CHAPTER IV

INDIVIDUAL AND FREEDOM

The most important feature of human existence for all existentialists is freedom. For Kierkegaard, freedom constitutes the individual, for it is only the free individual who may be said to exist truly. This chapter is an elucidation of Kierkegaard’s concept of the individual as endowed with freedom. Unlike the many other existentialists, Kierkegaard takes into account the Christian concept of the “fallenness” of human nature in the free individual, making for its own dynamism. This religious dimension is so crucial that it sets apart Kierkegaard’s existentialism from that of other thinkers, possibly with the exception of Marcel.

Kierkegaard begins, stating that, to realize existence, one must first of all realize that he is in “error”, and that he should will to choose. Obviously the error is not epistemic, but ontic; religiously speaking, it is “sin”. Thus, Kierkegaard combines the “facticity” with freedom, “givenness” with possibility. Therefore, to realize oneself, one has to look within, wherein one encounters oneself as the “action-field” of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. Man has no freedom for coming into existence, if existence is taken to mean the givenness of his being. Life is a free gift of God, man has no freedom either in receiving or ending it. But he can enhance the quality of the life given. He can consciously exist and authenticate it by his freedom of becoming. All his freedom therefore is the freedom, not of being but of doing. Man therefore is morally free, but not ontically. In virtue of this limitation, man’s freedom is a “freedom for God”. All his possibilities are in the realm of decision and action. Faced with possibilities, man experiences “dread”, which is a necessary ingredient of the exercise of freedom. All freedom, to the existentialists, ends in choosing oneself, and this passes through a
confrontation and acceptance of dread, before it is finally overcome. For Kierkegaard, it further involves that, in realizing his existence, the individual relates himself to God and, in relating to God, he relates to himself. All these issues are highlighted in this chapter. Finally, the understanding of freedom in Camus, Kafka and Sartre is briefly discussed for the sake of bringing out Kierkegaard’s contrast with the atheistic existentialists on individual’s freedom.

A. Human Nature and Freedom

Existentialists, in general, and Kierkegaard, in particular, do not think of man in terms of essence, a universal human nature. An essentialistic understanding of man characterizes him with fixity and rigidity. He is then more acted upon than acting, with no possibilities to realize. Kierkegaard attacked Hegel, whose philosophy was the highly favoured system during his time. His protest against Hegelian Idealism, or essentialism, earned him the title, “father of existentialism”, and this opposition was to become the benchmark of existentialist thought.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the individual in terms of a logical process of abstraction, characteristic of the realm of concepts. Here, thought takes a prominent place, which finally results in defining man as rational being; rationality becomes man’s essence. Kierkegaard however observed that concepts, on their own, have the quality of limiting whatever comes under their domain. Concepts do not, and cannot, explain man which, if limited, is as good as his being obliterated. Concepts are general ideas, and they remain the same throughout the ages. They are generally static and cannot change, or else the change would lead to a massive confusion in the use of language. On the contrary, man must be understood in terms of existence. Existence is unlike concepts. Indeed, it is the exact opposite of concepts, because it basically concerns improvement, quality of life, conscious effort and above all actualization. For Kierkegaard, man is ever-becoming, which dynamism the static concepts cannot explain. Hegel, as the champion of the logical idealism, advocates the universal. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, declares that
ideality, which expresses the universal, is preferable to reality, which expresses the particular. However, Kierkegaard, in his *Philosophical Fragments*, claims that consciousness establishes a relationship between ideality and reality, representing possibilities and actualities respectively.

Consciousness is not a pure consciousness, but a relational entity, an intentionality, it stands between the two related components. By this Kierkegaard intends to suggest that ontologically the self is constituted of the consciousness which establishes a fundamental relation. Consciousness expresses self-experience, therefore consciousness can only be the particular; it can never be the universal. This view of a particularized consciousness obviously runs counter to the Hegelian universal consciousness, or the “Reason” on march for the manifestation of ever more universal forms. Kierkegaard claims that the spirit in man expresses itself in an intentional consciousness, a consciousness-in-the-world. This was to receive an elaborate amplification in Heidegger later. All this brings out the implication that existence cannot be reduced to concepts, but that it can be understood only through self-experience. This is his way of defining the irreducibility of human existence. For him existence is the unification of contradictory forces by consciousness. The contradictory forces are ideality and reality. The ideality represents the possibilities, the options that are before man. The reality stands on the way of possibilities; it consists of immediacy, which is his state of unworthiness before God, his “pseudo”-(given) existence. In other words, human existence is encountered as the consciousness of a unity of finite and infinite, of temporal and eternal. This is also the paradox of his existence: he is, and he is yet to be; he is being, and yet becoming.

To Kierkegaard, the contradiction is overcome, when man confronts a divine-human paradigm in the paradox of Jesus Christ. When he is faced with the paradox, he realizes that his given reality is in fact a pseudo-reality, but that it can however be opened up to infinite possibilities. With this awareness, the individual is able to decide on the possibilities. He is now embarked upon the mission of making himself through choosing. This puts him on the path of giving up his ingenuine existence so that he can work on his
possibilities. Thus, when the ideality and reality are brought together, he makes a conscious effort to exercise his freedom. Human freedom is a product of the ideality and reality brought together. Freedom of the individual then reflects on the consciousness, effort and self-experience, -- all of which cannot be found in the universals, but only in the particular. For Kierkegaard, possibilities are meaningful, only when they are brought in relation to the reality, and this is reflected in the freedom of the individual. Thus existence cannot be reduced to concepts, because it has a personal element, and, it can be satisfied only in the particular. We can also understand freedom to mean consciousness, in as much as to be free means acting consciously, and this is the same as having self-experience. Thus, for Kierkegaard, existing individual is a center of consciousness or/and freedom.

Needless to say, Kierkegaard, being a theistic existentialist, has his metaphysical commitment. He does not feel the need for any apologies on this. But, it is important for us to recognize that it is not a blind submission to dogmas defined by the church. It is rather his own interpretation of the New Testament Christianity to which, he thinks, the Christianity of his times and place was not faithful. Kierkegaard has no hesitation to cross his swords with the Christianity of the Danish established church. It was the traditional conception among his people that Christianity was a set of true doctrines to be accepted as faith by the Christians; this was attacked by Kierkegaard. Traditional conception entailed that adherence by belief to a set of doctrines was all that was needed on the part of a Christian. One had to simply identify oneself with the Christian public in order to qualify to be a Christian. To be a Christian meant to be born into a Christian family and perform specific ecclesiastical rituals. This idea of Christianity was institutionalized in the idea of the state-church. Such an idea of Christianity was outright rejected by Kierkegaard, because it lacks the most important feature of Christianity, namely the personal commitment of the individual to the paradox of the divine paradigm. Without commitment there can be no Christian worth the salt. Kierkegaard bemoans that the state obligated itself to ensure the number of Christian, and this way the church had become an essentially secular institution instead of “a communion of the individuals”. The state
church itself was more interested in appointing priests to their office, whose survival depended on the number Christians than in training them to Christianity with individual responsibility. He sarcastically remarks,

If on the one hand people did not assume the name of Christians, the priest would have nothing to live on.  

In order to ensure their own and the institution's survival, the priests were concerned only with the quantity (read number) of the so-called Christians. Thus the priests are responsible, “in the direction of making Christianity, if possible, impossible.”

His sarcasm against the institutionalized religion finds a full expression in Attack Upon Christendom. But being a Christian himself, it was an attack from within Christianity. It is not the attack by a militant atheist or agnost, but a concerned and committed Christian. Kierkegaard says that to be born into a Christian family does not necessarily make one a Christian. He says,

No one starts by being a Christian, everyone becomes such in the fullness of time. ... if he does become such.

By implication, a Christian is one who has, in his individual capacity, chosen freely to be one. For Kierkegaard, to “exist”, to find the “truth” and to be “subjective” would all mean the one and the same, namely to choose to become a true Christian. Being born into a Christian family and being baptized at so young an age do not necessarily make one Christian. On the contrary, it may even pollute Christianity. This is so, because the baptized child is not capable of making its own decision, which is crucial to become a Christian. Without earnestness there can be no Christianity, because only in earnestness can an individual make a free choice. His Edifying Discourses are never tired of asserting this. Only that which edifies is Christianity, which is not possible without earnestness. “Only the truth which edifies is truth for you.”
In stating this, Kierkegaard carries his fight into the camp of the essentialists, who are known for their hunt for objective knowledge. Earnestness can be an experience only in subjectivity, therefore Christianity is made possible only in subjectivity. In objective truth the subject is detached from the truth, and so the truth has no power to influence and mould the subject. But, in the case of subjective truth, the subject is in constant relation with it, and is edified by the truth. The subject cannot be detached from the subjective truth, but he himself is involved with the truth. Subjective truth makes the individual relate to himself in his inwardness, searches for his true self so that he can rectify his old ways and realize his true existence. For Kierkegaard that is what Christianity does to an individual, that is, transform him radically in his individuality. Faith is nothing other than the meeting of the individual at his ontic level with the divine. It is individual’s intimate relation with the Infinite. Because he is in constant relation with the Infinite, he is both capable of being edified and also edify others. It is Kierkegaard’s conviction that Christianity cannot be either understood or practiced with reason alone, which is why he vehemently opposes the Hegelian pure rational understanding of religion. Without subjective commitment, there can be no religion, much less, Christianity, avers Kierkegaard.

