CHAPTER VI

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

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

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

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

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

Subjectivity of faith therefore has an objective datum, unlike in solipsism. Its starting point is the individual existent, as against the general and the universal, as it is in Hegel’s idealism. It is only the individual existent that can exhibit an infinite interest and passion for the faith-movement. Kierkegaard unmistakably rules out the self-direction of the movement, ending in the self
ilscif, arfirining thai 'a believer is one who is infinitely interested in another's 'reality'. Obviously, this reality is that of the teacher, who is also the paradoxical object of faith. This is a decisive criterion for the subjectivity of faith.

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

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

The knight of faith, as seen from the last three chapters, is a man of infinite passion. The passion for the infinite is so overwhelming that, for its sake, he forgoes not only the finite aesthetical but also his ethical duty and obligation, if so demanded sometimes. This great enthusiasm and passion would remain a
mere possibility, if the knight were not to arrive at the movement of decision. Needless to say, the decision does not come about by means of approximative calculations and objective determinations, but by a sheer act of free will. It is the will that is capable of the leap of faith. Decision can be arrived at, only by the individual, who has inwardness of subjectivity, for 'only in subjectivity is there decisiveness'. It may thus be said that the hallmark of subjectivity is the infinite passion, and the supreme task of subjectivity is the infinite passion, and the supreme task of subjectivity is the making of a decision of faith, essentially an act of free will.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In view of this, it is legitimate to speak of a transcendent teleology. Only against this backdrop, Kierkegaard’s philosophical reflections on an absolute telos, absolute duty, absolute commitment, makes sense, if any. Both his existentialism and protestant theology are made to fully bear on his transcendent teleology. Kierkegaard is careful to distinguish his absolute telos from all other telos of the finite order, be they telos of aesthetic sensibility, intellectual contemplation or ethical commitment. This is to suggest that the absolute telos is the transcendent telos. But transcendent teleology may sound equivocal, if we do not adequately qualify it. Unless we make a specific reference, it will remain a neutral concept to admit a free applicability. For example, we can think of a cosmic teleology, as having a transcendent content; and therefore, we can accordingly say that the changes and development in the physical world has a transcendent purpose and goal. Hence, we have to be specific, when we speak of Kierkegaard’s transcendent teleology. Kierkegaard’s conception of transcendent teleology does not share the nature of cosmic teleologies. Rather, what is envisaged in his conception is the kind of teleology, that concerns the purpose of human life both here and now and hereafter. Man, as an existing individual, has a goal and a purpose which transcends the temporal. We may not lose sight of an important philosophical thrust, that Kierkegaard gave a philosophy of life, that was to be know as Existentialism, namely, an ontology of human existence.
Therefore, it will be interesting to ask: What is man in the Kierkegaardian conception? What is the purpose of human existence? What is the human destiny? I believe, all these questions constitute, what may be considered as the Kierkegaardian philosophical anthropology. But it is an anthropology, that is at once transcendental. It must be of immense philosophical interest to students of philosophy. As far as my knowledge goes, so far in the Kierkegaardian scholarship, a rather one-sided importance is placed on a single concept of his anthropology, namely, the individual, but the element of transcendence seems to have not merited the attention of the scholars. Yet, it is so very crucial to Kierkegaard. If the problem of transcendent teleology within this anthropology were to be investigated, the attempt will be a step forward in the Kierkegaardian scholarship.

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

The two dynamic factors of possibility and actuality belong to two different realms of personality. Possibility resides in the mind, or thought, but actuality belongs to the will, or freedom. Between these two coordinates of personality there lies the phenomenon, that Kierkegaard calls an *interesse*. It is interpreted as admitting two meanings, distinct but inextricably linked. Firstly, it is ‘being-between’. This is the concrete existence of the human individual. It is an existence, characterized by temporality and eternality. It is an ‘in-between’
existence, hence admitting a dynamic process of becoming. By virtue of a process of becoming, a posse (possibility) is translated into an esse (actuality). The ability to be is turned into the act of existing through becoming. For Kierkegaard, the human actualization takes place by the constant exercise of the individual's will. In the realm of possibility there is no decisiveness. The exercise of free will, it has been observed, is decisive to Kierkegaard's subjectivity. It may be said here that, while, for Hegel, thought is the means by which possibilities are actualized, to Kierkegaard, however, through thought they are merely apprehended, but they are actualized by and through the will.

