A STUDY IN KIERKEGAARDIAN AESTHETICS

THE FIRST SPHERE

G. GEORGE

In this book Dr. George analyses Kierkegaard's theory of aesthetics and its influence on existential aesthetics in general. He further elucidates the peculiarly Kierkegaardian doctrine of the relation between aesthetic experience and aesthetic existence.

Kierkegaard's philosophical efforts to ground all reflections in "existence" has resulted in the formulation of his well-known theory of "existence-spheres". This further brings into sharp focus the nature of aesthetic experience in its integral relationship to a mode (or sphere) of existence called the "aesthetic sphere of existence", the first in a series of three which, though not mutually exclusive, have differing norms and emphases. Kierkegaard tirelessly descants in his philosophical works that the truth of the artist and the poet (as also that of the man of religion) evades the conceptual grasp of the philosopher. His existential aesthetics invites thought "to rethink itself in the face of such recalcitrant data."

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THE FIRST SPHERE

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The First Sphere

A STUDY IN
KIERKEGAARDIAN AESTHETICS

A. G. GEORGE

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Preface

I have attempted a difficult task in this book. The dangers facing a student of Kierkegaard's thought are many. They become more acute when one attempts to study Kierkegaard in translations. Besides, there is the difficulty of obtaining in India all the critical material on Kierkegaard, which are mostly in European languages. I am thus, at the very outset, pointing out the risks involved in the effort to complete a critical monograph on Kierkegaard's aesthetic thought. On account of these facts, no claim for finality of scholarship is made here.

The aim of the book is, therefore, a modest one. It is the simple one of presenting systematically and coherently Kierkegaard's views on art and literature which lie scattered in his numerous (aesthetic) works. I have collected and arranged various relevant theories of Kierkegaard under appropriate heads. The selection and arrangement of ideas are so made as to be able to present a coherent exposition of his aesthetic theories.

Kierkegaardian aesthetics is based on two doctrines which are fundamental to his philosophy. They are the doctrine of existence, and the related doctrine of the spheres of existence. It is maintained in this book that the theory of existence on which his aesthetics is based gives it its distinctive characteristics. It is essentially anti-Hegelian. It also differs from modern phenomenological aesthetics, although phenomenological aesthetics

is usually considered akin to existential reflections on art and literature.

The aesthetic writers of the romantic, idealist, and Hegelian schools usually begin their enquiries with metaphysical assumptions about the nature of Being and Truth. In a sense, phenomenologists themselves are not completely free from the preoccupation with Being.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, rejects this metaphysical starting-point from the very first. Kierkegaard too reflects on the nature of "Becoming". But his reflections, instead of leading to a metaphysics of "Becoming", arrives at a theory of existence. The notion of "Existence" is opposed to the concept of "Being". In every context in the aesthetic works, artistic and literary problems are analyzed and compared and contrasted with existence—problems. Metaphysics is thrown overboard.

The advantages of such an existential aesthetic enquiry are several, though here no ultimate questions are asked and no ultimate answers are sought. Probably in life there are neither ultimate questions nor ultimate answers. But at every moment one encounters existential problems in the existential struggle of life.

The implications of the adjective "aesthetic" as used by Kierkegaard present many difficulties. It is used frequently with two major implications. There is the usual meaning as referring to art and artistic theories. But in many contexts "aesthetic" is used to denote the aesthetic sphere of existence. The confusion increases because two more words "poetic" and "tragic" are sometimes introduced into the discussions. The use of hyphenated com-

pound like "aesthetic-poetic-tragic" to refer to the usual meanings of "aesthetic" would considerably facilitate the process of explanation. But I have kept the two meanings separate by clarifying respective implications in every discussion.

Another insurmountable difficulty rises from Kierkegaard's warning in the *Postscript* not to attribute to him the views ascribed to the various pseudonymous figures in the aesthetic works. Now, if we take Kierkegaard's advice literally, then the serious study of Kierkegaard's works becomes a futile occupation, a mere intellectual exercise, not very pleasurable and leading to no result. This obviously cannot be Kierkegaard's own intention. If posterity had taken his advice seriously he would not have exercised the influence which is so powerful on twentieth century thought. The use of pseudonyms might have given him certain amplitude in the choice of themes, and in the selection of materials for illustration. It has also solved the intricate problem of communication which so much engaged his attention. Thus, to cut the umbilical chord binding the author and his pseudonymous creations is fatally harmful to our endeavour to grasp the subtleties of Kierkegaard's aesthetics. In fact most of the ideas expressed through the pseudonyms in the aesthetic works enjoy the authentic validity of Kierkegaard's own reflections, as we can verify from the non-pseudonymous religious works. Moreover, we must bear in mind that the aesthetical was never discarded absolutely, but only discarded as the absolute.

We do not for instance, need an elaborate critical equipment to discover that the dramatic criticism

in "The Ancient Tragical Motif as reflected in the Modern", "The Diapsalmata", and "The Shadow-graphs" given us by "A" the aestheticist in *Either/Or*, I, are Kierkegaard's own. These views are not contradicted in the later works. But far from it, they receive further confirmation in the non-pseudonymous religious books. I have therefore not taken Kierkegaard's advice very seriously although I have exercised considerable caution in relating pseudonymous views of Kierkegaard's own theory.

The present book is the result of a labour of love, and not the product of a coldly dispassionate effort at critical evaluation.

Chandigarh A. G. GEORGE
15 July 1965

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ABBREVIATIONS

In this book, Kierkegaard's works are abbreviated as follows:

The Concept of Dread : *Dread*

Concluding Unscientific Postscript : *Postscript*

Philosophical Fragments : *Fragments*

Stages on Life's Way : *Stages*

Chapter I

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR NEW DOCTRINES IN AESTHETICS

THE vogue of existentialism in philosophy and literature in the twentieth century has posed new problems in aesthetics. Existentialism is *the* school of philosophy which takes literature and relevant aesthetic reflections with the serious philosophical attention they deserve. It is also here in the field of aesthetics that the two basic literary and philosophical attitudes inherent in existentialism meet and influence each other. As new points of view are introduced in philosophical speculation, so too in the field of artistic reflections, existentialism asks questions and attempts to formulate answers in idioms different from those of conventional philosophical schools. Contemporary existentialists, not satisfied with either the Kantian or Hegelian theories of art, seek for new sources of ideas. Soren Kierkegaard is one among the early sources of literary inspiration in the nineteenth century.

Kierkegaard divided his total literary output into aesthetic and religious works. Although the impact of his aesthetic works on contemporary thought is as powerful and formative as that of

his philosophy, a systematic approach to his ideas on art and literature poses difficult problems. There is the inevitable difficulty resulting from the pseudonymous character of the aesthetic works.[1] There is his famous statement in the *Postscript* that the aesthetic works do not contain his own views. One of the reliable methods of removing this difficulty partly is to depend more and more on the philosophical and religious works, and to accept those views as Kierkegaard's own which find repeated expression in the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*.

An equally difficult problem faces us as we examine the exact implications of the word 'aesthetic.' In many places this term is used as referring to art and literature. In several other contexts it is a word characterizing a sphere of existence, the first stage in a series of three. The other two are the spheres of ethical and religious existence. Kierkegaard's theories of literary and aesthetic categories emerge out of his two fundamental doctrines of existence and the spheres of existence.

The doctrine of the three spheres of existence has

[1] The principal aesthetic works are *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, *Trembling*, *Concept of Dread* and *Sickness Unto Death*.

Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms has provoked much speculation. It is attributed to his love of mystification, and to his affinities with the romantic philosophers. Johannes Hohlenberg explains his pseudonymity on the basis of the theory that by using pseudonyms Kierkegaard expresses himself more fully, and is able to use illustrations from his own personal life. See *Soren Kierkegaard* (New York, Pantheon Books Inc., 1954), pp. 11-15.

become famous as Kierkegaard's most significant contribution to existential philosophy. Existence, the life of an individual, belongs at any given time to one of the three spheres, although the spheres are not to be considered mutually exclusive. These are called the existential spheres, and are the aesthetic sphere, the ethical sphere, and the religious sphere respectively. The aesthetic is the most common and the lowest, and the religious is the highest.

There are determining characteristics for each sphere. The aesthetic life loves pleasure, the ethical life chooses action, and the religious welcomes and loves suffering.

But aesthetic existence is not simple hedonism. Its essence is that it is life divorced from moral will, and as such completely determined by external events. In *Either/Or* (II) the difference between the aesthetic and the ethical is fully explained. To live aesthetically is to live without choosing.[2] The aesthetic stage, taken by itself, means an immediate continuity with nature and feeling before any moral distinctions are attempted.[3] The aesthetic level leaves the meaning of life at the mercy of fate and fortune. One lives to enjoy life.[4] Whatever may be the variety of the enjoyment or type of pleasure sought, all kinds of aes-

[2] *Either/Or*, II, p. 172.

[3] David E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 67.

[4] *Either/Or*, II, pp. 184-186.

thetic life have this peculiarity, that spirit is not determined as spirit, but is immediately determined. Aesthetic life is the life of immediacy. The various types of enjoyments may differ widely, from complete stupidity to the highest degree of cleverness. Thus while all aesthetes are determined that one must enjoy life, they also know that the conditions for enjoyment of life lie outside it. Thus the chief categories of the aesthetic life are fortune, misfortune, fate, immediate enthusiasm, and, above all, despair. This complete susceptibility to externality and the dependence on factors outside one's own personality in the aesthetic mode of existence poses the problem of suffering in poetry and tragedy in new perspectives.

The ethical life is not merely good life. It is life governed by the principle of voluntary decisions. The distinguishing criterion between the aesthetic and the ethical is "the baptism of the will" which lifts up the choice into the ethical.[5] When one chooses the good life instead of the pursuit of pleasure, what is important is not the reality of the things chosen, but the reality of the act of choice itself. By the ethical choice one truly becomes oneself, liberated from the vagaries of chance and misfortune. His consciousness is unified. The final choice of the ethical man is the choice of himself. The transition from the aesthetic to the ethical is not a transformation into another being, but a unification of one's own consciousness :

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

The aesthetic in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is, the ethical is that whereby he becomes what he becomes.[6]

But in this transition to the ethical, the aesthetic is never excluded absolutely, but only excluded as the absolute. Thus the aesthetic element persists in the three spheres.

