



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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KIERKEGAARD AND THE PREVALENT  
METAPHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION: CRITICAL  
REFLECTION

BY

**BELAY TEKA**

*A thesis submitted to Department of Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Philosophy*

ADVISOR

**Prof. BEKELE GUTEMA (Ph.D.)**

July, 2019

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis work is my original work, has not been accepted for a degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree in this or any other universities, and all sources of materials used for the thesis work have been fully acknowledged.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university advisor.

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Advisor's Name

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Signature

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## INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to present Kierkegaard in a systematic manner. In this paper, however, I have systematically defended the thesis that he is a trenchant critique of what I call ‘dominant metaphilosophical tradition’. In other words, I have argued we cannot comfortably locate him as another philosopher in the metaphilosophy that can be generally classified as ‘traditional’. I have demonstrated that his theories of faith, existence, choice, indirect communication, and the self are some of the concepts that put him at odds with this tradition.

In the above assertion, the term ‘dominant metaphilosophical tradition’ is in need of clarification. In the opening chapter, therefore, I have expounded what I mean by ‘dominant metaphilosophical tradition’. In this introductory part let me just say that the prevalent metaphilosophical tradition refers to the fundamentally unchanged worldview of what philosophy is, what it is for, and the method it follows. I believe there is basic continuity.

Philosophy has been predominantly conceived to be the most general and most conscious discipline. It is based on the assumption that man is rational and through reasoning we can reach at knowledge or truth which is generally acceptable by all provided that they follow the same rule and method. This method of reasoning as the root to truth is said to have a universal and objective effect on anyone who follows and practices it. It is only in this sense that I shall argue that “Kierkegaard is an outsider in the history of philosophy”, to use the expression of William MacDonald (2018).

I believe that the whole authorship of Kierkegaard basically tells us that the true task of philosophy is not to build all-round system of knowledge but like Socrates it is about knowing that “philosophy is in the last analysis knowledge of ignorance”(Strauss,1987,p.33). This self-undermining approach is motivated by Kierkegaard’s underlying conviction that man is sinful, temporal and finite. The ramification of this conviction is that it is impossible for man to build a comprehensive system of knowledge that amounts to having a sort of godlike eye. It also signifies the impossibility of complete impersonal objectivity which Thomas Nagel (1986) calls “the view from nowhere”.

In the history of Western philosophy, philosophers have forgotten one important thing which impelled Kierkegaard to produce voluminous writings in a very short period of time. They all

forget what it means to exist and; thus, to be human. Considering a few examples will help us understand this claim. Generality for Plato, for instance, is equated with Knowledge which involves Truth. Philosophy must be about the general as the particulars are deceptive, unstable, and ever-changing. This in turn entails that truth, knowledge and reality are conceptual and abstract. To Kierkegaard's detest, for Plato, the concept 'humanness' is real as compared to an individual human being with flesh and blood. Kierkegaard also saw similar problem i.e. the problem of forgetting being human, in Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and more importantly in Hegel. Foundationalism of Descartes, totality of Spinoza, universality of Kant and absolutism of Hegel are instances of this problem.

Concepts such as generality, objectivity, conceptuality, rationality, universality, logical argument and reasoning as a path to truth and knowledge characterize what I call "dominant metaphilosophical tradition". These concepts have conspicuously dominated the history of philosophy and metaphilosophy as established characters which Kierkegaard attempted to refute. They all imply the prevailing belief of how philosophy is supposed to be.

After clearing the ground in chapter one, in the ensuing three chapters, therefore, I will demonstrate how Kierkegaard stood in sharp contrast with the above elements of the tradition in question. In chapter two, for instance, I will argue that his idea of "indirect communication" is a direct attack on objectivity and universality. It shows how it is difficult to convey a proposition which supposedly has an objective content and universal validation. If Kierkegaard is consistent with his claim that we don't have a life-structuring general, objective, universal scheme for the reason that being human is an existential condition, then to directly communicate this subjectivity, or "inwardness" that is not subsumed in this magnificent scheme is difficult. Hence, he resorts to indirect communication which includes pseudonyms, irony, humor, parables, sarcasm, parody and metaphors. Consequently, he consciously undermines his authorship as a pronouncement of an authoritative, objective and universal truth. His pseudonymous writings embody this self-undermining, self-disowning, self-revoking, self-retracting, self-withdrawing, and self-removing approach. This leads to the conclusion that faith and existential truth, in an ethico-religious realm, cannot be directly communicated for they are an inward life of each and every individual. For Kierkegaard, morality and religion are inextricable from human action.

One of the famous Kierkegaardian theses, to wit, ‘truth is subjectivity’ implies that both faith and existential truth are activities. To be specific, faith and truth are acts of choice. Throughout Kierkegaard’s writings we find words like ‘passion’, ‘inwardness’ etc. In my understanding, if I have to put them in a single word, ‘connection’ would describe them. By ‘truth is subjectivity’, Kierkegaard meant connecting with the truth through our individual acts of choice. For him, truth about goodness, for instance, does not lie in the most general, abstract, conceptual notion rather it resides in actively and existentially choosing good. Through passion and inwardness we become good, we choose good; we connect with doing good. But how do I know the truth to connect to in the first place? Kierkegaard oscillates between God, as a last resort, like George Berkeley, and that helplessly ‘solitary individual’ who is in a risky condition of choosing without guidance that helps her to know its consequence.

In chapter three, I have discussed Kierkegaard’s attitude towards reason and rationality. One way of discussing this could be through examining his ‘doctrines’ of choice, existence and faith. Kierkegaard never gives an accurate definition to his terms that are said to have deductive implications. So my reference of these terms is based on commentary books. As such I find myself in between two contending theories of “radical choice” and “responsible fideism” proposed by Alasdair Macintyre and C. Stephen Evans, respectively. Whereas the former implies that choice is devoid of reason; hence, insinuating that Kierkegaard supports irrationality, the latter admits that Kierkegaard is fideist but a different kind, one who rationally and responsibly argues that reason has limitations and that faith is beyond it. Irrational or rational fideist, I have argued that both theories are in line with my thesis that Kierkegaard rebelled against the dominant metaphilosophical tradition.

Moreover, in the same chapter, I have attempted to place Kierkegaard in what Isaiah Berlin called “The Counter-Enlightenment tradition”; thus, a critique to the dominant metaphilosophical tradition, assuming that the pillars of the Enlightenment are rationality, objectivity and universality.

Finally, in chapter four, I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard’s idea of the self is very much related with his critic of Christendom and speculative philosophy. As he firmly believes that totality and objectivity is inaccessible to an existing human being, a complete, fixed and unalterable self is also an illusion. Philosophers dehumanize themselves by purporting to

establish a system of eternal truth/knowledge. According to Kierkegaard, the self is dehumanized for it has been conceived to be eternal, static, uniform etc. The self as he defines it is a 'spirit'. A spirit is open and free. It evolves and changes in material time. The self is not immovable like definition. It is not a finished product. The self, for him, therefore, comprises being and becoming at the same time.

However, this self is not devoid of problems in the process of becoming. It suffers from what Kierkegaard called "despair" and "*angest*" (*angst, anxiety* or dread). Despair occurs in many ways but primarily it occurs when the self refuses to become self or when it fails to take up the task of creating oneself. Particularly, a despair which is directly related to this thesis shall be philosophy's futile attempt to build overarchitectural system using human reason. The other condition of the self i.e. anxiety is individual's recognition or awareness of possibility and freedom.

## CHAPTER ONE

### KIERKEGAARD AND THE DOMINANT METAPHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

#### 1. WHAT IS THE DOMINANT METAPHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION?

In trying to present Kierkegaard as a thinker whose ideas stood in sharp contrast with ‘the dominant metaphilosophy’, two intertwinedly instituted traditions of his age he severely attacked must be paid utmost attention. One was what he called ‘Christendom’ in the Danish State Lutheran Church and the other was Hegel’s speculative philosophy and its influence in the religious and intellectual life of the then Denmark. These two polemics fundamentally constitute and define Kierkegaard’s philosophy. In this chapter, I am not; thus, primarily concerned with analyzing Kierkegaard’s individualism or so-called existentialism *per se*. Rather I want to highlight his critic against the cultural, intellectual, and more importantly for him, the religious establishment.

Kierkegaard revolted against an age where unanimity replaced subjectivity and conformity shunned responsibility. For him, what is at stake in a culture of unanimity and conformity is authenticity. Does this make him asocial or solipsist? Not so much if his challenge of a society is Socratic. That is to say he questioned a complacent culture which was less self-critical due to its uniformity. His individualistic orientation was meant to expose the self-deception and ‘bad faith’ (as Sartre calls it) the individual is in. He wanted to rescue the individual who was lost in membership, habit and accumulated knowledge and who evaded taking responsibility for his personal choices. It is in this context that his philosophy must be understood.

But before looking into the depth of his philosophy it is imperative to understand the nature of the ‘dominant metaphilosophy’ he stood against. I chose the concept metaphilosophy because, in my view, that was what Kierkegaard engaged in. First, he problematized the way philosophy has been perceived in the West. As such, his primary concern was not with some intractable traditional philosophical problems but with philosophy itself- its nature, method and purpose. Second, he has been portrayed as fideist, irrational, anti-philosophy, Romantic and postmodern. In my opinion, some of these portrayals presuppose a certain metaphilosophy, that is to say, what philosophy is, what it is for, what method should it follow etc...etc. Arguments for or

against the presence of philosophical content in a certain thought, therefore, pose the question-what is philosophy in the first place? Hence, they presuppose a metaphilosophy.

Philosophers do not often agree on the nature, purpose and method of philosophy. Hence, there is no single characterization throughout its history. However, there is this characterization of philosophy that is usually presumed to be *the* characterization. The dominant metaphilosophy that is taken for granted, therefore, generally depicts philosophy as a discipline that, using objective and universal Reason as its tool, rigorously deals with the fundamental questions of human existence. It is viewed as an enterprise that rationally, objectively, and universally systematizes our investigations of human problems. One may not think of any other account of philosophy other than that but my task here is to discuss and critically examine how Kierkegaard problematized this practice of rational, objective, universal systematization (or establishment) in philosophy.

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye in his primer *The Unexamined Life*, for instance, defines philosophy as “a rational critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas underlying human thought, experience and conduct”(Gyekye, 1988, p.2). In this short introductory book which tries to show the practicality of philosophy without denying its abstraction, Gyekye insinuates, among other things, universality, objectivity and rational systematization to be defining elements of the enterprise called philosophy. He further argues:

The abstract level at which the philosopher operates is perhaps unavoidable in as much as philosophical questions are very often general. (Incidentally, the greater generality possessed by philosophical questions is one of the important ways in which philosophy differs from the special sciences) (ibid. p.4).

Owing to philosophy’s objectivity and universality, therefore, abstraction is inescapable.

Likewise, in virtually all introductory books, authors claim that philosophy is the most general discipline. Traditionally knowledge is supposed to be knowledge of the general, the complete, and the universal. It is a widely accepted intellectual disposition that scholars aim at building an overall philosophical system or abstraction that purports to grasp every possible singularity and explain human experiences. System can be understood as a mixture of general body of principles, doctrines, generalizations, conceptual frameworks, and abstractions. The system is claimed to totally avoid exceptional instances and/or anomalies that disprove/falsify it. Hence, the system is supposed to be comprehensive, complete, and general and so on. And to be fully

comprehensive, complete and general, it has to deny a place for any particularity that doesn't allow itself to be subsumed in the general system. It needs to make sure there is no system beyond the System. When Knowledge is believed to be knowledge of the general and/or the complete all knowledge *claims* are supposed to be whole. In other words, it is self- defeating to argue that there is incomplete knowledge or almost knowledge.

“Kierkegaard’s whole career might well be considered a self- conscious revolt against abstract thought” ( Fieser and Stumpf, 2015, p.372).According to Kierkegaard, the widely held metaphilosophical belief that philosophy aims at grasping the most general is problematic in that it can never be general enough. It cannot put existence on hold and embrace *Everything*. Existence is in a perpetual flux and continual process of change. So the minute we attempt to wholly secure knowledge about it, we become ignorant. Particularities *always* slip away from its leash of generality. As such generality fails to generalize some historical and/or existential dimensions. So, it becomes detached and disconnected. The implication of this is that our general epistemological conceptual frameworks and universal rational discourses lose their position as *the* only Knowledge or Truth. As a result, we cannot thwart such philosophy from frustration and discontent.

“He [Kierkegaard] revolted against the rational emphasis in classic Greek thought, which, he charged, permeated subsequent philosophy and Christian theology” (ibid.373).Ancient Greek philosophy, represented by philosophers such as, to mention only a few, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for instance, is known for believing in reason that supposedly investigates fundamental human questions through logical argumentation, clear and distinct demonstration and definition of concepts. These concepts were supposed to be abstract and general. Plato’s theoretical philosophy, for instance, despises particularity as unstable, always changing, uncertain and hence not the source of real knowledge which involves truth. Concepts are the means to arrive at this certain, unchanging, one, overarching truth/knowledge- knowledge that is supposed to subsume all the particular instances anytime anywhere. For Plato knowledge is knowledge of the general and hence it is universal. For the reason that there is no unknown knowledge, generality entails completeness, comprehensiveness, fullness, an all-in-all epistemological grasp of the to-be-known.

This endless philosophical frustration unavoidably exists in modern philosophy that tries to find an objective disinterested truth through universally objective reason. Kierkegaard shows the limitation and hence; frustration of temporal and finite reason which tries to encompass *Everything* and be *the* foundation but which inevitably fails for it is presumptuous of existential conditions, and multiplicities of experiences. The above premodern characterization of philosophy continued in what is called Western modernity to which I shall now turn.

### **1.1. Enlightenment Modernity**

In modern metaphilosophy this tradition of depicting philosophy as a rational inquiry of our fundamental problems/questions is adherently followed. By drawing a sharp line between itself and that of the premodern, modern metaphilosophy emphasizes the courageously autonomous use of objective and universal reason by the individual. In this era traditional authorities of the premodern such as the Pope, Kings or Aristotelian scholastics were vehemently rejected. Reason has become the only authority of truth and knowledge in all spheres of life.

As the Enlightenment which is also known as the Age of Reason chronologically came after the so-called Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment philosophers wanted to see the physical sciences' success repeated in the fields of value-laden areas such as theology, religion, morality, politics and philosophy. Just like the scientific assertion that scientific statements are universally true and objectively disinterested, philosophical statements are characterized as universal and objective. Hence, knowledge and truth in the fields of morality, religion and politics are considered to be universal and objective. Both are claimed to work anytime anywhere irrespective of language, history, culture, and geography.

The ramification of imitating the scientific method in philosophy was that philosophers came to believe that there should be a universal law of nature governing human life. The Enlightenment thinker, John Locke, in his *Second Treatise Concerning Civil Government*, for instance, argued that “[t]he state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason [...] is that law”(Locke,2003,p.102).Just like the scientists challenged the idea that truth or knowledge wasn't from an authority but from using an independent power of the mind, political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau challenged the idea that the king had an absolute power to rule his subjects and that he was literally God's agent on earth. Instead

of taking God for granted as a source of legitimate political power they consciously posed the question, “what is the source of power?” And they attempted to deal with it through human reason. Each individual using his autonomous reason can engage in establishing a covenant which will be the source of political power. Notice that popular sovereignty is one of the political ramifications of the Enlightenment.

The same line of thought was followed in religion too. At a time when perpetual violence and war over the truth of religious doctrines permeated Europe, philosophers thought that only the use of impersonal, disinterested, universal and objective reason in the sphere of religion could bring about toleration and everlasting peace. This means that, like the Ethiopian philosopher Zera’ a Yaqob, truth was believed to be one. And provided that everyone rationally discovers and follows this single truth, peace will prevail. As opposed to the idea that religious truth can only be received from God through revelation, this thought, which has come to be known as “natural religion” and/or “natural theology”, espouses the idea that it is possible to use “the cognitive faculties that are “natural” to human beings [such as] reason, sense-perception, introspection - to investigate religious or theological matters”(Chignell and Pereboom, 2017, p.1). These Enlightenment ideals were hugely represented by Western philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, to mention only a few. Let us briefly see them one by one.

### ***1.1.1. Rene Descartes***

In Western philosophy, the phrase ‘the father of Modern philosophy’ is traditionally associated with the name Rene Descartes. He was crowned with this depiction for the French philosopher’s attempt to autonomously come up with self evident and certain first principle that could be the reliable basis for all forms of knowledge. He strategically defied at least two external authorities- the church and the Scholars. Consistent with his methodical doubt, he didn’t resort to the dubitable God ( for he could potentially be the genius deceiver) or Aristotelian Scholars as a foundation for truth/knowledge rather he put trust in his mind’s ability to come up with an *apriori*, clear and distinct idea. In other words, he exalted independent rational inquiry by the subject who assumes exclusive authority. He contends that only the *cogito* is able to achieve foundationally certain knowledge. What is outside the ordaining/imposing *cogito*’s schematic rationalization cannot be known for certain.

Descartes can be typically situated under the dominant metaphilosophical tradition for his emphasis on universal, objective human reason which is supposed to produce foundational system. Leela Gandhi in her *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* argues:

To think of the world mathematically, that is, as *mathesis*, thus requires a reductive application of a few abstract and generalizing principles to the multiplicity of particular things. It requires a progression from *theoria*, or theory' to praxis, or practice, rather than the other way around. Seen in this way, Cartesian *mathesis* is clearly the basis of the Enlightenment universalism (Gandhi, 1998, p.36).

### **1.1.2. Baruch Spinoza**

Spinoza, one of the radical Enlightenment thinkers and a handful of philosophers Kierkegaard mentioned in his writings, embarked on inventing a new religion that was supposed to be impersonal, scientific and objective using universal human reason. In his *The Ethics*, Spinoza asserts that “[w]hatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (Spinoza2002, 224). He defines God as impersonal, indistinguishable from nature. He rejects all the anthropomorphic views of God mentioned in the Holy Scriptures - the God who makes, orders, talks, hears, dies, rages, and has interest in human beings. In other words, there is no separate ‘sky God’ beyond nature. For him God is timeless and cannot be divided. Just like his idea of ‘Substance’ God is an indivisible whole. Therefore, he argued, the best way to know God is to understand just the way the world is, by studying everything that *is*. His metaphysical thought views reality as static and solid entity.

Alasdair MacIntyre duly noted Spinoza’s anticipation of Hegel when he contends:

The universe is a single web in which the whole determines every part. To explain any state of affairs is to understand that and how it must necessarily be as it is, given that other things are as they are. If we try to envisage anything apart from the system, we are trying to envisage something whose occurrence could not be made intelligible, since to be intelligible is to be exhibited as part of the system. The name of this single system is “*Deus, sive Natura* (God or Nature)” (MacIntyre, 1967, p.142).

In the context of understanding Kierkegaard it is imperative to see how Spinoza, following the spirit of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, distances himself from the traditional past, and plans to replace the old religion with a radically new one which is solely based on human reason. Using reason, Spinoza famously distinguishes two ways of looking at the world. He argues we can either look at it from a finite self-centered position which he calls “under the

aspect of time” (*sub specie durationis*) or we can look at it “under the aspect of eternity” (*sub specie aeternitatis*). The former acknowledges man’s finitude, its unique time-bound, partial and incomplete vantage-point. The latter is supposed to view the world from eternity by assuming a kind of godlike eye that purportedly enables philosophers to “participate in eternal totality”. Kierkegaard, firmly standing against Spinoza’s *sub specie aeternitatis*, “thinks that there is a comical contradiction between the aspirations of such a philosopher to see the world as if he were God and his actual, finite existence” (Evans 2009, p.40).

