered truth than in the perceptive relationship.

It is plain from a perusal of Kierkegaard's works, from their beginning to their end, that he considered man as essentially ethical. For him, man knows in order to do. But further, man's doing is of a purposive kind, related to a sense of responsibility for what he does. Kierkegaard considers men as individuals, where each man has personal responsibility and is potentially if not actually conscious of such responsibility. Such a sense of responsibility is bound up with personal commitment to a course of action where the object (or objective as goal) lies in the future. Through commitment to such objectives or ends, through the actions which are designed to realize these ends, and through the acceptance of responsibility for both ends and means, the individual, we might say, builds his character; Kierkegaard says that he attains subjectivity (the creation of himself as a distinct and particular subject). Now in his first

pseudonymous work, Either/Or, Kierkegaard sketched the life situations and attitudes of some characters representing the contrast between a way of life where responsibility is not accepted (the "aesthetic" life, one devoted merely to enjoyment) and a way in which responsibility is accepted (the "ethical" life). At the end of the work stands this sentence: "Only the truth which edifies is truth for you."¹ This sentence I believe to be one of the keys to the understanding of what is meant by subjective truth.

Let us look at the sentence so as to draw the meaning out of each part. The word "edifies" has an ethical or a religious significance. We may therefore say that the first part of the sentence might be restated in this manner: "Only that which in some way builds you up (in character, in faith, in ____?)..." We have dealt with the subject side of the sentence. What can we do with the predicate? What other expression can be substituted for the word "truth" in the predicate so as to restate this part of the sentence without distortion of the meaning of the whole? I believe that either of two similar expressions will do, namely, "has meaning", or "has significance (is significant)". So then, the sentence paraphrased might read, "Only that which in some way builds you up has significance for you." Obviously, the last phrase, "for you", affects the meaning of the whole - it doubly emphasises the personal involvement. If we consider this paraphrase from a point of view which considers ethics as essential to human existence - and I shall

1 Quoted in the Postscript, p. 226, in a section where "Johannes Climacus" reviews Kierkegaard's previous works.

show in later chapters that this is what Kierkegaard held to be so - then we may take it as a description of subjective truth as applied to the ethical sphere. Considering our previous discussion where we spoke of building character or attaining subjectivity (cf. the previous paragraph) through commitment to a course of action and acceptance of responsibility for that commitment, we might restate the sentence from Either/Or again in this manner: "That which builds your character (helps you to attain subjectivity) is what is true (significant) for you as a subject, i.e. is subjective truth." However, we have not yet fully demonstrated in what way even this statement is to be approached so as to make it comprehensible. But before going on, I should like to discuss in brief another application of my theory that "significance" may be considered to be Kierkegaard's criterion of truth.

Can significance be applied as a criterion to what Kierkegaard speaks of as "objective truth"? I think it can. Kierkegaard speaks of objective truths of several kinds (what follows is not a cataloguing of these): metaphysical, historical, logical, scientific, truths of abstract thought. He further hints at fields of enquiry in respect to which statements may be true in one field which are not true in another. Consider the following statements:

The mode of apprehension of the truth is precisely the truth. It is therefore untrue to answer a question in a medium in which the question cannot arise.¹

If it is an error to say that there is something that is true in theology which is not true in philosophy,

1 Postscript, p. 287.

it is at any rate quite correct to say that something is true for an existing individual which is not true in abstract thought.¹

If we consider the sciences, history, philosophy, logic, as different disciplines dealing in different ways with objective statements - or with reality in an objective manner - and thus requiring somewhat different means of investigation, we may then see the meaning of Kierkegaard's statement that the mode of apprehension of the truth is (provides?) the truth for that field of enquiry. In that case, statements or data which are significant for one field of enquiry may not be at all significant for another, and then would follow the statement that it is untrue to answer a question in a medium in which the question cannot arise since the answer that is significant in one field may be meaningless in another. I shall deal more fully with Kierkegaard's discussion of various objective truths in the next chapter. In that place too I shall indicate his consideration of the correspondence and coherence theories of truth.

A while back I quoted the statement, "Only the truth which edifies is truth for you", and reinterpreted it as meaning that what builds a person's character is that which is significant for him and is thus to be called subjective truth. This is to consider subjective truth as essentially a personal involvement. Such involvement is most easily seen in ethical behaviour. As I have indicated above (pp. 13-14) Kierkegaard speaks of the ethical in a way which shows that he considers it as involving the responsibility for one's actions, commitment to ends and the means which are necessary to attain them, and

1 Ibid., p. 271.

the building of one's own character ("subjectivity"). He further speaks of the ethical way of living as serious use of time. (In a later chapter I shall consider in much more detail Kierkegaard's description of the ethical way of living.) The use of time is a natural consequence of subjective purpose. The determination of a course of action, the seeking after objectives, necessarily involves time for the action to take place, for the objectives to be sought.

If we look at the procedure we take in seeking ends and determining a course of action to attain them we see that this involves at the same time subjective certainty and objective uncertainty. Commitment, if it is consistent, means that a person is certain about his own commitment. He may be certain about his goal - at least at the time when he commits himself he is certain about what he feels his goal to be. These factors are entirely subjective, but are involved, we may say, whenever a commitment is made. The certainty with which the commitment is held to, the pertinacity with which one pursues the goal, depend, of course, upon the character of the individual involved. Here it is true that practice makes perfect, i.e. practice in the commitment of the self to goals and persistence in the seeking or striving for them gives the person strength for making further commitments and persisting in carrying them out. On the other hand, such actions also involve uncertainty about the success of the course of action undertaken. If the goal is near in time (and "time" for commitment always is the future), the uncertainty is usually

relatively small; it may be present only from the possibility that death may prevent me from completing my striving towards my goal. As the goal is cast further forward in time, the uncertainty of attaining it becomes greater when considered from the time the decision must be made; here the external factors which affect my actions become more numerous, and there also may be occurrences which remove the goal I am striving for (I may go to a great deal of effort and pains to get something, but it may not be there when I get through). Furthermore, where the goal in some way involves my own character, so that an inward transformation (for instance, of my attitudes or of my powers of will) is necessary in myself, the uncertainty of the result when considered at the beginning of the action becomes immeasurably greater, though practice in repeated decisions of the same kind usually lead to an increase of confidence in one's ability to attain the goal.

Kierkegaard points out that the uncertainty of the result of a course of action and the strength of the commitment to that course of action are in a certain sense reciprocal. The more uncertain of attainment I see the result or the goal to be, the more dedicated I must be if I intend to seek it. With regard to ethical goals, such as the transformation of my own character, or my developing the capacity to do some great deed, the uncertainty lies mainly in the path to the goal. The goal I seek may be apparent to me, but the risks involved or the obstacles in the way may be so great as to make the attainment uncertain. Or uncertainty may arise because the means necessary for attainment of the goal may be obscure or complex.



Kierkegaard takes the type of determination required in ethical decisions as a key to or paradigm for the kind of commitment which he claims takes place for a religious person. He distinguishes two types of religiousness, one which he calls "religiousness A" or sometimes "the ethico-religious sphere", the second of which is "religiousness B" or Christianity (these will be discussed more fully in later chapters). According to Kierkegaard the object of religious faith, whether immortality, God, or God incarnate, takes the position of a goal to which a person relates himself. In Christianity the object of faith involves both an uncertainty (that God exists, that God has become man as a historical person) and also a paradox (that God could become a man). Kierkegaard says that in Christianity the type of commitment is the same as that for ethical goals, but the degree of commitment is immeasurably greater than for ethical goals - in fact, he claims, the greatest possible. In Christianity the uncertainty within the object (to which one is committed) is additional to the uncertainty present in ethical decisions (uncertainty of attaining a goal which itself is known). Therefore the degree of commitment is seen to be reciprocal to the uncertainty of the goal or object (The religious "spheres" are discussed more fully in later chapters.).

Kierkegaard speaks of commitment (ethical or religious) involving venture, risk, and faith. Risk or venture require a willing to achieve, or to relate myself to a goal. Faith is required in relationship to a goal (ethical or religious): I must believe that the goal exists, that it can be attained, and

that I can attain it. Kierkegaard contrasts faith or commitment with the intellectual type of relationship in the following passage:

Anything that is almost probable, or probable, or extremely and emphatically probable, is something he can almost know, or as good as know, or extremely and emphatically almost know - but it is impossible to believe.¹

When knowing about some object, commitment is not necessary; when seeking a goal or relating oneself to an uncertain object (whether uncertain in itself or because of the way to it), commitment, venture and faith are required. (In the discussion of Christianity, the meaning of "faith" is more restricted than I have described it here.)

I believe we may take commitment of the subject as the meaning of subjective truth. Let us see how Kierkegaard speaks of this in connection with a religious relationship of the subject:

Here is such a definition of subjective truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.... The above definition of truth is an equivalent expression for faith.²

If we consider the words "appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness" we can equate with them an expression such as "most strenuous commitment". This is reciprocal with the uncertainty of the goal or end sought. The goal or objective in a religious commitment of the subject is more uncertain than in a situation involving an earthly or physical goal. Where the religious relationship is entered into, there commitment is

1 Ibid., p. 189. 2 Ibid., p. 182.

also religious faith. We shall see that in his discussion of Christianity Kierkegaard applies faith in the strictest sense to a person's appropriation of the paradox that God became man in Jesus Christ. But his argument for the possibility of having such a belief is an extension of the ethical phenomenon of commitment.

We may test the theory that subjective truth essentially means commitment in connection with another of Kierkegaard's statements in the Postscript: "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said."¹ In the knowing, or intellectual relationship, what is important, i.e. information, facts, objective data. In the determination of a purpose, seeking of a goal, or the consideration of actions as right or wrong, how I relate myself to the purpose, goal or actions, determines whether I am an ethical or moral being or an amoral being. These acts whereby I relate myself are commitments.

We may ask, after having seen how subjective truth swings away from the objective approach to truth, whether there is anything objectively true in connection with subjective truth and vice versa. There is, in both cases. Kierkegaard argues that even in the intellectual relationship where the nature of objective reality is to be discovered there is commitment - either to doubt or to accept that which appears. (I shall deal with this aspect of objective truth further in the next chapter.) There is also an objectivity or objective reality

1. Ibid, p. 181.

(factual existence) connected with subjective truth. But in the case of subjective truth the objectivity is to be attained or created by the committed subject. This is fairly obvious in the field where Kierkegaard starts his discussion of subjective truth, i.e. the ethical. Though I must commit myself to a goal while uncertain of it, if I attain the goal then that goal has become objectively real through my having attained or created it; before it was subjectively real as my goal. If I set out to change myself, the new form in myself (e.g. the creating or breaking of a habit) comes into existence when created by me. If I set out to prove that what I consider right is really possible, it will become objectively true when I have proved in my own life that it is possible, and thus have brought it to actuality. It is in this way that we may understand the following passage from Kierkegaard's Journals, where he describes faith as a "how" which creates its "what":

In all that is usually said about Johannes Climacus being purely subjective and so on, people have forgotten, in addition to everything else concrete about him, that in one of the last sections he shows that the curious thing is: that there is a "how" which has this quality, that if it is truly given, then the "what" is also given; and that it is the "how" of "faith". Here, quite certainly, we have inwardness at its maximum proving to be objectivity once again. And this is an aspect of the principle of subjectivity which, so far as I know, has never before been presented or worked out.¹

A fuller discussion of what is meant by this passage will come

1 The Journals of Kierkegaard, tr. and ed. by Alexander Dru, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1959 (first published by Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 177-78. From other sources I learn that it is Selection 1021, and in the Danish is numbered X² A 299.

in connection with the discussion of Christianity, to be made in a later chapter. Let us consider it now as describing one of the ways in which commitment to something (the "how") becomes realized later as something objective (the "what"). (It is possible in English to make a pun of this phenomenon: A person's objective may become objective.)

It may be useful to make a comparison of the relative positions of the subjective and objective elements of truth in the intellectual and in the ethical relationships. In the intellectual relationship of a subject to the object known (as I discover or come to know something) the object known is present beforehand as data; following upon their presence, a selection is made, or an organizing act undertaken, by a subjective decision. (Later, of course, the principle inferred by the knower may become instrumental for discovering objective data in the future, but originally there are some objective data given.) In the ethical, or ethical-type of relationship such as the religious, the subjective aspect is first: the commitment is made, and the objective fact may follow as the realization of the end to which the subject was committed or the attaining of a sought for relationship to a religious object. (Here again, however, this is not always strictly so, for a commitment to something uncertain may be made on the basis of analogy with past experience, where a certain course of action has been found to produce results of a certain kind.) In general, then, for the intellectual and ethical-type of relationships of the subject, the positions of the objective and subjective elements in an action are

reversed: as a knowing subject, a person places his commitment and action in a posterior position to the objective data; as an acting ethical or religious subject, he places his commitment and action anterior to an objective which is a goal to be attained.

It was to emphasize the fact that a human being is not only a knowing subject but is primarily an acting subject that Kierkegaard formulated his concept of subjective truth. By this emphasis he hoped to clear away what he considered to be false ideas about Christianity caused by considering it from an objective point of view, and to lead his contemporaries to understand Christianity as being primarily a subjective commitment. He also saw that the multiplication of objective knowledge and the emphasis upon the knowing relationship of man was leading to a demoralizing of men. For men would cease to act as persons willing to take responsibility for their actions (In his book, The Present Age, he described the anonymity and irresponsibility of the democratic mass-man.).

Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth is in some ways similar to the pragmatic theory of truth, given express formulation by John Dewey, but there are also essential differences. For the pragmatic view, that is true which "works", which in practice produces the results desired. It is true that Kierkegaard's concept of commitment to a goal, when realized by action, produces the results desired. But Kierkegaard's emphasis was upon the commitment, and the personal responsibility for the commitment made. Kierkegaard argued that to have an eye upon the results was immoral for ethics (though the religious

relationships include a concern for results, i.e. an eternal happiness):

The true ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost limits of one's powers, but at the same time being so uplifted in divine jest as never to think about the accomplishment. As soon as the will begins to look right and left for results, the individual begins to become immoral.¹

In his ethical theory, Dewey argued for accepting responsibility for the means used,² and so resembled Kierkegaard in the latter's argument for the responsibility of commitment. However, Dewey applied his concept of the pragmatic as the criterion of truth to fields in which Kierkegaard would have found its use illegitimate (the fields of enquiry in which Kierkegaard believed that the objective approach was the significant). Furthermore, in the attainment of results in many cases in which the pragmatic theory of truth would be applied Dewey would have seen no ethical implications at all, and presumably would have assigned no responsibility for the choice of means (for instance, in his example of a person discovering a way to bridge a stream). The fact is that Dewey and Kierkegaard started in entirely different fields with their typical theory of truth: Dewey with the scientific, Kierkegaard with what he called the ethical. Thus we see that Kierkegaard's concept of subjective truth as commitment and Dewey's concept of truth as pragmatic touch at certain points but are otherwise different.

In this chapter I have attempted to show what Kierkegaard meant by "subjective truth" and, in describing subjective truth, what he considered to be the criterion for truth in

1 Postscript, p. 121. 2 Cf. Dewey's article, "The Continuum of Ends-Means" found in Meldner, A.I., Ethical Theories, New York, Prentice-Hall, 1950, 1951.

general. From Kierkegaard's use of the terms I have deduced that for Kierkegaard the "true" is the significant in any well-defined field of enquiry or action, that "subjective truth" is equivalent to commitment, and that commitment is significant to the subject as an ethical subject because it builds up his character or subjectivity. In the succeeding chapter I shall discuss what Kierkegaard has to say about the objective enquiry for truth. Later on I shall discuss his applications of subjective truth to various fields of personal existence (including finally, the possibility of Christianity).

III THE SEARCH FOR OBJECTIVE TRUTH

In the previous chapter I pointed out that Kierkegaard's conception of subjective truth resolves itself into commitment for the sake of building up personal subjectivity (character). In arguing that when the personal subject is emphasized the truth is that which most deeply involves the person, Kierkegaard was attempting to describe a truth which would be essential for the person's existence. What is the opposite of this? Kierkegaard described another way of considering truth, and that which is the common way of considering truth, also under an approach to reality - the objective approach. I am using the phrase "objective truth" to describe his description of what is generally spoken of as "truth". So far as I know, Kierkegaard does not himself use the phrase, "objective truth"; he does use such terms as "objective reflection", "objective knowledge", or the "objective manner" of considering truth. He also speaks of "the truth" or "truths" which are objective, though mainly in criticism of other philosophical ways of considering the truth. I consider it legitimate to use the phrase "objective truth" to describe truth which may be discovered by objective enquiry.

What Kierkegaard has to say about objective truth is mainly negative, voiced in criticism. His positive standpoint in regard to what is generally spoken of as truth must be gathered by examination of his critical remarks about theories of truth, especially his criticism of the Hegelian view of truth. In brief, his own views regarding a theory of objective truth seem

to be these: The attainment of objective truth, or objective knowledge, is the result of the subject's activity as observer. As an observer, his own feelings and his own person are indifferent (for subjective truth they were essential). He seeks what is in the objects. There seems to be a confusion in Kierkegaard's belief about how objective truth is to be attained. At times he seems to follow Kant to state that the observer selects the data which he will consider and imposes a framework of meaning upon this data. Kierkegaard, however, did not follow Kant's schemata regarding the organization of knowledge. At times he appears to follow Plato, for he considered that there were several fields of knowledge, each of which had its own rules. It is difficult to say whether he considered these rules to have been imposed by observers, because it appears as though he spoke of the rules as being objective in the field. Thus he recognizes distinctions between essence and existence and states that what can be stated of the one is not immediately true of the other. He regarded certain characteristics to belong, by nature, it seems, to each field. In other places he states that knowledge of any objects (or their relations) is arrived at only by abstracting from the concrete data at hand and seeking the ideality behind the data.

Kierkegaard seems to have tried to blend the theories of truth commonly known as the correspondence view and the coherence view (he uses the terms "empirical" and "systematic"). Thus, he seems to consider that in seeking truth as an observer we seek both that which corresponds to the facts or data and

also that we must unite these in one system. The latter deed he says is impossible for any human being, because no one is in a position to know everything at once since each person is in the stream of existence. Thus, he rejects the ideal of Hegelianism. However, he seems greatly influenced by Hegelianism in his consideration of what truth is according to the correspondence theory. He does not allow any statements about empirical existence the status of knowledge in a strict sense, for he seems to believe that data must be generalized and unified in order to arrive at knowledge. Thus he states that the attaining of objective knowledge is only an approximation-process¹. The result is that Kierkegaard appears to be a sceptic regarding the attainment of objective truth, as it is usually considered, for he holds as an ideal for such truth an impossible combination of three criteria: correspondence with concrete existence, generalization from concrete existence to general forms of reality, and a unity of all knowledge in one. Since he recognized these to be impossible, he emphasized instead concrete particular existence, especially as it involved the individual person and his involvement in it - thus subjective truth. At the same time, however, Kierkegaard criticized Hegelianism for believing that existence would conform with its "pure thought". He himself favored a progress from concrete existence to general principles, though he seems to believe that the actions of the subject as observer to a large extent determine what is discovered. Thus he can say, "The mode of apprehension of the truth is precisely the truth"², indicating a Kantian approach, and in another place

1 For instance, Postscript, p. 216.

2 Ibid., p. 287.

that the ideality behind the external is the real¹, indicating a Platonic approach. I shall try, in the following, to outline what I consider to be most typical of Kierkegaard's discussion in the Postscript, in spite of the confusion which is sometimes apparent. (We may, perhaps excuse Kierkegaard a bit if we remember that he was not trying to be systematic, but was trying to criticize the overvaluation of intellectual effort, and especially Hegelianism, and at the same time put forward Christianity as the ultimate in commitment; it is in this connection that his statements about truth as an object of enquiry come.) My discussion will cover several topics.

The fact that Kierkegaard regarded the approach to existence as basic to the description of truth is borne out by the following statements:

For an objective reflection the truth becomes an object, something objective, and thought must be pointed away from the subject. For a subjective reflection the truth becomes a matter of appropriation, of inwardness, of subjectivity, and thought must probe more and more deeply into the subject and his subjectivity.²

A similar statement a few pages later repeats most of the above, but with these words: "When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner..."³. We may consider another statement, which I have quoted earlier, (p. 21) "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said."⁴

Kierkegaard agrees that the what of the subject's relationship is of importance. But he further argues that the what that is

1 Ibid., pp. 288-289.

2 Postscript, p. 171.

3 Ibid., p. 178.

4 Ibid., p. 181.

known or discovered is discovered in such a way that our understanding of it is affected by our means of investigation. This will become more evident in my discussion of his understanding of scientific truth as abstraction, to follow later in this chapter. However, this does not mean that objects are created by the discoverer or observer, as the objective factor in a person's character is created by him (in ethical commitment). Objective truth is considered to hold irrespective of the character, or other subjective characteristics of the person who discovers or learns it. Yet we are aware that prejudices do enter into the selection of data from which conclusions are drawn. We are also aware that the pursuit of objective truth is a course which sees many revisions of theories and refinements of conclusions.

Kierkegaard, especially in the Postscript, argued that objective truth is uncertain and elusive. This, he said, is so when the truth is considered as a description of an objective world, i.e. according to a correspondence theory of truth. He called to attention the factors of decision - in a sense, commitment of the observer - required even in the discovery of such truth. He also claimed truth to be uncertain and elusive if it is considered according to the coherence theory: here we meet with propositions which have been rationally worked out from logical presuppositions rather than derived from experience. Kierkegaard claimed a paradoxical situation applied to the truth considered as an object of enquiry or observation: the more closely connected with empirical, particular and concrete

existence, the more uncertain; the more precise and certain and systematic, the farther from concrete existence. His alternative to both the empirical and idealistic considerations of truth as an object (correspondence and coherence theories) is an emphasis upon man as essentially a creature of will (decision) for whom the intellectual is only one of several areas of activity.

The following, which at first sight might seem to be Kierkegaard's definition of objective truth, is really his statement of the correspondence and coherence theories, in order that he may point out the insufficiencies of both:

Whether truth is defined more empirically, as the conformity of thought and being, or more idealistically, as the conformity of being with thought, it is, in either case, important to note carefully what is meant by being....If being, in the two indicated definitions, is understood as empirical being, truth is at once transformed into a desideratum, and everything must be understood in terms of becoming; for the empirical object is unfinished, and the existing cognitive spirit is itself in process of becoming. Thus the truth becomes an approximation whose beginning cannot be posited absolutely, precisely because the conclusion is lacking, the effect of which is retroactive. Whenever a beginning is made... such a beginning is not consequence of an immanent movement of thought, but is effected through a resolution of the will.... From the systematic standpoint...the term "being"... must...be understood...much more abstractly, presumably as the abstract reflection of, or the abstract prototype for, what being is as concrete empirical being. When so understood there is nothing to prevent us from abstractly determining the truth as abstractly finished and complete, for the correspondence between thought and being is, from the abstract point of view, always finished. Only with the concrete does becoming enter in, and it is from the concrete that abstract thought abstracts. But if being is understood in this manner, the

formula becomes a tautology. Thought and being mean one and the same thing, and the correspondence spoken of is merely an abstract self-identity.¹

It is necessary to the discussion of this passage to understand that Kierkegaard to a great extent followed the classical distinction between existence (the world of the concrete and particular) and essence (the area of universals, and the prius for the particulars). The world of existence he considered to be concrete in the sense that it is tangible, but also to be characterized by change, flux, movement, impermanence (he recalls the principle of Heracleitus and applies it to the empirical world of existence)². The area of essence he considered to be in some sense real, as giving the foundational characteristics of the world of objects that exist. But as such the area of essences is not applicable to existence. It is an area of abstractions, universals, which are but do not exist. It is a body of abstract principles useful in understanding existence but not immediately relevant to existence. Kierkegaard conceived the field of essences to be a unity, a system, to which the principle of the Eleatics applied (that all is one and there is no movement or change)³. The investigation of, and discovery of such universals he regarded to be the province of metaphysics and logic, and, it seems, also of mathematics and pure science. Kierkegaard contended that it was in the area of universals, and only in that area, that Hegel's principles applied - and that for the most part they applied well.

1 Ibid., pp. 169-170. 2 Ibid., p. 272 and note.
3 Ibid., pp. 272-73, cf. pp. 99-100.

Objective knowledge is regarded by Kierkegaard as having the form of statements about objects, i.e. as propositional. Such statements are produced by a thinker, and are the result of his thinking in an objective manner about that which is outside himself,¹ or about himself as an empirical (rather than an ethical) subject². Objective truth can be communicated directly, that is, statements or propositions derived from objective thinking can be spoken, uttered, and learned, without concern about appropriating them (they may also be those which lead to subjective truth, or commitment and appropriation). University students quote the example of such communication in the facetious definition of a lecture as a process whereby the notes are transmitted from the notebook of the lecturer to the notebook of the student without going through the mind of either. Objective knowledge, as such, is not personally significant - though it may be made personally significant by involvement in it. Objective knowledge is significant, rather, as either a description of an object or as a description of another description. Kierkegaard speaks of the communication in objective knowledge as direct communication, because the truth or falsity of the statements is not altered by the character of the persons included in the communication process, and the statements can be uttered without personal involvement (emotional or ethical) and can also be received without such involvement³. Thus, knowledge or truth that is objective is not changed by the persons and need

1 Ibid., p. 70 (cf. 173-174).

2 Ibid., p. 509.

3 Ibid., p. 70 (cf. p. 68).

not change them in being communicated.

If objective truth is regarded as a quality of statements about objects, or about other statements, then the question of whether such truth is characterized by correspondence or coherence ceases to be of grave importance. Statements cannot correspond in every way to objects, and so are by nature only approximately accurate representations of the objects. Statements can cohere with other statements, and thus can be accurate in their interrelation; but unless some of the statements somewhere have some connection with empirical reality, the whole body of statements, though coherent, may be totally irrelevant to empirical existence. But if a chain of statements is at some point empirically connected, this connection makes the whole coherent chain subject to the characteristic of the statements about empirical reality, namely, that it is only an approximation of what empirical reality is.

In the above paragraph I have attempted to give my own description of the characteristics of empirical and a priori statements as these are discussed by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard considered the empirical world to be existent (he believed it to be God's creation) but the truth of our beliefs about it to be uncertain. Thus Kierkegaard was not a sceptic about existence but a sceptic about the possibility of obtaining objective truth. Empirical "knowledge" is an approximation, because both the observed existence and the observer are in process of change; abstract knowledge may have the form of certainty, but is removed from concrete existence. Kierkegaard considered the Hegelian system with its thought about thought to be at the

farthest remove from concrete existence.

Any consideration of objective enquiry involves the question of the place of sense-perception. Kierkegaard, in the Philosophical Fragments, states that "Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive"¹, "The Greek sceptic did not deny the validity of sensation or immediate cognition; error, he says, has an entirely different ground, for it comes from the conclusions that I draw."² This carries the implication that it is not immediate sensation which is knowledge, but a conclusion drawn upon the basis of such sensation. What is important is the question, What is the meaning of the sensation that I have? In the Postscript it is stated that the external is not the real, but rather that the ideality behind the external is the real³. Such a statement as, "My car is blue", states a fact about something that is perceived. But the meaning of the statement depends upon what is the significance of "car", and what is meant by "blue", which lie behind the immediate perception and are involved in the process of giving meaning to the perception. In his treatment of sense perception Kierkegaard would seem to imply an interpretation similar to that above. In this area he agrees with the position of idealism: "The apparent trustworthiness of sense is an illusion. This was shown adequately as early as in Greek scepticism, and modern idealism has likewise demonstrated it."⁴ Though Kierkegaard takes sense-perception as a fact, he does not regard it as by

1 Philosophical Fragments, tr. David F. Swenson, 1946, Princeton, p. 66, 67. 2 Ibid., p. 68. 3 Postscript, pp. 288-9. 4 Postscript, p. 280.

itself giving meaningful statements. To go back to the distinction between the empirical world of existence and the realm of essence, this would be to place knowledge of particulars in an inferior position to a knowledge of essences, for the ideal, or essence, of a thing must be known before meaning can be given to the particular. (In life, however, Kierkegaard considered the particular to be the important thing.) However, the places where Kierkegaard discusses sense-perception are very sparse, and it is difficult to show conclusively how he regarded sense-perception.

The Philosophical Fragments, however, do give us light on Kierkegaard's belief concerning the process of drawing conclusions. Where conclusions are drawn from either sense perception or historical data, he argued, belief is involved. Just as doubt is a reservation of judgment concerning the conclusion, belief is a committing of oneself (intellectually) to the acceptance of conclusions¹. The intellectual process, though it is involved with objects and not with the subject's decisions about himself, requires decisions of the subject as observer when it proceeds beyond immediate sensation or immediate cognition.

Belief is the opposite of doubt. Belief and doubt are not two forms of knowledge, determinable in continuity with one another, for neither of them is a cognitive act; they are opposite passions. Belief is a sense for becoming [e.g. I believe that something has come into being, or that it is related to something else.], and doubt is a protest against every conclusion that transcends immediate sensation and immediate cognition. ²

But the fact that belief is involved in drawing conclusions means also that more than one interpretation of the data at hand is

1 Philosophical Fragments, p. 69. 2 Idem.

possible. This is true even of sensation, which gives us information about the world of nature as it is when we perceive it.

The possibility of a variety of occurrences, as well as interpretations, comes into play when time is involved, i.e. in history. The subsequent, or antecedent, developments to the state of nature we now perceive probably included many possibilities, depending upon the causes which were, or are, present. So too with the course of events which we describe as history. That which happened, though it cannot now be changed, could possibly have happened some other way¹. Therefore, even in my knowledge afterwards of such natural or historical events belief is involved, for I consider them as having demonstrated a certain ideality or type, or as having a certain meaning. "Everything historical, in the fact of being known, is eo ipso past and has the ideality of recollection"². By habit, we consider that history (as past) was necessary, Kierkegaard says, but this is only an intellectual illusion caused by distance in time, just as distance in space causes sensory illusions³. The conclusions we draw, both with regard to nature and history, are a result of an act of will; we draw conclusions. "The conclusion of belief is not so much a conclusion as a resolution, and it is for this reason that belief excludes doubt."⁴ Kierkegaard claims that we exclude the uncertainties and the other possibilities when we draw conclusions. So, even a scientist draws conclusions from a

1 Ibid., p. 63. 2 Postscript, p. 509 3 Fragments
p. 65. 4 Ibid., p. 69.

number of experiments and thus has to decide when to make his conclusions. But if we look behind our drawing conclusions, the other possibilities are or were still present. It is Kierkegaard's contention, then, that what is considered objective knowledge (the result of objective enquiry, not personally related) in areas closely connected with concrete reality, is yet subjectively determined by the decisions of the observer relative to his observation. Thus he claims that what is considered objective knowledge can never be more than approximately certain, for one is not sure that the conclusions he has drawn might not be (or have been) otherwise. So he argues that the attaining of objective knowledge is always an approximation-process.