The sphere of religious existence accepts suffering as the principle of life. The suffering welcomed in the religious sphere is different from the misfortune of the aesthetic life and the tragic suffering depicted by the poet. The religious life is oriented towards the problem of eternal happiness, while the aesthetic life is circumscribed within the sphere of immediate pleasure without an absolute *telos*. The desire of momentary pleasure governs the aesthetic, that of eternal happiness the religious. Both are existential problems. The initial expression of this existential pathos is the absolute respect toward the absolute *telos*.[7] This pathos expresses itself through the transformation of the individual's existence, whereas aesthetic pathos expresses itself not in existential transformation, but in words. For an existing individual the concept of an eternal happiness is essentially related to his mode of existence.[8]

Aesthetic pathos keeps itself at a distance from

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[7] *Postscript*, pp. 346-519.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

existence, or is in existence in a state of illusion; while existential pathos dedicates itself more and more profoundly to the task of existing, and with the consciousness of what existence is, penetrates all illusions, becoming more and more concrete through reconstructing existence in action.[9]

The conception of existential action relates to inwardness, and not to action in the external world. Action in inwardness is the effort to transform the individual's own inner existence. And "action in inwardness is suffering."[10] Thus suffering is the highest action in inwardness. The inwardness that is the core of the ethico-religious individual understands suffering as essential to life and not as accidental. Immediate existence within the aesthetic sphere views suffering as accidental to life. This constitutes the fundamental difference between the two spheres. Unlike the religious individual, the aesthetic individual connects suffering with misfortune, seeks to avoid it, and fails to know that suffering is there even when it does not outwardly manifest itself.[11] Tragic poetry presents suffering without understanding it, but the religious individual understands that "it is precisely in suffering that life is to be found."[12] In poesy the immediate consciousness finds the explanation and glorification of life. The religious consciousness, on the other hand, comes to life precisely in suffer-

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 387. [10] *Ibid.*, p. 388.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 389. [12] *Ibid.*, p. 391.

ing. "Immediacy expires in suffering ; in suffering, religiosity begins to breathe."[13] The aesthetic life of immediacy is thus distinguished from the religious life of suffering.

The distinction which Kierkegaard makes between external action and inward action or "action in inwardness" is significant. External action transforms the world, and its impact is measured in terms of measurable or tangible results. It may even alter the individual's external existence, as when a man becomes a millionaire or an emperor. But all such action expresses only aesthetic pathos, and the law governing such actions is the law for aesthetic relationships in general.[14] But action in inwardness affects the nature of one's own inner consciousness. He becomes a different man in the ethical sense, although no tangible results measurable by any quantitative assessments are visible.

Kierkegaard's aim is to present a radically transcendent interpretation of life. Consequently he repudiates all the assumptions, and criticizes all the categories of Idealist thought. Hence his opposition to Hegel's philosophy. Hegel ignores the importance of the contingent and absorbs it into his logic. But Kierkegaard maintains the distinctness of the contingent as an integral part of reality without permitting it to slip into logic.[15] Kierkegaard also opposes Hegel's attempt to in-

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 390. [14] *Ibid.*, p. 387.
[15] *Dread*, 'Introduction' by Walter Lowrie.

troduce the negative as the motive power which brings about change and movement.[16] Logic cannot deal with the problem of motion. In logic everything *is*.[17] The very concept of movement is a transcendence which can find no place in logic. Thus when logic has to deal with the sphere of existence and reality, its impotence appears. In the same manner the reality of concrete existence cannot be absorbed into being. 'Being' is usually interpreted, as Idealism does, as the abstract reflection of, or the abstract prototype for, what being is as concrete empirical being.[18] What is of fundamental importance is 'becoming.' Movement and change cannot be explained away ; neither can be absorbed into the idealist concept of being. Thought, being, becoming, and truth, have all to be maintained in their distinctness. We cannot identify thought with being, as Hegel did. Nor is it possible to equate becoming and being.

The problem of becoming finds detailed examination in the *Fragments*. What is the nature of the change involved in the process of becoming ? In all other changes, the existence of that which changes is pre-supposed. But in becoming the subject of change itself retains its identity and still changes. What is the nature of this change in which the subject of becoming remains unchanged in the process of becoming ? To quote Kierkegaard's own words, "This is not a change in

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 11. [17] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[18] *Postscript*, p. 17.

essence, but in being." Therefore becoming has a being, which is nevertheless a non-being, and "this being is known as possibility," as distinct from a being which is actual being, or actuality. The change, therefore, involved in becoming is the transition from possibility to actuality.

The concepts of freedom and necessity are derived by Kierkegaard from the above theory of becoming.[19] The change involved in becoming is not a change due to necessity. The change involved in becoming is an actual change, and this transition is effected with freedom. He does not accept the assumption that whatever exists, exists because it is necessary. If we begin with the assumption that everything which is necessary is possible, we will arrive at the contradiction that the necessary comes into being. This is false, because the necessary *is*.

All becoming takes place with freedom, not by necessity. Nothing that comes into being does so by virtue of a logical ground, but only through the operation of a cause.[20]

Implied here is the repudiation of the Hegelian notion of the relation between logical necessity and being. He relates freedom and becoming :

Becoming is never necessary. It was not necessary before it came into being, for then it could not come

[19] *Fragments*, p. 60. [20] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

into being ; nor after it came into being, for then it has not come into being.[21]

Kierkegaard applies the doctrine of freedom to the field of the historical. The past is part of the process of becoming. Whatever is historical must have come into being, for the present is not historical. The historical comes into being by the operation of a relatively free cause, and this further points to an absolutely free cause. It is true that what has happened is immutable, in the sense that what is past cannot be undone. The immutability of the past in this sense is different from the immutability of the necessary. The immutability of the past lies in the fact that its actual character (the 'thus') cannot be changed. But this does not mean that the past could not have happened in a different manner. The necessary is immutable in the sense that it is always related to itself in the same manner. It does not admit of any other change. Thus neither the past nor the historical came into being because they were necessary. On the other hand the operation of freedom in the historical is proved by the fact that it has come into being.

The application of the idea of freedom to the sphere of individual life gives us the peculiarly Kierkegaardian concept of existence.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Chapter 2

BECOMING AND EXISTENCE

AFTER rejecting the problem of 'being' as not relevant to the human situation in the *Fragments*, Kierkegaard focusses his attention on the problem of becoming and existence in the *Postscript*. Existence in the Kierkegaardian sense is the process of becoming through the operation of freedom manifesting itself in the sphere of individual life. This central doctrine of existence is elaborately set forth in the *Postscript*. We have also Kierkegaard's own conclusions which he arrives at by the application of the doctrine of existence to the philosophy of art and to the philosophy of religion. We can initially gather a rough idea as to what Kierkegaard means by human existence, in contradistinction with the life of plants or animals, from his remark that

> a plant is as germ that which it becomes as developed plant, and so also the animal, but not a child.[1]

The dynamic process of transition through free decisions and actions by means of which the child

[1] *Postscript*, p. 492.

becomes qualitatively a different being from what it was as a child is known as 'existence.'

This concept of existence is employed to oppose the fundamental concepts of two powerful traditions in European philosophy, Idealism and Rationalism.

The effort to grasp the nature of being through philosophical speculation constitutes the essence of Idealism. The endeavour to grasp the nature of empirical reality through reason, knowledge, and cognition, constitutes the major aim of Post-Cartesian Rationalism. Kierkegaard opposes existence to being on the one hand, and to knowledge on the other. Thus we have in the new conception of existence, the anti-Hegelian and anti-rationalist twist in Existential philosophy. Kierkegaard ridicules Hegel's attempt to make a presuppositionless philosophy with his notion of undetermined being. The earlier attempt by Descartes to make cognition the starting point of all reflection is also rejected. The idea of existence is made the presupposition for a new philosophy. It is not only the beginning of all reflection, but the only worthwhile concern of man's thought. The Copernican point lies not in the cognitive subject, but in the ethically existing subject.

> The real subject is not the cognitive subject, since in knowing, he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject.[2]

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 281.

The above statement is repeatedly emphasized in the *Postscript.*

The problem of being is relegated by Kierkegaard as unimportant in comparison with the existential problems life presents. All reflections on the nature of being belong to the realm of the possible, and are hence abstractions.[3] When being and truth are defined in abstract terms, then it is possible to equate them. The philosophical concept of being is "the abstract reflection of, or the abstract prototype for what being is as concrete empirical being."[4] Hence Idealist speculation can easily postulate a correspondence between thought, truth, and being. But the concrete empirical being cannot be neatly fitted into such a facile generalization. Particularity and actuality rebel against abstraction. They too are part of the reality of experience. Existence is both concrete and particular.[5]

As a term of wider reference, "existence is a mark that the thing has passed from potential to actual being, that it subsists as an individual entity."[6] According to Kierkegaard, existence is the mode of being proper to a subject. And as part of becoming, the change involved "is the transition

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 169-173. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[5] The idea of the eternal is also to be contrasted with that of becoming and existence. The eternal never becomes. It *is.* The eternal transcends all becoming. Since Kierkegaard's theory of eternity is more relevant to his philosophy of religion it is not discussed in this context.

[6] James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1954), p. 250.

from possibility to actuality."[7] The constituent elements of existence are change, temporal duration, particularity, and actuality.

As contradistinguished from cognition and reflection, existence is understood in terms of the tasks and responsibilities confronting an individual. A life devoted to objective reflection and knowledge of the external world is an evasion of man's responsibilities as an individual.

To quote David F. Swenson, Existence is

> first of all a synthesis of status and task. The task may be evaded or shabbily executed ; but the existence of the individual as a matter of status remains to plague him with its unfulfilled requirement and to render his situation comical. . . . Existence is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal which posits a process of becoming and hence involves an incessant striving.[8]

Thought alone cannot transform life. It is passion and decision which affect life. If a man occupies himself, all his life through, solely with logic, he would nevertheless become logic.[9] The intellectualist effort to make thought the highest expression of the human spirit has resulted in the conceptualization of existence. Apart from the fact that existence cannot be conceptualized, nothing is

[7] *Fragments*, p. 60.

[8] *Something About Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), revised and enlarged edition, p. 129.