If man is a unity of the actual and the possible held together in a spiritual unity, it is important that we rightly understand the givenness of human nature in Kierkegaard’s theistic existentialism. Kierkegaard’s existentialism reflects the Christian tenet that man is created in “the image of God”. The question, What in concrete does the individual mean to Kierkegaard?, can be answered only after taking into consideration his metaphysical commitment to Christian doctrine of creation of man after the image of God. Man is not simply a biological organism, or even a psychological animal, responding to its environment. Rather man is an actual existence, whose life is endowed with meaning beyond his responses to his immediate environment. Man realizes the uniqueness of his existence through his activity of conscious freedom. But human freedom is made possible in virtue of his being created after God’s own image. How should we understand this statement?
It may be understood that God creates man, because, being of the nature of unbounded love, God wants the foundation of his creation to rest on love. In order to temporalize his love, he creates man in such a way that the seed of free love is sown in human heart. In the entire creation only human beings can love in freedom. Every form of love human beings exhibit in freedom is an expression of divine love. For example love between spouses reflects God’s own love; love between the parent and child reflects God’s own love. However, since man and God are not equal, all human love in its various forms is conditioned, in comparison with the unconditional love of God. God’s love is far too great for man. The examples cited are only to bring out the characteristic significance of human love. Love is the exuberant and spontaneous feeling that man experiences, arising out of his will. No one can have love either by demanding or commanding it. A robot cannot fall in or out of love because it is a machine, but man is capable of falling in or out of love, because he has the autonomy to will or not to will the falling in love. It is the Christian belief that, since God created man out of love, he requires of his creation, namely man, to love him freely, in return, for the external manifestation of his glory. And that, to fulfill this, God gave man the freedom to choose whether or not to love him, for a determined love simply ceases to be love. Thus, a human nature, ontically dependent on God, nevertheless, is morally free. Morality is specific to man, and presupposes freedom on the part of man. And, because man has freedom, his life can look beyond the determinism of the given, and come to entertain both meaning and purpose.

Despite acknowledging the uniqueness of man in creation, Kierkegaard believes, God and man are not equal, because God is his master, in virtue of God’s being the creator. Being created, and being created in God’s image, man has his existence because of God. God, by his creative act establishes man into the world, and man has his source of existence in God. Being created by God, it is presumed, man should have a certain impression of his creator. The impression is the capacity to freely love, inherent in his nature. Love and freedom go together in man. The uniqueness of being endowed with the
image of God, then, means that a created being, therefore, a derived being, is intentional to knowing and willing. The voluntarist that he is, Kierkegaard highlights the latter. The Christian theist that he is, he further highlights a will "wounded" by the "original sin".

B. Sin in Human Nature

Whatever its religious interpretation, original sin, to Kierkegaard, is, again, a "defect" in human nature that binds it to finitude and imperfection. It is a force opposed to the good will impelling man to perfection. Though impressed with the divine image, man is by himself incomplete and imperfect. This is the philosophical way of understanding the finitude of human life. Religiously, however, it may be construed that man is "born in sin", and that he is born without love and trust for God. Man has to grow in love and trust in responsibility, therefore in freedom. Kierkegaard says,

The strongest and, I would say, the most positive expression of original sin in man is precisely that he is born in concupiscence.

The Biblical myth of the "first parents" and the "fall in the Eden" captures the human predicament religiously: Man is a descendant of Adam and Eve. The fall in the garden of Eden is the result of the lapse of human nature before the holiness of God. But this too is a free act of man. Man has the moral freedom either to choose or not to choose God. The descendants of Adam and Eve are predisposed to possess the same imperfection. Since predisposition of human nature to imperfection is an integral part of every man, original sin is born anew with the birth of every human child. Thus man is said to be in sin, because, by exercising his freedom, he can decide not to choose God. This however makes him fall short of the requirements of becoming an authentic being before God, and of achieving his destiny to which his nature is open to. That man is in sin by the very fact that he is born enlarges our concept of sin beyond the realm of action as well. Kierkegaard says,
It is the fact of being derived which predisposes the individual, without for all that making him guilty.

Since he is not actively guilty of any commission, it is, in a sense, an “innocent” sin, an “inherited” sin. The free action of Adam and Eve gets repeated in the very being of man. It is the condition of predisposition to evil that manifests itself as an act of unfaithfulness to God in the sin of commission and omission. Therefore human nature is in a perpetual state of imperfection.

Thus, sin remains a function, in a much deeper sense, of the individual’s free decision and therefore of the individual’s responsibility. In this way, it could be said that man lacks that perfection by virtue of which he decides to become a true and authentic being. It is a state which man has to overcome with the help of God in order to realize his destiny. Commenting on the Biblical statement, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans, 8:19), Kierkegaard says,

... for if there can properly be any question of anxious longing, it follows as a matter of course that the creation is in a state of imperfection.

Again,

The derived is never as perfect as the original.

Thus, human nature is imperfect, yet, God has endowed it with freedom (of the spirit), so that man can nevertheless rise against his sins. Since the being of man is derived from God, there can never be an ontological separation of man from God, but a moral separation is however possible for man. God dwells in each and every human being, as is testified in the 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?” Reflecting on this statement, Kierkegaard believes that, for man, to consciously rise and strive against his sins makes for existing in the true sense.
Man exists, not by way of reasoning, but by way of willing and choosing. The former involves a detached contemplation, but the latter, involvement, commitment and passion. Therefore for a Christian, to exist, is to choose the paradox of Christ. The paradox is the incarnation of God into the world, personified in Jesus Christ, the eternal coming into being in space and time. It is God’s personal intervention into the history of man. Anyone who is interested in realizing his true being can do so only by commitment to the paradox that generates the maximum passion in him. He cannot move towards existence with the help of speculative philosophy, or reasoning alone, because by reflecting upon existence he forgets that he himself exists. Existence can be explained only by living, by passionately experiencing life, and not by mere thinking. If man cannot receive existence through passion, he simply abrogates it. The individual attains existence through his existence, and, for a Christian, this requires of him to make “the leap of faith”. But this unconditional leap of faith is not without its own concomitant dread of uncertainty. To be in the passion of faith is like standing all alone without the capacity to express directly, yet, being true to one’s conviction, having in inwardness a direct and close relation to the infinite. Kierkegaard says,

To have everything against you, not to have a single direct expression for your inwardness, and yet to stand by your words: that is true inwardness.

To be in passion may mean believing against one’s reasoning, or speculative thought, and this can be done only with the help of the infinite passion of inwardness. Kierkegaard thinks that speculative philosophy cannot explain Christianity. He regrets that for long philosopher’s hunt for truth has been a way through speculative philosophy. This is the truth, not truth as it is, but as claimed to be truth by the philosophers. Speculative philosophy in no way does justice to Christianity.

Kierkegaard is of the view that the generality of mankind is not even aware of its finite, sinful predicament. Even its awareness marks out a qualitative step towards a belief in God. It is the first step also towards a self-understanding. He becomes aware
that, whereas he is a synthesis of body, mind and spirit, he has been all along wrongly identifying himself with the finite element alone in him. The spirit within helps him to come to this realization that other stages of existence is possible to him. Consciousness of sin makes him at once a dreaming spirit, in as much as a desire to overcome sinful existence can now be entertained; he becomes a hoping being. Man realizes that he is born in sin and so must make a conscious effort to rise out of this unfortunate state. With the qualitative decision, his salvation is at hand.

The awareness of sin, or the ontic “error”, is thus obviously, for Kierkegaard, an individual act. The individual must, first of all, in order to start the journey of becoming an individual, realize that he is in error. He has to realize that he is an imperfect spirit; then only can he be on the path of becoming a true being. In order to attain this perfection, personal inwardness is a necessity. Therefore the act itself is deeply and intensely private and personal. Whether one has realized one’s true being can be known only by oneself, because one can be aware of it, not by any other means, but only through self-experience. Kierkegaard says,

How sin comes into this world every man understands by himself alone; if he would learn it from another, he co-ipso misunderstands it. 

It is clear from this that Kierkegaard so much emphasizes on individuality that he rejects even “discipleship”. God-relationship is intensely individual. Man does not need either a human mediator or a human agency to take him close to his creator. One has only to look within, and be in constant inwardness, if he is to “know” God. That is why, for Kierkegaard, every knowledge of God ends with a self-discovery, and, in this case, the discovery of one’s own individuality. To know God is to know oneself and to know oneself is to be in truth.

The truth referred to is the truth of subjectivity, which cannot ever be doubted
If the truth of subjectivity is to be judged in terms of knowledge, it is the “decisive” knowledge, radically different from the detached epistemic knowledge that is given to us through the mediation of “science”. Science deals with presuppositions and speculations, therefore, with essences or universal concepts. On the contrary truth of subjectivity is related to existence which deals with actuality. Speculations of science, despite their being harnessed to workable, utilitarian technology, are only tentatively true. The scientific principles, which are universally accepted today, might stand corrected in the near future, given the growth of our knowledge of nature and its workability. For example, our planet earth might suddenly lose its known gravitational pull, due to certain new (dis)functions of interstellar bodies, as a result of which the principle of earth’s gravitational pull may stand largely modified or even become null and void. Scientific speculation therefore cannot furnish man with absolute certainty. But existence of man cannot be based on speculations, it has to be evaluated by more substantial truth. Such substantial truth is God, the truth that has absolute certainty; only God can substantially hold existence. Indeed, to consider truth as the base of existence suggests that God is the source of all existence. But, how does man experience his existence?

