CHAPTER V

DYNAMIC PERSONALITY

Since one of the great contributions of Kierkegaard to existentialist philosophy is the resurrection of the concept of human personality, through that of the individual, this chapter is devoted to the study of perfecting human personality. Individual is a dynamic personality, in virtue of his capacity to adopt various “attitudes to life”. Existence of the individual person is dynamically realized as he progresses through these attitudes of life. Indeed, human existence is deeply personal, it makes for the personality of man. It is the personal dimension of human existence that makes it too difficult to define it; nonetheless, it is subjectively grasped. Hence it is grasped in terms of subjectivity in man. Man’s subjectivity is at its highest in the act of decision making, progressively taking man from the lower to the higher “stages of existence”. The “religious stage” is the crux of human existence, for, here, human personality is trained to exist in and for God. Perfecting of human personality, is, however, understood as a continuous process, where the “aesthetical stage” is sought to be continually refined, “ethical stage” is pushed to the borders of religious stage, even if it may have to be at times suspended, and, finally, the religious stage is made the very breath of man’s dynamic personality.

A. Irreducibility of Human Existence

Kierkegaard’s quest for human reality is apparent in all his writings. This led him to reject its reconstruction in terms of an idealistic unity, or identity, of thought and being, as was done by Hegel. Despite the semantic nuances, unity and identity are often taken by the idealistic absolutists to have the same meaning. A well-known dictionary \(^1\) explains “unity” as “the state of being one, oneness”. Likewise “identity” is explained by
it as “the state of being exactly the same.” For convenience, I will use the word “unity” in the following analysis. Let us begin by asking, first of all, if such a unity can be talked about. When we come across a certain unity, it is obvious that its parts, united into a whole, are likely to be compatible with one another. For two forces to come together and unite as one requires a compatibility, or unanimity, from both sides. Each should be structured in such a way that the one can easily merge with the other. In other words, they should not be incommensurable with each other. The unity at hand for our explanation is that of thought and being.

Thought is that which deals with ideas and thinking. Being, on the other hand, for all its “primitiveness”, is much more difficult to define. As a noun it has meant anything that exists either in reality or thought. One could say that being is an “essence”, a nature. But, as a verb, being is the “act of existing”. Here is the difficulty. There is hardly any compatibility between thought and existence. This is all the more so in respect of human reality. In fact, we are to know what existence of man is only through this unity. What is existent is already a united whole. Attempt to understand it through unity is like putting the horse behind the cart. When we do not have in hand a second element required for a unity, we cannot talk of a unity at all. The idealist makes the mistake of talking about existence as a unity of thought and being, both themselves existent already. This makes it clear that idealists do not view “being” in the right perspective. They take existence for granted. Moreover, there can never be a unity of thought and being, because, as parts, they are entirely different. The one belongs to the epistemological order, and the other, to the ontological. They are contrary to each other, they are in conflict with each other, if they are transposed.

But, the Hegelians encashed on the conflict. They made conflict integral, not only integral to our knowing, but also to the structure of being. Being passes through growth and evolution through conflict. This they indiscriminately applied to human reality, too. If man is in conflict, he will not be able to live a life the right way. Existence, human existence, in particular, on the other hand, consists in living the life in a manner that does
not represent a conflict. The idealist, in the opinion of Kierkegaard, subscribed to a conclusion wholly unacceptable. Kierkegaard however saw existence as a step ahead of the conflict within man. He views existence as the synthesis of contradictory elements in man. Indeed, existence consists in resolving the conflict within each individual. On the contrary, the Hegelian thesis of considering existence as nothing but thinking leads us nowhere, because in thinking we cannot have being qua being. In thinking there can be at the most a conformity between thought and the conceptual being, which however is the same as conformity of thought with itself. There is no passage from the thought to reality outside it. Thus human existence cannot be understood by mere thinking, because in thinking one may even be subjected to the temptation of thinking away one’s own existence. This in fact happens, when man tries to understand existence from a distance.

When we use the words, “from a distance”, we understand that the matter at hand concerns not a single but two referents. In the examples, “We waved from a distance”, “I could see Joe from a distance”, there is a reference to two persons: The “we” that waves the hands, and the “they” that are waved at; “I” who see, and “Joe” who is seen. They are separated from each other by a considerable space; they stand (stance) as spatially separated (dis-). The two referents, or persons, are not one, nor parts of a whole. The word “distance” implies that they are situated differently from each other. Likewise, when the idealists say that existence is the unity of thought and being, they have in mind existence outside their own existence. Because they consider existence as something outside man, they wrongly come to such a conclusion. As a result they fail to conceive the individual as the “possessor” of, or the “instrument” behind, existence. Human reality is the irreducible individual person. Kierkegaard therefore thinks that man is a concrete being, he cannot be reduced to concepts, as if he were an “essence” first, to which an existence somehow accrues, then, from outside. Hegelian philosophy of man fails to speak to us.

The moment existence is described in words, as the Hegelians do, it no longer stands as existence. It becomes a mere concept, robbing man of all his concrete
endowments like freedom, will, individuality, autonomy --, indeed, his existence. It is one thing to have freedom of thought and another to have freedom of speech. Kierkegaard thinks that Hegelians have erred in turning their freedom of speech into a system. Man can have freedom of thought (i.e. existential thought), it in fact enriches his life, but to exercise freedom of speech without discrimination is suicidal. At least with existence such freedom does not in any way help man. Existence is not what is talked about, but it is what makes speech itself possible. The moment he utters his existence, he nullifies his own existence, because existence cannot either be defined or reduced to concepts, the categories of thought, but can only be experienced. Directing his diatribes against the Hegelians, Kierkegaard sarcastically remarks,

How absurd men are! They never use the liberties they have, they demand those that they do not have. They have freedom of thought, they demand freedom of speech.

The remark is apt to those, even in our own times, who vociferously demand their freedom of speech without weighing the pros and cons of their utterances judiciously.

Existence should not be understood as something outside man. It is inseparable from man. Nay, more, it is what man is. Because one has existence, addressing him as so and so becomes meaningful. For example, someone is addressed as “Mr. Paul”, the addressee knows that this Mr. Paul exists, is alive. If it is the case that he is already dead, then, Mr. Paul will be referred to as “the late Mr. Paul”, and not as “Mr. Paul”. It can also be said that, “Mr. Paul ceased to exist”, meaning that he is dead, that he is not alive. In all these phrases, the sense of existence can be understood as “living”. As far as a human being is concerned, we can say that only when man is alive do we say that he exists. Along with this sense of “living”, we may have to read many other senses as well. To live means to “feel”, “do” and “become”. Moreover, life of every man does not follow a specific pattern, which is why it is often said, “Life is what we make”. Existence, as life, then, is not a finished and ordered product, but a “process”, a “project”, which every man
has to go through according to his own genius and endowment. It is intensely personal, subjective, private.