[9] *Postscript*, p. 86.

gained by doing so. One of Kierkegaard's Journal entries entitled "Kant and Existence" formulates his objection against the conceptualization of existence:

> What confuses the whole doctrine about "being" and logic is that people do not notice that they are always operating with the "concept" existence. But the concept existence is an ideality and the difficulty is, of course, whether existence can be reduced to a concept. So that Spinoza may be right: *essentia involvit existentia*, namely conceptual existence, i.e. ideal existence. But from another point of view Kant is right that with "existence no new measurement is added to the concept." Kant is evidently thinking honestly of existence as irreducible to a concept, empirical existence. In ideal relationships, it is always true that *essentia* is *existentia* . . . (But) nothing is added to a concept whether it has existence or not, that is a matter of complete indifference; it has got existence, i.e. conceptual existence, ideal existence.[10]

Kierkegaard views passion as inseparable from existence. "It is impossible to exist without passion."[11] And again, "Passion is the real thing, the real measure of man's power."[12] But by passion is not meant unrestricted energy, nor uncontrolled emotion running rampant.

[10] *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard:* A Selection, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (London, Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 357-358.

[11] *Postscript*, p. 276.

[12] *The Journals*, p. 102.

Let no one misunderstand my talk about passion and pathos to mean that I am proclaiming any and every uncircumscribed immediacy, all manner of unshaven passion.[13]

In existence passion and action dominate thought and knowledge. Consequently, existence is a striving. And the ideal of a persistent striving expresses the subject's ethical view of life. Without completely repudiating the relevance of knowledge to life, Kierkegaard relegates it to the external world. Objective thought is directed away from the subject to the object, and to the objective world. But to 'exist' is to redirect one's focus of energies to the subject. The existential action is oriented inward and not outward. Thus all decisiveness inheres in subjectivity, the state of being a subject, the willing, deciding, and acting individual as opposed to the pure *ego* of reflection.

Where reflection ends, existence begins and the beginning is made by a resolution of the will.[14] Subjectivity does not imply the accidental, the angular, or the selfish and the eccentric. It implies a true ethical enthusiasm which consists in willing to the utmost limit of one's powers. In this sense "passion is subjectivity."[15] Subjective existence is existence in freedom, and with freedom operating more and more in the direction of inwardness.

As soon as the will directs itself to the external

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 133. [14] *Postscript*, p. 103.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

world the individual ceases to be subjective. A truly great ethical personality would strive to develop himself with the utmost exertion of his powers. Indirectly he may produce great effects in the external world. But they have inner significance for the existing individual, for he keeps himself apart from objective transformation.

> Subjectivity or subjective existence is the true ethical hypertension of the infinite in the individual.[16]

The ethical is the inwardness of the spirit, and the ethical task is the task of becoming subjective.

It is clear that when Kierkegaard separates thought and being, and maintains that "existence is their separation," he is not introducing irrationalism or romanticism.[17] He is stressing the ethical subjectivity of genuine human existence.

The identity of subject and object posited through the principle of mediation leads to the notion of truth as an identity of thought and being. And indirectly the subject is rendered into something merely accidental.

Existence is never finished, is always movement and persistent striving. A movement has both continuity and goal. The goal of the existential movement is towards the ethical act of making decisions. The eternal, not the abstract eternal but the concrete, provides the factor of continuity. The concrete eternity manifests itself in an in-

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 124. [17] *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 117.

dividual by the maximum degree of his passion, for "all decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity."[18] When existence or subjective existence is made the presupposition for a new departure in philosophy, the problem of communication acquires a complex difficulty.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Chapter 3

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND THE NATURE OF ART

IT is somewhat curious that Kierkegaard who was seriously concerned with aesthetic problems has not attempted a general theory of the nature of art. It is only in one place in the *Postscript*, while dealing with the problem of communication, that a general theory of art is indirectly and briefly attempted.

To the existential definition of reality as internal or ethical, correspond the doctrines of existential thought and indirect communication. Affirming that reality can be known by the intellect only after distortion, he rejects the pre-eminence of thought in its engagement with reality.[1] The only reality that can be known is internal reality or existential reality. The distinction he makes between external or objective reality and internal or ethical reality is apparent everywhere. Existential reality can never be systematized, for existence separates and holds the various moments of exis-

[1] Cf. the Chapter "Real or Ethical Subjectivity" in the *Postscript*. See also "The Anti-intellectualism of Kierkegaard," in *Something About Kierkegaard* by David F. Swenson.

tence discreetly apart.[2] For the existing individual, his highest interest in existence constitutes his reality.[3] Man can only have a cognitive relation to external reality. He can only establish an intimate relation with "his own reality, the fact that he exists; this reality constitutes his absolute interest."[4] The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality.[5]

Kierkegaard's attitude to internal reality is partly similar, and partly opposed, to that of Bergson. He too argues that the only reality we can seize "is our own person in its flowing through time, the self which endures." Here ends the similarity, and when Bergson advances the conception of intuition to replace analytical reflection, we have the difference between his thought and Kierkegaard's.[6] Instead of intellectual intuition, we have Kierkegaard's conception of existential thought.

While existence rejects objective thought, it has its own mental operation, namely, existential thought. Here thought is appropriated into existence. And reflection is combined with feeling, and is, above all, passion.

> All existential problems are passionate problems, for when existence is interpenetrated with reflection it generates passion.[7]

[2] *Postscript*, p. 107. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 279.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 280. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 280.
[6] Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by Mabelle, L. Andison (New York, Philosophical Library, 1961), p. 35.
[7] *Postscript*, p. 313.

The method of direct communication or objective communication is adequate for dealing with objective reality. Objective reality deals with results and conclusions. And objective communication thus aims at precise and accurate statements. It is indifferent to subjectivity. But since existence is continuous becoming, it has no final conclusions to communicate. The subject of existential communication is, in fact, the very process of becoming. How is communication possible, when the very subject matter of communication is not available in formulable terms? Here lies, according to Kierkegaard, the nature and function of art. The artistic process is the process of communication of subjectivity. In his own words:

> Wherever the subjective is of importance in knowledge, and where appropriation thus constitutes the crux of the matter, the process of communication is a work of art, and doubly reflected. Its very first form is precisely the subtle principle that the personalities must be held devoutly apart from one another, and not permitted to coagulate into objectivity. It is at this point that objectivity and subjectivity part from one another.[8]

The nature of the artistic process, especially the art of literature, is explained in terms of the process of communication. The content of subjective thought has essentially the characteristic

[8] *Postscript*, p. 73.

of a secret, because it cannot be directly expressed. A secret is not simply that which is not expressed, but also that which cannot be expressed. This elusiveness of all existential problems renders them into secrets so far as their communicability is concerned, or into mysteries as Marcel called them.

Since existence is the process of becoming, the existential thinker constantly reproduces this existential situation in his thoughts and translates all his thinking into terms of process. The raw material of art is to be found in the endeavour to reproduce and communicate the existential process of becoming. It is in this doctrine that we find the source of Kierkegaard's attempts to deduce aesthetic categories from existential categories. He always discusses the nature of aesthetic activity (what he sometimes calls "the poetic activity") in the context of what is termed as the aesthetic sphere of existence.

The negativity that pervades existence, the tension at the heart of consciousness, the paradox that man is an existing infinite spirit, the contradiction that in existence the temporal and the timeless meet, the isolation of the individual consciousness, the inadequacy of reflection to grasp the nature of reality—all these can lend themselves only to the artistic or indirect process of communication.[9]

[9] Most of the great literary works, tragic or epic, deal with these themes. And such themes can only be expressed through artistic or indirect communication.

The difference between Kierkegaard's theory of artistic communication and that of the moderns is easily noticeable. I. A. Richards, for example, also begins with the initial assumption about the multiplicity of experiences and "the natural isolation and severance of minds."[10] But no distinction is here made by Richards between existential experiences and objective experiences. Richards means by communication a transference of experience.[11] This theory makes the criterion of artistic excellence lie merely in the intensity of the process of communication, whatever the nature of the experience, and therefore, tends to minimize the importance of the subject of art. The Kierkegaardian theory, by relating existential reflection to the artistic process of communication, covers both form and content in art.

The close affinity between Kierkegaard's philosophical and literary insights springs from this principle. Analysis of an existential problem is only possible through the artistic process. From among the most intimate of personal problems, Kierkegaard chooses the problem of death and demonstrates that death can never be dealt with in philosophy. Because of its essentially personal character, it cannot be understood intellectually. It is an ultimate event which cannot be grasped in an anticipatory conception by philosophy. The being of death is a non-being. Only existential reflections

[10] *Principles of Literary Criticism*, London, 1926, p. 177.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

can be made about the nature of death. We can agree with this conclusion when we remember that the poetic rendering of death in lyrics and dramatic soliloquies is far more effective in their communication than what philosophers have said.[12]

But at the same time we must avoid one error. On account of the fact that Kierkegaard relates art and existential or ethical reality, we have no evidence to conclude that he validates the aesthetic interpretation of reality as the finally dependable one.

[12] Hamlet's reflections on death and life (Act iii, 1) constitute a case in point. Shakespeare is, in fact, communicating this existential difficulty, the difficulty of directly commenting on the predicament of a human soul when it approaches the border-line between life and death.

An equally illustrative example is Tolstoy's story "The Death of Ivan Ilych." I quote in full the relevant portion :

> Ivan Ilych saw that he was dying, and he was in continual despair.
>
> In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.
>
> The syllogism he had learnt from Kiezewetter's Logic, "Caius is a man ; men are mortal ; and therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius—man in the abstract—was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate from all others . . . Caius really was mortal, it is right for him to die ; but for me, Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it is altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible. (Trans. by Luise and Aylmer Maude.)

This is an illustration that death cannot be grasped by logical thinking or by objective reflection in an anticipatory conception.

He avoids the idealist and the romantic error of equating aesthetic intuition as the only possible agency for grasping truth. The aesthetic (or poetic) engagement with reality is merely the first step in a series of three. What is considered as a valid engagement with reality is the ethico-religious orientation towards it. The poet, while concerning himself with reality in the sense of actuality, idealizes it. Thus poetry and art deal with the ideal possibilities of existence, or with ideality.[13] This explains why the poetic presentation of any experience, say that of love, is more beautiful than its actual experience in life. The love which poetry presents is unlike the love we have in actuality. Thus from the artistic standpoint, possibility is higher than reality. But from the ethico-religious standpoint, reality is higher than possibility.

