CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the results of my study. Hopefully, the summary will be read as an integrated essay that highlights the major conclusions of each chapter. The second part of the essay is devoted to hints that may be treated as corollaries of the study. As hints they are tentative and provisional. They will have to be worked out in greater depth and details. I hope, some of these corollaries will engage my attention beyond this thesis in the days to come.

I

Kierkegaard's philosophy is well known as a protest against essentialism, which advocates all reality, including existence, to be rational. The Hegelian man is a universal essence, an abstract nature. Kierkegaard's philosophy of man, on the contrary, may be said to be a philosophy of the existent particular. Existence concerns the particular individual, -- living, knowing, feeling, willing, suffering, enjoying, believing, loving and even dying. Man is a being in his environment, both physical and social, with which he constantly interacts by way of stimulus and response, but deliberately. What man is is not a matter of intellectual abstraction; it is rather to be grasped in terms of an experience of all faculties, cognitive, emotive, conative and volitive, -- all brought into harmony through knowledge, decision and action. It is only when feeling and willing are merged with thinking that man may be said to act. Only such action raises him to a level of human existence. But for this he would be a mere organism acted upon by his environment, bound by his instinctual endowment. It is only at this level of true human existence that man may be said to be open to science, philosophy, art, literature, values and, above all, religion. Kierkegaard, in a way, could see what had become of man, in his
Christian Europe, when the individual existence was relegated to the hinterland. Kierkegaard’s thoughts, too novel for his times, were not fully grasped for its implications to be immediately appreciated. It took two world wars for man to realize the true significance of the concerns that Kierkegaard voiced in favour of the individual vis-à-vis the abstract human nature.

In a sense, it may be argued that the whole of western metaphysics is centred around the concept of the universals and particulars. The problem of the relation between the universals and the particulars was a central problem in the history of philosophy everywhere. The debate on the issue comprised the origin, the nature and the relation of these two central concepts. What is prior, the universal or the particular?, was at the core of the debate. People, trees, animals etc. exist. When they do exist we also have a universal concept of “people”, “tree” and “animal”, under which we can classify the existent individuals. This suggests that the human mind, by way of conceptual apparatus, bestows a certain unity on the diverse objects of our experience. While things themselves are individuals, their concepts, through which they are grasped, are unifying; the concepts are universals. Their may be a mechanism for the derivation of the concepts. However, when we enquire into their origin, or how the universal concepts can be derived, we cannot but end with concrete things. This implies that what exists is the particular, and that universals depend on what can be thought about the particulars, thereby justifying a prior acceptance of the particular. All the existentialists, Kierkegaard, in particular, have advocated the primacy of the existence of the particular. For Kierkegaard the existent human being is pre-eminently an individual.

Aristotle in ancient times, Aquinas in medieval times and Strawson in our own contemporary times confirm that man is a composition of body and “soul”, whatever be the conception of the “soul” in its evolution; and that the principle of individuation is “matter”, again, whatever be its diverse understanding in the history of philosophy. This further suggests that it is the particular which exists in the true sense. Idealism of various brands may have now and then played down the importance of the particular, though.
However, with the emergence of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, the understanding of man as the existing individual was brought to the foreground of philosophy, once again. For Kierkegaard, the theistic existentialist, the individual is not only a unity of body and mind, he further brings in a positive third element which he identifies as the “spirit”. Man is the synthesis of body, mind and spirit. For Kierkegaard, human ontology is illumined by both theology and philosophy, because man is characterised by both theological and philosophical insights as the two sides of the same coin. In virtue of the spirit, man is ontologically grounded in the divine being in accordance with the Christian doctrine of creation. Naturally, as the corollary of this metaphysical commitment, the individual is said to be a being constituted of a spirit, with an intentionality to a defined telos.

There were factors responsible for the rise of existentialism. The sense of nationalism prevalent during the later part of the nineteenth century and the earlier part of the twentieth century was a result of political ideologies advocating aggressive nationalistic aspirations. Such political ideologies led to the rise of Nazism and Fascism, which had scant respect for the dignity and freedom of the individual. During the Nazi and the Fascist governance, the individual was suppressed with no freedom of his own, and often given the ideal of sacrificing himself for the state. More often than not, it ended up with the execution of the individuals, especially of the dissenters, for the alleged upliftment of the state. Mass murders, ethnic cleansing and genocides became a daily occurrence in the total absence of human dignity and individual freedom. It is a moot point if the corrupt and ambitious leaders, often psychopaths, used the nationalistic sentiments for their own lust for political power and supremacy. This indignity on human beings was visited upon by the people because of the corrupting ideologies. Before a political action comes to be executed, it is prepared and legitimized by an ideology. Thus the rise of narrow nationalisms had a debilitating effect on individualism. The individual was submerged in the waves of nationalism. Kierkegaard read the signs of times rightly. He felt the need to herald the sanctity of the individual, and, for this, he turned to the two sources of the western culture, viz. the Greek mind and the Semitic heart. It is perfectly understandable, if, in the process, his emphasis came to rest more on the latter, in
particular, Christian religion. He intensely felt that the Greek mind, especially in its essentialistic manifestations, was misused by the powers and principalities that he was to challenge.

Existentialism of Kierkegaard marked a new and positive turn in understanding man and his concrete situation in the world. Kierkegaard brought to light the much needed significance of acknowledging man as an individual, a particular, and not merely an anonymous unit constituting the universal. Universal is invariably understood in terms of the abstract concepts, therefore, the particular has the danger of becoming a concept. Indeed the leading philosophies of the times understood man in terms of an abstract essence, a common nature realized in the particulars. The particulars are evanescent, while the universal nature is permanent. The existence of the individual, here, is irrevocably lost along with its distinctive individuality. Therefore Kierkegaard reasserted that the particular is higher than the universal. If there were to be no individual, there would be no point in talking about the universal. The individual precedes the universal. Existence of the individual is primordial, in the sense of being the fundamental datum with which all philosophy, in particular, of man should begin. This perception is at the root of the basic existentialist thesis: Existence precedes essence. Essence is an idea, and it can never explain existence. Existence is not a quality added to the essence. What then is existence? There is no way of determining it, because only essence can be defined. Nevertheless, it can be described. Existence that is identical with the human individual is dynamic. It is living, becoming, a continuous process, a project. It cannot be caught in the static substance, it must be sought to be understood in its process of continuous making.