### **1.1.3. Immanuel Kant**

Kant as the most “typical and supreme representative of the Enlightenment” (MacIntyre 1967, p.190), identifies the age with the courageous and autonomous use of reason. In his famous essay “What is Enlightenment?” Kant defines Enlightenment as “man’s release from his self incurred tutelage.” The tutelage here stands for the intellectual laziness one imposes on himself by allowing traditional, cultural, or religious authorities to overshadow his ability to use his own mind. The fettered person thinks: “If I have a book that has understanding for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who judges my diet for me, and so forth, surely I do not need to trouble myself. I have no need to think, if only I can pay; others will take over the tedious business for me” (Kant 1996, p.58). The Enlightenment is an age where the individual is, thus, encouraged to rebel against these authorities and proclaim the ultimate judge to be his independent reason. Reason as Kant sees it is universal and objective.

Even though Kant in his critical theory limits the role of reason, his moral theory can be taken as a defense of religion. Kant in his deontological moral doctrine argues that every individual being endowed with inherent rational will should use his independent reason to come up with universalizable moral laws. These laws are supposed to be categorical (as opposed to hypothetical) and absolute commands that the individual should follow as a duty not expecting any reward in return. The duty is supposed to be followed for its own sake. Kant’s emphasis on the idea that the law must originate from the individual who is exercising the capacity to reason results in rejecting any external authority other than the individual himself. Hence, God, human desires, wants, inclinations are all shunned as externals (as heteronymous). We shouldn’t follow moral laws even if they are from God or because our natural desires and needs compel us to behave in a certain way. Moral laws presuppose freedom and we can’t claim we are free if we

allow any external authority such as God or natural human desires to dictate us. In his view, we can't find morality in a mechanically determined nature. However, when Kant says in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, "the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition of a supreme cause of nature" (Kant, in Gardiner 1988, p.22), he is asserting that his morality would be pointless unless "[p]ractical reason presupposes [...] a belief in God, freedom, and immortality. God is required as a power capable of realizing the *summum bonum*, of crowning virtue with happiness; immortality is required because virtue and happiness manifestly do not coincide in this life; and freedom is the presupposition of the categorical imperative"(MacIntyre, 1967, p.196).

It is important to note that Kant's moral theory is essentially interconnected with his epistemology. Awakened from his "dogmatic slumber" by Hume's critic, Kant in his transcendental idealism asserts the idea that what is knowable is the experience that can be shaped by universal categories and concepts in our mind. In his transcendental realism, however, he contends that the *noumenal* world is beyond the grasp of reason altogether. That is to say properties of objects of knowledge are not dependent on the mind; hence, unknowable. So argued, according to Kant, God is inaccessible to human reason leaving room for faith. His theory of epistemology, being devoid of God, and his moral laws are from the individual not from outside authorities like God, Kant inconsistently concludes the idea that good moral acts are rewarding in after life by God with happiness. Kierkegaard would be happy about Kant's effort in limiting the capacity of reason when it comes to religion. However, he would despise the reductionist and apologetic sense of Kant's natural religion. For Kierkegaard, Kant's attempt to ground religion on his moral theory is another attempt to vindicate religion through human means i.e. reason and language.

#### ***1.1.4. G.W.F. Hegel***

In contemporary philosophy it is now universally accepted that the finite individual cannot build system of Knowledge/Truth which is overarching. A number of philosophers today convincingly argue that there is no such thing as *the* Truth for philosophy and philosophers are historical, social, cultural etc. In other words, ahistorical, asocial and cultureless and hence; objective, universal knowledge/truth is non-existent and its quest is an illusion. The trace of this contemporary ethos can be found in Hegel's philosophy for he believes that philosophy is

historical. “And he believes this because he believes that philosophy clarifies and articulates the same concepts which are implicit in ordinary thought and practice. Since these have a history, philosophy too must be a historical discipline” (MacIntyre, 1967, p.199-200).

This far Kierkegaard would agree with Hegel. However, what Kierkegaard opposed was “contrary to Hegel’s explicit intentions, [his philosophy] seemed too abstract; it did not seem to deal concretely enough with the actuality of people’s lives as they led them, making specific choices in specific circumstances”(Melchert 1995, p. 441).This Kierkegaard’s problem with Hegel is well stated by Patrick Gardiner :

The very conception of the ‘speculative’ thinker, set apart from the contingencies of everyday living and coolly contemplating existence from a privileged vantage-point, was apt to arouse his suspicion, even antipathy; amongst other things, he was prone to treat it as involving a bland indifference to what mattered to people as individuals whose real interests found no recognition at the hands of ‘systematists and objective philosophers’ (Gardiner, 1988, p.15-16).

Hegel’s ambivalence between the concrete and the ideal is shown in what he calls the Absolute Idea or the Spirit. Hegel thought that the multiple historical experiences of different epochs can be understood when they are put within an all encompassing system. Like a jigsaw puzzle, when we see human history from that vantage point of the System every pieces fittingly makes sense. Each historical experience is logically interconnected. So, Hegel famously argues ‘what is real is rational; what is rational is real’. Moreover, Macintyre (1967) notes Hegel in his later writings such as the *Science of Logic* equated himself and his system with the status of God.

Modernity, growing out of the Enlightenment, continues the emphasis on the principle of reason in all spheres of life. Enlightenment’s metaphilosophical values of rationality, objectivity, universality, certainty and finality were kept alive in modernity. Peter Burger in his *The Decline of Modernism* argues that modernity as it is defined by “the German sociological tradition represented by Max Weber and Jurgen Habermas” (Burger, 1992, p.4), for instance, refers to the social systematization, standardization, mechanization and industrialization through rationalization of the capitalist bourgeois society in Europe.

With regard to this life-structuring modern reason Burger further says:

For Max Weber, the distinctive mark of capitalist societies lies in the fact that in these societies the process he calls rationalization comes to full development. This process concerns, on the one hand, the faculty to dominate things by calculation, on the other, the systematization of world-views and, finally, the elaboration of a

systematic way of life. The principle of rationalization shapes all areas of human activity. It determines not only scientific and technical processes, but also moral decisions and the organization of everyday life (ibid.p.4.).

Keeping modernity in the Weberian sense, Modern Western philosophy followed the footsteps of the ideals of the Scientific Revolution which espoused the idea that scientific truth was objective and anyone applying the ‘scientific method’ could find it out without being reliant on an authority such as the Church. Therefore, “[k]nowledge, for a modern, is impersonal: the facts are just “out there” the same for everyone, equally accessible to anyone with rational faculties. Objectivity is achieved through abstracting from any peculiarities of my situation or yours” (White 2006, p.100).

Galileo in a statement that rightly described the spirit of the age he was in said that one should ‘measure what can be measured, and make measurable what cannot be measured’ (Gaarder, 1994, p. 99). Measurement implies objectivity; thus, anyone can and ought to arrive at the same result. Modernity also teaches us that logico-scientific statements should be measurable in such a way that anyone participating in an argument can objectively assess the relationship between premise/s and conclusion. Statements in a philosophical presentation are supposed to be clear and distinct. So observed, they are understandable and meaningful for everyone irrespective of language, culture, history. In other words, they are universal that anyone from any experience can effectively verify, approve or disprove them. What is beyond the presentable, clear and distinct language is irrelevant when it comes to the production of truth and knowledge. In other words, there is no such thing as the inexpressible (the unsayable); even if there is, it amounts to be superstitious. As Weber observes, “there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted” (Weber, in Gandhi, 1998, p.36).

## **2. KIERKEGAARD AS A CRITIC OF TRADITIONAL METAPHILOSOPHY: CRISIS IN EUROPE - TOO MUCH KNOWLEDGE, TOO LITTLE FAITH**

My principal thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we had forgotten what it means to exist, and what inwardness signifies, and that the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity was explicable on that ground (Kierkegaard, in Conant, 1990, p.20).

My intention in this thesis is to contrast the dominant metaphilosophy with some Kierkegaardian concepts that locate him as an outsider. Many writers including sympathetic commentators of

Kierkegaard's work concedes that he is not a philosopher in the strict sense of the term. Since, in my opinion, the history of philosophy is a metaphilosophy, he defies philosophy as it is defined by Western premodern and modern philosophers. One thing we could learn from Kierkegaard is that there is no eternal single metaphilosophy/definition of philosophy. So discussing Kierkegaard is discussing the question what is philosophy after all? What are the limitations of human language and reason through which we philosophize?

Kierkegaard in his voluminous seminal work self-consciously attempted to criticize some elements of the Western metaphilosophical tradition. Serving as points of departure in my thesis, generally, these include his emphatic critique against the self-sufficient overarching systematic Reason in Hegelian sense, philosopher's over confidence in human language, philosophers' traditional view of the self as static – as an unchanging substance and the finite self's futile quest for what he calls "finality" or the infinite. The central idea that unifies all these three critics is his doctrine of existence. All the three critics I mentioned above directly relate to the tradition's indifference to "what it means to exist."

For Kierkegaard, being human is an existential condition. The existing individual is not endowed with Absolute Reason, her language is not adequate enough to express her existence, her selfhood is always in the making, and she has no power to see existence in its totality or 'finality', as he calls it. In a nutshell, Kierkegaard wants to make it "harder to ignore the way in which history intrudes into the structures of unifying reason with the contingencies of what is unforeseeably new and other, and these contingencies belie all rash syntheses and limiting constructions" (Habermas, 1992, p.131).

But all these critics originated from his detest for the kind of Christianity that was practiced in his time. His version of Christianity as opposed to "Christendom" animates his theory of existence or his philosophy in general. So he set out to wake people up from the easy certainty which was caused by Christendom and Hegelian speculative philosophy and make life difficult just the way existence is. Let's see why he thinks Christianity and existence are difficult.

## **2.1.Christianity and Existence**

In an age where religion as a world view gradually waned, Kierkegaard sets out his primary task to be answering the question what it means to *become* a Christian. What is religious truth or

knowledge? In an attempt to defend religious truth and knowledge which is threatened by the pervasive formidable power of reason which permeated the sphere of religion and morality, Kierkegaard posed a serious challenge to the practice of philosophy as a rational and systematic inquiry. It is in this attempt of his that I am trying to distil some of his thoughts that stood in sharp contrast with the prevalent metaphilosophical paradigm. Some of his oppositions to modern metaphilosophy by no means are unique or he is not the only one in this endeavor. Many philosophers have done that in their peculiar way. Hence, by presenting Kierkegaard as a critic I am just adding him in the constellations of the critics of speculative philosophy. As such I place him in the tradition of early critical thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and Nietzsche, to mention only a few, who intentionally engaged in putting limitation to speculative reason in favor of the particular, the practical, the historical or the existential. This would seem to contradict my earlier attempt at placing Kierkegaard against what I called representatives of the dominant paradigm but Kierkegaard would only be categorically unique in his severity and radicalness even as compared to these early critical thinkers.

Even though Kierkegaard was immediately alarmed by Hegel, his brief discussion of few Western philosophers who tried to subject everything to universal reason and establish knowledge/truth showed him that all along the problem was that there was too much knowledge. What was at stake here for Kierkegaard was a Europe which was suffering from an abundance of knowledge and conversely from a scarcity of emotion, passion and imagination. One specific area which, in his view, was suffering from too much knowledge but too little passion was Christianity. His whole philosophy is a blunt reaction to this Hegelian and Weberian rationalization of Christianity he observed in the Danish State Lutheran Church. It is in this reaction that we find his original contribution to philosophy. So, what is Christianity for Kierkegaard?

In some respect his answer is biographical. It is almost universally agreeable now that Kierkegaard's father was a huge influence in his understanding of Christianity and his philosophy for it was his father who taught him the harsh version. "From his earliest years, the elder Kierkegaard, a deeply religious man but preoccupied with the darker side of Christianity, impressed his son with his own rigid notion of duty and a quite morbid sense of guilt"(Barrett, 1956, p.77). This sense of duty and guilt arises out of the recognition that we are all sinners. But

Christians have looked for a way to avoid this fact through building knowledge systems. For him, accumulating knowledge about our sins is quite different from existing as a person who recognizes the sin. We cannot get rid of sin by having too much information about it. We cannot easily discard sin by regurgitation, by becoming a member of an established Church, or by identifying ourselves with a culture and state practices. He seriously was up against Christianity's establishment and Christians' conformism that he saw in his time.

Kierkegaard's authorship primarily aimed at explicating what Christianity is and what it means to truly *live* as a Christian. In line with this aim he figured out two inseparably interrelated hindrances that thwarted the individual from *living* as a Christian. These were Danish (Christian) Hegelianism and established Danish State Lutheran Church. One could easily observe from his writings that he firmly opposed the practices of Christianity which was rampant in the established Church of his age. He says "an apostle's task is to spread Christianity, to win people to Christianity. My task is to disabuse people of the illusion that they are Christians" (Kierkegaard, in Moore, 2002, p. x-xi). So, in order to define what a true Christianity ought to be, he severely criticized the intellectual and religious tradition which was highly influenced by the philosophy of Hegel.

According to Kierkegaard, the Church was tainted with what he called "Christendom", which he thought was surface, cosmetic, nominal form of Christianity that superfluously emphasized membership of some sect, display, appearance, regurgitation. Besides, "Christendom" pays attention to knowing more, mastering, memorizing and rationalizing the Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, so to say. However, notional reasoned "knowledge" about Christianity in Christendom resulted in false comfort, complacency and self-deception. The true Christian individual is supposed to faithfully plunge into uncertainty, the un-lived and unseen life about which s/he has no prior knowledge. Therefore, knowing about Christianity is quite different from living as a Christian.

Christianity as it was practiced in his age was conformist. It was about identifying oneself with the already accepted cultural, social, political and intellectual establishment. He complained that Christianity became a religious bandwagon, a pre-defined set of ideal principles which was inseparably intertwined with culture and the practices of the state. In his view, Christianity's legitimacy does not arise from its mass followers, the cleric or the state. Therefore, he made his

life-long task “to keep people awake, in order that religion may not again become an indolent habit” (Kierkegaard, in Moore, 2002, p. ix).

In Kierkegaard’s view, Christianity is not a doctrine or a body of knowledge to recite. These are all easy, false comforts. For him, Christianity is an existential condition. It is something we *become* not that we are. Christianity is not a mere well-thought-out experimental System detached from existence. He argues in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

Christianity is not a doctrine but expresses an existence-contradiction and is an existence-communication. If Christianity were a doctrine it would *eo ipso* form not the opposite of speculation, but rather a moment within it. Christianity has to do with existence, with the act of existing; but existence and existing constitute precisely the opposite of speculation (Kierkegaard, 2009, p.318-319).

As opposed to organizational sameness he preferred an existential condition of individuals susceptible to various different life possibilities with respective individual freedom, choice, and responsibility.

Adding his voice to the century old debate between action and thought, for Kierkegaard what constitutes Christianity is the idea that it is essentially an action which is manifested through *acts* of choice. The fact that there was too much knowledge *about* Christianity and that people confuse this pile of knowledge with Christianity as an action indicates that people evade responsibility. In this confusion faith, passion, care, choice and responsibility are undermined. To give a relatively simple example (take this as passion-scale), when someone says ‘trust me’ do we incline to make a rational analysis before we trust, do we look for endless rational justification to trust or not to trust or do we care, choose or put faith on trusting?

For Kierkegaard what Europe lost was not evidential truth/knowledge, but this emotional engagement through care, faith, choice and passion. C. Stephen Evans, a prominent Kierkegaard scholar, in his interview with *Philosophy News Service* said that “[f]or Kierkegaard (and I agree with him here) the main problem lies not in the evidence but in the knower. How do we become the kinds of people who are capable of understanding and grasping the truth?”(Evans, in Pardi, 2011).

## **2.2.Existence and Reason's Limit**

In a direct opposition to Hegel's life-structuring, omnipresent logical System that identifies itself with human history as a whole, Kierkegaard emphasizes individuals' spontaneous, innocent, irreducible, unknown and inexplicable existence that is impossible to subsume in a System. So, "by soliciting a return of what Hegel represses, Kierkegaard points [...] to something different, something else, something other" (Taylor, 2000, p. xi). That other of course signifies what cannot be included under systematic rationalization.

In a revealing statement he said "life can only be understood backwards (that is, when it is over) but it has to be lived forwards" (Kierkegaard, in Barrett, 1956, p.81). We may approximately understand the past as a matter of fact but there is no logic available for the existing person to embrace its entirety. For Kierkegaard, Evans noted, "what we call "reason" is shot through with our assumptions and attitudes. "Reason" is a verb, not a noun, and how people reason reflects their character. Humans are sinful and their reasoning is shaped by sin"(Evans, in Pardi, 2011). Like Hegel he believes that reason is embedded in history but as opposed to Hegel, reason, for him, is forever captive of existence/history without any possibility of culminating in the transcendental Absolute Idea. So he "counterposed the facticity of one's own existence and the inwardness of the radical will to be oneself against a chimerical reason within history" (Habermas, 1992, p.39).

Existence renders itself intimate with the existing individual through her choice. Her choice is her existence. Choice is a personal action. The question what guides us into the right choice or action is not something Kierkegaard states clearly. What is clear from his argument is that reason is impotent to decide between choices we encounter. Of course, we try to provide premises in defense of our choices; we try to support them with logical arguments. But that is the farthest reason can go before action (specifically the act of choice) takes over. There is a natural demarcation and a decisive difference between reason, reflection or argument on one hand and act of choice on the other, or between thought and action.

The predominant view towards Kierkegaard as irrational and thus anti-philosophy emanates from his attempt to emasculate the kind of omniscient Reason which is imposing and prescriptive; thus, unilaterally reduces everything to its terms. Since the gist of his philosophy is on existence,

he is very much skeptical about the capacity of reason to be able to fully grasp existence. As opposed to what is known as ‘apologetic Christianity’ that tries to fit in the scheme of rationalization, Kierkegaard tried to offensively show the limitations of human language and reason in the sphere of existence in general and religious (particularly Christian) existence in particular. We are beings who exist before during and after reasoning. As I have tried to show above, the vast experience of the tradition of Western metaphilosophy shows that philosophers have been attempting to grasp complete knowledge about the object of knowledge using reason. In his view, this tradition is at fault for the reason that; first, existence is in an uninterrupted change. Second, the knower loses the comfort of consulting reason as action takes over reasoning. Reason only takes us as far as it naturally ends and it ends when we jump into making a decision. Third, existential human beings are sinful, temporal and finite creatures.

I have shown that both Enlightenment and Modern philosophers strongly believe that there is no such thing as inexpressibly beyond the bounds of reason. This structuring, authoritative reason sees everything from within. What is beyond is irrational, superstitious, pre-logical so on and so forth. For Kierkegaard, faith is beyond the realm of human reason and the two must be kept apart. For reason, for instance, the idea of what he calls the “Absolute Paradox” (or the Incarnation) is absurd, contradictory, offensive, and nonsensical. Kierkegaard concedes that the idea of ‘God-man’ is absurd from the point of view of self-sufficient reason but he questions why faith should reduce itself to the terms of reason. The demands of faith and that of reason are mutually exclusive.