Kierkegaard has more to say about the approximate nature of historical knowledge from another standpoint. Since he considers objective truth as that which has meaning or significance in the field which is being considered, he treats historical knowledge as a system of facts related to each other. I believe that this truly is Kierkegaard's approach to the question of historical knowledge by itself, and not merely an accommodation for criticism to the Hegelian interpretation of history. Beyond the uncertainty that attaches to the knowledge of an event when it is past (since it was not the object of immediate cognition), there attaches the uncertainty of interpretation in the light of other events. In order to interpret several events together, there must be a selection of events. For no person can apprehend all the possible antecedents of an event; nor can anyone forecast with certainty what the consequences of events now taking place will be, so as to better understand the present

events.¹

For several reasons, then, Kierkegaard argues against treating history as a rational science (as the 18th and 19th century idealists had done). It is not by nature an abstract study, but is rather a study of the concrete and empirical. The concept of a necessary development, i.e. that history embodies a development of overall rational ideas, is not supportable, he argues. On the one side, this is because of the nature of necessity. Necessity, he says, is not a synthesis of the possible and the actual, but is separate from both; if something is necessary, it is, and does not come into being; if it came into being that would indicate that at some time it was not necessary, but only possible². The necessary, he argues, is a category of essence, not of existence, and therefore does not belong in a study of existence, such as history is. History, therefore, is incapable of being approached as a science from an a priori standpoint. On the other hand, historical events, considered as empirical, cannot be related to one another so as to find a rational principle by inductive methods. This is because of the limitations of knowledge, which necessitate a selection of data. Selection as shown by Hegel presupposed a principle already carried in the mind of the selector and, he claims, extraneous to the body of material being selected. Even though a principle may be considered to be embodied in a sequence of historical events, its presence there will be illusory, Kierkegaard argues, for in fact it will have been

1 Ibid., pp. 63-71.

2 Ibid., p. 61.

read into the events by the person making the selection. A prime example of this, according to Kierkegaard, is the attempt by idealists or theologians to read into history the hand of God, or an ethical progress on a mass basis. God may indeed have a plan, Kierkegaard says, but it is not knowable for anyone but God. And, "If an individual happens to see something ethical, then it is the ethical in himself...so that he thinks he sees what he nevertheless does not see."¹

It would seem, then, that Kierkegaard was opposed to the treatment of history as a science in any sense. This point of view seems to be confirmed by a great deal of what he has to say in the Postscript where he accuses the world-historical viewpoint of being demoralizing. What is important for an individual is not to try to realize his place in history (that is, how he will appear to those who come later in time) but to realize himself as an ethical individual in his own history and in his relationships to those to whom he will have responsibility. History is very uncertain. Kierkegaard cites the remark about Cleopatra's nose, and says, "the world-historical comes into being through what is ethically a perhaps"². Only God can know world history as an observer, Kierkegaard argues, the rest of us experience a limited part of it as participants³. Furthermore, to assume that God has a purpose for world history according to the pattern of the idealists is to say that God is wasteful and tyrannical. Rather we should assume that God has

1 Postscript, p. 140. 2 Ibid., p. 132. 3 Ibid.,
p. 141.

individual tasks for individuals in their development of their characters¹.

Nevertheless, we find in some of Kierkegaard's writings what might be called a scientific approach to the historical development of a limited area. He regarded Western Europe, including Denmark, as following out a process of development in some ways resembling that later proposed by Marx, though more closely resembling Plato's description in the Republic: the abolishing of the aristocracy would lead to the tyranny of the masses, and this would eventually lead to the tyranny of dictators². But this process, Kierkegaard says, is the result, not of the embodiment of a rational principle, but rather the cumulative result of irresponsible actions by many individuals. It is not to be regarded as a necessary development, i.e. as irreversible and ordained, but rather as something which has come about through the cumulative effect of many individual choices, and which may be reversed if some individuals would begin to act responsibly toward each other and use their influence so that others might also do so. However, the assumption that history is a process en masse, he says, gave the illusion that such developments as were taking place were fated to take place and thus removed the desire and the energy to change them. Thus we see that Kierkegaard argued that a rational treatment of history is intellectually fallacious and ethically demoralizing. Of course his own principles must also be applied to his conclusions about his own time (see above, p. 38), namely that we draw conclusions about what we see, and

1 Ibid., pp. 141-142.

2 Cf. The Present Age.

that these conclusions about nature or history are a type of belief to which we commit ourselves. ✓

Kierkegaard's criticism of the attempt to make a science of history gives us an indication of his attitude towards ✓ sciences generally. He considers sciences to be the result of abstract thinking, and so to show the search for essence. By "abstraction" he means generalizing towards ideal forms, away from the concrete and particular. In the process through which scientific principles are derived, particulars are first used to gain a hypothesis which can describe the essence of the objects or events considered. This hypothesis is a general principle which is related to probably one factor in the objects or events, or perhaps to several factors which are believed to be interdependent. If the hypothesis seems to hold true in further instances of the same kind it finally becomes a (descriptive) law. This process is also used in the mathematical description of events or relationships (for instance, in the plotting of the graph of a chemical reaction, or in Newton's laws of motion and gravitation). Regularity is assumed. What is searched for is some statement which can describe the regularity shown in a group, or a type, of events or relationships. But once derived, a scientific law does not need to be referred to any specific particular. It becomes an entity of its own, used to describe the existing objects in general from a particular aspect. Scientific or mathematical laws, though empirically derived, are not concerned with existence as it is but only with certain aspects of the existing things. Logic and

metaphysics are even more abstract but are derived in the same way. While particular sciences and mathematics are first derived from the behaviour, or relationships, of existing objects, and later deduce other principles coherent with the first, logic is first derived empirically from statements, and metaphysics from different relationships between classes of concrete reality.

Usually we consider logic and metaphysics as abstract, and mathematical and scientific laws as related to the concrete. But I believe it to be Kierkegaard's point of view that all of these are abstract in different degrees while each, to be real and not illusory, must in some way at some point be related to the concrete empirical world. I believe he would therefore not consider a priori principles (of logic and metaphysics) and the empirical to be real distinctions of objective truth, but rather consider all objective truth to be empirically derived. He does not, to my knowledge, use the term "a priori" but does speak of the fields where it is applied. When we get beyond individual particular facts, however, we are proceeding along the way of abstract thought. "Just as existence has combined thought and existence by making the existing individual a thinker, so there are two media: the medium of abstract thought, and the medium of reality."¹ This point of view is shown in Kierkegaard's discussion of history where he states that reality may be a system for God who is able to observe it all². Kierkegaard severely criticizes Hegelianism for attempting to make all existence comprehensible within an a priori type rational system; because system implies finality, no human observer can construct

1 Postscript, p. 278.

2 Ibid., p. 107.

such a system. The principles of the field of essence, then, are not really principles of a separate world, as they were for Plato, but are principles of correct thinking in making the abstraction from existence to essence.

Kierkegaard argues that whereas existence is the world of reality and involves change and movement, the area of essences, as the abstract from existence, does not involve movement, but rather is a description of essence as static or of relationships as static. He considers that Hegel was in error to introduce movement into logic¹ or necessity into existence². But he says, Hegel's logic and metaphysics, as a refinement of abstraction, are admirable³. Hegel was incorrect in describing his system as "pure thought", because it is only abstract thought, and must ultimately be an abstraction from empirical reality⁴. He further criticizes Hegel for being oblivious to, or for misrepresenting, the actions involved in making abstractions from existence.

(Compare the latter part of the passage quoted above, p. 32.)

Kierkegaard examines the process by which Hegel's system begins, namely reflection:

The System, so it is said, begins with the immediate... and hence without any presuppositions, and hence absolutely.... But...How does the System begin with the immediate? That is to say, does it begin with it immediately? The answer to this question must be an unconditional negative. If the System is presumed to come after existence, by which a confusion with an existential system may be occasioned, then the System is of course ex post facto, and so does not begin immediately with the immediacy with which existence began...The beginning which begins with the immediate is thus itself reached by means of a process of reflection.... No logical system may boast of an

1 Postscript, p. 100. 2 Philosophical Fragments, p. 61, cf.
Postscript, p. 101, 271. 3 Postscript, p. 275. 4 Ibid.,
p. 279.

absolute beginning, since such a beginning, like pure being, is a pure chimera. When it is impossible to begin immediately with the immediate, which would be to think as by accident or miracle, and therefore not to think, and it is necessary to reach the beginning through a process of reflection... How do I put an end to the reflection which was set upon in order to reach the beginning here in question? Reflection has the remarkable property of being infinite... it cannot be stopped by itself.¹

Hegelian logicians...therefore define this "immediate", with which logic begins, as the most abstract content remaining after an exhaustive reflection... This definition says indirectly that there is no absolute beginning... (except) when we have abstracted from everything.²

Such reflection and its halting, abstraction, etc., involves, Kierkegaard says, decisions - decisions as to selection and principles to be used. They involve a discontinuity, a leap³. In another connection he says, "The leap is the category of decision."⁴ Abstraction is not a process independent of a thinker, but is controlled by a thinker. Further with regard to Hegel's concept of pure thought, Kierkegaard says:

In the objective sense, thought is understood as being pure thought; this corresponds in an equally abstract-objective sense to its object, which object is therefore the thought itself, and the truth becomes the correspondence of thought with itself. This objective thought has no relation to the existing subject⁵.

Such would be true, if pure thought or the truth about it were real; but in fact, abstract thought is the result of someone's thinking, and therefore is subordinate to a thinker, even though the attempt has been made to make it a separate existence.

It is an aim of the objective enquiry that knowledge gained by such enquiry should be universally true, irrespective of the

1 Ibid., pp. 101-102. 2 Ibid., pp. 103-104. 3 Ibid.,
p. 105. 4 Ibid., p. 91. 5 Ibid., p. 112.

subject perceiving it. In principle, any person with sufficient intelligence to understand the procedures involved in mathematics or in a scientific demonstration should be able to perceive the conclusions to which the procedures come. The statement of these conclusions can also be said in principle to be true irrespective of time and place (unless they are by nature about some particular time or spatial locus). The more abstract objective truth is, the more it fits into these characteristics. Statements about chemical process are not completely indifferent to time, for they involve time; but the time which they involve may usually be duplicated again and again. Principles of physics and mechanics involve spatial relationships, but not any particular space. When we come to mathematics, numbers involve neither space nor time; a geometry involves a basic configuration of space, but not any particular location. Logic, which is the science of statements, is bound to neither time nor space, even in the general way that the natural sciences and mathematics are bound. If we consider metaphysics as dealing with concepts of being or non-being, and relationships possible within being, this too is non-temporal and non-spatial. Logic and metaphysics, which are most abstract, would also be most objective, that is, indifferent to observer, to space and to time. (See above, p. 34.) The a priori principles of logic would then be the most objective of objective forms of knowledge. These a priori statements, in the tradition of idealism, have also the appellation of "eternal". In the same tradition, universals, i.e. classes of particular things, have also the appellation of "eternal".

Kierkegaard grants to idealism the right to use the term "eternal" in speaking of universals and a priori principles, but is most concerned to differentiate this use from the Christian use, where "eternal" has a time quality as that to which a Christian looks forward (as in the concept of "eternal life") and which means "unending". He gives a definition which can be applied to both uses: "The eternal is the factor of continuity".¹ (A further consideration will follow in the chapter on religion.) In his argument Kierkegaard uses the word "eternal" in both senses, though in different contexts. But he shows that different conceptions of eternity are involved in the different usages, and that the confusion of these uses has resulted in a confusion of Christian theology, first with Platonism, and later with Hegelianism. To say that something objective is eternally true is to consider objective truth as indifferent to time. But this is not the same thing as a Christian means when he says that something will become revealed in eternity. Eternity, "the eternal", has in the Christian usage a relationship to existence as future. The two uses are distinguished in the following quotations:

Hegel is utterly and absolutely right in asserting that viewed eternally, sub specie aeterni [Kierkegaard's term; the more common usage is aeternitati], in the language of abstraction, in pure thought and pure being, there is no either-or.... On the other hand, Hegel is equally wrong when, forgetting the abstraction of his thought, he plunges down into the realm of existence to annul the double aut.... It is impossible to do this in existence, for in so doing the thinker abrogates existence as well.²

1 Postscript, p. 277.

2 Postscript, p. 270-271.

Where eternity is related as futurity to the individual in process of becoming, there the absolute disjunction belongs. When I put eternity and becoming together, I do not get rest, but coming into being and futurity.¹

Christianity has announced eternity as the future life... because it addresses itself to existing individuals.²

The two forms of the use of "eternal" are contrasted side by side in the following passage:

The eternal is the factor of continuity; but an abstract eternity is extraneous to the movement of life, and a concrete eternity within the existing individual is the maximum degree of his passion.... The eternity of abstract thought is arrived at by abstracting from existence.³

Kierkegaard admits in several places in the Postscript that the religious sense of eternity is problematic, i.e. there may not be an eternal life. But at least, he argues, this meaning of eternity is relevant to a person's individual existence. The abstract sense of "eternal", on the other hand, is not relevant to an individual's existence. The Hegelian treatment of immortality, for instance, abolishes the question of a personal immortality (a personal use of eternity) in the concept of the preservation of values in the Absolute.

In a fantastic sense, all systematic thinking is sub specie aeterni, and to that extent immortality is there in the sense of eternity, but this immortality is not at all the one about which the question is asked, since the question is about the immortality of a mortal, which is not answered by showing that the eternal is immortal, and the immortality of the eternal is a tautology and a misuse of words.⁴

Absolute idealism took such personal questions and changed them to an abstract form where they were not at all relevant to an individual in existence. The objective consideration of

1 Ibid., p. 272. 2 Ibid., p. 273. 3 Ibid., p. 277.
4 Ibid., p. 153.

immortality is not the same as a subjective consideration.

In the Platonic philosophy the abstract sense of eternal is put together with the sense which is related to existence. The ideas or Forms are considered to be eternal (they are represented in Hegel's philosophy as the universals). In Platonic philosophy also, the soul is considered to be of a divine stuff or material. The soul is considered to be both pre-existent and immortal, and to have acquaintance with the eternal forms in the periods between existences (trans-migration of souls). Kierkegaard considers the Socratic-Platonic idea that all learning is recollection from a previous existence (or from a time between existences) as an attempt by an existing individual to take himself out of existence by recollection into the eternal. This, he says, is still implicit in Hegelian idealism (personal immortality is absorbed into the eternality of the Absolute) and also in the theology which leans on Platonic arguments for immortality. Kierkegaard assumes this as involved in any religion which arises from, or supports itself with, attempts to think the individual's way to God. The movement is made impossible in Christianity by the concept of original sin as an essential separation between man and God (this will be discussed more fully in later chapters).

In connection with the study of Kierkegaard's distinction between the eternal as abstract and the Christian conception of eternity, a diagram showing the contrast has been devised by a Danish Kierkegaard scholar, E. Geismar. It is cited, with the accompanying explanation, by Reidar Thomte in his book,

Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion:

The diagrams of E. Geismar:

1) Christianity

2) Speculation



The upper line signifies the eternal, or the background of consciousness, the absolute, which is to be expressed in existence. To express it is to exist. The dotted line signifies the moments of time, and x represents the particular moment when the eternal is brought into the temporal. This [the Christian] attitude faces the future. The speculative attitude is the very opposite. Instead of regarding the eternal as the future ("becoming") which is to be realized as a task, its concern for the eternal is speculative, directed toward the past (the eternal regarded as "being"). The same diagrams also illustrate what Kierkegaard regarded as the difference between Greek and Christian religiosity. Socrates had his God-relationship secured in the past in the doctrine of the eternal recollection, which to him had become a proof of the immortality of the soul. Christianity has its God-relationship in "the repetition" which immediately makes the eternal a task to be realized.... Although the Greek conception of preexistence may have been discarded, all idealistic speculation has eternity or ideality in the past.¹

In discussing Kierkegaard's attitude toward objective truth we return again and again to his distinction between the subject as observer and the subject as making commitments for his own life. Kierkegaard points out that it is the same subject who lives and who observes. One aspect of his criticism of objective idealism was that in its attempt to deal in "pure thought" it completely removed the content of thought from the existing thinker. However, he points out that in general the way of

¹ Thømtø, Reidar, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1948, pp. 112-113.

objective reflection (considering something an object and producing objective statements about it) makes the subject accidental¹. We today are perhaps in a position where we are able to see the force of this remark, for we live in an era where objective truth can be processed by an electronic computer much faster and more accurately than by a human thinker.

Kierkegaard considers that objective thought must be kept as a servant to the human individual in his total existence. Thinking is not the be-all and end-all of human existence, but is only one aspect of human existence among others. At one time it may have been difficult to achieve a disciplined procedure of thought, he says, but the situation is now quite reversed; thought is so well ordered and so pervasive that it is difficult to appreciate other aspects of man's activities, and especially to think of man's activity as a person committed to goals.

In Greece, as in the youth of philosophy generally, it was found difficult to win through to the abstract and to leave existence, which always gives the particular; in modern times, on the other hand, it has become difficult to reach existence. The process of abstraction is easy enough for us, but we also desert existence more and more, and the realm of pure thought is the extreme limit of such desertion.²

Kierkegaard held it to be necessary for a human being both to think consciously and to realize that as a human being one did other things than think. Even a professor could not be engaged always in pure thought; some of his activities must be the same as a human being's: to eat, sleep, carry out his bodily functions, hopefully, to fall in love and marry. Man is by nature a thinking

1 Postscript, p. 173. 2 Ibid., p. 295.

being, but his nature is not exhausted by this activity. It is true that "existence has brought about, and brings about, a separation between subject and object, thought and being"¹, but it is also true that "the subjective thinker is an existing individual and a thinker at one and the same time; he does not abstract from...existence, but lives in it while at the same time thinking"².

Kierkegaard is not to be considered anti-rational in the sense of opposing thought or the activity of reason. I have discussed earlier some of the rational distinctions he makes between the elements of objective thought. He can be considered anti-rational in two senses: that he opposed and condemned the idolization of reason, and secondly, that he considered the attainment of a unified body of objective knowledge to be impossible. In his opposition to the supremacy of reason his argument applies not only to objective idealists but also to empiricists. The following quotation is instructive concerning his attitude to thought:

If thought speaks deprecatingly of the imagination, imagination in its turn speaks deprecatingly of thought; and likewise with feeling. The task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is existence. By positing as a task the scientific process instead of the existential simultaneity, life is confused.... The unification of the different stages of life in simultaneity is the task set for human beings. And just as it is an evidence of mediocrity when a human being cuts away all communication with childhood, so as to be a man merely fragmentarily, so it is also a miserable mode of existence for a thinker who is also an existing individual to lose imagination and feeling, which is quite as bad as losing his reason.... As long

1 Ibid., p. 112. 2 Ibid., p. 314.

as a human being makes claim to a human form of existence, he must preserve the poetic in his life, and all his thinking must not be permitted to disturb for him its magic, but rather to enhance and beautify it. So also with religion. Religion is not childlike in the sense that it is to be put aside with the coming of the years; this notion is, on the contrary, a childish and superstitious over-valuation of thought. The true is not higher than the good and the beautiful, but the true and the good and the beautiful belong essentially to every human existence, and are unified for an existing individual not in thought but in existence.¹

Kierkegaard did not agree with the Romantic movement of the 19th Century, however, that a man should submerge himself into the stream of nature by means of his feelings and so become irrational. The succeeding chapter will point out his opposition to this sort of irrationalism and intuitionism. He was concerned that the individual be self-conscious to the highest degree possible, and the use of thought was one of the essential ways in which a high degree of self-consciousness must be achieved. Kierkegaard opposed the detaching of thought from the thinker, the making of knowledge indifferent to a human being.

Kierkegaard pointed out that there are certain areas of existence which are beyond the power of thought to think. If thinking is applied to these without recognizing the limits of thought, distortion results. The limits of the processes of thought are especially noticeable in two fields, the search for the subjective self and the search for God. He examined the classical "rational" attempts to prove the existence of God and rejected them all as begging the question. He also considered Descartes' "cogito" and showed that this too assumes what it purports to prove.

1 Ibid., p. 311

Each of the classical "proofs" for the existence of God, Kierkegaard says, fail because they beg the question. The argument from perfection to existence might be rephrased to show this: "'A supreme being who does not exist must possess all perfections, including that of existence; ergo, a supreme being who does not exist does exist.'" This would be a strange conclusion."¹ But, in fact, Kierkegaard says, this is the implication of the argument which defines a supreme being in such a way that if he exists, he must have the perfection of existence. In a similar way, Kierkegaard says that the argument from causality and design, i.e. that certain works are the works of God, fails, because if the argument is of the form: the works of God exist, therefore God exists, then God's existence has already been assumed; if not, one is left with the greatest doubt as to whether certain happenings in nature are indeed the works of God.² In any discussion involving the attempted proof of God's existence, either God is assumed to exist, or else not to exist. Then, if God is assumed to exist, the possibilities which follow can be examined and considered in conjunction with the idea of God. But, Kierkegaard says, if we believe that God exists, it is foolish to prove it, even irreverent; for if God does exist, he demands worship. And if God is assumed not to exist it is folly to attempt to prove that what is assumed not to exist does exist. The most that the reason can come to is to some idea of an Unknown beyond the powers of reason; but if this Unknown is assumed to exist, its nature and its existence

1 Ibid., p. 298. 2 Philosophical Fragments, pp. 31-33.

can not be discovered by the reason, but must be found out by some other means.¹ This knowledge, if there is to be knowledge, must come from God.

Against the "cogito, ergo sum" argument of Descartes Kierkegaard first applies an argument which is common among 20th century empiricists. But he follows it with another which is quite in opposition to the same philosophy. "If the 'I' which is the subject of cogito means an individual human being, the proposition proves nothing: 'I am thinking, ergo I am; but if I am thinking what wonder that I am': the assertion has already been made, and the first proposition says even more than the second.... The proposition is a tautology."² The 20th Century empiricist follows the demonstration of the begging of the question with a restatement in this form: There is a thought here, ergo, there is no person but only a thought.³ This is to follow the analysis first proposed by Hume. Though I have found no reference in Kierkegaard's works to Hume, several of his statements in the Postscript are a propos to this argument. Here again, the existing subject is considered to be more than the subject considered as an object of investigation.

With respect to every reality other than the individual's own reality, the principle obtains that he can come to know it only by thinking it. With respect to his own reality, it is a question whether his thought can succeed in abstracting from it completely. This is what the abstract thinker aims at.⁴

The objective idealist considered the subject to be a part of the "pure ego", and so abstracted from the reality of the individual.

1 Ibid., pp. 31-37. 2 Postscript, p. 281. 3 Cf. Ayer, Alfred Jules, Language, Truth and Logic, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1936, 1946, pp. 46-47. 4 Postscript, pp. 281-282.

But the scientist also produces an abstraction, not by an absolute idea, but by considering thoughts to be the ultimate reality. So the following:

Science organizes the moments of subjectivity within a knowledge of them, and this knowledge is assumed to be the highest stage, and all knowledge is an abstraction which annuls existence, a taking of the objects of knowledge out of existence.¹

In a different approach to the question of the reality of the subject, Kierkegaard states that the person is not to be identified with his own historical externality, but rather with his own ethical reality, that is, his commitment to a purpose.² "That my purpose was such and such I can absolutely know to all eternity, for this precisely is the expression of the eternal in me, my very self; but the historical externality a moment later is to be attained only approximando."³ (Cf. above p. 37.)

The empirical, external person - and even the thoughts of a person while thinking - represent only part of his capacities. Therefore, Kierkegaard argues,

For an abstract thinker to try to prove his existence by the fact that he thinks is a curious contradiction; for in the degree that he thinks abstractly he abstracts from his own existence. In so far his existence is revealed as a presupposition from which he seeks emancipation.... The abstract thinker, so far from proving his existence by his thought, rather makes it evident that his thought does not wholly succeed in proving the opposite.... The attempt to infer existence from thought is thus a contradiction.⁴

Thus Kierkegaard recognized the movement to the denial of the self which has followed from subsequent discussion of Descartes'

1 Ibid., p. 311.

2 Ibid., p. 509.

3 Idem.

4 Ibid., p. 281.

principle, and showed how this argument was implicit already in Descartes' attempt to comprehend his existence within his thought. Kierkegaard rejects not only the subsequent development but also the original effort; he says rather that thought is to be comprehended within existence, as one of the activities of an existing person.

It is very curious that whereas Kierkegaard, who held to the reality of the ethical subject, not only denied the argument of Descartes on the grounds of logic but also rejected it as an attempt to discover the ethical subject, Sartre accepts the argument for this very purpose. I quote from Sartre's

Existentialism Is a Humanism:

At the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself.... Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everybody; it consists in one's immediate sense of one's self.¹

Kierkegaard argues that the objective intellectual approach to existence leads away from personal existence rather than towards it. In this place I think the more honest thinking has been done by Kierkegaard rather than by Sartre. The contrast illustrates, in a small way, the divergence of Existentialism from Kierkegaard. In essence, Kierkegaard's approach to the question of the existence of the person and his consciousness of himself is similar to that of Kant's Critique of Practical Reason, though Kierkegaard rejects Kant's principle of autonomy (This will be discussed later in this

¹ Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism", (1946), Mairret's translation, as found in Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, Meridian Books, New York, 1956, p. 302.

thesis, when I take up in more detail Kierkegaard's principles of ethics.).

In this chapter I have tried to show Kierkegaard's understanding of objective truth, in contrast with subjective truth. The two kinds of truth are related to two different approaches to existence: the subjective approach looks to the ethical-type experiences of the person, as he finds himself seeking goals and committing himself to means and ends; the objective approach views existence as something to be observed with non-involvement of the self in order that the characteristics of the object-matter may be discovered. The fact of not being subjectively involved allows the observer to examine what exists in order to seek general characteristics in it, which, when systematized, lead to descriptive laws. The descriptive laws become tools for further investigation, and a two-way movement of abstraction (from existence to laws) and application (from laws to existence) is developed. It has been shown how Kierkegaard considers the abstract as a field of essence, while the concrete is the world of existence, but that in reality he considered these not as two separate worlds (as did Plato) but as means of classification for the sake of obtaining consistent knowledge. Kierkegaard's views about the investigation of history have been examined, showing in this field of human affairs his contrast of the individual-ethical with the world-historical. Lastly, I have discussed his appraisal of rational arguments which relate to two subjects important to ethics, the existence of God and the nature of the self, and have shown his rejection, not of God and of the self, but of the rational arguments which had been put forward for their existence. Kierkegaard's approach to objective

knowledge has turned out to be a critique of reason, recalling that of Kant, but applied in the interests of a human subjectivity for which the objective approach to truth is one approach out of two possible, and one activity out of several possible.

Kierkegaard applied himself as thoroughly as he did to examining the objective approach to truth in order to make clear later how the possibility of becoming a Christian follows instead the subjective way. As he said,

It is not denied that objective thought has its validity; but in connection with all thinking where subjectivity must be accentuated, it is a misunderstanding.¹

The following chapters will pursue again Kierkegaard's subjective way. But lest it be thought that there are no misunderstandings within the subjective, the next succeeding chapter will be concerned with a phase of the subjective in which the subjective is misunderstood.

1 Ibid., p. 85.

IV THE AESTHETIC "SPHERE" OF EXISTENCE

In the last chapter I pointed out that Kierkegaard considered the search for objective truth to be characterized by the subject's approaching existence as an observer. This attitude was desirable for obtaining knowledge, but was essentially irrelevant to the character of the person so observing existence, and involved no essential self-commitment of the subject. We are about to examine a way of life which, though not intellectual, has about it also the characteristic of observation and non-committal. This way of life is called by Kierkegaard the aesthetic, and is to be described as an approach to life in which the subject is involved in existence only to the extent necessary to enjoy himself to the utmost, but without the acceptance of responsibility in his involvement. The way of life is that of the search for enjoyment, and takes its name from the idea behind aesthetics in the narrower sense, to perceive (Gk. *αἰσθητικὴ*) in order to enjoy.

Though Kierkegaard uses the term "existence" in a general way to refer to the concrete, empirical world (as opposed to "essence"; see above, previous chapter), he also uses it in a narrower sense to refer to a human existence in which the person is conscious of himself as a person. This narrower use is fairly well equivalent to "way of life" or "human experience". The earlier "aesthetic" works, such as Either/Or, Repetition, and Stages on Life's Way speak of "spheres of existence", and by this term refer to distinctions within human attitudes toward various subjects' own personal existence. The application of the term "existence" to human experience which is self-conscious obviously involves the

positing of a value for self-conscious experience above other empirical existence. Likewise, within this field of existence, the delimitation into different spheres involves a value judgment upon different ways of human living. The description of these spheres and the judgments of value implied or involved in each will follow in more detail in this chapter and subsequent ones. However, I believe it fair to say that the basic criterion which Kierkegaard applies to the contrasts between the wider and narrower meanings of existence and within the narrower meaning itself is that of subjective truth: as various ways of living are considered, the test is applied, How much commitment and responsibility is involved? According to this criterion, as it is applied by Kierkegaard, there is a progression from the lowest sphere, the aesthetic, upward through the ethical to the religious and finally to the Christian-religious sphere.

The spheres of existence are, according to one expression used in the Postscript, "views of life"¹, and according to another, "interpretations"². From Either/Or on three main types of spheres of existence come up repeatedly in Kierkegaard's aesthetic and philosophical writings (as distinguished from his religious discourses). These spheres are the aesthetic, ethical and religious. Either/Or is concerned mainly with the aesthetic and the ethical, and makes the primary distinctions between these two spheres. In Fear and Trembling the religious is introduced. The relationship of the three is described further in Stages on Life's Way³. But by the time the Postscript was written the three-fold distinction

1 Postscript, p. 388. 2 Ibid., pp. 506-507. 3 Stages on Life's Way, tr. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1940, 1945, p. 430.

has in practice been enlarged to four, with the Christian-religious as the fourth (called also "religiousness B"). There are indications in the Postscript of a further theoretical division into either five or seven spheres. Compare the following passages:

There are thus three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. Two boundary zones correspond to these three: irony, constituting the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical; humor, as the boundary that separates the ethical from the religious.¹

The spheres are thus related: immediacy; finite common sense; irony; ethics with irony as incognito; humor; religiousness with humor as incognito; and then finally the Christian religiousness...²

In actual practice, irony and humor are considered as phases of the comical which are manifest in life in persons characterized by a transcending of the respective sphere below them but who have not yet reached the next sphere above them. The division within the aesthetic sphere, indicated in the second quotation above, seems never to be referred to explicitly except in this place. However, the Christian religiousness, as another sphere of existence, takes on great importance in the Postscript.