Kierkegaard is convinced that Hegelian philosophy could not do justice to existence. The acclaimed Hegelian idealism is rooted in the speculative and abstract thinking. Now, in all thinking, moment and movement become a mere fanciful imagination. Existence on the other hand, has to do with real moments and movements of the individual. Therefore, to exist is to exist as an individual. For man, to have individuality means that his concerns should possess something of his own, in a manner
that they can be only his and no one else’s. The only thing of which man can say that it belongs to him, and only to him exclusively, is his self-experience. It goes without saying that self-experience is eminently subjective. In the attempt to capture existence by way of thought (thinking), speculative philosophy misses on the moment, but rather thinks existence as having existed in the past. But existence is not about the past, existence has to do with the present, that which is existing, as such, existence can only be lived. Likewise the attempt misses on the movement, in the sense that human existence is a living concern, a concern that is continually and consciously chosen as its own. Hence, it is said that man does not exercise his freedom only once, but it is an on-going process. Indeed, so long as he exercises his freedom, man exists; freedom is then at the core of human existence.

All existentialists share in the common belief that, for man, to be is to exist, and to exist is to be free. Freedom therefore, is the fundamental characteristic of the individual. Theistic, no less than the atheistic, existentialists subscribe to the thesis of the free, or autonomous, human existence: Man is a centre of freedom, but the freedom is to be exercised in the world of determinism. Therefore he is at once a part of the world and also transcends the world. This transcendence, however, for Kierkegaard, unlike the atheistic existentialists, is the heritage of a creature, divinely endowed by God in man, in virtue of his being a unity of body, mind and spirit. Whereas the inauthentic existence, to the atheistic existentialists, is succumbing to finitude, for Kierkegaard, it is more than finite “guilt”; it is rather “sin”, in as much as inauthentic existence is a rejection of one’s own nature, therefore of God, the ontic foundation of that self-transcending nature. This necessarily introduces an element of dread in the exercise of freedom that gives meaning to human existence. In dread man is intensified in passion by projecting either his authentic or inauthentic existence before God. The individual becomes by choice either a saint or a sinner. He has the capacity to become either by virtue of his being a spirit in the flesh represented by his body and mind. Dread then is the spiritual restlessness that man experiences in the exercise of his freedom because of man’s dual nature. Dread brings into focus the finite and infinite element in man.

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For Kierkegaard, human existence is encountered as the consciousness of a unity between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal; it is a unity of contradicting forces. The contradiction is overcome, when man is faced with the paradox of Christ, the God-man. God-man represents the predicament of human existence that strives for being divine without ceasing to be human. Incarnation then is the paradigm of human existence. It is therefore the paradigm of human freedom as well. When he faces the paradox, he realizes that his given reality is in fact a pseudo-reality, but that it can however be opened up to the infinite divine possibilities. The exercise of human freedom therefore becomes, in the fusion of the given and the possible, of ideality and reality, an occasion to establish man in the authentic existence. Freedom of the individual is an assertion of the spirit in man over body and mind; therefore it eminently reflects his consciousness, the volitive effort and self-experience of the individual. Thus, in every free act, man transcends the determination of the given to authenticate his dynamic existence. Conscious becoming, rather than drifting existence, is a product of commitment to ethical and religious principles.

Kierkegaard was unhappy with the type of Christianity practised by the people of his times. He thought that the Christianity, the religion of commitment, had become a mere Christendom, a drifting soulless culture. In his opinion, it lacked the most important feature, namely the personal commitment of the individual to the paradox. Such a commitment is possible for man on account of his free choice that emanates from a dual nature, the unity of the actual and the possible held together by the spirit in man. The spirit in man is nothing other than the image of God that is implanted in him by his creator. It is an endowment that calls for a free choice, if man wants to commit himself to God. By God’s creative act, man is established as a being-in-the-world, and he has his source in God. Every time man exercises his capacity to freely will and choose, he is established in genuine existence, an existence anchored in the divine image in man. This clearly is a movement from the limitation of the given to the illimitable expanse of the spirit in him. Such human existence is the authentic existence.
When the word “freedom” is positively understood, it stands for, to begin with, an ability. We should however be quick to note that this ability is not for the being, but the becoming. It is obvious that man cannot have the ontological freedom, since, for Kierkegaard, the being of man is derived from the creative act of God. Therefore, if we take freedom to mean as such, it is a truism to say that man cannot come into existence by himself. In the realm of freedom for becoming, freedom is the conscious ability to do or not to do something. Therefore freedom is the freedom of action. Closely associated with the freedom of action is the freedom to choose the alternative ends of our actions. It now follows that ontologically man does not have “a freedom from” God, because all his freedom is freedom in God; for his being, his existence, is derived from God. But, he can legitimately have a freedom for or against God, in the sense that he can make a moral choice for or against God. Besides he has the freedom of choice. This type of freedom is what we call moral freedom, as distinct from the ontological freedom. When Kierkegaard says that man has to realise his existence by freedom, he has in his mind the capacity of man to consciously and deliberately choose his actions as well as the alternate goals of actions.

Kierkegaard observes that, while the individual has duty towards oneself and other, he, by experiencing the intensity of the paradox, comes to realize an absolute duty towards God. He becomes conscious of the absolute duty towards the absolute, only because he has freely willed to believe in the paradox. It is possible that a great many people are not even aware of the absolute duty towards the absolute, because they have yet to exercise their freedom for the paradox of Christ. Human freedom is not jeopardized by the absolute duty, rather it makes his freedom not merely extensive but deeply intensive. The depth of the freedom is to be gauged by the intensity of the subjective passion that the individual brings in for the exercise of his freedom. There is a certain dialectic here between freedom and the duty that Kierkegaard acknowledges. In a sense, Kierkegaard is not against the Hegelian dialectics as a method of philosophy, although he has no sympathy with the content of the Hegelian dialectical philosophy. In a way, he
himself can be said to uphold a dialectics, when he talks of the individual as a synthesis body, mind and spirit. Freedom is exercised by man in this paradoxical synthesis.