This view of Kierkegaard about reason arises out of religious and philosophical convictions. The religious conviction states that anything human is tainted by Original Sin. Sinful human using human reason to understand God always falls short of completeness. In his philosophical conviction, he “interprets reason as human, all too human – as the rationale of the current social order, which knows nothing higher than itself” (Westphal, 2018). In other words, since human beings are essentially temporal, all humanly things including reason is inescapably temporal. Given that human reason is always captive of temporality, “... as over against God [it] [is] always in the wrong” (Kierkegaard, in Swenson, 1920, p.20). Moreover, how reason sees in advance what is totally spontaneous, contingent, surprising, unintended and un-lived is a serious

question that existence poses to human reason. This challenge also holds for human language which the next section of this chapter discusses.

### **2.3.Existence, Language and Communication**

To reiterate, Kierkegaard's whole oeuvre aims at trying to find an answer for what it means to *live* (or *exist*) as a Christian. Existence, Christian or any other, for him, is radically personal. It is solely the person's encounter. Consistent with his assertion that Christianity is not a set of doctrine or a body of knowledge; rather an existential condition, he contends that it is categorically individualistic. Therefore, existence is an antithesis of reflection. As we saw earlier, reflection entails generality and abstraction; hence, universality. I've also shown that the dominant metaphilosophy which is characteristically general, abstract and universal is problematic. Any truth/knowledge drawn from this conceptual abstraction and generality is tautological truism. Truth for Kierkegaard must have existential contact with the person who claims it.

Kierkegaard's emphasis on existence has ramifications when it comes to human communication. It poses, for instance, the question on how we manage to impart knowledge or truth (particularly religious and moral) about our individually multiple existential experiences. In other words, how potent human language is to communicate existential truth transcending subjective understanding. Since there is no body of knowledge or general abstract principle which is uniformly applicable for all experiences and since each individual experience is radically different, any use of universal language results in misrepresentation, inconsiderate and unfair normativity.

Kierkegaard argues that it is imperative to use what he calls "indirect communication" when it comes to morality and religion. For him, these are value spheres devoid of objectivity and universality. Any attempt to be objective and universal in moral and religious matters is prescriptive or imposing because morality and religion are inseparable from action. Here he seems to anticipate the view that language is not merely a means of communication but also persuasion. Language as a means of persuasion has a tendency of being prescriptive, expansive, and absolute. The speaker or the writer expects automatic acceptance by the listener/reader.

Kierkegaard, therefore, espouses “indirect communication” and pseudonymity which he thinks are considerate of the alterity and diversity of human existences.

Kierkegaard’s primary aim of writing in pseudonyms using the technique of what he calls ‘indirect communication’ is to show the multiplicity of life-possibilities not already foreseen or projected by a System but as an embodiment of existential choices of a person in the process of becoming authentic self through choice. These life possibilities are meant to reveal the problem of what it means to exist as a human being. Besides, they indicate the idea that the solution to this fundamental problem is figured out through the choices one actually makes. In other words, according to Kierkegaard, one defines and creates oneself through these choices. So the pseudonyms are supposed to embody the process of formulating a self that one becomes through these choices.

His literary ironical style of “indirect communication” and pseudonymous writings is a central point of his thought as a critique of systematic philosophy. It is in this style of his that we find the important idea that there is no overarching *Truth* that explains *Everything* disinterestedly. Such *Truth*, for Kierkegaard, is ahistorical, non-existent and unrepresentative- that is to say it cannot be the voice for the particular existential person. In systematic speculative philosophy, “life comes to a halt” (Kierkegaard, in Kosch 2006, p.90). Hence, his use of “indirect communication” and pseudonymity is meant to show that there is no independent and disinterested space from which we project our System. In other words, the System builder himself is already situated in existence that he cannot find a neutral position to foresee *Everything* in advance. Since our thoughts always emanate from *somewhere*, there is no such thing as, what Thomas Nagel called, “the view from nowhere”.

Recently we see a new direction on understanding Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms and indirect communication in matters of ethics and religion. People argue that the fact that Kierkegaard wants us to know that we shouldn’t take him by his word indicate the ineffectiveness of human language. Anticipating postmodernism, his pseudonymous writings signify his desire to self-undermine himself as a prescriptive writer. In line with his thought that everyone is a spokesperson of her own private existence, he believes that the aim of an author’s undertaking should not be conveying information but to let the reader be in charge of her own experience. As such the pseudonymous try to indirectly communicate us by “represent[ing] the various life-

views on existence” (Kierkegaard, in Moore, 2002, p. xvi). But Kierkegaard knows that complete representation of general existence is not possible for an author. Claiming so amounts to constructing Hegelian System which is impersonal, ahistorical, non-existent, illusory and ideal.

If existence is private, then nobody else can effectively represent my existence through language. In other words, there is no objective point view that is universally applicable. As I tried to show above, for Kierkegaard, both human language and reason, because we humans are fundamentally temporal, are projected through a subjective and existential eye. This is exactly what Kierkegaard wants to tell us through his use of layers of pseudonyms. The writer must refrain from being authoritative, prescriptive or from being a spokesperson for all existences for, “what can be indirectly communicated cannot be directly communicated” (Kierkegaard, in Conant 1990, p.8).

#### **2.4.Existence, Authenticity and the Self**

Kierkegaard embarks on a project of stripping Christianity of its social, cultural, philosophical pretensions in order to find what it truly is. In other words, he insists that we must disengage it from the establishment. Christianity is not something that we do out of habit and that we gradually accept as a matter of fact. It is the individual’s existential condition that unfolds itself in the person’s private choice. It is a recurrent venture one plunges into without guarantee. It is a condition constituted by insecurity and uncertainty. In light of this thought Kierkegaard thus characterizes the self (be it Christian or secular) as substance but not as static as Plato or Descartes defined it. In a direct opposition to the dominant understanding of the self as a substance; hence, unchanging, he argues that the self is always in becoming. The self is both a substance and possibility. This possibility is its potentiality to become its authentic self.

His attack on Christendom or Hegel and Hegelian tradition and his insistence on authentic Christian life call for authentic selfhood. As long as the self sees itself as mere member and avoids individual responsibility, s/he risks authenticity. In Kierkegaard’s philosophy the stress on the individual is meant to imply responsibility. Being lost in membership is equal to Hegel’s life-structuring System that doesn’t give space for radically other. Life of the individual must be active not passive, not merely informed by detached System. Christian life “is not merely an abstract, propositional belief” (Evans 2009, p.9). So, he calls for radical authenticity of a

Christian self that doesn't identify itself with a particular human culture or society. Hence, he posed the critical question if society and authentic self are compatible? But Kierkegaard never gave us an answer to the question to what extent is the individual supposed to be free from social, cultural influences to achieve authentic self and if that is even possible. I will expand more on that later in chapter four.

For Kierkegaard, the self's odyssey in existence is a lonely personal journey. The task of this journey is to achieve authenticity where one is expected to become oneself. This search for authenticity is not an easy task given that freedom, unaided choice and responsibility all come in set. Besides, there are many hindrances that prevent the self from realizing its true self. Discussing Kierkegaard's famous three "stages" and/or "spheres" are helpful here.

It is very difficult to find out a well-organized structure in his writings. For a person, therefore, who looks for one in Kierkegaard's writings will definitely end up in frustration that makes reading him challenging. One exception of a structure that is found in his writings is the way he divides existence and/or "life possibilities." He, therefore, categorizes the life possibilities embodied by the multiple pseudonymous into three general 'spheres' and 'stages' of existence. These are the "aesthetic", "the ethical" and "the religious."

About these spheres of existence, Merold Westphal says:

These are not developmental stages in a biological or psychological sense- a natural and all-but-automatic unfolding according to some DNA of the spirit. It is all too possible to live one's life below the ethical and the religious levels. But there is a directionality in the sense that the earlier stages have the later ones as their telos, or goal, while the later stages both presuppose and include the earlier ones as important but subordinate moments (Westphal 2018).

The difference between 'spheres of existence' and 'stages of existence' can be understood, respectively as a horizontal and vertical view of human life- that is to say "[w]hen understood as "stages" these provide an account of a path to authentic selfhood; understood as "spheres" these concepts provide a description of three rival views of human existence and its meaning" (Evans, 2009, p.ix-x).

As I briefly mentioned above, the difference between "stages" and "spheres" of existence lies in a person's will to freely and self-consciously choose between progress and stagnation. So the word 'stages' signifies the developmental progression of an individual from the aesthetic to the

ethical and finally culminating to the religious. However, by 'spheres' Kierkegaard means, being stuck in one of these two domains of human existence without showing any desire for progress into the next better stage i.e. the religious. It seems like the individual can choose to stay there. As the words themselves indicate sphere stands for closure, sameness, complacency while stage signifies stepping into novel level through one's choice. In other words, there is detachment from previous being.

In an esthetic stage/sphere the self is in search of what is pleasurable and avoid boredom. It is unstable for what it finds to be pleasurable today will not be so tomorrow. It gets immediately bored with everything it touches. This ever-flying process of securing pleasure and avoiding boredom results in lack of identity and character. The esthete's life is discontinuous and fragmented. In search of unity to its life the aesthetic self moves to the ethical stage/sphere. According to Westphal (2018), this stage is similar with what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*. The self in this stage identifies itself with the laws and customs of the society. It lives up to the expectation of the community it is in and therefore its task is to fulfill that expectation. The typical example of this stage is the married man. But what compels the self in the ethical stage to move to the religious stage is its awareness of its potentiality or possibility of becoming oneself. It, for example, becomes aware of its sinfulness and looks for salvation. Philosophically, the self knows its inescapable temporality and finitude and longs for the eternal and the infinite only to which existence is a System.

The religious sphere of existence is one lived by 'leap of faith'. Here like all the other forms of existence, there is no Cartesian like foundational certainty, nor Spinoza's *sub specie aeternitatis*, or Kantian categorical imperative, or Hegel's Absolute Idea. It is animated by a complete blindly faithful thrust towards the unknown like the Biblical Abraham who almost killed his kid as a sacrifice to God. This, for him, is what it means to live as a Christian. We can see from the story that Abraham is an individual making a difficult choice all alone. According to Kierkegaard, this is the recipe for authentic selfhood, as it were. Notice that this recipe is not meant to be formal. That is to say the personal appropriation must be kept intact through the individual's free choice. This is exactly what Kierkegaard means when he asserts that the "crowd is untruth" or "truth is subjectivity".

In sum, according to Kierkegaard, the self can lose its authenticity (or its becoming) in many ways. It can erroneously identify itself with doctrines as in a Christian self that proclaims 'I know the doctrine; hence, I'm a true Christian'. Or a self losing its identity by giving exaggerated importance to mere membership thus proclaiming - 'I am a member of such sect; therefore, I am a true Christian'. Or a self that forgets its humanity; hence its finitude by claiming an infinite overarching rational idea to which history culminates. A Hegelian self that is apathetic to its essential quality of becomingness by assuming closure, totality and finality. All these selves suffer from illusion, complacency and self-deception. Moreover, a self can also be lost in objectivity. The ethico-religious self is in, as compared to the physical sciences' objectivity to which the truth is indiscriminately 'out there' for all to see, a radically personal, private and hence subjective existence.

## **2.5.The Self and its Quest for Closure**

Economists and market analysts try to come up with how *precisely* the mysterious market operates. They want to grasp the *exact* identity of the market so that it would be easy to control and manipulate it. After the 2008 financial crisis started in the US many renowned economists cried out that they knew this would come, that they told us this was what exactly would happen. Politicians/Social scientists try to *exactly* understand the political and social problems and prescribe remedial generalizations. For Kierkegaard, such generalizations are often destined to frustrate as there is no way for the existing individual to access comprehensiveness, completeness, closure. The whole point of Kierkegaard's philosophy gets at demonstrating the indispensability, inescapability or unavoidability of subjectivity.

The search for certainty, closure, the unchanging foundation, and the really real is a deeply rooted tradition in Western philosophy. But this search has produced what is known as speculative philosophy. The speculative philosopher, being herself a particular person embedded in existence, tries to deify her thought as an all-encompassing system, as 'finality' with which history ends. For Kierkegaard this system that claims unchanging and final truth/knowledge in morality, religion has still to face the predicament of choice and decision. The systematist has understood everything but "to understand everything except oneself is very comical" (Kierkegaard, in Barrett 1956, p.78).

Kierkegaard would say:

In the long run the grand formulations of philosophical systems are only prolonged detours that eventually come to nothing unless they lead attention back once again to the individual. Mathematics and science can undoubtedly solve some problems, as can ethics and metaphysics. But over against such universal or general problems stands life—each person's life—which makes demands upon us. At these critical moments abstract thought does not help (Fieser and Stumpf 2015, p.373).

For Kierkegaard, the self is both static and dynamic, necessity and possibility, finite and infinite, eternal and temporal. The pregnant moment that defines its dynamism, possibility, infiniteness and eternity is the person's choice. Through her choice she creates herself. As we can see in the philosophy of Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, however, there is forgetfulness of the existential dimension of being human. They forget that existence entails experiential difference. They unilaterally and unfairly universalize and objectify what constitutes the self. Therefore, in a direct opposition to Hegel's 'Both/And' or his concept of mediation, Kierkegaard espouses an Either/Or.

### **3. KIERKEGAARD AND CONTEMPORARY DEBATE OVER METAPHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION**

Contemporary debates which appropriate Kierkegaard have a wide range. His influence is felt across fields such as theology, psychology, philosophy, Literary theory, Communication theory, Social, Cultural and Political theory. In his philosophical thought, Kierkegaard's influence spans from existentialist thinkers such as Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre to postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers like Derrida, Lacan, Rorty, etc. His seminal influence can also be seen in theological thinkers such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, to mention only a few. In psychology, his theory of despair and anxiety influenced thinkers such as Freud and Jung. In this section, however, I shall selectively discuss some of the debates which have a direct relevance to my thesis that Kierkegaard is a critic of the dominant way of doing philosophy. As such, we can find an overlapping with few postmodern arguments on reason, moral truth, human language, communication, Absolute Truth, objectivity, subjectivity, universality, the status of the author, and the fusion between philosophy and literature.

### 3.1.Kierkegaard and Postmodernism

Postmodernism attacked some ideals or pillars of the enlightenment and modernity as illusion. These include, among other things, the quest for Absolute truth, objectivity, universality, freedom and progress. Kierkegaard, anticipating postmodernism, “did deny the ability of reasoned thought to arrive at universal and objective truth on matters of value [such as morality and religion]” (Hannay and Marino, 1998, *introduction*).

On this point, C. Stephen Evans argues that there are:

themes in Kierkegaard that overlap with later postmodern emphases, particularly his arguments that objective human knowledge--the kind we gain when we take a detached, objective point of view--is always incomplete and subject to correction, because of human finitude (particularly our temporality) and our sinfulness (Evans, in Pardi, 2011).

As we have seen, these overlapping themes are what put him in sharp contrast to the dominant Western metaphilosophical tradition.

If modernity is taken as a break from the past and its authority in favor of a new authority i.e. reason, then Kierkegaard is rightly placed as a critic of this new authority, its claim for universal normativity and objectivity. Certain aspects and implications of this critic have been appropriated by many contemporary thinkers. For instance, many postcolonial thinkers equate Western universal and objective reason with its nature of evangelism, central expansiveness and prescriptiveness hence; superiority of European culture. It is here that Kierkegaard’s idea of existential truth, existential understanding, and existential communication are useful for intersubjective and intercultural polylogue. Existential authenticity of the self is vital for effective, fruitful, inclusive and genuine intersubjective and intercultural discourse. Though Kierkegaard’s radical subjectivity makes it difficult on how we can constructively see beyond our existential eye, fundamental concepts of Kierkegaard such as his doctrines of existence, choice, the finite self, and what he calls “indirect communication” all justify the need to relativize the self since no one can justly replace anyone’s existential historical experience.

Modern dominant metaphilosophy is characteristically constituted by its defining ideals of rationality, alleged disinterested objectivity and producing universally binding and prescriptive utterable /communicable truth and knowledge. These ideals have prevented people from having

genuine intersubjective discourse for they are inherently hegemonic and discriminatory. Like Kierkegaard, “since any question in Chemistry, history, theology, agriculture or any other discipline admits multiple answers, depending on which interpretation of the evidence you find convincing, postmodern[ists] have lost faith in the idea of objective verification”(White, 2006, p.108).

Kierkegaard argues choices of the self in its existence carve out authentic subjectivity. It is not a product of some overarching rational System which abstractly detaches itself from the concrete. In other words, it is not a *pre*-defined set of ideas. It is rather existentially embedded in its choices. There is a unique relationship between the self and the choices that it makes. According to Kierkegaard, ultimate choice is devoid of reasoning. Choice becomes decision, an action not a reflection. As a result, radical authenticity of the self is formulated. The self as such is not static but always dynamic; it is always in becoming, in perpetual change. A Rational, universal and objective system of thought for Kierkegaard is final and closed. Finality leaves no room for difference and; therefore, for change, for a becoming self in existence. Kierkegaard’s self, however, encounters alternatives that choosing one and leaving the other results in the possibility of making a wrong choice, a mistake. Hence, choice involves pains of anxiety, dread, fear and trembling. Pains that are incurred by the absence of finality/closure, a perfect ready-made thought to consult with and inform our act of choice in the right direction. In other words, the self is a helpless and lonely individual who is left without objective criteria to *pre*-determine the rightness and the wrongness of his or her choice. The choice is radically mine. But, if we follow Kierkegaard’s conceptual framework of radical subjectivity, then the basis of moral rightness and wrongness lacks clarity.

Kierkegaard’s radical subjectivity is also manifested in his theory of indirect communication. Through his pseudonymous writings the whole purpose of Kierkegaard is not about merely informing us but about pushing us into an experience. As such the self (the indirect communicator) is supposed to relativize himself as opposed to directly prescribe an absolute universal and objective truth/knowledge that works for anyone anytime anywhere, for all selves, cultures, subjectivities. In other words, communication in an intersubjective discourse is born out of the authentic self who does not prescribe hegemonic truth to others. For example, for Kierkegaard, faith in Christian life is an existential condition to be realized through one’s

independent choice. Any attempt to put it in objective rational terms makes it inauthentic and distantly detached. The whole purpose of indirect communication is to push the individual to find objectively incommunicable truth by himself. In contrast, for Habermas, “although the nonidentical [the self] ... always slipped through the net of basic metaphysical concepts, it remains accessible in a trivial way in everyday communicative practice” (Habermas, 1998, p.48).

Indirect communication, the finite self in the process of becoming and the act of choice, all are meant to guarantee authenticity. In short, existence entails authenticity. Detachment from objectivity must be the road to genuine subjectivity for objectivity has not, at least historically, been disinterested as it is supposed to be. The objectivity of Christianity, for instance, as it espoused for millennia has caused war, separation and atrocities such as the Holocaust. As a starting point towards true self, it is existential choice that makes the self what it is and it will be. There is no science or philosophical system of choice.

### **3.2.Kierkegaard, Authorship, Irony, Humor and Philosophical Literature**

There are convincing reasons why Kierkegaard mentioned Socrates in so many places in his writings and why he described himself as the gadfly of Copenhagen. One thing Kierkegaard learns from Socrates is his ironic revocation that “he knows that he knows nothing”. He allows his interlocutors to get in touch with the truth themselves. For Kierkegaard, what is more important is what it means to *be* in truth, particularly in the ethico-religious one. That can only happen in individualistic existence/subjectivity or, as he calls it, ‘inwardness’. His pseudonyms are attempts to show this underlying conviction of Kierkegaard.