The various spheres are judged, as I said on the previous page, by the degree of subjective truth, i.e. subjective commitment, present in each. As will be seen in following chapters, Kierkegaard conceived the degree of commitment, and of self-conscious subjectivity, to increase greatly from sphere to sphere, until it was the highest possible in Christianity. The lowest possible condition of self-conscious existence is that which is hardly conscious of the self at all. It is

1 Postscript, p. 448.

2 Ibid., p. 473, note.

... an existence loosely so called... a drunken peasant who lies asleep in the wagon and lets the horses take care of themselves. To be sure, he also drives and is a driver; and so there are perhaps many who - also exist.¹

Such is the condition which, Kierkegaard maintained, was that of many of his contemporaries. He described them as living in the aesthetic sphere, allowing their moods and feelings to determine their lives. In contrast with them would be the persons who were very conscious of their own subjectivity, were committed to a course of action, and participated in their course of life with a deep interest which might be described as passionate. So he said, "It is impossible to exist without passion, unless we understand the word 'exist' in the loose sense of a so-called existence."²

Later in the Postscript we find Kierkegaard's description of the spheres in terms of what the subject in each case takes as the measure of his life. This measure of one's life Kierkegaard calls a person's "dialectic" - this seems to have a meaning related to the Hegelian use, where the "dialectic" or opposite also in some way determines or limits the first term in the triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

If the individual is in himself undialectical and has his dialectic outside himself, then we have the aesthetic interpretation. If the individual is dialectical in himself in self-assertion... inasmuch as the self which is at the basis is used to overcome and assert itself, then we have the ethical interpretation. If the individual is inwardly defined by self-annihilation before God, then we have religiousness A. If the individual is paradoxically dialectic... the individual being brought to the utmost verge of existence, then we have the paradoxical religiousness.³

1 Ibid., p. 276. 2 Ibid., p. 276. 3 Ibid., p. 507

In this description of the determinative factor of the four spheres (we see that in spite of other divisions, four are considered as distinct attitudes towards life or ways of life), that of the aesthetic sphere is enjoyment, that of the ethical the attempt to live according to a universal principle with oneself as the law-giver (cf. Kant's "categorical imperative" and "autonomy"), that of the first type of religiousness is resignation of oneself into God's hands, and that of Christianity is the risking of one's self in commitment to the idea of the existence of Jesus Christ as the God-man (the "Paradox"). We may summarize this description of the "dialectic" or determinative factor in each sphere of personal existence by paraphrasing the saying of Protagoras ("Man is the measure of man."), so as to have this comparison: For the aesthetic interpretation, enjoyment is the measure of a person's life; for the ethical interpretation, principle becomes the measure; for the first type of religiousness, God is the measure; for Christianity, God in Christ is the measure of a man's life.

Having given a preliminary sketch of the narrower meaning of "existence" and an outline of some of the primary characteristics of four "spheres of existence", let us continue with a closer look at Kierkegaard's description of the "aesthetic" mode of life. The interpretation of life which considers that the purpose of life is enjoyment per se seeks to gain enjoyment with the least possible cost (of involvement, responsibility, or commitment) and in the most numerous possible ways. This interpretation of life is self-centred in a selfish way. Other people become means to be used in the process of gaining enjoyment. Involvement is avoided, except in a temporary and superficial way, because a thorough involvement

would lead to the acceptance of other values than the self's own pleasure. Obviously then, this way of life is not one which builds a person's character. Whatever the person enters into must become an occasion for pleasure, and so such occasions are sought out. The variation within this basic mode of existence may range from the coarse and unreflective - seeking only the gratification of the senses - to the reflective and perceptive person, who is aware of the "finer things of life" and seeks them out - again, for enjoyment. A combination of the gratification of impulse and reflection for this purpose is portrayed in the first part of Either/Or in the "Diary of a Seducer". In this diary the seducer seeks not just the girl but to influence her to desire him, so that he may have added to the pleasure of the senses the pleasure of a mental triumph.

The aesthetic man (in Kierkegaard's use of the term) is amoral, that is indifferent to right or wrong. Since he refuses to commit himself as a self he also refuses to commit himself to any scheme of responsibility which might possibly cause him to recognize himself as wrong. Kierkegaard's ethical man, in Either/Or, says:

My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil / or excludes them.¹

I believe that Kierkegaard has in mind here a distinction which is of importance regardless of the source of ethics that is considered. There is a great difference between the person who accepts some standard of responsibility for himself - whether his reason for accepting responsibility be on a philosophical, Christian, or some other religious basis - and the person who excludes responsibility

1 Either/Or, II, p. 143, quoted in Thømtte, op. cit., p. 46.

and the concept of right and wrong from his life. The person who accepts some sense of responsibility is said by Kierkegaard to have an ethical interpretation of life. Such a person is ethical in a broad sense (he may be immoral and yet be ethical in this sense if he recognizes his own conduct to be immoral). The ethical person chooses himself as a self; the aesthetic person is not aware of being a consistent and responsible self, because he is not. Thømté points to the comparison with Socrates, that for Kierkegaard "'choosing oneself' is the counterpart of the Greek 'know thyself'"¹. I believe the comparison is valid for two reasons. First, the accompanying Socratic dictum, "The unexamined life is not worth living", has also an ethical connotation. And secondly, Kierkegaard attempted to follow and supplement the ethical position of Socrates.

The person who seeks the meaning of his life in enjoyment lives for the occasion which brings enjoyment. Kierkegaard points out that this has a two-fold implication. First of all, such a person is a creature of moods. He has many interests, but successively, not simultaneously. He may be determined by the outward happenings and circumstances of the world around, or by his own desires. Change of circumstances, "fate", fortune or misfortune² or the like, could have drastic effects upon his moods, plunging him from supreme happiness to despair. In order to get the most pleasure out of his pursuits, he might divert himself by the "rotation method" (described in Either/Or). Somewhere, because of the pursuit of many different interests in succession as if each were the real interest, Kierkegaard describes such a

1 Thømté, op. cit., p. 49. 2 Cf. Postscript, pp. 387-389.

person as "a legion, not a man" (referring to the story of Jesus' casting out the demons from the insane man).

A second implication of living for the occasion is that the aesthetic man does not have a sense of time as a continuum in which he lives and which he accepts and uses. He rather seeks moments within time (the occasion for enjoyment) as the time which is meaningful to him. Whole sections of time will be of no use to him, may indeed be hateful to him. As we say, such a person would "kill time" until the moment of enjoyment can be found, and would then seek to prolong this, repeat it, or recapture it in memory so as to prolong his enjoyment. Time is not used for self-discipline (as in the ethical approach to life) nor as that for which thanks is given, with its times of special enjoyment (as in the religious approach). The aesthetic interpretation of life is indifferent to personal time as a whole but extremely concerned with various bits of time. We may consider as a typical example of this attitude the seeking for thrills, even if the thrills are thrills of fear. These are by nature short-lived, but the seeker after thrills tries to increase their frequency and concentrate their occurrence.

One aspect of the aesthetic approach to existence is the Romantic view of life.¹ The Romantic view of life became a movement which sought the closest possible identification of man and nature. This is the condition of "immediate" or intuitional involvement with nature. The subject tries to merge himself with nature, and his existence is, according to Kierkegaard, a dreaming state. This was the condition, he says, of the pre-scientific,

1 Cf. Patrick, Denzil, Pascal and Kierkegaard, vol. II, Lutterworth Press, London and Redhill, 1947.

pre-monotheist Greek pagan. Man sought an affinity with nature where he might float in or be submerged by nature. In the ancient Greek situation, man was not aware of physical forces as separable and investigable, but deified them. The person who consciously and deliberately seeks enjoyment for its own sake also deifies the forces of nature (by his attitudes towards them) though he may not be aware of doing so.

These descriptions of the aesthetic attitude towards life call for an examination of the similarities and differences between this sphere of existence and the intellectual approach to existence. Both seem to be interpretations of existence (this time in the broader meaning) or attitudes toward the world. Why is the intellectual not a sphere of existence? Obviously, the main distinction is that in the aesthetic sphere, uncommitted as it is, the individual subject is living his own life. His interests are concentrated upon himself - though in a defective way - rather than upon the world outside him. Kierkegaard describes the person's attitude to himself and to experience as essentially passive, in that he lets things happen to him. In this respect, there is much more consciousness in the intellectual approach to existence than there is in many forms of the aesthetic. The intellectual approach to existence separates a subject and his outer existence, whereas the aesthetic tries to merge the two. At the same time the aesthetic may use the intellectual, i.e. use knowledge of outer existence in order to increase enjoyment: the examples range from electronics to contraceptives. But the aesthetic way of life is not clear about the outer - as is science - nor about the inner -

as is ethics. However, in one respect the aesthetic sphere and the intellectual approach to existence are similar, and that is that they both are indifferent to commitment. The intellectual, however, is observational and non-committed from principle (one might say that there is an ethical ramification of the intellectual, and that non-objectivity is an intellectual sin), whereas the aesthetic is non-committed and, at times, observational, from laziness or selfishness. The two are alike in being indifferent to a personal purpose or telos, but again for different reasons (as above). Neither is concerned with building a character, or as Kierkegaard says, a self. However, the intellectual, if considered one of the functions of a person's existence, has a legitimate function, while the merely aesthetic does not (Kierkegaard regards the "aesthetic" as artistic as having a place in a balanced person's life.).

The aesthetic in the narrower and more usual sense (as involved with various forms of art) is considered by Kierkegaard to be comprehended within the aesthetic interpretation of existence. Either/Or contains a discussion of Mozart's Don Juan as an expression of the musical-erotic. Kierkegaard was interested in music as a form of art possibly because time is an essential characteristic of music: musical notes are sounded in sequence and according to patterns of rhythm. In this respect it differs from painting and sculpture. Ballet and opera and drama also use time, but time is most essentially a factor in the production of music. Considering Kierkegaard's other statements that the aesthetic is indifferent to time, what is to be made of his recognition of time as involved in certain art forms? There is a

vital distinction. An art form is made to be observed or contemplated, but is generally not made to arouse commitment. Kierkegaard would then say that the art form is indifferent to the observer; it is not his personal time which is involved, but a depersonalized time, a time which is not the time of any one person. Even a musical piece is in a sense sub specie aeternitatis, since it may be reproduced time after time without essential change to its character as music; in this respect its time is indifferent to the general course of time.

There is an important respect in which Kierkegaard's attitude to the aesthetic serves as a commentary on Plato's attitude. Plato considered the abstract, universal essence, the Form or Idea, to be eternal and to be the true reality. But he despised most art forms as being a double imitation, that is, as an imitation of particulars, which in turn he considered to be imitations of the eternal Form; so the art form would be twice removed from reality. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, considers both the intellectual and the aesthetic (artistic) movements to be essentially a seeking for generals or universals. In the intellectual approach, the essence sought is a universal class. In the aesthetic or artistic approach this is also the case: the artist is not interested in the particulars per se or in an imitation of the particulars (Plato to the contrary). The artist rather seeks, according to Kierkegaard, the essence behind the particulars, and he constructs what appears to be a particular to express an ideal type¹. Kierkegaard sees the artistic approach as leading away from particulars (which, from the ethical point of view are

1 Cf. Postscript pp. 282, 286, 288.

the most real) to essences, ideal types, abstractions. He cites Aristotle as supporting his judgment.¹

We may pursue this particular contrast between Plato and Kierkegaard by the following example: In the Symposium, the education of a young person in loving the beautiful in physical forms follows this pattern: first, to love one such beautiful form, second, to see that another has a similar beauty, third, to recognize that beauty in every form is identical, and finally, to despise that which he originally loved (or else his original love) and love all beautiful forms as mirroring Beauty.² What would Kierkegaard do with this order? Certainly he would consider it immoral or at best amoral. Apply it to the love of a beautiful woman: Plato's progression would lead to loving the beauty of all beautiful women and despising the first. Kierkegaard argues instead for a commitment to the one, with a repeated enjoyment of her beauty, inner and outer, with the beauty itself being renewed by the devotion of the lover. The practice of the despising of the particular for the desire of universal is typified, in Kierkegaard's answer to the Symposium ("In vino veritas" in Stages on Life's Way), by the seducer who claims to love the universal woman and sees in the individual only "the moment" (occasion) for discovering the essence. Kierkegaard's ethically based philosophy condemns this as a travesty of love and of humanity.

From the foregoing examination, we might also conclude that

1 Ibid., p. 282. 2 Plato, Symposium, tr. Jowett, third edition in The Works of Plato, Modern Library, New York, 1928, p. 377.

Kierkegaard would condemn any suggestion of "art for art's sake", just as he condemned the abstraction of the intellectual for its own sake. And just as he recognized the intellectual as having a legitimate place in human existence, so he also allowed a legitimate place for the aesthetic or the seeking for enjoyment. But this was to be subordinate to the ethical, that is, to the responsible and principled life. It is the merely aesthetic which is condemned. As Lowrie points out in his Introduction to the Postscript, Kierkegaard's either/or takes the form of the intellectual and aesthetic on one side/ or the ethical and religious on the other¹. I indicated above (p. 53) that Kierkegaard spoke of the intellectual, the poetic, and the religious as unified in existence, that is, in the personal existence of the subject. A bit later in the Postscript he states that the ideal of a person's life is to be concretely and balancedly all-sided (he accuses his generation of being abstractly all-sided and thus deluded), though strong one-sidedness is pretty much the highest that is attained². Having many interests simultaneously was Kierkegaard's ideal of the balanced man who would have his life centred in the religious. "There is required for a subjective thinker imagination and feeling, dialectics in existential inwardness, together with passion. But passion first and last..."³ The aesthetic in this scheme of life will be only an employed interest, used, for instance, as a diversion from the strenuousness of the person's religious dedication⁴. The aesthetic interest must be used in its proper place and not be allowed to usurp the central position in a person's life.

1 Postscript, p. xviii. 2 Ibid., p. 312. 3 Ibid., pp. 312-313. 4 Ibid., p. 439.

In contrast to Hegel's dialectic involving the three-stage movement of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, which enveloped a great number of categories from the simplest to the most complex, Kierkegaard suggested what he called a "qualitative dialectic" in which the different spheres would remain qualitatively distinct and would each have their own "categories". From the multiplicity of such categories for the aesthetic and ethical spheres, it seems that Kierkegaard's categories might just as well be called "qualities", for they seem in most cases to be adjectives describing the different interpretations of life, or else nouns of a descriptive nature. Kierkegaard accused his contemporaries of confusing categories which belonged to the different spheres of existence and thus of confusing their understanding of the things they investigated¹. The realization that there are different ways of interpreting existence makes it necessary, he says, to keep the categories which imply one interpretation distinct from those which imply another. Thus the categories which belong to the aesthetic interest must be used in their proper place. The substitution of aesthetic categories for those of the ethical in the life of a man was regarded with scorn in Kierkegaard's earlier works, and the mixing of aesthetic categories into the ethical, religious, and Christian-religious spheres is treated with scorn in the Postscript. For instance, he says of a preacher,

Dazzled by the aesthetic in him, people believe that he is a religious personality, alas, even an outstanding personality, although perhaps he is not religious at all.²

1 Ibid., p. 283.

2 Ibid., p. 348.

Such confusion leads to a sentimental treatment of both the religious and the aesthetic, without benefit to either.

In the following paragraph I have tried to collect the categories described as belonging to the aesthetic sphere of existence, and also to the aesthetic as the artistic. These are spread throughout several chapters in the Postscript and are not catalogued in any one place. I shall indicate them by underlining.

Under the aesthetic are included appearance¹, as applied to facts, and to being as it appears²; the aesthetic is the realm of things as they are (the ethical is the realm of things as they should be)³. The aesthetic also includes abstraction, ideal types, as related to art, music, poetry, beauty, fame, etc.; contemplation and enjoyment, outwardly directed; imagination⁴; quantitative and relative determinations⁵, such as relative paradox, differences between man and man, eg. mediocre or outstanding⁶, boring and interesting⁷, admiration⁸, and as applied to truth, probability⁹, and approximation¹⁰, as applied to politics, the majority or popular demand¹¹. It describes human beings as they are (as some say today, "real life") and includes immediacy, fortune or misfortune, fate, immediate enthusiasm, pathos, and despair¹²; it includes pleasure and pain; the prudent and the shrewd¹³ as applied to actions and comparative or quantitative guilt and punishment¹⁴. It considers suffering to be accidental to life¹⁵. In the field

1 Ibid., pp. 287-288. 2 Ibid., p. 377. 3 Ibid., p. 370.
4 Ibid., p. 376. 5 Ibid., p. 195. 6 Ibid., p. 348.
7 Ibid., p. 352. 8 Ibid., p. 320. 9 Ibid., p. 209.
10 Ibid., pp. 288-289. 11 Ibid., p. 130. 12 Ibid.,
pp. 387-389. 13 Ibid., p. 316. 14 Ibid., pp. 472, 475,
cf. Either/Or, vol. II. 15 Ibid., p. 489.

of religion, the aesthetic includes "natural religion", where God is regarded as an object for contemplation, as making appearances in theophanies, directly recognized and wondered at or admired¹, and so includes idolatry²; to consider Christianity as an object and to admire faith is said to be an aesthetic approach³. As used by the ethical or religious man, the aesthetic is a source of relief and diversion⁴.

Where a person's life is confined to the aesthetic, so that it is merely aesthetic and the purpose of his life is only enjoyment, the end result is conceived to be despair. In the earlier books, despair is described as also providing the possibility of leaving the aesthetic interpretation of existence in order to change to an ethical (responsible, self-committed) way of life. In the later books, including the Postscript, this standpoint is modified to state that it is only with God's help that a person gets through despair to the ethical⁵. Reidar Thømtø summarizes what he believes to be five modes of the aesthetic, as indicated by Kierkegaard in Either/Or⁶, as follows:

1) The mode of life which regards health as the highest good. The poetical expression for the mode is: Beauty is the highest good. The personality is immediately determined as physical, and the condition of enjoyment lies beyond the individual himself, since it is not posited by him.

2) The mode of life which finds the goal and content of life in riches, honor, position, etc. The condition is again outside the individual.

3) The mode which finds the meaning of life in the development of a talent. In this case the condition is within the personality, yet relatively external, since it is not determined by the personality.

1 Ibid., p. 219.

2 Ibid., p. 220, and note p. 387.

3 Ibid., p. 304.

4 Ibid., p. 439.

5 Ibid., p. 230.

6 Either/Or, II, pp. 153-165.

(A person's "dialectic" is outside himself in the aesthetic; see the passage cited above, p. 64.)

4) The mode of life which strives to satisfy one's taste for pleasure. The condition is again external to the personality.

5) According to Kierkegaard, every aesthetic mode of life is despair, hence the most refined and superior aesthetic mode is despair itself. It is aesthetic since the personality remains in its immediacy. This view possesses a consciousness of the emptiness of such a Lebensanschauung. However, the despair is not actual, but a thought-despair.¹

Kierkegaard considered many of his contemporaries to be living in a way of life that was merely aesthetic, and so to be in what he describes as the aesthetic sphere of existence. As Thømté has observed, Kierkegaard believed this to be an unconscious despair. When a person living in the aesthetic sphere got to the point of being conscious of his despair, there would be hope for him. He could pass into the ethical sphere - the view of life which accepts responsibility and is conscious of one's own self - by despairing with all the strength of his personality². As I mentioned on the previous page, in the Postscript, in the section where Kierkegaard reviews his earlier works, it is pointed out that though a person by himself can despair with all the strength of his energy, he cannot in the same way be relieved from despair and find himself.

It seems to me that Kierkegaard's description of the aesthetic sphere as a mode of life or interpretation of life is in general quite true to fact. There are indeed persons who live this way. But I question very strongly his interpretation of the place of despair. It is certainly false to say that most people living

1 Thømté, op. cit., pp. 34-35. 2 Ibid., p. 36. The thought is pervasive in Either/Or, II, and to a lesser extent in Stages on Life's Way.

their lives for the sake of enjoyment are in despair. They certainly are not conscious of it. It would be more accurate, I think, to consider boredom - (or perhaps melancholy) - as the chief characteristic of the aesthetic mode of existence.

Kierkegaard himself suggests boredom as typical in Either/Or when he has such a person describe the "rotation method" of pleasures. We today can observe many people who seem to be satisfied for many hours with exposure to the television set, the radio, or the record player. By this means a person can be entertained and time can be killed without his ever appropriating anything, building his character, or making any decisions. But what such a person is avoiding is not an alternative of commitment/ despair but one of commitment/boredom. Such a person's life may be full, and yet be considered empty of character; in a sense it may be true to say that for some people the more they are exposed to or take into their minds the emptier their minds become. The phenomenon is also manifest in people who are professedly religious. Many read the Bible not for the sake of personal change or ethical help but to see how many curious things they can find in it by which they may be entertained, overawe their neighbors, or baffle their minister. There are many professedly religious people too who spend their leisure time running from revival meeting to revival meeting, retreat to retreat, without growing at all in their love (or even having any) for their fellow men, in their strength in meeting adversity, or in their willingness to share the religious goods they supposedly have (except where they can covertly lord it over other people). And yet these people are not conscious of despair, nor can they be brought to a conscious despair within their

mode of existence. They are people who are lacking in spirit, in self-consciousness, in will, in a sense of responsibility for themselves or their fellow-men, - all characteristics of Kierkegaard's description of the aesthetic life - but they do not have despair.

It seems to me, from my own experience, observations, and a reading of a few religious and psychological studies, that despair belongs in the ethical sphere rather than the aesthetic. Not only do indifferent people not seem to have or be capable of despair, but persons who view life with a sense of commitment and responsibility (Kierkegaard's ethical man) do experience despair. Studies of depressed persons connect depression not with indifference but with an exaggerated sense of responsibility, an active conscience, or religious striving. It is true that a person who lives in a depression may - it seems as a self-defence mechanism - repress his keenness for living and feeling, but this is not his original condition. Persons whom I have known who have committed suicide were not indifferent, outwardly determined, "aesthetic" persons; they were persons with a strong sense of responsibility. In several cases they had difficulties in the field that Kierkegaard seems to describe as aesthetic - difficulties connected with a seeking for enjoyment in life. But their trouble was not an unawakened sense of responsibility but a consciousness of a lack of moral or spiritual support for their lives. I myself find that depression and despair are my experience, not in a time of indifference to moral values and responsibility but when either physical strength or self-confidence is not adequate to support my sense of commitment. The cure for this is a restoration of balance: medically, drugs may reduce awareness and so reduce the

sense of responsibility to be more equal to the powers of the person; religiously, confidence (through a trust in the forgiveness and power of God) and power may be increased to meet the sense of responsibility. I believe that Kierkegaard's admission in the Postscript (in his Review) that the person in despair cannot by himself come into the ethical sphere but must have the help of God¹ is a very telling criticism of his scheme of the spheres and of his earlier theories of the position of despair. In his description of the religious sphere of existence he describes infinite resignation into the hands of God as coming before faith (infinite resignation seems to equal the conception of faith as trust in Lutheran theology, while Kierkegaard's conception of faith is especially commitment and involves exertion to believe). It seems to me that being cured or relieved from despair by trusting oneself to God is this resignation. Therefore, from this reason too, it seems that despair is a feature of the ethical mode of existence, to be relieved by a religious resignation or trust, and that Kierkegaard was mistaken in placing it in the aesthetic sphere.

Kierkegaard's description of the aesthetic man contains strong evidence to the contrary of my view. I have already referred to his description of the opposite extreme feelings of elation and despair (see above, p. 65). This was also his own experience in his early twenties. It is a phenomenon of youth, but is more marked in some persons than in others. It is more marked in those who will later be persons subject to depression. We may ask then if this phenomenon of the extremes is a feature of the aesthetic

1 Postscript, p. 230.

interpretation of life (as Kierkegaard describes it, especially in his earlier works), or if it is a feature of an ethical (committed self-conscious) approach to life. Is the person who, as Kierkegaard described himself once, is the life of the party, and who over-compensates for feelings of inferiority with exuberant brilliance, an indifferent person? Is he unaware of himself as a self? I think not. Certainly such a person is very much aware of himself, is very subjective, and is in search of himself. The depression which follows his elation is not a result of indifference but - aside from physical and nervous fatigue - contains a feeling of having done wrong, of having betrayed himself or of failing to represent himself fairly or honestly to others. These are feelings which Kierkegaard considers as features of the ethical sphere of existence. The person who behaves this way is certainly immature in evaluating himself, and might be considered to be immature ethically. But if the ethical sphere is the one in which a person is conscious of his subjectivity and acknowledges right and wrong, then this behaviour fits within the ethical sphere.

Perhaps Kierkegaard's reason for placing despair in the aesthetic sphere was that he wished to make it parallel with the philosophical conception of doubt. Kierkegaard points out that modern philosophy had tried to make doubt the beginning of philosophy, while the ancients had believed that it began with wonder. Descartes used methodological doubt as the beginning of his philosophy, and before he attacked Hegel Kierkegaard intended to write a work against Descartes. Kierkegaard pointed out that doubt is a suspension of commitment and thus presupposes a fairly involved process of thought before it occurs, and so is not

immediate or first in thought. But it seems that, in spite of his criticisms of the philosophic place of doubt, Kierkegaard was influenced by the position he attacked and wished to place his substitute for doubt, despair, in an early or immediate position in his own scheme of spheres and categories. Thømté points out parallels in the Danish (and corresponding German) words for doubt and despair, and suggests that Kierkegaard was deliberately trying to create a new mode of philosophical thinking that would begin with despair.

Tvivl [Ger. Zweifel] is the despair of the intellect, and is always regarded by Kierkegaard as belonging to the realm of logic and therefore subject to necessity. Fortvivlelse [Ger. Verzweiflung] is the despair of the personality. Judge William [in Either/Or, II] looks forward to the time when the philosophical point of departure in search for the Absolute is no longer doubt (Zweifel) but despair (Verzweiflung).¹

Thus there seems to have been a methodological reason for Kierkegaard's placing despair as early as he did in his scheme of existence. It is unfortunate if this was the predominant reason, for it shows not only an apparent misplacing of despair in existence but a failure of Kierkegaard to liberate himself from the parallel of the idealism which he opposed.

A type of theology has followed Kierkegaard's conception of the place of despair, especially as this has been appropriated by Existentialism. This theology has manifested this judgment in theories and practices of evangelism. Following the theories of the Existentialists, who in this respect follow Kierkegaard, those who follow this line of thought have considered that man must be

1 Thømté, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

brought up against certain crisis situations in order that he will consider the need of God in his life. But they assume that an indifferent person can be brought to these crises by pointing out to him the emptiness of his life, i.e. showing him that he is an aesthetic man and that he has despair as an underlying characteristic of his life, and attempting to make this despair come to the surface. Other theologians, especially the late Dietrich Bonhoeffer, have expressed doubt as to the method involved and the theory of man's existence underlying it (Someone has referred to Existentialism as "secularized Methodism" because of the similarity of emphasis upon crisis.). Crisis very probably is a relevant takeoff point for a leap into Christianity. But if Kierkegaard was wrong in his evaluation of the locus where despair occurs then the theology of evangelism which leans on him also proposes the wrong methods of approaching the indifferent man. If, as I have suggested, despair really belongs to the ethical attitude towards existence, then the indifferent person must be brought to a sense of responsibility, and of right and wrong, before he will reach despair. The point of emphasis should not be on despair or on trying to arouse despair (for example, by a shocking catalogue of the evils of the age, which tends either to produce callousness or to arouse interest in the evils) but on setting before the indifferent person the concept of responsibility for his own life. Once responsibility is accepted, inadequacy will also be discovered; when this has been discovered, despair is near, and new strength through religious faith can be pointed to, not as an escape from terror but as a giving of new balance to the person's life.

It is necessary to understand that the aesthetic sphere of existence is not made by a quantitative accumulation of practices which show a seeking for enjoyment. If such were the case, it would be possible to show that a great many people who are both ethical and religious in their outlook are aesthetic in their practices. Kierkegaard was not interested in a quantitative evaluation of life. What he regarded as of importance in discriminating between different ways of living life was a qualitative distinction. The source of the qualitative distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical (and religious) interpretations of life lies precisely in the interpretation or attitude which a person applies to his existence, or from another side, what is the measure of his life. It is somewhat disconcerting to make comparisons between Kierkegaard's descriptions of the aesthetic man's actions and one's own; one is likely to ask oneself whether one's own mode of life is "aesthetic" in the above sense. The point of examination should not be with individual actions but rather of one's attitudes. Let a person ask himself, Do I accept responsibility? Then he will find that his life is within the ethical sphere even though his actions may seem the same as those of a person who seems indifferent to right and wrong. Or let a person ask himself, Do I conceive a relationship to God to be possible and real to me? Then he will find himself to be religious, in Kierkegaard's description of the religious sphere of existence (The religious sphere, he says, has within it criteria of how real or how true one's religiousness is.). Further, let a person ask himself, Do I conceive my life to be based on a real relationship to God in time in the person of Jesus Christ? Then

he comes up against the question which Kierkegaard considers to be central for Christianity. In each case, the point is not found in outward actions by themselves, but in the attitude of the person toward his existence which is conceived to direct and orientate his actions. A sphere of existence, as has been mentioned earlier, was for Kierkegaard a personal interpretation of existence; the aesthetic sphere is the interpretation which finds the purpose and measure of existence in enjoyment. The aesthetic sphere is the life of a person for whom the concepts of right and wrong are meaningless, and for whom also commitment, responsibility and self-consistency are to be avoided.

V THE ETHICAL "SPHERE" OF EXISTENCE

In this chapter I shall try to describe the qualities which Kierkegaard ascribed to the ethical "sphere" or interpretation of existence. As with the aesthetic sphere, it is personal existence which is the concern here, not empirical existence in the broad sense as it might be studied by an observer. I have already indicated in Chapter II above that Kierkegaard seems to have derived his concept of subjective truth from the phenomenon of commitment which is present when a person self-consciously and consistently seeks a goal. Thus some of the material with which this chapter deals has been referred to already and covered, at least by implication, in a previous chapter. In this chapter, however, I shall try to bring into relationship not only what Kierkegaard says about the ethical in the Postscript but also some of the salient points of his treatment of the ethical in the previous non-devotional works as well as in the later Sickness Unto Death.

It must be pointed out that Kierkegaard's ethical sphere of existence is not identical with the ethical as the good. This may have been apparent from what I have said about subjective truth as derived from the phenomenon, most common in ethical action, of seeking a goal and making commitments to reach it. There are certain ways in which Kierkegaard attempts to connect the ethical in this broad sense and the ethical as the moral or good. These attempts will be discussed a bit later. Let us first briefly look at the ethical in the broader sense, the sphere or interpretation of existence. The ethical sphere of existence is

characterized by a great deal of subjectivity or self-consciousness. In it an individual seeks for consistency in his approach to his life. In Either/Or the ethical was distinguished from the aesthetic by the self's choice in order to consolidate himself self-consciously as an enduring, unified personality. We may compare a passage from Either/Or with commentary on the work in the Postscript:

It is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated.¹

(In the above and elsewhere the word "pathos" may be interpreted as meaning "strong concern".)