Life is what man makes of himself, at once the cause and effect of his actions. It is an unchartered becoming, because man is a free agent. Life is always a progress, a forward movement, and not a finished and dead end. No one knows when he is to die, nor does he say that he has reached an end in his life, nor that he has nothing more to do in life. No one knowingly and willingly says that he will die at such and such time (cases of suicide are not relevant here!). Even the man who is fully prepared to die, having finished a great many tasks set before himself by himself, does not know the exact hour of his death. Death occurs, often, when man is least aware of it, often least prepared for it. In this sense life is a process which does not reach its final end. If existence is the same as life for man, we may say that existence is a process, and not a product. Thinking can lead us only to possibilities, but existence is actuality, because it is dynamic living. This actuality is continually brought about both creatively and qualitatively through man’s will. Possibilities are actualized by the assertion of man’s will. The individual makes decisive decisions, which are not outside of him, but deep within him. Decisions are intensely subjective. Hence Kierkegaard holds that human reality, or existence, is personal; therefore, subjectivity is the truth for the individual.

B. Subjectivity and Personality

How does man come to acquire the truth of subjectivity? Kierkegaard, throughout his writings, more notably in *The Concept of Dread*, speaks of how God, the ultimate Spirit, is related to the body, mind and spirit of man. Descartes, speaking of man in terms of psycho-physical dualism, unlike Kierkegaard’s trilogy, argues that man’s mind and body are related to each other, and that they meet at a point which is the pineal gland in the brain in the human body. Descartes explained only how mind and body in man are related to each other to account for the mutual interaction. The view, we know, was called into question even within rationalism. But Kierkegaard goes a step further in
saying that body and mind of man are united by the spirit, and that the spirit is further related to the supreme Spirit, as its ontological ground. Therefore, man has his repose in the Spirit. Kierkegaard is wedded to the Christian belief that God created man and, in creating man, he implanted in man the spirit, the “image of God”. With the divine image the supreme Spirit qualifies the personality of man, which is unique to every man. Endowed with the spirit, man has in him the eternal element, in a seed, as it were, and it gets activated in the exercise of freedom.

To be free means to be aware of possibilities, and consciously make decisions, which is possible for man only in his subjectivity. Freedom is possible only in subjectivity, otherwise it will not be a free act. A free act is a conscious act. There is a difference between a human act and an act that gets done in man mechanically, chemically. Likewise human actions are different from natural events. Only the former are free actions. Doing something knowingly implies that the doer is actively involved in the act, because he is a conscious spirit. Non-conscious actions do not involve the doer. Further, we can say that conscious actions have value attached to them, because they are the outcome of a decision on the part of the doer. The agent of a conscious act considers his action to be a true action, because he is involved in it, he pursues it for a good that he seeks for himself. A non-conscious action lacks such value, though it may have its own effect. In a free action, man is fully subjective, because the action is made possible due to what God has endowed man with, namely freedom. In this sense, subjectivity itself is taken to mean man’s freedom. Man has subjectivity by virtue of his being established by God as creature with spirit in him. Each man has subjectivity, and the matter of concern is how subjective each man is.

While subjectivity is in every man, in virtue of his personality, the manner in which it is exercised depends on the attitudes man displays in his life. Hence, the question, if man is subjective in the right path, becomes crucial. To see how man is subjectively in the right path, or how he perfects his personality, Kierkegaard identifies
three stages of life in which man's subjectivity may be exercised: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious stages. They are not so much chronological as logical stages.

(i) Aesthetic Subjectivity

The aesthetic stage is seen as the kind of life in which one is driven by sensuous inclinations and lack of commitment. In it one is oblivious of one's moral obligations and religious concerns. Freedom is not exercised through any serious personal commitments. Because the aesthete does not make decisions by personal commitments, he is reduced to mere sense impressions and instinctual drives. At this stage of life, he is what he merely is, and not what he becomes. All becoming involves a qualitative decision. Man at this stage is merely dreaming, as it were, he cannot differentiate himself from his environment. He is characterized by the "stimulus-response" of the environment and organism respectively; he is less than the individual man. But becoming an individual is solely in his own hands. It however involves tremendous efforts subjectively to become what he can from what he already is. Nevertheless, his true being is within him, he only has to make an effort to uncover and discover it. Kierkegaard gives a telling simile of a pregnant woman's fear, who, on checking the course of nature, may fear that she may give birth to a monster. But, for the woman who gives birth spiritually, there is nothing to fear, because, in a sense, she gives birth to herself. Now everyman's predicament is that of a woman in travail to give spiritual birth to herself. It is within man's power to choose to be such a woman. It takes only a decision on man's part to become what he already is. The travail of becoming is spiritually creative. The aesthete however is not prepared for the creative becoming.

The aesthetic man lives only for the moment. He refuses to let go his pseudo-reality, because in it there is the momentary enjoyment, and life here is like a flotsam that drifts aimlessly. But the aesthetic life is a way of deception, not so much to others as to oneself. It is a life where one deceives oneself by refusing to make decisions, thereby holding oneself from moving forward in life. One plunges headlong into the momentary
pleasures one after another, however fleeting they may be. The individual does not make free decisions, as he allows himself to be ruled by his bodily passions and drives. But the aesthete is in for a rude shock. Every instant he devotes himself to the pleasures, he experiences at the end of it all not pleasure, but despair, and this discovery awakes him to the reality that the pleasure pursued is after all in vain. One works furiously to attain what one desires, but, in doing so, he is left in the end with nothing but despair, dejection and nullity. This feeling of despair and irony results in the awareness of a requirement for a higher form of existence. Kierkegaard says,

\[\text{You have seen through the vanity of all things, but you have got no further.} \]

Man may have achieved for a while what he wanted, he nevertheless feels a void in his life, he fails to get a feeling of contentment.