Therefore, an author purporting to embody objectivity and universality in her writings is something Kierkegaard resoundingly rejects. As I mentioned time and again, the reasons for this rejection are first the unavoidable temporality and finitude of the author and second the reader can only appropriate truth when she experiences it and knows for herself what it means to possess that truth. Kierkegaard believes this understanding only applies to value-laden; hence, subjective aspects of our life such as religion and morality. Since man is an existential *person* the truth about religion and morality can only be understood existentially or subjectively.

Kierkegaard here anticipates postmodernism in that “for a postmodern the meaning of a text lies ultimately in the hands of its reader” (White, 2006, p.113). An author who self-undermines and

revokes herself from her writing, therefore, becomes the fitting conclusion of Kierkegaard's argument when he said,

In this book [i.e. Repetition] there is no dogmatizing, far from it; this was precisely what I had wished, since it was in my view the misfortune of the age to have too much knowledge, to have forgotten what it is to exist, and what inwardness is. Under such circumstances it is desirable that an author should know how to withdraw himself, and for this purpose a confusing contrast-form is always usable (Kierkegaard, in Conant 1990, p.19).

Kierkegaard's use of irony or humor is similar in purpose with his conviction of writing in pseudonyms and communicating indirectly. Both are meant to show that in the final analysis the author is not essential in becoming an authentic self ethically and religiously. The dominant tradition of the purposive nature of a philosophical literature claims to authoritatively impart truth/knowledge to the reader. Kierkegaard argues humor and irony can express the unsayable and the infinite for they are expressions of self-contradiction, of indirect communication *eo ipso*. The ironist/humorist is in a self-declared mission of showing that language is ineffective and that truth is not to be found in the writings.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXISTENCE, SUBJECTIVITY AND COMMUNICATION

#### INTRODUCTION

Generally, this chapter is about the limitation of human language. Depicting Kierkegaard as a critique of the dominant metaphilosophy, in this chapter, I intend to bring Kierkegaard's discussion of the incommunicable, inexplicable, the unsayable, and silence etc. into the limelight. Kierkegaard was preoccupied with the problems which evade human language, rational and objective explanation and communication. As a result, he devised what he calls 'indirect communication' in order to show that there are things which escape 'direct communication'. I shall try to show how Kierkegaard's use of what he calls indirect communication is meant to problematize objectivity and universality in communication.

I shall explain what Kierkegaard called indirect communication is meant to push each and every individual into subjective reading of his authorship. He firmly believes that there are some dimensions of human subjective experience, specifically in an ethico-religious experience, that cannot be directly passed on others using direct communication. As a result, he pronounces that there is no such thing as archetypal, commanding and objective meaning in his writings.

Kierkegaard claims that his writings do not have objective content. In other words, he is not after communicatively declaring or pronouncing truth which is said to have deductive or necessary consequence upon readers/others. In order to be consistent with this claim, he deliberately used forms of writing which disowned absolute, universal truth for everyone. By self- undermining his writings he pushes his readers to find out their existential truth as they encounter them. It is this self-undermining, self-removal, self-distancing, self-revoking that make his method different from the methods used in the dominant metaphilosophical tradition.

His form of writing quite uniquely employs pseudonyms, irony, paradox, humor, parables, metaphors, parody etc. He used these forms to show that his writings embody its very purpose or intention, to wit, the purpose of avoiding a declaration or pronouncement of objective, universal truth that works for everyone despite our existential differences.

In this chapter, therefore, I shall try to show how Kierkegaard thinks that human language in general and philosophical communication in particular as it is understood in modern philosophy is fundamentally problematic. The chapter also presents and critically examines what Kierkegaard thinks of the problems with the use of, what he calls, ‘direct communication’ in philosophy and how his ‘indirect communication’ can resolve these problems.

### **1. PHILOSOPHICAL COMMUNICATION IN TRADITIONAL METAPHILOSOPHY**

There is a typically modern view that espouses the idea that an individual can establish truth or knowledge which is universal. Despite the existential, cultural, linguistic context that the individual is in what she produces as truth and knowledge goes beyond her. The individual context is supposed to be irrelevant. Supposedly, universalism can come from any corner, any angle or any side. For instance, no matter how ‘bad’ the individual’s personal character or behavior or action is what she thinks about the concept of goodness is considered as universal that goes beyond the individual. Modern logic, for instance, teaches us that arguments which involve *ad hominem* are fallacious for it is irrelevant to establish the truth of the conclusion in the process of an argument. The person does not matter. What matters is the idea of the person. And the idea is supposed to have a universal implication no matter who produces it or where it comes from. This position is vehemently rejected by Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard maintains the Socratic position that philosophy in the final analysis is about humility, ignorance, and about knowing that we know nothing. All Kierkegaard’s attempt to distance himself from his own writings demonstrates this position. As shown very briefly in the previous chapter, accusing the prevalent metaphilosophy of lacking this humility, Kierkegaard uses the technique of what he calls ‘indirect communication’ as a direct attack on traditional and conventional way of doing philosophy (metaphilosophy). The dominant metaphilosophy traditionally uses the method of what Kierkegaard calls ‘direct communication’. Direct communication espouses that there are objective principles of logic in light of which we engage in logical argumentation that everyone should accept its result as a matter of necessity. In traditional metaphilosophy, the nature of direct philosophical communication has been one that tries to persuade readers and listeners through logical argumentation which demands objective result. This conventional type of communication is compellingly authoritative. It dictates there is

an objective rule of the game every communicator (interlocutor) should follow and accept its objective outcome.

The direct communication that both traditional and modern metaphilosophy have endorsed starts from a preeminent center. The belief has been there is a common, universal and objective way of communication at play which serves as a universal standard. This way demands uniformity irrespective of the differences of existential experiences in general. As such it does not arise from existential differences rather it imposes normativity towards them. Logic as a means of communication is one typical example of this claim for commonality, universality and objectivity irrespective of subjective individual differences. But the question where this objectivity comes from and how it claims to be binding in all possibilities are some of the questions that put Kierkegaard in stark contrast with the dominant metaphilosophical paradigm.

So, he argues, "[a]ll communication of knowledge is direct communication," whereas "[a]ll communication of capability is indirect communication"(Kierkegaard, in Oden 1978 p. xv).By the first quote what Kierkegaard means is that there are kinds of knowledge or truth that we simply receive as it is, as a matter of fact, as hard data. In other words, they do not need appropriation by the recipient. They are purely objective. Thus direct communication is possible as it literally indicates *directly* passing information. Unlike direct communication, in indirect communication there is no positive raw objective fact to pass on. In the latter quotation, 'capability' refers to the capacity to *do*. It implies active self-engagement and self-creation. Doing, self-engaging, self-creating are all *actions* by the self or by the subject. They require responsible act of choice. The recipient needs to appropriate and internalize in such a way that reflect her own existential subjective self. The aim is not just about passing information but it somehow requires that the recipient is affected by the communication to *act* or to *do*.

Kierkegaard never denies that there is objective truth. His argument is that there could be such truth but it is impossible for us to access it specifically in an ethico-religious sense. In fact he believes there is such a truth in what is called hard sciences but not in an ethico-religious life. In other words, morality and religion are inseparable from action. This revolutionary analysis of Kierkegaard is premised on the idea that man, as compared to her creator, is temporal, finite, and sinful. So the sensible or meaningful conclusion drawn from our finitude and temporality has irreversibly imperfect and limiting implications for an objective (direct) communication.

It is important here to discuss the story of Abraham which Kierkegaard used to signify this human predicament. The Kierkegaardian appropriation of the story can be taken as a thought experiment that presents an existential scenario which challenges our moral laws, principles of logic, objective rationality and direct communication. The story is meant to demonstrate that the century old way of direct communicative rationality is indifferent to various different existential individual cases like that of Abraham. It tries to show the idea that there is always an experience that cannot be governed by the laws of direct and objective communication which is characteristically dominant in traditional metaphilosophy. If there is no objective meaning, then “any verdict on [someone’s] thought can only be the expression of the critics own existence, not a critical assessment which could stand or fall according to some objective, impersonal standard”(MacIntyre,2006,p.61-62).

Even though most references to the biblical ‘story’ is meant primarily to show that man’s moral belief can be teleologically suspended as Abraham is willing to trespass the moral law that declares murder is wrong and teleologically suspend what is morally unacceptable in any social norm, the story is also relevant to Kierkegaard’s challenge to the role of language in modern metaphilosophy which he thinks is misguided. The pseudonym who authors *Fear and Trembling*, in which the story of Abraham is mentioned, is *Johannes de Silentio* which literally means ‘John the silent’. It is not without purpose that this book is ascribed to this name. The word ‘*Silentio*’ implies Kierkegaard’s belief that human language is incapable of explaining the inexplicable. Abraham faces a difficult choice where anything human falls entirely short of being handy and useful. He totally deviates from what rationality and morality demands as there is no sensible way to explain that murdering one’s son is right. It is an experience which is beyond human as it defies each and every earthly normalcy. But the idea that a human being thinking about what is completely beyond human is a self-defeating argument to which Kierkegaard would unconvincingly reply that this self-defeat itself justifies his stance on the inadequacy of every human dimension.

The fact that some of his writings include contradictions, paradox, irony, indirect communication has an intrinsic value of proving that language and rationality naturally have an unbridgeable chasm between earth and heaven or between Athens and Jerusalem, as Tertullian said.

## 2. INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AS A CRITIC OF PREVALENT METAPHILOSOPHY

In chapter one I have already discussed the dominant metaphilosophical tradition that Kierkegaard was up against. He, for instance, highlights the “inadequacy of a purely rational approach to life” (Carlisle,2006,p.11).He argues, owing to life’s sophistication, depth, complexity and fluidity, the attempt to wholly capture it is to forget what it means to exist and thus what it means to be human. He embarks on demonstrating the serious limitations of theoretical reflection. As shown in the previous chapter, modern metaphilosophy informed by the project of Enlightenment rationalism, has boldly asserted that man can reach at a general systematic knowledge that works anytime, anywhere for anyone. Kierkegaard accepted objectivity or universality in the fields of the physical sciences such as mathematics. He, however, emphatically rejected the application of the same approach in moral and religious life.

Ethico-religious life cannot claim an objective and universal system into which every individual could be subsumed. The reason for this is that the system overestimates its power by purporting to include *Everything* within its grasp. According to Kierkegaard, however, such objective, universal, systematic and purely rational approach is of little use when it comes to existing individual cases. For him, therefore, any existential philosophy is oxymoronic if philosophy is understood in the same way that modern metaphilosophy has characterized it. It is in this context that Kierkegaard critically questions the capacity of human language and reason, or rather the power of finite and temporal man who boasts to claim universality, nonpartisanship, disinterestedness, and impersonal objectivity.

We have seen that Kierkegaard thinks that language has a limitation when it operates within the domain of the general, the universal and the objective. So as to show these limitations of language, Kierkegaard resorts to indirect communication, to writing in pseudonyms, to use of irony, humor, story, metaphor and parable. As I mentioned above, indirect communication is a literary technique that is supposed to shun serious positive proposition. Like Socrates his intention is negative. The motto here is the classical ‘I know that I know nothing’. This is why Kierkegaard asserts: “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task” (Kierkegaard, in Muench 2006, p.1).

As Socrates assumes the role of a midwife in helping his interlocutors to come up with the truth, Kierkegaard analogously claims that his theory of indirect communication aims at helping readers and listeners discover their own truth. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, Socrates was not looking for existential/subjective truth? The truth he was looking for is universal though he assumed the role of a midwife in search of such a truth. Truth is universal and anyone can discover it with the help of dialectics and logical argumentation. But, like Kierkegaard, his approach is not of giving ready-made, doctrinal truth. This is what he means when he says, “[t]he fact that several of Plato’s dialogues end without result has a far deeper reason than I had earlier thought... [It makes] the reader or listener self-active...” (Kierkegaard, 2008,p.276).In order to avoid being an imposer in the process of the production of truth and knowledge, Kierkegaard has to withdraw himself and say “I have no opinion and wish to have none” (Kierkegaard, in Conant, 1990, p.17) and give way to the reader/listener. For me this sounds contradictory for he frets about, among other things, Christianity and speculative philosophy. This can be observed when, for example, Kierkegaard opines that there is no textbook for Christianity, that it primarily is a private undertaking by an existing individual and that Christendom and speculative philosophy are divorced from life.

Given his emphasis on individual existence, Kierkegaard is reluctant to assume a position of preeminence as an author and philosopher. So, in order to be consistent with his fixed conceptual framework of radical subjectivity, life of becoming and existence, he has to claim withdrawal, both as an author and philosopher, from any kind of systematizations, generalizations, abstractions, universalizations and objectivity. He refrains from lecturing others about what it means to be in their subjective private existence. Notice that Kierkegaard here is also consistent with his anti-Christendom conclusion that Christianity is a private way of life. It is an activity, not a doctrine or set of belief, system of thought, ready-made list of facts, and set of instructions or collection of teachings imposed by an objective authority.

Indirect communication, unlike direct communication, invites the reader/listener to participate actively. It allows them to be able to install their side and angle which no overarching system can possibly cover. This is why he argues “[i]f anyone is to profit by this sort of communication [indirect communication], he must himself undo the knot for himself”

(Kierkegaard in Oden, 1978, p. xiii). Indirect communication disallows us to be bystanders in our own existential life.

## 2.1. Use of Pseudonyms

Kierkegaard is famous for his use of pseudonyms such as *Victor Eremita*, *Judge William*, *Johannes de Silentio*, *Johannes Climacus*, *Anti-Climacus*, *Nicolaus Notabene*, *Constantine Constantius*, *Hilarius Bookbinder*, *Vigilius Haufniensis*, *Frater Taciturnus*, *Quidam*, *Inter et Inter*, “H.H.”, “A”, and “B”. These pseudonyms are not pen-names used to conceal the real identity of the author. Kierkegaard himself made it clear that the pseudonyms were not used to keep him anonymous in a relatively small city of the then Copenhagen.

He tells us that the pseudonyms rather have a communicative purpose. This purpose takes the myriad existential ways and unlimited possibilities of life into consideration. The pseudonyms are supposed to constructively push the reader towards recurrent self-discovery and self-knowledge. By insisting that individuals should return to their inward life, they merely serve as mirrors. They also stress the existential other. In short, they reflect the idea that life possibilities are inexhaustibly multiple and different.

But you may ask isn't it contradictory to *re-present* infinite possibilities. Doesn't it seem like they do have an agent that speaks for them? For Kierkegaard, it is a resolute yes. It is contradictory. But this is exactly what Kierkegaard does want his pseudonyms should avoid-being a *representative*. No author or philosopher can possibly existentially *re-present* anyone. In short, everyone speaks for herself for, in his view, an ethico-religious existence is a lonely odyssey which calls for individually subjective action.

Kierkegaard tells us that indirect communication is a difficult exercise. In order to show how indirect communication is difficult in a perpetual existential becoming Kierkegaard in his famous *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* makes the following revealing analogy:

To stop a man on the street and stand still while talking to him, is not so difficult as to say something to a passer-by in passing, without standing still and without delaying the other, without attempting to persuade him to go the same way, but giving him instead an impulse to go precisely his own way. Such is the relation between one existing individual and another, when the communication concerns the truth as existential inwardness (Kierkegaard, 2009, p.247).

We usually find layers of pseudonyms in a single piece of work. “His reason for doing this [for writing in pseudonyms] was precisely to avoid giving the appearance of attempting to construct a single, consistent, systematic edifice of thought” (MacIntyre, 2006 p.62). Kierkegaard time and again suggests that readers should take the views of the pseudonyms as the pseudonym’s own rather than his. He reiterates that, at times, some of their views are even contradictory with that of his own. He tells us that they do have their own separate persona. In other words, they do have independent voices that the reader should grapple with. This is why, about the pseudonyms, Kierkegaard says “there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, nor the remotest private relation to them” (Kierkegaard in Carlisle, 2006, p.33); hence, “if it might occur to anyone to quote a particular saying from the books, he would do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonymous author” (Kierkegaard, in Conant, 1990, p.14).

The pseudonyms are supposed to exhibit experimental choices and alternative scenarios. The intention is to remind the reader/listener that she is not a mere distant spectator of her life but a person who must actively engage in self-creation.

As I mentioned above, Kierkegaard’s skepticism about the possibility of direct communication is confined to the ethico-religious existence. The ethico-religious life-possibilities or subjectivity is uncontainable by static, primordialist pre-definition. For both ethical and religious life there is no watered-down scheme or synthesis. But isn’t this self-defeating? Isn’t Kierkegaard defining what ethico-religious existence should universally look like in advance? Yes, Kierkegaard here is committing the classical self-contradictory assertion that Habermas calls “performative contradiction”. So, he is successfully self-defeating when he says “I have no opinion and wish to have none” for, in my view, this very complex sentence itself counts as an opinion.

Like all philosophers no doubt, albeit self-contradictorily, that Kierkegaard is projecting his system from a conviction of some sort, to wit, existence precedes reflection; thus, uncontainable by it or existence is an either/or; thus, no synthesis or mediation. Kierkegaard argues that “[i]mmmediacy is reality, language is ideality, consciousness is contradiction [*Modsigelse*]. In the moment I make a statement about reality, the contradiction is there, for what I say is ideality” (Stokes, 2010, p.41).

His conviction about indirect communication proceeds from the question ‘what does it mean to exist?’ So the inevitable follow-up question deriving from this conviction is that how can you convey or impart the message to someone else with an absolute authority of rightness. How can you tell someone else what their existence means to them? Despite this contradiction Kierkegaard clearly suggests that “[i]t is thus left to the reader himself to put two and two together, if he so desires but nothing is done to minister to the readers’ indolence” (Kierkegaard, in Conant, 1990, p.19).

We have seen that modern philosophy not only espouses that there is objective truth but also that we can communicate it objectively. This position arises from the conviction that we can objectively rightly make a differentiation between what is true and false. It is made of an uncompromising discipline that there is an all-sorted-out way that everyone should subject to. Kierkegaard was concerned with the problem of such kind of communication- a communication that has an implication of universality and objectivity. His analysis of communication is founded on the philosophical assumption of existence. For him, since existence has a personal touch it is constituted by acts of choice.

The pseudonyms, therefore, are meant to show to the reader that life-possibilities cannot be embraced by a single individual. Since each pseudonym has distinct life, readers will learn that their life too is irreplaceably distinct.

## **2.2. Philosophically Purposeful Form of Writing**

In this section of this chapter I will try to show Kierkegaard’s style of writing as an embodiment of direct opposition to traditional metaphilosophy. Through his writings he demonstrates what he thinks are wrong with language and philosophical communication as it is used in modern metaphilosophy. So, I will try to analyze what sets him apart from both traditional and modern dominant way of doing philosophy.

So the basic question is-should a form of writing embody its purpose? Suppose, for instance, there is a belief which asserts that thought should not be written down to count as philosophical. So any attempt to put this belief in writing cannot be purposeful. The only way to walk the talk is to not write it down. In this case we rightly say the fact that it is not written or the fact that it is done orally is congruent with its purpose. It would be self- contradictory, for instance, if a

philosopher writes that philosophy should not be put into written form for contentious reason that if it is written down it loses its philosophical content and purpose. From ancient Greek philosophy, Plato could be a fitting example for the conviction that the form or style of the writing should reflect what the writing attempts to communicatively achieve. Plato, following his teacher Socrates (though he never wrote anything for he believed that philosophy should be a live dialogue), wrote philosophy in dialogue form. This is supposed to show that the form matches the content and the writing embodies the purpose.