The ethicist has despaired (the first part was despair); in this despair he has chosen himself; in and by this choice he reveals himself... he is a husband... and concentrates himself... upon marriage as the deepest form of life's revelation, by which time is taken into the service of the ethically existing individual, and the possibility of gaining a history becomes the ethical victory of continuity over concealment, melancholy, illusory passion, and despair.²

Choice for self-consistency is one of the essential characteristics of the ethical interpretation of existence as Kierkegaard conceived it. The individual, aware of himself as a subject, makes basic commitments by which he determines his future. The commitments and purposes he has are internal, but they show themselves in outward actions and relationships. The relationship of marriage, for instance, involves one person essentially with another in the closest way possible. Self-consistency implied, Kierkegaard believed, the willingness to reveal ones purposes and principles to others. This last point, of course, leads us beyond the concept

1 Either/Or, II, p. 141.

2 Postscript, p. 227.

of the ethical interpretation as characterized by commitment.

There are several presuppositions which affect Kierkegaard's development of the ethical interpretation of existence as it is related to the "ethical" as the mood. One is somewhat related to the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the other is derived from the Bible's description of man. The first considers man as universally, essentially the same. The second considers man as a synthesis of soul and body, created by God, and potentially immortal or eternal. These two presuppositions affect the types of choices that a human being is considered capable of making, that is, of the way in which general choices are supposed to become specifically moral or ethical in the narrower sense.

Kierkegaard conceived each human being to be essentially the same, and the ethical (in the narrower sense) to be expressible by the universal. In the Philosophical Fragments he represents Socrates' doctrine of man as his own, and states it thus: "the Socratic...principle that every individual man is Man...man is the measure of all things...in the Socratic sense that each man is his own measure, neither more nor less."¹ The "universal" is used to describe the ethical (in the narrower sense) in Either/Or, in Fear and Trembling, in the review of the previous works in the Postscript, and in other parts of the Postscript. The two are specifically equated in the Postscript in this statement: "Whatever is great in the sphere of the universally human must...not

1 Philosophical Fragments, p. 30.

be communicated as a subject for admiration, but as an ethical requirement."¹ The underlying possibilities inherent in human nature become the field for ethical action. It seems to me that in his theory of how the good could come to be known, Kierkegaard was attempting to follow Kant's categorical imperative, or at least the procedure which Kant followed in deriving it. However, whereas Kant started by relating one man to others in the rule, act so that the principle of your action could be a rule for all mankind, Kierkegaard tried to find the universal rule within the individual alone. The procedures are quite different, and I do not believe that Kierkegaard was successful in getting from the form of choice which he indicated to a moral result.

That each individual man is also a true representative of mankind, i.e. that there is a universal nature of all men, is assumed by Kierkegaard. His assumption is indicated also by his use of terms such as "self", "subject", "individual" and "man" (in the singular as an individual) as equivalent². In a later book, The Sickness Unto Death, he gives an explanation of the "self". I shall break up the passage with interspersed comment.

Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self...the self is not the relation, but that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self.... Such a relation is that between soul and body, when man is regarded as soul.³

My understanding of this passage is that Kierkegaard wished to express

1 Postscript, p. 320. Cf. pp. 270, 274. 2 For instance, Postscript, p. 116. 3 The Sickness Unto Death, tr. Walter Lowrie, published together with Fear and Trembling by Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1954, p. 146 (first published by Princeton University Press, 1941).

the nature of the self as a dynamic relationship of three characteristic parts, body, soul and spirit. Body is an earthly, perishable, factor. Soul is a divinely created factor (It seems to me that Kierkegaard held the view of the soul's origin known in theological history as "creationism". See chapter VIII below.). In the relating of these is the true dynamic nature of man, restless, fluid, active, which he calls "spirit". I think one may be helped in understanding the phrase "the relation relates itself to its own self" if we think of Kant's "noumenal self", which is the conscious actor and synthesizer of all the activities of the self which can be discovered, the "phenomenal self", but is itself undiscoverable. Since it is the relating, i.e. the dynamic aspect, which is important, and not a static relationship of two terms, man is to be considered not merely as a soul inhabiting a body, nor as soul in synthesis with body. In the relating of soul to body, however, the soul is considered to be infinite and eternal, the body finite or temporal. "Freedom and necessity" express different factors of individual experience, where freedom is the individual decision for different possibilities open to the individual, while necessity expresses the confines of the individual's life and the limits of his possibilities. The self is found in the dynamic relating:

If...the relation relates itself to its own self, the relation is then the positive third term, and this is the self.¹

This dynamic synthesis, or dynamic relationship, is considered as having been created by God.

1 Idem.

Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another. If this relation...is constituted by another...this relation...is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation. Such a derived, constituted, relation is the human self.¹

Thus another level is present. Not only is man a dynamic relationship of soul and body to one another, but in his origin he is God's, and presumably in his relationship with himself he should also come into contact with the God who constituted him.

These two beliefs about what man is - that each man is essentially typical of all human beings, that each is constituted by God, and that the good is the universal human - are vitally related to the connections Kierkegaard describes as existing or as occurring between action in the ethical sphere and actions which are described as ethical in the sense of being good. In Either/Or it is assumed that when a person chooses intensely enough he will find what is good - "It is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses." (See above, p. 87.). This is Kierkegaard's principle for reaching the moral, which he appears to substitute for Kant's categorical imperative, while he believes he achieves the same goal as Kant sought. According to this description, if a person concentrates his power in a choice which is basic for the orientation of his life, he will in that choice come into contact with the power who has constituted him, and thus will discover right and wrong (See the quotation on p. 64 above.). The force of despair, which Kierkegaard ascribed to the whole aesthetic sphere of existence but which particularly applied to the terminus

1 Idem.

of it, was considered to bring a person down to (what we may call) "rock-bottom" and thus to God. (Paul Tillich has called God "the ground of our being".) We see this idea carried over into modern French Existentialism, where the consistently, honestly evil person may become a saint; because a person recognizes his own evil and pursues it consistently, he reaches the good. This particular viewpoint, i.e. that despair is the gate to the ethical, seems to have been given up by Kierkegaard by the time the Postscript was written - if indeed he himself ever held it, for it may have belonged only to his dramatic character in Either/Or. In the Postscript, in reviewing Either/Or, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author criticizes the assumption that a person by himself can come through despair into the ethical; God must be present, not as someone discovered, but as someone active to carry the person over¹. Also in the Postscript it is shown that because of sin - described as a dreadful exemption from realizing the ethical - the individual is cut off from immanent contact with God who created him.

The process of self-consolidation through choice is treated in other places as implying the choice of the ethical as universal. This seems to be an argument from consistency. If a person discovers himself, Kierkegaard seems to imply, he discovers the universal human in himself. Or as he attains self-consistency he discovers the ethical as the consistent. We imply something similar when we argue that evil is essentially parasitic to a society, and that the evil, if applied universally, destroys all association of people.

1 Postscript, p. 230. Cf. my previous chapter.

This form of argument from the ethical as the sphere of commitment to the ethical as the good is implied in several places in the Postscript. The movement is from the individual outward to encompass other people and has several stages. First, as the individual seeks for goals in his own life he seeks the realization of his own possibilities¹. He also considers his own life to be a task for himself, wherein he is primarily concerned. So we have statements such as the following: "Becoming a subject (is) the highest task confronting a human being"², and, "The individual's own ethical reality is the only reality"³, i.e. that which is known to him as real for him. Secondly, as an individual is conscious of his own actions, of his own goals and recognized tasks, he assumes that other human beings are similar. So one person understands another historical individual primarily by understanding oneself;

Only by closely attending to myself, can I arrive at an understanding of how an historical personality must have conducted himself while he lived; and only so do I understand him, when in my understanding I preserve him alive.... What it means to live...I must experience by myself. And therefore I must first understand myself.⁴

As the person has become conscious of his own patterns of action, he is in a position to understand other people, assuming them to be similar to himself. Thirdly, assuming the similarity of others, an individual may appropriate what he considers to be great or good in another as a possibility for his own actions. The reality of another person becomes an ethical possibility for the individual who contemplates him. This is illustrated by Kierkegaard in

1 Postscript, pp. 284-292. 2 Ibid., p. 119. 3 Ibid.,
p. 509, cf. p. 291. 4 Ibid., p. 131.

reference to the relation of Themistocles to Miltiades¹. Themistocles, he says, was made sleepless by thinking about the exploits of Miltiades in defeating the Persians at the battle of Marathon. The objective reality of what Miltiades had done became in Themistocles' imagination a possibility for his own life, and later he in fact did become a second Miltiades in the measure of his own deeds against the Persians. This transference of reality - possibility - reality implies that everyone has a consciousness of a universal human nature.

The fact that we do look to other people and assume either that they are like us or that we are like them is not a guarantee that what either does is good. But this is in fact what Kierkegaard, at this stage, sought to demonstrate. Yet, even if I accept another person's reality as a possibility for my life - and thus commit myself to a course of action similar to his - I do not know that what he has done, or what I shall do in imitation, is good unless I already have a judgment of what good is. Kierkegaard uses a similar critique in his approach to the argument for God's existence from his acts - I do not know that they are God's acts, or that they are good, from the acts themselves, any more than I know that Napoleon's acts were great without knowing what great is². In later years it seems that Kierkegaard more and more abandoned the criterion of the universal for the good and depended instead upon statements from the Bible.

In a passage from the Journals, written in 1850, Kierkegaard seems to have abandoned the idea of finding the good as the universal

1 Ibid., pp. 286-287, cf. 321-322. 2 Fragments, p. 32.

which is to be discovered by the self, thus seemingly abandoning all connection with Kant's categorical imperative. What is emphasized in the following is still the idea of choosing in the depth of one's being, with the supposition that God enters in through the circumstances surrounding one's choice.

Real self-duplication without a third factor, which is external and compels one, is an impossibility and makes such existence into an illusion or an experiment.

Kant held that man was his own law (autonomy), i.e. bound himself under the law which he gave himself. In a deeper sense that means to say: lawlessness or experimentation. It is no harder than the thwacks which Sancho Panza applied to his own bottom.... Not only is the law which I give myself as maximum not a law; but there is a law which is given to me by one higher than I. And not only that; but that lawgiver takes the liberty of joining in at the same time in the character of educator, and applies the compulsion.¹

Kierkegaard's criticism of Kant's position turns on a misunderstanding of Kant: Kant tried to go from the universal in man to the individual. Kierkegaard interprets Kant's autonomy as being like his own idea of a self-centered, self-determined man. This selection points to a view similar to that expressed earlier in Either/Or in that the results of actions, placed together with the individual's own judgment of right and wrong, leads to a progress of recognition of what is right and wrong. This is not the same as a prudential view of ethics, but it may be charged to be very similar: the person is considered to have principles to which he holds, but if these are altered by consequences his principles might be said to be dependent upon results and show merely prudence. (Cf. my comparison of Dewey's and Kierkegaard's criteria of truth, chapter II above.) The attitude expressed in

1 The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, ed. & tr. Alexander Dru, Oxford University Press, 1938, 1951, pp. 364-365, selection 1041 (in Harper Torchbooks edition of 1959, pp. 181-182).

the quotation might be proper as a subordinate approach to life circumstances, where the primary approach would be through a system of principles whose origin is likely a religious faith. If morals depend on religious faith, then we may easily consider God as acting through circumstances. But if we look only at the circumstances we will not see God. We may compare what Kierkegaard has to say about this in the Philosophical Fragments (p. 33), and also in the passage in the Postscript where he argues that the world-historical cannot be considered as ethical (see above, p. 41). It seems to me that the connection between the ethical interpretation of existence (which involves commitments, attitudes and subjective judgments of value) and the ethical as good or moral (an objective system of values) can not be sustained by an argument of learning through consequences any more than it is sustained by the argument from the universal.

There is further evidence in Kierkegaard's works that he was unable to make a satisfactory connection between his proposed form of ethical action (choice and commitment) and the content (the values considered as objective and universal) which he would call ethical. That is the possibility of consistently evil choices. As we have seen, the machinery of choice and commitment is considered by Kierkegaard to be characteristic of the ethical sphere of existence. A person who makes vital choices is seeking for self-consistency and consolidation - or, we may say, vital choices are those by which an individual seeks consistency, self-consolidation, greater self-consciousness, a personal history. But Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the individual opens the way to the choosing of a consistent object for one's own life of something

which is morally reprehensible to others. We may object with Kant that this sort of choice, made universally, would lead to action destructive to society. But this might not affect the particular individual, and Kierkegaard was concerned with the individual as ethical, not with social mores. It is quite conceivable under his theory that a truly evil person might consolidate himself with all consistency in an evil character. This is similar to Kierkegaard's description of the demoniac in The Sickness Unto Death. The demoniac is there described as one who in despair is determined to be himself in opposition to God. Such a person has reached the ethical interpretation of existence, but has so interpreted the content of that sphere as to choose evil for its own sake.

Another type of unethical choice is shown earlier, in Fear and Trembling. There Kierkegaard suggested Abraham as an example of a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in his sacrifice of Isaac. In his case, the ethical requirement of care for his son was suspended because of a higher, religious requirement, his devotion to the Absolute (God). In a work between the Fragments and Postscript, called The Concept of Dread, Kierkegaard considered sin, especially original sin; in the Postscript it becomes clear that he regarded this work as showing the possibility for each person of a suspension in another direction.

Just as fear and trembling represent the state of mind of the individual while under teleological suspension, so dread represents his state of mind in the desperate emancipation from the task of realizing the ethical.¹

Sin is thus a reversal of the ethical considered as the good. But

1 Postscript, p. 240.

as a result of consistent choice, it seems possible for sin to occur within the ethical as an interpretation of existence without losing consistency. To be fair, I should quote the succeeding sentence to the above, wherein Kierkegaard calls sin also the opposite of subjective truth:

The inwardness of sin, as dread in the existing individual, is the greatest possible and most painful possible distance from the truth, when truth is subjectivity.¹

I cannot see how this follows merely from the subjective state in the ethical interpretation of existence. It seems to me that Kierkegaard's attempts at connecting the ethical-type form of choice and commitment with ethics as an objective universal set of requirements fails. It is true that after publishing what he considered to be his definitive works leading to the elucidation of Christianity (especially the Postscript) Kierkegaard published Christian ethical works, such as Works of Love (1847) and Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing (1847). In these, ethical content depends upon religion (Christianity) and not religion on ethics. It seems to me that we must consider Kierkegaard's description of the ethical sphere as having succeeded in describing the subjective state of ethical decision (commitment) only and as having not succeeded in giving an ethic. Perhaps some contemporary theologians might consider this not a weakness but a strength: the fact that he has not succeeded in connecting individual ethical rules with a form of ethical behaviour, they might say, means that he has avoided "legalism" and has instead pointed towards a view of the

1 Idem.

ethical as a way of life and of sin not as individual transgressions but as opposed to this way of life. I doubt whether the form without content can be finally satisfactory, and also whether sin is inconsistent with Kierkegaard's ethical sphere.

I shall have more criticisms to make later in this chapter, but feel that I should first try to outline some of the other features of Kierkegaard's ethical sphere of existence, with emphasis upon the aspect of commitment. One of the basic features of Kierkegaard's conception of ^{existence is} the place of time in a person's life. For him (as later for Heidegger) time is of the essence for personal existence. He criticized the objective view of existence, which resulted in science and idealistic philosophy, because it tried to organize what is as if it were timeless. In the sciences, descriptive laws are to be true of the phenomena to which they apply at any time; idealistic philosophy considered everything to be sub specie aeterni and, Kierkegaard said, was thus like the Eleatic philosophy which considered that everything is and nothing comes into being. Kierkegaard emphasizes that for individual human subjects - and, he claims, each conscious person is no more than this - the use of time is what he is always concerned with. One of his criticisms of the aesthetic attitude towards existence was that it tried through pleasure-seeking to destroy the sense of time (to "kill time" as we might say). He considers any individual who has any sense of making commitments and accepting responsibility to be primarily conscious of the use of time. Commitments of any sort cast the personal consciousness forward in time. The consciousness of the possibility of his own death makes a person aware of having, or possibly not having, a

certain amount of time (Kierkegaard implies that it is impossible to think my death as death; I can think of it as the end of time, as the end of life, or as a transition to an after-life, but I cannot think it for myself as an existence¹). This consciousness of time, however obtained, is a fact of life for all except those who seek to smother it in intellectual or hedonistic pursuits. Kierkegaard considers time to have been given by God in his constituting of the human self. Time is basically futurity for the individual. Eternity Christianity proclaims to be a future life; so eternity too is time as futurity. Kierkegaard considers a person existing in the ethical sphere of existence to be concerned with questions like, "How much time do I have?", or "How can I use this time?", or with the New Testament idea of "redeeming the time".

Now it seems to me that we have to look at Kierkegaard's conception of time for some of the basic characteristics of his conception of the ethical and its connection to the religious. And, indeed, we find time essentially connected with guilt later on in the Postscript². Everyone conscious of use of personal time, everyone who makes commitments, is also conscious of misuse of time and failure to live up to his commitments. So we derive guilt, not as the result of transgression of objective ethical rules but as a failure of the self. This guilt is thus present as a quality with a person (as an involvement of responsibility and commitment) and does not need to be outwardly derived. For instance, any misuse of time, for the person who does make commitments,

1 Postscript, pp. 147-158.

2 Postscript, pp. 468-470.

brings guilt. Kierkegaard speaks of there being a total guilt, even if one is not guilty in certain circumstances. I think this idea must derive from the conception that one's time is a whole, so that the misuse of any part is a misuse of the whole. "Misuse", of course, need only be related to one's own sense of purpose and need not be related to any outside requirement.

This guilt, according to Kierkegaard, leads eventually to the acceptance of a religious view of life, i.e. to the transition to the religious sphere of existence. In this way the religious is derived from the ethical sphere of existence - though later the Christian ethic is derived from the Christian religion, conceived as "religiousness B". Furthermore, when the sense of time is put together with the idea of God, responsibility becomes greater; for now it is not only responsibility for time, but to someone. The cure for guilt is also to be found in connection with God: the self which fails as a self can resign itself into the care of the God who constituted it. This is described as "infinite resignation", and is described by Kierkegaard as being the step that comes before faith (where faith is active commitment to God). A fuller description of the place of infinite resignation and faith will come with the discussion of the sphere of "religiousness A". It should be said, however, that in the Postscript the boundary between the ethical and the religious spheres is less definite than in the earlier works.

However, if we consider commitment of the self to purposes, and that guilt is a result not of the breaking of moral rules but of unfaithfulness to one's own purposes, then this scheme

of life is open to the same challenges as before. Mere commitment does not mean that one is committed to that which is objectively good. One's own "good" is not necessarily "the good". Such a guilt, even if for the misuse of time, is a responsibility to oneself alone. I have indicated that Kierkegaard does not succeed in showing that choice in oneself led to discovery of the universal in man. He tried to solve this problem by resorting to God's will being shown in life circumstances - a point of view which in the Fragments he had rejected. It appears that Kierkegaard sought to unite the ethical as commitment and the ethical as pursuit of the universal in man, but was never able to show that the second follows from the first. Even his concept of guilt resulting from misuse of time shows the same weaknesses as I have indicated before.

Kierkegaard introduced two concepts to describe the transformation of beliefs into life. After Either/Or he was interested in the idea of "repetition" and published a book by that name. This term, designed as a contrary idea to the Platonic "recollection", has the meaning of remaining essentially the same in character (constant subjectivity) while passing through various experiences in time. The best example is marriage, where the relationship of person to person, and the romantic attraction to the beloved, are to be kept constant as the years go by. Philosophically, repetition was intended to show the ethical learning of a person as derived, not by a recollection from a previous (past) existence, but by the same person's resolution carrying him forward through existence. The idea fits very well the concept of subjective truth as forward-looking, in opposition

to systematization as backward-looking. However, the concept seems to have been dropped by the time of the Fragments and Postscript. The second concept, "reduplication", was used for a longer time and is of some importance in the Postscript. It is less static than repetition, in that it allows for growth of self-consciousness and so for change of purpose. By reduplication is meant the transformation into one's actions of one's thoughts and imagination. My taking of ideals into my thoughts may be considered to be an attempt to duplicate something outside me in my own imagination. My devotion to such an ideal will be made real in my life when I reduplicate this in the reality of my own actions. Perhaps the easiest way to grasp this is by means of Kierkegaard's example of Themistocles and Miltiades (see above, p. 94). Themistocles' admired Miltiades' conduct - this could be considered duplication of it in his imagination. His adopting the same sort of resolution in his own character, and the transformation of this resolution into action, was reduplication. "Repetition" applied to the putting into constant practice of one's own resolution so as to remain the same amid change; "reduplication" means also the putting of resolution into practice, but the decisions which lead to the resolution being formed have a broader field.

The concept of reduplication is one example of appropriation. As reduplication was broader than repetition, appropriation encompasses a broader field than reduplication. Reduplication applied to transformation into actions. Appropriation may mean this, but also applies to the acceptance of a belief as one's own personal possession where no action may follow. The crux of

appropriation is that what is objectively real outside a person is to become a personal possession of one's own subjectivity. The process of description by which one person's life and character is communicated to another is called by Kierkegaard "existence communication". There is an objective fact involved, but the intention of appropriation is that the description may be grasped by the second person not in the form it comes to him but in a form which he imagines as a possibility for his life. Thenceforth it may be made actual in his existence. Where an objective truth may be grasped directly by the intellect and may be known without any life change in the knower, direct communication is said to take place. "Existence communication", in contrast, is meant for appropriation.

Kierkegaard's emphasis upon personal existence, subjective commitment, and the personal use of time, makes his man of the ethical sphere seem very self-centred. Such statements as the following point this out:

For the study of the ethical, every man is assigned to himself.¹

There is only one interest, the interest in existence.²

When an individual abandons himself to lay hold of something great outside of him, his enthusiasm is aesthetic; when he forsakes everything to save himself, his enthusiasm is ethical.³

There is at this stage no love for the neighbor as oneself (this comes, after the description of Christianity, in such works as The Works of Love). The individual, and the individual alone, is conceived as adopting an idea⁴, and proving its possibility in one's own existence⁵. This self-centredness continues into

1 Postscript, p. 127. 2 Ibid., p. 282. 3 Ibid.,
p. 350. 4 Ibid., p. 123. 5 Ibid., p. 379.

Christianity, as he describes it, for, as Kierkegaard expressed it in one of his later books, I know that faith exists in the last analysis only if I myself believe (his pseudonymous author of the Postscript contradicts this in describing Christianity as a commitment without himself being a Christian). In the face of this almost ethical solipsism (see further pp. 113-114) it is very difficult to understand why Kierkegaard conceived it to be a necessary part of ethical behaviour to reveal oneself, to be open in one's purpose and not to keep any secrets - and he did conceive this to be necessary in Either/Or and in the review of Either/Or in the Postscript. He himself considered that marriage was a good example of the ethical, as the universal, and felt he could not get married because he had a secret he could not share. The very point of Fear and Trembling in which Abraham, honoring God absolutely as a religious man, is unable to reveal to others his having been commanded to sacrifice Isaac, turns on the idea of the ethical as not only the universal but the revealed. Yet in the Postscript the individual character of the ethical - granted, as a sphere of existence - is emphasized, and the concept of an "essential secret" is applied to the ethical existence of an individual. Compare the following:

When Socrates isolated himself from every eternal relationship by making an appeal to his daemon, and assumed...that everyone must do the same, such a view of life...constitutes an essential secret, because it cannot be communicated directly. The most Socrates could do was to help another negatively, by a maieutic artistry, to achieve the same view. Everything subjective, which through its dialectical inwardness eludes a direct form of expression, is an essential secret.¹

1 Ibid., p. 74.

While the first part of this statement might seem to show that it is said about the religious (compare Abraham) the last sentence shows that it applies also to the ethical. It seems to me that the concept of the ethical as being the open and revealed has no roots in Kierkegaard's own principles. It must therefore be an assumption from the idealistic and Kantian ideas of ethics current in his day and, like the idea that the ethical is the universal, accepted by Kierkegaard as obvious.

As I have indicated in the foregoing discussion, I do not believe that Kierkegaard succeeded in connecting together the various concepts which he included in the ethical sphere (interpretation) of existence. Nevertheless, I shall catalogue the various categories which he describes as belonging to this sphere (as I mentioned in discussing the aesthetic categories in the previous chapter, he used the term "category" freely, pretty much in the sense of "quality"). The categories of the ethical sphere are underlined in what follows.

The ethical is the sphere which emphasizes time¹ as the medium in which a person exists and which is material to be used and for which he is responsible; it is the sphere of duration of time², and of concrete eternity as futurity³ (as contrasted with the abstract sub specie aeterni); it is thus the sphere of becoming⁴ or change in existence, rather than of being in essence; of action and commitment⁵ to a course of action, thus of choice and venture⁶, through which a person tries to construct his own character as an ethical reality⁷, by the realizing (and limitation) of possibilities⁸

1 Postscript, p. 182. 2 Ibid., p. 469. 3 Ibid.,
pp. 272 & 277. 4 Ibid., p. 376. 5 Ibid., pp. 302-304.
6 Ibid., p. 133. 7 Ibid., p. 280. 8 Ibid., pp.
286-287.

(among which possibilities is the ethical or factual reality of others) in his own life¹; such work is an ethical labor². Because of the need to realize in one's own life that which a person finds to be a possibility for himself by making it concrete or actual, the ethical is the sphere of what ought to be, whereas the aesthetic is the sphere of things as they are: while in actuality a person is at the same time both good and bad, ethically he becomes at one time either good or bad³, not both (that is, any action tends towards only one of these alternatives at one time). As related to the person, the ethical emphasizes the particular, specific, individual man⁴. In reference to himself, the ethical man knows only himself, is rigorous with himself, but is lenient toward others⁵ because from his own experience of himself he knows that the external appearance is ambiguous⁶ as related to the inward. With reference to what he ought to do, it is assumed that the ethical, as the good, is the universal human⁷ which is required⁸ of every one (and so is a rule) so that he may become an entire man and an illustration of what is man⁹. In this respect, the requirement of the ethical is said to be absolute¹⁰, irrespective of consequences¹¹, and so to embody qualitative distinctions between good and bad, guilt or innocence (as contrasted with the quantitative or relative distinctions of the aesthetic sphere)¹². Desire to escape the requirement of the universal human is temptation. The ethical is the sphere of

1 Ibid., p. 284. 2 Ibid., p. 133. 3 Ibid., p. 376.
4 Ibid., p. 128. 5 Ibid., p. 286. 6 Ibid., p. 127.
7 Ibid., pp. 270, 274, 320. 8 Ibid., p. 320. 9 Ibid.,
pp. 309, 312. 10 Ibid., p. 133. 11 Ibid., pp. 119-121.
12 Ibid., p. 120.

individual striving¹ and purpose², and of concern or passion³ (self-interest) regarding what a person should do, and therefore is subjective in the highest degree⁴ (cf. "subjective truth") though supposedly not to be selfish or without concern for others. Since the ethical is regarded as required of every one, each person is ethically important, and no person can be regarded with indifference⁵ nor can any time be regarded as insignificant. The person existing in the ethical sphere regards the situation in which he finds himself to be all infinitely important as an exercise for him of realizing the universally human in time, and he seeks to employ the outward to make manifest his inward convictions and commitments; this is reduplication⁶. In living in a concrete existence, and in entering into various life situations which are actual (as contrasted with the situation as thought, where it may be only a concept) such as marriage, the ethical person combines the life of self-conscious spirit with the psycho-somatic⁷.

As has been described already, Kierkegaard believed that the ethical person found at the depth of his serious choices the voice of God⁸. While striving to attain the universal human he would discover failure within himself, and so discover guilt⁹; when examining himself, he would discover within himself all sorts of evil¹⁰. If he brought God sufficiently into his life (became religious) he would be able to make the movement of repentance, and of resignation of himself to God, and from there would enter into the religious sphere with faith¹¹ as active

1 Ibid., p. 84. 2 Ibid., p. 139. 3 Ibid., pp 313,
350, 206, etc. 4 Ibid., pp 146, 281, 306, etc. 5 Ibid.,
p. 132. 6 Ibid., p. 269. 7 Ibid., p. 160. 8 Ibid.,
p. 138. 9 Ibid., p. 469. 10 Ibid., p. 144.
11 Ibid., p. 354.

commitment. If he chose deliberately to flout the ethical requirements of which he was aware, this attitude is sin¹. Sin is the deliberate choice to consider oneself exempt from the ethical, and therefore is a return to the status of the aesthetic sphere (where one was indifferent to good and evil) by one who has become conscious of the reality of good and evil. Because it is impossible for a person to return to the aesthetic after being conscious of the ethical, sin is considered to belong to the religious sphere². Further discussion of sin will be undertaken in the subsequent chapter.

So far in this chapter I have not considered closely choice, which is the prime mechanism within the ethical sphere. Perhaps a review of the way in which it is said to become determinative for the ethical sphere would be useful at this point. Kierkegaard described the aesthetic sphere, or interpretation of existence, as one in which the goal of life is pleasure or enjoyment, and the person living this way is indifferent to right and wrong, to self-conscious commitment, and to subjectivity. In most respects, his life is determined by outward circumstances and forces or by feelings and moods. This way of life is said to come to grief in despair (as I have argued in the previous chapter, this term seems to me to be inappropriate for this sphere). Despair is considered to be a means of transition to the ethical sphere, if a person becomes conscious of being in despair and so self-conscious. If he chooses despair he finds himself at the "rock-bottom" of his life; in the Postscript it is explained that a person must have

1 Ibid., p. 239. 2 Idem.

the help of God to get over into the ethical sphere, where right and wrong, subjectivity and purpose are meaningful to him. This way of life is considered to be a great improvement, in that the effort required for making choices consistent with a sense of purpose disciplines the self in the direction of a great deal of inner consistency. But this way of life in turn fails: the ethical is considered to be the sphere of requirement, to perform the universal human (I have shown how the connection is not satisfactorily explained) and the self cannot meet these requirements. A sense of guilt results. The failure in the ethical field leads towards repentance, and resignation into the hands of one who can take away the insufficiency of the effort and can remove the effect of the wrongdoing. Such a one is conceived to be God, and such reliance leads to what is described as (religious) faith.

Through choice a person is supposed to find himself. But in Either/Or the choices are described as not such things as whether to be a tailor or a scholar, what sort of clothes to wear, what amusements to seek, etc. That choice which is to be vital for the ethical sphere is essentially choice of oneself. Even right and wrong are not so important in this choice - they will be discovered - as the energy of the choice: "It is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses."¹ We have already looked at this statement in a search for the origin of the standards of right and wrong. Let us now consider it in an examination of choice.