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

Secondly, human existence, understood as an inter-esse is an infinite interest. Human existence is intentional, in the sense that it has within itself a fundamental openness, or orientation, to the infinite. This brings us back to the transcendent teleology, the moorings of the dynamic movement of human being from all possibility to actuality. It is this second meaning of inter-esse that takes us from a cold metaphysics to a philosophy of religion in Kierkegaardian anthropology. In the light of this meaning, we need to have a fresh look at the two categories of possibility and actuality, and also their inextricable relation, in the dynamic movement of one into the other. Kierkegaard argues that, if human existence, or actuality, is 'interest', possibility is disinterested of existence. But, the ethical stage of existence, unlike the aesthetical one, proposes to do away with the disinterestedness of the possible, by making existence the infinite interest. It represents the first attempt at opposing the contemplating of humanity and existence, because, by means of contemplation, we arrive only at
the possibility. For Kierkegaard, the ethical, by virtue of the exercise of will and freedom, is concerned with the existence of the particular. It is the actuality. The ethical is realized only by the individual subject from within, since he alone can know what it is that internally moves him. Whereas the ethical is only the first stage in the actuality of the human existence, its culmination is met with in the religious stage of existence, in particular, in faith-relation. For it is only in faith, being the passionate and infinite interest, that human existence is actuality in the full sense of the term. Hence, the Kierkegaardian motto would be 'to be is to believe', 'to exist is to be faith-full'.

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

Moreover, in the realm of aesthetics, Kierkegaard thinks that art and poetry have been called a mere anticipation of the actual. But, from an existentialist's viewpoint, art and poetry are not essentially related to an existing individual; for their contemplative enjoyment, the joy over what is beautiful, is disinterested. Aesthetic joy is experienced by being detached from oneself. The connoisseur of art is contemplatively outside of himself. On the contrary, to Kierkegaard, the real, which denotes the actual, is of infinite interest to the existing individual. Such an existing individual is not a contemplative, but one who is decisively
interested in his transcendent *telos* by way of the commitment of faith. Thus a deeper study of the interplay between possibility and actuality, in the context of transcendent teleology, may not be without its rich dividends.

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

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

It is a fact that the subjective elements of human existence are generally and largely ignored, and almost conveniently neglected, by philosophers, especially in the post-Enlightenment philosophies. Even if a subjective phenomenon is pursued by them, it is done half-heartedly, perhaps, on the plea that it evades
speculative examination and scrutiny. But Kierkegaard chooses specially these subjective elements of the human spirit for his philosophical reflections. This is amply exhibited in his interpretation of faith. He does not hesitate to introduce in it the paradoxical and the absurd, as the categories of Christian religion, by which alone faith is appropriated as the depth-dimension of human life. Perhaps, it is this undertaking that marks every now and then Kierkegaard's departure from the traditional and conventional trends in modern Western philosophy of religion.

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

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

Firstly, the charge, that Kierkegaard does no philosophy, is to be rejected outright. On the contrary, he does a philosophy with the skill of a master-thinker. He has left a characteristic mark on Western philosophy. The trouble however
with him is that he is at once a metaphysician, a philosopher of religion, and
aesthetician, a moral philosopher and an epistemologist, without binding
himself or his reader to a philosophical system. He vehemently opposes the
nomenclature of a system to his thought. He would not call the new trend, that
he sets in philosophy, even as existentialism, although he was to be hailed as the
father of modern existentialist movement. His concern with life, as it is lived in
its concrete situations, was so great that he called his reflections only a
philosophy of life or existence.

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

Now is there any need to glorify his religious absurdity. Since his concern
was a scathing attack on Hegel’s glorification of essentialism, in particular, the
reduction of faith to knowledge, he had to deliberately bring to the forefront of
the philosophical debates on religious categories the existential categories. His
vituperations against objective knowledge, reason, revealing of faith, mediation
that takes place at the level of thought and reasoning, are only in the service of
safeguarding the sanctity of existence, faith-relation, decision, freedom, passion
and so on. In the history of Western philosophy, the sea-saw battle between
rationalism and voluntarism has contributed positively to the development of
philosophy as such. Enlightenment philosophies were effectively countered by
Romantic philosophies. In the same spirit, Hegelian rationalism is countered by
Kierkegaardian existentialism, representing the efficacy of voluntarism once
again.
Far from being an anti-rationalist, he employs reason to fight against reason, being fully aware that it is precisely in such dialectics that one is transparent before God, the telos of human life. The limits of reason, when acknowledge, is the act of self-transcendence through reason. This is the only way that religion can guard itself against blind irrationalism and obscurantism. In Kierkegaard, what one meets with is an enlightened and philosophical non-rationalism rather than a naive irrationalism, when he discusses such categories as faith, as constituting the depth-dimension of human life. Hence, I must end my thesis with a quotation from Kierkegaard:

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

THE END