Kierkegaard's style of writing is far from what is now universally considered as standard philosophical writing. It does not try to get at a single conclusion following a strict line of argument where premises are provided in support of a conclusion. Besides, his writings are extremely specific. They lack follow-up and development on his assertions. They are not a single solid systematic treatise that aims at clarifying a concept or arriving at a thesis. Most of his non-pseudonymous writings are didactic or as he calls them "edifying" or "upbuilding". He doesn't seriously engage in an intellectual exchange with philosophers in the history of philosophy. His engagement with the few past philosophers he mentioned in his writings (for example, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel) is not taken argument by argument. So, he fails to grapple with previous philosophical works that potentially undermine his argument. Moreover, unlike most modern philosophers, he is fundamentally religious. Evans argues that "work with religious aims can be properly philosophical is a distinctly modern and western one" (Evans,2009,p.2).If this is true then Kierkegaard directly opposes this modern view by making Christian concepts and figures such as Original Sin, Incarnation, Epiphany, Abraham, Jesus and so on part of his assumptions or presumptions. Moreover, given that his writings are very diverse, they are hard to classify and, to his satisfaction, are difficult to study them systematically. All these set him apart from what is 'normal and acceptable' in modern metaphilosophy.

Kierkegaard prophetically said that after his death professors would pick up his body of work for systematic study. He despised the fall of his work at the hands of philosophers for the reason that he despised philosophical systematization which he thought was lifeless just like Christendom. About one of his most celebrated philosophical works Kierkegaard says "[a]bove all, may heaven preserve the book [i.e. Concluding Unscientific Postscript] and me

from every appreciative violence which might be done it – that a billowing partisan might quote it appreciatively and enroll me in the census” (Kierkegaard, in Conant 1990, p.17). He does not want to be reduced to a certain place in a system and become like everyone else.

Another important point with regard to Kierkegaard’s style of writing is his literary inclination. Irony, humor and paradox ubiquitously pervade his writings. He extensively writes in parables and metaphors. The use of all these literary techniques goes hand in hand with his belief that writings should reflect their purposes. In his *Parables of Kierkegaard*, Thomas C. Oden talks about the purposive nature of the use of literary techniques with an exclusive emphasis to parables. But it also holds for all the techniques when Oden(1978) argues:

The story format was necessary for implementing his highly explicit theory and method of indirect communication, which was essential to the purpose of his writing. If *subjectivity* (or personal existence, or becoming oneself) *is truth*, which is Kierkegaard's premise ("the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation"), - then the communication of truth must be quite different from the objective presentation of data or information. Such an "indirect" communication requires a "double reflection": on the one hand the communicator is imaginatively presenting alternative possibilities of self-understanding that call for decision ("either/or") by the reader; on the other hand the communicator is intensively concerned about what Kierkegaard calls "the appropriation process," that is, the means by which the reader grasps his or her own human possibilities (p. xii-xiii, emphasis original).

To be consistent with his assertion that he has no wish to have a positive propositional opinion, he must resort to the negative. Since negatives are not declarative statements or since they do not assert some substantive propositional content, they usually withdraw, revoke, self-undermine, retract, and distance themselves. The basic desired target of all these is to avoid authoritativeness both as an author and philosopher. The use of all these literary techniques “is quite typical of the way Kierkegaard simultaneously participates in, and distances himself from, the practice of philosophy” (Carlisle, 2006, p.58).

In this regard, the following two quotations reveal Kierkegaard’s conviction that the form or style of the writing should reflect the purpose of the writing:

So then the book [i.e. Concluding Unscientific postscript] is superfluous; let no one therefore take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood It (Kierkegaard, in Conant, 1990, p.17).

To be an authority is far too burdensome an existence for a humorist (ibid. p.17).

In his style of writing Kierkegaard wants to show that he doesn't want to be called philosopher or associated with another brand new philosophy. He doesn't want to end up being what he criticizes. So his style or form of writing itself is an attempt to criticize the prevalent metaphilosophical tradition. It would be inconsistent and paradoxical if Kierkegaard, in order to criticize philosophy itself, was to produce another philosophy and make the same 'mistake', to wit, philosophy trying to embrace the whole truth about human existence, though it is questionable if Kierkegaard succeeded in this regard.

Kierkegaard was interested in showing that pure theoretical reflection misrepresents actual existing individual. He was not interested in producing another theoretical or speculative philosophy but to show its inherent inability to embrace dynamic existence. This position is further explained by another characteristic of Kierkegaard's authorship which is worth mentioning, to wit, the fact that his writing is very much autobiographical. "Kierkegaard's biography is necessarily more relevant to his thought than is the case with most philosophers, for he himself saw philosophical inquiry neither as the construction of systems nor as the analysis of concepts, but as the expression of an individual existence"(MacIntyre,2006 p.61).

Many philosophers have written on the individual. But Kierkegaard would say the individual has been reduced to a concept, a generalization, and an object. It has been erroneously reduced to a mere thought and reflection. For him the only way we overcome these pseudo-individualism is to let the individual become herself by her choice. Since it never gets more personal than this, this is the only way authentic selfhood is guaranteed. The individual will become truly herself because she defines herself. She has firsthand contact with herself. Hence, she owns her subjectivity. Besides, she is so a loner in this voyage that she only is responsible for it.

However, despite his intention to go beyond academic philosophy, or to criticize it without being a reflective, ideal and theoretical academic philosopher, or to show the problem of philosophy without philosophizing, Kierkegaard, in my opinion, has posed fundamental philosophical problems through his philosophy.

### **3. TRUTH AND COMMUNICATION**

According to Kierkegaard, truth that has no contact with the existing person is no truth. So he sets out his goal to find if there is a truth that reveals itself only existentially or subjectively. So

the question is what is truth to the existing person? For Kierkegaard citing Socrates was important for he claims that he knows nothing. Truth is to be found in his interlocutors. He acknowledges that we cannot copy-paste truth from one individual to the other for the obvious reason that their existential context is decisively different. Thus, he refrains from placing himself as an authoritative Christian and philosopher who preaches analogous and uniform truth that works for everyone.

When Kierkegaard famously stated phrases such as ‘truth is subjectivity’ or ‘the crowd is untruth’ what he meant was the following. According to Kierkegaard, truth in order to count as truth, it needs to be appropriated in action. He argues “the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation” (Kierkegaard, in Oden, 1978, p.xii). Experiencing the truth (whatever it is) in real material time, we should all individually or subjectively say *‘aha! This is what it actually means’*. So conceived, it must give a real sense for the individual who is actually experiencing the truth in real time. Scholars of Kierkegaard warn us that the phrase ‘truth is subjectivity’ has nothing to do with the assertion that truth is relative. The former refers to being *in* the truth, living or acting upon the truth and/or experiencing the truth. It refers to being at one with it. He is not saying truth is what the individual says it is.

To give an example, everyone talks about development these days and I agree that it is measurable. But in a “develop-*ed* stage” there would be an unforeseeable outcome which arises out of the possible discrepancy between our plans and its implementation. In other words, due to our human condition there might be an immeasurable and unintended outcome. Consequently, developed stage might comprise of both planned outcomes and unintended outcomes. Despite our meticulous plan it might turn out different. It is only in this sense, truth is subjectivity or truth is an experience. In other words, from within this stage, a person can exclaim that *‘aha! This is what a developed stage looks like’*. Now being at it, she is making sense of it. She is in the truth. Perhaps this immeasurable outcome is illusory but looking into history this discrepancy has been part and parcel of human experience. For Kierkegaard, truth and existence are inseparable. Truth makes sense when it is appropriated by an individual who is standing in her existential context. Since the modern philosopher ignores this existential context, the search for absolute, certain and objective truth, for the most part, remains elusive.

This should not be misunderstood as Kierkegaard is saying there is one path for each and every individual. If there is in fact one path it is the path of individualism. This reminds me of a clip from a movie in which a person is telling a gathering that they are individuals, that they should go on with their independent life. But, misunderstanding the speaker, the crowd keeps repeatedly shouting in unison '*we are all individuals!*' '*We are all individuals!*' If they were autonomous individuals with their own independent life, then they wouldn't have shouted similarly. Is Kierkegaard making the same mistake when he tells us that we are all individuals? Isn't he predefining the path to how exactly we become autonomous sovereign individuals?

Here one may raise the question - can't we think of an autonomous individual in relation to something which is predefining? Individuality is possible as long as the individual actively shapes herself in relation to others, something or God. I may be a product of predefining society or culture but at the same time I am an individual who creates my becoming, or owns my subjectivity. Otherwise individualism as a set of principles would be like Christendom.

Therefore, for Kierkegaard, truth must be individualized. It might not be made by the individual but ultimately truth must be an individual's existential experience. Truth is not collective for our actions are unilateral. Since we fundamentally and inexhaustibly vary in existential experience, existential truth must mirror that existential variety. In my opinion, Kierkegaard never gave a serious thought to the question if truth is neither universal nor relative then what is it? In other words, he failed to come up with an exact theoretical distinction between subjective truth/knowledge and objective truth/knowledge. He simply classified moral and religious truth/knowledge under the former and Natural science, mathematics and history under the latter. Of course, Kierkegaard in order to be consistent with his underlying assertion on Christianity and systematic speculative philosophy, he should refrain from producing another theory of truth. As a result, he came to the conclusion that truth in an ethico-religious realm cannot remain to be a mere notion or theory. In this realm truth must be lived out for truth calls for private, individual subjectivity. Kierkegaard's fear with the claim that truth is universal and objective is that people might think they are good or they are Christian simply because they have accumulated universal and objective theories in their mind without taking into consideration of the need to do the good or live out Christianity. In short, he is not giving us a definitive definition of truth instead he is saying moral and religious truth requires action, appropriation by the existing individual. So, for

him, it is only the truth that is acted upon which accounts to be truth. As Evans (2010) observed, Kierkegaard here seems to follow the classical correspondence theory of truth for there must be an objective truth to correspond to in the first place. But truth in the context of axiology calls for subjectivity as the subject is required to act upon the truth. Mere accumulation of truth is pointless. But here is where Kierkegaard lacks clarity for question arises once we accept Kierkegaard's characterization of existence as indeterminate and our act of choice as rationally ungoverned. Subjective appropriation of truth seems relative. And to bring in God is not consistent with his assertion of the indeterminacy of life.

Another way of understanding Kierkegaard's thesis that truth is subjectivity is to ponder on his assertion that the crowd is untruth. This rather provocative statement shows "the incompatibility he saw between established ecclesiastical conformism and the inward and personal character of Christian faith" (MacIntyre 2006, p.61). He observed that individuals at times evade their responsibility by identifying themselves with the bandwagon and collectivity. Truth erroneously becomes what is widespread. As such it is accepted as truth without appropriation, meaning and sense by the single individual, by the last flesh who has a final and exclusive access to existence. Truth is confused with manyness, with number. Truth of the crowd is characteristically similar with speculative philosophy and Christendom for both are un-lived, nominal, detached, surface and overarchival. It is like a description of medicine enumerating all kinds of side effects, indications and counter- indications. But when it comes to its use it varies from individual cases to individual cases. Some might see the side effects while others might not. Some might be cured by it instantly; others might acutely suffer from it.

Kierkegaard seems to emphasize the how rather than the what. As such he reiterates the importance of whether it is existentially felt, experienced, sensed or not. Only then, that we use the word truth meaningfully. It must give sense and meaning to the existing individual. Truth with capital 'T' which is believed to be universal, absolute and a product of objective logical system forgets what it means to exist and what it means to be human.

Kierkegaard, therefore, advises us to be cautious when we impart existential truth to others. He contends that "to write a book and revoke it is something else than not writing it at all; that to write a book that does not claim importance for anybody is something else than leaving it unwritten" (Kierkegaard, in Conant 1990, p.18). So, Kierkegaard's famous thesis i.e. 'truth is

subjectivity' signifies the existentially important point that whatever that truth might be the significant point is what it means to possess it for truth enters human life only through subjectivity. In other words, we are affected by the truth in our subjectivity.

As shown in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard opposed two things. The first is what he called Christendom and the second speculative philosophy. Even though these are two different or separate fields, in his view, they both have the same problem. They both are lifeless. They are devoid of life/existence. They both are pure and easy in the same way that a tautology is. They both are detached from subjective and existential truth. Existence is neither pure, perfect solid nor an all-sorted-out ease. Existence is full of effort. It involves insecurity, painful choice, disbelief and melancholy. It is not something that is already written; hence, unchanging. To identify oneself with this unchanging, objective system compromises and risks one's freedom and authenticity. In a direct opposition to how Hegel's theoretical system makes everything easy, Kierkegaard said "[m]oved by a genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere" (Kierkegaard, in Conant 1990, p.25). By this what he means is that in thought everything is easy but in action life is difficult.

As we have seen, Kierkegaard is about the inexhaustible, the spontaneous, the unforeseeable, the radically surprising, and totally accidental aspect of human existence. He talks about the uncontainable rich, deep, sophisticated and complex human life. Any attempt to embrace this aspect of human condition through some kind of linguistic generality, conceptual framework, or abstraction is destined to fail. It is always doomed to frustration. He is concerned about the ones that *always* slip away. Moreover, this aspect of human life is an offence to autonomous human reason, language and moral rules. But this didn't lead him to skepticism. To fill out this epistemological vacuum caused by human inescapable predicament he resorts to will, passion, care, love, faith, to the paradoxical (to the offensive), to Christianity etc. In the following chapter, therefore, I shall discuss why Kierkegaard thinks that autonomous human reason is deficient and thus why we should alternately make use of passion, faith, care etc as compared to using reason only.

## CHAPTER THREE

### KIERKEGAARD AND RATIONALITY IN TRADITIONAL METAPHILOSOPHY

#### INTRODUCTION

Like the previous two chapters this chapter also draws on the presupposition that there is a prevalent worldview towards reason or rationality that philosophers have used as their tool and method. The established worldview of reason which constitutes a dominant metaphilosophy uses reason as a tool of closure, certainty, systematization and generalization. It maintains the age-old tradition that goes back at least as far as Plato. According to this tradition, what is true is what is carved out as orderly general from the disorderly particulars.

Kierkegaard tries to tell us that complacency with the general, the stable, and the static is the most dangerous attitude in both philosophy and Christianity which thwarts change and progress into true self. Kierkegaard opposed the mechanical understanding of autonomous human reason and espoused, like Hegel, its dialecticality, its imperfection or its endless process. However, unlike Hegel the process does not finally come to a closure in a sublime stage.

For Kierkegaard, there is no such thing as rationally inevitable or imminent. He opted for the indeterminate nature of existence and he believed this would save Modern Europe from its intellectual and 'spiritual bankruptcy'. Being consistent with his thesis, he opposed thoroughness, a black and white decision or an easy certainty in favor of a decision of grey uncertainty. He considers the indeterminate nature of what we encounter and the infinite and open possibilities in the breadth and depth of life.

We have seen that existence as an object of knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is indeterminate, spontaneous, accidental, open, irreducible, random, novel, unpredictable, irregular and is fraught with surprises.

Kierkegaard would agree with Alan Lightman's bifurcation and categorization of order and disorder in every aspects of the universe. Lightman in his essay *In Defence of Disorder* (2019) puts in one basket, to borrow his revealing collection of terms, system, law, reason, rationality, pattern, predictability, symmetry, order, principle, cause, regularity and

repeatability and in the other randomness, newness, novelty, spontaneity, freewill, unpredictability, unconstrained personal freedom, irregularity and entropy. Kierkegaard attributed the second category to existence while the first category, in his view, rightly depicted what philosophers and theologians, at his age, were seeking in futile.

If Kierkegaard is right, if existence is not fully controllable and is not subject to rational order, inevitability, predictability or epistemic certainty, then it poses a direct challenge on the tradition which accepted reason and rationality as an impetus for certain, absolute, universal, objective and systematized knowledge and truth. Kierkegaard is skeptical of the capacity of human reason to fully comprehend existence arguing that it inevitably falls short of existential substance. Hence, objective content is an illusion. Any humanly built system/scheme could be near-perfect but it can never be perfect in the strict sense of the word. This for Kierkegaard is a decisive point upon which he built his entire philosophy.

Provided that the main theme of this paper is taking Kierkegaard's philosophy as a new metaphilosophy which stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing metaphilosophy which I have discussed in the opening chapter; in this chapter, therefore, I will discuss Kierkegaard's attitude towards philosophy and the prevailing philosophical method which is dominant for centuries. I shall also try to put him under what has come to be known as the tradition of the counter-Enlightenment. In order to do all the above, I should critically examine his 'doctrines' of choice, faith, existence and their relations with what is termed as reason.

## **1. KIERKEGAARD, PHILOSOPHY, PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD AND THE ANTI-ENLIGHTENMENT TRADITION**

### **1.1. Kierkegaard, Philosophy and its Method**

Kierkegaard's negative attitude towards academicians in general and philosophers in particular is related with his firm stance on what it means to be human. The reason he was critical of Hegel and Hegelianism was because he accused theoreticians, speculative philosophers, academicians, intellectuals and theologians of ivory-towerism and impersonal abstractions that forget the venturous condition of being human. Through their system of thought, they make existence easy and controllable. In contrast to Hegel for whom both/and

(synthesis or mediation) is possible, Kierkegaard argues that it might be possible in thought but not in action which is an either/or (choice or repetition).

For him, being human is inextricably linked with existence. We cannot separate human beings from existential conditions they are in. As a result, this existential human condition reflects human beings' temporality and finitude. These natures of temporality and finiteness, in turn, make philosophers' capacity and search for absolute knowledge paralyzed and seriously limited. After all philosophers are human beings.

His and his father's personal acquaintance with intellectuals and some Church elites, who were ardent Hegelians, also shaped his life-long despise to philosophy. In his writings he, time and again, wrote that he had no intention of inventing new philosophy. He even prophesized that philosophers in the future would misunderstand the very purpose of the corpus of his works by systematically studying them.

His detest for philosophy also lies on his underlying assumption that existence entails becoming; thus, any static systematization of it will never be fully comprehensive. It is like to claim to know how exactly existence begins and ends. According to Kierkegaard, modeling existence in general rational principles is the sin of philosophy. If existence is a process, then to claim to know, in advance, that it inevitably ends in some determined way is a fantasy. Therefore, as philosophy is about the general and the conceptual, it will not do justice to the existential.

As it is the case for any academic discipline, philosophy follows a certain method, even though there has not been a single philosophical method in the history of world metaphilosophy that all philosophers have agreed upon. The reason behind this variation is because of the fact that the question what is 'philosophical method' is a contentious philosophical question in itself. The very answer to the question - how should one approach the fundamental problems of philosophy? - results in instituting various schools of thought.

For Tsenay Serequeberhan, for instance, "philosophy-as, strictly speaking, with all things human-is an inherently interpretative undertaking grounded in the mortal existentiality of human existence" (Serequeberhan, 1994, p.2). Hence, the task of postcolonial African philosophy is essentially hermeneutical.

For a person whose philosophy is fraught with concepts like existence, choice, passion, the ‘absurd’, ‘paradox’, ‘irony’, and ‘indirect communication’, ‘double movement’ and the Incarnation, philosophical method as we know it is already in question. Consequently, Kierkegaard has become a synonym for fideist, misologist, irrationalist, anti-reason, as someone who “claims to despise philosophical method, is dismissive of reason” (Robinson and Zarate, 2006, p.88).

The philosophical method which was sanctified by the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment unequivocally give primacy to reason, consistency, clarity, precision and direct communication instead of faith, paradox, parables, irony, metaphor and indirect communication. Moreover, it embarks on a method that focuses on conceptual analysis, the search for the general and for what must work anywhere anytime.