[13] *Postscript*, p. 283.

Chapter 4

A CRITERION OF AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT AND SOME IDEAS ON THE MEDIA OF THE ARTS

THE principle of the fusion of form and matter is advanced by Kierkegaard as the best aesthetic criterion of judgement. This principle is already implied in his theory of indirect communication. In *Either/Or* it is employed both as a principle of interpretation and as a standard for evaluation.[1]

Kierkegaard is fully aware of the dangers of over-emphasizing either the idea or the form. To over-emphasize the subject is certainly to ignore the artistic energy of creation. Moreover, the very quality of greatness in a work of art is known to us only through the interpretation of that subject by the artist as embodied in his work. To say that Homer found his perfect subject in the *Iliad*, and therefore, Homer's achievement is great, is only a tautology.

Equally misleading is the attempt of the classical school to emphasize the significance of the form overmuch. The falsity of one-sidedly emphasizing the formal aspect leads to the danger of over-

[1] *Either/Or*, I, p. 47.

estimating every neat bit of artistry as a classic. But in the long historical perspective they all prove to be insignificant.

Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel in stressing both idea and form in artistic considerations. He deplores the fact that this aspect of Hegel's aesthetic philosophy has not received the attention it deserves.[2] The substance of Kierkegaard's arguments is the following :

He points to the fact that it is "ordinarily only a single work, or a group of works, which stamps or stamp the individual artist as a classic poet, artist and so on." The same artist may have produced other works which are in no way classics. But it is in the classic productions that the artist achieves the complete balance of form and content, the absolutely reciprocal interpenetration so that the subject-matter penetrates the form as the form penetrates the subject-matter.

> This concord is so absolute that a later reflective age will scarcely be able to separate, even for thought, the two constituent elements here so intimately united, without running the risk of entertaining or provoking a misunderstanding.[3]

Thus in the classic production of an artist, it is neither the subject-matter nor the form, but their fusion which makes it a thoroughly achieved work of art. Otherwise every work of an artist must be a

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 51. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

classic, and this is not the case. Kierkegaard instances Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as a case in point. Here Mozart found an appropriate subject and penetrated it with his art skilfully. All other productions of this subject-matter of Don Juan, whether dramatic or poetic including those of Byron or Moliere, fail to achieve this level of excellence. Mozart's *Don Juan* as a classic has the harmony of form and content, and their union is so complete that we cannot separate them for analysis.

This aesthetic criterion of the fusion of form and idea is used by Kierkegaard to throw light on the history of the classics from a new angle and to attempt a fresh classification of the arts. It is clear that form alone cannot be used as a criterion for classification of the arts. Hegel has, on the other hand, used differences in subject-matter or the idea as a basis of distinction. But the idea is inseparably fused with form and because of their mutual penetration and modification, it is misleading to separate the idea for classification and analysis. Thus this union and this mutual intensity within itself, which is a property of every classical work poses new problems of analysis.

The medium of art has some characteristics which can be used for making distinctions. The medium through which an artistic idea is manifested can be abstract or concrete, rich or poor, and these differences can distinguish art-objects.

The more concrete and rich the idea which one

form of art expresses through a similarly rich and concrete medium, the larger will be the number of classics in that form of art. Take the case of literature, and poetry in particular. The idea which finds expression in the literary arts is the richest, and language is the most concrete medium. Consequently we find a larger number of classics in literature. But in the case of sculpture where the medium and the idea which finds expression through the medium are both abstract, the number of classics is comparatively less. To quote Kierkegaard:

The more abstract the idea is, the smaller the probability of a numerous representation. But how does the idea become concrete ? By being permeated with historical consciousness. The more concrete the idea, the greater the probability. The more abstract the medium, the smaller the probability ; the more concrete, the greater. But what does it mean to say that the medium is concrete, other than to say it is language or is seen in approximation to language ; for language is the most concrete of all media. The idea, for example, which comes to expression in sculpture is wholly abstract, and bears no relation to the historical ; the medium through which it is expressed is likewise abstract ; consequently there is a great probability that the section of the classic works which includes sculpture will contain only a few. If, on the other hand, I take a concrete idea and concrete medium, then it seems otherwise. Homer is indeed a classic poet, but just because the epic idea is a concrete idea, and because the medium is language, it so happens that in the section of the classics [there will be numerous works] which are

all equally classic, because history constantly furnishes us with new epic material.[4]

That medium which is farthest removed from language, is, according to Kierkegaard, the most abstract medium. And among the ideas which lend themselves to artistic representation, the idea of sensuousness (what is called the 'sensuous genius') is the most abstract. The word 'sensuous' has to be understood without the implication of any moral censure. It is used to signify the quality or the inmost essence of sensuousness, "an amoral wild impulse following its purely wild natural urge."[5]

Discussing the comparative merits of music and language as artistic media, Kierkegaard considers language a superior medium, dismissing with ridicule the opinion that where language leaves off, music begins. He rejects the extremes of both views. On the one hand, there is the exaggerated emphasis on music as a medium, and on the other, there are some religious critics who denounce music.

Kierkegaard maintains that language is the absolutely qualified spiritual medium, and therefore the proper vehicle for the idea, and that music is only relatively qualified as a spiritual medium.[6] Language involves reflection, and therefore, cannot express immediacy. Reflection destroys the immediate. Hence it is impossible to express the

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 53. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 447. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

musical in language. But this is at once the merit and defect of language, in the sense that the immediate is the indeterminate and indeterminateness is a defect.

Music is the daemonic, and in the erotic-sensuous genius, music has its absolute object.[7] Thus each art has its own proper idea. Beauty is the absolute object of sculpture, and beauty celestially glorified that of painting. But man's esssential idea is spirit. Language alone can express this, and the highest significance of language is not to produce inarticulate sounds, but to produce thought. Language is considered by Kierkegaard to be the highest medium.

Both language and music take place in time. This is a common element. But the musical element is inseparable from language. It is easily seen that music everywhere limits language. Expression at its most elementary pre-speech level, as in the babblings of infants, consists of inarticulate sounds. Prose is the form of language farthest removed from music. But even in oratorical prose we find a hint of the musical. This musical element manifests itself more strongly in the poetic form, where finally the idea is renounced and everything becomes music. This is the explanation of the saying that when language ceases, music begins. Kierkegaard argues that this is clearly a misunderstanding. It can hardly be said that music "is a richer medium than language unless one is willing to assume that

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

saying 'uh' is worth more than a complete thought."[8] Thus we have the misunderstanding that "music is a richer medium than language. . . . As a rule it [music] thinks itself higher than words, although it is inferior."[9]

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 68. [9] *Ibid.*

Chapter 5

ON TRAGEDY, ANCIENT AND MODERN

SOME categories of the tragic are discussed by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* (I) in the section entitled "Ancient Tragical Motif."[1] Kierkegaard's interest in the nature of the tragic and in analyzing the differences between a tragic conception and a religious conception of life is apparent in the *Stages* and in the *Postscript*. It is in *Either/Or* (I) that pure dramatic criticism, unmixed with religio-philosophical issues, is to be found.

One of the important problems that is posed for our consideration is the problem of the differences between ancient tragedy and modern tragedy (i.e. post-renaissance tragedy). It is possible to argue that since it is natural for man to weep at all times, the categories of tragic art must always be the same.[2] But since the factors which make

[1] These views on tragedy are given through the pseudonymous writer A of the first volume of *Either/Or*. But this fact need not prevent us from considering them as belonging to Kierkegaard. It is clear that here, through A, Kierkegaard is expressing his own opinions. The consistency and coherence of the tragic criticism here with those of the *Postscript* validate them as Kierkegaard's own.

[2] In this context Kierkegaard briefly comments on the

men weep differ from time to time, similarly, the conceptions of tragic guilt and action also undergo differentiations in accordance with changing orientations to values. Further, the attitudes to sorrow and pain, the nature of the tragic suffering and the problem of anxiety, all come to be viewed in different perspectives in different times. No doubt, these differences are only evolutions within a single generic concept.

While commenting on Aristotle's observation that thought and character are the sources of action in tragedy, and that action is the most important element in tragedy, Kierkegaard distinguishes between the action of ancient tragedy and that of the modern. The difference resides in that the action in old tragedy has an element of suffering (passion, *Passio*) in it. Further the action does not exclusively issue from character. The dramatic action does not find its explanation in subjective reflection and decision. Hence the dialogue of ancient tragedy does not exhaustively reveal subjective reflection. The monologue and the chorus supplement the dialogue. The action of ancient tragedy has an epic quality in the sense that it has an element of the event in it. The ancient world did not develop subjectivity, and although the

differences between ancient comedy and modern. It is equally true to say that it is natural for men to laugh at all ages. But the comic elements of ancient comedy are not the same as those of the modern. Although laughter is common to all ages and cultures, yet the conceptions of the ridiculous vary vastly, and this variation affects the history of comedy.

individual was free to act, yet he moved within the categories of state, family, and destiny. This provides the element of fate in their tragedy, and the hero's destruction is caused by suffering, unlike the modern tragic hero who is destroyed through his own action. In the case of modern tragedy, situation and character are fully developed, and the tragic hero attains full self-conscious subjectivity, and we are interested in a certain moment of his life considered as his own deed. Therefore modern tragedy can be fully represented in situation and dialogue. It has no epic foreground and no epic heritage and the hero suffers entirely on his own acts. This constitutes the essential difference according to Kierkegaard, between ancient tragic action, and modern tragic action.

What are the differences in the nature of the tragic guilt? The differences in the two conceptions of tragic action also explain the differences in the two conceptions of tragic guilt. Just as action in ancient Greek tragedy is intermediate between action and passivity so also is the guilt of the hero. And this accounts for the interest we have in tragic conflict, for the hero is neither absolutely guilty nor absolutely innocent. If there is no guilt absolutely then the hero cannot interest us tragically for the conflict is weakened; on the contrary, if the character is entirely guilty, then he is criminal, and the tragic effect is marred.