This leads to venturing into the next and higher stage of life. It should however be mentioned that the venturing into the next stage is not an inevitable, much less a necessary, step for the individual. The individual may feel the void, but he may continue to live in the same fashion. The passage from one stage to the other is marked by a definitive decision, for which not all are prepared. This applies to the ethical man, too. The ethical man, too, may not venture into the religious stage. The development of the individual from the one stage that he is to the next higher stage solely rests on the qualitative and radical decision he has to make for the sake of becoming. Kierkegaard is of the view that, for man to reach the final and religious stage, it is not mandatory to have lived both the aesthetic and ethical stage. The individual can skip a stage, although for the generality of mankind a progressive movement is recommended. Thus, though the stages are not chronological but logical, there is a gradation depending on the age and stage of life that one grows into.

When we look from the perspective of personality, too, the aesthetic man is said to fall short of the actual man. Immediacy is the hallmark of the aesthete. The personality
of the aesthetic man is immediately determined, in the sense that he lives for the moment. His personality is largely physical, because he lacks the qualitative commitment, which is a feature of the mind and the spirit in man. Since the spirit in man is the regulative principle for other elements of body and mind, his personality should be spiritually defined. Only the spiritual personality holds value, in as much as it is more than the physical personality. Physical personality is without substance, it may look beautiful from outside, but it lasts only for the moment like the beauty appreciated from outside. It is forgotten no sooner than it is beheld. But the spiritual personality is radiant, because being received in seed from God as the inner beauty, it is further developed by the individual through his striving. Physical personality is like the book in one’s personal library, of which one knows nothing, because one has not cared to read it. Such a book is as good as not having it. Likewise merely to have a physical personality is as good as not having one. Genuine personality is spiritual, and it shines from within. Aesthetic personality however is determined by immediacy. Kierkegaard observes, “Personality immediately determined is not spiritual but physical.”

(ii) Ethical Subjectivity

Dissatisfaction with the aesthetic way of life on account of the despair generated by it, may pave the way for man to take the first step towards the ethical stage. As man enters the ethical stage, he is not a totally new person, he does not sever completely from his aesthetic personality, but that it is gradually transformed. The state of irony and despair experienced by the aesthete is the first ray of the new day for the ethical man. Because he experiences the feeling of emptiness, man is able to move into the next stage, thereby giving the element of continuity to life.

Ethical stage is characterized by the (ethical) commitment to ideals of action. With the ethical we find the emergence of decisions in man. He is portrayed as the ideal citizen, who follows all rules laid down by the society. He is a moral being, who takes decisions in order to live in conformity with the society he is in. Commitment is the
hallmark of his life. He is committed to his family, the society, the state and the church. His relations to them are governed by the moral norms. Kierkegaard recognizes such norms to be universal. He often exemplifies it with the conjugal commitment. But, the ethical decisions and commitments are not necessarily of the highest quality. Nevertheless, the ethical man, by associating himself with the society in all its forms, associates with the universal. He is the "society-man", and not yet the particular individual standing in particular relationship with the absolute. He has not distinguished himself from the matrix of his environment. His life is of course higher than that of the aesthete, but he does fall short of the highest possible relation. Kierkegaard says,

He now acquires some little understanding of life, he learns to imitate the other man, noting how they manage to live, and so he too lives after a sort. 5

He learns, and definitely makes decisions, but such decisions may socially and ethnically fortify, but do not have the power to spiritually edify. The ethical man is a man of duty, who has the support of the society, because others understand his greatness, they admire him, they reward him by their appreciations and recognitions. In this sphere everything is seen in the light of the universal. The particular however is pushed back to the insignificant corner of his life. Everything has to manifest in the universal, it is revealed and nothing is concealed. Man's sole ethical task is to bring out his hidden being out in the open, so that he identifies himself with the universal ideal. Kierkegaard notes,

So his ethical task is to develop out of this concealment and to reveal himself in the universal. 6

Importance is given to the outward harmony with his ethical ideal.

The possible difficulty however is that such an atmosphere may not help in becoming the true human being, which emphasizes on the personal, the inner and the particular. The ethical fails to transcend the universal in order to reach the particular. Indeed, the particular has to be abrogated to reach the ethical universal. Since truth is
"subjective", it may come in conflict with the universal, which is necessarily objective. Therefore the ethical may fall short of reaching the maximum subjectivity. Ethical man firmly dwells in the universal, therefore, he may fail to make decision which edifies. The ethical labours to transform man into the universal man, not because it is his duty imposed from outside, but because he finds it in himself in his commitment. He is conscious of himself to the extent that he sacrifices the particular for the sake of the universal. He does everything for the welfare of the universal, expecting nothing in return. His sacrifices are heroic. The ethical works in building a kind of personality, which has a universal identity. His commitment is to the outward, and not to the spiritual element within. The ethical task is essential to him, because the ethical gives significance to his life. For now, he is content with such a "group-personality". He is a perfect social man.

The ethical man easily identifies himself with the race of man. Adam is a "fallen" being, and his imperfection is inherited by the subsequent generations of mankind. Oppressed by the weight of imperfection or fallenness, he feels the guilt and the dread. Dread is in-built in man. Because man is born in imperfection, he feels the dread oppressively. Man's dread grows ever more, as sensuous imperfection increases from one generation to another. This Kierkegaard refers to as "the quantitative dread". Man has here only an obscure knowledge of his imperfection, but he is not yet fully aware of it, because, being in the historical nexus, man confounds himself with the race and its history. By confusing with the race he does not take responsibility for his own actions. Particularity is swept away by the race. He rather holds the race responsible. He fails to see that his concern should not, in the final analysis, be the universal but himself. Man cannot be aware of the "qualitative dread" in the ethical. Indeed, the ethical man is racially risen above the others. "He who becomes guilty in dread becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to be." 7

The ethical man is awakened to the responsibilities of his deeds, only when he is challenged with the "religious paradox", a religious "mystery", say, Christ, the God-man.
The most common challenge is that of the “paradox of sin”, or man's finitude. Man knows his sin intrinsically, and this leads to a struggle within him which results in despair and dread, because he realizes that to make the right decision, the right choice, against sin and for God, in the single act, he should be in passion, and be with God. He experiences now the religious dread because he is in sin, not because of the racial sin but because of his personal sin. Ethically he may be guilty as a result of the quantitative dread. Because of the inherited sin, there is a quantitative increase in the predisposition to sin in the individual from generation to generation. This dread of sin or imperfection, in turn, brings the actual sin with it. He now experiences the qualitative dread.