Even though the very definition of the concept ‘philosophical method’ is debatable, Kierkegaard consciously distanced himself from the dominant metaphilosophy which authoritatively pronounces *the* philosophical method we all should follow. Reading Kierkegaard will make us less confident to dare to exclude concepts like faith, paradox, irony, indirect communication etc. as concepts that are anti-philosophy.

## **1.2. Kierkegaard and the Anti-Enlightenment Tradition**

The term ‘tradition’ in the title of this section suggests that there had been a conscious intellectual engagement which sharply stood in opposition to the intellectual movement that we call the Enlightenment. Though the anti-Enlightenment tradition grew out of the Enlightenment as a contending discourse, some scholars argue that the former is as old as the latter.

Relatively recently, there are works which argue that the anti-Enlightenment engagement took place in parallel with the Enlightenment itself, that they both were exact contemporaries. For instance, Isaiah Berlin’s famous essay *The Counter-Enlightenment and Ze’ev Sternhell’s The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* can be taken as typical examples.

Some notable works which indicate the presence of such an oppositional engagement at about the same time the Enlightenment was in its full swing include: Michel de Montaigne’s

*On Cannibals*; according to Berlin (1979), Giambattista Vico; according to Tom Furniss (2004), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *First Discourse, Second Discourse, The Social Contract and the Discourses*; according to Francis Ferguson (2004), Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* so on and so forth.

Moreover, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* took this line of tradition making critique as a new way of correcting the path of Enlightenment philosophy. Besides, schools of thought such as feminism, postcolonial theory, Poststructuralism and postmodernism can be taken as the latest offshoots of this tradition.

If it is true that there were initial ideals which make up the Enlightenment, according to Berlin, what constituted the counter-Enlightenment tradition was “[t]he rejection of the central principles of the Enlightenment – universality, objectivity [and] rationality” (Berlin 1979 p.19-20).

In this sense, Kierkegaard definitely is the heir of philosophers who stood firmly against the central ideas and ideals of the intellectual movement called the Enlightenment. In my view, his entire philosophy is a critique of the pillars of the Enlightenment which include, among other things, rationality, objectivity and universality.

In this historical context called the Enlightenment, these three concepts were given supreme importance and they were inextricably intertwined in many ways. For instance, all three converge in their underlying conviction that reason is universal, that it is given and provided for all humanity. So if we go wherever reason leads us the outcome is the same for every rational being. No one with the rational mind, rational will (Kant), could possibly deny it. That is to say, its proper use and application is universally binding. Owing to its pursue for the most general in every human interaction, it is supposed to lead us to uniformity, and undifferentiated view. Moreover, it is objective. It is not subject to individual emphasis, personal preference, race, religion, gender, there are no multiple points of view, or perspectives. Despite these diversifications any outcome of reason is supposedly not susceptible to various different interpretations.

For Kierkegaard, the ramifications of rationality's claim for objectivity and universality are many. First, its arbitrary self-proclaimed preeminence as the only way for truth is rejected

by Kierkegaard for it mistakenly excels reason over faith; or even excludes it as incapable of achieving the truth altogether. Rationality becomes the only common language and form of knowledge which is used as a path for truth. Second, it demands uniformity. Pertinent to Kierkegaard, therefore, it shuns diversity borne out of existential and experiential differences. Third, reason's quest for Cartesian-like certainty and absolute foundation is unachievable for certainty and absoluteness demand God-like panoramic vantage point. The fourth is the problem with abstraction and generality. According to Isaiah Berlin, conceptualization of the 'natural law', for example, was "a vast, cold empty abstraction" (ibid.p.9) which defined the ultimate goal of all devoted propagators of the Enlightenment.

In a passage that clearly reflects Kierkegaard's accusation of the wrongs of Speculative philosophy and that of Christendom, Berlin writes:

Scientists invent systems, philosophers rearrange reality into artificial patterns, shut their eyes to reality, and build castles in the air[...].Systems are mere prisons of the spirit, and they lead not only to distortion in the sphere of knowledge, but to the erection of monstrous bureaucratic machines, built in accordance with the rules that ignore the teeming variety of the living world, the untidy and asymmetrical inner lives of men, and crush them into conformity for the sake of some ideological chimera unrelated to the union of spirit and flesh that constitutes the real world (Berlin, 1979,p.8).

## **2. EXISTENCE, CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALITY**

The milieu Kierkegaard was in saw the zenith of rationalism in its radical form. What began with philosophers like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, and Gottfried Leibniz, gradually reached its climax through Kant's and Hegel's philosophy which typically defines the worldview of the enlightenment and modernity. It was the time that rationality entered in almost every aspect of life in general, morality and religion in particular. Kierkegaard also observed the death of God as it elevated rationality as the only real way to knowledge which involves truth that can be produced to the exclusion of all other ways as illusory.

As I mentioned in the opening chapter, the rise of modern rationalism can be traced back to the Reformation, the Renaissance, the advent of modern science as a worldview and the ensuing 'successes' of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard was well aware of the successes of what are known as 'exact' sciences as fruits of objective

rationality. Scientific rationality might have replaced superstition but philosophy's metaphysical speculation, its claim to have a System with God's-eye, its appropriation of objectivity (the view from nowhere), especially in an ethico-religious sphere, all amounts to human supernaturalism.

Alastair Hannay, one of the most prominent scholars of Kierkegaard argues:

Scientism, however, was not Kierkegaard's own target. His concern was with matters that occupy people in an open confrontation with life, matters wrongly assumed to be in the hands of the masters of metaphysics and theology. Kierkegaard was wary of scientists, but science itself was something he held in considerable respect, though typically enough mocking popular expectations (Hannay, in Lowrie, 2013, p.xix).

But Kierkegaard would definitely agree with the Iranian philosopher, Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, who argued: "From the standpoint of science, the universe is like an old book the first and last pages of which have been lost. Neither the beginning nor the end is known. Thus, the worldview of science is a knowledge of the part, not of the whole" (Mutahhari, 1985, p.69). They both share the idea that scientific rationality cannot give us a God's-eye view of reality. Owing to its own method, science has a limited domain as far as truth and knowledge is concerned.

The dominant thinking has been that reason can give us an objective view from which we make a distinction between our choices. We often hear people asking for an 'objective opinion'. But for Kierkegaard objective opinion is oxymoronic. We all shoot our opinion from a subjective point of view. We are in this situation because of the human condition, to wit, existence and this is exactly both premodern and modern philosophies have failed to recognize.

Existence is not an idea, not a concept. It is not a product of philosophical deduction. It is perpetual being that we cannot pause to have a calm supervisory reflective look. In other words, life knows no deferment. It cannot be postponed to later time. It does not wait until we get the right thought to live by. There is no premeditated recipe for existence. Every time we impose logic on life, it gets tainted. Hence, Kierkegaard provocatively questions if we can attach logic to existence/life without doing injustice, without misinterpreting and misrepresenting it.

Unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard never gave us a thorough definition of existence. He left his readers to find out what existence is via examples of concrete personal experience and through the existential agency reflected in the 'life' of his pseudonyms both taking either of the three forms of existence which he called the aesthetic, the ethical and religious. Gregor Malantschuk (2003) in his *Kierkegaard's Concept of Existence* argue that existence, for Kierkegaard,

consists essentially of three elements: the subject (the self), freedom, and the ethical- constituted in such a way that in his freedom the subject must continually make ethical choices. But this also means that existence always involves movement. Therefore, from the beginning Kierkegaard was interested in 'motion', and it is significant that of the four motions mentioned by Aristotle Kierkegaard focused on the movement that expresses the transition from possibility to actuality. In this movement there is for Kierkegaard the question of freedom, which initiates the movement, and also of the ethical [and finally the religious] as the goal that is to be actualized (Malantschuk, 2003, p.11-12).

Kierkegaard's philosophy can be understood as a reaction and attempt to show the increasingly mechanical lifeless existence towards which the world has gradually been heading since the advent of modern science with rationality taking the authoritative central stage permeating every aspect of human life. But as human rationality is limited in capacity, Kierkegaard observes our overreliance on it has led us to what he calls 'spiritual bankruptcy.' Hence, after such a blunt critique about the power of human reason, Kierkegaard opens another door-the door of 'passion' and faith to connect us with what reason cannot understand, with the lost pages of an old book that Mutahhari asserts that rationality alone cannot deal with. It is here that we are tempted to ask if Kierkegaard himself is in the tradition of Enlightenment for "[...] the historical record plainly shows that the great majority of canonical Enlightenment philosophers placed great value on the role of the sentiments and passions in guiding the conduct of our lives, and warned of the many dangers of subordinating ourselves to the supreme authority of the faculty of reason" (Smith, 2019, p.10).

As the ultimate goal of Kierkegaard's authorship, from first to last, revolves around Christianity, he felt impelled to come to terms with a kind of cultural Christianity which he termed Christendom. Based on his observation, he found Christendom devoid of 'motion', 'passion' or faith. He saw Christianity being reduced to static rational system. Faith, therefore, is the natural ramification of the fact that existence is motion in which individuals

should build their authentic self. It also arises out of the awareness of the impossibility of containing existence in a thought. If faith does not enjoy the luxury of pre-existing theory or broad generalization that purports to explain in advance the trajectory of dynamic life which is full of change, then it is a venture, a risky expedition in search of the unknown or the other side. It is a life where an all-too-human logic from the sovereign rational subject is of little help.

However, Kierkegaard never argues that Christianity is incompatible with reason rather he believes that reason cannot make us a believer. Faith is not a matter of rational knowledge, certainty, general objective system but it is an existential condition. Faith is a decision, an action not a thought, not a rational calculation. In short, it is an existential choice.

For Kierkegaard, we are all pitiful and finite temporal beings whose understanding is woefully limited by our earthly situation. To think that we can ever have a God-like perspective, outside of space and time, is the height of folly. No one, not even Hegel, can reach a vantage point of “pure thought” (Robinson and Zarate, 2006, p.93).

There is a noticeable parallel between Kierkegaard’s critic of Christendom and speculative philosophy of Hegel which was in vogue at the time. They both ignore the surprising and spontaneous attribute of existence. They both claim totality and certainty. They both purport to contain the endless becoming which, according to Kierkegaard, is the salient feature of existence. As a result, they both claim self-fulfillment or complacency. Kierkegaard sets to demolish the complacency by emulating Socrates who, as a self-proclaimed gadfly, tried to disconcert the complacency of Athenians who claimed to be knowledgeable.

At the risk of oversimplification, let me call this ‘philosophy of the embrace’, a philosophy that tries to subsume existence in thought. Thought trying to embrace action or existence is futile for thought however comprehensive, cannot adequately simulate the real-life situation faced by the individual. As a result, unable to embrace some experiences, it denies their normalcy. The catchphrase here would be ‘anything my net does not catch isn’t a fish’. This has been the ramification of Enlightenment modernity or one side of it if we agree with Smith’s *Irrationality* (2019).

As expressed in the saying, the embracing philosophical ‘net’ entailed in our systems, generalizations, theories, abstractions and doctrines insinuate that if it is outside of the

embracing net then it is unworthy of serious philosophical, epistemological, rational attention. The assertion forgets that every time we make a step in the course of existence we are getting into uncharted territory. It forgets that there isn't easy, complacent certainty every step of the way in our existence. In other words, some things always slip through the net! Some are beyond and outside. If we think that what is beyond the net, by definition, is an anomaly, then we are impelled to ask whose definition is right and what possibly is beyond that definition. These are some of the decisive questions posed by Kierkegaard.

We have seen that Kierkegaard accused modern Europe for being bereft of imagination and passion, emotion, faith and care as its emphasis extremely has gone to the other polar, to wit, rationality and all-encompassing knowledge.

This is why Kierkegaard argues:

At the moment one is afraid of nothing so much as the complete bankruptcy toward which the whole of Europe seems to be going, and so we forget what is far more dangerous, the apparently unavoidable spiritual bankruptcy which is at our doors (Kierkegaard, in Gates, 1960, p.30).

Or he humors:

Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion. Nowadays, not even a suicide kills himself in desperation. Before taking the step he deliberates so long and so carefully that he literally chokes with thought. He does not die with deliberation, but from deliberation (Kierkegaard, in Robinson and Zarate, 2006, p.95).

When Kierkegaard asserted there was too much knowledge in Europe, and when he says 'the age in which we live is wretched, because it is without passion'(Kierkegaard, in Carlisle, 2006, p.22), he was implying, among others, that the metaphysical attempt of reason to grasp action, existence, life in its entirety is impossible and has cost us spirituality or, for him exactly, has cost us genuine Christianity which must be grounded on faith above and beyond reason.

### **3. CHOICE, FAITH AND REASON**

Kierkegaard's theory of choice is the springboard for his entire philosophy. It is from this theory that his assertions about Christianity and his critique of systematic philosophy radiate

or project. It is indispensably related with concepts which ubiquitously appear in his entire authorship. Choice, freedom, existence, faith, motion, self, despair, angst, indirect communication are all meaningfully connected to each other.

His doctrine of choice is also one that has created a serious cleavage among scholars of Kierkegaard. For some this theory is what put Kierkegaard as outright irrationalist; as someone who is deist. For others, it is a theory that Kierkegaard uses to show the limits of reason and to show that faith is above reason not to propagate irrationalism as such. As far as my intention in this thesis is concerned, however, I found both camps to be the same. One way or another, they both seem to present Kierkegaard as a critic of reason and its role in the dominant metaphilosophy. Let's see if this claim of mine is right.

For Kierkegaard, existence is a journey or 'motion' as he prefers to call it. It is through this motion that an individual is supposed to freely choose the path that makes up her authentic self. However, choice does not enjoy objectivity and this has been overlooked for centuries in the history of Western philosophy. Choice, ultimately pins down to "that solitary individual". In other words, choice calls for subjectivity. The so called rational objective choice is of little help as the individual is bound to face the uncertain and the uncontrollable. The individual makes choices in uncertainty. In planning or charting an uncertain future, therefore, objective rationality is pointless. We need to be faithfully committed to our unbound existence. Faith fills out the imminent gap which is likely to happen in following objective rationality. We need that 'passion' and 'leap of faith' to go on in life.

Kierkegaard's concept of motion is not as materialistic and mechanistic as Hobbes's theory of motion. Hobbes' motion is initiated by our natural, innate desire for self-preservation whereas for Kierkegaard, it should be motivated by authentic self-creation. For Kierkegaard, this restless motion does not necessarily take place in a predictably organized fashion. "[N]othing in the cosmos would ever change – like a row of upright dominoes held rigidly in place..." (Lightman, 2019). It is erratically shapeless.

Choice cannot be based on a refined theory that charts a certain path and prescribes on how to go about it. Any broad rational, universal and supposedly objective (neutral) generalization, abstraction, system, and doctrine, no matter how it strongly looks for a philosophy of control and

certainty, it cannot fully comprehend motion or, existence. The reason behind this rejection is that there is no such thing as *the* complete. Moreover, the system is supposed to suit almost any existential situation but in vain. Tailoring, in advance, theoretical clothing to existence will always end up unfit.

There is an ongoing debate on the assertion that Kierkegaard is proponent of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls “radical and ultimate choice” (MacIntyre, 2007, p.41). MacIntyre in his *magnum opus* book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* argues that the concept of choice in Kierkegaard is a direct opposition to reason. Therefore, “the act of choice had to be called in to do the work that reason could not do” (ibid. p.47). Based on MacIntyre’s interpretation, radical choice entails arbitrariness and irrationality. Choosing one is no more right and rationally justifiable than choosing another. Reason is unable to guide our choices. So what guides our choice is not reason but what Kierkegaard calls ‘leap of faith’. MacIntyre observed Kierkegaard oscillate with unease between God as the ultimate guide for our choices and a lonely individual with no guidance at all.

To justify this interpretation, some followers of MacIntyre draw on the story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. They argue there is a reason why the pseudonym author of the book, *Johannes de Silentio* called Abraham, the “Knight of faith”. Abraham faced two choices he was to sacrifice his son as per God’s command or defy it. His mind was never occupied with a kind of calculative Pascal’s Wager. He never hesitated to do what God commanded by telling himself that what he was about to do is immoral. He ‘teleologically suspended the ethical’ in the face of the supreme.

Abraham’s “infinite resignation”, that is, the abandonment of everything human his son, his wife, his moral integrity, happiness and his rational judgment does not suggest that he is defending irrationalism rather it shows the limits of what is human in the face of the exceptional, the indeterminate, the unknown and the unpredictable etc. It is about leaving all before the extraordinary. If reason was capably useful, Abraham would have used it.

Moreover, according to MacIntyre, Kierkegaard brought his theory of choice in an attempt to correct Kant’s vindication of morality. In the eyes of Kierkegaard, Kant was wrong in grounding morality upon reason. Reason for Kierkegaard, as I have discussed above, is

incapable of being universal, objective or neutral. Besides, reason can only lead us as far as decision, action or act of choice ultimately takes over. Therefore, MacIntyre argues: “Kierkegaard and Kant agree in their conception of morality, but Kierkegaard inherits that conception together with an understanding that the project of giving a rational vindication of morality has failed” (ibid. p.47).

The big question is, in choosing something, is it faith or reason that guarantees or secures truth and knowledge, especially ethico-religious truth and knowledge? When Kierkegaard asserts that truth is subjectivity, he meant that knowledge *about* goodness isn't enough. It requires *being* good. It is required of us to existentially *choose* the good.

The idea that Kierkegaard espouses radical choice and; thus, irrationalism, is vehemently rejected by other devoted scholars of Kierkegaard such as C. Stephen Evans. Evans argues that Kierkegaardian concepts such as choice, “Absolute Paradox” of “God-man”, the Incarnation, and the “absurd” are misunderstood and illicitly upheld against him as anti-reason. In an attempt to justify his case Evans came up with an idea he termed as “responsible fideism” (Evans 2008, p.1022) and he called Kierkegaard as responsible fideist. For him “responsible fideism, though it involves a critique of reason, is a position that can be rationally defended” (ibid, p.1022). He further explains: “Responsible fideism is to be distinguished from what I term irrational fideism, the view that religious beliefs are autonomous or exempt from rational appraisal” (ibid, p. 1022).

It seems Evans is saying, after all, human reason is a shared, common ground for humanity. It must ultimately begin from this basic ground such as  $1+1=2$ , as it were. What Kierkegaard projects from this common ground is a critique of this shared common ground without completely abandoning it. And this makes him a responsible fideist who has his own say in the ever going traditional debate between faith and reason. As such Evans rejects that faith is impervious to human reason. In other words, for him, faith is rationally criticizable; at the same time faith enables us to expose the limits of reason and this is where Kierkegaard's responsible fideism is observed. So, according to Evans, only because Kierkegaard demonstrated the limits of reason, he does not deserve to be labeled as irrational or deist.

To put it in standard modern logical argument form Kierkegaard is saying- since we are sinful; therefore, our religious truth/knowledge in the face of God is inadequate. Since we are finite and temporal and imperfect beings, human reason cannot deliver a perfect knowledge system or Truth. So, faith rather fills in the void caused by our sin and temporality. How does it do that? It does that by recognizing that faith is an existential condition. This existential condition is a natural extension of human existence. Kierkegaard begins his philosophy from the concrete existing individual-from 'that solitary individual' to use his expression. Speculative philosophy, as the name itself indicates, cannot speak for that individual's existence. As a result, in the final analysis, philosophy should be an exercise of sympathy and humility.