Man can experience his existence, not in concepts, but only in passion. Because the maximum passion is in the encounter with the paradox, man experiences his existence at its highest when faced by the paradox. Such a paradox is found in his own nature which is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. Man is endowed with the temporal element of body-mind complex, and also the eternal element of the spirit, the image of God. In virtue of the one, he is determined, but in virtue of the other, he is also free. His existence, in which he is established by the divine creative act, is such that it is a paradox. In realizing his paradoxical existence in passion, man becomes the individual. Man receives his existence from God, but he also perfects it by the exercise of his freedom for God. He does not have “a freedom from God”, but only “freedom in God”. Apart from God, Kierkegaard thinks, man cannot realize his existence, in as much as his existence is
grounded in God. Due to this ontological dependence, man can realize his existence by looking within, inwardly, for God is reflected in his own inwardness. Kierkegaard captures the truth in the following:

He is in the creation, and present everywhere in it, directly He is not there; and only when the individual turns to his inner self, and hence only in the inwardness of self-activity, does he have his attention aroused, and is enabled to see God.

Yet, this turning inward is a free activity, on the part of man. Man is a being endowed with freedom.

C. Freedom in the Positive Sense

The word "freedom" is generally understood in two senses, negative and positive. Negatively, it means the absence of constraint. An action is free, if it is done without constraints. In this sense, man is free, if no one is forcing him to do something against his will. He is then not acting under any compulsion. Positively, in a more radical sense, freedom is the same as an ability. In this sense, man is free to do certain things. He is free to do those things, which he can do, if he chooses to do. But he is not free to do those things that he cannot do, or has no ability to do. For example, man is not free to fly like a bird, because he cannot fly even though he chooses to fly. But he is free to fly, making use of the technological devices like a balloon or an aeroplane, for, here, he technically acquires an ability. Yet, it is not he who flies but the device, in which he is seated, is flown, overcoming the constraints of gravitation. All this suggests that the exercise of freedom presupposes an inbuilt ability, which may have to be actualized under certain conditions.

Taking freedom in the positive sense, let us try to understand the freedom of man in the light of Kierkegaard's philosophy of the individual. The individual, for Kierkegaard, is a center of freedom, he is essentially endowed with the ability to free
decision prior to any action; the action itself, under certain circumstances, may be subject to constraint. Therefore, discussing freedom of the individual in the negative sense of the word “freedom” does not arise. Kierkegaard however would place human freedom in the right perspective. He is aware that man by himself cannot come into existence. As descendent of Adam and Eve, who were created by God, man has a derived existence. Nevertheless, man is the highest expression of God’s creation, in as much as man is created after God’s own image. Since Adam and Eve have their origin in God and since man is the descendent of Adam and Eve, man has his origin in God. Religious philosophers have acknowledged the truth in stating that man has his being grounded in God. Indeed, being thus grounded in God, or being created after God’s own image, makes for the ability to freedom. Going by the dictionary meaning, ability means the knowledge to do something, and all knowledge is a form of awareness. So, freedom positively means the awareness, a consciousness to do something freely. The ability to do something can thus be understood as being conscious to do something freely. A conscious action is an action done knowingly and intentionally. All this only suggests that human freedom is one of doing, and not of being.

The claim that man can come into existence would mean that he has the ability to come into existence, and therefore, the awareness that he is coming into existence. But such ability and the awareness of being are not possible for man. His is a derived existence, on the contrary. From the perspective of medical sciences too, the awareness of being is not indicated. The initial stage required for growing into a fetus is the fertilization of an ovum. The ovum gets fertilized in its contact with the sperm. The ovum and sperm in their union are predisposed to move, not that they consciously decide to move, as a result of which they come into contact and the process of reproduction starts. The medical sciences do not claim that the ovum and sperm move consciously, but they act according to a mysterious “program” in-built in them. Man cannot be said to have awareness of coming into existence, for if he were aware, then, he would be said to exist already. On the contrary, his consciousness grows gradually, and it is in its fullness, only when man is able to act consciously. Freedom therefore is associated with his conscious
doing. Since man cannot have the awareness of coming into existence, he does not have the ability to come into existence on his own. Ontologically he is established in existence by God, but once so established he has the ability to act freely. Hence, man does not have “a freedom from God”, because his being, his existence, is derived from God, but he can have only a “freedom in God”, argues Kierkegaard.

Being endowed with freedom, man can either choose or reject God. This is God’s way of respecting human freedom. Since man is free, he is responsible for all his actions, including his act of choosing or rejecting God. He will have to bear the fruit of his actions, good, bad and indifferent. If he chooses God, he enjoys the divine life. If, on the contrary, he does not choose God, he is alienated from God. If he exercises his freedom to choose God, he enjoys the fruit of realizing his existence continually. Kierkegaard, though forthright in rejecting the ontological freedom for man, is also the strong champion of man’s moral freedom. The story of “fall” at the garden of Eden, he thinks, is the symbol of man’s acting as a free agent. Adam and Eve choose to move away from God, when they accept the “fruit of knowledge” from the “serpent”. They are responsible for their free choice. The tendency to move away from God is not because God wished man to do so, but it is totally the resolve of man. God endowed man with freedom so that he can make the free and the right choice, including of himself. But by choosing to move away from God, man moves deeper into imperfection, but by moving closer to God by his free acceptance, he also strives for his perfection. Since man has his origin in God, he can find meaning in existence only in God. Man’s alienation from and union with God are, however, his own making.

What is more, for Kierkegaard, adherence to God is a striving, a continual exercise of man’s freedom for God. It is not a single act of affirmation of his belief in God once for all. It is rather continuous. The individual with affirmation of his belief must also experience constant passion and earnestness for God in all his life. Belief in God is not something man acknowledges one instant and forgets the next. It is a constant
"walking" with God. Once man chooses God, he cannot fall back, but steadily move forward in his God-relation. Kierkegaard says,

The situation is not this simple: choose one of the two. The situation is rather this: there is only one choice if one is actually going to serve only one master, and that is God. 14

Here, with Kierkegaard pressing on one choice, prima facie, it may look as if the individual is not given any other option, and therefore man has no freedom. The apparent contradiction in respect of human freedom is partly due to the use of the Biblical language and imageries. But, it is also partly due to the manner in which students of philosophy often think of freedom. They often tend to believe that freedom, if meaningful, should be exercised between the alternatives. To be sure, choosing between alternatives is freedom. But not choosing between any number of alternatives too is freedom. Freedom then has a much wider field. What Kierkegaard wants to say is that, the individual, having already made a choice, has got to strive to perfect the quality of his choice continually. Once the individual has decided on God, he has to serve him continuously. This serving may involve repeated choices in the day-to-day life. After choosing God the individual cannot serve any other interest "idolized" into the supreme value of life. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard says that the individual has only one choice, and in understanding this choice exclusively, he is close to the spirit of the New Testament. This is borne out by the use of the Biblical imagery further that the individual cannot afford to serve more than one master, and that, if he does, he falls short of the requirements in the eyes of God. This is Kierkegaard's way of saying that God demands man's total commitment, loyalty and earnestness. Once the individual has decided to serve only one master, it has to be nothing other than God. The instant he serves another master, he abrogates his relation with God. That is why the individual's relation with God is one of intense passion and commitment. This is the only way that he realizes his derived existence, and perfects it continually.
But the individual can choose either to realize or not to realize his existence. He has the freedom to make his existence consciously meaningful, or allow it to drift aimlessly. In willing to realize his existence he accepts his existence as having come from God, and God as his master. In the process, he looks up to God, who brought him into existence, to fill his existence with meaning. When the individual is faced with the paradox of his existence, he realizes the need to take a qualitative leap, or “the leap of faith”. The paradox of his own existence is met with the paradox of faith, the unconditional surrender to God. The belief in the paradox awakens man to the reality that his being, though derived, is yet rooted in God. The paradox of faith helps man first of all to overcome his sin, and prepare him to forge a close relationship with God. The sin referred to here is not so much a sin of commission as of being oblivious of his own reality; the obliviousness that he is the synthesis of body, mind and spirit. To be in faith is to consciously accept one’s existential predicament, and then to move on further in faith. To be in faith is to take the first step in a dynamic movement.

D. Freedom with Absolute Duty

Kierkegaard is known to be a philosopher of subjectivity. He observes that by experiencing the intensity of the paradox one realizes that one has an absolute duty towards God. Man’s existence is already given to him by God, but somewhere along his life, blindfolded by sin, man fails to acknowledge his existence as bestowed upon him. Since man failed to keep the purity of his existence, it is now man’s absolute duty towards God in recovering what he has lost. Kierkegaard writes,

The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty towards God.  