However, it should not be construed, here, that the individual is determined by dread to commit the actual sin. The individual has the tendency to commit sin because of his inherited imperfection, but this does not necessarily lead to the actual sin. The individual is fully responsible for his own sin, he has the moral freedom. It is in his power to actually commit or not to commit sin. Though he has the tendency, he can take a qualitative leap by way of his personal decision. Mere tendency does not mean the actual commission of sin. The tendency is still a possibility. The individual needs to take a conscious decision to actualize a possibility. With a conscious decision the individual brings about the qualitative dread, the actual sin. When Kierkegaard says that dread in turn brings sin with it, he only means that the individual is alive, is a descendant of Adam and Eve, he is born and that he has the freedom and he may commit sin on his own. This is Kierkegaard’s way of saying that the individual is a free agent. The individual, personal, sin is a function of his free decision and he is fully responsible for it. To overcome it, it is necessary to receive the almighty God within himself unconditionally, as one enters the third and final religious stage.

(iii) Religious Subjectivity

At this juncture the individual as such does not desert the ethical stage. He does not detach himself completely from the ethical, indeed, his ethical consciousness grows
even more acute, because he sees the other in divine light. He continues to be an ethical man, but with an eye on the eternal. His passion and commitments are however shifted to the mystery of the divine. He is an ethical as well as a religious man. But his priority concerns the eternal. If ever the individual is faced with the dreadful choice of commitment either to the ethical or the religious, he definitely shows his loyalty to the religious by way of teleologically suspending the ethical, and suffer in silence for his decision.

In the final stage of life, if he is subjected to the trial of faith, man stands alone, amid mockery and ridicule by his race, because the "crowd" fails to understand his suspension of the ethical. He is the single individual in relation to the paradox, who stands in dissonance with the crowd. Every religious paradox transcends the merely ethical, which, after all, being universal, rational and objective, is perfectly understandable. Kierkegaard is of the view that without the paradox of Jesus Christ, who is at once God and man, Christianity itself is not possible. Thus Christianity is a paradoxical religion. Indeed, all religious life is paradoxical in one or the other way. This is bound to be so because God and man are not of the same status. The one belongs to the order of the creator, and the other, to the order of the creature. Moreover, the paradox of God-man that Christ is is the personal intervention by God in the human history. To the religious man therefore all truth is what pertains to him most passionately, therefore is deeply subjective. The highest truth can only be the truth of faith.

Truth of faith for Kierkegaard is "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness." Kierkegaard obviously refers to the truth for the subject, whereby the individual grows spiritually. He deliberately juxtaposes the seemingly contrasting concepts of objectivity and uncertainty. Prima facie, we tend to think that truth is characterized by objectivity and certainty. He "rejects" such truth, because such truth does not elicit either passion or inwardness. There is no need to hold fast to it. It is not the certainty, but the mysterious, that elicits our passion. But it should also be such truth that it can be appropriated for our growth of personal life.
Hence passion has to be combined with the inwardness of the subject, who wants to assimilate the truth concerned for subjective growth. In the commitment to the paradox of Jesus Christ, there may be the certainty of historical Jesus, but this is secondary; what is primary is the Christ of faith. It is the latter which is the object of the truth of faith. Kierkegaard writes,

In this case, however the dialectical contradiction lies essentially in the fact that the historical comes in the second place. 9

The inwardness of the individual, directed to the Christ of faith, that can never be objective, takes the first place. Faith is possible only in respect of the paradoxical or mysterious. This truth of faith is the highest, because it can be appropriated subjectively. All objective truth involves a degree of objectivity, because it has some historical knowledge in it. But all historical knowledge, at its maximum, can only be an approximation to the truth. But the truth of faith is about willing subjectively to aspire and hold on to the historical, in the interest of appropriating the eternal and the unknown; hence, it enhances the existential quality of man. In virtue of man’s being created by God, he has been established into existence, but, because of his sins, his existence is clouded. His existence however is not lost totally, but only that he does not consciously realize it, it is overshadowed by his sins. Faith presupposes the existence gratuitously given. Thus Kierkegaard says, “In order to have faith, there must first be existence, an existential qualification.” 10 But the growth in faith depends on man’s striving by way of exercise of freedom for God. Every individual must exercise his freedom with utmost passion and earnestness. The existential element referred to is the native freedom of man. Because he has freedom, he is able to grow in faith and thereby improve the quality of his existence in God. The instrument for realizing existence therefore is the exercise of freedom.
C. Dynamic Existence

In stating that man is an existence, Kierkegaard wants to highlight the continuity of his nature as distinct from an inert essence. Only man as a continuity in existence can make a qualitative leap, or will to choose. In willing to choose, he chooses himself out of various possibilities and choices. However, in willing to choose himself, he is in isolation, for he is no longer in the universal crowd; by making a decision, he withdraws from his surroundings. He establishes his uniqueness, his individuality as a being capable of making a choice. However, he moves from the given existence to existence in continuity. The self, that is chosen, must have existed prior to the choice, or else it cannot be claimed to be a choice. The self that is chosen is the existential qualification referred to, and the choosing itself is made possible, because of the existential qualification, which is the spirit within man that is bestowed on him as a part of his nature by the creator. The existential qualification is man's freedom, and Kierkegaard represents it by such terms as the "spirit", "subjectivity", "consciousness" etc. The individual exercises his freedom by willing to choose, thereby qualitatively changes his life, in as much as the self now becomes self-conscious. This transformation takes place in time, ensuring his existence in continuity. Thus the existing individual is best understood as that which is in continuity.

How does man come to a position where he is able to make the qualitative leap, or is able to have faith? Man, to begin with, may be said to be in an existential slumber, because he is still not aware either of his limitations or of his possibilities. But this cannot go on forever, because he is a being capable of self-reflection, hence, at some time or other, he looks at himself and at the same time looks to that perfect Being, the ground of his own limited being, and who lacks nothing. In the consciousness of his limited being vis-à-vis the illimitable holiness of God, he is struck by the sin-consciousness:

In sin-consciousness the individual becomes conscious of his difference from the human in general which becomes by itself conscious of what it is to exist qua man. 11

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Now, he becomes aware of the possibility of dynamic existence. When man is faced with the paradox, it dawns on him that the possibility can be realized in the exercise of his freedom. The identification as an individual, emerging from the amorphous collectivity, can be achieved, provided that in passion and commitment, he can accept the paradox. When he realizes this, he may make a conscious effort to exercise his freedom with all his passion. The acceptance of the paradox is the first step, which will determine the course of his life henceforth. With the consciousness of his sins, he also sees the light which will deliver him from his sins. Man is now able to make qualitative decision, because he has faith in God. Thus, it may be said that, when man becomes sin-conscious, he is in a process of becoming. Prior to being sin-conscious, he was nevertheless a sinner, but it lacked any passion either against it or for the perfection of the divine. The consciousness results in certain alterations in the position of the subject himself. The individual is now inwardly in a different position, because he is aware of his sins. With consciousness of sin the individual may be said to have taken the first step to existence. Thus existence can be realized only in inwardness, man moves in a forward direction, learning even more of himself as he progresses. We should not imagine that all these he does with great care, because it is a process of decision in isolation, which expresses itself in tremendous pathos, not necessarily joyous. It is a moment of uncertainty, confusion and dread. The individual’s relation with the absolute becomes more and more particular, defining his isolated personality sharply, at times in dissonance with the ethical universal.