1 Either/Or, II, p. 141 (see above, p. 87).

What does it mean to choose the self in earnestness and passion? Kierkegaard believes it is not to choose selfishly, though we have seen that his emphasis (in the Postscript) upon the ethical reality of the individual implies this. A choice of the self takes place when the self is faced with a crisis. But when is the person aware of a crisis? Is it not rather rare for most people? It seems that the individual must go through many day to day choices which are aesthetic in form before he meets with a crisis. Is he therefore unethical? The matter is answered somewhat in the consideration of the religious sphere, for there life is focussed upon God, and the religious person, though doing the same things as a man seeking enjoyment, may do them for different reasons. But what constitutes a crisis? I know a young man who found that deciding to sell his car was a deep decision, which certainly affected his understanding of and choice of himself. For another person this would not be a crisis at all. But I doubt whether the young man in question recognized his problem (which included financing the car, other debts, need of the money for a family crisis, the relative freedom of having or not having a car) as a problem in the choice of himself. To "find himself" he will have to make other choices, which involve some outward choice as well as inward struggle. His case is in one way a good illustration of Kierkegaard's "choice of the self" and of "the energy with which one chooses", for the young man had to put energy into his choice. In another way his example contradicts Kierkegaard, for, according to Kierkegaard, a person choosing himself should be conscious of the full significance of his choice, should make it in inwardness first before making an outward application, and, apparently, having once made such a

choice should be in possession of himself in consciousness of his subjectivity. I do not feel the young man I have in mind meets these conditions. Indeed, I feel that most people make extremely significant choices for their lives - and their inner character - without being aware of the significance of the choice at the time it is made. Furthermore, it seems to me that most people make their choices on the basis of day to day life, keeping oneself alive, achieving security and comfort, etc. without being aware of crises. On the other hand, some tense people may make every decision a crisis. Kierkegaard's description of determinative choices for the consolidation of the self has some truth in it. But the scheme into which he places such choices seems to be the exceptional rather than the rule. The person who chooses consciously and knows that he is making a choice for life is undoubtedly a strong, spirited person, whereas the person who does not choose - in Either/Or Kierkegaard rather describes such a person as choosing not to choose, i.e. choosing to be oblivious to the impact of the choice he may make - does not develop into a strong personality. But strong personalities are rather rare, and among strong personalities there are perhaps as many "demonic" characters as there are moral characters. Perhaps, in fact, the consistently evil person may be more conscious of consistent choices than the good person who acts by training and habit. The implication is then that the evil person is more a part of the ethical sphere of existence than is the person who is good from training and habit. Again we are up against the fact that Kierkegaard's concept of the ethical sphere does not necessarily lead to ethical values.

Another severe criticism that we must make of Kierkegaard's concept of the ethical (as found in his description of the ethical sphere of existence) is that it seems to miss the whole point of the concept of "ethical". Kierkegaard selects the phenomena of commitments and choices, made self-consciously by persons. He calls this pattern of choice "ethical", because what is commonly accepted as ethical behaviour involves this type of choice. He finds what he calls ethical behaviour to be characterized by commitment and choice which seeks its goal in the future; this, then, is centred on the individual who chooses or commits himself and on his own time in which he expects to live and which is the field within his commitments operate. As we have seen, this is in contrast to Kant who sought the principle for the individual's action in the field of what all men might do in their relationships with each other. To avoid, at this stage of his scheme of spheres, the deriving of ethics from religion, Kierkegaard has derived an ethical pattern of action from what actually takes place in human existence. In a sense, he has sought for a natural pattern of ethics. So we may say that he has derived his ethical pattern from one aspect of what is commonly accepted as ethical behaviour, namely, our committing of ourselves, and risking of ourselves, for a purpose or ideal. But is the ideal of an individual really the centre of what we commonly understand as ethical behaviour? It seems to me that Kierkegaard's focus is wrong. Is not ethical behaviour more truly described by another aspect of what we commonly understand as ethical, namely, the living for others? As we have seen, Kierkegaard assumed something like Kant's categorical imperative, that the ethical was the universal, but this assumption did not really follow from his

other principles. Do we not have to say that ethical behaviour is by nature a relationship between people, rather than a relationship of an individual to an ideal? The family, a social unit, is more basic than the individual. The great ethical systems, for example, the Ten Commandments, are more easily demonstrable as necessary for the life of a society than they are for the life of an individual (e.g. dishonesty or adultery quite obviously break down interpersonal trust without which a society cannot continue, but their consequences in an individual are not always so apparent). It seems to me then that the essence of ethical behaviour lies in interpersonal relationships and not in the dedication of an individual to an ideal (which, as we have seen, may be true also of a person dedicated to an evil ideal). As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kierkegaard later derived an ethic of love for the neighbour from Christianity. But at the stage of his "ethical sphere of existence", where the derivation seems to be naturalistic, i.e. from the nature of human life, love (agape) and the other person seem to be extra to the ethical. What appears to be almost an ethical solipsism, and which appears in consideration of the religious sphere as a solipsism in respect to faith, appears to have its origin in the fact that Kierkegaard saw the centre of ethical activity in the individual and not between persons. We may speculate that his particular understanding of the ethical was due to his own self-centredness, partly traceable to his relationship with his father, himself a moody and self-centred man.

With the Postscript Kierkegaard developed his conception of the place of irony and humor in relation to the spheres of existence.

In the earlier works irony and humor were not brought into specific relationship with the existence-spheres, although Kierkegaard had written his Master's thesis (in 1841) on the conception of irony with particular reference to Socrates. The place of irony and humor is set forth in the following passage (I have already quoted it in the previous chapter, p. 63):

There are thus three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. Two boundary zones correspond to these three: irony, constituting the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical; humor, as the boundary that separates the ethical from the religious.¹

It should be emphasized that these are boundary zones, not transitional areas. The two, irony and humor, are not spoken of as having any power in themselves to cause a transition from one sphere to another. They are rather states of mind, manifested in attitude and action, by persons who are about to enter the higher sphere in question, or as appearances given by a person in a higher sphere to one in the next lower.

The spheres are thus related: immediacy; finite common sense; irony; ethics with irony as incognito; humor; religiousness with humor as incognito; and then finally the Christian religiousness.²

I have already stated (above, p. 63) that we cannot take this sequence seriously as if it were used by Kierkegaard in the way that it is outlined. But the suggestion of the incognito is rather important. Irony and humor are not treated by Kierkegaard merely as phases of comical behaviour but also as personal characteristics. The comical is described as a metaphysical category³ in the Postscript, and presumably then irony and humor

1 Postscript, p. 448.

2 Ibid., p. 473, note.

3 Ibid., p. 112.

are categories of existence for which the comical is the ground or prius. The comical is described as produced by contradiction¹. "The tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction"². Now there are apparent contradictions in the relationship between one sphere and another, and an awareness of these by an individual may be revealed as either irony or humor, depending on which field it is applied, and an individual may embody irony or humor just as he may embody the aesthetic or another sphere of existence. But the ironical man and the humorous man as described by Kierkegaard are in themselves observers of existence rather than committed in existence, though the ironist may also be committed to the ethical and the humorist to the religious. It is as if a man grew out of a lower attitude toward existence and paused before coming into the higher sphere.

An ironist is aware of the inadequacies of the aesthetic sphere and becomes skilled at revealing these. The example Kierkegaard gives is that of Socrates, who, though knowing more than his contemporaries, pretended to know less, allowing his opponents to state their case while withholding the stating of his own. Thus they were revealed in their inadequacies and contradictions. So, Kierkegaard says, the subjective existing thinker is as negative in relation to the truth as he is positive. Kierkegaard himself attempted to apply this method in opposing the positive confidence of Hegelians³. The comparison between the aesthetic and the ethical (here in the sense of a system of values)

1 Ibid., pp. 459, 462-466.

2 Ibid., p. 459.

3 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

is in certain respects the comparison between things as they are and things as they ought to be. The ironist then is in possession of a certain standard of values (his conception of things as they ought to be) and is on the attack against inferior standards. Thus irony has a bitterness about it. The withdrawal of the ironist is a methodological withdrawal, as was that of Socrates, but does not indicate that he himself as a person has the position he pretends to have by his negativity. The pretense of the ironist has an opposite purpose than that of the hypocrite¹: the hypocrite pretends to a position he does not occupy, because he wants to have the credit for being there; the ironist pretends to one he does not occupy so as to reveal the inadequacy of a position other than his own and which is occupied either by the ignorant or the hypocritical². Both irony and hypocrisy demonstrate that the individual's "ethical reality" (the inward) is not necessarily what appears (the outward)³.

Humor also appears related to the ethical sphere as a position above the ethical but not yet in the religious, though in the Postscript the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, describes himself as a humorist and further as on the verge of becoming a Christian (and thus as having his position in "religiousness A"). Therefore it may be said either that the position of humor is uncertain or that the separation of "religiousness A" from the ethical sphere is not distinct. The places where humor is discussed in relation to the religious indicate the latter alternative. Why,

1 Ibid., p. 287. 2 Cf. Kierkegaard "On Authority and Revelation", The Book on Adler, tr. Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1955, p. 125. 3 Postscript, p. 287.

we may ask, does Kierkegaard place humor as a boundary zone before the religious or before Christianity? This can best be answered by illustration. Consider first the conception of the forgiveness of sins. This is a religious idea. Ethically, it is to be supposed that a person shall get the just reward for his deeds: that if he does right, he shall be rewarded, and that if he does wrong, he shall bear the consequences. But forgiveness proposes to remove the wrong and the consequences, not by obliterating the fact that the wrong took place, as if one could go back in time and change the past, but by regarding the wrongdoer as if he had not done the wrong. But yet, this is not to say that the wrong act was right, that is, to condone the wrong. It is, while calling the act wrong, to separate the wrongdoer from the wrong and regard the person as not having done wrong. For someone who does not believe this it is ridiculous, humorous. The person who is aware of this religious idea but does not accept it is therefore described by Kierkegaard as a humorist. The situation is not, like that which called forth irony, something to be attacked as not ethically what it should be, for the wrong is recognized as wrong. There is no hypocrisy about forgiveness if it is really carried out (there would be if forgiveness were promised but not fulfilled). Another example Kierkegaard cites is the Christian belief in and commitment to Christ as the God-man. This concept, Kierkegaard says, is beyond the understanding. Yet a Christian attaches his life to it. "Humor", he says, "... absorb(s)...the amusing aspect. For it is a species of suffering, a martyrdom even in peaceful times, to have the happiness of the

soul tied to that which the understanding despairs about."¹ For the person who does not believe it, such a belief is foolishness, amusing. The type of Christian life that Kierkegaard recommends, absolute commitment to that which can not be objectively certain together with outward conduct which though ethical does not attract attention to itself, also can be regarded with humor. Is it not amusing for someone to fasten his life decisively to such an object - an object which one cannot for certain know in this life - and then to have no certain outward rewards or recognition for his faith?² These aspects of the religious, and Christian, life may be regarded as humorous by the person who has a sense of the ethical but is not religious.

There is another way in which Kierkegaard applies humor to the approach to the religious sphere. Humor is considered to be a possession of the one who has passed into the religious sphere³. For the religious person, "humor makes use of the comical over against the presumptuous forms of the religious"⁴. According to Kierkegaard, there is nothing more comical than a misunderstanding of religion by a person who seeks to be religious. The bigot is comical because he considers the wrong matter as decisive. The person who wants an outward reward for being religious is comical. So is the religious organization which uses non-religious means to enforce the outward observances of religion⁵. The person who appropriates only the outward form of religious observance is said to be comical to both the religious person and to a humorist who

1 Postscript, p. 259. 2 Ibid., pp. 402-403. 3 Ibid.,
p. 466. 4 Ibid., p. 466. 5 Ibid., p. 465.

recognizes him for what he is. If religious people apply aesthetic categories to a description of religion they become comical: for instance, if forgiveness is to be obtained through paying a sum of money¹, or, if one person wishes to be more religious (that is, more absolutely committed) than another², or if a preacher should be outstandingly religious³. On the other hand, the person who is truly religious in hidden inwardness is inaccessible to damage by the comical because he is inwardly consistent and has his source of joy within himself (in relationship with God and not in outward rewards), and furthermore has enough humor within himself to see the contradictions⁴.

I have observed already (see above, p. 116) that both the ironist and the humorist are described as observers of one or other of the spheres of existence. That is to say, they are persons who from the vantage point of a position outside a particular interpretation of existence view those who practise or embody one particular interpretation. They thus are not attempting to observe all of human existence but only a particular area within human existence, namely the practices of persons exhibiting a certain attitude toward their own existence. Kierkegaard's pseudonym in one lengthy passage⁵ speaks of a spy who observes the weekday behaviour and interrogates those who heard a sermon on Sunday. The ironist or ethicist is like a spy upon the aesthetic or upon the religious sphere, respectively. We may ask, however, why a description of existence in the strict

1 Ibid., p. 467. 2 Ibid., p. 466. 3 Ibid., p. 348.
4 Ibid., p. 466. 5 Ibid., pp. 417-427.

sense - as the field in which an individual is involved - should allow for persons who are not committed to their own interpretation of existence. Is not the status of the ironist and humorist very similar to that of the intellectual observer of existence, whose attitude was condemned because he tried to place himself outside of existence? It is difficult to see that the ironist per se, i.e. if he is not also an ethicist, or the humorist per se, i.e. if he is not also an ethicist or a religious man, is really committed to a way of life. Is either of them committed to the greatest realization of his own subjectivity? Or considering that both are aspects of the comical, and tragedy is considered to be the complement of comedy (like the opposite side of the coin tragedy regards the painful examples of contradiction), would the tragedian be committed to realizing his subjectivity? What is the difference between observing all existence in an intellectual way and using one's intellect to observe part of human existence? I don't believe the problem is recognized by Kierkegaard. It seems that to escape a charge that the ironist and humorist do not fit within a scheme of subjective truth we must look not at the fact that they are observers but at how they observe what they do observe. The intellectual attitude was also one of abstraction, which tried to derive general or universal rules from the particulars in existence. The ironist is concerned with the concrete and particular in someone else, even though he is concerned about it as an observer. So with the humorist. If either of them - or the tragedian - were to make general observations he would presumably pass out of the subjective to the objective

interpretation. However, it is obvious that both of them transgress the rule that the ethical reality of the individual is the only reality, since they are not concerned with trying to imitate or appropriate what they observe in the personal existence of others. Thus in some respect at least the ironist and humorist do not fit within the rigorous confines of subjective truth. The place assigned to them is not satisfactory.

It may have been noticed that in the relation of irony and humor to the ethical, the "ethical" has to be taken not only as the sphere of commitment but as containing a definite system of ethical values. We thus might have objected to the consideration of these boundary-zones, as they are called, simply on the grounds that they assume as part of the ethical sphere that which has not been proven to belong to it. I do not feel the point worth pressing in the examination of Kierkegaard's understanding of the two concepts, but believe it should be mentioned.

In this chapter I have considered various aspects of what Kierkegaard calls the ethical sphere of existence (or interpretation of existence). First I considered the general characteristic of this interpretation, commitment and choice for self-consistency. Then I examined Kierkegaard's attempt to show that by such choice and commitment one could arrive at a scheme of values, to the ethical in the objective sense. Two presuppositions were involved here, Kierkegaard's belief that man is the same and the ethical is the universal human, and that this is so because man is a synthesis of body and soul established by God. We saw that neither of these could be proved to follow from the phenomenon of the type of

choice that Kierkegaard described as ethical (the form of the ethical). We considered how Kierkegaard treated personal time as essentially related to the ethical choice, and how this might affect his concept of guilt. Next I considered two ideas involved in his concept of ethical behaviour, repetition and reduplication. After this I examined two seemingly contradictory features of Kierkegaard's ethical sphere, the emphasis on the individual on the one hand and his belief in the necessity of self-revelation on the other. A cataloguing of the qualities (Kierkegaard's categories) involved in the ethical sphere then followed. I then discussed some of the ambiguities in Kierkegaard's concept of the choice of oneself. After this I expressed my opinion that Kierkegaard had selected the wrong point for the centre of the ethical in that he had neglected the essential position of the individual's relationship to others. The last few pages have been somewhat of an appendix, the consideration of Kierkegaard's conception of irony and humor, which he places as boundary zones on both sides of the ethical. As a conclusion to this chapter, I wish to make some general criticisms and evaluation.

The pattern of commitment to a purpose of a type that will be crucial for an individual's life and can thus be regarded as "choice of oneself" is basic for Kierkegaard's ethical sphere of existence. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, Kierkegaard emphasized the form which ethical (in the usual sense of the word) choices take and seems to have believed that through these choices the content of ethics could be achieved. We have

seen that this view was modified in different ways between the writing of Either/Or and the later Journals, so that by the time of the Postscript it is stated that God must be a helping party to the discovery of oneself. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Kierkegaard did not fully appreciate the impossibility of his proposal. We have seen that Kierkegaard assumed as axiomatic that an individual man embodies the essence of man, so that choice of what will organize or unify one's own life is choice of what is common to all men. Choice of "the self", i.e. of that which would consolidate oneself, he took to be choice of what is inherent in all humans, "the universal", which he assumed to be the ethical.

Kierkegaard did emphasize the reality of sin as estrangement between man and God, but does not seem to apprehend the effect of this estrangement on man. True, the man of the aesthetic interpretation of existence is estranged from good and evil; he is an amoral person because he is not willing to discover his own person and live in the consciousness of his unity, historicity and (self-) responsibility. Transition to the ethical (the sphere of commitment and consistent historicity) is said to take place by the help of God (so the Postscript). But according to Kierkegaard an ethical sphere separate from devotion to God is still assumed to be possible. And in this sphere man is considered able to find himself, i.e. that once a man comes into an interpretation of life which admits good and evil as realities it is assumed that with enough exertion he will discover the good. Sin then is considered to be an estrangement from God but not to make it impossible for a man to discover his own true self, or (considering

his true self another way) the universal human.

We have seen that Kierkegaard did put into his ethical sphere of existence a scheme of positive ethical values which could not be derived from the view that the ethical sphere has to do simply with the need of commitment. Kierkegaard possessed this value system as the content of his ethics because of his Christian and philosophical backgrounds. It was there, as shown in The Sickness Unto Death, even in his description of the nature of man (a synthesis of soul and body in spirit, established by God). Since this was so, it might seem that he should have gone directly from an aesthetic sphere of existence to a religiously based ethico-religious sphere (later, he propounded a Christian ethic full of content and quite different from his ethical sphere - see above, p. 98). The ethical sphere seems in the Postscript at times to merge with the religious, and yet it is also stated that, "as for the religious, it is an essential requirement that it should have passed through the ethical"¹. The fact is that for Kierkegaard's methodology it was necessary, for he sought to establish the religious, and the Christian, as the further extent of the phenomenon of commitment to a goal which becomes certain only in the future life of the one who commits himself. But since we have found that the content of Kierkegaard's ethical field is not derived from the sort of subjective state which he takes as typical of the ethical approach to existence, we have every right to suspect whether this same subjective state applied in a religious field, can give rise to the religious content that Kierkegaard desires to establish. I will try to examine this in the chapter to follow.

¹ Postscript. p. 347.

I have pondered for several years the anomaly that modern Existentialism, especially the atheistic type, should be able to claim descent from Kierkegaard. At first I put this descent down to an appropriation of only part of Kierkegaard's thought, for instance, Heidegger's attachment to The Concept of Dread and seeming despising of Kierkegaard's other works. However, I have come to see that the shape of atheistic existentialism - its atheism, and (in Sartre) its emphasis upon the cruel, the morbid, the sadistic and the immoral - are in fact logical developments from Kierkegaard's assertion of the subjective state as antecedent to content in the ethical sphere. What modern Existentialism has done is to accept these Kierkegaardian principles without accepting the Christian presuppositions of Kierkegaard and to push them to (let us hope) their ultimate limits. I once considered that the works of Kierkegaard should be saved from what the Existentialists had done to them. Now I believe that in his life Kierkegaard's faith saved him from himself. The glorification of the immoral, the sainting of an evil man because he is consistent and fully realizes (i.e. lives out) his evil, are fully possible and consistent developments of the idea that with enough energy in seeking himself a man will find his true self. For Kierkegaard, the true self was a self dependent upon God and (to paraphrase Protagoras) God was the measure of man.

The fact that there is content in man's choice of himself solely as human is demonstrated by the Existentialists' writings. But this content is not man in relation with God. It is, I believe, man as warped by sin, as an estrangement from God and from his true self, a sin which is so truly a part of man's nature

that it can be called "original sin". Kierkegaard also believed in original sin, though he varied in his treatment of it; in The Concept of Dread, written between the Fragments and the Postscript he treats it as an individual (though universal with every individual) choice to be unethical, whereas in the Journals of 1850 original sin is asserted as a revealed doctrinal truth that "must be believed"¹. Kierkegaard more and more turned away from the view that the content could be achieved by the subjective state (i.e. that commitment could discover what a person is committed to) toward an ethics Biblically based. Perhaps it is more true to say that, once he felt he had described for the aesthetic and philosophically minded man of his age the conception that Christianity is essentially commitment, he did not find it necessary to write as if the doctrines of Christianity did not exist. But in the Postscript commitment is still central as the way which shall lead to the assertion of Christianity not as a body of objective doctrines toward which one may be indifferent but as an intense subjective commitment.

This chapter has been difficult to write because of the disappointment it expresses. There are many features of Kierkegaard's discussion of the range of human life which show a great amount of insight into human existence. His distinction between men who regard life amorally and those who regard it with purpose is one of these. Another is the recognition of choices which are more than the choosing of outward alternatives but are truly a choosing of his character by an individual - in spite of

1 Journals, Tr. Dru, Oxford, 1951, selection 106., p. 376.

the fact that it is difficult to define from outside the individual what choices these are. I believe that Kierkegaard's investigation of the psychology of the individual is a real psychology, whereas much of what is called by that name is simply biology and statistics. However, Kierkegaard's concept of the ethical sphere of existence is not consistent in spite of many individually valuable insights it shows.

VI THE RELIGIOUS SPHERES OF EXISTENCE: ATTITUDES AND OBJECTS

In the three chapters to follow I intend to consider those two types of religiousness which Kierkegaard describes as "religiousness A" and "religiousness B". The former is also called the "immanent religiousness", in contrast to the latter, which is Christianity, as a transcendental religiousness. The word which is translated by Swenson and Lowrie as "religiousness" is used by Kierkegaard to emphasize the subjectivity of religious feeling or devotion, rather than the ordinary word for "religion", which he felt carried too much the implications of objective doctrines.

In the second chapter, where I introduced Kierkegaard's idea of "subjective truth" I pointed out that this notion refers to the commitment of the individual to purpose or ideals or a course of action. By its very nature this phenomenon of commitment projects the individual forward in time towards the realizing of something which is uncertain. Commitment involves seeking to attain an objective. In many cases the objective (as aim) also is made to become actual by the labor of the committed person in attaining it or creating it. The labor involved is called by Kierkegaard "striving", "venture" and "risk". The uncertain nature of the goal is especially evident when an ideal is involved which is intimately related to the individual's own character, but is a feature of any course of action which strives for the attainment of something which is not immediately present. Kierkegaard pointed out, however, that the more uncertain the goal worked for, the more subjectively certain of his commitment an individual

needs to be when he undertakes such a course of action. Kierkegaard calls such commitment "subjective truth", because it is something which is "true" for the committed individual. At the end of his first major work, Either/Or, he stated as a moral that only the truth which edifies is truth for you, and I interpreted this as showing his belief that subjective truth built up the individual's character (Kierkegaard uses the word "subjectivity" instead of "character").

In the two types of religious devotion which Kierkegaard calls "A" and "B" (the "immanent religiousness" and Christianity) the subjectivity (or inwardness) of the devoted individual is emphasized more and more. Kierkegaard cites the seeking after ideals as characteristic of the ethical sphere of existence (or interpretation of life); the more difficult the ideal, the greater the exertion necessary to attain it, therefore the greater the subjective truth necessary. The characteristic goal for both types of religiousness is wholeness of the personality and personal immortality, an "eternal happiness", though with "A" this is personal survival as such, and with "B" an "eternal happiness" is a condition of blessedness in the presence of God, or heaven. But neither immortality nor heaven can be shown to be objectively certain. If they were, the assertion of their existence would be objective truths upon which a person might act (just as one takes appropriate action when it is raining) and not desired goals towards which one acts. Kierkegaard is at pains to point out that the attempt of objective idealism to demonstrate the enduring character of the "Absolute" as immortality does not equal a personal immortality. He also is at pains to discount any forms

of religion which try to show that God is perceivable directly and outwardly, either like the images of some forms of paganism, or, in Christianity, that Jesus could be directly recognized as God by "his mild countenance", or that a Christian can be directly recognized by a certain look in his face, etc. Kierkegaard classes all attempts to recognize God directly as paganism, even if such attempts take place within Christianity. He also calls the over-valuing of anything associated with Christianity (preachers, converted people, hymnbooks, saints, etc.) either paganism or "an aesthetic reminiscence" (i.e. an attitude carried over from the sphere which sought enjoyment as the greatest goal). Likewise Kierkegaard deprecates most of the Christian apologetic throughout the centuries as an attempt to make Christianity palatable and objectively probable, so that it can be known or almost known, whereas by this action it cannot be believed, i.e. one cannot commit oneself to it as a goal to be attained¹. Religiousness, for Kierkegaard, must be demonstrated to be real subjectively, not objectively, by bringing a person to the highest possible tension between the objective uncertainty of that which he seeks and his own subjective certainty of his own commitment. Whereas others would be disturbed by the uncertainty of an immortality or of the existence of God as man in Jesus Christ, Kierkegaard seems to want these uncertainties as a challenge to a person to believe, to venture or risk himself. Kierkegaard addressed his literary work to the attempt to lead his contemporaries to a new understanding of Christianity, viz. that Christianity was not a body of

1 Postscript, p. 189.

historical, theological or philosophical doctrines to be accepted but a subjectivity or commitment to be attained - not to believe in the sense of accepting, but to believe in the sense of venturing. It is because he felt that there were only two types of religion that called forth such subjective attitudes that he dealt neither with the many forms of paganism nor with the dogmas of Christianity.

We have seen that in the ethical sphere of existence, Kierkegaard attempted to make a connection between the action, choice, and the objective standards of morality which he felt could be discovered by choice (the content he sought was pretty much Kantian and Christian). We have seen that he failed to do so. The most that he really was able to show was that a person's commitment was related to some principle, but he was not able to show from an analysis of commitment as such what that principle would be. (In opposite directions, we can see the result of pursuing Kierkegaard's idea of the choice determining the object or standard in the theology of Tillich - God as the "ground of being" - and the philosophy of Sartre - man as determiner of standards for himself as if he were choosing for all men.) Kierkegaard attempted in the ethical sphere to make subjective truth (commitment) sufficient to discover objective ethical principles which would be universal and given, i.e. objectively true. This was to attempt to make the form of subjective commitment the determiner of the object of commitment. The fact that he failed to establish this connection is of some importance for considering the relationship of the subjective attitude with the object of religion.

I have indicated on the previous page that Kierkegaard emphasized the subjective attitude - the religiousness - rather than the objective body of belief - the religion, (again the form, rather than the content). There are however, indications that with the religious spheres too Kierkegaard attempted to connect the attitude with the object of belief. I shall cite some of these and comment on them in what now follows:

Johannes Climacus...shows...that there is a "how" which has this quality, that if it is truly given, then the "what" is also given; and that this is the "how" of "faith". Here, quite certainly, we have inwardness at its maximum proving to be objectivity once again.¹

This reference from the Journals of 1849 refers to the Postscript (pp. 181-182) where it is indicated that the "how" of faith determines its object as the infinite (presumably, God). But the statement seems to be contradicted by one a few pages earlier (p. 178) which states that a person may be in the truth (subjectively) although he may be related to something which is not true (objectively). When we look carefully at the statement from the Journals it is possible to consider it as saying only that the how of religious devotion determines the content of that which is believed, or else determines whether one really believes what one professes to believe; it is not necessary - from the statement itself - to interpret it as meaning that the how of my belief determines whether God is or is not. However, there are other passages which do seem to say the latter:

1 The Journals, Selection 1021; in Harper Torchbooks, 1959, pp. 177-178.

In the life of time the expectation of an eternal happiness is the highest reward, because an eternal happiness is the highest telos.¹

An eternal happiness as the absolute good has the remarkable trait of being definable solely in terms of the mode of acquisition.²

God himself is precisely this: how one relates himself to him. In the case of tangible and external objects, the object is something other than the way.... In the case of God how is what. He who does not relate himself to God by way of absolute devotion cannot relate himself to God. In dealing with God, one cannot relate himself to a certain degree, for God is the exact opposite of everything that is "to a certain degree".³

These passages give the impression of saying either that the attitude creates its object, i.e. that "an eternal happiness", and "God" exist only as creations of my own imagination, or else that the religious attitude is somehow guaranteed to find the object to which it is trying to relate itself. From the fact that Kierkegaard regarded Jesus Christ as having been a real person, and having also been really God-in-time, we should discount the former. If we accept the latter postulate, however, we are in pretty much the same situation that we saw was characteristic of Kierkegaard's description of the ethical sphere of existence. This would be to say that for any religious attitude, the how (the way the attitude is held, its intensity, the amount of commitment, etc.) guarantees the discovery of its related object: that idol-worship finds an idol, that belief in immortality discovers immortality, that belief in God finds God, that belief in Jesus Christ finds Jesus Christ. If we accept this, then we

1 Postscript, p. 360. 2 Ibid., p. 382.
3 Kierkegaard, Papers, X2A 644, quoted in Johnson & Thulstrup,
A Kierkegaard Critique, New York, Harpers, 1962, p. 171.

should have to say that any fancy describable as religious has some objective reality corresponding to it, which objective reality arouses or responds to the devotion shown. Such a supposition is fantastic! Perhaps we could say that, if Kierkegaard makes it, he postulates it only of the belief in immortality, belief in God and belief in the God-man. But then we have either to seek evidence outside the attitude relationship or to accuse Kierkegaard of being arbitrary. Perhaps there is another possibility - to consider a person's desire (attitude) as prayer, and to consider that God answers his prayer, whatever it is.