It may be noted that the individual acknowledges the absolute duty towards God only after he has chosen God. Only when he is in inwardness and full of passion, he is faced with such duty. That the individual has an absolute duty towards God might give the impression that the individual has to believe in God since it is his duty; that he has to
believe in God regardless of whether he wants to do so or not. Does the absolute duty then not jeopardize human freedom?

Kierkegaard is fully alive to the objection. He goes on to answer. Because man has freely chosen God and the question of absolute duty comes only after his choice, man’s freedom is by no means jeopardized. The individual realizes that it is a duty only when he has already placed his faith in God. Such realization will not arise if the individual does not in any way relate himself to the paradox. Only after he has reposed his belief in the paradox, will it dawn upon him that it is an absolute duty. As such there is no breach of freedom of the individual, here. When the individual looks into his own nature (the religious man calls it “recalling the past sinful life”), he realizes its finitude (to the religious man, it is “sin”). Since man is created by God, ontologically he has his being in God. The individual realizes his absolute duty only after he has decided for God. Such realization sets in only after he believes in the paradox of his nature, believes that he was in “error” and that yet the error can be overcome. Acknowledging the absolute duty means that the individual further affirms his faith in God that, if man wants to realize existence, he can do so only in God, in as much as he has his being rooted in God. Man’s realization of absolute duty towards God is itself made possible, because man has within him the eternal spirit which is awakened in freedom. Because he is capable of acting freely and choosing God, he also knows his absolute duty. Kierkegaard writes,

... but within the individual there is a potentiality (man is potentially spirit) which is awakened in inwardness to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere. 16

By willing to believe in the paradox, the individual accepts his duty towards God. If the individual wills not to believe in God, the question of duty towards God does not even arise. In a petrified consciousness, man is chained to his finitude, he does not even “exist” in the true sense. It is the glory of the finite man that he has been bestowed by God with freedom. By exercising his freedom, man both acknowledges his finitude and realizes his need for overcoming it by way of establishing a relation with God. Man has the
potentiality to establish a relation with God, and his potentiality consists in his freedom. Only the free man can be an existing individual.

Kierkegaard is well known for using the familiar imageries of the world literature to serve his own purpose, often he reads in them meanings in the direction opposite to what was originally meant. To explicate the relation between man and God, Kierkegaard writes,

> But whoever rubs the wonderful lamp of freedom becomes himself a servant—the spirit is Lord. This is the beginning. 

Man, in being free, resigns everything and becomes a servant of God, because only in God can he realize his true being. God is the master, and the individual the servant. Just as a servant has no identity apart from his master in the myth of the *Allahdin and the Magic Lamp*, the individual too cannot realize his true being apart from God. It is God who constantly nurtures man. The meaning Kierkegaard reads, here, we may note, is in contrast to the magic lamp of Allahdin, where Alladhin is the master and the spirit the servant. However, for Kierkegaard, man, on rubbing the lamp of freedom, becomes the servant, and the spirit, that is God, is the master. The individual, in becoming the servant, surrenders his all, and this is precisely where his individuality begins to develop. The individual, being created, cannot demand anything from his master, but, on the contrary, the master demands all from the individual. This is the kind of situation required of the absolute duty of the individual, if at all he is to realize his authentic existence. A situation any less cannot serve the purpose of the individual. Kierkegaard says,

> He has clad himself in duty. for him it is the expression of his inmost nature.
E. Necessity and Spontaneity

This way of realizing human existence with the help of the paradox is a special feature of Kierkegaard’s existentialism, clearly in contrast with the Hegelian way. He observes that man has been bestowed by God with a freedom, which will enable him to make decisions by exercising his free will. Man has a freedom for choosing, to will what he thinks is good for him. Kierkegaard says

All coming into existence takes place with freedom,
not by necessity. 19

For Hegel, on the other hand, existence takes place necessarily. Hegel advocates the general proposition that what is rational is also true. It follows thus that whatever the mind is capable of rationalizing is true. Truth consists in its being rationalized. For him what is rational is the truly real, the absolute. He indicates that the absolute is not a being separate from the rational world of nature or from the rational individual persons. It is reason that manifests dynamically in both. Hegel describes the absolute as a dynamic process, a complex system. Hegel believes that the absolute can be reached by human reason, because the absolute is disclosed in the working of the laws of nature and of human mind. The working of the human mind, in particular, is what the absolute expresses itself in the capacity to reason. The truth therefore is, pre-eminently in reasoning. Thus a person thinks the way the absolute expresses itself. It becomes possible to rationalize the absolute. All reality, man included, is basically rational. Man therefore realizes his being rationally. Hegel’s philosophy has its culmination in man’s knowledge of the absolute’s spirit, which is the goal of dialectics. Knowledge of the absolute is the synthesis of the subjective spirit and the objective spirit (i.e. the working of the human mind and the “mind” in its external embodiment in the social institutions respectively). The knowledge of the absolute is made possible, because the human mind is so structured that it eventually and inevitably leads to such knowledge. The individual’s mind is such that it necessarily reaches such knowledge. The spirit, through the dialectic of thesis,
antithesis and the synthesis, is bound to realize its existence in the final stage. In man it acquires the stage of self consciousness.

But Kierkegaard criticizes Hegel, and says that the individual realizes his existence, not of necessity, but of spontaneity, i.e. by an act of will. Will operates in the domain of existence, unlike reason that operates in the domain of essence. With a qualitative leap, man exercises his freedom to will the realization of his true existence. For Hegel, the spirit reaches its final stage by way of the evolution of reason in an impressive system. The spirit concerned need not make any conscious effort, it is brought into existence from without (the outside force). Kierkegaard however notes that, if it is brought into existence from without, it cannot at any rate claim that it also realizes existence all by itself. For Kierkegaard, the individual comes into existence as a result of his free will, the will transforms the static essence into the dynamic existence.

We have to rightly capture the Kierkegaardian opposition to Hegel. In a sense, Kierkegaard is not against the dialectic development of the spirit as exhibited by Hegel. In a way, he himself can be said to uphold a dialectic, when he talks of the individual as a synthesis of body, mind and spirit where the spirit is said to synthesize body and mind. But the difference, too, may not be overlooked. Indeed, it should be highlighted that the dialectic of Kierkegaard does not come about of necessity, but is rather the handiwork of the free individual. His dialectic is of the will that realizes the human existence as to transform man into an individual, the one who truly exists. Existence is a matter which relates to man in a very personal and individual manner. If it is personal, then, it cannot also be attained in any other way than personal. The individual concerned must be personally involved in attaining it. The process is not inevitable, but conscious and deeply "intentional". For Kierkegaard, the individual’s freedom is the instrument in realizing his existence. By exercising his freedom, the individual personally takes part, and is the main force behind the attaining of his existence. The individual has to work on perfecting his existence. No one but he alone can take credit for all the labour put into the task of dynamic existence. For Hegel, existence takes place necessarily, and so, in the
opinion of Kierkegaard, the Hegelian existence cannot be said to be “authentic.” That, which man does not will, cannot be said to be his own. “Happenstance” does not have a place in existence, because existence concerns conscious willing, and it results in conscious and deliberate actions. Kierkegaard’s existentialism throws light on the personal passion, earnestness and inwardness, all of which characterize the voluntary actions. The individual makes a conscious effort to realize his existence. He is aware of his position and his environment, he is impelled to work in such a way that all his actions will have an impact on his personality. He has to help himself if he wants to truly exist. Realizing his true existence is entirely in his own hands.

This is why Kierkegaard takes existence to be an “art” rather than “science”:

The subjective thinker is not a man of science, but an artist, existence is an art.²⁰

The individual is an “artist”. An artist creates artifacts through his efforts; likewise an individual will have to realize his existence by himself, as he freely crafts out his existence. He cannot have his existence realized by another, because such existence would become the existence of the other. Any existence that is not one’s own is eo ipso inauthentic. I cannot live the life of another person, even as another person cannot live my life. Only I, and I alone, can live my life. I exist as myself, and not as another, therefore existence is an intensely personal matter. That which is personal is my inwardness, earnestness and therefore entirely subjective. Anything, that is from outside, cannot be considered as personal. Ultimately existence consists in the individual’s own project. The artist creates his art, using his own imagination. Likewise the individual creates his existence, using his freedom to accomplish his own art of existence. The individual’s task of realizing his existence is made possible by his inward passion, which is actualized in his exercise of freedom.

The effect of this entire process, too, may be carefully noted by us. Since the material that an individual works on is himself, the individual, by exercising his freedom,
brings about "edification" within himself. Self-edification is the end product of this "spiritual" art. This edification is his manner of creating his existence. He creates his own existence, it is a personal effort from within, and not imposed upon him from outside. By creating himself, he becomes an authentic man. The concept of authenticity is dear to all existentialists, and Kierkegaard sows its seeds so that Heidegger could richly reap a harvest on this. To create himself means the individual creates consciously. To do so, he is in inwardness. It appears to me that "inwardness" is Kierkegaard's word for self-authentication, that gets left behind in existentialism, whereas the term "authenticity" gains greater currency later. This inwardness represents the "subjective reflection", or the "existential thought", for Kierkegaard. Objectively, he thinks, there in no relation between the knower and the known, because all reflection is directed outside, and not within. The so called self-reflection is seen as a sort of "bending backwards" from its natural course, as if it were more an exception than a rule. Reflection is merely on the thought-content, and not on the thought-subject. On the other hand, subjective reflection is directed towards the inwardness or the individual, which constitutes the "how", representing the passion of the infinite. This "how", rather than "the what", is the inwardness, the existential thought, which establishes the relation between the knower and the known. This makes the task of the individual one that involves transforming himself into an instrument, that is at once capable of clearly and definitely expressing in existence whatever is essentially human. The individual undergoes edification within himself in order to be this instrument of existence. Only subjectivity accentuates human existence. Kierkegaard says,

The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough to give his life aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to interpenetrate it with thought.21

The "how", which is the passion of the infinite, is subjective, because it can never be affected objectively. Passion is reflected only in earnestness. If passion of the infinite is subjective, then, truth automatically becomes subjective. Only in subjectivity can one
realize his true being. To be subjective means to be in passion, and to be passionate implies that one holds to the paradox of one’s own nature with all his passion.