Let us now look into the impact that the religious stage has for the ethical stage. This has to be seen at two levels. The first level is a positive relation to the ethical, whereas the second level marks a state of being at variance with it. The religious man is committed to the ethical norms, which often are inextricably associated with religion. This is partly because every religion, most notably Christianity, has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Vertical transcendence is inseparable from the horizontal immanence. But the level of commitment to the ethical in itself lacks that passion, which can be found only in the particular’s relation to the absolute in religion. The ethical is still
open to the rationality, and to that extent, the "passion" involved is rationalized. But the particular's commitment to the religious realities is intense passion and inwardness. We find the level of commitment in it to be far higher than what it is in the ethical. In the religious life the particular is in passion, despite the seeming oddities of the religious paradoxes. His ethics itself becomes religious, being grounded in religion. Only after the individual has reached out to God, can he reach out to his fellow brothers and sisters. Religion so infuses the ethical that all ethics, on the part of man, is seen as an extension of his religious life. There is no variance here between religion and ethics. One echoes the other's sentiments. Man learns what love is when he is in relation with the absolute and infinite love. When the individual loves God, his relation with fellow beings also takes a positive attitude. Likewise when he displays any form of human love, conjugal, fraternal, filial etc., he incarnates the divine love among the human beings. A religious man is recognized by the manner in which he relates himself to his society. His relation with God is so intense that it overflows to others. God thus affects every aspects of man's life. Such is the power of love, if man wills to love God, that it takes him to organize his entire belief and action centered around God.

At the second level, however, there can be the individual's being subjected to a trial of faith, a steeling of faith. This is what is often known in religious parlance as the "test of faith". It may so happen that the religious faith of man may demand an action that apparently runs counter to what ethics generally advocates. When this happens ethics and religion are clearly seen as two distinct realms. Unfortunately the suspension of the ethical by the religious man will neither be understood by his fellow man nor does he receive any sympathy or applause from any quarter. The religious man has to live out his life in isolation, to use a phrase of Kierkegaard, "in fear and trembling", in the face of the paradox that he encounters. It is not the case that the religious man, all of a sudden, has become unethical. But the truth is that he is on a higher plane that simply cannot be grasped ethically either by himself or by anyone else. Here ethics and religion are at variance temporarily.
Why is this so? Kierkegaard says,

The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the universal by his relation to the universal.  

This makes it clear that the individuality of the man of faith is so autonomous that it cannot be bargained for anything, not even the ethical norms. There can be an opposition between the ethical and the religious. Indeed, ethical itself can serve as the “temptation”, on account of his highly evolved ethical consciousness. But the demand of the religious is absolute, categorical, in a way that no ethical norms can ever be. The commands and the fulfillments of the religious existence are meant for edifying, and not merely for the human refinement, be it aesthetical or ethical. But the religious man here is in utter isolation, an individual in every sense. Hence the individuality that the religious stage comes to form in the man of faith is of the highest type. Hence in the fullest sense, the religious man is the individual for Kierkegaard.

D. Belief and Faith

In the foregoing discussion we have identified religious man with the man of faith, or even with the man of “belief”. A conceptual clarity however may be made between “belief” and “faith”. In common parlance, the word “belief” is often used to mean the same as “faith”. Yet, there is a difference between the two, in as much as belief goes with knowledge; in as much as belief is the first step towards knowledge; also, belief is still without the certitude of knowledge. Faith, on the other hand, is said to go with religion, in as much as it is said to be a “religious belief”. A philosopher of religion is further interested in showing how belief is related to faith by bringing out the distinction between “belief-that” and “belief-in”. Belief-that conveys the propositional aspect of faith. It is an intellectual assent, an activity of the mind, at once implying the role of reason, resulting in knowledge. This is specially true of the doctrinaire of a
religion, e.g. I believe that Christ is God. Here, knowledge is the base of any belief that follows. Because one has knowledge about a certain thing or object, he believes it. Such truths may be transcendental or purely historical or empirical. But one gives his intellectual assent, irrespective of its rationality or otherwise. The Christian creed is the best example for the belief-that. Belief-in, on the other hand, implies an element of passion involving trust and commitment to the absolute. It may be the commitment to a person. It represents basically the affective attitude of man. In this light, it can be said that belief-in is synonymous to faith. Kierkegaard, when he speaks of faith, invariably thinks of belief-in rather than belief-that. He decries that often people have mistaken the belief-that for genuine faith.

Faith is the relation between the man who believes and God who is believed in, provided, belief is understood as the personal commitment. It is a one to one relationship, which makes it deeply personal. The relationship implies a strong conviction that what he believes in is the highest goal of his life, and that he feels safe and secure being with the object of his belief. Yet, in a sense, the terms of this relation, man and God are on different plane, making for a tension in it. Indeed, if God and man were on the same level, belief would never have been generated. “Between God and man, however, there exists an absolute difference.” 13 By believing in God, man surrenders everything to God, making it impossible even to survive on his own. His greatness indeed results from his relating himself to God as nothing. For man to become nothing requires his utmost conscious and decisive willing. In becoming nothing however he is established in his identity as the individual grounded in God. He gets his identity only to the extent that he acknowledges his ontic being in God. “Thus a human being is great and at his highest when he corresponds to God by being nothing at all himself.” 14