Kierkegaard attacks the critical tendency which makes the dramatic hero so individualized as to

be ethically responsible for his guilt. If character is destiny, then the hero is responsible for that part of life which tragedy presents as being the result of his deeds and his character is accountable for everything. In doing so modern critics transform an aesthetic guilt into an ethical one. The consequence is that the tragic hero becomes bad and evil, and sin, which has no aesthetic interest, becomes the tragic subject. Incidentally, Kierkegaard attributes this tendency of criticism to the rising interest in comedy which the nineteenth century had. In his view, the essence of the comic lies in isolation and contradiction. It is the characteristic attitude of comedy to isolate the individual and to exaggerate his individual traits. The essential point is that in modern tragedy, the active guilt of the hero is greater than in ancient tragedy because "the more the subjectivity becomes reflected, the more one sees the individual left to himself," and, therefore, "all the more, the guilt becomes ethical."[3] That is to say, in Greek tragedy, the tragic guilt is nearer passivity, while in the modern, it is nearer active guilt, guilt of the individual character.

These differences in turn affect the principle of tragic pleasure. Kierkegaard examines the Aristotelian categories of fear and pity (compassion). Hegel's category of sympathy is parenthetically dismissed as being too vague and general. Kierkegaard separates the 'passion' or suffering from the 'com' of compassion, and explains the difference

[3] *Either/Or*, I, p. 142.

between the two theories of tragic pleasure as differences in the relation between sorrow and pain. "In ancient tragedy the sorrow is deeper, the pain less; in modern, the pain is greater, the sorrow less."[4]

Sorrow and pain are distinguished on the basis that sorrow always contains something more substantial than pain. Pain involves reflection over suffering which sorrow cannot understand. This is illustrated by Kierkegaard by pointing out the differences in reactions to suffering experienced by a child and a mature man. When a child sees an old man suffer, it is not reflective enough to feel the pain, but its sorrow is deeper. The child cannot reflect on the nature of suffering. The nature of the sorrow in Greek tragedy is similar to this. But when an older person sees a child suffer, his pain is greater, the sorrow less.

> The more clearly the conception of the guilt stands out, the greater is the pain, the less profound the sorrow.[5]

The sorrow and pain do not lie in the spectator, but in the tragedy, and the spectator must imbibe the consciousness relevant to the tragedy to feel the appropriate compassion.

We see here already the germ of the distinction which Kierkegaard establishes in the *Postscript* between religious suffering and tragic suffering.

It appears to the present writer that the analysis of the nature of sorrow and pain helps us consi-

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 145. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

derably in our approach to different types of tragic suffering. Sorrow has the opposite movement to that which pain has. Sorrow moves towards obscurity, pain towards transparency of cause. The greater the innocence, the greater the sorrow. The greater the personal guilt, the greater the pain.

Guilt and innocence, as applied to tragedy, have to be relatively understood. The tragic guilt has an element of innocence in it, and tragic innocence, an element of guilt. The ideas of absolute guilt and absolute innocence are not the subjects of tragedy. Their union is pertinent only in the context of religious categories. And because the synthesis of absolute guilt and absolute innocence is not an aesthetic category, the life of Christ is not tragic nor his suffering tragic.

The tragic action always has an element of suffering in it, and the tragic suffering an element of action; the aesthetic lies in the relativity of these.[6]

It is not to be concluded that the concept of pain was totally unknown to Greek tragedy. Kierkegaard rightly points to the instance of *Philoctetes* which shows a transition from sorrow to pain. Thus, so far as purely aesthetic categories relating to tragedy are concerned, the transition from ancient tragedy to modern is fundamentally a transition from sorrow to pain, from relative dependence on fate to more and more of individual

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

responsibility, from relative innocence to relative ethical guilt. In his own words :

> The true tragic sorrow consequently requires an element of guilt, the true tragic pain an element of innocence ; the true tragic sorrow requires an element of transparency, the true tragic pain an element of obscurity.[7]

This explains the "dialectic which lies in the concept of the tragic guilt."

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 149. Kierkegaard makes a further distinction between sorrow and anxiety, and considers anxiety the true tragic subject. He defines anxiety as "the organ by which the subject appropriates sorrow and assimilates" it. Anxiety is determined by reflection. Thus it becomes the true tragic concept.

Since pain also involves an element of reflection, the distinction which Kierkegaard makes between sorrow and anxiety on the one hand, and pain and anxiety on the other, is not very clear. See further *Either/Or*, I, pp. 149-150.

Chapter 6

SUFFERING, TRAGIC (AESTHETIC) AND RELIGIOUS; THE UNITY OF THE TRAGIC AND THE COMIC

IN the *Postscript* and the *Stages*, aesthetic categories and religious categories are analyzed and contrasted.[1] The doctrine of the three spheres of existence already introduced in *Either/Or* is set forth in detail in these works. But it is useful for us to remember what Walter Lowrie points out concerning the "either/or" presented by Kierkegaard:

> From the very first S. K.'s either/or was: either the aesthetical/or the ethical and the religious.[2]

The aesthetic is to be contrasted with the ethico-religious, which is frequently referred to by Kierkegaard as the ethical.[3]

[1] In this chapter, the word 'aesthetic' is used to include the two meanings: referring to the aesthetic sphere of existence, and also referring to art and literature. It is clear that in the *Postscript* Kierkegaard establishes a similarity between the poetic interpretation of human experience and the attitude to experience illustrated in the aesthetic sphere of existence.

[2] "Editor's Introduction" to *Postscript*, p. xviii.

[3] In the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard uses the words, poetic, tragic, and aesthetic, as all interchangeable.

We have already seen how Kierkegaard combines passion with existence. Passion and pathos are also the essential ingredients of the making of a poet. "Without passion no poet, and without passion no poetry."[4] In passion we find the common element between the poet and the religious man of faith. We can trace the same idea in *Either/Or*. The first 'Diapsalm' (in the first volume) defines the poet as an unhappy creature whose heart is tortured by the deepest sufferings, and whose lips are so formed as to make the cries and sighs of his heart sound like beautiful music. The poet is compared to the unfortunates who were imprisoned by the Greek tyrant Phalaris in a brazen bull. There the victims were tortured over a low fire. Their cries, however, could not reach the tyrant's ears, for they got transformed into sweet music. The same comparison is used by Kierkegaard in *Training in Christianity*.[5]

The aesthetic pathos finds expression in words, while existential pathos transforms inwardly the existence of the individual. Thus the poetic pathos is oriented towards ideality, and not reality.

> Reality is for the poet merely an occasion, a point of departure, from which he goes in search of the ideality of the possible. The pathos of the poet is therefore essentially imaginative pathos.[6]

[4] *Stages*, p. 369.
[5] *Training in Christianity*, p. 248.
[6] *Postscript*, p. 347.

The tragic (or aesthetic) suffering is likewise external. Aesthetically viewed, the nature of suffering is inexplicable. The individual who lives in the sphere of the aesthetic immediacy cannot grasp misfortune. He can only present it through the medium of art. Tragic poetry, for instance, views suffering as external to life and as accidental. But existentially or ethico-religiously considered, suffering is essential to life.[7]

The qualities of the tragic hero and the religious individual (the man of faith) can also be understood in terms of the differences between tragic suffering and religious suffering. The tragic hero becomes great because he conquers. The religious hero is great because he suffers. Even though the tragic hero suffers, he suffers in such a way that he triumphs in the outer world, and this triumph exalts the spectator.[8] The aesthetic hero is always represented as possessing the requisites for conquering. He is a pre-eminent figure socially, and is in full vigour and good health. And the tragic collision comes from without.

On account of the externality inherent in the aesthetic view of suffering, it has to relate all suffering to some central idea. Mere sufferings such as toothache and gout are rejected by it.[9]

[7] *Training in Christianity*, pp. 247-249. S. K. explains the difference between artistic passion and Christian passion.

[8] *Stages*, p. 411.

[9] Pascal's attitude to suffering is similar. In modern times, Miguel de Unamuno has developed a religio-tragic philosophy of life with Kierkegaard's theory of suffering

Fortune, misfortune, fate, immediate enthusiasm, and despair—these categories determine the aesthetic view of life.[10] Misfortune is explained by Kierkegaard as

> a happening in relation to immediate consciousness (fate). Viewed ideally, in the light of the view of life natural to immediacy, it has gone or it must go.[11]

In order to express this attitude towards suffering, the poet invests immediacy with ideality by using the idea of fortune. On the other hand, misfortune as employed by the poet must depict the hero succumbing to suffering. Thus we have in aesthetics, either fortune removing suffering or misfortune leading to the destruction or the death of the tragic hero. But tragedy does not comprehend misfortune. It does not come to an understanding with misfortune by making suffering the point of departure for a new view of life. When confronted with the problem of suffering, the tragic poet uses either fortune or misfortune to explain it away. But the ethico-religious view of life makes suffering its central principle.[12] In *Either/Or* the same view is advocated by the ethicist :

> As for poetry and art, I would remind you again that they provide only an imperfect reconciliation with life. . . .[13]

as the starting-point. See his *Tragic Sense of Life*, tr. Crawford Flitch, London, 1921.

[10] *Postscript*, p. 388. [11] *Ibid.*, pp. 388-389. [12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Either/Or*, II, p. 277.

Suffering becomes essential to the ethico-religious dimension of existence, while, if aesthetically viewed, it is only accidental.

In the religious sphere every suffering acquires an interest. But if the relationship to a controlling idea is absent, suffering becomes meaningless in aesthetics. This is why poetry, instead of reconciling one with existence, arouses one against it. For example, tragic poetry can never make sickness a fit subject for tragedy. Tragedy deals with suffering by positing distinctions and concerns itself only with the privileged sufferings. But the religious attitude welcomes all suffering as inherent in the individual himself. "The ideal relationship it establishes is a God-relationship."[14]

The Aristotelian principle of tragic pleasure, pity and fear, is itself controlled by this central idea to which suffering is related. Kierkegaard further argues that without emotional susceptibility the spectator of the tragedy is left unmoved. Therefore fear and pity must be of a definite sort. The purely natural man is unmoved by the art of tragedy. Consequently the views about the nature of tragic pity vary in accordance with the various world views of the spectators.