**F. Dread in Freedom**

With the facing of the paradox of human nature, man also confronts the depth of human freedom. A peep into the abysmal freedom can also make man dizzy. Freedom, being a pure possibility, can be exercised by man to move away from God, his ontic foundation. This alienation may also lead to self-alienation. Therefore, man, in the exercise of his freedom, can experience a strong feeling of “dread”, or “anxiety”. Dread, for Kierkegaard, is crucial, because the feeling brings out the significance of the synthesis of body, mind and spirit that he is. Dread is an objectless feeling, unlike fear. Fear is about something, but dread is about “nothing”. Dread is a state, unpleasant though, man cannot do without. Even though it alarms him, it captivates him, it is a love-hate relationship. Kierkegaard captures its ambivalence:

Dread is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy.\(^{22}\)

To experience dread is to be in despair, and to be anxious over the possibilities of one’s future. In despair man is unhappy, because of his consciousness that he fails to measure up to what he now knows, namely the depth of his freedom, by virtue of the paradox. In anxiety, man is restless, because of his consciousness that, with freedom as a possibility, he may not act in conformity with his nature and the divine dictates. Such a person is characterized by Kierkegaard as a being in “sickness unto death”. But this sickness is of a very different kind in that it does not kill, but mortally tortures. Even so the “death” referred to is very different from the physical death.

Death itself, to a Christian, is not the end of everything, as it is to the atheistic existentialists. From the Christian point of view,
Death is the gate to an eternal life, and every individual must experience it. When Kierkegaard talks of man's "sickness unto death," he means that man, fully conscious of his sinful state, is full of anguish and distress, making him want to die. That such a man is tarnished in the eyes of God and, in helplessness, wants to die but "cannot die," because death is only in the hands of God. Only God is the author of life and death: "No one is asked when he wishes to enter life, no one is asked when he wishes to leave." Man knows with certitude that he is to die one day, but he cannot bring death to himself. And, this very anxiety of having the task of dying, and yet not being able to die, is a way of experiencing death without dying once and for all. Now that man has come to know of his existential predicament that he is a "being-unto-death," he may want to die, but without being able to do so. The only alternative that man has is the desperate cry to God for deliverance from sin, or finitude. Dread then is salvific, in the final analysis. Kierkegaard, here, is very different from the atheistic existentialists, Camus and Kafka. (I shall dwell on this later).

Coming to know of his predicament, man cannot help but feel acutely anxious. He is faced with possibilities, and he needs to make choices, which generate dread in him aplenty. Because he desires to give up sin, he chooses God. By choosing God, he builds a close relationship with God, who teaches him how to live. With God, his dread, anguish and despair vanish. Thus he lives to experience the death of his (past) sinful life, and looks forward to a plentiful life. Kierkegaard says,

The dying of despair transforms itself constantly into a living.

Man, by willing to get rid of his sinful life, experiences despair to the extent that he stands as nothing before God. This generates despair, arresting his whole life, which
however is required as a phase for the death of his sinful life. He is in a state of despair because he wants to be his genuine self. For such a person, “despair is precisely self-consuming.” Therefore to be affected by the sickness unto death does not mean the physical death, but to experience death-like situation within one’s soul to make room for God.

Despair and dread are necessarily experienced by the individual, who is on the spiritual journey of authentic existence. The individual comes to a point of realizing his in-genuine existence, and he arrives at the consciousness of his state of affairs only with the assertion of the claims of the spirit in his nature. Consciousness of one’s predicament marks the first step towards the development. This awakes him to the reality that without the spirit within him he is helpless. Without the spirit, his existence is no more than that of a piece of inanimate object, or at best, of a brute animal. Characterized by pseudo-existence, he rarely exists as human being. The specific mode of human existence is the existence of the free and authentic individual. What concerns him is his existence, the consciousness of which is a prerogative of the spirit. The experience of despair is possible only to a being endowed with spirit. With despair comes dread, too, because dread is spirit’s restlessness. It is the uneasiness resultant upon the consciousness that so far he has lived a pseudo-existence, and not an authentic existence.

The decision is not a flight from the self, because there cannot be any escape from oneself. To rise up from an inauthentic existence does not mean that he has to look somewhere outside. He can find true existence only within him. Therefore he has got to face the despair and dread within him, he cannot shun them. In the decision to confront the dread within rests his existence. Everything he decides will determine the kind of existence he chooses, the genuine or the in-genuine existence. Every decision is preceded by possibilities, which naturally generate dread in him. The individual is in an inchoate state open to many possibilities, and he has got to decide on one, on his own with whatever resources within him. He has to make a conscious effort to choose one, and exclude the others, and be responsible for his decision. His life, in its givenness, i.e. in its
sin and finitude, serves as the backdrop against which he makes his choices. He makes his existence, when he consciously makes every decision. In all these decisions, he has to face life as meaningful to him, because it is his making, his creation. Through his earnest decisions he is able to see life in a new light, as different from the old inauthentic life.

Dread signifies a conflict within the individual. It is the conflict between the known and the unknown, or the past and the future. In dread, the individual is at that point of time, when he is not able to bring a harmonious balance between the two. This is why the individual undergoes tremendous emotional anxiety. He draws his attention inward in self-observation, and becomes extremely sensitive to the outer reality as well as the inner reality. The individual's outer reality consists in his past, and the inner reality in his future, which itself consists in a host of possibilities. The present is the "moment" from where he sees both his past and the future, the outer and the inner reality. The individual, to realize his true existence, must have a true understanding of the contradiction of the past and the future, the outer and the inner reality, in himself. Understanding the contradiction will pave the way for ending the conflict within the individual. The past has a strong grip on the individual, and it is largely involuntary, it has therefore a hold on him unawares. It influences the individual in such a subtle manner that the individual becomes scarcely aware of it, if at all, only after it has influenced him. In our times, the depth-psychologists, in particular, Freud, have spoken of it in various theories of the "unconscious". It invariably comes in conflict with the authentic existence which is a "project" for man. With the understanding of the contradictions, the individual must move forward in bringing about a balance within him. The individual has his determined past, but he is also faced with the future possibilities. The individual will have to bring them together in the present, in the "now". The "now" is what synthesizes the conflict between the past and the future.
G. The Moment in Freedom

Kierkegaard refers to the “now” as the “moment”, because it is characterized by “the leap of faith”, and it is exhibited in the passion with which one’s freedom is exercised. Every exercise of freedom is an act of “faith”, accompanied by an intense passion. Therefore, the unity of the being is realized in the moment of passion. Thus it becomes clear that the “now”, or “the moment”, constitutes the crucial point of time in which the individual realizes the unity of his being, or his time-existence. The “leap of faith” of the individual represents the innermost passion, it is the moment when the individual makes a choice. The “now” represents the point of time when the individual is free from all shackles of the past, and surges forward in future with the strength of passion. Being in passion makes the individual stand before God as “no-thing”, or free. In taking the “leap of faith”, the individual makes the choice to surge into the future towards his projected existence. How does the individual make the choice, or act as a free agent?

The individual is perfectly aware of his outer and inner reality within himself. He feels the contradiction intensely between the “given” and the “possible”, he tries to bring a harmony between the two conflicting forces by exercising his freedom and making the right choice. The individual is aware of his past, solidified as it were, to chain him to the given finitude. In order to break away from the servitude of the past, he has got to venture into the realm of the unknown, the future and the possible. This he does by way of conscious decisions. When the choice shuns the past sinful life to choose God, he breaks free from the known past to the unknown future of the life of faith. However, it is not the case that the past is not required. He is able to make the right choice, because his past life serves as the backdrop against which he rises. In the right choice he brings about a unity of the past and the future to hold them together in the present. Because of the past he is able to make a choice, which consists in choosing a future devoid of the past. But, it must be recognized that he is able to do so because of his past life. If he does not have a finite past, there does not arise the need for a decision making, therefore, the exercise of freedom.
Freedom means the resolution of the conflicts within, and in freedom the
individual realizes his true existence. In freedom he makes himself free from the past, the
known. Thus, to realize one's existence means to bring about a harmonious balance
within oneself. The right choice consists in making a choice, which at once involves both
the realities of the past and the future in the present, for the individual. That he is a unity
of both is implicit in his paradoxical nature itself. By uniting them, the individual reaches
a higher level of consciousness by which the individual is able to relate himself to both
the given and the possible in his nature. The "now", or the present, has the potency to
become the "then", the past of the individual. Therefore, by the continuous exercise of
freedom, the individual lives in the perpetual now, and, in it, keeps on balancing his
conflicts. The "now", becomes the "then", for the future. As the individual moves into the
future, the "then" (which constitutes the harmonious decision) does not anymore throw a
threat to him, because he has overcome the conflict. Now the individual will outlive the
past in a new prospective, which consists in seeing everything as a unity. Thus the
individual, by making the right choice, wills for a new beginning, which consists in
seeing himself as a unity, a synthesis of body and mind, brought about by the spirit
(freedom), made possible by the supreme Spirit, God. That the individual breaks free
from the known, the past, does not mean that the past is forgotten, is not encountered by
the individual anymore. It only means that the individual no longer views the world in the
same way as he did before. Freed of the past, the individual does not move backwards,
but rather forward, because he now has taken a qualitative leap towards life. The
individual did not have passion in the past, but now he does everything in passion.