There are some places in which Kierkegaard seems to make an attempt at showing that there are existing realities which religion attaches itself to, realities that exist whether or not there are believers with the correct attitude. With regard to belief in immortality, however, the best he seems to do is to show that the belief exists or has existed (i.e. the religion, a body of beliefs), while with Christianity he attempts to show its plausibility on the grounds that it is not plausible that men have invented it (In both cases, he does not claim that the existence of the objects is demonstrated with any certainty.). Some of the passages wherein these ideas are expressed are the following:

Immortality is the most passionate interest of subjectivity; precisely in the interest lies the proof.¹

Socrates...puts the question objectively in a problematic manner: if there is an immortality.... On this "if" he risks his entire life, he has the courage to meet death, and he has with the passion of the infinite so determined the pattern of his life that it must be found acceptable -

1 Postscript, p. 155.

if there is an immortality. Is any better proof capable of being given for the immortality of the soul?¹

However, lest we think he means this as objective proof, consider the following:

Systematically, immortality cannot be proved at all...viewed systematically, the whole question is nonsense.²

The determinateness of immortality can only be possessed determinately by the Eternal, but by an exister can be possessed only in indeterminateness.³

With regard to Christianity, Kierkegaard holds that the existence of Jesus Christ, though it may be as well documented as any other historical fact, yet as a historical fact is at best only an approximation (an objective uncertainty, because all historical knowledge is a matter of interpretation); regarded as the Incarnation of God, it introduces something supra-historical into history, and thus must be judged not only as historical but as qualitatively unique in history. Nevertheless, he suggests as an argument for the reality of the Incarnation (a supra-historical fact) its incredibility as a human invention (we may compare Tertullian's statement: "credo quia absurdum"). This argument from the impossibility of invention is indicated in the following passages:

It is not impossible that it might occur to man to imagine himself the equal of God, or to imagine God the equal of man, but not to imagine that God would make himself into the likeness of man... This would be a most stupid thought, or rather, so stupid a thought could never have entered into his mind; though when God has seen fit to entrust him with it he exclaims in worship: This thought did not arise in my own heart; and finds it a most miraculously beautiful thought.⁴

1 Postscript, p. 180. 2 Ibid., p. 155. 3 Ibid., p. 157. 4 Fragments, p. 28.

A similar passage speaks of the idea of a new birth (conversion):

Is it not strange that there should be something such in existence, in relation to which everyone who knows it knows also that he has not invented it, this pass-me-by not stopping or capable of being stopped even if we approached all men in turn? This strange fact deeply impresses me, and casts over me a spell; for it constitutes a test of the hypothesis, and proves its truth.¹

A passage near the end of the Postscript refers back to this argument, thus showing that it is not typical only of the

Fragments:

[In Christianity one] bases one's eternal happiness upon an approximation, a thing which can be done only when one has in oneself no eternal determinant (and that again is no more possible to think than how such a notion could occur to anyone, since the Deity must provide the condition for it), and hence this again is connected with the paradoxical accentuation of existence.²

With both types of religious devotion, however, the objective aspect is never considered to be certain enough that it can serve by itself as a foundation for subsequent objective belief (as, for instance, the fact that the earth is a sphere); in both types, faith involves the risk of being mistaken and so must be a commitment to something which is objectively uncertain.

If we take "religiousness A" as the type of religion attempted by a person who thinks about a higher being consistently and attempts to think his way through to such a being and live his life on the postulate that such a being exists, we can see better the contrasts with "religiousness B" (Christianity). Kierkegaard indicates that in "A" the relationship to God is considered to be found within the person:

Aesthetically, the holy resting place of edification is outside the individual, who accordingly seeks the place;

1 Ibid., p. 16. 2 Postscript, p. 509.

in the ethico-religious sphere the individual himself is the place, when he has annihilated himself.... In religiousness B the edifying is a something outside the individual, the individual does not find edification by finding the God-relationship within himself, but relates himself to something outside himself to find edification.¹

In Christianity, God is considered to be discovered outside the person, to be localized in an individual (Jesus Christ), and to be known because of God's revelation that God is in Christ. (More about these will be said later.)

As with the transition from the aesthetic sphere (which had as its goal enjoyment) to the ethical (its goal being the life of principle, consistency), so there is a psychological propulsion of the individual into the religious spheres and from one to another. Because of despair, the aesthetic individual found that way of life insufficient, and was led to the ethical way of life. But the ethical way of life (taking the ethical now as a seeking for self-consistency) has been said to give rise to the consciousness of guilt (the breach of consistency, or betrayal of the self). The person who is burdened with a consciousness of guilt is then led to postulate God as a support for his life, i.e. to enable him to live in spite of his inconsistency and self betrayal. But he is seeking God by means of his own thoughts and his own inward devotion. Within this field ("religiousness A") the discovery is made that there is a barrier between him and God, namely that he is in a state that can be called "sin". But Christianity puts forward a means of removing sin through forgiveness. The consciousness of sin - qualitatively different from the consciousness of guilt - propels the religious individual to the

1 Ibid., p. 498. Cf. p. 509.

point where he is ready to accept Christianity - even though it is paradoxical, an absurdity to the understanding, and also an offense to one's pride - in order to get through to God and thus to save the integrity (or integration) of oneself. Such, I believe, is the course which Kierkegaard believed to be that which might lead an individual to become a Christian. I shall expand this description (as it applies to the religious spheres) in what follows. We may note here again however, that the course is psychologically oriented, and so subjective, and not based on the relationship of a cognitive individual to objective knowledge.

VII THE RELIGIOUS SPHERES OF EXISTENCE (CONTINUED):

"RELIGIOUSNESS A"

In the fifth chapter I described Kierkegaard's concept of the ethical interpretation of existence (or sphere) as typified by a person's seeking for the consistent integrity of himself. In his review of his previous works he describes the ethicist in Either/Or as seeking to consolidate himself and to gain a history. I also indicated briefly in that chapter how we have to look to the personal use of time for an explanation of what Kierkegaard sees as the origin of guilt consciousness. The ethical sphere involves setting personal goals. The failure to use time for the purposes for which one has set oneself produces guilt¹ (for the aesthetic individual guilt is said to be comparative, i.e. that one person compares himself with others and decides that he is relatively speaking innocent²). Now we must realize that Kierkegaard considers the consistent history of an individual as being just that, i.e. of involving all aspects of his life in one whole, and, of course, all his personal time in the one whole. Therefore the removal of guilt cannot be accomplished by the individual himself in time, either now or anywhere else, for it is by time that he becomes guilty (by being an exister in existence)³; he cannot retract himself into his own past and live his life over again. If he is not to take the course of diverting himself (i.e. of abandoning his sense of responsibility and plunging into an aesthetic way of

1 Postscript, pp. 468-470; see above, 100-102. 2 Cf.
Postscript, pp. 471, 473. 3 Ibid., p. 470.

life) he must find something outside himself as a support for his life and his time. Kierkegaard states that the individual reaches for support in God. God is postulated in a desperate bid of the individual to find support for his existence. (We may contrast Sartre here: in his existentialism, man is to live with the painful knowledge that there is no God to support him; he is thrown into existence with nothing but himself to rely on.) I believe that the following passage, though it is found in a place where the initial postulate has already been introduced and the individual is considering how to relate himself to God, well expresses the "leap" by which an individual is led from the ethical interpretation to the religious:

God certainly becomes a postulate, but not in the otiose manner in which this word is commonly understood. It becomes clear rather that the only way in which an existing individual comes into relation with God, is when the dialectical contradiction brings his passion to the point of despair, and helps him to embrace God with the "category of despair" (faith). Then the postulate is so far from being arbitrary that it is precisely a life-necessity. It is then not so much that God is a postulate, as that the existing individual's postulation of God is a necessity.¹

1 Ibid., p. 179, note. Despair in this passage seems to have a different position from that previously indicated. In his earlier works - as also in the review of them in the Postscript - Kierkegaard assigned despair to the end of the aesthetic sphere as the situation wherein the aesthetic individual was led to change his outlook on life to an ethical one. In this passage it seems that despair might also be considered to belong to the ethical sphere, prior to the religious. In my discussion of the aesthetic sphere I criticized Kierkegaard's location of despair, since I believe it is more a feature of an ethical outlook on life than of that which avoids commitment (See above, pp. 77-84.). Perhaps the above passage supports my view. Or perhaps - another thought has come to me - we may have a case of mis-translation, and faith is not the category of despair but of desperation. Kierkegaard elsewhere says of Christianity, "Christianity...is a desperate way out for everyone who really accepts it." (Postscript, p. 96.)

Kierkegaard everywhere connects God with the infinite both in power and in time, and thus also with eternity. The postulating of God could thus be said to involve the idea of an eternal happiness as one of its corollaries. I believe, however, that it is possible to approach the postulating of an eternal happiness, or immortality, from another point of view. If one views one's life as a whole and one's personality as integral, then immortality is naturally suggested to one as a way in which his personal history may be continued after this life. Such is the belief of Socrates in the Phaedo; this belief appealed to Kierkegaard as the example of "religiousness A" in paganism, and Socrates' decision to act as "if there is an immortality" is treated by Kierkegaard as an analogue of faith¹. Thus, it seems to me, we have two slightly different paths leading to the concept of immortality or an eternal happiness as the goal sought by the individual who is religious.

Kierkegaard points out, however, that postulating either immortality or God - without postulating a forgiveness of sins - does not do away with the problem of the guilt consciousness. Immortality itself merely intensifies the problem. On the one hand, the eternal happiness is sought as an extension of one's personal, integral, principled life; and the "happiness" is supposed to include a removal of guilt. Because of guilt a person seeks an eternal happiness. So guilt is said to be a decisive expression of an individual's relation to an eternal happiness²;

1 Ibid., p. 184. 2 Ibid., p. 470.

this I take to mean that for a person indifferent to principle, thus indifferent to guilt, the interests of this life would be sufficient and he would not seek an eternal happiness. The aesthetic individual is not concerned about a continuous existence as a self, but only for the moments of enjoyment¹, and the individual devoted to the abstract intellectual is not interested in his existence². The person seeking to live his life on the basis of principle knows the consciousness of guilt and seeks continuity. But once a person seeks an eternal happiness, guilt follows him there as well, for eternity (considered concretely, not sub specie aeternitatis) is the extension of time, and if time made him conscious of guilt through his misuse of time, there is the possibility of the misuse of eternity before him! Kierkegaard considers the eternal recollection of guilt the greatest possible punishment!³ The eternal consciousness of guilt is total guilt, i.e. guilt as a determinative of his total existence.⁴

Postulating God, by itself, likewise does not do away with the guilt consciousness unless God is conceived to be merciful and to remove guilt. In fact, Kierkegaard in several places indicates that the postulating of God may increase the guilt consciousness. In Either/Or, volume II, he had included a "sermon" with the theme "that over against God we are always in the wrong".

In the Postscript (in his review of his previous works) he says of this, that it "constitutes no determination of sin as a

1 Ibid., p. 473. 2 Ibid., p. 470. 3 Ibid., p. 489.
4 Ibid., pp. 473-477.

fundamental condition, but is merely the discrepancy of the finite and the infinite brought to rest in an enthusiastic reconciliation in the infinite", but he also indicates that this attempted reconciliation is not possible¹. Later in the Postscript, when distinguishing between the two types of religiousness, he seems to consider God as an object for man's religious devotion and not as a being who acts to reveal himself to man. The revealing of God to man then is spoken of as typical of Christianity. However, the conception of an eternal happiness as something hoped for is typical of "religiousness A", the "immanent religiousness".

The fact that a person is capable of having a consciousness of guilt is not taken as entirely negative. As I have mentioned above, it is considered to show that a person has related himself (in his thinking, for his life) to an eternal happiness. It is also said to be an expression of freedom as this is found in the religious sphere². Here again the recognition is stated to be indirect: my consciousness of guilt (even though the source of my guilt was only one occasion of becoming guilty) is argued to be an indication that I have the freedom to become guilty, for if I had no freedom at all I should have no guilt.

It should be remarked here that Kierkegaard does not keep the distinctions between the ethical and the two religious spheres clear. We may be helped to understand this if we remember his explanation that they are interpretations of existence by persons (as interpretations they also carry a set of attitudes and values

1 Ibid., pp. 239-240. 2 Ibid., p. 475.

with them). In the Postscript he at times speaks of the "ethico-religious". There is also an application of categories to different spheres. We see with regard to guilt consciousness that it involves both the ethical and the first type of religiousness. We shall see later that sin involves both the ethical and Christianity. Also, "the absurd" was introduced with Fear and Trembling as applying to the religious sphere generally, and in the Postscript is applied in particular to Christianity. There are probably other similar cases.

Kierkegaard's conception of guilt-consciousness sometimes seems to involve transgression as a cause and sometimes not. His consideration of total guilt, i.e. that in connection with the postulating of an eternal happiness one guilt is enough to make us essentially guilty, seems to depreciate the measurement of guilt by transgressions. To be guilty at one time, innocent at another, he says is childish; if we are once guilty we are guilty always, for all eternity¹. However, the statement that guilt consciousness is an indication of freedom would indicate that the exercise of freedom presumably involved a transgression. Perhaps we may conclude that the consciousness of guilt is considered to be a proof that at some time we have transgressed a moral principle, even though the time of the transgression be unknown or indefinite. However, I have already shown (in the chapter on the ethical sphere) how the setting of an ideal for oneself is all that we can say self-determination does, and that

1 Ibid., pp. 473, 475.

Kierkegaard cannot succeed in showing the connection of this ideal with a universal ethic. However, the postulating of an eternal happiness is consistent with even this. But if guilt is self-derived (by our failure to live up to our own ideal) it need not indicate a transgression of anything except our own principle. In that case we are objectively not any better off than Kierkegaard said was true of Kant's "autonomy" (that it was like the thwacks Sancho Panza applied to his own bottom). In that case also our guilt may be only psychological: real in our experience, related to a subjective standard, but not really related to an outward standard. In such a case we have to consider the attempts of the psychoanalysts to remove guilt consciousness, by saying that something is not wrong, as having some semblance of rationality. However, I do not see that this method would succeed in removing the deep seated guilt consciousness which Kierkegaard speaks of as involved in the effort to live a consistent integral life. However, it might succeed in pushing this into the background¹.

The postulating of God as the support for one's life leads to two other features which Kierkegaard considers typical expressions of the first type of religious interpretation of existence. These are 1) the attempt to maintain an absolute relationship to the Absolute and relative relationships to relative ends, and 2) suffering. These two are considered by him before guilt consciousness, though when he gets to guilt consciousness he indicates that it is more basic.

1 Cf. Postscript, p. 471.

It seems to me that the postulating of a God as the support for one's life should involve the idea that this God has some claim upon one's life. But Kierkegaard does not deal with the matter this way. In connection with the ethical sphere he speaks of an infinite resignation of oneself to God, but later speaks of resignation as part of the sphere of religiousness A. In the earlier Either/Or he had suggested that a person who first chose himself for all he was (including his cultural inheritance) might also repent himself out of this existence (we might compare the Old Testament stories of the confessions of Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel who confessed their people's sins as their own), but in the Postscript he says that this notion is a bit childish. In his description of the absolute devotion to an absolute telos (goal), and the consequent suffering, he rather seems to approach the notion of an eternal happiness through what I have described earlier as an anthropological approach, namely, that we investigate an eternal happiness (immortality) because there are people who believe in it.

Kierkegaard considered Socrates to be the paradigm of religiousness A, since Socrates indicated (especially in the Phaedo) that his moral decisions were related to his belief that there were gods and after this life he would go to some of these gods. Such a concern as Socrates showed for asserting himself as immortal is described in the latter part of the Postscript as an "existential pathos", where "pathos" apparently means "earnest concern" or "interest on behalf of oneself". We may compare the concern of an ethically oriented person that he live a consistent life and have a personal history. (We may also wish

to remember Kierkegaard's later description, in The Sickness unto Death, of man as an active relationship of soul and body, constituted by God; or the description of "existence" in the early parts of the Postscript as the striving of a committed person, to fulfill himself in time, whose ultimate range of time would be his immortality.) Unfortunately, Kierkegaard also seems to have believed that Socrates' belief in preexistence of the soul, the divinity of his Forms (eternal ideas, universals), and the soul's contemplation of these between existences, was in some way a necessary part of a religion devoted to seeking immortality. Therefore we find him speaking as if the Hegelian idea of the eternal as around one were in some way the same as what he had already described to be the essential of the Christian idea of eternity, viz. the future life. For Kierkegaard religiousness A is an immanent religiousness: its basic conceptions can be discovered by human thought and will, and its conception of God never gets beyond the idea of an Absolute or supreme being, i.e. a God whose nature can be grasped and stated conceptually. This also supposes that a man can discover God by rational activity or at least that man tries to do so. He also suggests that it includes the attempt - suggested in Plato's dialogues - of thinking oneself out of existence into the eternal. Kierkegaard opposed this attempt when he felt he discovered it in the Hegelian philosophy, but in discussing the religious spheres he says that it does not finally become impossible until man is discovered to exist in sin,¹ i.e. to be separated from God. Though this

1 Ibid., pp. 185-187.

description of the immanent religiousness seems strange, it is indicated in the following passages, among others,

An eternal happiness inheres precisely in the recessive self-feeling of the subject, acquired through his utmost exertion.¹

There can be no stronger expression for inwardness than when the retreat out of existence into the eternal by way of recollection is impossible...²

These passages, and the notion that they express, seems to bring religiousness A very close to absolute idealism.

Kierkegaard describes the "initial expression" of the existential pathos of religiousness A as the seeking for an eternal happiness (or immortality) as the absolute good³ for an individual. The term absolute telos is used in this same place⁴ to describe that which is the goal for an individual whose life is religious. It is called the absolute telos because it is conceived to transform an individual's existence absolutely⁵. Therefore "absolute telos" refers to immortality or an eternal happiness as goal and also as highest value. It is an absolute telos for an individual if his life is oriented towards it. It is also stated to be a personal concern for personal immortality, not an intellectual or contemplative concern about immortality in the abstract. The self concern of the ethical sphere is considered to be a necessary presupposition for the religious concern for one's immortality: "As for the religious, it is an essential requirement that it should have passed through the ethical"⁶. The comparison with the deep self-concern of the ethically oriented

1 Ibid., pp. 53-54. 2 Ibid., p. 188. 3 Ibid., p. 347.
4 Idem. 5 Ibid., p. 347. 6 Ibid., p. 347.

person is shown in the following passages as well: "...an infinite decision, such as that on which an eternal happiness is based"¹, and, "...one who, driven by the infinite passion of his need of God, feels an infinite concern for his own relationship to God in truth."² I believe we can legitimately compare Paul Tillich's notion of faith as "ultimate concern". Again, this is the ethical subjectivity extended to include one's whole life, and to go beyond it.

Kierkegaard holds that if there is an absolute telos one will have an absolute relationship to it, and a relative relation to all other ends which will therefore be only relative ends³. To hold a hope of an eternal happiness as an absolute telos will mean that "all finite satisfactions are volitionally relegated to the status of what may have to be renounced in favor of an eternal happiness"⁴. This attitude Kierkegaard contrasts with the aesthetic attitude concerning religion or immortality, which sees religion as an additional good among the various goals or values of life. In his devotional writings he followed out this treatment of an eternal happiness as the highest good: in commenting upon the story of Mary and Martha, where Mary sat at Jesus' feet while Martha was busy serving, he argues that religious devotion is the one thing needful, not another needful thing; in several meditations upon the text James 1:7 and related verses he states that "purity of heart is to will one thing". The relative ends may be renounced in favor of the absolute. On the other hand, they may be only potentially removed, so that

1 Ibid., p. 37. 2 Ibid., p. 179. 3 Ibid., p. 365.
4 Ibid., p. 350.

though they are lived in, they are not lived for; one holds an attitude of thanksgiving to God for them, even while one is willing to give them up at any time¹. The movement of resignation of finite ends in favor of the absolute end is described as an "inspection" of one's religious attitudes, that is, a criterion by which one may judge whether one is really absolutely concerned about one's eternal happiness. The idea of inspection is apparently derived from Socrates' attitude towards his "daemon"; cf. the Philosophical Fragments, p. 6. We see then that renunciation or resignation becomes a key category for the religious sphere. (The infinite resignation of oneself which was at the end of the ethical sphere is here continued, but with a different object. The resignation of one's whole self to another now is the resignation of one's finite ends to an absolute end.)

If we recall the earlier description of subjective truth as commitment, we see that the decision to relate oneself to an eternal happiness as an absolute telos is such a commitment, and the eternal happiness (immortality) is the goal for which the commitment is made. But whereas in other examples of this type the attainment of the goal is possible in this life, with an eternal happiness this is not so. The goal cannot be proved to be a fact within the time when a commitment is carried on. As has been remarked earlier in this chapter, Kierkegaard admits that one cannot prove that there is such an objective state corresponding to that which is sought. Here is a case where the

1 Ibid., p. 363.

inward decision is much greater than that in the commitment to ethical attainments (e.g. the creating of one's character), and according to the theory of subjective truth as commitment, the "truth" of the individual's devotion must be so much greater in order to maintain such a relationship. The reciprocity of uncertainty with commitment is indicated in the following passages:

In the life of time the expectation of an eternal happiness is the highest reward, because an eternal happiness is the highest telos.¹

Immortality is the most passionate interest of subjectivity; precisely in the interest lies the proof.²

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.... But to will absolutely is to will the infinite, and to will an eternal happiness is to will absolutely, because this is an end which can be willed every moment. And this is the reason it is so abstract, and aesthetically the most poverty-stricken of all conceptions... And therefore the resolved individual does not even wish to know anything more about this telos than that it exists, for as soon as he acquires some knowledge about it, he already begins to be retarded in his striving.³

Though the subjective state here is that which Kierkegaard described as subjective truth, the goal to which it is directed is definitely of the nature of wish-fulfillment, except that it has become somewhat philosophically described. An eternal happiness cannot be proved to occur; the most that can be done is to describe the subjective state that one should have in orienting his life towards it.

Kierkegaard describes further his conception of how the resignation or renunciation of finite ends is to be carried out. Religious devotion he held to be inwardness in the individual,

1 Ibid., p. 360. 2 Ibid., p. 155. 3 Ibid., p. 353.

He also maintained that outward behaviour of a professedly religious person is not an accurate indication of the person's devotion - unless it is a negative indication, i.e. a person making a great deal of noise about his religious profession probably has little or nothing besides the outward display, just as the one who boasts of being in love is not as deeply attached as the one who is quiet in his devotion. The outward appearance of the individual who lives for finite ends (aesthetic, but living in "finite common sense"¹) and the one who lives for an absolute devotion while using finite ends (he has devoted them to service of the Absolute) may be the same. Therefore inward renunciation of finite ends must be constantly reasserted as a check on the quality of one's concern. The outward renunciation of the finite pursuits may not always be necessary, nor capable of being carried out even if attempted. Kierkegaard refers to the monastic movement as an attempt to make the inward the outward. He says that monasticism attempted the outward renunciation of a number of finite pursuits as an expression of the religious. Kierkegaard argues that this renunciation became a misunderstanding of the religious: the outward renunciation became an end in itself, and thus another finite end; and its pursuit became a diversion from the inward renunciation of all finite ends. But, he maintains, the modern age is no better. It does not renounce anything nor does it even have the concern to renounce anything; its spirit is worldliness, i.e. it lives its life in concerns of the world around, while it pretends to be Christian. The Middle Ages at

1 Ibid., p. 473, note.

least showed the right concern, though mistaken in the means in which the sought-for renunciation was to be brought about.

Kierkegaard argues that the correct place for the movement of renunciation must continue to be the inward and the renunciation must continually be reviewed. As inward, it is more difficult than if it could be satisfied through some simple outward acts.

The sphere of religiousness A is also referred to as the religion of hidden inwardness. Because of its hidden inward character it is subject to misunderstandings both from outside and within its sphere. As Kierkegaard describes them, these misunderstandings seem to focus on the aspect of infinite concern. The concern shown in religiousness A has resemblances to the concern for the "reality" of the self in the ethical interpretation of existence. At the same time it differs from the ethical concern. The resemblance is a source of misunderstanding. The difference causes the religious sphere to have a superficial resemblance with the aesthetic, and this is another source of misunderstanding. The following paragraphs will explain these further.

The concern of religiousness A is for a person's own eternal happiness through an absolute relationship to the Absolute. It is personal concern. In this respect it resembles the ethical concern for one's own character. However, Kierkegaard believed that in the ethical sphere one sought the universal human. In that respect the attainment of an ethical character would be noticeable and understandable to others who also were seeking an ethical character, even though the achievement of this ethical reality must be by the individual himself. The religious man is

also to be ethical, and is such is duty bound to make his outward acts conform with his inward beliefs (the concept of reduplication). However, since the Absolute is conceived as known inwardly, the person's own absolute relationship to the Absolute (though like the ethical in the locale of concern) is not like the ethical in the object of concern, and is not directly understandable even to another religious person (we are still dealing with religiousness A). In some instances the absolute devotion to an absolute telos - since it is absolute - may lead him to regard the values of the ethical sphere as relative.

Several examples of this transcendence of the ethical sphere by the religious are cited by Kierkegaard in other works. In Fear and Trembling (1843) he considered Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son Isaac. In the account in Genesis God is represented as testing Abraham's devotion by commanding him to offer in sacrifice his beloved son, the gift of God's promise. Abraham obeyed, but in his answer to Isaac concerning the lamb for the burnt offering he indicated, says Kierkegaard, his belief in the "absurd", that God himself would provide a lamb (According to the Letter to the Hebrews, Abraham believed that God could restore Isaac to him from the dead.). (The "absurd" is later applied by Kierkegaard to religiousness B", Christianity.) Ethically considered, Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was monstrous. Yet the fact that Abraham, otherwise an ethical man, was willing to make such a sacrifice of the son whom he loved shows the position of the religious sphere as higher than the ethical. Kierkegaard contrasts Abraham with the tragic hero of Greek legend, who sacrificed a son or daughter for the advantage

of the state (when they believed they were under a curse by the gods), and so for the universal (by Kierkegaard's previous definition, the ethical standard). Abraham sacrificed his son for a personal, individual value, his own relationship to the Absolute. A second example cited by Kierkegaard is Jesus' saying that those who come after him must "hate" father and mother, etc. This was spoken, not to unethical men who would find it easy to hate their parents, but to men who were ethical and who would understand the saying as a comparison of values demonstrating the supremacy of the religious (in this case, their relationship to Jesus). But considered by someone other than the person involved in the decision or possible renunciation such action would appear less than ethical, though the person involved would consider his action higher than the ethical. These distinctions of values in the different interpretations of existence is one of the grounds for speaking of a "qualitative dialectic", in which the highest in one sphere is inadmissible in a higher¹. (It also means that what makes sense in one context is foolish, or even immoral, in another). Thus the seeking of enjoyment, the goal of the aesthetic sphere, is transcended by duty in the ethical sphere, the seeking to live out principles; now again, the ethical constitutes the temptation for a person in the first religious sphere; and the values of the sphere of religiousness A will have to be transcended in Christianity. A person who is in a lower sphere will not understand a person in a higher, because he does not have the experience himself. In the previous instances, the

1 Ibid., p. 347.

religious person is not understood by the ethical man. (We may, however, bring an ad hominem argument against Kierkegaard. His pseudonym who writes the Postscript, Johannes Climacus, is not supposed to be a Christian, but yet is able to describe Christianity as a challenge to become a Christian.)

The foregoing has described a possible misunderstanding of religiousness A from the point of view of the ethical. An observer might consider the religious individual to be aesthetic, because that which determines his life might appear to be utterly selfish (his absolute relationship to his Absolute). Kierkegaard denies that the religious devotion is illusory in essence. But he does believe that a person's own religious devotion may seep away until it no longer exists and he is indeed living his life in the aesthetic sphere. This would happen if the individual concerned ceased to be honest with himself. The religious interpretation of existence does not have an outward criterion of whether a man is religious or not. This fact implies that the inward criterion of the resignation of all finite ends must be maintained constantly. Such resignation would include also the resignation of "religious" advantages of an outward nature (cf. Kierkegaard's later book, Purity of Heart). Otherwise, an individual might make the appearance of religiosity the means through which he seeks enjoyment as the goal of his existence. Where the inward "inspection" is not maintained and where the "religious" becomes merely a matter of rote or of imitation of others, then the religious has in fact deteriorated into the aesthetic attitude. If that happens, Kierkegaard says, a person who observes the situation has every right to portray the professedly religious person as comical, because there is a

contradiction between his professed goal (an eternal happiness and nothing else) and the finite goals which he demonstrates to be his actual goals.

The concern for an eternal happiness as the highest good is described in the Postscript as the "initial expression" of the religious attitude within religiousness A. This is followed by a description of suffering as the "essential expression" and of guilt as the "decisive expression". Suffering and guilt are not considered as consequences in time, i.e. that the religious interpretation of existence leaves behind a concern for immortality in order to proceed to a knowledge of suffering, etc., but rather as factors discovered to be involved in a religious devotion as one goes deeper into it. (Thus I have already considered guilt, since it is necessarily involved for the transition from the ethical to the religious interpretation of existence.) One might consider them as chronological discoveries for the person who is religious by training and goes about the investigation of the basics of the religious attitude. Since guilt has already been considered, let us turn our attention to what Kierkegaard has to say about religious suffering.

It seems to me that the experience of suffering as a religious phenomenon results from the imbalance between desired end and power to attain it (we may compare despair and guilt arising in the aesthetic and ethical spheres respectively). The resignation of finite ends for the sake of an absolute relationship to an eternal happiness as absolute telos would involve suffering either in the process of renunciation (loss of finite ends) or in the inability to make a total renunciation. Religious suffering will

differ from misfortune (inability to gain the means of enjoyment) in the aesthetic sphere¹ and also from physical suffering afflicting the body². The renunciation of finite ends is a continued struggle within existence, not to be accomplished once and for all by some heroic act, but to be carried on throughout one's personal time, conscious at the same time of death's possible nearness and remoteness³, and with one's energy in renunciation focussed upon the present moment. (Kierkegaard casts scorn at the "enlightened" individual, who feels that his conversion once and for all gives him security in his God-relationship, so that there is nothing more for him to do in his religious existence - except treat the rest of the world in and with tracts. Kierkegaard considers such a person's actions and confidence to prove that he does not have a God-relationship⁴.) The paradox of one's personal time, that it may be long, but that still it is possible that the next moment is one's last, is one source of suffering in relationship to renunciation of finite ends. Another source is that it is necessary for a religious individual to live in these finite, relative concerns, while being willing to abrogate them. (He cannot live in an eternal happiness while in existence, but only for it.) The relative ends, being a part of existence, tempt towards a merely aesthetic way of life, i.e. to their enjoyment as ends. This conflict in relationship to the concerns of life brings suffering to the religiously defined individual. The strenuousness of the devotion to the absolute telos is said by Kierkegaard to produce the temptation of Anfechtung, of being

1 Ibid., p. 388. 2 Ibid., pp. 404-405. 3 Ibid.,
p. 403. 4 Ibid., p. 406.

repelled by the highest good (in contrast to the usual temptation of being attracted to something lower), which temptation comes only to one who is deeply religious¹.