Kierkegaard's theory that the tragic hero becomes the universal man is both new and contrary to the post-renaissance view of the tragic hero as highly individualized. He explains Aristotle's remark that poetry is higher than history on the basis that

[14] *Stages*, p. 415.

poetically speaking, possibility is higher than reality. Because the tragic represents the possible (therefore in that sense) tragedy represents the universal.

In *Fear and Trembling* the tragic hero and the man of faith are compared.[15] The internal conflict of the tragic hero, his inner dilemma, arises from the conflict, between duty and wish. The stories of Agamemnon, Antigone, and Hamlet are brought in to illustrate this theory. The tragic hero, instead of fulfilling his own wish, chooses duty and transforms his own wish into duty. "The tragic hero gives up his own wish in order to accomplish his duty."[16] And since the ethical is the universal, the tragic hero, because he acts according to the universal, becomes the universal man.

> The genuine tragic hero sacrifices himself and all that is his for the universal; his deed and every emotion within him belong to the universal; he is revealed and in this self-revelation, he is the beloved son of ethics.[17]

The tragic action culminates in the ethical. The religious action culminates in the teleological suspension of the ethical. This is the conclusion to which Kierkegaard's comparison of the tragic hero and the man of faith (whose prototype is Abraham) leads us in *Fear and Trembling*.

The tragic hero is invariably great, and belongs to the privileged class. "But the lame, the crippled,

[15] *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 118-119.
[16] *Ibid.* [17] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

the poor, are the heroes from the religious point of view."[18]

It is clear that Kierkegaard repudiates the individualistic and the subjectivistic interpretation of the tragic. He views individualistic isolation as comic, for "the comic lies in isolation."[19] Pure subjective self-absorption also cannot explain the nature of the tragic action, guilt, and the hero. We have seen, in Chapter Five, the difficulty of making the tragic hero solely responsible for his guilt. In this case, the causal connection between character and destiny will be only too apparent to allow the operation of pity and fear in the spectator.

Kierkegaard's analysis of the categories of the tragic and the comic are related to, and in fact derived from, his doctrine of human existence. Another conclusion which it leads us to in aesthetics is the doctrine of the unity of the tragic and the comic. Existence involves contradiction. Contradiction is one of its central principles. In existence, we find the union of contraries : freedom and necessity, time and eternity, the universal and the individual. All these are held together in existence. The process of becoming, manifested in the existential struggle, maintains their unity in actuality. Hence the agonistic view of life maintained by Kierkegaard.[20]

Both tragedy and comedy arise from the very contradiction at the heart of existence :

[18] *Stages*, p. 415. [19] *Either/Or*, I, p. 142.
[20] *Postscript*, pp. 313, 317, 350.

The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction ; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction ; the comical, the painless contradiction.[21]

In the *Stages*, Kierkegaard explains this doctrine of the unity of the comic and the tragic :

. . . in the relation between the aesthetic and the religious I see again the unity of the comic and the tragic which the two of them constitute when they are brought together. Thus in poverty I see the tragedy that an immortal soul suffers, and the comedy that it all turns on two shillings. I go no further than the unity of the comic and the tragic in the equilibrium of life.[22]

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 459. [22] *Stages*, p. 418.

Chapter 7

THE NATURE OF THE COMIC: IRONY AND HUMOUR AS EXISTENTIAL DETERMINANTS

THE comical, according to Kierkegaard, is universally present in every situation and stage of life. Contradiction lies at the basis of the comical. Wherever there is life, there is contradiction, and wherever we have contradiction, we have the comical.

The tragic too springs from contradiction. But it is a painful contradiction. The comical is a painless contradiction. The difference between the two lies in the relationship between the contradiction and the controlling idea. The comic, while manifesting the contradiction inherent in life, points also to a way out of the contradiction. Hence it is painless. The tragic attitude sees the contradiction without, at the same time, being able to find a way out.

In his theory of comedy also, Kierkegaard differs from Aristotle. Kierkegaard's contention is that Aristotle's theory of comedy does not cover all the comical situations in life. Aristotle says:

It [comedy] consists in some defect of ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain.[1]

As Kierkegaard rightly points out, Aristotle does conceive the ludicrous as something. To Kierkegaard the comical is not 'something,' but it is a 'relation,' the faulty relationship of contradiction without any pain. A few of the illustrative situations of Kierkegaard's theory of the comical is given below :

If one were to say that a giant is seven and one-fourth yards tall, it is comical and the contradiction lies essentially in the fraction. Seven yards are fantastic. But the fantastic is not consistent with realistic accuracy. The quarter yard reminds us of reality. Here is the contradiction between the fantastic and the real.

If a patriot were to assert : "I will sacrifice my life for my country," and then later add, "Aye, I will do it for ten dollars," it is comical. The contradiction lies in the incompatibility of the highest and the lowest ideals expressed together.

Errors are all comical on account of the contradiction. For example, if one were to mistake a pen for a cigar and attempt to light and smoke the pen it is comical. Similarly discontinuity in speech is comical because there is a contradiction between our rational conception of human speech

[1] *The Poetics*, tr. Butcher, Chapter v.

as something connected and the discontinuity. That which is not ridiculous in itself may produce laughter if involved in a contradiction. Thus when one who usually dresses strangely appears on occasions in elegant dress, he is comic. For the same reason drunkenness is comic. We are used to steadiness in human gait and action, and when a drunken man falters, there is a contradiction.

Caricatures are comical because of the contradiction between likeness and unlikeness. Contrasts also produce the comic effect through contradiction.[2]

The existential spheres themselves are differentiated according to their relation to the comical. The aesthetic (immediate) consciousness has the comical outside it. But the ethico-religious consciousness has the comical within it.[3]

The concepts of irony and humour are also derived by Kierkegaard from the theory of existence-spheres :

> There are three spheres of existence ; the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. Two boundary zones correspond to these three : irony constituting the boundary between the aesthetical and the ethical ; humour as the boundary that separates the ethical from the religious.[4]

Kierkegaard rejects the romantic concept of irony as verbal aritifice, a form of expression.

[2] *Postscript*, pp., 458-462. [3] *Ibid.*, pp., 413, 463.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 448.

Kierkegaard calls irony and humour existential determinants.[5]

Whoever has the ironical has it within him always because it springs from having a secret incommunicable to others, and nothing is so ennobling, as Kierkegaard puts it in *Either/Or*, as to have a secret to keep all through life.[6] Irony is the attitude of the ethicist when he recognizes that he "has the infinite within him." This discovery constitutes his secret, and he, avoiding direct communication, becomes an ironist. We can gather the following ideas about the nature of irony from the *Postscript.*

Irony arises when the finite confronts the infinite. From this mutual confrontation arises the contradiction. Irony is, further, a synthesis of ethical passion and culture. The ethical passion accentuates the existential inwardness of the individual and makes him more and more subjectively individualistic. But at the same time education and culture demand that a man should abstract himself from his personal ego. The tension between cultural restraint and ethical passion is the essence of the ironical. Thus an ethicist uses irony as his *incognito.* A *Journal* entry for 1845 defines irony :

> Irony is the fusion of a passionately ethical view which inwardly lays infinite stress upon the self—and of education which outwardly (among others) abstracts infinitely from the personal.[7]

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 449-451. [6] "Ancient Tragical Motif."
[7] *Journals*, ed. and tr. by Dru, p. 139.

The ethical ironist conceals the manner of his inner existence. The ethicist perceives that what interests him absolutely does not interest others absolutely, and his perception transforms him into an ironist.[8]

> Irony is thus a specific culture of the spirit . . . . [it] follows next after immediacy, then comes the ethicist, then the humorist, and finally the religious individual.[9]

Kierkegaard's doctrine of humour is developed in the context of his theory of total guilt or religious guilt. Just as irony is explained as the attitude of an existing individual who must conceal his inner passion for ethical transformation, so also humour occurs as the result of an inner consciousness, the consciousness of guilt. This consciousness of guilt is just *the* criterion of religiosity. The sense of guilt originates in the disparity between the magnitude of the task facing an exister and the fleeting character of temporality. The essential task is that of relating one absolutely to an absolute *telos* and relatively to a relative *telos*. This task has to be achieved in time and thus the individual is responsible for the use of his time. Every delay, every hesitation, means that time has passed. The sense of guilt endures. New decisions are made, and again time goes forward. Guilt endures

[8] I have not been able to consult Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, which is not yet available in the English translation.

[9] *Postscript*, p. 450.

again at a "usurious rate of interest." Thus when we realize the enormity of the task facing us in comparison with its totality, the fact of realizing a little of it is a retrogression. There results the consciousness of total guilt.[10]

The consciousness of total guilt is not to be numerically computed as the sum of smaller guilts. The total guilt is related to an eternal happiness and not to particular deeds of guilt, or what is called the comparative consciousness of guilt. Comparative consciousness of guilt does not comprehend existence as total guilt does.

The essential consciousness of guilt is the first deep plunge into existence.[11]

Comparative consciousness of guilt belongs to aesthetics. Total consciousness of guilt belongs to religion. The aesthetic consciousness has a lower conception of guilt. Aesthetically speaking, guilt is not existential, but only dialectical and accidental. Aesthetically, the individual becomes guilty through some particular action and is not always and existentially guilty. Aesthetics has a remedy for its guilt—nemesis. This conception of nemesis is an aesthetic-metaphysical conception.[12] The doctrine of nemesis assumes the righteousness of nature. Kierkegaard explains it :

[10] Kierkegaard here indirectly refers to the *Bhagavad Geeta*, and to the predicament of Arjuna to illustrate the nature of total guilt.

[11] *Postscript*, p. 473. [12] *Ibid.*, p. 452.

The aesthetic is the unopened inwardness; hence that which is or should be inwardness must manifest itself as an outward perception. It is as when in a tragedy the hero of a bygone age manifests himself as spirit before the eyes of the sleeper; the spectator must behold the spirit, although its manifestation is due to the sleepers's inwardness. So it is also with the consciousness of guilt (aesthetic guilt): inwardness becomes externality. Hence one could see the Furies.[13]

Nemesis is the satisfaction for aesthetic guilt. Humour provides the satisfaction against the consciousness of total guilt. In this sense it constitutes the borderline between the ethical and the religious.