But the difference, too, may not be overlooked. Indeed, it should be highlighted that the dialectics of Kierkegaard, unlike that of Hegel, wherein the march of the universal Idea takes place with an inner necessity, is rather the handiwork of the individual. The greater the intensity of the subjective passion towards the absolute, the more intense is the freedom involved. This is why Kierkegaard takes existence to be more an art than a science. Existence is realized not in the act of cognition, but of volition, and the goal of all volition is the procurement of beatitude. The first fruit of the beatitude is the edification for one’s self. Self-edification conduces to the happiness of the individual, because it invariably brings in the development of human personality and individuality. Briefly, it creates human personality, at once intensifying the subjective inwardness. This inwardness radically changes the character of cognition and volition in man. The object of cognition in inwardness, for instance, is now no more detached object of contemplation, it is rather the one in which the subjectivity of the thinker, the knowing subject, is at the core of his thinking act.

Kierkegaard observes that, objectively, there in no relation between the knower and the known; or if there should be one, it is superficial, because all reflection in objective thought is directed outside. The thinking subject is lost sight of in all hunt for objectivity. Reflection is merely on the thought-content, and not on the thinking-subject. On the other hand, subjective reflection is involutionally directed, in the sense that the subjective reflection is towards the inwardness of the individual, and it constitutes the “how” rather than the “what” of cognition. The how of inwardness involved in cognition (the more so in volition), is reflexive: it matures in the philosophical discovery of the self, not as an abstract nature, but as the existent individual. Only such reflection establishes the significant relation between the knower and the known. This makes the task of the subjective individual a task for transforming himself. Now cognition becomes an act of self-discovery, all volition an act of self-realization.
For Kierkegaard, the individual, set on the path of self-discovery, realizes that he is in "error". Philosophically speaking, "error" is man's awareness of his own finitude. Later philosophers in existential philosophy were to term this human predicament as the "fallenness" or "facticity". For Kierkegaard, its religious articulation is more significant, the theistic existentialist that he is: Error is "sin", or "being imperfect in the eyes of God", when man accepts the mystery of God with all his passion. It is the intense awareness of the holiness of God, on the part of man, with the acute awareness of his own limitation, or sinfulness. It is man's awareness of himself as "nothing" before God. But the experience of the self as nothingness, while being oppressive, is also at once liberative. It is liberative in as much as man experiences his own "no-thingness", that he is endowed with the capacity to transcend the bondage to the given, the facticity, the fallenness. He is not a thing, but a conscious and free being. He is endowed with the freedom to make his own existence. Kierkegaard believes that man is on his own "existential project", when he consciously chooses God. Man, coming to know of his predicament of being at once in bondage and freedom, is subject to dread.

Dread, for Kierkegaard admits several layers of meaning. It is the dread of his being sinful. It is also the dread that he is, while being endowed with freedom, open to the infinite possibilities of his freedom: he may reject God, the ground of his being and freedom. Dread is the sign which indicates that the individual is faced with the possibility of freedom. It is the restlessness that one feels, in the present, of the future, the unfathomness, the abyss of one's freedom. In the confrontation of the "now" of the individual with the past and future, dread is experienced by man. Dread bears witness to the conflict between the being and becoming, the given and the possible, the past and the future, the outer and inner reality, - - all within the individual. The individual is the battle-field, the ground of intense conflict of human predicament. The spirit in man brings to the fore the diverse conflicting elements in the "now", or the "moment", to resolve them in a creative synthesis. The "now" or the "moment" is the moment of passion in which the individual realizes the unity of his being. Such a unity of being is
achieved by man by his acceptance of his finitude and the freedom for God. In this act he authenticates his true existence.

Being in existence is not being fixed in a spatio-temporal point, to Kierkegaard. It is not passive, but intensely active, for to be is to be free. This means that human existence is not a finished product, but an ever making process. This is so because, in freedom, man is faced with infinite possibilities that the individual seeks to realize in the inwardness of his passion; the experience of realizing the possibilities continuously is integral to the human existence, that cannot be fixed in a static point.

It is important that we understand the dynamism implicit in the movement of choice. The existing individual, in choosing, chooses his own authentic self. The authenticity however in anchored ontologically in God, given man’s derived being as creature. Therefore every right choice of man has a bearing on the choice for God. In choosing God, the individual may be said to move away from his own narrow self, the bondage to the finitude, but to a step towards God. The paradox of the movement is such that, when he chooses God, he also moves towards his own liberated self, the infinitude within himself, the spirit, -- in short, his authenticated existence. The movement takes a pattern of “from-and-to”, but not in a linear, but circular direction. Starting at a point, it moves progressively to another point, but on reaching its divine moorings, it comes back to the same starting point, but, now, not in its givenness, but in the realization of its original possibilities. The outward and inward movements of the spirit are dictated by the two forces, one centrifugal and the other centripetal. In virtue of the former, it dissipates its narrow self, while, in virtue of the latter, it centralizes all energies in its spiritual core. This is what is meant in saying that the individual authenticates his existence by choosing himself. By choosing, he rejects the givenness, chooses God as the ground of his existence, and accepts his own existence authenticated in its divine source.

But, the process of exercising one’s freedom is continuous. It is a constant “walking with God”. It is not the case, Kierkegaard reminds, that, once man chooses
God, he can fall back and rest, as if his work is over once and for all, but that he steadily moves forward in his God-relation. Not moving forward here is not a mere backsliding, but ceasing to be authentically existent. If one is not steadily moving forward, one simply ceases to exist, for such a one, instead of being consciously existing, is a mere driftwood. To walk constantly with God therefore means to constantly exercise one's freedom. This at once suggests that existence for Kierkegaard is a continual exercise of freedom. All the existentialists, since the times of Kierkegaard, have felt the need to highlight this aspect of human existence as freedom. They all think that the individual is best represented by freedom.