There is a further contradiction within the religious life which produces suffering. It too is involved in the conflict between the absolute relationship to the Absolute and the need to live in the relative, but from a different point of view. The religious person will magnify God by considering God as the source of his existence. But, if God is the source of his existence and the power which upholds his existence, then he can do nothing by his own power, for all his power will come ultimately from God. However, he will have the feeling of having power, due to his life in the world (In the ethical sphere too, according to Kierkegaard, a person demonstrates his freedom by asserting it and living it.). To maintain the concept of doing nothing by one's own power and to live with this concept while at the same time being able to initiate and carry out acts, apparently in one's own power, requires the highest exertion. Merely to think of one's dependence on God on Sunday and live otherwise during the rest of the week is foolish; if dependence upon God is true, it should be lived in continually. After a lengthy discussion, Kierkegaard seems to resolve part of the conflict by having the religious individual give thanks in a spirit of humility, acknowledging God's power and giving thanks for it while enjoying both one's work and one's enjoyments and diversions. (Compare the idea of living in relative ends but not living for them, Postscript p. 363.) But this

1 Ibid., pp. 410-411.

attitude, Kierkegaard states, is strenuous, since it involves on the one hand a "dying away" from the immediacy of one's feelings of power in finite relationships (with the purpose of living in the absolute relationship), while at the same time living one's life amongst these finite relationships and giving thanks to God for this possibility. (Compare Kierkegaard's judgment of the monastic movement as a misunderstanding of the above conflict and its resolution.) The religious individual will live his life responsibly and ethically, at the same time realizing that his power and exertion is, religiously viewed, an illusion. Compared with the relationships to God, the seriousness of one's exertions and of one's ethical relationships are as a jest. Yet they are not less serious for one's existence because of this; much depends upon them, and they may be ended any time by death. According to Kierkegaard, the truly religious individual (and here the attitude in religiousness A also carries over into Christianity) will go about life in the same way as other people - working, enjoying diversions, ethically earnest - while he holds his inward relationship with God as the determinant in his life, and while he believes that the whole field of everyday life may end at any time.

I have already referred to guilt as the "decisive expression" for a relationship to an eternal happiness (the emphasis is upon the relating by the person; so guilt is the indication that one is concerned about an eternal happiness). In this place I want to add merely some comments on the fact it is discussed by Kierkegaard after the absolute relationship to the Absolute and after suffering. It seems to me that it is considered in third place in reference to one who is already religiously orientated. Kierkegaard is saying

that such a person needs to experience that suffering and guilt are parts of the religious interpretation of existence, in order, I believe, that he may not take this interpretation too lightly. The fact that guilt is decisive for the whole sphere (interpretation) of existence is emphasized by Kierkegaard in his discussion. He also says that the discussion, eternal happiness - suffering - guilt, goes backward, while plunging deeper into existence¹. Guilt arose from the ethical interpretation of existence. In the sphere of religiousness B (Christianity) guilt is further modified as sin by being placed over against God revealed as a person.

By the time of the Postscript, Kierkegaard came to place humor as a boundary zone between the ethical and the religious, or, sometimes, between religiousness A and Christianity. In his discussion of the subject, he considered that the religiously determined man should have humor, because from the non-religious point of view many considerations of the religious interpretation of existence appear contradictory. They are able to be borne by a religious man because he can view them from a superior standpoint. In an earlier chapter I have already discussed some of Kierkegaard's opinions about the place of both irony and humor. At this point, however, I wish to call attention to a bit of irony involved in religiousness A, and which Kierkegaard himself points out.

The three features of the existential pathos (concern) of the sphere of religiousness A, namely, resignation, suffering, and guilt, are still within the person's own "immanence"², his concern

1 Ibid., pp. 468-469. 2 Ibid., p. 474, and others.

for himself and the notions about God that he produces in his own thoughts. Now if it is true that immortality actually occurs, and each person should turn out to be immortal regardless of what attitude he has had, then the person who is unconcerned - the aesthetic person - will come out just as far ahead at the end as one who is totally concerned - a person who is religious in his hidden inwardness, as Kierkegaard describes Socrates to have been¹. Regarded from the viewpoint of religiousness A, each will be immortal, and Socrates would not be further ahead than any other man; all his sufferings and concern would appear comic (In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates distinguishes between the afterlife of the philosopher - like himself - going to live with the gods, and others who are reincarnated in the kind of existence that they had most desired.). If the object of concern, the expectation of an eternal happiness, is real, then the concern spent on it, the absolute relationship of oneself to it as an absolute telos, is of no value for a future life, for the unconcerned man will also be immortal. All the concern placed upon one's existence as determined by an eternal happiness will have value only for existence. The concern, the suffering, and the sense of guilt will profoundly affect existence but they will not guarantee the reality of the object for which this way of life is undertaken and to which it is directed. Religiousness A turns out in the end to be an "as if" philosophy, valuable for those who undertake it, but carrying no further guarantee of the reality postulated. It is in the psychological sense a "projection", whereby I create an

1 Ibid., pp. 493, 515.

object and thereupon create a relationship of myself to this object.

The foregoing indicates the basic inadequacy of the type of religious attitude characterized as the "immanent" religiousness. At the beginning of this chapter I stated that Kierkegaard was considering religious attitudes as further examples of "subjective truth", which involved the building of one's consistent character through commitment to a goal. The goal of religiousness A, an eternal happiness, cannot be demonstrated, and if it is real, the devotion of religiousness A to it makes no difference for the attainment of that goal! What may be attained through this devotion - and so shown to be real when it has been created - is a type of character, or, we may say, ethical values; these precise values will likely not be attained by one who does not devote his life to the attainment of an eternal happiness, for this goal is stated to transform a man's life absolutely. Religiousness A is then a further extension of the ethical sphere of existence through relation of the self to a goal beyond this life. Religiousness B may provide something better.

We might criticize Kierkegaard's definitions of religiousness A as artificial on the grounds that such an abstract and singular devotion to the expectation of an eternal happiness does not exist by itself. Reading in the Platonic dialogues gives me the impression that Kierkegaard has idealized and oversimplified Socrates' devotion to the idea of immortality, Important as this indeed was for Socrates, it appears mixed with belief in several gods, and Socrates' hope for an eternal happiness is mixed with an intellectualistic bias that at times seems plainly snobbish (Kierkegaard attributes the intellectualistic elements to Plato,

the ethical to Socrates; to my notion, the Phaedo refutes this separation.). We may agree that Socrates' conception of immortality was a great advance upon the previous notions of paganism, but it is not "religiousness A". Kierkegaard admits this; but he considers that religiousness A could have occurred in paganism¹. If we consider the descriptions of religiousness A which do not derive from Socrates, these come from that tradition of theology and philosophy which Kierkegaard accused of being a betrayal of Christianity through the attempt to consider God as an object. Kierkegaard attempts to avoid describing God as an object by making an eternal happiness the key term in his description of the religious devotion within immanence.

One of his reasons for putting so much effort into a description of this type of religious devotion was to refute the Hegelian judgment that "faith" belonged together with "feeling" in a first "immediacy". By his own scheme of the aesthetic sphere as the first immediacy and religiousness A as a sphere of existence twice removed from this, Kierkegaard believed that he was demonstrating the importance of the religious view of life. He was at the same time trying to replace Hegel's philosophy, Hegel's dialectic, and Hegel's categories, with his own. This effort perhaps explains his pains to define religiousness A. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard does not seem to be able to avoid being very intellectual and systematic in his approach while attempting to be only existential. Religiousness A does not appear so much to be a distinct sphere of existence as an intellectual description of certain aspects of non-Christian religiousness. He himself

1 Ibid., p. 496.

admits that religiousness A is speculative, but distinguishes it from speculative philosophy¹.

1 Ibid., p. 505.

VIII THE RELIGIOUS SPHERES OF EXISTENCE (Continued):
CHRISTIANITY

In the previous chapter I outlined and criticised Kierkegaard's description of a type of religious feeling which he calls "religiousness A". He describes this as an "immanent" type of religiousness because, he claims, it is possible for a thoughtful person to discover the objects of religious faith (i.e. objects towards which his faith is directed, or goals to the attainment of which he is committed) by his own thought, i.e. within the scope of his own thinking. In religiousness A the degree of commitment in the subjective state of the religious person is stated to be greater than that of the ethical person. The ethical person dealt with principles, supposedly discovered by his own choices, i.e. through his commitment, and the realization of which in his own life was pretty much within his control. The religious person related himself to objects outside of himself: immortality, and God. He was unable to create these or to realize them in his own life; the most he could realize (make actual) in his own life was his own relationship to them. But it is stated that this relationship, which edifies (builds up) his own life is to be found within himself; this, as I understand the argument, is because he can by his thought discover the idea of God and of immortality.

It is stated regarding Christianity, on the other hand, that the object of faith, Jesus Christ, as God-in-time, cannot be discovered by human thought. The existence of the object to which the Christian (the devotee of "religiousness B") relates himself in his subjective commitment is further described by Kierkegaard

as "the absurd" to the human understanding. As I have indicated in chapter VI above, this seems to be the only argument which Kierkegaard feels has any soundness as far as "proving" the object of Christian faith: the actual existence of God in time in the person of a particular historical man is too absurd to the human understanding, it is beyond the power of human thought to conceive, to have been invented or devised by man. Since a story about such an historical, divine-human existence does exist, nevertheless, it is argued that this story could only have arisen by some action of God. Christianity is regarded by Kierkegaard (in common with most who profess to be Christians) as a "revealed" religion, i.e. statements about the object of the faith of the Christian must arise by the action of God. Kierkegaard, as we have seen, offered no proof of God's existence, nor did he think it possible to devise or discover a proof that would be cogent. Furthermore, where Christian theologians since the second century A.D. to the present have believed that there is objectively true evidence for the existence of a historical Jesus Christ who was/is both God and man, Kierkegaard makes common cause with higher critics of his time and since in denying the reliability or cogency of such evidence. Thus in the Postscript he begins with an examination of "the objective problem concerning the truth of Christianity", under which he discusses three varieties of supposed historical evidence, the argument from the scripture, the argument from the existence of the Church (or its creeds), and the argument from the history of Europe, and argues for the insufficiency of all of them. Nevertheless, throughout his later works Kierkegaard was a bit inconsistent in his attitude to the scriptures: he accepted the

scriptures as true sacred history, though without giving any argument to support his position.

Kierkegaard even seems to make a virtue of his dismissal of the traditional attempts to give arguments for the reality of Jesus Christ as God and man, though he himself believes in the reality of such a person who was "God in time". The traditional arguments, he says, are part of an objective way of looking at Christianity, i.e. to consider Christianity as a body of objective truths which one may know or believe as an observer. Of this approach, he claims, the world has had too much: what he will do is concentrate attention on the subjective state of the Christian, and describe Christianity not as a thing which one possesses or a body of objective statements which one believes, but as a way of commitment. Thus, almost the entire argument (for in spite of all Kierkegaard's desires otherwise, it is an argument) for Christianity in the Fragments and the Postscript is concerning the subjective state of the believer, and how the particular type of commitment which Kierkegaard will call Christianity (or "religiousness B") could, and presumably should, arise.

In this pattern of argument, Kierkegaard follows two main lines. That of the Fragments presented an attempted philosophical description of sin as a separation between God and man, and of a needed overcoming of this separation as a redemption. This line of argument is in fact to present man's need as requiring something which Christianity (here treated as a body of ideas, i.e. as something objective - in spite of Kierkegaard's attempts otherwise) offers to satisfy. The line of argument followed in the Postscript is in fact that which I have already outlined, namely, the

progression of the degree of subjective commitment through the "spheres". Near the end of the Postscript the argument previously presented in the Philosophical Fragments is injected into the discussion of intensified commitment as presenting the factor which determines the type of commitment of Christianity as a more particular and further advanced form of religious commitment. My discussion in this chapter tries to show especially the argument found in the Philosophical Fragments (though with relevant passages from the Postscript) and to show how this is blended with that from the progression of the "spheres".

Sin as an obstacle to commitment to Christ, has a place comparable with other obstacles to the progress of subjectivity. The aesthetic interpretation of existence was shipwrecked on despair, which was implicit in it always, but not always discovered; the ethical interpretation discovered guilt; in both, the discovery of the basic obstacle led to a different interpretation of life by the adoption of new values. Guilt became the transitional category from the ethical sphere to religiousness A. It there seemed as if by accepting God as an Absolute to which one might resign oneself that guilt could be overcome and life lived consistently and satisfactorily. But, Kierkegaard says, human experience shows that we do not indeed have association and conversation with an absolute God. We are in the position of believing in a God, of seeking the support for our lives in such a God, but also of finding a barrier between ourselves and God. Such a barrier is what has been called

sin. If we consider God as an object for consideration, or for philosophical thought, then sin is the expression of the fact that we do not have personal knowledge of God. This means that God is different from us; it also means that, from our considering God to be the sum of perfections, we are aware that the locus of the difference is in ourselves, that we are separated from God, heterogeneous to God. Such is the description of sin in one part of the Philosophical Fragments¹. Here, we should note, the concept of sin does not explicitly involve transgression. It is so far only an expression for the fact that we seek an Absolute as the support for our lives but find ourselves unable to make contact with such an Absolute.

The foregoing description of separation as the essence of sin would indicate that Kierkegaard considered that we should naturally be in a state of personal contact and conversation with God. Earlier in the Fragments he made a comparison of a postulated knowledge of God as Truth with the Socratic description of truth being discovered within the individual, who possessed it from a previous state (preexistence of the soul). After much pondering, I cannot help but conclude that Kierkegaard meant to imply that the soul of an existing person has some existence before he comes into the world, and that in this prior state the soul does know God. According to such an idea, it would be natural for a person to continue having such a knowledge of God, unless by some action of his he had caused a separation between himself and God. That Kierkegaard did indeed believe in some sort of

1 Fragments, p. 37.

preexistence for the individual human soul (It need not be identical with that of Socrates' belief in order to show some parallel.) is indicated also by some passages in the Postscript. In the first place, when he considers that sin, as a being in untruth, is a greater assertion of inwardness than that subjectivity is the truth¹ (because it is a greater assertion of existence) he says, in explaining this,

The subject cannot be untruth eternally, or eternally be presupposed as having been untruth; it must have been brought to this condition in time, or here become untruth in time.... There has taken place so essential an alteration in him that he cannot now possibly take himself back into the eternal by way of recollection. To do this is to speculate...what followed Socrates on his way as a rejected possibility, has become an impossibility....

Let us now call the untruth of the individual Sin. Viewed eternally he cannot be sin, nor can he be eternally presupposed as having been in sin. By coming into existence therefore (for the beginning was that subjectivity is untruth), he becomes a sinner. He is not born as a sinner in the sense that he is presupposed as being a sinner before he is born, but he is born in sin and as a sinner. This we might call Original Sin. But if existence has in this manner acquired a power over him, he is prevented from taking himself back into the eternal by way of recollection.²

Another passage which indicates some sort of belief in the soul's preexistence is found much later on in a discussion of the implications of Christianity. The passage is this:

The contradiction is a new expression for the fact that existence is paradoxically accentuated; for if there is any vestige of immanence, an eternal determinant left in the exister - then it is not possible. The exister must have lost continuity with himself, must have become another (not different from himself within himself)...³

The implication of the statement, "the exister must have lost continuity with himself", is that through sin the person is

1 Postscript, pp. 185-186. 2 Ibid., p. 186.
3 Ibid., p. 510.

different from what he originally was. From the fact that he is not in communion with God who constituted him, this means as well that in losing continuity with himself he lost contact with God, and thus needs redemption. This is one of the ideas which the first chapter of the Philosophical Fragments gives us. Comparing the two passages, we see that originally, the person is supposed to have had by nature an eternal determinant which he has now lost. He is not a sinner before he is born, but is born as a sinner.

I am also convinced, from Kierkegaard's description of eternal life as the futurity for the individual, and eternal blessedness, etc., that he did not subscribe to the Socratic-Platonic doctrine of reincarnation. The parallel with the Platonic position is thus broken in at least two respects: reincarnation is not the ground for preexistence of the soul, and recollection into the previous state of existence is impossible because the individual has been transformed by sin. How then, excluding reincarnation, are we to explain Kierkegaard's belief in the existence (originally sinless) of the soul before birth? The explanation is to be found within some varying theological explanations of the origin of the soul. One of these is that called "creationism", a theory that God creates for each person a soul, either as he is born, or else sometime before his birth, and unites this soul with his body before birth. According to this view, the body is produced by generation, the soul not. The implications are that the body is corrupt, sin is situated in the body, and the body corrupts the soul. (A contrasting view, known as "traducianism", holds that both body and soul are produced by natural generation; that sin is inherited; and

that the seat of sin is in the will, a function of the soul of man, which corrupts both soul and body.) It appears that Kierkegaard was a holder of the theory of creationism, which implies a perfect soul coming from God. Since it came directly from God, it would be natural for it to know God and have conversation with him. (It will be noticed that an acceptance of traducianism nullifies several of Kierkegaard's arguments.)

If Kierkegaard held to the theory of creation of each soul directly by God this would help to explain his description of the origin of original sin, as this appears in The Concept of Dread. This book, written concurrently with the Philosophical Fragments and published a few days later (June 17, 1844; the Fragments June 13), was subtitled "A simple psychological deliberation oriented in the direction of the dogmatic problem of original sin". In it Kierkegaard seems to reject original sin as inherited sin and to consider it rather as the leap of each individual into a dreadful state of positing himself as exempt from the ethical, i.e. an assertion of personal freedom in disobedience to the ethical standard. Disobedience, here regarded as begun by each individual introduces the factor of transgression into Kierkegaard's consideration of sin. (As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, in a passage of the Journals from 1850 Kierkegaard considered original sin as inherited.) In Kierkegaard's review of his earlier writings found in the Postscript, sin is considered both as transgression of the ethical and as separation from the truth (where truth is considered as commitment to God and some sort of fellowship with him), with the emphasis upon the separation aspect. The following passages summarize the thought expressed in the review

of The Concept of Dread:

Sin is decisive for an entire existential sphere, the religious taken in the strictest sense.¹

Just as fear and trembling represent the state of mind of an individual while under teleological suspension, so dread represents his state of mind in the desperate emancipation from the task of realizing the ethical. The inwardness of sin, as dread in the existing individual, is the greatest possible and most painful possible distance from the truth, when truth is subjectivity.²

The putting together of the two concepts of transgression and separation in this way is to interpret sin as an attitude rather than as an act or series of acts. In this respect, Kierkegaard is following traditional Lutheran theology which interprets Sin as the condition of man in which he is in rebellion against God and because of which he commits individual acts of disobedience, which are considered as sins (However, traditional Lutheran theology regards original sin not as an individually originated condition, but as inherited.).

The description of sin as a barrier between the God-seeking self and God sets the stage in the Philosophical Fragments for the outlining of a possible act of reconciliation or redemption. This is to be that described by Christianity. But in the Philosophical Fragments the Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption are described without using that name. A theoretical problem is set, whether a learning situation can be supposed in which the person of the Teacher is decisive for the learner's discovery of the Truth. Comparison and contrast is made with the Platonic theory of learning as recollection. Learning was the

1 Postscript, p. 240. 2 Idem.

discovery within the learner of insights which were dormant from his preexistence, and the teacher was only a midwife helping the learner to recall this knowledge, helping him to deliver himself of it and testing it to see whether it was a proper child (cf. Theaetetus). Far-fetched as this sounds in such a form, Kierkegaard believed the maieutic, mid-wife, indirect relationship to be the actual one where propositions were to be learned, though he described it in a somewhat more refined form: the teacher is the occasion for the learner to recognize and grasp the facts or relationships of objective knowledge; once he has grasped them, the teacher is no longer necessary. Even with the ethical sphere of subjective truth he asserted an indirect relationship to be real: each person lives his own life, and one person's ethical reality becomes a possibility for his admirer, which he must translate into reality for himself by putting it into practice or by imitation. Thus in the Fragments (and also the Postscript) Kierkegaard considered that an advance on Socrates, either intellectually or ethically, required a situation in which the learner was in a state of error that prevented him from recovering a Truth which he once had or should have had. Such a state of error he describes as Sin, a separation between the learner, man, and his Teacher, God, caused by the individual man's own fault. Considering the distinctions made between subjective and objective truth earlier in this thesis, it will be observed that when the Fragments speak about Truth in the way described above, Kierkegaard is referring to a supposedly possible state of affairs which can be described in objective terms, and not to subjective commitment. The recovery of an interpersonal

relationship with God, described cryptically in the "experiment" of the Philosophical Fragments as "the Truth", will be redemption or salvation, the cure for the separation from this "Truth" which separation is sin. In the "thought-experiment" of the Fragments "the Truth" is meant to parallel the propositional truths of recollected knowledge considered by Socrates in the Theaetetus. Thus in the Fragments Kierkegaard is talking about the relationship to God as a relationship to an existing object. In the latter part of the Postscript, however, the object to which the Christian relates himself is said to produce a modification of his commitment in such a way that he will attain the highest subjective truth attainable for an existing individual (This point will arise again near the end of this chapter.).

Sin as separation from God - a separation postulated as having been caused by the human soul itself and somehow involving rebellion against God - is considered in the Fragments as the state or condition in which a person is until he has received the "Truth" (as personal relationship with God) from the person of the Teacher (described in the Fragments as God-in-time). Thus the person who has not yet become aware of this "Truth" is in a situation parallel to that of the unawakened person in the description of Socrates' and Plato's theory of knowledge. Before he receives the personal relationship with God the person is described as being in error, not knowing that there is even an interpersonal knowledge of God to be had, not seeking it, not even knowing that he is in error¹. Knowledge of the divine Teacher

1 Fragments, pp. 9-15.

is said to be knowledge of the "Truth". The divine Teacher is said to give this and to give the condition for knowing or apprehending this "Truth", as well as the knowledge that the person was previously in error (Sin), the removal of this Sin (removal of the barrier to the Truth), subsequent to it the knowledge that the learner is now in a new state. All of this may be described as a new birth or new creation. Thus knowledge of Sin according to the "experiment" of the Fragments takes place when a person is no longer in Sin, or at least when Sin is no longer a barrier. This would seem to imply that Sin no longer exists, since it was previously described as error, a barrier to Truth, and now when Truth is had (in the interpersonal relationship with God) the barrier is gone. Does Kierkegaard mean that only a person delivered from Sin knows what Sin is? There are indications in the Postscript that in some way he does, though there are probably more passages which show that he could not have meant it, (see next page) or else did not see the implications of what he had said in the Philosophical Fragments. A passage which would indicate that in the Postscript too he considered Sin to be known only when a person was no longer in Sin is the following, found in his description of the results of coming into the Christian faith:

Sin is the new existence-medium.... Now, to come into being [as a human being, to be born] is to become a sinner. In the totality of guilt-consciousness, existence asserts itself as strongly as it can within immanence; but sin-consciousness is the breach with immanence; by coming into being the individual becomes another, or the instant he must come into being he becomes another, for otherwise the determinant sin is placed within immanence... When the being who is planned on the scale of eternity comes into the world by birth, he becomes a sinner at birth or is born a sinner... This is the consequence of the Deity's presence in time, which prevents

the individual from relating himself backwards to the eternal, since now he comes forwards into being in order to become eternal by relationship to the Deity in time. Hence the individual is unable to acquire Sin-Consciousness by himself, as he can guilt-consciousness...¹

This passage not only states that sin-consciousness depends upon God in time, but goes on to separate sin-consciousness from guilt-consciousness in these words: "in guilt-consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is an alteration of the subject within himself; sin-consciousness, on the other hand, is an alteration of the very subject himself... he has become a sinner."² This seems, in effect, to separate not only knowledge of sin from a person who is not a Christian, but also to separate sin from guilt (or vice versa). It is only after a person becomes a Christian, says the Postscript, that he extends sin-consciousness to the whole race³, i.e. considers that all who have not believed or entered into a personal relationship with God are in Sin (which statement becomes a tautology, that they are separated from God).

The position that only Christians can know what Sin is seems contradicted by other statements that indicate that the consciousness of Sin is that which induces a person to become a Christian. Among these is one that, taken together with the assertion of Christianity as accentuating existence so that a person is a sinner⁴, indicates knowledge of sin before one has believed or become a Christian. "Christianity was...a desperate way out when it first came into the world, and in all ages remains such; because it is a

1 Postscript, pp. 516-517. 2 Ibid., p. 517. 3 Ibid., p. 518.
4 Ibid., p. 192.

desperate way out for everyone who really accepts it."¹ Such a statement would indicate that consciousness of sin produces desperation, and Christianity, as giving a forgiveness of sins, is the desperate way out; though here again we speak of sins as known or understood as transgression, and not sin-consciousness as a separation from God. Either Kierkegaard did not think through completely the implications of his statements (especially with regard to his attempted parallel with Plato's theory of knowledge) or else the translators have not distinguished sufficiently between his usage of Sin as a specific technical term and sin as producing guilt.

It appears to me that the description of man's condition adopted by Kierkegaard, and on which he bases his description of Sin and Sin-consciousness (and, by implication, the reason for God's coming into time as the man Christ-Jesus), is all very artificial. The parallel between Kierkegaard's description of man's state and that of the learner before the arousing of recollection in Plato's theory of knowledge means that rejection of the latter as unreal implies that one must reject the former as unreal as well. Even to limit Kierkegaard's parallel to one of the origin of the soul by an individual creation prior to birth seems to me to involve the Christian doctrine of the soul in a false position. Creationism, as a theory of the origin of the soul, is obviously derived from a Platonic prejudice that the soul of man is divine; applied to the Christian doctrine of sin, it means that the Fall of Adam and Eve was not enough, but that

1 Ibid., p. 96.

God had to continue creating souls so that each could fall individually (or perhaps, that one now and then might not fall). It is easier for me to consider man as having a continuity of inheritance, the soul as produced by generation, and original sin as an inherited bias in which an individual naturally asserts himself as having supreme value, and guilt as the result of the assertion of this bias in action.

There are features, however, of Kierkegaard's description of the situation of man which are not damaged by his parallelism with the Platonic doctrine of recollection. Certainly it is true that human beings do not find themselves in a situation where they have personal knowledge (i.e. acquaintance with) of God. It is also true that many persons have a strong sense of guilt. If "sin" is used as a definition for the fact that persons do not have a personal knowledge of God, it may be as good as any other to describe that situation. It can be so without the assumption of either preexistence of the soul or special creation of the soul, though Kierkegaard does seem to assume the latter and parallel it with the former. Even his statement that the individual has lost continuity with himself¹ is amenable to an interpretation separable from belief in special creation of the individual soul - a statement of this type is found in the same discussion: "In sin-consciousness the individual becomes conscious of his difference from the humane in general..."² However, one of his other statements, to the effect that the presence of the Deity in time makes impossible a backward relationship to the eternal³ seems incompre-

1 Postscript, p. 517.
p. 517, cf. p. 187.

2 Ibid., p. 517.

3 Ibid.,

hensible to me, because it seems based on a parallel with the doctrine of preexistence. Even with the most favorable interpretation, there are many features of Kierkegaard's description of man in sin which seem very artificial, because he has tried to establish this description by a parallel with the Platonic doctrine of learning through recollection.

The most crucial point of any religion which attempts to be more than the projection of wish-fulfillment, or an "as-if" on which transformation of life is based (which religiousness A turned out to be), is the demonstration of the objective reality of God and of human contact with a real God. Kierkegaard was conscious also of this point. But his attempts to supply arguments for the existence of human contact with a real God strike one as weak. He believed that all "proofs" of God's existence begged the question, and he also believed that the attempt to prove the objective reality of the object of Christian faith had failed. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the first part of the Postscript he critically examined three theories which attempted to establish the desired point: the inerrancy of the scriptures, the existence of the Church, the sociological effects of the acceptance of Christianity. He found all of them to be defective and inconclusive. Moreover, he argued, even if each were to be granted a success (e.g. the historical accuracy of the scriptures established beyond the criterion used for other historical records) yet the point to be proved, i.e. that Jesus was the Son of God, is an assertion outside the ordinary range of objective proof, an exception to all comparative procedures of objective proof. We cannot prove that Jesus was the Son of God

because if it is so, it is an unique case, for which we have no prepared standards of objective proof. In the Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard states that the knowledge of Jesus' being the Son of God comes from God, so, the knowledge of the (objective) truth that Jesus is Son of God comes from the person of the teacher, in a situation comparable to but surpassing the onset of new knowledge in the Platonic theory. It was to show that man's condition demands such a revealing of unique knowledge that Kierkegaard went to such pains to set up a situation parallel to that of the Platonic doctrine of recollection.

The effort of the Fragments strikes me as like an algebraic equation: the left side is the description of man's condition, the right side the answer. But such an equation would be defective, because, according to Kierkegaard's own admission, man is not really aware of sin (as distinguished from guilt) until the Teacher reveals it to him. He is like the learner in the Platonic situation, in such a deep error that he does not know this until a teacher (like Socrates) begins to work upon him. But in order for this realization to come to the learner by the divine teacher's work, the right side of the equation, the divine teacher, has to be present simultaneously with the left side, the person's need. So, in fact neither the person's need (as sin) nor the existence of the answer, the divine-human "teacher", have been demonstrated to exist. The existence of the "teacher" is demanded by the need; but the real character of the need is unknown until the "teacher" is present! Had Kierkegaard shown that guilt has a transcendental character, this might have sufficed as providing a demonstration of the need. But, unfortunately for such an argument, he describes

guilt as immanent, aroused by the conflict of a person within himself and his standards of value or of attainment, and sin as something else! The separation of guilt and sin makes seemingly impossible the psychological propulsion of an individual towards Christianity (cf. above, p. 167.). The whole elaborate scheme of the "thought-experiment" of the Fragments proves useless because, by Kierkegaard's definition of Sin, the need for a "Saviour" cannot be felt without the Saviour's presence - but the need was to demonstrate the necessity of the Saviour!

We have seen that Kierkegaard's argument that man's need demands the answer of the salvation described by Christianity is vitiated by the very qualifications which he gives to the critical terms in the argument. In saying that man is really aware of his need only in the presence of the answer, Kierkegaard agrees with traditional Christian doctrine. But traditional Christian doctrine assumed that it had some proofs of the objective reality of the answer, i.e. Christ; and it is these very proofs that Kierkegaard rejected. Yet there are statements in the Postscript which show that Kierkegaard believed that Christianity did have, and must have, a definite existing object towards which its concern and commitment is related. The object is called the dialectic part of Christianity - dialectic, as has been explained in an earlier chapter, because it provides the measure or determinant of a person's life. The limits of both subjective devotion, by itself, and of an objective treatment of Christianity (consideration as a body of objective truth) are indicated by the following sentences:

The Problem presented [of how to become a Christian] was an existence-problem, and as such it is pathetic-dialectic. The part, A, which is the pathetic part [showing concern,

or pathos] has been dealt with: the relationship to an eternal happiness. Now we go on to the dialectic part, B, which is the decisive part for this problem. For the religiousness which has hitherto been dealt with...is not the specifically Christian religiousness. On the other hand, the dialectical part is the decisive part only in so far as it is combined with the pathetic to create new pathos.