The basic reason for his anti-philosophical stance is his conviction that existence is a system only for God. In other words, philosophical System in Hegelian sense is beyond the reach of temporal and finite human beings. As such Kierkegaard is not entirely unique in his critique of philosophy. It is only the scale of radicalness and severity that makes him different. For example, I haven't found a philosopher who time after time reminds his readers/listeners not to take his writings seriously for they are nonsensical or absurd or with no positive content. Despite his intentions, Kierkegaard constructed philosophical arguments without which he wouldn't make any case. One critical observation that immediately comes after reading Kierkegaard should be his overall structural self-contradiction. The statement God is inexplicable itself is an explanation of God. Moreover, one could find rational systematization and generalization at work in his philosophy. In other words, no matter how hard he tried to distance himself from philosophy he could not escape philosophizing. We often see him attempting to confer reason for his views and constructing generalizable and universalizable truth. Hence, his self-undermining approach is self-defeating.

Besides, even if Kierkegaard tells us there is no one universal objective configuration to be a self or to be a Christian for being human is an indeterminate possibility which cannot be contained by a system, he presuppose, assume and presume a certain conception of who God is and what Christianity consists of.

However, Kierkegaard was successful in posing the question how philosophy using human reason could fail to deal with that which unforeseeably posits itself to the fore in existence and history for reason as a "timeless, godlike faculty"(Evans,1989, p.361) is non-existent.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SELF, SUBJECTIVITY AND EXISTENCE

#### INTRODUCTION

In my discussion so far I have attempted to show Kierkegaardian concepts such as faith, choice, existence, paradox, irony, absurdity, subjectivity and indirect communication indicate his underlying conviction that there are things that are beyond systematic necessary structure that human reason constructs. I have also argued that, among other things, it is this conviction which does not situate him under the dominant metaphilosophical tradition. In this chapter, I shall discuss Kierkegaard's concept of the self with the same intention of making it relevant to my thesis.

As I mentioned time and again Kierkegaard's ultimate goal of his authorship from first to last is to answer the question- What does it mean to *become* a Christian? Or what does a Christian self comprise of? In trying to answer these questions, Kierkegaard came up with a novel account of the self as compared to what has been believed the self to be. Provided that his philosophical approach sets him apart from the dominant metaphilosophical tradition, his idea of the self is a reflection of his stance on philosophy.

In this chapter, therefore, I shall analyze the following critical questions that can be mined from his thoughts -Is the self animated thus, full of motion? Or is it planted once and for all and thus, motionless (static)? Is the self organic, natural or civil? Is it something that always grows, that always changes, and that always becomes? Is the self objectively knowable? Does it have a uniform universal identity?

In previous chapters, I have discussed that human existence, for Kierkegaard, is an either/or. It is a choice. So, we become what we choose. This process of self-creation through one's choices presupposes freedom. In what has come to be known as Kierkegaard's philosophical psychology, he talks about what he calls "*angest*" (angst, anxiety or dread) and their relation to human freedom. Anxiety comes with our awareness that we are free to create ourselves and take full responsibility for who we become. But what happens to a self that is not willing to choose its

becoming and take full responsibility? According to him, this self suffers from self-inflicted “despair” for it tries to deny oneself and refuses to become oneself or for it loses its selfhood.

I shall follow two approaches to discern the self as analyzed by Kierkegaard. They can be loosely called cultural approach and philosophical approach. The first approach is primarily related with what Kierkegaard firmly believes the Christian self should constitute. In this approach he gave us a cultural critique of how the Christian self could easily lose its identity by identifying itself with the religious, cultural, social and political establishment. This self shuns taking responsibility for its personal choices and self-knowledge. For him, there is no such a thing as automatic Christianity. In other words, it does not happen of necessity.

Under the same approach we could also talk about how Kierkegaard would have opposed the mechanistic view of the self and even denial of the existence of such a thing as the self with the advent of modern science. Also during the Enlightenment, as rationality took a central stage, Kierkegaard would have opposed a pre-structured, self-centered view of the self. In other words, enlightenment self just like Christendom self does not take existential differences into consideration. Instead of an activity this self became definition, an abstract set of formal propositions. As such it has a determined positive content or identity. The self isn't a task to be fulfilled in relation to its existential encounter but the same everywhere irrespective of existential differences.

The cultural approach is inextricable with the philosophical approach. In his philosophical analysis of the self he contends that the self is always in becoming without losing its fixed static nature as an entity or substance. According to Kierkegaard, as philosophy is not a discipline of closure, so is the self. In stark contrast to the traditional conception which primarily conceives the self as an ‘entity’ or ‘substance’; hence, closed, static, primordialist and essentialist, Kierkegaard believes that the self is a “synthesis”. It is both a substance and motion. As there is fixed unchanging nature of the self, it is also continuously shaped by the pregnant moment when the individual plunges towards the unknown and gets into uncharted territory. The self perpetually embarks on the process of creating itself, as it goes forward in life. In this chapter I shall discuss these two approaches in more detail.

## 1. KIERKEGAARD AS A CULTURAL CRITIQUE OF THE SELF

In a very famous yet provocative statement Kierkegaard says “the crowd is untruth”. This should not be conceived as Kierkegaard saying that collectivity is automatically bereft of truth. As noted in the introduction, the wrong he saw with the crowd was related with the fact that; first, he saw things from a religious point of view. On this point he argues:

The spiritual man differs from us men in being able to endure isolation, his rank as a spiritual man is proportionate to his strength for enduring isolation, whereas we men are constantly in need of “the others,” the crowd; we die, or despair if we are not reassured by being in the crowd, or of the same opinion as the crowd (Beabout and Frazier, 2000, p.76).

We have seen that his harsh version of Christianity is deeply austere and associated with suffering, guilt and melancholy. For him Christian life should be a difficult life. But people usually prefer an easy life. So they identify themselves with the crowd. To follow what the crowd follows is easy as it gives us a sense of security. In one sense the story of Abraham from the Holy Bible symbolizes the difficulty of faith. Abraham did not have the comfort of crowd confirmation. He was in an insecure, lonely, difficult, personal act of choice. He stood out and stood against the crowd. This is why Kierkegaard portrayed him as a “knight of faith”.

Secondly, the ‘crowd is untruth’ because ‘truth is subjectivity’. In one passage Kierkegaard argues that an honest ‘pagan’ is more truthful than that of the dishonest Christian. Clearly what matters most for him is action rather than name. He is concerned more about the ‘how’ instead of the ‘what’ because Kierkegaard associates truth with action and transformation. Accumulating knowledge of truth or theorizing truth through language is not enough. Truth resides in those who are passionately committed to materialize what is truthful. As a result, mere membership of the crowd does not make us automatic Christians. Christianity is something that we earn by doing not by learning, as it were.

Moreover, Kierkegaard opposed the culturally and politically captive self for this self does not take responsibility for its own creation. It conceals itself within the crowd.

He observed this, for instance, in state religion when he argued:

Thus it was established by the State as a kind of eternal principle that every child is naturally born a Christian. The State delivers generation after generation, an assortment of Christians, each bearing the manufacturer's trademark of the state, with perfect accuracy, one Christian exactly like all the others with the greatest possible uniformity of a factory product (Kierkegaard, in Robinson and Zarate, 2006, p.83).

What is at stake due to this uniformity is authenticity. Authenticity can only be achieved through self-creation and self-definition. The self should be in an undetermined free journey to become oneself. But it could easily lose itself by identifying itself with the state for membership could be confused with Christianity. Such a 'Christian' is "a self he was not, and a self he did not become" (Kierkegaard, in Evans 2006, p.267). Christianity is built in our interaction with what we encounter. So, it is what happens to us. And what we encounter is not always determined by culture, the state, politics, or society.

The relevance of Kierkegaard is not confined to issues pertinent to Christianity. He also observed the problem of uniformity in an industrialized, mechanistic age of science and enlightenment where systematic rationalization was pervasive. "[T]he Enlightenment marks a point at which the nature of human self-understanding is reshaped in the image not of an engagement with spiritual forces but instead with an engagement with the resources of reason itself" (Tsakiri, 2006, p. ix). What they all share in common is the idea that there is an objective rationally determined way which everyone should follow in a similar manner in order that individuals will surely achieve the pre-conceived target. This exaggerated rational and epistemic human power was what Kierkegaard was vehemently critical of. In a direct conscious disagreement with this alleged power Kierkegaard's philosophy is about that which cannot be subjected to systematic rational order, that which is beyond human knowledge etc.

Though Kierkegaard had an admiration to science, he would have opposed the understanding of the self as something mechanical as it is represented by modern "scientific materialism" or "scientific naturalism" or "evolutionary reductionism". The self here is subject to the principle of strict cause and effect. It is included as another 'thing', 'entity', or 'substance' that can be objectively studied just the way physics studies matter in the physical world. As a result, the self is determined, systematized, rationalized, structured and necessitated. As liquid takes the shape

of its container, the self is supposed to be how human reason pre-arranges it. It is this reductive account of the self that Kierkegaard rejected.

In what is known as the age of information the self is lost in sameness, uniformity and conformity. Information circulation as we go anywhere creates this identicalness. Consequently, modern self becomes disengaged with itself, detached from itself. It has a designated place since it is predictably structured. It is disengaged because it has lost personal identity by identifying itself with the vogue. It goes with the bandwagon. This disengagement originates as the self confuses itself with the crowd. In other words, it becomes a mere follower of what is widespread. What is wrong with that is it is in personal denial and loss of self-recognition.

Like the uniform Christians in Christendom, the self of the enlightenment creates a humanism which is supposed to be uniform. The enlightenment self has become centralized. To use the concept “expanding centrism” from Intercultural philosophy, this self occurs when self-proclaimed center becomes the only source of truth or knowledge which peripheries must accept. As such, the self becomes a result of rationality, objectivity, universality and thus uniformity. We must always remember that Kierkegaard’s imperative idea that rationality when it is contrasted with infinite possibilities lacks pre-determined comprehensiveness. History is full of these surprising possibilities which, as human beings, we do not have access to. There are things which escape rational structure. This is the fundamental problem of the so-called the age of reason which culminated in Hegel. Selfhood is a journey of uncertainty. It is a journey into the unknown. The Enlightenment was supposed to illuminate this darkness of uncertainty and unknowability. But Kierkegaard fundamentally is about what is beyond rational certainty and human knowledge. Reason alone cannot shed light on the so-called ‘the dark’ and ‘the unknown’

Moreover, we have seen that, for Kierkegaard, sin is a human condition. Or as Simon D. Podmore argues “the meaning of Kierkegaard’s “infinite, radical, qualitative difference”[...] between humanity and God was essentially *sin*”(Podmore,2011,p.xi,emphasis original). But because Enlightenment rationality elevates reason as the only source of objective and universal truth/knowledge , this results in rejecting the idea of Original Sin. Man by self-ordaining himself rejects the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between man and God. There is nothing man’s rationality couldn’t achieve. The place of man during this time was excelling. Man with his capacity of reason became a center or a standard. Kierkegaard takes the task of de-centering such

a self. He wants to show us that “epistemologically such a self remains *fallible*, unable to see the world *sub specie aeterni*” (Westphal, 1996, p. ix; emphasis original).

Moreover, Kierkegaard rejected the “Un-Socratic aspect of modern philosophy” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.93). It is un-Socratic because by immersing itself in abstraction it forgets existing human being with flesh and blood. Life is not considered to be an action rather it is taken to be an automatic or necessary product of rationality. Besides, unlike Socrates, it is bold in claiming certain knowledge leaving no space for hesitation or human fallibility. But for Kierkegaard, mankind is in no position to grasp totality, to achieve all-encompassing knowledge.

Life is an either/or. In existence, humanity is only capable of leading an either/or life. In other words, we can only live one choice at a time. This is Kierkegaard’s central idea of human nature. Thus, we cannot understand the self in a fixed, pre-determined way which destroys individuals’ genuine choice in real time. According to Kierkegaard, the self is not something that is naturally embedded with us. It is something we can create and lose. We may not even recognize when we lose the self. On this regard, Kierkegaard says: “The greatest hazard of all, losing the self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss—an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. — is sure to be noticed” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.32-33). This shows that selfhood is not something that we are automatically endowed with by virtue of mere necessity. The self is a house in the making.

In his famous spheres/stages of existence, Kierkegaard discusses ways that thwart the self from becoming a self or that make it lose selfhood and its authenticity. In the aesthetic stage, the aesthete, for instance, lacks a definite self as it refuses to become oneself. The aesthete drifts around without having any unifying purpose in his choices. His only criteria for choosing things are based on getting pleasure and avoiding boredom. He follows his immediate impulses for the most part but he may devise a sophisticated plan of achieving pleasure and getting rid of boredom. Yet again he gets bored by his brilliant reflective plan. The life of the aesthete is dissected into multiple experiences which are bereft of unity. After the aesthete realizes that he is lacking identity and passion, that his life is fragmented and shattered by following what is immediate and that he has a sick self for his life is full of despair, he looks for identity in an ethical stage.

In the ethical sphere of existence, Judge William the pseudonymous author of the second volume of *Either/Or* recommends marriage for the aesthete so that he has a continuous identity and purpose. According to William MacDonald (2018), marriage for Judge William metaphorically embodies the societal universal moral norms. Hence, he believes the identity of the aesthete and its selfhood can only be regained and sustained when it is grounded on and integrated with the society. The ethical self, as compared to the esthete has a clear identity and continuity. Besides, the amorality of the aesthete is replaced by the morality of the society he belongs to.

The religious/Christian self is not a necessary negation of the ethical. The ethical sphere of existence is not a wrong life as compared to the religious sphere. The ethical, however, needs to be ready to ‘teleologically suspend the ethical’ when it is so demanded by a higher stage where Kierkegaard thinks that the self gains its full identity and achieves true selfhood. It is only in relation to God that the self achieves ultimate authentic selfhood. The transition from the ethical to the religious is effected due to a deep seated despair tied to the individual’s own sinfulness and temporality.

Several questions could likely arise with regard to his idea of the self. First, how does Kierkegaard respond to the interplay of power, social values, politics, culture, history, trade, forceful acculturation or assimilation through war in the process of self-creation? Isn’t it illusory to think of the self as unaffected by society, history, culture, habit, politics etc? In other words, what is authenticity *vis-à-vis* society, history, culture? Second, how do we precisely identify *the* right way of doing Christianity, if Christianity is inward relation between the self and God? If there is divine guidance to achieve true Christian self, then how do we claim that we are free? Third, is Kierkegaard a fundamentalist when he discards culture, habit, history and politics out of Christian self and insists on the exercise of pure faith? Is Kierkegaard’s self too individualistic? Let’s see if his philosophical account of the self deal with these questions.

## **2. KIERKEGAARD’S PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF THE SELF**

Some take Kierkegaard’s theory of the self as his philosophical anthropology. Kierkegaard himself believed that the task of his authorship was to undertake “genuine anthropological contemplation” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. x). This assertion is highlighted in his book *The sickness*

*unto Death* where his mature idea of the self is discussed. Kierkegaard started this book with a famous yet esoteric passage in which he contended:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.13).

As Kierkegaard's philosophy in a nutshell is an emphasis to changeability, in the above passage the term spirit entails process, evolvment. In Kierkegaard's view, "in the life of the spirit there is no standing still" (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.94). When the answer to the question-what is the self? - involves the word 'is' in Parmenidian sense, for Kierkegaard, it signifies the metaphysically unchanging, immobile essence or nature of the self. It is claimed that this essence is knowable with the aid of human reason. It is this epistemic metaphysical certainty about, for example, the self that Kierkegaard stood against. The self as static, essential, primordial and fixed entity is contrasted with the self as a task, as a relation, as an achievement to be fulfilled in a life-long process. An example of the former could be Cartesian self which was defined by Descartes as "a thinking thing". Long before Descartes, ancient Greek philosophers also characterized the self as unchanging. For them, the nature of the self is not something that perpetually shifts.

Two things could be drawn from the view that characterizes the self as a static entity. First, the self as an entity is universally identical. When Descartes defined the self as a "thinking thing" its domain of application was supposedly claimed to include all, even though we need to consider that this characterization was not inclusive from the very beginning as claimed by postcolonial theorists and et al. Second, according to this view, selfhood is not something that we lose. Kierkegaard rejected both.

In contrast to the above view, according to C. Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard's theory could be termed as "relational-achievement theory of the self" (Evans, 2006, p.264).Based on this theory, the self identifies and creates itself in relation to something and in what it encounters in the process of everyday interaction. Consequently, the self cannot be uniform for its character is shaped *in relation to* others and God. Besides, it could lose its self when it refuses to relate. For Kierkegaard, selfhood is achieved in "becoming subjective" (Kierkegaard, in Evans, 2006,

p.266), in a personal journey toward self-knowledge and self-recognition. For him, this journey of course is the journey of the “self before God” (Podmore, 2011, p. xiii).

Kierkegaard’s self entertains opposing synthesis between the finite and infinite, the temporal and eternal, freedom and necessity. But this synthesis is not a kind of Hegelian synthesis where mediation takes place. The finite, the temporal, necessity cannot be assimilated by the infinite, the eternal, freedom and vice versa. The opposites, as it were, live together in a balanced continuous tension. The self is physically limited and time-bound as a ‘substance’ or ‘entity’ but at the same time the self produces unlimited and eternal concepts in its thought. The self as an entity is subjected to necessity but at the same time it is free to construct a full-fledged selfhood. So, as George Stack argues “man is determined in his being, but determining in his becoming” (Stack, 1973, p.116).

This fully grown selfhood can only be achieved “in the relation to the power that established it” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.14). This “power”, for him, is God. And it is in relating to God that selfhood is to be truly achieved. Our self should not simply be characterized in relation to the rational, finite, temporal or the necessary it should also relate to what is paradoxical, absurd, eternal, infinite, incomprehensible, and inexhaustible. In other words, the self is not as simple as tautology. My DNA can never be my whole story! As there is no automatic Christianity; hence, there is no automatic self.

However, one might say that ‘substance’ or ‘entity’ implies universality. Yes but Kierkegaard is not saying that selfhood is mere ‘substance’ or ‘entity’. The individual must take the active role to uniquely add up something of its own in this raw self, as it were. As such, he opposes this imposed, automatic universality as in uniformity of selfhood. Selfhood primarily is the individual’s own free self-creation.

Is it an *ex-nihilo* self-creation that Kierkegaard talks about? No it is a self-creation out of a relation. Kierkegaard in another abstruse passage says:

Such a relation, that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another [. . .] The human being’s self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.13-14).

This “another” could be God, other human beings or even the society. Kierkegaard himself says “the individual is primarily related to God and then to the community, but this primary relation is the highest, yet he does not neglect the second” (Kierkegaard, in Beabout and Frazier, 2000, p.79).

In chapter two we saw the primary aim of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings. He insists that each and every individual must take up the task of selfhood for it is radically a personal undertaking. He warned us that looking for a recipe for selfhood in any of his “deliberately unsystematic” (Stokes, 2010, p. 6) writings would be a misunderstanding of the very purpose of his authorship.

In a revealing passage William MacDonald, for instance, argues that writing could be one way of creating oneself aesthetically:

Kierkegaard’s use of writing to work upon himself is continuous with aesthetic self –writing insofar as it helps to transfigure given actuality (the appearance of the world we have inherited). But this is not a license to create the world *ex nihilo*. We are constrained by the way the world is taken to be. Our first task (the ethical) is to acknowledge these limits; our second task (the religious) is to transfigure our epistemic limits or the limits of the “universal” in Kierkegaard’s terminology. Within the shifting, relativistic world of interaction between subject and object, Kierkegaard thinks we need a constant to orient our transgressive inventions. This he finds in the single life goal and in the practice of faith (MacDonald, 1996, p.67).