As the individual makes the right choice, his despair and dread vanish, and they
bring out the liveliness in him. Freedom is the expression of the divine spirit in man, in it
its exercise brings out the liveliness in him. In dread, he is faced with the possibility of
exercising his freedom, but, once the possibility is actualized by the actual choice, it
reveals itself to be the friend of the spirit in man. Thus, man makes a qualitative leap in
willing to choose, made possible by the spirit within him. Only a spirit has the ability to
experience dread, it is indeed a mark of humanness. The greater the dread that man experiences, the greater the quality of man. Amongst all creatures, only man is capable of experiencing dread, because only he has spirit within him. Dread is possible to a being that is at once a spirit, without at the same time ceasing to be a derived being. It is the task of a derived spirit to relate itself to itself. "Such a derived, constituted, relation is the human self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another." 28

II. Self-Relating in Possibility

We may note that this passage of Kierkegaard unmistakably explains the individual in terms of a self-relation. In self-relation man discovers his ontic dependence on God. All social relation with another self is secondary to Kierkegaard, it is made possible through the relation with God. Kierkegaard talks of God as "my other" 29, because the spirit in man is ontically in relation with God; only through God, one individual spirit is in relation to another individual spirit. The body and mind of man, on their own, cannot be said to constitute the totality of man, because only in the spirit does he become whole. The spirit, which reflects God, the maximum spirit, unites body and mind. I may use an analogy, here, with its own limitation, however. A car is made up of a number of parts. Each part of the car has to function in order that we have a car. A car can be brought into use only if we add fuel to the car. Without the fuel we may call the contrivance a car, but it is of no use. Likewise spirit is the fuel for human being to exist. Without spirit man may dwell on earth, but we cannot say that he "exists", in the true sense. We may not call a mechanical contrivance a car, if it does not do the work of a car.

The spirit in man is the indispensable element, without which man cannot exist. It is that element which makes man whole, a perfect combination of mind and body. The spirit is the divine element in man. Because he is a divine being, he has his repose in God. Man, a dweller of space and time, but, with an eye to the eternal, strives to actualize his true being, a synthesis of body, mind and spirit.

102
The self-relating act gives birth to the concreteness of the existing subjective individual. This can be more readily comprehended through an examination of the categories of necessity and possibility, as already hinted previously. Kierkegaard vehemently denounces the Hegelian system, which advocates the evolution of the spirit out of necessity. Hegel is the philosopher of necessity. Kierkegaard however observes that necessity is submersible in abstract thought. It has a limiting effect, it is constricting possibility, or freedom. Abstract thought explains truth by proclaiming the identity of thought and being, but this is not true of an existing individual, whose empirical existence in time and space, on the contrary, separates thought from being. Kierkegaard says,

... the knower is an existing individual for whom the truth cannot be such an identity as long as he lives in time.

The existing individual, above all, has self-consciousness in the body and the environment he lives in. This sets him apart from the idealist who is lost in his thoughts. The existing individual knows, is aware of his position that he has a body and also the capacity to think. He is not lost in his thoughts, but his thoughts are controlled by the body that he possesses, subjected to mechanical laws; his body and thought are further regulated by the spirit. Existence for him becomes a conscious activity, overcoming the constriction imposed by necessity.

Possibility is one of the most dynamic concepts in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, indeed, it is at the root of his concept of freedom. Possibilities save the individual from the suffocating grip of necessity and determinism. Without possibilities, human existence would have no significance. Without possibility man would be reduced meaninglessly to a mere ordinary organism, instinctively responding to the stimuli elicited by his environment. Without possibilities the individual will be left with no choice and, thus, no freedom, because everything he does will become a necessary act. Possibilities are the potencies of becoming, they are responsible for realizing and guaranteeing the
authenticity of the individual in freedom. Though the possibilities are in every sphere of life, they are aplenty in ethical life, but they are maximum in the religious sphere of life.

The ethical individual may be faced with possibilities, he may or may not obey the law, but because the ethical is its own telos, he cannot see any telos beyond these ethical possibilities. If he decides to obey the law, he obeys, and that is the end of the matter. It merely shows his commitment to the law. But, for a man of religious faith, possibilities have an expanse of becoming, because he not only has commitment but he also believes and hopes. Belief and hope put man on the path of continual becoming, for, when the individual believes and hopes, he chooses God, his acts throw light on the quality of his belief, trust and hope in God. This makes it possible for him to entertain passion and earnestness through which alone there is the growth of the individual. Because he takes a leap of faith and surrenders himself to God, the possibility that he chooses works within him directly. Because he chooses with passion, the possibility becomes a source of potency for becoming. The individual is surrounded with infinite possibilities, all of which have significance to him only in passion. Only when he is in passion can he see the potency of the possibilities.

Man's nature is such that it is finite and sinful. It is characterized by the necessity of a pseudo-existence, out of which he has to rise, if he is to truly exist. To exist is to realize the possibilities. When the individual is made aware of his necessity and possibility, the individual experiences despair and dread. But, in that experience, he also sees the possibility of a future, edification and remedy for his being. He experiences dread, because, being in space and time, he has the capability to look to the eternal, the Unknown, for the enrichment of his being. The awareness of both necessities and possibilities are accentuated in the exercise of his freedom. Being aware, the individual dwells in his inwardness and passion. Looking within, he is in the moment of passion, eager to exercise his freedom. Only in earnestness can he realize the existential unity of his being. "This unity is realized in the moment of passion." For Kierkegaard, one's existence is realized not in thought, but in passion, which reflects one's nature of being.
space and time, and yet enhanced in the eternal. The possibility and necessity are united in the exercise of freedom, and freedom itself is bestowed on man by God. Every time man exercises his freedom he relates himself to God and realizes his existence, because God is existence as such.

By willing to choose God, man actualizes his possibilities in resolution and commitment. In other words his existence is actualized in the world at the moment of passion displayed in free decisions. It becomes an actuality in continuity, because exercise of freedom is actualized in time and space. The idealists too may claim that they exercise freedom, but here it can be said that their exercise of freedom does not have any concrete significance. Freedom is not exercised merely at the mental sphere. On the contrary, with the decision taken, one has to actualize one's freedom in action. One has to actively "perform" his freedom, only then can we say that a person has done a free action, and hold him subsequently responsible for the act. The idealist's kind of exercising freedom cannot be accepted as an act of freedom, because as long as it is only at the conscious stage without percolating into action, it has still remained a possibility. But for freedom to be sufficiently carried out, the decision taken should be actualized in action by a being who is in body, who is in space and time. That is why Kierkegaard says that man, existing as freedom, exists as continuity, a progress, an actuality. Therefore existence is anything but passive.

I. Actuality of Freedom

Being an actuality, existence is active. The exercise of freedom implies an active knowledge of oneself. Willing to choose makes the individual concerned realize that he has the potentiality to make himself in God. To know God as one's ontological basis is at once to know the eternal element within oneself. To the extent one knows one's own ontic foundation is to know one's self as grounded in God. The Kierkegaardian dictum may therefore be read: To will is to know the self. Kierkegaard writes,
A man who has no will at all is no self; the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has. 

Again,

The self is freedom

The individual is active not only in the spatio-temporal world, but he is active inwardly in his passion. With every decision at hand, the individual experiences himself as a field of intense action; he experiences a tug of war. It is a war between necessity and the possibility. It is a war either to choose to become or to fall back on his pseudo-existence. Thus the truly existing individual constantly goes through self-experience.

If man wishes to realize his true identity, he has to fall back upon his own resources, in as much as he cannot expect any help from outside. He has to be in isolation, all by himself, to probe deeply into himself. His true existence lies latent within him, and he alone must realize it from within. No outside agency can come to his rescue to take him to his own existence, and so the individual must take the initiative and continue to dwell in intense passion. Kierkegaard says, “The individual having chosen himself, in terms of his freedom, is co-ipso active.” The passion of the individual is not something active for a while, but vanishes, then, to become active, again. The individual should experience passion all the time. It is the passion of the man who concretely exists in the world, unlike that of a recluse. Existence is experienced in the intensity of passion in the world.