The Hegelian talk of the unity of thought and being is outright rejected by Kierkegaard, for this is an attempt to reduce the irreducible existence to the dictates of the thought. Kierkegaard asserts that thought and being cannot be united, because the one belongs to the epistemological order, and the other, to the ontological. That reduction would be a category mistake. The two are incompatible, therefore the forging of a unity of the incompatible is a futile philosophical exercise. The Hegelians wrongly talk of such a unity, because they take existence to be outside of man. Existence, on the contrary, is inseparable from the human reality. It is not the case that there is an independent essence, legitimized by the thought, that comes to acquire later something called "existence". Existence of the human reality is the indubitable, irreducible starting point for any philosophy of man.

Endowed with the spirit, that synthesizes the body and the mind, man has in him the eternal element. It is the eternal element that gets activated in the exercise of freedom. Through the exercise of freedom, the human spirit becomes aware of the possibilities and consciously makes its decisions to realize the possibilities into actualities. Both the awareness and the conscious decisions spring from the inner subjectivity, in virtue of which man is what he is, and is distinct from all other determinate beings. While his subjectivity is from God, his creator, his becoming an individual by the assertions of the subjectivity in thought and action rests solely in his own hands. For, here, he is a
conscious and responsible agent for both discovering and actualising his subjectivity. For in the maximization of his subjectivity, he perfects his individuality: The self that is divinely chosen must have existed prior to the choice, or else it cannot be claimed to be his choice.

For Kierkegaard, the perfecting of the individuality is through faith. This is because it is only in faith that the individual stands in all his particularity before the absolute. No mediation, be it of a teacher or a church or a priest, is possible in the faith relation. Faith is a transparent existence of the individual before one’s God. This may involve sometimes even the frightful teleological suspension of the ethical. This does not mean that the man of faith is unethical. The impact of religion on the ethical is generally positive. The individual in faith sees the ethical as an extension of his religious life. The ethical gets a divine illumination. The religious man develops an acute sensitivity to the demands of the ethical duties and the propriety of the moral rules. Nevertheless, the ethical is in the universal. A mediation is still possible when faced with ethical dilemmas. Those ethical decisions with higher telos are chosen in preference for those with lesser telos. What is more, the higher ethical telos are judged to be higher precisely on account of the abrogation of the particularity and the individuality. They are higher because their telos are more universal and less individual.

But in faith, it is precisely this individuality that is asserted at the cost of the universal telos in which one can seek refuge. In faith there is the confrontation with one’s own individuality. In the test of faith, the individual gives up the temporal in favour of the eternal, but this is not the sacrifice of a recluse. The man of faith is man-in-the-world. Having made the infinite resignation, the man of faith is restored back by God to his temporality. His individuality is so sacrosanct that even God respects it. In the intervening period, however, he may be subjected to the maximum dread. Therefore both the being in faith and the becoming in faith are not possible without the temporal, even when it serves as the temptation. Man of faith however has to move consciously beyond the temptation of the temporal to truly exist. In faith, the individual realises that he is
imperfect, therefore he infinitely resigns himself to the absolute, suffers the loss of the temporal, and yet is restored back to his temporality, therefore to his individuality. In this dynamism of faith, which involves the double movement, his individuality is perfected.

Kierkegaard's advocacy of the teleological suspension of the ethical has given rise to much misunderstanding among the philosophers. He has been branded as an anti-intellectualist, despiser of reason, the noblest faculty of man, an unwitting advocate of the unethical. But the teleological suspension of the ethical should not be mistaken for a moral holiday in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Kierkegaard does hold that the ethical at times may be suspended for a divine telos, but this, more an exceptional situation than a usual law. He uses the word "suspend" to mean what is brought to a hold temporarily, in the cause of the test of faith which God may demand. Thus the ethical is brought to a hold for some time only, and not completely brought to a stop in one's life as a rule. But for this, Kierkegaard does believe that the ethical closely borders on the religious. It is important for us to take note of the fact that, for Kierkegaard, while the aesthetical attitude of life is completely rejected, the ethical attitude is never done so. It rather continues side by side with the religious attitude to life. If anything, the ethical sensitivity is heightened by the commitment to religious life. Even in the light of religious commitment in faith, faith is what is practised by the religious man in his day to day life, in which the ethical obligations and duties are performed conscientiously. There can be no unethical religious personality, who seeks to perfect his individuality in faith in isolation of the ethical obligations. It is the same human existence which is both ethical and the religious.

The incapacity at understanding the oneness of human existence is at the root of dichotomizing the realm of our activities as "sacred" and "secular". Kierkegaard deplores the tendency of dividing human existence. It is not the separation, but the transcendence, of human existence that Kierkegaard calls for. We cannot forget that the politician and the priest are both very much in this world, and yet both can either be lost in the secular or transcend it. A politician may carry out his political activity and statecraft with a
religious devotion and dedication, even as a priest may perform his religious rituals with an outright secular ostentation. Kierkegaard's call is for a transcendence of human life. It is a fault on the part of man to divide the unity of life into fragments. This is what Kierkegaard was against, when he rose against Christendom that reduced the sacred to the rituals one day in a week with no impact on the rest of the week. This type of separation of man's activities do not conduce in any way for bringing meaning to life. Man can make life meaningful, and thereby truly exist, only if he can bring together the sacred and the secular after the manner of the synthesis of the temporal and eternal within him. His own paradoxical nature is the paradigm for his way of life. Religion therefore involves the whole concern of the individual in his day-to-day life. He will be able to see the beauty of both the scared and the secular, once he overcomes their conflict by a free act of acknowledging the two realities as integral to his existence. Not only the sacred but also the secular activities, too, should be done with the intense commitment and dedication. The secular is the field of soul-making for the spirit that gives a unity to the many aspects of one integral life.