The humorist therefore talks rarely of this guilt or that guilt because he comprehends guilt totally.[14]

The spirit which can transform the consciousness of total guilt is the spirit of childlike innocence. Let the childlike spirit reflect upon this consciousness. The resultant would be a sense of humour.

The humorous effect is produced by letting the childlike trait reflect itself in the consciousness of totality. Intellectual culture on an absolute scale put together with childishness produces humour.[15]

Kierkegaard gives a typical example of a humorous utterance:

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 482. [14] *Ibid.*, p. 489.
[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 489-490.

If a man like Kant who stands at the pinnacle of scientific culture were to say regarding the proofs of God's existence, 'well, I know nothing more about it except that my father told me it was so,' this no doubt would be humorous.[16]

There is a difference between humour and irony. In humour there is a concealed pain. Consequently it also expresses sympathy. But irony has no sympathy. It is detached. Apart from this difference, humour and irony are similar existential determinants in the aesthetics of Kierkegaard. Humour too is a specific culture of the spirit. It gives to existence a greater significance than irony. Humour is a borderline for the hidden inwardness, and it connects the ethical with the religious by assimilating the suffering which religiosity views as essential to existence. "The humorist apprehends the significance of suffering as belonging to existence."[17] Humour recognizes the tragic nature of life, and reconciles us to pain.[18]

[16] *Ibid.* [17] *Ibid.*, p. 402. [18] *Ibid.*, p. 464.

Chapter 8

KIERKEGAARD AND IDEALIST AESTHETIC TRADITION

To what extent are Kierkegaard's ideas on the nature of art and literature related to the tradition of idealist aesthetics? We may widen the scope of the question and ask: Is it possible to view existentialism (as we find it in Kierkegaard) as another offshoot of the romantic temper and spirit? Herbert Read is one among the critics who relate romanticism and existentialism.[1]

According to Read, all the basic ideas of existentialism are present in Schelling and Coleridge. In his opinion all the main concepts of modern existentialism—*Angst*, the abyss, immediacy, the priority of existence over essence—are to be found in Coleridge.[2] In *Coleridge as Critic*, Read maintains:

[1] See Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 81.
Also, Herbert Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism* (London, Freedom Press, 1949); and *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (London, Faber and Faber, 1940), pp. 115-130. Guido de Ruggiero, *Existentialism*, tr. Rayner Heppenstall (London, Secker and Warburg, 1946), 'Introduction.'

[2] *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 5.

The origins of existentialism are usually traced to Kierkegaard, but a much better case can be made out for Schelling.[3]

Mr. Read further argues that writing before Kierkegaard was born, Coleridge had already formulated the terms of an existentialist philosophy.[4] Coleridge had discovered that existence is its own predicate and that the dialectic intellect cannot arrive at insights concerning the possibility and the world.[5] He traces the origin of these ideas in Coleridge to the influence of Schelling who had already anticipated the basic problem of modern philosophy—the struggle between conceptual necessity and existential freedom. Commenting on Schelling, Read concludes :

These later speculations of Schelling were continued by Kierkegaard and are taken up again by Husserl, and are now the pre-occupation of Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre, and other so-called existentialists.[6]

Read's conclusion is that Coleridgean romanticism and Kierkegaardian existentialism, deriving as they do from Schelling's idealist philosophy, are the same.

But one need not labour the obvious, and can, for the time being, settle the controversy by quoting from Kierkegaard's *Journals* concerning Schelling's influence on him :

[3] *Coleridge as Critic* (London, Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 29.
[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.*, p. 32. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Schelling drivels on quite intolerably. . . . His whole doctrine of Potence displays the utmost impotence . . .[7]

It is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to reconcile Schelling's transcendental philosophy and his principal doctrine of identity with Kierkegaard's thought and its stress on existence. Confining our attention to some fundamental ideas basic to the aesthetic theories of each, we see that Kierkegaard opposes the notion of the leap to Schelling's notion of intellectual intuition. In spite of all the variations and developments that Schelling's philosophy underwent, the essential principles of continuity and identity remain in his system. These are ideas which Kierkegaard has demonstrated to be false. Instead, we have the Kierkegaardian ideas of discontinuity and existential disparateness.

To Schelling, art is the true organ of philosophy. The beautiful is the manifestation of the infinite in the finite. And in art, the philosophical problem of the identity of the real and the ideal is solved in sensuous appearance. Poesy and philosophy are intimately related. The aesthetic intuition of the artists and the intellectual intuition of philosophy are the same.[8]

According to Kierkegaard, art is to be understood as a process, a process of communication. It is

[7] Quoted in J. Hohlenberg's *Kierkegaard*, p. 112.

[8] Cf. Katherine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (London, 1956), Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (London, 1956), Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 1800.

neither intuition nor revelation. Art does not reconcile us with reality nor with existence.

Idealist aesthetic theory culminates in Hegel. Hegel's aesthetic philosophy is directed towards the reconciliation of the Infinite and the Finite. Hegel's doctrine of the Absolute Spirit asserts the unity of the subjective and objective spirit. Spirit in this union becomes perfectly free from all contradictions and is reconciled with itself. The dichotomy between subject and object, representation and thing, thought and being, the finite and the infinite, is done away with. The infinite is recognized as the essence of the finite. The knowledge of the reconciliation of the highest opposites or of the infinite in the finite manifests itself through the intuition of art, the feeling embodied in religion, and philosophical speculation.

The beautiful, in Hegel's philosophy, is the absolute or infinite in the finite, manifested through sensuous existence, the idea in limited manifestation. In his Berlin *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel defines art as the presentation of the Ideal.[9] A more critical examination of the evolution of the mind through the arts is given in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.[10] Art is always interpreted by Hegel as the presentation of the Ideal, and the Ideal is the Absolute viewed through art.

[9] Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art*, tr. F. P. B. Osmaston. 4 vols. London, 1920.

[10] *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J. B. Baillie, London, 1955.

The idea *qua* beautiful in art is not the Idea as such, in the mode in which a metaphysical logic apprehends it as the absolute, but the idea as developed into concrete form fit for reality, and as having entered into immediate and adequate unity with this reality.[11]

And,

Art . . . imparts to phenomenal appearances a higher reality born of mind.[12]

In short the idealist tradition of aesthetic theory beginning with Fichte and developing through Schelling, culminates in the works of Hegel in a metaphysics of art. Aesthetics has been transformed into metaphysics. Art and truth are reconciled in a metaphysical synthesis. Thus when Schelling asserts in his *Philosophie der Kunst* that God is the immediate cause of all art, he initiates a tradition of metaphysical aesthetics which finally leads to the assertion found in Hegel's philosophy that art has the function of revealing truth in the form of sensuous, artistic shapes and of presenting to us the reconciliation of the contradiction, and that the subject-matter of art is spiritual reality.[13]

[11] *Hegel's Introduction to Philosophy of Fine Art*, tr. B. Bosanquet, London, 1886, p. 141.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[13] It is not necessary for our purpose to examine in detail the minuter aspects of their respective theories. The point at issue is the very metaphysical character of their aesthetic theories.

Kierkegaard's aesthetic theory is not metaphysical. It is an empirical theory of art. And it has, therefore, limited applicability. It is relevant chiefly to the literary arts. Although of limited applicability, it saves us from many far-fetched, abstract, metaphysical generalizations which throw no light on the explication or appreciation of works of art. The attempt to explain the nature of artistic activity and of the mode of existence of art from a metaphysical standpoint has always, from Plato to Hegel, proved wrong and misleading. Kierkegaard's theory defines and delimits the nature and scope of aesthetic enquiry. Questions relating to ultimate reality are separated from aesthetic enquiries.[14] Moreover Kierkegaard's doctrines of suffering, tragic and religious, his analysis of the pathos in aesthetics and existence, all clearly indicate his points of departure from the tradition of idealism.

[14] *Postscript*, pp. 189-283.

Chapter 9

KIERKEGAARD AND ROMANTICISM

ALTHOUGH Kierkegaard's aesthetic thought offers some points of contact with romanticism, he does not belong with the romantics. He repudiates both idealism and romanticism.

In one sense, idealist philosophy and artistic romanticism belong together. In the case of philosophical idealism, the philosopher seeks to integrate into his thought the creative intuition of the artist, whereas the romantic artist seeks to integrate idealist assumptions into his art.

Kierkegaard's criticism of the main aspects of the romantic spirit is well known. The most marked contrasts between romanticism and his thought is to be found in his criticism of the diamonic principles of life which the romantics chiefly cultivated and in his analysis of the nature of the human self and of human personality. In Kierkegaard's interpretation of the legends of Don Juan and Faust, we have a sustained criticism of the romantic attitudes and values. Both Duan Juan and Faust embody sensuousness and despair, themes which are the favourites of literary romanticism. The two principles in accordance with which aesthetic

existence is determined are those of aesthetic immediacy and intellectual doubt.

Kierkegaard considers Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the supreme expression of the romantic ideal of sensuous immediacy, an important romantic principle. The sensuality which Don Juan embodies is a kingdom of values in contradistinction to the world of spiritual and ethical values.[1] Here we obtain the implicit tendency to make aesthetic interests primary. Don Juan illustrates the fact that when passion is separated from moral will and the rule of the spirit, it degenerates into lust. Existence loses its goal and becomes a search for the pleasurable moment. Such a life ends in *ennui*, restlessness, and finally despair.

The romantics fail to appreciate the full scope of the life of passions. The ethicist in the second volume of *Either/Or* writes to the aesthetist in the first volume :

> However, the spirit will not let itself be mocked, it revenges itself upon you, it binds you with the chain of melancholy.[2]

The individual whose life is governed by the principle of aesthetic romanticism cannot make a permanent decision because the aesthetic life makes no provision for the moral will. But Kierkegaard insists that the moral passion itself is one

[1] Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p. 53.
[2] *Either/Or*, II, p. 208.

of the deepest passions. The romantics follow passion so long as passion yields pleasure. But they abandon the passional side of life when life has to deal with the higher moral and spiritual passions. "Faith," he tells us, "is the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity."[3] Thus Kierkegaard rejects the romantic advocacy of passion as inadequate. He goes beyond the romantics in making passion the central existential principle. The aesthetic passion of romanticism is replaced by the existential passion of subjectivity.