On the contrary, a mystic chooses himself abstractly and, in doing so, he chooses himself out of the world. Mystic is a recluse ever on the flight from the world to realize his existence. He takes himself out from the world into the realm of ideas in his contemplation. Kierkegaard says of the mystic, “What he wants rather is to be through with the temporal.” The task is bound to be futile, because it is counter to human nature. Individual’s way of life is just the opposite. He lives subjectively, but in this very world, conditioned by space and time. In choosing to trust and obey God, the individual chooses himself, because God created him in body, mind and spirit, and placed him in the
midst of the created world. By choosing his creator, he chooses the eternal element regulating other elements within him. By choosing the spirit within him, he is able to exercise his freedom, in the environment in which he is placed by God. Therefore in the exercise of his freedom, he relates himself to the spirit in association with the non-spirit and also to the supreme Spirit. When he relates to the supreme Spirit, he indirectly relates to the spirit within. Likewise he relates himself to the non-spirit bound up with the space and time. Thus the individual, by choosing God, chooses himself, and by doing this, he chooses to be in the world. God, on creating him, has placed him in the world and, when the individual chooses God, he indirectly chooses to be in the world. The individual is very much a part of the world. Kierkegaard says,

He has his place in the world. with freedom he chooses his place, that is, he chooses this very place. He is a definite individual, in the choice he makes himself a definite individual for he chooses himself.

Man can find his true existence, to be sure, only in God, because he is ontologically grounded in God, but he has also to find it in the environment which, too, is a part and parcel of his being. He is a spirit in time and place, sharing at once a paradoxical nature. In choosing himself, he chooses both the spirit and the “flesh” to bring about a harmonious balance of his being. He overcomes the conflict within him.

J. Dynamics of Choosing

The existing individual, in choosing, chooses himself. But the content of choice is significant, in as much as we rightly understand the two points of the movement of choice. In choosing God, the individual moves away from himself towards God. Yet, this is a choice of his own self, because when he chooses God, he also moves towards himself as grounded in God. The movement then takes a definite pattern of “to and from”, where, starting at a point within himself, it moves to another point in God, but, on reaching God, it comes back to the same staring point in the self. Thus, in choosing God, the individual
is made to realize his own existence, because God is the source of his existence. When the individual chooses God, God shows him the way of individual's own existence. In choosing God, he chooses the spirit within him, and in choosing the spirit within, he chooses himself in inwardness and passion. On the contrary, by first choosing himself, the individual chooses his existence on his own as devoid of the spirit. Then he chooses only a partial and pseudo-existence, bound to the necessity to which all organisms are chained. It is an existence with no possibility of becoming. Such an existence, to Kierkegaard, is inauthentic, because it is not true to itself. But in choosing God, and thereby himself, the individual firmly stages the claim for his authenticity; he authenticates his derived existence. The individual here establishes himself as a definite individual. The theistic elucidation of freedom in Kierkegaard could not be more explicit.

That the individual, in choosing, chooses himself has an implication to the space and time factor of an existing man. An idealist too may claim that he exists in time, but his understanding of time is largely different from what the existentialists mean by it. For an idealist, time, taken as it is, is an endless and eternal continuum. In it man exists, "sub specie aeterni; in short, he is absent-minded," 37 in it he is lifted to a state of eternity, where only ideas are brought to mind. It is like a fancy, or dream, in which he can conceive anything, but nothing in it is real. But, for the existentialist, on the contrary, to exist means to be in time and space. Only that which is in time and space can be qualified as real. The Real is what is in space and time, therefore, what can be perceived by the sense organs. There is a perfect co-relation between time and space, indeed, modern physicists tend to treat them as a single concept, in as much as they together constitute a dimension of perceived reality. Continuity and movement help us to know about real existence, and real human existence is a dynamic progress. When one is in space or time, one understands what it means to exist in a space-time continuum. One experiences the continuity and movement of time and space, because he understands existence as a unity of body, mind and spirit. Existence does not consist in mere thinking, it is a complex unity of thought and body, and it is exhibited in a free act.
The individual, in choosing, chooses himself in passion. He is in passion, because, being in space and time, he has to look up to the eternal, the unknown, for his survival. The precarious situation of the spatio-temporal being looking up to the eternal generates passion within the individual existing in space and time. He has to make a decision, and the passionate moment of decision is vital for the individual, because it is in this passionate moment of decision that the factors of time and space are reflected in him. In fact, man can make vital decisions precisely because he is in space and time. Man, being in the temporal and the spatial, or "the known," chooses the eternal, or the unknown, and in this act, he gives up the temporal and the spatial, the "known." But it is the known that is able to choose the unknown. Precisely because of this the known temporal is not abrogated. In choosing the eternal, the temporal is given back to him by the eternal.

There is a peculiar "repetition" in the dynamics of choosing. What is given up by man to choose the eternal is given back to man; man has to live in it, in as much as it is an essential ingredient of his choice. God gives back the temporal to man, because it is vital for further exercising his freedom. The temporal serves as the backdrop against which man will have to make further choices. To decide means to resolve to do certain actions, it is to be active; being active is, however, meaningful only if one is also in the space-time continuum. Both are equally important, because, being in one, and not the other, will render everything about the choice into a phantom, and his freedom will have finally no significance. They together make possible passion in the choice. Only man in space and time can look at the eternal with longing. God, therefore, by giving man his existence, releases him back into the world of space and time so that he can continue to strive for perfection. The individual, by choosing himself, chooses his own existence by relating himself to God, his Creator. God gives man in his temporality the freedom to choose, and man is required to strive for perfection by exercising his freedom. This is the reason why he is put back into the spatio-temporal world by God. Existence implies, on the part of man, a striving for perfection in the eyes of God. It is not a finished product but a process, a project. It is not a stage reached, possessed, and then forgotten once and
for all, but a constant striving. Existence is to live dynamically in space and time, lest it should become a mere fantasy.

K. Freedom and Unity

Going a step further, merely living in space and time however does not suffice. The aesthetic and the ethical man, too, can be said to live in space and time, but what sets apart the existing individual is that he consciously brings about a balance between the spirit in him, on the one hand, and space and time, on the other. He can relate to his physical, psychical and the spiritual reality in such a way that it does not result in any inner conflict. The two inner and the outer realities can co-exist in harmony. To exist harmoniously means that the individual should be free from all conflicts within him. Only when he is freed of conflicts can he make his choice the right choice. When the individual makes the right choice, it implicitly shows that the individual is free of conflicts, and thereby he truly exists.

What makes Kierkegaard's thought radically different from that of Hegel is the dynamism of will, that he infuses into the act of consciousness. For Kierkegaard, man exists as a self-conscious being, and not as a mere contemplative unit of abstract thoughts. To exist is to know one's self, to know one's self is to be conscious. Kierkegaard furthers the thesis into a robust voluntarism: To be conscious is to will, and to will is to be self-conscious. It is clear then that the task of every individual is to become self-conscious through freedom. The existing individual does not understand himself as existing unless he is in fact free, and is conscious that he is free. He can be said to be free only when the content of his consciousness can be actualized, that is, acted upon. The exercise of one's freedom actualizes self-consciousness, because only in an act of freedom does the self relates itself to itself. Thus, to be self-conscious means to perform, as Kierkegaard says, "This self-consciousness therefore is a deed". But when
the subject is only and merely conscious, it is inactive, it is dreaming, and hence asleep, it
does not enhance the harmony of the body-mind unity. Only when man exercises his
freedom, does he establish himself as an existing, and self-conscious being. Exercise of
freedom is an act of the spirit, and it unites the body and mind. The individual is a
synthesis of body, mind and spirit, they together exhibit the individual as a free agent.
What does it mean to be free? It means that we consciously decide, or resolve, to do that
which is placed before us as a possibility. We know of our own decisions, because we
have an awareness of the process of decision making. We are aware, because we
experience it, and to experience it is to have self-experience. Each time a decision is
made, consciousness reflects more on itself, because consciousness is the act of decision
making. By having self-experience, more is known about the self. Knowing more about
the self leads to realizing one’s authenticated existence.

By a leap of faith in passion, the individual moves towards God, and, in moving
towards God, he comes into a close relationship with God. The individual understands
that his life, being grounded in God, is in the hands of God. Therefore all his freedom is
the moral freedom, made possible by God. The individual will be in conflict within him,
if he does not accept that his life and freedom is given to him by God. Kierkegaard does
not seek the unmitigated ontological freedom for man. He sees that, if man is to truly
exist, and save himself from self-destruction, he has to hold on passionately to his derived
existence.

L. Negation of Freedom is Self-Destruction

Self-destruction can take many forms. The individual can either choose to
continue with his past, and live a pseudo-existence; or he can also choose to commit
suicide. In both cases he fails to stand out as a unique being. The individual ultimately
destroys himself, if he fails to resolve the conflict within him. The awareness of his
finitude, sinfulness, in religious sense, can push man to the very edge of self-destruction.
The avoidance of self-destruction calls on the part of man for the need to grasp the
paradox of his nature in the right perspective. Man has both to accept the given and open himself to new possibilities through clear and decisive decision. He has to decide to make a new beginning. He should decide to make life meaningful, to exist, in the true sense. By making the right choice the individual will be in a position to know more about himself. Since his being is rooted in God, he will know more about himself, as he relates himself more and more to God. The individual, in thus realizing himself, realizes his existence in God. By relating to God he will know the purpose and destiny of his being created. Kierkegaard says,

The Lord only knows what He meant by me, or what He would make out of me.  