The individual is reduced to nothing before God because of his love for God. Love is one such feeling that consumes the individual, making him “vulnerable” to the object of his love. Precisely because of this vulnerability, love is the most intense and positive feeling. It arrests the lover to the point of reducing himself to nothing before his
beloved. Love is the result of "belief-in". In order to illustrate, we may fruitfully draw an example from the day-to-day experience of falling in love, despite the limitations of the example when applied to the divine love. There are cases where the lover is said to fall in love with her beloved, after carefully weighing the partner on several parameters. That the partner is handsome, that he is educated, that he holds a good job, that he has a fortune to his credit, that he hails from a good family with a good up-bringing may be a host of considerations, that may carry a lot of weight in falling in love with the beloved. We may say that this is a case of love based on knowledge acquired by a number of considerations, or simply the belief-that. However, there can also be instances where a person loves another, being intensely passionate about him. If the parameters of the first instance were to be applied, the beloved would perhaps lose on many counts. But the intensity of her love makes her felicitously blind to those considerations. The lovers in the second instance may be of very different background, the beloved may be of poor means, his social standing may be of inconsequential significance, yet, the love accepts the beloved unreservedly. She has, in a sense, reduced herself to nothing to be with her beloved. Though the odds are many, the lover loves her beloved, come what may. How is this possible? The only answer, which is not necessarily reasonable, can be that the lover believes in her beloved. Because the lover has a "belief-in" the other person, she is able to overlook and overcome all the barriers, that stands between them in the intensity of her passion for the beloved. Because she believes in the partner, she loves him. This instance is a case of genuine and unreserved love, while the first instance cannot claim fully to be so, though it may have its own dynamics. In a sense, in the first instance, the lover was selfish, and, to that extent, it lacks something in the truth of love. The second instance bespeaks of love based on belief-in, that is characterized by a self abandonment, reducing oneself to nothing before the passion of love for the beloved. Thus belief-in generates that kind of love which results in unquestionable faith. When we transpose the human love to divine love based on belief-in, the man of faith stands before God as nothing. He believes in God, he develops faith in God. In this sense both love and faith can mean to represent the belief-in, where the exercise of freedom for commitment is crucial.
Let us consider what freedom has to do with belief-in, or love. All love directed to a person, either human or divine, is a free act, because love by definition is a self-giving. To love God means implicitly that man has chosen God. The choice of either loving or not loving God is already exercised, he has acted as a free agent. Love therefore projects man as a free agent. In this sense love is an expression of freedom for the individual. Freedom indeed is that element which represents the spirit in man by virtue of being created by God. Kierkegaard says,

"It is God, the creator, who must implant love in each human being, he who himself is love."  

Therefore in the belief-in and love of God, man becomes an individual. This becoming may involve its own stages; consciousness of sin, its repentance etc., may precede it. Kierkegaard observes that love "born of repentance is more beautiful than any other love, for in it you love God." 16 For Kierkegaard such faith and love are for edication; he approvingly quotes the 1 Corinthians 8:1: "Knowledge" puff's up, but love builds up." Love therefore is the source of sustenance for the individual, because it is the basis of all existence. How is faith to be understood in the light of existence of man? While love is the basis of all existence, faith is the very breath of human existence, it is the atmosphere, Kierkegaard understands, in which we breathe, move and have our existence. Apparently he is deeply influenced by the Pauline theology of the New Testament.

To be in faith means to be in constant inwardness and earnestness, holding on to the absolute against all understanding, so that man can in passion realize his existence. By implication faith is not given to the categories of reason. Kierkegaard’s anti-intellectualism is specially directed to Hegel, who tends to make faith less than knowledge. Faith is a personal matter, which concerns the passion and earnestness of the individual. It is subjective, and, in being subjective, it is the truth of subjectivity. To human being to exist means to be in the truth of subjectivity, therefore, faith becomes necessary for a man to realize his existence, because in faith man is fully subjective. Only
in faith can man build a personal relationship with God, and the relation overwhelms him with earnestness and inwardness.

E. Perfecting the Personality through Faith

(i) Edification

It is significant that love, faith, freedom and existence, that Kierkegaard highlights, are meant for the edification of the individual, and not of the universal. All edification for Kierkegaard is individual. Striving to become the true being is of the individual alone. Kierkegaard observes,

Only when the individual has evacuated himself in the infinite, only then is the point attained where faith can break forth. 17

Striving is man's effort to effect a personal relation with God. God, being personal, relates to man in a personal way. We associate responsibility with the individual, and not with the crowd, for only an individual is capable of performing conscious and decisive actions. To hold a crowd responsible for an action is generally meaningless. Faith is a personal matter, only in faith man can realize his existence which is equally personal. A crowd merely is, but it is only the individual man who exists in the strict sense of the word. If one were to try to realize existence as a member of a crowd, one will eo ipso nullify his existence, because existence belongs to the particular, and not to the universal, the crowd.

The individual is a personality, but in making that personality dynamic lies the perfecting of that personality. Kierkegaard elaborates on perfecting the individual personality. Belief-in is also followed by a belief-that, for whoever believes in God does entertain in his mind a few basic truths about God. It would not make sense to say that one does not know anything about God, though he believes in God. Thus, though
Kierkegaard downplays the belief-that in putting it against the belief-in, he is not hostile to the latter; he allows for the propositional faith. The knowledge about God follows as one relates oneself to God. In improving the quality of relationship with God, one also progressively perfects one’s personality. When man relates to God, God makes himself known to man in diverse ways. Even suffering can become a way of educating human personality. But all divine knowledge has to come to man through himself, through his own experiences. No external agency can be of any help to him. Through his diverse experiences the individual comes to know the qualities of God; the divine nature, however inadequate the knowledge concerned be, his will, purpose and destiny for man. Unlike the many religious philosophers, Kierkegaard makes the growth in personality depend on the direct experience, without any mediation, of God by the individual, because it involves serious individual responsibility. It is not without reason that Kierkegaard is hailed to be the champion of human individualism.

Relating to God is not a trivial matter, it cannot be done in a frivolous manner. A whole-hearted seriousness is called for, and this needs man’s constant inwardness. Man should constantly be in relation with God, who is ever present to man in being the ground of human existence. But the autonomy of the will, that man is endowed with, can in a moment of weakness swerve away from the divine presence. One can easily get deceived by all the appearances around him. Man needs constant relation with God, so that he does not slip away from the Truth of his being. God is not found directly in the things around him, they are all created, though with a divine “imprint”. One has to look beyond the objects to reach God, who can never be reduced to the status of an object. Nevertheless, the created order can indirectly lead him to God. This is also the reason why man must not make the mistake of considering the created things as “God”, because God is not directly present in them. God may be said to be reflected in the created objects. The individual reaches God indirectly in the sense that he does not directly find God in the created objects. This is Kierkegaard’s way of asserting Christian theism, at once distinct from polytheism or pantheism. Nevertheless, through the created order, the individual can establish a personal relation with God, because the created order is not meant to come on
the way of his relation with God. The objects are rather instrumental in helping the individual to build a personal relation with God. The individual is also a created being, he too shares his body and, at times mind, with the created heritage, who is however concerned with a personal relation with God.