Of the many aspects of human existence that are sought to be integrated, the psychological aspects are of considerable significance to Kierkegaard. Indeed, for Kierkegaard, psychology and ontology are inextricably woven together to illuminate the holistic nature of the individual. Kierkegaard specially throws light on the subliminal, the unconscious nature of dread and its value. Feeling of dread announces that there is something amiss with one's personality, a hidden imperfection, a deep deficiency in man's nature. But it also announces the hope that the perfection, a "redemption" of existence can be achieved. The individual realises that he is in contradiction with God, and as such is guilty. But he also learns that a reconciliation is possible. The finite psychological "guilt" can be, in the light of faith, seen as "sin", a specifically religious category. The transformation of psychological guilt into religious sin is an important feature in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Sin-consciousness is a breach with immanence. As such it constitutes not an alteration within the self, but a transformation of the self, so that
the self’s identity with itself is seen in an altogether new light. Man-in-the-world is seen as a self-anchored-in God.

The psychological insight of Kierkegaard is fully brought to bear upon the Biblical myth of “fall”. Kierkegaard explains the psychological state of Adam in the garden of Eden. When Adam was prohibited to partake of “the tree of knowledge”, it also awakens a desire in him and, at the same time, rings an alarm within him. The prohibition awakens in him the possibility of freedom. He experiences a possibility of an innate capacity to become. What it is that he can become he still has no conception of. Adam is perplexed, because he is not yet capable of understanding the meaning of God’s words for he has not yet eaten “the fruit of the tree of knowledge”. Hence, the innocence of Adam, in relation to the prohibition and the punishment, expresses itself in dread. Dread is the dread of freedom. He is not guilty and, yet, he is in dread. Once the freedom is exercised, the guilt has become sin with its “wages”, viz. death. That there is the hope of redemption for man is Kierkegaard’s theology, into which I have not entered. However, long before the advent of depth-psychology, Kierkegaard had stumbled on the hidden reality of the “unconscious”, -- which contribution is not always acknowledged by the psychologists.

There is common psychological ground covered by Kierkegaard and Freud. Both are intensely concerned to lay bare the hidden depths of human nature. Both are concerned about the reality of man in his natural and social environment and man’s response thereto, despite Kierkegaard’s refusal to view man as totally determined creature of his environment. Dread, like the unconscious of Freud is inaccessible to the probing of the conscious and the pre-conscious. Freud aims at education for the “reality principle”, freedom from the tyranny of illusions, and a self-knowledge, which can be attained by removing layers of self-deception with the help of psychoanalysis. Similarly, for Kierkegaard, too, in the act of confronting and overcoming dread, man arrives at the self-knowledge, that he is a spirit in union with the body and the mind. This knowledge is
of the nature of a consciousness that man is rooted in God. Faith is nothing other than living the life of the individual in commitment to the absolute.

But Kierkegaard and Freud also differ radically. Freud's psychological patient, once cured, remains henceforth passive, in the sense that he is integrated with the environment that formally threw him off his balance. He is no more required to re-live the past traumatic experiences, because their unconscious causes are brought to the conscious fore from their hidden depths. But, for the individual of Kierkegaard, existence is a constant striving, a process, always active. By way of continuous choice, the dynamism of human existence is sustained. Dread in the individual, for instance, can be related as corresponding to the three divisions of time, namely, the past, present and future.

The past represents the facticity, the actuality of the individual; the present, the possibilities that lay before the individual; and the future, the freedom, or the course of action that is to follow. Freud, understands the individual purely in terms of the past; the retrospective reconstruction of the individual robs him of his freedom; the individual, here, is totally determined, a victim of his physical and social environment. The cured individual goes back to live in the same environment passively. But, Kierkegaard understands the individual from the wholistic perspective of the past, present and future. It is through the individual’s past and present that the reality of the individual is projected in the future. The individual has to live his past and present in such a way that they conduce to his blissful future; the individual looks forward for his future with hope. Thus, Kierkegaard’s individual is best understood, and best represented, as the one who lives with a vision for the future. To have a vision for the future consists in hoping for a future. The individual here is constituted proleptically as a project to be achieved and never as a finished product. In view of this, an individual is understood as a being in faith and hope; for with faith, hope necessarily comes into the picture. Needless to say, the fulfilment of his faith and hope is in the absolute, without abrogating his individuality.
Alfred Adler, the one-time associate of Freud, on parting company with Freud, felt increasingly out of joint with Freud’s brand of psychoanalysis. If he gave his school of psychology the name of “Individual Psychology”, it is at once a recognition of Kierkegaard’s influence on the European scene. This was a big set-back for the depth-psychology of Freud, modelled on human nature grasped deterministically. The difference between Freud and Adler could as well be stated as a difference between Kierkegaard and Freud. While Freud sought to account for all human behaviours in terms of the past, Adler set his face towards the future. To Freud, the unconscious is the repository of the past repressed impulses and wishes, in terms of which the human personality is explained: Personality is regressive, retroactive. But Adler’s emphasis is on the unity of the individual, formed prospectively, because of his concern for the future the individual displays in his life.

The idea that the individual is a totality pushing forward towards something better lying in the future is central to Adler as well as Kierkegaard. Adler firmly believed that man is ever moving towards some significant goal. All human behaviour is purposive and goal-directed, it is teleological. A goal orients the individual’s personality towards the future expectations. But this does not mean that there is a perfect correspondence between Kierkegaard and Adler. Kierkegaard is a theistic existentialist, and he can never lose sight of the religious transcendence as the moorings of his philosophy. The goal of man is the eternal beatitude which is the participation of divine life, in the final analysis. Adler however is restricted to a well integrated individual personality that lives his life in socio-psychological harmony. Adler then may be closer to other humanistic psychologists than to Kierkegaard, in the long run.

Humanistic psychologists like Rollo May, Binswanger, Erik Erikson and Erich Fromm gained a lot from Kierkegaard’s philosophy of the individual. But they remained strictly psychologists; their concern did not extend to ontology. They may have dwelt at length in their thoughts on the freedom of the individual as the force which is responsible for the well integrated personality development. Kierkegaard however traces such an
integrated personality to its divine moorings, without overlooking the socio-
psychological factors within the human personality. The creative linkage between the
personality and man’s eternal happiness is however a distinctive feature of Kierkegaard’s
philosophy. In him there is a perfect coalescence between human psychology and
ontology. Human being (existence) is made through becoming, in freedom, which itself is
rooted in the being of God.