Man therefore is required, with all his passion, to take the leap into the unknown, so that the spirit engulfs him and make him worthy of God’s grace. We see how Kierkegaard does not seek any apology for his theistic, indeed, Christian existentialism. Needless to say, it may run counter to the atheistic existentialism of quite a few thinkers. This counter perspective may also be presented as a criticism against Kierkegaard.

M. A Counter-Perspective to Kierkegaard

Sartre however is radically opposed to Kierkegaard’s understanding of man and his freedom. To him, man is so endowed with freedom that it is in his power to wish for death as well as birth. Sartre will not allow any force from outside to tamper with human freedom. Man is defined by freedom, and he is responsible for all that he is and not merely to all that he does. Man is man because of what he decides and wills; freedom is the core of man, conceived as the “being-for-itself”, as distinct from the “being-in-itself”. Sartre writes, “What happens to me happens through me”. Man is the cause of his own life and death, and he is entirely responsible for them. Man is the maker of his own life with no outside influence. Things happen to man, because he chooses it to happen. By exercising his freedom, man becomes what he is, he makes himself. Freedom moulds him, and God has no influence on him; indeed, any influence of God on man is the
violation of human freedom. It is therefore necessary that there be no God, so that man can truly exist. Sartre rejects outright the Kierkegaardian transcendental dimension of human life. Sartre further says that man has the freedom to choose birth and death, and is responsible for both, although it is not clear to us how man is responsible morally for his birth. His argument, that man's attitude towards the facts that he has a presence in this world, is his way of assuming responsibility to his birth. But it is hardly philosophically convincing. But he advocates his thesis that “in a certain sense I choose being born.” 41 Man, in his life, says Sartre, encounters only responsibilities, and therefore he is perfectly revealed by freedom. For him, man is responsible for what he is and what he does. Sartre poignantly writes, “I am condemned to be wholly responsible for myself.” 42 Sartre thinks that Kierkegaard, for all his concern for the individual and his freedom, indeed, robbed man of his freedom by making him God’s slave. He thinks that Kierkegaard violates human freedom, that Kierkegaard’s advocacy of human freedom is a violence to human autonomy. In my considered opinion, Sartre perhaps is not sensitive to Kierkegaard’s distinction between the ontological and the moral freedom. Further, Sartre failed to explain adequately the given finitude of human existence, even if he were to reject the human transcendence. The radical autonomy, implicit in Sartre’s human freedom, was therefore increasingly rejected by some existentialists in our own times.

There is, again, a drastic difference between Kierkegaard, on the one hand, and Camus and Kafka, on the other, when we direct our attention to the value, or meaning of life. Both Albert Camus, a French, and Franz Kafka, a German, are not philosophers in the conventional sense, but are considered nevertheless to be existentialists by virtue of their novels and essays, which reflect their commitment to existential ideas and ideals. Their thoughts are different from Kierkegaard’s on the value of life, in as much as they talk of life as absurd. They attempt through their literature an understanding of the phenomenon of human life, and come to conclude to the absurdity, futility and the meaninglessness of human life, and thus run counter to the Kierkegaard’s philosophy of life.
Camus considers the world as non-rational. Man, being a conscious human, wants to understand the nature of the world, but his attempt is bound to fail. The physical world, much less, the human world, cannot present any structural coherence. Man is left alone in isolation, because the world is not capable of providing him any support. As such man’s life is meaningless, but he has no alternative but to live it. Man lives however a routine and monotonous life as if he were a driftwood. But, “One day, however arises the question, “why”?”, which defies an answer. Camus says that suicide perhaps can be a solution to man’s meaningless life, but, on analyzing, he concludes that death is not the solution, but only an escape, as Caligula mutters in the play bearing the same name: Murder is no solution. In death man cannot solve his problems, because, though he exercises his freedom and kills himself, it does not change his state of life, he is fated to live a meaningless life. Man is faced with a hopeless predicament because of the irrationality of the relationship between him and the outside world. He cannot know, and so his life lacks value. After all, what is life without knowledge? His life is useless, he aspires towards eternity, and is crushed by conditions which are all around him. He believes that it is man’s fate to live without hope and grace. Man cannot grasp life to the fullest, because there will always arise new avenues which will pave the way for new questions, reasserting the absurdity of human existence.

There is some similarity between Kierkegaard and Camus in their analysis of the human predicament. Kierkegaard, too, in analyzing the givenness of human existence, sees in it its finitude and sinfulness. This accords with the Christian perception of human existence as characterized by the original sin. But Kierkegaard would not go with Camus, in as much as he, being a Christian philosopher, recognizes the transcendence in human life, and acknowledges the possibility of meaningfulness of human life. Acknowledging the spirit in human nature, the image of God, as the Bible conceives it, he seeks the realization of meaning by way of exercising human freedom, although it is the moral, and not the ontological freedom. In the free commitment to God, man regains for life its meaningfulness.
Franz Kafka, a German litterateur, resembles in his thought Camus a great deal. He is of the view that in man there is a hidden guilt of commission. The original sin of Christianity has assumed in him the original guilt minus God. "Kafka knows two things simultaneously, both with equal assurance: that there is no God, and that there must be God." This is the source of an ever-present dilemma found in all his writings. Man, for Kafka, is a prisoner in the strange world, he is lonely, and cannot quite fit in into his physical world, nor can he come in contact with the soul. "The soul does not know itself. Hence it must remain unknown." Kafka, guided by his simultaneous knowing, believes that man "longs for matter, ... at the same time he denies it; he is appalled by spirit even when he must seek it absolutely." Faced with this contradiction in his personality, man withdraws into himself helplessly, since "No exit is to be found." Man feels excluded from the world, and consequently does not know what he is capable of. This kind of situation leads him to despair, and makes him unable to decide and, thus, makes freedom a nightmare for him. In such a situation man cannot see any meaning in life. Life seems empty, for Kafka, against which he cannot rise up. He concludes, "That is just it. Man cannot see beyond himself. He is in the dark."

Once again, there may be a great deal of similarity between Kafka and Kierkegaard in the analysis of human predicament. Kierkegaard's despair and dread is similar to Kafka's despair and helplessness. Both have the rare perception of the depth of freedom. However, Kierkegaard does not seek refuge in the self-enclosure that Kafka helplessly advocates. Because of his Biblical vision of the nature and destiny of man, Kierkegaard advocates the self-transcendence of man. Because man is a synthesis of body, mind and spirit, it is possible for the spirit to assert and assume the regulative power. Man can hope to seek meaning in life by way of exercising his freedom and choosing God. In choosing God, man chooses himself and realizes the authenticity of his existence.

The idea of freedom in Sartre, Camus and Kafka is greatly different from that of Kierkegaard. Human freedom was seen by the former as constricted within the physical
world, its expansion and fulfillment was seen within the confinement of the physical world. Man was seen as a part of the physical environment where he operates. But, this did not help man much in enhancing either the quality of life or endow it with meaning. It ultimately made life worthless. Their existentialism was branded as pessimistic, and this, not without reason. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, found freedom of man as representing the harmonious blend of both the physical and the spiritual aspects of man. Perhaps, it gracefully lifted man to a status higher than that of the animal way of life, befitting the dignity and integrity of man as an individual. Because freedom for Kierkegaard means a decision, based on faith, and because to be free means to exist, meaningfulness of life cannot be ruled out from his understanding of man. This surely is a contribution in our understanding of human nature.

In conclusion, it can be said that Kierkegaard’s concept of the individual is inextricably linked with that of freedom. The individual is the free man. Such a thesis may be propounded by many a thinker, but the dynamics for it in Kierkegaard may be distinctive. He is very different from the other thinkers, notably, the atheistic existentialists. This is so, because, for him, freedom, which is vital for authentic existence, can be understood only by taking into consideration the metaphysical or the ontological commitment of man to God. By choosing God, man chooses to obey and serve God at all times. As a result, he chooses God again and again. With every free action, the individual moves closer to God. By choosing God continuously, he makes his own existence a process. With every free action, he realizes and knows more about his existence. Human existence is now no more a state attained once and for all. Rather existence should be understood as an actuality, which is, far from being a finished product, a process, a project. On his journey of spiritual progress, man experiences tremendous anguish, despair and dread because of his relation with the absolute, while he himself is relative. Man exists as a being in space and time, but this is necessary for exercising his freedom. In choosing God, he chooses himself; by choosing himself he finally authenticates his existence. But this may not be construed that the individual is acting under any compulsion. Faith in God and religion, understood as the individual’s
commitment to God, do not contradict freedom. In fact religion and faith are made possible, only when the individual makes a conscious effort to seek himself as grounded in God. Kierkegaard is basically a religious philosopher. Here, too, he is an existentialist philosopher, in as much as even religion, to him, comes after existence as propounded by Kierkegaard. Man first exists, and only thereafter his religion follows, if it is so willed. Thus Kierkegaard is an existentialist, whose thoughts are flavoured by religious insights. Indeed, Kierkegaard can be said to be the first to have shed light on the existential elements such as individuality, freedom, autonomy of man, and also the feeling of dread in man. To realize his existence, man requires to acknowledge his true reality, that he is a unity of the temporal and eternal aspects in him. Only the individual exists, because only the free man is the individual.