It is the romantic themes of intellectual doubt and diamonia which come in for criticism in the interpretation of *Faust*. Faust is a repetition in the later Middle Ages of Don Juan.[4]

> Don Juan . . . is the expression for the daemonic determined as sensuous; Faust, its expression determined as the intellectual or spiritual which the Christian spirit excludes.[5]

Kierkegaard considers Faust to have appeared later than Don Juan, when the European man after his revolt against the Catholic Church is left unguided. And Faust is the symbol of this. Though Faust is "a reproduction of Don Juan," the two characters, as they develop, show differences. Kierkegaard objects to the usual conclusion that Faust finally becomes a Don Juan. Unlike the sensuousness of Don Juan, the sensuousness of

[3] *Postscript*, p. 118. [4] *Either/Or*, I, p. 89. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Faust is the result of a previous frustration and the loss of a whole "kingdom of intellect." What he seeks therefore is not simple sensual pleasure, but "a striving which detracts and diverts his attention from the nothingness of doubt."[6]

Faust is interpreted as a daemonic figure in *Fear and Trembling*. An intellectual diamonia, like the spirit of sensuousness, is a special dominating principle according to which a person ordains his life. And like the romantic notion of genius, he is a law unto himself. But can such a life be related to a genuine existence ? Is every intellectual diamonia an adequate substitute for existence ? Kierkegaard's interpretation of the story of Faust shows the futility of such lives and the intellectual despair which is the final goal of such lives.

The most significant point of departure from romanticism is to be found in Kierkegaard's interpretation of the nature of personality and self. It is true that like the romantic philosophers, Kierkegaard also stresses the importance of the individual. But almost on every point, Kierkegaard's interpretation is at variance with that of romanticism. Rousseauistic individualism asserts the importance of the individual as against society and social institutions. Romantic individualism on the whole stresses the experiential side of man, rejecting the moral will in existence. Consequently, personality is viewed under the category of neces-

[6] *Ibid.*, I, p. 204.

sity. The aesthetic individual is the accidental individual. And aesthetically viewed, the substantial unity of the self is a datum, and not the result of an ethical choice.[7]

Kierkegaard's trichotomous view of man as a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily, places emphasis on the element of synthesis. The synthesizing factor is the spirit, and without this synthesis of spirit there is no unity of self, and the unity of the self is not the datum from which we proceed, but the result of the ethical will choosing itself in its concretion.[8] The nature of human reality is consequently understood in terms of a substantial tension in which contraries are united by the existential passion of subjectivity. The nature of man is not to be understood merely as a unity of trichotomous elements, but as a possibility, a possibility which becomes through freedom an actuality in existence.

The idea of the human self is posited by the qualitative leap. Before the leap there is no self.[9]

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics,* Bergson accepts unity of the self as the primary datum of experience.

But to Kierkegaard :

> The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it]

[7] *Fear and Trembling,* pp. 148-152.
[8] See *Dread,* p. 39 ; *Sickness unto Death,* p. 17 ff.
[9] *Dread,* p. 71.

that the relation relates itself to its own self ; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self.[10]

Thus the reality of the self is not in its substantial unity, but in the fact that it is a relation which relates itself to itself. Consequently the self is freedom.[11] And freedom is the dialectical element in the terms possibility and necessity.[12] And the consciousness of the self is the decisive criterion of self—the more consciousness, the more self ; the more will, the more self.[13]

The task of the self is to become. George Price points out concerning Kierkegaard's theory of the self :

> The self is activity. There are only events, bodily and mental, which are synthesized into living patterns of reality.[14]

The Kierkegaardian conception of the self which lies behind his doctrine of the individual is different from the conception of the romantic philosophers. The individual becomes an 'individual' by choosing himself as a concretion. And this concretion is the reality of the individual. Or as the ethicist puts it in *Either/Or*, the individual is his own teleology. And the personality manifests itself as the absolute

[10] *Sickness unto Death*, p. 17. [11] *Either/Or*, p. 218.
[12] *Sickness unto Death*, p. 43. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[14] *The Narrow Pass* (London, Hutchinson, 1963), p. 37.

which has its own teleology in itself.[15] Personality is a synthesis of possibility and necessity.[16]

This description of the nature of the self leads to a scheme of values different from that of romanticism; Ethical calling (duty) becomes a higher value than aesthetic talent or the pursuit of the beautiful. Aesthetic (or romantic) conception of heroism yields to ethical heroism, and the heroic lies not in deeds of exceptional magnificence, but "in the way a thing is done."[17] The existential hero finds pleasure in fulfilling his duty however low, "in doing his job." He works in order to live. His work is at the same time his pleasure, and he fulfils the duties of his calling. According to the ethicist in *Either/Or*:

> In calling a man a hero one must reflect not so much upon what he does as upon how he does it. One man may conquer kingdoms and lands without being a hero, another may show himself a hero by ruling his own spirit. One man may show courage by doing the extraordinary, another by doing the ordinary.[18]

Kierkegaard's attitude towards melancholy is also not an aesthetic one. He considers melancholy a determinant of the spirit. Melancholy is the hysteria of the spirit. In the aesthetic life of sensuous immediacy, the spirit is neglected. But at a certain stage, the spirit demands a higher form of exis-

[15] *Either/Or*, II, pp, 256-279. [16] *Sickness unto Death*, p. 62.
[17] *Either/Or*, II, p, 300. [18] *Ibid.*, p. 303.

tence in which it can apprehend itself as spirit. Immediacy coheres with earthly existence. But the spirit will collect itself and transform the personality by making it conscious of itself in its eternal validity. If this transformation of existence is checked, the consequence is melancholy. Thus melancholy is the psychological state resulting when existential transformation is arrested. Melancholy, dread, and despair—these are psychological states preceding existential transformations.

Thus when we examine the major conceptions of Kierkegaard's thought, the differences between his intellectual and aesthetic positions and those of romanticism begin to emerge more distinctly.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

KIERKEGAARD'S reflections on art and literature are fragmentary and occasional. They lack the finality of conclusions which doctrinaire existentialists and the phenomenologists of the twentieth century have attempted to impart to their theories. Although fragmentary and occasional, they throw light on the issues under discussion. Since the discussion of aesthetic problems is related to the aesthetic mode of existence, the connection between literature and life is defined. The aesthetic-poetic interpretation of reality is shown to be relevant to a certain mode of approach. But what is offered as ultimately relevant to the human situation is not the aesthetic-poetic approach to reality, but the existential preoccupation with reality.

Modern existentialism tends to systematize its aesthetic reflections. The application of phenomenological method to the explication of literary works has yielded some substantial results. But a metaphysics of art, from which Kierkegaard fortunately saves us, is indirectly introduced. Thus, Arturo B. Fallico's attempt to deduce a generalized aesthetic theory leads us once again to the domain of

metaphysics. His conclusion is that art antecedes reflective action.[1] His main point of departure is ontological.[2] Phenomenological aesthetics generally begin with ontological problems, while Kierkegaard starts with existential enquiries. Fallico relates art and being. Art embodies the pure possibility of being.[3]

According to him, the aesthetic and spontaneous is prior to the practical and intellectual; that is to say, it is an immanent pre-condition feeding the main life-stream of existential activity. It is also, and above all, operative and present in every moment of our human experiential reality.[4] These few conclusions point out how dangerously close to idealist aesthetics does Fallico's theory come.

If we thus separate aesthetics from existence, and relate it to being, neglecting the essential element of communication in art, the result would be a confusion of aesthetic categories with metaphysical categories.

A safer method would be to reject ontological issues and confine our attention to the method of explicating works of art through phenomenology. Some phenomenologists pose the aesthetic problem as essentially the problem of the mode of existence of a work of art, and its system of strata. By reducing aesthetic phenomena to psychological processes, it is possible to elucidate the artistic quality of an art-object.[5]

[1] *Art and Existentialism*, New Jersey, 1962, p. 60 ff.
[2] *Ibid.*, "Preface," p. vii. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 66. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[5] Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Phenomenology and Science in Contemporary European Thought*, New York, 1962, p. 32.

Existential aesthetic theory had its origin in the occasional protests which are found in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky. Modern existentialists have streamlined these sporadic protests into regular concepts : the concept of the absurd (Camus), *Befindlichkeit* (Heidegger), anguish and transcendence (Jaspers), hope (Marcel), nausea (Sartre). And existential aesthetic concepts replace intellectual concepts. Existential concepts enable the existential writers to grasp reality in its affective elements.[6] And it is in this effort that existentialism and literary art are closely united. The common ground between modern art and existential philosophy is the human interior.[7]

The time-old opposition between artist and thinker vanishes in the aesthetic theories of existentialism. Here Kierkegaard paved the way for their reunion. The truth of the artist eludes the conceptual grasp of the philosopher, and existentialism invites thought to rethink itself in the face of the recalcitrant data set forth by the artist.[8] It is Kierkegaard who began for the first time in the nineteenth century to grapple with such data. His analysis of the existential spheres and existential possibilities brings into focus the deeper dimension of an intentional communion with

[6] Cf. Albert Dondeyne, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*, tr. Ernan McMullin and John Burnheim, Pittsburg, 1958.

[7] Cf. J. Von Rintelen, *Beyond Existentialism*, tr. Hilda Graef, London, 1961.

[8] William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, New York, 1958, p. 258.

reality, the reality of existential becoming. Kierkegaard's aesthetic theory, not merely centres around the problem of discovering existence as a factual engagement in being, but more importantly centres around the experience of certain inner psychological states such as the experience of conflict, doubt, melancholy, despair, crisis, loneliness, boredom, *ennui*, which condition and prompt the self to greater and greater inwardness and subjectivity.[9] Modern literary existentialism finds many, if not most, of its themes in Kierkegaard's analysis of these psychological states.

[9] Cf. Frederick Patka (ed.) *Existentialist Thinkers and Thought*, New York, 1964.

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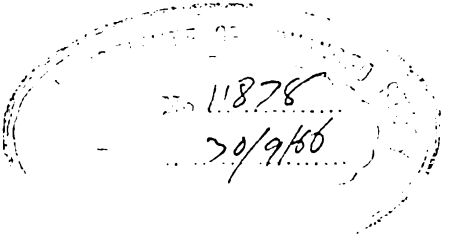

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