Generally one is not contemporaneously aware of both. The religious address is inclined to present the pathetic factor and to annul the dialectic, and therefore, however well meaning it may be, it is sometimes confused tumultuous pathos, composed of all sorts of things.... Learning is inclined to take charge of the dialectical, and with this intent to carry it over into the medium of abstraction, wherewith the problem is again missed, inasmuch as it is an existence-problem and the real dialectical difficulty vanishes when it is explained in the medium of abstraction which takes no account of existence. If the tumultuous religious address is for emotional people who are quick to sweat and quickly sweated out, the speculative view is for pure thinkers, but neither is for people who are acting and by virtue of acting are existers.¹

To return to the problem of "how" determining the "what" of religious belief (see above, pp. 133, 134) we see from this quotation that Kierkegaard did not hold the position that the "how" (form) of religious devotion could bring into existence Jesus Christ, the object of this devotion for Christianity. However, the two are presented as reciprocal in Christianity, in that the peculiarities of the relationship to Jesus Christ affect the form of the Christian's devotion or commitment, while at the same time (Kierkegaard believes) a willingness to commit oneself absolutely must be present in order that we should have Christianity and not a cataloguing of "Christian" doctrines as objective, but indifferent, truth.

As I have mentioned before (chapter VI and the beginning of

1 Postscript, pp. 493-494. The passage is found in the "Intermediate Clause between A and B", after the description of "religiousness A".

this chapter) Kierkegaard did lean on the argument of the impossibility of human invention of the assertions about Jesus Christ found in Christianity as evidence for its objective truth. This argument is closely connected with his description of "the Absurd". The object of Christian faith is Jesus Christ as the singular incarnation of God in time. That God should be in time is considered by Kierkegaard to be the Absurd or the Paradox par excellence ("the absurd", as that which was to be expected in spite of evidence to the contrary because of trust in a higher power determining one's future, was first presented in Fear and Trembling and Repetition). In his use, Kierkegaard considers paradox as that which is beyond the understanding (sometimes also an offense to the understanding). So in the Philosophical Fragments a great deal is said (chapter III, "The Absolute Paradox", pp. 29-38) about reason seeking to discover its farthest limits and there to collide with the Unknown. A similarity between the opposition Reason to Unknown and Man-as-sinner to God is then drawn, with the argument that in both cases that which is absolutely different is sought. (I cannot comprehend the argument.) In the Postscript three paradoxical aspects of the existence of God-in-time and of a religious devotion to such an object are discussed. All of them stress the fact that the Christian religiousness is centred around an historical object - and thus is different from religiousness A, where God is not historical, but is considered as the eternal being present at all times indiscriminately.

In the following paragraphs I shall quote the statements (from the Postscript) of the three paradoxical aspects of Christianity, which Kierkegaard presents together with statements in the sections

which seem to explain the point of each, after which I shall comment on each.

The first paradoxical aspect of Christianity is stated to be this:

The dialectical contradiction which is the breach: to expect an eternal happiness in time through a relationship to something else in time.¹

The problem constantly dealt with here is this: how there can be an historical starting-point... The individual who was not eternal now becomes such, and so does not recollect what he is but becomes what he was not, becomes...something which possesses the dialectic that as soon as it is, it must have been, for this is the dialectic of the eternal. This proposition inaccessible to thought is: that one can become eternal although one was not such.²

In B the fact of existing...(leads to the situation) that only in existing do I become eternal, and consequently the thing of existing gives rise to a determinant which is infinitely higher than existence.³

Here the contrast with religiousness A is emphasized. There, Socrates, concluded that he himself was eternal, and believed this to be shown by recollection. When seeking to become a Christian a person might have no reason for considering himself to be anything else than a temporal creature, and so the promise of eternal life would be the extension of existence beyond what one can grasp in one's understanding of that which is available as knowledge. The contrast is also made that the eternal now is in time (as a person) not as that which can be discovered by thought.

Beyond the fact that the contrast with religiousness A is here pointed out, I do not see anything paradoxical in the fact that a Christian is led to discover in time a relationship to that which

1 Ibid., p. 505. 2 Ibid., p. 508. 3 Ibid., p. 508.

can make him know himself as eternal. It seems to me that the contrast, as Kierkegaard draws it, is in this case too closely bound up with a confusion (in the discussion of religiousness A and to some extent in the first chapter of the Fragments) of the "eternal" in the Hegelian and Platonic sense with the eternal as he defines it in the Postscript, viz. as the future life. If eternity is the future life, then it is an extension of existence and compatible with existence. On the other hand, the "eternal" as a realm of universals or ultimate values (Hegelian) is a different world, supposedly existing here and now, discoverable by thought. For Plato, the two realms, and the meanings of "eternal" coalesce. For the Christian, ultimate values are believed to be a part of creation, as such in some way coming from another world which exists even now; but the discovery of values by thought does not place him into this other world, for only the relationship to Jesus Christ does that - and this only in an anticipatory sense (cf. the use of "the heavenly places" in the Letter to the Ephesians). Though Kierkegaard in the Postscript was at pains to define the Christian meaning of "eternity" as different from the Hegelian, rejecting the latter, this "paradox" seems too much determined by a lack of separation of the two meanings. To me, there is a difference between discovering ultimate values of life and existence (they may poetically be called "eternal") and coming to believe that one may have personal survival in the presence of God. Though the latter is a belief in that which is beyond the ordinary facts of experience (revelation, and the resurrection of Jesus would have to be considered extraordinary facts for one who

believes them) I do not see that there is any contradiction involved in the statement of such an expectation, based on the testimony of what is believed by Christians to be/have been factual. (The acceptance of this testimony must rest on other reasons than Kierkegaard has given.)

Kierkegaard's statement of the first paradox (see page 187) might be approached as presenting difficulties in this way: I exist now; God was incarnate in time at a historical time in the past; how do I now relate myself to a historical person, apparently past, so as to have a personal relationship with him? Christian theology answers this by declaring that God lives, and Christ lives, and that the Holy Spirit is the communicator of the grace of both "persons" to the believer. Kierkegaard follows this description in the Philosophical Fragments stating that there is no disciple "at second hand" because the Teacher (God) gives the condition for knowing the Truth (Jesus Christ as God) to all believers. For the believers who saw Jesus, his presence was the occasion for their believing; God was the cause. For succeeding generations of disciples, the testimony of precedent disciples is the occasion, while God is still the cause. Though I share the belief described above, yet it seems to me that the relationship of the disciple in time to God-in-time as historically past might have been a far more serious subject to be called a paradox than the one chosen by Kierkegaard. The problem I describe at least keeps to existence, whereas his seems to mix two different conceptions of "eternal" with existence.

The second of the paradoxes of Christianity is described thus:

The dialectical contradiction that an eternal happiness is based upon something historical.¹

The contradiction is: to base one's eternal happiness upon an approximation...²

Objectively, it is no more difficult to ascertain what Christianity is than what Mohammedanism is or any other historical religion, except in so far as Christianity is not a simple historical fact; but the difficulty is to become a Christian, because every Christian is such only by being nailed to the paradox of having based his eternal happiness upon the relation to something historical.³

The point of this suggested paradox lies in what has previously been described as one of the features of "subjective truth", namely, that in the formation of character, one commits oneself with determination and subjective certainty to that which is objectively uncertain. In the chapter on objective truth Kierkegaard's attitude to historical investigation has already been described. Having these facts in mind, the "paradox" seems to me to be a pointless laboring of that which should be obvious from Kierkegaard's argument for truth as subjectivity. In Christianity, the relationship to something historical is the basis for an eternal happiness, i.e. faith in Jesus Christ as God-in-time is the basis for eternal life. Considering Kierkegaard's definition of eternity, as understood by Christians, i.e. as the future life, I can see no paradox within the statement. If "eternal" in "eternal happiness" refers to the absolute idealistic meaning of eternity (a viewpoint rejected by Kierkegaard) then the accentuation of existence by Christianity appears paradoxical. Since absolute idealism is no longer a dominant popular philosophy,

1 Ibid., p. 508. 2 Ibid., p. 509. 3 Ibid., p. 512.

the point of the "paradox" is lost. Perhaps it would be safe to say that this feature of Christianity is paradoxical in relation to absolute idealism, but not necessarily a paradox to men not so orientated. Of course, the possibility of prolonging one's existence, and a division within such prolongation because of a future judgment, is still beyond the understanding, but this is because of the nature of the evidence (the incarnation, resurrection, etc.) not because of difficulties with the definitions of words. Here again, there is a problem; and here again, it seems to me, the problem is confused by Kierkegaard's obsession with refuting Hegelianism.

It seems to me that the heart of the paradox of Christianity, and the heart of the problem of the objective reality of the object of faith in Christianity, is stated in Kierkegaard's third paradox of the Christian faith:

The dialectical contradiction that the historical fact here in question is not a simple historical fact, but is constituted by that which only against its nature can become historical, hence by virtue of the absurd.¹

There are actually two points here, one that the reports of the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ describe a historical fact which is beyond the ordinary events of human affairs; and secondly, that to think of God as limiting himself so as to be incarnate as a true human being leads to the exhaustion of the understanding in that it cannot be understood (if what cannot be understood is absurd, then this is the Absurd). Honoring God, one may say that nothing is too hard for God, not even becoming

1 Ibid., p. 512.

one of his creatures: but this does not make it any easier to understand how it could be. The second point is a bit obscured by Kierkegaard's concern with Hegelianism, in that there is a possible cleavage between the "eternal" as abstract and universal and that which is in existence as the particular (cf. the earlier chapter on objective truth). Kierkegaard rejects the Hegelian idea of an eternal transition from the sphere of universals to actual existence. "What is possible in the fantasy-medium of possibility (...speculative talk about an eternal divine becoming...) must in the medium of reality become the absolute paradox".¹ Here we are up against the real difficulty of the object of Christian religious devotion. This, Kierkegaard maintains, cannot be proved. If it is believed, it must be, he claims, by the action of God as the divine Teacher (excelling Socrates as the midwife) who also gives the condition for accepting it even though it cannot be understood. Such a devotion of the individual to this object Kierkegaard calls faith in its truest sense (Socrates' commitment to immortality he calls sometimes "faith", sometimes the "analogue of faith"). It is faith because it must be believed; it cannot be proved.

Contrary to the efforts of the Church to prove the incarnation by proving the historicity of Christ and of the resurrection, or to appeal to Biblical authority, or to show its effects in history, Kierkegaard asserts that such a message cannot be proved but can only be presented. Objectively, the evidence for such a thing is

1 Ibid., p. 514.

that it is beyond "something which has...entered into the heart of man to believe...human nature's own idea"¹, and since it is beyond human understanding it is therefore supposed to be beyond the powers of human invention as well. Rather than be concerned with the traditional proofs, Kierkegaard was concerned with communication - not of the incarnation as a doctrine, but as a description of what believers have believed. Then, he believes, God will either be able to get the response of faith in a human being (individual by individual) or men will be offended². Such a communication he describes in the Philosophical Fragments:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: "We believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," it would be more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done all that was necessary; for this little advertisement, this nota bene on a page of universal history, would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account can in all eternity do nothing more.³

Kierkegaard heaps scorn on the idea that Jesus would have been recognized directly as the Son of God. If this had been so, why was he crucified, why did Peter - who had confessed him to be Son of God - deny that he knew him? and why did Jesus say, "No one can come to me unless the Father who is in me draw him?"

In the Postscript Kierkegaard states that Christianity is an "existential communication" describing a way of life, (cf. the "ethical reality" of a person) not a doctrine to be described objectively and treated indifferently.⁴ In making this distinction he had in mind the doctrines considered by Hegelian philosophy,

1 Idem. 2 Ibid., p. 518. 3 Fragments, p. 87.
4 Postscript, p. 339.

and he wanted to assert that Christianity involved both the factor of subjective devotion and an object of this devotion which exists (what he calls the dialectic). His emphasis is upon the subjective devotion. With this in mind, we can consider a varying statement (in the Fragments) of how he felt Christianity should be communicated:

When I say that this or that has happened, I make an historical communication; but when I say; "I believe and have believed that so-and-so has taken place, although it is a folly to the understanding and an offense to the human heart," then I have simultaneously done everything in my power to prevent anyone else from determining his own attitude in immediate continuity with mine, asking to be excused from all companionship, since every individual is compelled to make up his own mind in precisely the same manner.¹

These words as well emphasize that Kierkegaard believed the reality of Christianity to lie in the subjective commitment to Jesus Christ as God-in-time, which commitment also involved believing that he existed. In an age when every citizen considered himself to be a Christian as a matter of course (because he was baptized, grew up in a "Christian" nation, and was confirmed) Kierkegaard did not emphasize the need of Christian doctrine - this was well enough taught already - though his assertion about Jesus Christ is such doctrine. What he emphasized instead was the how of the appropriation of this doctrine. But, we must emphasize, the appropriation depended on believing that propositions about Jesus Christ are objectively true.

Before passing on to Kierkegaard's final definition of what it meant to be a Christian, we should note the place of the

1 Fragments, p. 86.

"dialectical" factor for the Christian as compared with the other spheres of existence. Earlier in this work (pages 64-65) I cited Kierkegaard's description of the dialectical factors for the different spheres. Briefly, for the aesthetic sphere enjoyment is the goal pursued, circumstances the determiner of life, and the individual seeks to lose himself in enjoyment. For the ethical sphere the attainment of character is the goal pursued, principles are the determiner of life, and the individual is concerned with his actions and his character. For religiousness A, wholeness of living (free of guilt) is sought, the thought of God or of immortality is the determiner of life, and the individual resigns himself into the relationship with God. For religiousness B (Christianity) wholeness of living together with an eternal happiness is the goal; but here, God-in-time is the determiner of life, and the individual exerts himself to maintain the relationship with God-in-time through believing in spite of the paradox. The contrast of Christianity with the aesthetic (by emphasizing the self-hood of the person) and with the metaphysical (by emphasizing particular existence) on the one hand, and with the ethical on the other (by emphasizing, similar to the aesthetic, an object outside the self) is summarized in the following words:

Faith is a sphere for itself which, paradoxically distinguished from the aesthetic and metaphysical, accentuates existence, and paradoxically distinguished from the ethical, accentuates the existence of another person, not one's own existence.¹

It is the emphasis of the relationship to its believed object, God-in-time as Jesus Christ, that is asserted to be the condition

1 Postscript, p. 514.

of blessedness, integration of the self, forgiveness of sins, or salvation for the Christian. Whereas in religiousness A infinite resignation to God was possible for everyone only if he thought it (though for this reason it was only a self-transforming religion) in Christianity blessedness is stated to be available on a particular condition, the connection with a particular person. Thus it is claimed the God-man is the dialectical factor in Christianity.

Because of the particular nature of the dialectical factor of Christianity, Kierkegaard puts forward three effects of the individual's relation to it upon his devotion. I have referred to two of these already. The three are described as Sin-consciousness (said to be attained by the work of the divine Teacher in giving the condition for knowing him, see above, pp. 170 ff.), the possibility of offense (because the object is the Paradox, the Absurd), and the smart of sympathy. The latter is explained as exclusiveness, in that only one who has become a Christian can really understand the relationship entered into (however, this is said by "Johannes Climacus", supposedly not a Christian!). By Sin-consciousness the person is made aware of his separation from God, even as he understands that it can be overcome through forgiveness (or, knowing the "Truth", that is, knowing God); Sin-consciousness involves the initial aspect of the Christian religiousness. The possibility of offense Kierkegaard considers to continue with a Christian always, for in order to believe that which is beyond the understanding he must live in the humility of

laying aside his understanding (though he says in another place that a Christian "uses the understanding...to make sure that he believes against the understanding. Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding...but he makes so much use of the understanding that he becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and then he holds fast to this..."¹, and also, "not everyone who has lost his understanding over Christianity thereby proves that he has any"²). The situation of the Christian and his understanding is comparable to the Socratic ignorance. The sympathy which a Christian feels for other Christians is considered to be a result of his living in faith.

Since Kierkegaard abandoned the attempt to establish the existence of the object of a Christian's faith by the traditional arguments of apologists (with the exception of Tertullian's argument from absurdity), we may well ask whether he rested all his argument for Christianity on his subjective emphasis. Almost. His presentation of what he feels to be the challenge to become a Christian is reminiscent of Pascal's "wager", that is, that a person is invited to bet his life on the belief that God exists. We have seen that Kierkegaard believed Socrates to have done this with regard to immortality, that he staked his existence on his belief that his soul was immortal. Kierkegaard went further. He states (though in a modified way) that with regard to Christianity too, the how of subjective commitment determines what the person is committed to. With the ethical sphere Kierkegaard claimed that the how discovered the principles to which a person is

1 Ibid., p. 504. 2 Ibid., p. 495.

committed. With religiousness A he cannot say so much: rather he claims that an absolute devotion can be related to only one object, the Absolute. With Christianity he cannot say that the commitment discovers or brings into existence Jesus Christ; he rather says that the how of commitment produces Christianity, since the commitment (he claims) can be related only to one object, the Absurd or absolute Paradox. The how of belief is then the way in which the individual will exert himself to remain in Christianity. So he says:

Subjectively, what it is to become a Christian is defined thus: The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness. The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the what of Christianity but by the how of the Christian. This how can only correspond [have as its object] with one thing, the absolute paradox.... Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree....

(Compare the definition of subjective truth quoted by me on p. 20.)

Faith therefore cannot be any sort of provisional function....

(This against Hegelian philosophy, which placed faith in a low place, similar to the emotions: cf. Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere.)

Faith must not rest content with unintelligibility; for precisely the relation to or the repulsion from the unintelligible, the absurd, is the expression for the passion of faith.¹

Here, then, we have what Kierkegaard felt to be the highest form of "subjective truth" manifested by the person who is committed to an object whose existence is not certain and which itself must be presented by a miracle if it does exist.

We may rightly challenge Kierkegaard in his claim that how

1 Postscript, p. 540.

determines what because for both religiousness A and Christianity the what has turned out to be not God and immortality (re A) nor Jesus Christ (re Christianity) but the absolute devotion, in the case of religiousness A, and "Christianity" - by which Kierkegaard means a way of believing - in the case of itself. Kierkegaard has not shown an object of commitment as the what but rather has presented us with the commitment; he has in fact cheated us. With regard to Christianity, specifically, he claims that the object of faith cannot be produced, invented, or discovered by the person, but must be supplied by God; but he has not shown us that God exists, but has rather directed us to look to the subject's commitment to find out what Christianity is! But then he says that this commitment is specific, because it can be related to only one object, God-in-time (Jesus Christ) - whose existence he will not attempt to prove! The argument is circular, and begs the question. Kierkegaard accused absolute idealism of not being tied down, i.e. not connected with the empirical, and therefore of being a mere fancy of the imagination. But his "Christianity" is worse: because of his own qualifications of the critical terms, e.g. Sin, God-in-time, it cannot be shown to have a firm connection either with historical fact or with psychological experience, but it chases from one to another seeking rest.

Kierkegaard would not explain or prove the object of faith (God-in-time, Jesus Christ as the God-man) of Christianity. In fact, we learn from other works of his that he felt that all explanation was retreat, and that Christianity needed again to go on the attack. What he attempted to do, he claimed and hoped, was

to delineate Christianity more sharply and call his contemporaries to believe - or be offended - thus, to go on the attack. It is for this reason (as well as others) that Denzil Patrick compares him with Pascal as showing a worthwhile strategy for evangelism. Yet he did believe that Christianity had objective content, i.e. that Jesus Christ had existed as God-in-time.

If Christianity is not continuous with the other forms of subjective commitment in that its object is supposed to be a particular historical person (strictly speaking, we have seen that they are not altogether continuous as well), why did Kierkegaard use them to lead up to his statement of the subjectivity of becoming a Christian? There are two reasons, I believe. The minor reason is that he felt men must recognize that they already operated subjectively in their lives as human beings, even though in regard to knowledge and use of things they operated objectively. The major reason was that he felt it was their devotion to Christ as the basis for a way of life (existence) that needed to be restored, for their knowledge about Christian doctrines was already sufficient. The first of these was directed against Hegelianism (and also against science) in its increasing objectification of human beings. The second was directed against the careless assumptions of the citizens of an officially Christian state. With regard to the first, Kierkegaard does show that the devotion of Christian religiousness is compatible with both the ethical commitment and the devotion of religiousness A. "Every Christian possesses the pathos [concern] of religiousness A, and then this pathos of discrimination."¹ Christian devotion, he says, includes the lower

1 Ibid., p. 516.

forms of devotion (a Christian even is aesthetic on occasion) but transcends them. However, it would be a mistake to represent Kierkegaard as believing that only the subjective devotion made Christianity (consider what he said about the tumultuous religious address; see above, p. 185). He believed that both the devotion and the dialectical (objective) factor were necessary - though he said the latter was uncertain - but that the emphasis on devotion was most necessary in his day.

In his later works Kierkegaard stated that what he had written should serve as a corrective to a one-sided approach to Christianity, but that it too was one-sided (cf. especially For Self-Examination, in which he describes Luther's emphasis upon justification through faith as having led to worldliness, though at its time it was necessary to correct the misunderstanding of the Middle Ages). We must ourselves consider whether the conditions of our day are not different from those of Kierkegaard's and thus demand a different sort of medicine. It appears, on the whole, that what is needed now is an assertion again of the existence and nature of the object of Christian faith. Modern life is full of many kinds of subjective feelings which Kierkegaard himself would have decried as a travesty of subjectivity. As we have seen (cf. above, p. 197) he did not believe that every kind of nonsense that a person might fancy he believed was Christianity. He did in fact accept the verity and reliability of the Scriptures, even though this fact is not brought out in the Postscript. Unfortunately, in his emphasis upon subjective commitment as subjective truth, he seems not to have recognized how dependent upon an existing content

any substantial ethics or religion must be. Kierkegaard believed it was unnecessary and undesirable to emphasize the doctrines of Christianity or the principles of the accepted ethics of his day. Unfortunately, his philosophically orientated works have given the appearance that the knowledge of the doctrines and principles (and belief in their truth) is itself unnecessary. As we have seen, the argument for Christianity of the Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript does not stand up. Kierkegaard's own faith did not rest on this argument; it is unsafe for others to try to rest their faith on it. ✓

XI GENERAL CRITICISM

Since I have already offered considerable criticism and discussion of Kierkegaard's doctrines in the body of this work (especially in the chapters on the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence, and in that which discussed religiousness A), I shall confine myself here to some general comments. My comments and criticisms will deal mainly with three fields: the progression of subjectivity within the spheres of existence; Kierkegaard's attempts at indirect communication in order to arouse subjectivity; the "individual" in ethics and in Christianity.

Kierkegaard's overall purpose in all his literary work was to sharpen awareness of the meaning of Christianity and to lead his contemporaries to a new understanding of being a Christian as a subjective involvement. One of the means he used to reach toward this end was the description of the various spheres of existence. Considering them overall - aesthetic, ethical, religiousness A, and Christianity - there is a deepening of subjective involvement with each successive sphere. Superficially, then, one might consider that they are spheres of living, or stages on life's way, and that there is a linear progression from each to the succeeding one. We have seen, however, that Kierkegaard defines them more specifically as attitudes to or interpretations of existence (see my chapter on the aesthetic sphere). We have also seen that with two of them, namely the ethical and that of religiousness A, what he calls the dialectical or objective factor to which the person is committed (i.e. the object of his commitment or goal for his striving) is in reality self-discovered, a creation (or even a

projection) of the self; in the ethical sphere, commitment to principles chosen by the person leads to consistency of character (I argued, not necessarily good); in religiousness A, resignation before God seeks a wholeness of the person and harmony with the source of his existence. With the aesthetic sphere the objects of commitment are outside, and many, since commitment is usually only momentary and usually without awareness of being committed. With Christianity, the claimed object is again outside, but (in contrast to the aesthetic where the objects were visible and at hand) removed by history and so historically uncertain (cf. my discussion of objective truth), except as the believer believes that he has received a revelation - or the power to believe - from God. It thus appears that though there is subjective involvement in all four "spheres", the type of involvement is discontinuous.

It is considered by most commentators that Kierkegaard intended the spheres to indicate a possible progression, or if not that an ascending scale of values in four different attitudes towards life. It seems to me that he attempted to do both. It also seems to me that in the books preceding the Postscript he was fairly satisfied that in showing an ascending scale of values he was also showing a possible linear progression of a person from the aesthetic through the ethical to the religious spheres, culminating in his acceptance of Christianity. However, in the treatment of these spheres in the Postscript we see increasing recognition of discontinuity (for instance, the recognition that one cannot get out of the aesthetic sphere into the ethical via despair without the help of some higher power). In my examination of these spheres I have shown other weaknesses: that despair seems misplaced in the

aesthetic sphere (I feel it goes with an ethical view of life), that in the ethical sphere Kierkegaard does not demonstrate how individual choice can discover universal principles, and that there is no consistent explanation of the connection of guilt (in the ethical sphere and religiousness A) with sin (in religiousness A (?) and in Christianity).

It seems to me, therefore, that we cannot consider Kierkegaard's scheme of the progression of the four spheres (or stages) as proven with any success. There is even a doubt of their plausibility as a hypothesis, for the reason that very few persons seem to become aware of the nemesis of each lower sphere in the way that Kierkegaard suggests (see especially my discussion of "despair" in the aesthetic sphere in Chapter IV). It occurs to me that Kierkegaard may have been attempting a Hegelian dialectic progression, as follows: enjoyment - despair, principles - guilt, God - sin, reaching the final synthesis in faith's connection with God-in-time. But the connecting links are not proven. Further, the final goal is not proven. It seems to me, therefore, that we may more safely regard Kierkegaard's descriptions of the four spheres as descriptions of various attitudes towards existence and of the type of lives that such attitudes produce. As psychological descriptions they are often very convincing and illuminating. As attempts at describing temporally successive stages (even if only in possibility) they are not convincing.

The fact that the succession is not convincing of course casts doubt on whether the final description of Christian subjectivity - faith - can be true. I find the description attractive. But I

suspect its plausibility derives from the New Testament, rather than from any comparison of attitudes toward existence.

Kierkegaard stated that Christianity was not a doctrine, i.e. not a proposition to be considered objectively, but an existence communication, i.e. a description of a way of life intended to rouse acceptance and imitation. The model for an existence communication is the description of another's (ethical) way of life: the description, put in objective terms, appeals to the imagination of the hearer as a possibility for his life, and by his action he transmutes this into reality in his life so that he does an act similar to that of the person whose life he heard described. Kierkegaard's chief example was Themistocles' admiration and imitation of Miltiades. Kierkegaard also attempted, by means of his pseudonyms and their utterances, to lead to Christianity through "indirect communication", so as to avoid stating doctrines or propositions. It is very questionable, however, whether such a separation between propositions, to be considered objectively, and "existence communication" can be made. Kierkegaard (through his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus) repeatedly has to utter propositions in order to define his spheres. In some of these he is quite dogmatic and arbitrary, for instance, in saying (in several places) that direct recognition of God is paganism. He has to be propositional and thus claims to assert objective truths, in stating the categories of the different spheres, and in stating why some are inadmissible in a different sphere while others, e.g. guilt, are. Finally, in stating that God-in-time is the object (or, dialectical factor) of Christianity, that the scriptures are

unnecessary, that baptized persons are not Christians (they merely have the possibility of becoming Christian), he is giving many propositional statements as definitions - and is, in fact, stating a new doctrine of the Church. His assertion that Christianity is both an attitude and a relation to a specific object which he believes to exist is doctrinal and propositional. It is obviously derived from the New Testament, though Kierkegaard plays down the scriptures and attempts to derive his position from his psychology of the attitudes towards existence. In my discussion of the ethical sphere I indicated that Kierkegaard was depending on a tradition of idealism, and especially heavily on Immanuel Kant. With his assertions about Christianity he is likewise leaning heavily on a tradition involving scriptures, creeds, Church practice, and Church history, while accusing these of being insufficient to tell what Christianity is. In the very areas where he tried to show communication of subjective truth, he has to rely heavily upon the statements which, if correct, are objectively true. It is obvious, therefore, that though Kierkegaard emphasizes the subjective involvement or commitment necessary for certain life experiences he cannot make the separation he attempted between propositional statements which are objectively true or false and "existence communication". I believe that he does us a service by showing us the great areas of life where we are involved and should be involved, even though he is not altogether successful in making it separate in all respects from the area of life where we know objectively in order to control. Though for human life there must be a distinction in attitude between the world of persons and values and the world of things, yet the separation is not total nor always clear-cut.

In seeking to stem the dehumanizing and depersonalizing of life, Kierkegaard emphasized the individual. I believe that we recognize that this was in some ways necessary in his time and all the more necessary today. However, probably because of his exceeding loneliness and inability to share himself with others (as typified by his breaking his engagement), he developed a philosophy of the individual that certainly omits, and seems often to deny, any philosophy of community. This lack means that the individual is again threatened - by other individuals. Kierkegaard's emphasis upon ethics as individually chosen standards of conduct (he is unable to show that these are universals, as he claims) produces an ethical solipsism, which, as I have indicated (in the chapter on the ethical sphere) can be consistently extended to relativism, or, what is worse, to a worship of what C. S. Lewis called "the dark gods in the blood". As I indicated earlier in this work, I believe that Kierkegaard saw the locus of ethical conduct in the wrong place: he, led on by idealism, found it in absolute principles, discovered by the self, rather than in interpersonal relationships (the source of ethics may still be in religion, though their place of operation is among persons). Because he took the ethical sphere as the model for the later spheres, he also described religiousness A without reference to community of need and of worship (he chose the individual, Socrates, as his model for this religiousness). And when he came to Christianity, he again emphasized the individual, not only as the believer, but also as devoid of sympathy for non-Christians - though it is not clear how he would even know there were other Christians, or that

they believed as he did! In his later religious works Kierkegaard put forward an ethics derived from love to God and learned from the New Testament. But this seems a correction or afterthought and not part of his philosophy of the spheres. It is in this area, I believe, that the emphasis upon Kierkegaard (directly or indirectly) by "crisis theology" or existentialism is most dangerous, for the flight from mass bodies and depersonalization can lead, if Kierkegaard is followed, not to true community but to the assertion of the superman. (One who seems to have learned from Kierkegaard without being dominated by him is the late Dietrich Bonhoeffer; this is evident if one reads his shorter works in their order of composition.)

I have found the study of Kierkegaard's ideas in turn very thrilling, interesting, frustrating, and depressing. Finally, at this stage I am ready to grant him credit for reemphasizing something that needed to be emphasized, and for many psychological and religious insights. But I am no longer ready to appropriate his ideas in toto nor to be especially enthusiastic over him as a person. I have also noted that most of the earlier works in English about him suffer from either a too superficial acceptance of his four-stage theory of human life or from overenthusiasm about his Christianity. Meanwhile, the existentialist philosophers seem to me to appropriate only part of his thought, without realizing that it was uttered from the background of Christianity and with the hope of revitalizing - not destroying - Christianity.

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