However, the individual looks to establish a relation with God by directing his concern on himself, because he is also a created but eternal spirit in matter and psyche. He is looking to reach God through himself and, in doing so, he establishes a direct and personal relation with God. The individual’s concern about his own self therefore is at once a concern about the eternal. Concern about the eternal within himself establishes a personal relation with the eternal Self, or the maximum subjectivity, that God is. Reflexively, therefore, the individual’s relation with the eternal reflects on the concern he has for himself. This brings out the existential feature in the relation between the individual and God: The individual is concerned about his own existence, and so he looks to God to anchor his being in God. This he does by exercising his choice for God, and further he needs God continually to make the right choices to grow in his personality. Kierkegaard is never tired of saying that to exist means to make the right choice. Therefore, the individual, in being concerned about his existence, looks continually to God, this is existentially being related to God. The individual’s clear objective is to realize his existence in God; in God he authenticates his existence. By directing himself to his own self, man experiences earnestness and passion to God.

(ii) Self-Perfection

How is the word, “perfecting”, in general, understood? Literally, it is a “making through” (facere per), in the sense of “making completely or in totality”. “Perfecting” is the present continuous form of the infinitive, “to perfect”. “Perfect” then should mean “complete” in all essential elements; by extension of its meaning, we can say, it means “faultless”. Generally, when we talk of a person as perfect, we mean to imply that he contains within himself all the conditions required to be a complete, total, nearly faultless
personality. It can be said that perfecting implies that the man concerned is striving to achieve all the essential elements required to be a man. Thus, the man perfecting his personality is one who is ceaselessly, positively and tirelessly, working to achieve all the essential conditions for reaching the prefect state of personality.

Usually, saying that a man is perfect includes in it the idea of “happiness”, or the “good life” the philosophers speak of. The perfect man should be living the “good”, or “happy” life. It should be a life characterized by meaning, security and safety. It would be anomalous to say that a particular person is perfect, though he lives an unhappy, insecure and unsafe life. For man to live a prefect or happy life, he should find meaning in his life and feel safe and secure. Kierkegaard thinks that the striving for such a life cannot be ensured by knowledge, because it can at most let him know what life is. But what man needs is not so much to know as to find meaning in it. What man needs to do is to look into his own life, find its moorings. These moorings will determine the meaning of life that he can now strive to realize. The moorings of human life are divinely planted, therefore, to make his life meaningful, man should live as God demands of him, because he is the giver of man’s life. Perfecting implies that there is a yardstick, in the light of which perfecting takes place. Divine perfection is the yardstick for man. Approximation with the divine perfection is the meaning of man’s life. Amongst all creations man distinctively stands out. He is superior to the rest of creation in virtue of the image of God, or the spirit in him. Perfecting of human personality finally means the perfecting of the spirit within him.

(iii) Abraham, the Biblical Paradigm

For perfecting his personality, man first and foremost needs his personal commitment towards God. The commitment that takes place in faith is unflinching, even when that faith is subjected to trial. In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard presents before us the case of Abraham who perfects his personality as the man of faith, who is characterized by the unflinching commitment to God. The whole content of Abraham’s
life depends on his commitment of faith, upon which his individuality depends. He does not waver in his faith, even when he is asked to go against the ethical norm, and thus be branded as the violator of the ethical principles, that hold the society in its place in peace and harmony. Any truly religious person, like Abraham, too, knows that suffering may be the hallmark of faith. Suffering is inevitable in life, but faith can find meaning in it; it can then be used in the steeling of faith and the growth of individual personality. Refusing to suffer is the same as not believing in the power of the religious paradox. Abraham was unintelligible to others around him, because of his relation to the paradox. He suffered in silence, in distress and dread. Abraham practised silence, and silence paradoxically was his only means of communication with the divine. In his distress and dread, he knew that he was carrying out the divine imperative. This faith is his personal matter, and he could not find any solace in the universal. This is the only way that man can perfect his existence. Outside faith, there is no difference between the static existence of any created object and of the human being. Man has to make his existence dynamic by his striving in faith.

Abraham is in a state, where he has to strive within himself, fight to make the right decision, as a result of which he experiences tremendous distress and dread. Abraham fights his battle in a divine "language", which is totally unintelligible to others. Abraham has no one to console him, and he cannot get solace in the temporal. "Abraham keeps silent -- but he cannot speak. There in lies the distress and anguish." In his venture he is incomprehensible to others around him. He is wrenched away from the ethical, and this generates pain in him; however, "the pain is his assurance that he is in the right way". He has no desire to guide others, because he is completely immersed in his own life, his own pursuit for existence, because he cannot realize existence outside of him, in other words, outside of God.

Abraham cannot justify his actions to people around him. Nevertheless, the Bible asserts that in God Abraham is fully "justified". What kind of a justification is this? In order to clarify the nature of "justification by faith", or justification in God, we may
compare the situation of the "knight of faith" and the "tragic hero" in world's literature. A tragic hero, unlike Abraham, can justify his actions to people around him, because of his commitment to moral values, which are entirely universal. By virtue of the moral values, he is made a hero, for he acts in accordance with the ethical, binding on all and valid for all times without exception. He lives in the universal. On the contrary, Abraham's action is justified only in God, strictly by his personal relationship to him. Whatever Abraham does is intelligible to him and God alone, making him unintelligible to the universal, because it is a test of faith demanded by God. In the strict sense, testing of faith is only for the individual, and not for the universality of the crowd, the group. Abraham, the religious man, wills to accept all that befalls him. In doing this he goes against the ethical, so that he can learn from God, his master. He gives up the finite in order to grasp the infinite, the known in order to grasp the unknown.

The situation of the tragic hero, on the contrary is very different. He gives up the personal for the universal; he gives up the less universal for the more universal. In either case he is still deeply rooted in the ethical and the temporal. He becomes a hero for the emulation of the generations to come. Bravo! He deserves everyone's acclaim and admiration and encomium. But Abraham, having been ethical all his life, suddenly, rises beyond the ethical. He has to teleologically suspend the ethical. Abraham suspends the ethical obligations in favour of religious demands, "irrationally" exacted by God. Nevertheless, Abraham obeys the divine, wills to concede to the demands, hence suspends the ethical, because he has a different goal, and this goal is the obedience; he cannot for once waver in his personal commitment towards God, despite the personal anguish and loss. His situation brings out the implications of a personal commitment, demanded of man by God. Kierkegaard cries out, but also accepts the answer of faith, "Why then did Abraham do it? For God's sake, and (in complete identity with this) for his own sake." Abraham was motivated to do what was demanded of him by God, because God demanded of him and also because he had to obey in faith. Abraham was willing to teleologically suspend the ethical because of his personal commitment to God, which generates in him the transcending of the present, in order to attain the future. He is
miles away from the tragic hero, despite his sharing the ethical sentiments of the tragic hero in fullness. He is qualitatively different in his commitment.