II

Coming to the second part of the conclusion, I will dwell on a few corollaries that
may be said to emerge from the issues discussed in the preceding chapters. They emerge
specially in the context of juxtaposing the issues discussed across the chapters. The
interlinking of the key issues of the chapters makes for a more comprehensive vision of
some of the problems that have arisen.

To begin with, Kierkegaard is often considered by scholars to be a “religious”
thinker. But, in my opinion, this consideration has not always gone in favour of
Kierkegaard the philosopher. It has been a facile generalization that fails to take into
account the philosophical genius of Kierkegaard. It must be conceded that Kierkegaard is
a philosopher of human freedom even before he is a religionist, therefore he is an
existential philosopher in a true sense. He acknowledges the religious concerns of an
individual only to bring to focus the existential realities of man. Freedom is a
presupposition of the existential realities of man. If faith is discussed by him as the
highest stage of human existence, it is a religious stage that is consciously chosen by the
individual. Faith is a concern that requires an individual, and not a crowd, because it is
subjective, and subjectivity can be found only in the exercise of human freedom by the
individual.

As such, Kierkegaard comes to the existential fact that it is the particular that
exists in the true sense. Moreover, one can be religious, only to the extent that one has
authentic existence. That the individual chooses God, decides to place his trust in God, is
an expression of authenticating existence. Without a free resolution on the part of the existing individual, faith will not be generated. If faith is said to envelope all aspects of man’s life within its fold, it is because faith is an expression of human authenticity. Thus Kierkegaard says that man can truly exist only in God. Ultimately one’s own free decision matters in concerns that are religious. Thus, to Kierkegaard, freedom comes before religion, in other words, the reality of the existing individual is prior to all other concerns. Therefore it can be said that freedom of the individual is the starting point of his existential philosophy, that finds further extended in his religious philosophy. This is the direct corollary of his emphasis on the irreducibility of the individual’s reality. The existing individual is that irreducible integer that gives an authentic unity to all religious and mundane activities of man.

Secondly, the emphasis on freedom by Kierkegaard the existentialist must be viewed from a right perspective. Freedom is not licentiousness, much less a moral holiday in the name of a capacity to do what one’s private fancy dictates with utter disregard for all laws. Human actions are subject to laws, both physical and moral. The latter, in particular, raise the human actions to value-loaded preferences. It is this concern that made Kierkegaard rightly to rise against the Hegelian essentialism, the preferred philosophy of his times. Moral responsibility is attributed not to a universal nature, but to the particular, or the individual. Indeed the universal nature or essence is derived from the concretely existent particulars. There is the essence of the universal “tree”, because there are existent trees. This is all the truer in respect of human beings that exist as particulars endowed with a capacity for moral choices.

Existence concerns an individual, in a manner that it is only his and no one else’s. We could further say that what is exclusively his is self-experience. To have self-experience means, to Kierkegaard, to authenticate one’s existence. What is more, from the theistic perspective, man is a synthesis of body, mind and spirit. In virtue of his being a spirit, individual’s self-experience has an intentionality to God, the supreme Spirit. Hence Kierkegaard believes that in every self-experience he becomes more and more
divine in nature. Most religionists have understood this self-growth as a striving for perfection in the eyes of God. Kierkegaard is no exception. He believes that this striving for perfection is a continuous process, and, in the language of the existentialists, the authentication of human existence. Kierkegaard himself calls it edification. This concept of edification perhaps has not received enough attention so far in the Kierkegaardian scholarship. A deeper study of this may have to take into account more than one related concepts.

To exist is to have self-experience, and all self-experience is an expression of freedom exercised. Hence, man is said to exist only when he exercises freedom. Unlike Sartre, Kierkegaard does not believe that the exercise of freedom is a capricious act of choosing one way or another. Choosing is conducive to human existence, only when the choice is anchored in God, only when man rightly chooses does he exist: In every choice therefore man ought to be aware of the spirit that makes possible the human freedom. Hence every right choice is eo ipso a freedom for God, on the part of man. If this were not the case, there would arise the anomaly of the decision not to choose God becoming conducive to existence. This however is absurd to Kierkegaard. It is not any choice, but the right choice that authenticates, or edifies the human existence.

Not understanding rightly this notion of edification has led some scholars to pick a hole in the armour of Kierkegaard. In part, the spirit of existentialism itself is responsible for such a misconception. Too often certain questions are raised against a backdrop, where freedom is taken for a mere ability to exercise a choice. Ability is a capacity to do something, and in the case of human beings, with a certain degree of human consciousness. This is specially true of freedom, which is an act of doing something consciously. If freedom is generally understood to mean simply being conscious and exercising the capacity to do something, then, anything which is done consciously can mean a free act, including, say, a murder. Does the free act of murder enhance human existence? Just because one has the ability to act and the consciousness accompanying it, is one free to commit murder? Is one’s freedom also the freedom to
take away another’s life or, for that matter, one’s own? Kierkegaard would remind us that a free act is not necessarily a morally right act. Hence it is imperative for us to bear in mind that freedom comes with responsibility. All obligations inherent in responsibility comes from the divine law, to Kierkegaard. This is what is meant by the religious moral philosophers that one is answerable to God. Since only God is the author of the moral laws, obedience to which enhances human existence, all freedom is to be exercised in accordance with the divine commands, lest it be a sin. Sin is, in the final analysis, a violation of one’s own existence, in as much as it is ontologically grounded in God’s own existence.

Thirdly, there is a problem closely associated with the public morality in the philosophy of Kierkegaard that needs a closer, possibly more critical scrutiny. This is the problem of the so called “teleological suspension of the ethical”. Speaking of the perfecting of the individuality in faith, Kierkegaard depicts his “knight of faith” as one under the absolute command of God that may run counter to public morality. The knight of faith, Abraham, is said to be prepared to deny, or more appropriately, “suspend”, the ethical. The knight of faith suspends the ethical for a purpose, a telos, which is the fulfilment of God’s demands. The situation here is such that, in effect, the public morality is denied. Kierkegaard goes so far as to admit that the ethical itself can be a “temptation” for the individual in the fulfilment of the divine command. The crucial question here is this: Is the negation of the moral justified? Is there not the danger of mistaking one’s own subjective fancy for the divine command. How can what I am convinced subjectively as an inalienable divine command be an actual divine command?