Kierkegaard’s idea “to become what one already is” (Kierkegaard, in Evans, 2006, p. 263) is in line with his overall goal of becoming Christian. But existence as he proposed it is a kind of disorderly, non-preformed, non-premeditated, spontaneous, unpredictable, infinitely changing life. The two seem contradictory to me. After criticizing all these reductive view of the self, Kierkegaard’s self aims incoherently at ‘single life goal.’ As a result, we are left in between the assertion that there is no definitive “correct” formulation of self and a self whose every step pointing to a fixed goal. Kierkegaard seems inconsistent with his belief that the sophistication and complexity of existence cannot be reduced to rationally constructed systems.

Consequently, notions of ‘philosophy of self’, “ontology of selfhood”, “metaphysics of selfhood” in my opinion would be oxymoronic in the context of Kierkegaard’s conceptual framework. This is because terms like philosophy, ontology, and metaphysics imply system. But as we have seen the self for Kierkegaard is incremental or developmental process. Selfhood is poetic,

imaginative, difficult, existential, and constantly novel. This is because of the fact that existence is indeterminately tied to infinite possibilities which do not have prearranged shape. Kierkegaard's conceptual framework could only make sense if he believes that "Indeterminism is the admission of alternatives of action, or degrees of freedom" (Lane, 2018, p.33). It is on this ground that, I argue, Kierkegaard would have rejected deterministic modern science and enlightenment as they discard alternative possibilities, infinite selfhood and freedom.

Kierkegaard's philosophical contribution is that he critically introduces "that which perpetually evades and disturbs human rationality" (Mjaaland, 2008, p.1) or that in the opening chapter I expressed as the things that always slip away of generality. As Marius Timmann Mjaaland (2008) enumerates, these could be death, God, paradox, faith, absurdity, irony, despair, and the self. Kierkegaard uses these concepts in order to show that there is no deterministic logical or historical scheme that could explain them with complete certainty.

Different scholars on Kierkegaard characterize his theory of selfhood differently. You may find such characterization as ontological, metaphysical, teleological (in Aristotle's sense), as social (in Hegel's sense) or as purely existential (in Sartre's sense.) Anoop Gupta, for instance, argues that Kierkegaard's "understanding of self fits well with the ethos of Aristotelian metaphysics, where *what a thing is* is defined by *what it is meant to be*. [...], therefore, the proper perspective for understanding the metaphysics of Kierkegaard's notion of the self is that of teleology" (Gupta, 2005, p.7 emphasis original). In my view I do not think that Kierkegaard's conceptual framework allow us to depict his view of self as both metaphysical and teleological. His self has no fixed reality and no determined historical steps aiming towards a goal. Of course true self must be related to God but freedom is what keeps the self plunging into its future. Otherwise, in my opinion, the fear and trembling of Abraham does not make sense altogether.

As for the sociality of Kierkegaard's self, the ethical self, according to Kierkegaard, is Hegelian in the sense that its identity is ingrained in society's universal norms, institutions and laws. But this self is also a transient self because it is a possibility. Surely, for Kierkegaard, the religious or Christian existence is where the self achieves fulfillment.

### 3. THE SELF, DESPAIR, ANXIETY AND FREEDOM

In the process of ‘becoming what one already is’ and achieve true selfhood ‘before God’ the self passes through difficulties or what Kierkegaard calls ‘sickness unto death’. According to Kierkegaard, this sickness primarily is “despair” and “*angest*” (or anxiety). In what is called Kierkegaard’s philosophical psychology, he contends that without overcoming this sickness, selfhood in its true sense cannot be achieved. This section of this chapter deals with what Kierkegaard characterizes as a sick self and how he believes that it can be overcome.

As I mentioned above, for Kierkegaard, selfhood, though it has a fixed nature as an entity, is something we can fulfill or fail to fulfill. It is like a form to be filled out. Besides, Kierkegaard’s self basically or essentially is a theological self which finds its fulfillment ultimately in God. Interestingly, despair and anxiety play a positive role in this fulfillment. Kierkegaard believes that recognizing one’s despair and come to term with it is vital for authentic selfhood.

According to Kierkegaard, there are different forms of despair. These include despair of possibility, despair of impossibility, despair of finitude, despair of infinity, despair of eternity, despair of temporality, despair of necessity, despair of freedom so on and so forth. Despair is a state of imbalance which happens when we incline towards one of these opposing pairs of the self. As we remember, for Kierkegaard, the self is a synthesis of these opposing pairs. In this context, stressing or emphasizing one at the expense of the other makes us develop deformed or deficient self which is despairing self.

Among the three forms of existence which Kierkegaard formulated the aesthetic sphere/stage is where despair is rampant and pervasive. Despair is to fail to take up the task of embarking on creating oneself. However, the aesthete’s interest is momentary and immediate. Enjoying the moment without the feeling of the burden of responsibility for one’s consistent choices is the hallmark of this life. The aesthete’s passion is for the immediate pleasure in an attempt to evade boredom. Hence, the aesthete’s life becomes fragmented and discontinuous. Consequently, despair occurs when “the self refuses selfhood” (Evans, 2006, p.270).

The kind of despair which is relevant to my thesis is the despair that longs for the absolute, foundational and certain thought system that modern speculative philosophy is infected with. Cartesian Foundationalism is one of the best examples for this kind of despair. This philosophy

suffers from what can be called Cartesian Despair for it tries to build an overarching foundation in the make-belief thought of a finite and temporal individual. Kierkegaard in his *Either/Or II* says the following:

The polemical conclusion, from which all your paeans over existence resonate, has a strange similarity to modern philosophy's pet theory that the principle of contradiction is canceled. I am well aware that the position you take is anathema to philosophy, and yet it seems to me that it is itself guilty of the same error; indeed the reason this is not immediately detected is that it is not even as properly situated as you are. You are situated in the area of action, philosophy in the area of contemplation. As soon as it is moved into the area of practice, it must arrive at the same conclusion as you do, even though it does not express it the same way (Kierkegaard in Kosch, 2006, p.90).

What Kierkegaard says here is that Hegel is wrong because the principle of contradiction can be mediated in thought, in philosophy, in contemplation but not in action. Existence does not allow us to unify two opposing actions by both nullifying and preserving them at the same time. Trying to do otherwise leads us into despair. This despair happens because we are refusing to acknowledge what is possible and what is not possible for an existing human being. So, this detachment from existence results in existential problem of despair. How do we get rid of despair?

According to Kierkegaard, despair is not a particular problem in our mood. It is not a particular disease in our body or mental condition. It is the structure of the self. It is the self. In other words, "[i]ts occurrence expresses an underlying dysfunction on an ontological level" (Stokes, 2010.p.61). Despair is explained as deeper, underlying, foundational, "ontological" phenomenon. It is structural because it is the condition of the whole self. So, we cannot discard it by particular diagnosis. Ultimately, to get rid of this human predicament or human condition that Kierkegaard calls despair, he equates it with another structural human condition i.e. sin. So, a self that is free from despair is a self that is devoid of sin. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, discarding despair or sin has the following formula: "The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (Kierkegaard, 1980, p.14). This lack of a self which

results in despair will only come to an end by relating to God. Knowing that despair is a sin is the right path for self-discovery, self-knowledge and self-recognition.

Another condition of the self, according to Kierkegaard is '*angest*' or anxiety. On his account, anxiety is good because it opens the chance to the self's freedom, infinite possibilities and progress. In his *Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard famously characterized anxiety as the "dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis, and freedom now looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself" (Kierkegaard and Anderson, 1980, p. 61). Most of us choose stagnation by looking down on our possibility, on what we could become by realizing our potentiality. Hence, we lay hold of finiteness, stagnation at the cost of plunging towards the unknown. In order to analyze this quote it is important to look into how Kierkegaard compares anxiety with fear. They are different in that fear has some known object to be feared. We do not simply feel afraid. We fear *something* that we *know* it causes some detriment. It is clear and present danger. Anxiety on the other hand is fear of freedom towards infinite possibilities that are not yet known. Kierkegaard gives us an example of an anxious person who stands at the edge of a cliff. His anxiety originates from the thinking that it is *possible* for him to throw down himself over the cliff, that he is free to do that. As such, anxiety becomes "dizziness of freedom."

Anxiety understood in this Kierkegaardian sense becomes everyone's existential condition. Decidedly, this was the condition Abraham was in. Theologically, "Kierkegaard uses "anxiety" (or "dread," in older English translations) to describe the condition in which the individual constantly dreads failing his/her responsibilities to God, at a time when humanity is given its freedom" (Rix, 2012, p.473). Secularly, to Kierkegaard, anxiety is an integral part of human life. It is the reality we face every day. As the self unfolds its selfhood in existence, anxiety can only take place within freedom. The self is built in continuous and free acts of choice we make. So, anxiety is a condition in the process of free self-creation. Many scholars of Kierkegaard contend that, among other things, it is this original discussion of the relations between anxiety and freedom that earned him the name 'the father of existentialism' though he would oppose this characterization.

At the end of the second section of this chapter I raised some critical questions on Kierkegaard's idea of the self. If faith is an action and if action is private, then the road

towards God is through faith, a private act of choice. In this sense ultimately, the self is a private relation with God. In his own words, the self is a self 'before God'. First, this argument would not probably convince those with secular persuasion. Second, the transition from the ethical sphere to the religious sphere still is a human projection. In other words, Kierkegaard failed to realize that his ideas themselves are captive of the inescapable human finitude.

However, I agree with Kierkegaard as far as the self is not only a fixed identity once and for all and the self cannot be a self unless it relates. In other words, the self is not completely self-reliant, totally independent, unaffected by society. In fact, the self cannot be a self because it is a relation. So the self is not fully a self with and without that relation. This is because it is always in a perpetual relation. The self is a product of relations. We must remember that for Kierkegaard the self is a synthesis between necessity and possibility. So we may be a necessary product of culture but also individuals who creates ourselves responsibly. On the other hand, if we take him as cultural critique, Kierkegaard's individual is vital when the self's relation with culture corrupts us not to take individual responsibility but I disagree with the search for pure self for this very search itself is historical.

## CONCLUSION

A recurring theme of this paper has been the thesis that Kierkegaard is too unique to be included under the prevalent metaphilosophical tradition. This peculiarity arises out of his conscious critique he forwards on philosophy, reason, and truth as we know them. Kierkegaard can be discussed in the context of a general critique of the European psyche; hence, treating him as a precursor to Nietzsche and later existentialists. But in this thesis he is generically contrasted with the prevalent metaphilosophical paradigm by bringing into focus his underlying conviction of what it means to exist and problematizing how philosophy has put this conviction into consideration.

Kierkegaard, as with any other philosopher, was a man of his age. His thought was a blunt reaction to the commanding influence of Hegelianism (or so-called Danish Hegelianism) on Danish Lutheran Church. I followed two approaches to show Kierkegaard's reaction. We can see him as both a cultural critique and as a critique of systematic or speculative philosophy. Interestingly, the two are inextricable as they share some common fundamental similarities. It is on this basis that I argued Kierkegaard problematized the prevailing use, method, goal, scope, limit of philosophy.

As a cultural critique Kierkegaard was in a direct clash with what he called Christendom –a term he used to criticize Christianity as it was practiced in the then Denmark. Christendom is when Christianity becomes one with culture, habit, politics or even organized religion. For him, it is only through faith we become Christians, not by merely being a member of an organization. Moreover, Christianity is not a theory, creed, doctrine or collection of formal teachings to be just recited and memorized. All these idealities derail us from the most vital endeavor of being an existential Christian who has no way to enjoy the luxury of having a readymade manual on how to follow the commands of God.

Christianity is a dialectical activity which is full of paradox, irony and contradiction. It is not a thought system in which everything is already figured out. In short, Christianity is an existential condition. Compare a priest who preaches about Abraham with the finest, most absorbing words and Abraham himself, a believer who did not talk but acted. Abraham did not have a set of universal rational moral doctrines to refer to when he was asked by God to sacrifice his only son.

He was in total silence, in fear and trembling as he had to choose. The command that Abraham encountered was ironic, paradoxical, surprising, unexpected, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unforeseeable or what Kierkegaard called “the exception”-something that could not be subsumed in pre-existing knowledge system. Existence is spontaneous. And faith is a response to what we encounter without referring to finished doctrines, propositions, formal abstract general theories. If existence is fraught with surprises, then, by definition, there is no way closed theories could comprehensively explain it in advance.

When Kierkegaard explains about that puzzling or enigmatic phrase i.e. “truth is subjectivity”, he is referring to a person who is in a risky difficult situation of *being* good or *chooses* the good. Unlike the priest the individual in this situation is not interested in some doctrine or creedal statement on the general idea of goodness. So, truth lies in the individual’s subjectivity, not in an objective general, universal concept. So there is no doctrine to teach or preach only to indirectly tell you that it is something you need to figure it out yourself in your own *act* of choice. Any systematic overarching knowledge in morality and religion can never be accurate. Truth must be felt and experienced.

Like I mentioned above, the philosophical critique meaningfully matches with the cultural critique. If Christianity or faith is an existential condition, then one should ask what existential condition is. It was in dealing with such a vital question that his philosophy was born. Kierkegaard was writing during the heyday of Danish Hegelianism. So, the critic was set out against Hegel and Hegelianism. He awakened from his slumber when Hegelianism permeated Danish Lutheranism and when the intellectual and religious elite embarked on equating the former with the latter. However, Hegel was not Kierkegaard’s immediate philosophical influence. It was Frederich Schelling whose lectures Kierkegaard attended along with Karl Marx et al. While he was in Berlin, he wrote a letter to his friend saying that he found the lectures of Schelling as ideal and abstract as that of Hegel. Hence, his emphasis on existential condition was meant to avoid this impersonal abstraction.

My major task in this thesis has been to argue that Kierkegaard is critical of a metaphysical establishment. I assumed that there has been fundamentally unchanged worldview of what philosophy is, what it is for, what method does it follow and so on and so forth. If I am right that there has been such long tradition, then in chapter one of this thesis I have dealt with what I

mean by the dominant metaphilosophical tradition. In the following three chapters I have shown how Kierkegaard stood in sharp contrast to this tradition using some of his concepts as a point of departure.

Kierkegaard rebelled against the tradition in question by rejecting, for instance, what he calls 'direct communication'. Direct communication, I believe, has generally been part and parcel of the dominant metaphilosophical tradition. This is because in a direct communication the information to be passed on is not exposed to subjective call or subjective appropriation. So it means it is objective, it is standard and, thus; it is the same everywhere.

Kierkegaard, however, believes that language is seriously limited and to some extent powerless. Unlike Kant, he claims that objectivity, rationality and universality, in an area of value-laden aspects of human life such as religion, are impossible. In the ethical stages of existence, however, Kierkegaard (or Judge William) extensively defends marriage; thus, universal social morality. The teleological suspension of the ethical only comes in our progress towards the religious stage/sphere of existence.

Moreover, as I have shown earlier, we do not see a line by line argument in his writings in response to another philosopher. What we typically find is that an ironical humorous criticism of an idea especially of that of Hegel. Throughout his writings, he used paradox, irony, humor, parables, metaphors, pseudonyms etc. He called it indirect communication. He believed existential condition could only be communicated indirectly. So he ends up in ineffability, self-disowning, self-undermining, self-distancing and avoiding ownership and authorship of an existential truth as it cannot be directly communicated. In my opinion, this sets him apart from the tradition whose major style of communication can only be called, following Kierkegaard, direct.

In this thesis I have also discussed Kierkegaard's theories of choice, existence, paradox, irony and faith and their implication to human reason. Here I showed Kierkegaard's opposition to reason by talking about the privileged place it has been given under the prevalent metaphilosophical tradition. As such I take Kierkegaard as a critique of the fundamental underlying assumptions that we found in this tradition with regard to reason. Kierkegaard embarked on demonstrating the limitations of reason in particular and speculative systematic

philosophy in general within the context of the value-laden fields of morality and religion. He observed how systematic speculative philosophy made people passive and irresponsible in their action and choices in their individual existence. He resented how morality and religion became mere notions in speculative philosophy and as a result it forgets the idea that the moral agent and the Christian primarily is a doer or an actor whose daily act of choice constitute his mortal existence. So observed, Kierkegaard's critique of philosophy is inseparable from his critique of metaethics. In other words, it is my assertion that presenting him as a critique of prevalent metaphilosophy is an extension of his metaethical critique.

In discussing Kierkegaard in such context, I found myself in between two camps. One judges him as irrationalist, misologist or fideist and the other characterizing him as "responsible fideist"- a term stipulated by one of the prominent scholars of Kierkegaard i.e. C. Stephen Evans.

The first camp bases its claim on what Alasdair Macintyre called "radical choice". We usually claim that our choices are based on reason. But this practice could lead us to infinite regress if we ponder on the reason for earlier reasons based on which we already make a choice. We can't dwell on endless whys. Finally, we need to get into action. As action or decision takes over reason, we can no longer claim that our choices are rational. Remember Abraham whose choice never drew on reason. Here the philosophical question is where exactly does reasoning (reflection) end and action begin?

The second camp argues that Kierkegaard is a different kind of fideist, different from what Evans called "irrational fideist". An irrational fideist claims that faith is entirely impregnable to reason, that it is rationally unjustifiable. This camp does not believe Kierkegaard is irrationalist. Kierkegaard here is seen as a 'serious philosopher' who tries to show the limits of reason using reason. Reason has a limited power to explain faith and concepts like the incarnation, Absolute Paradox or God-man synergy. They are an "offense" to it.

In my view, both camps strengthen the thesis that Kierkegaard is a stranger in the tradition of the dominant metaphilosophy. Whether he is 'irrational fideist' or 'responsible fideist', in both cases, Kierkegaard rejected objective and universal reason. For him reason is all- too-human. What the history of philosophy has forgotten is what it means to be human. Being human, in his

view, entails sinfulness, temporality and finiteness. A sinful, temporal and finite self cannot use human reason to produce the most perfect knowledge system.

In chapter four, I used the concept of the “self” as it is used in Kierkegaard’s writings in order to show that his theory of the self is a direct reflection of his firm critic against speculative philosophy and Christendom. As we have seen previously, the theme of Kierkegaard’s philosophy centers on, among other things, human’s inherent deficiency of establishing archetypal timeless system. The idea of the self is no exception. He opposed the view of the self as mere ‘substance’ or ‘entity’ which entails timeless, static nature. Kierkegaard accepts that there is an aspect of ‘substance’ in our nature but he believes that a human being is a balance in the battle between contending pairs of the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal, freedom and necessity.

It is through this philosophical idea of the self that Kierkegaard is critical of the mechanistic view of the self as espoused by modern science and the Enlightenment. Ranging from scientific materialists or naturalists who contend that there is no such thing as the self to those who claim that even if there is, it is another material thing subjected to scientific method. In the age of enlightenment, the self is tied to what the capacity of human reason declares the self to be. The self as an object of reason is determined. As such the self is reduced to mechanical lifeless pre-determined idea or simple definition. For Kierkegaard, the self is both an entity and an activity.

After a century and a half of hindsight, Kierkegaard’s central ideas and their contemporary cultural and philosophical relevance appear unattainable. But his individual can be a challenger of a community which is less self-critical; his existential bent can be a cure for the inherent discontent of speculative philosophy; his emphasis on sin, human finitude and temporality can be a reminder of the possibility of that which is beyond human rational systems; his emphasis on passion, care and faith can be a help for pure lifeless mechanical existence impelled by human reason.

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