To be fair, to Kierkegaard, the ethical is not negated by the religious individual: it is only a suspension of the ethical. Even this may create problems in the multi-religious societies that we live today. The mono-religious culture of Kierkegaard is very different from the multi-religious culture of our own society today. Kierkegaard, however, justifies the suspension of the ethical (laws) by virtue of faith, should an occasion of conflict arise. If such is the case, then, how do we face situations that arise in a multi-religious society?
Excessive subjectivity, coupled with narrow and passionate adherence to the dogmas and praxis of one's own religion, contain in them implicitly seeds of fanaticism antithetical to the virtue of tolerance and mutual forbearance. It is not uncommon that in the name of religion there can be a clash of values. There can be serious clashes amongst religious people belonging to the different religious, or even the sects of the same religion. For example, for most Indian religions, an icon is holy, it symbolises the eternal, whereas, for the Semitic religions, an icon may represent idolatry. There would be no peace and harmony in the society, if someone were to be convinced that it is a divine command to be up against idolatry and subscribe to an iconoclastic mission. Such a situation will lead to social chaos and anarchy. Such social situations are not merely theoretical. We are painfully aware of the scourge of religious communalism in the societies. Such situations and conflicts have already entered our lives, which, no doubt, are rooted in religious beliefs and practices. The sentiments of groups belonging to different sects and religions have been hurt. Clash in religious values is not a remote possibility. The more so, because religious sentiments can easily be whipped up by forces pursuing narrowly personal or party interests. Unless we recognise a common humanity that we all share, and this, only on the common criterion of rationality, we can live neither our personal life nor a social life.

Fourthly, I find an interesting parallel between Aristotle, Aquinas and Kierkegaard. Plato asserted the primacy of the universal Ideas in the "world of forms". The existing individual became an evanescent shadow, lacking in reality. Aristotle, while incorporating the notion of "form" in his philosophy of hylemorphism, restored the existent individual substance as a unity of matter and form. He accorded primacy to the individual substance, which is a composite of from and matter whose potentiality is actualised by the form. In medieval times, Aquinas accepted and developed Aristotle's approach of upholding the supremacy of the individual as that which concretely exists. But this he does by way of adding a new chapter to Aristotle's hylemorphism: Aquinas agrees with Aristotle, when he says that the individual, or the particular, is a unity of matter and form. That which exists is quantified by matter. Aquinas' new chapter
however has a bearing on existence, an additional principle of actualization. Aquinas suggests that the unity of matter and form gives us the essence, which is further actualized by the principle of existence. Existence is the new "form" that actualises the potentiality of the composite essence.

We can possibly think of a similarity here between Aquinas and Kierkegaard. The similarity is to be studied at two levels. On the first level, we can see Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegel as similar to Aristotle's opposition to Plato, in a sense. Aristotle refused to accord the primacy to the immaterial disembodied form as reality, as was done by Plato. He rather made it a principal in union with matter to speak of the reality of the material substance. Kierkegaard, too, refused to accord reality to the Hegelian essence that precedes existence. Indeed, his concern, as a true existentialist, is existence that comes before all else, including the essence, which is a mere abstracted entity. On the contrary, the concrete existent is the particular existent. In the case of man, for instance, the particularity is his individuality, inseparable from his materiality. The integration of the body, mind and spirit into an existent individual is the central concern of Kierkegaard.

At the second level we need now to study Kierkegaard's similarity with Aquinas and his philosophy. Kierkegaard talks of body, mind and spirit forming an integral unity in man, in which the mind and the body are synthesised in spirit. The spirit, the eternal element, represents the freedom in man; hence, for man, to be free is to exist in the true sense. The spirit, uniting with the body and mind, gives existential significance to body and mind, raising them at once to a level that the inanimate and other animate nature cannot even aspire. While the potentiality of the body and mind is actualized by the spirit, potentiality is open now to be actualized into human existence, which is freedom. Spirit now acquires a new "form", namely, freedom; it is responsible for bringing existence to the human individual. Just as Aquinas had given a new and further direction to Aristotle's hylomorphism, Kierkegaard now may be said to have given an equally new and significant direction to Aquinas' hylomorphism. Human existence here has become freedom, a new form. In virtue of this new form, Kierkegaard is now equipped with the
provision for resolving the conflict within man. The conflict of body and mind, that many
a philosopher and religionist spoke of, can be surpassed by the spirit in asserting the
freedom, in asserting the true human existence as prior to any abstract human nature or
essence. This thought of Kierkegaard, that to exist is to be free, may have to be worked
out in greater depth in order to show how Kierkegaardian philosophy has taken us a step
beyond Aquinas’ concept of existence.

Fifthly, Kierkegaard’s radical view that the individuality is perfected in faith, and
that, too, in faith that has for it the object the paradox of Christ rather than the historical
Jesus, tends to make his philosophy narrowly sectarian and parochial. Kierkegaard’s
assertion, that the individuality is perfected in the commitment to religious faith, may
readily find its acceptance among all religionists, in as much as they all would subscribe
to the view that faith opens up dimensions of objective reality and the subjective
personality that are otherwise not given to human experience. But Kierkegaard’s attempt
to restrict faith to faith in the paradox of Christ, the God-man, makes his otherwise
universal philosophy somewhat sectarian. This raises in our mind also other questions:
Does Kierkegaard, in any way, suggest that Christianity is the only way to attain true
existence? If so, does not such a contention smack of a narrow parochialism? We can
readily understand his times and the mono-religious culture of Christian Europe. But a
philosopher is one who is prepared to rise above the limitations of his culture to see
beyond his times. Is he prepared to accept the development of human individuality in
faith across religions in the world? This is another vexed problem that the
Kierkegaardian scholarship has to grapple with someday.

Our acute consciousness of religiously multi-polar world today has to bring to the
foreground such vexing problems. I can only hint here at the direction in which this study
can further be pushed. While readily granting that the human individuality can be
perfected in faith in Christ, the paradox, it is possible to view the paradox of Christ the
God-man, as a religious symbol rather than an absolute reality. If the object of faith is
viewed as the symbol of a meeting point for God and man, every religion may be credited
to possess its own paradoxical symbol, at once divine and human, -- indeed, a hierophany, the manifestation of the divine in a multiplicity of human and less-than-human forms. Kierkegaard's distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history may provide for such a liberal interpretation of faith as a paradoxical phenomenon. Faith is not of the historical Jesus but of the paradoxical Christ. Now, the question if mankind should adhere only to one religion becomes entirely redundant. The suggestion that Christ is the symbol of religions, including Christianity, may not lack entirely the theological and spiritual foundations. This corollary however has to be worked out in greater depth by the Kierkegaardian scholars in our times.

Sixthly, Kierkegaard's philosophy of the individual may be said to have contributed, at least in some sense, to the radical dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, to which all the Semitic religions, in particular, Christianity, are heir to. The dichotomy, it is noted, has resulted in making man's life somewhat ambivalent. While the Christian religion is other-worldly, Christian cultures in practice have been largely this-worldly. The Christian may be said to live in a no-man's land, hanging in the mid-air, in a state of confusion, not knowing which direction he should take. This inevitably has an impact on man's experience of existence, or freedom. Commitment to his religious telos and the engagement in the secular world became somewhat incompatible.

I am inclined to believe that Kierkegaard effectively bridges the gap. While asserting the primacy of the religious, he may be said to have recognised the legitimacy of the pursuits of an integrated human personality. Man of faith is a man-in-the-world, a concrete existent, exercising his freedom in the secular world. With the emergence of Kierkegaard's existentialist ideas, the understanding of man soared high in the heaven with his feet firmly planted in the earth. The individual is neither a mere material man nor a pure spiritual soul, but a free and conscious agent, anchored in the secular with a clear vision of the sacred telos. For Kierkegaard, man is not only a unity of body and mind, but the unity is further forged by the spirit for the enhancement of personality. The spirit then brings about a harmonious balance between the sacred and the secular realities. Indeed,
the dynamism of the life of faith is sustained by the dialectics of the sacred and the secular within man. Man of faith, to Kierkegaard is neither a recluse nor a debauchee, but an ordinary man, who, having resigned everything infinitely, comes to live in the finite. He represents within himself both the realms of the sacred and the secular, but now the spirit has established in him a divine perspective.

With the spirit as the guiding and controlling force within, man is able to overcome situations, which otherwise would leave him utterly confused. The perfected one does not lack one thing, the clarity of the vision, the greatest gift of the spirit. He has now a sense of direction, making life eminently meaningful. His life becomes meaningful, because the meaning itself is derived proleptically from the perception of a divine telos. The telos itself makes his sacred and secular concerns significant to his integrated life, far from keeping them apart as the two incompatibles. This mitigation of the radical dichotomy of the Semitic religions is perhaps a service rendered by the philosophy of Kierkegaard, which he himself thought as a “philosophy of life”, much before others termed his philosophy as “existentialism”. Kierkegaard realized that man, being created by God, can have the realization of his existence only in God. However, he has the freedom to decide for realizing his own existence. But he exercises his freedom as a synthesis of body, mind and spirit, at once physical and psychological with all the merits and the demerits they are heir to in the concrete existence. His concept of the individual aptly grasped the human reality as it truly is, -- a nature at once “fallen” and yet, “redeemed”.

In the seventh place, an impression has grown among the historians of philosophy that Kierkegaard is an anti-intellectualist because of his vituperations against reason. This impression may be lop-sided, especially when we consider the fact that he is at pains in attacking a version of “reason” prevalent at his time. He refuses to identify the core of human reality with the triumphant march of Reason in its Hegelian dialectics. He has nothing against “reason” in the classical sense viz. the specificity of human existence as distinct from that of the brute animal, in virtue of which we know our telos, pursue
values, have a capacity for language, culture, religion and philosophy, and, finally, exercise our freedom. Though there is a perceptible movement in Kierkegaard from rationalism to voluntarism, his volition, far from being all passion, is a passion illumined by the light of reason. Both reason and will are the powers of the spirit, that forges the unity of the body and the mind, the temporal and the eternal in man. It is in virtue of reason that Kierkegaard is in a position to acknowledge the legitimate demands of every component of human individuality.

Finally, to explicate the nature of subjectivity, characterizing the individual, Kierkegaard demarcates, with the skill of a master artist, the concerns of man into aesthetic gratifications, ethical obligations and, lastly, religious commitments. Because he talks of these three types of concerns as "stages" in man's life, some scholars believe that Kierkegaard himself is a dialectician on par with Hegel. This observation may be accepted with a certain qualification. Kierkegaard is not a dialectician in the Hegelian sense. Indeed, he has no sympathy with the Hegelian type of dialectics, where the individuals are a phase that is to be abrogated in the process of the higher synthesis, or the emergence of the evolution of the human spirit into higher and better human nature. While Kierkegaard believes in the growth of the human spirit in its movement towards the final goal, the individual is the focus of his attention. The individual is himself responsible for bringing about the movements from one stage to another stage in his life. This is a conscious and free movement of man. The Hegelian dialectics, on the contrary, is an inner compulsion of the spirit that is of itself evolves into different phases. For Kierkegaard, however, the individual creates his existence consciously, by the conscious exercise of his freedom. Existence is a project, a process. This is the reason why Kierkegaard asserts that existence is more an art than a science. Like the artist who creates his art, the individual creates his own existence, taking responsibility for every contour and cadence in his art. Thus, for Kierkegaard, existence cannot be defined, but can only be experienced, or lived in concrete situations. It is fitting that Kierkegaard is today treated as the "father of existentialism", in the sense, that he heralded the advent of a philosophy of the individual human life.