Why is the individual able to commit himself totally to God? This happens because, with faith, the individual is also led to put his entire trust in God. The individual depends and relies on God, surrendering his everything to God. He strongly feels that, with God by his side, nothing can go wrong, despite the seeming oddities of the temporal. He can trust God with his very being, because he believes that his hope for the future will not be belied, but will be fulfilled only in God. Now, his only hope is God. To rest of us, it looks as if he has lost all hope; in a way, it is true that he has lost all hope in himself, but he is firmly anchored in God. Because of this, he is able to stand before God as nothing. An onion consists of layers of peels, which can be removed one after the other, leaving nothing. As we remove the last of the inner layers we are left with nothing. Likewise an individual sheds his layers of temporal accretions, and of sins, in order to move closer to God. The “amazing Grace” envelopes his existence, now. When he is forgiven of all his sins he becomes nothing, he stands naked, as it were, before God. He is totally transparent to God. He cannot hold on to anything temporal anymore to establish his identity, because that act itself would become a sin in the eyes of God. Only when he stands before God as nothing or, to use a Biblical expression, as “dust and ashes”, does God establish him in his total individuality, in his full and perfect personality.

F. Individual is the New Personality

The genuine individual is the nihilated individual before God. He is born anew into a spiritual personality according to God’s own heart. He is a realized image of God. He is great, because he has the courage, the passion to humble before God. Humility is a paradoxical virtue. If it boasts of itself, it gets negated eo ipso. It can exist only in silence, therefore it is an extremely difficult virtue to practice. It is a very difficult task for men to humble before his fellow beings whom he can see. It is even more difficult to surrender to God whom one does not see. For man, to believe, trust and humble before
God whom he cannot see, but only to have faith and trust in him, calls for enormous passion, an all-consuming earnestness and inwardness. It will require an enormous amount of trust and faith. That is why the individual is nothing, and, in being nothing, he becomes everything in God. The individual, on being nothing, moves towards God. In moving towards God, he moves away from his narrow self and the concerns of that empirical self. God occupies now the centre of his life. The outward movement of the self and the inward movement of the spirit in his life are dictated by the two forces, one centrifugal and the other centripetal.

In order to authenticate his existence, he moves more and more away from his own self. The self is ejected from the centre to the periphery. The individual moves away from the centre but, in moving away from the centre, he also comes back to his self, renewed and resurrected, as it were. This is the impact of the centrifugal force. By giving up the temporal the individual moves towards God. God occupies the space vacated in the centre of man’s life. He moves now from within. This is the impact of the centripetal force.

(i) Dialectics of the Temporal and Eternal

Once this transformation has taken place, God gives back the temporal to the individual. This is a strange dynamics in Kierkegaard’s philosophy of faith. Faith is not an annihilation of the given heritage of man. Man may have renounced everything to make room for God. But, God, having taken possession of the centre stage of the self, re-establishes man back in the temporal. Life of faith has to have within itself the dialectics of the temporal and eternal, the finite and the infinite. God places the individual back in the temporal, so that he can continue to exist, to choose God, as was the case in the test of faith for Abraham. The individual moves away from himself, but at the same time gains himself in God. With the exercise of freedom, executing a free decision, his body and mind are brought together, synthesized in the spirit. In the free act he renounces his body and the mind, the expressions of the temporal, in the sense that he is in the pursuit of God.
alone. But the temporal does not vanish, it has to sustain his body and mind. Only that it is his lesser concern before his *sumnum bonum*. When he chooses God, he gets back the temporal fully restored: His body, his mind, his society are given back to him. His ethical universal is renewed and given back in a divine light.

By being a free agent he represents the spirit, he is still not complete. The process of completion is on-going, the growth of the individuality, or personality, is continuous. The human spirit has to relate to the divine Spirit in order to become whole. Thus the individual moves towards God, and in doing so, he becomes a complete integer. He not only gains God but also his temporal. He becomes a synthesis of body, mind and spirit in God. He attains his existence in God fully authenticated, fully individuated and fully personalized. He lives now in the temporal, but with an eye to the eternal. Thus, ultimately, the individual comes back to himself, fully established in his existence. He has his body-mind complex, and, yet, his faith. He fulfils the ethical obligations, as is required in his society, and he also has his tested and strengthened faith in God. He exists in reality, unlike the idealist, who by way of abstract thinking, forgets the whole realm of the temporal, as if it were a passing phase of evolution of the reason, or idea.

Thus, for Kierkegaard, it can be argued that existing man is distinct from an objective reality, that can be made the object of our consciousness like an inert piece of furniture. He is a subjective spirit that nevertheless dwells in the temporal. Because man has to respond as a subject to God, who transcends this temporal world, he exhibits in himself the paradoxical nature of a body, mind and spirit. Despite his emphasis on the spirit, Kierkegaard acknowledges role of the temporal in perfecting man’s personality. Being in faith and the becoming in faith are not possible without the temporal. This is specially true of the test of faith. Man realizes his existence in God, and God establishes man back into the world, so that he can perfect his personality and individuality. Temptations are the expressions of the hold of the temporal, and they are unavoidable to one who is spiritual.
Every temptation occurs in a "garden of Eden", that is, in space and time. In the temptation to lie, for instance, the particular person finds himself in a situation of lying, as a result of his own misdeeds. It is possible that in order to cover up his mistakes he has to lie. In the instance of stealing, without the object of envy, stealing is not possible. In both instances the temporal element cannot be denied, and the spirit in man has to negotiate with it. It is because of the temporal element that man is placed in a situation of temptation. But the act itself in a given situation is not inevitable. It is within the power of human freedom to choose either the temporal or the eternal, the finite or the infinite. Choice itself is made possible for a spirit embedded in the matter. By implication, we can say that if there is no choice then there is no temptation either. Man could straight away have the infinite, and there would be no need for striving to perfect the personality. Because we have both the finite and the infinite within us, there arises the question of choice, which further results in striving and suffering. Because of the finite, man is able to choose the infinite. Kierkegaard does not rule out the role of the temporal, when he talks of man being put to test of faith by God. Man cannot afford to ignore that he has to dwell on the temporal so that he can strive constantly for his perfection. Man is aware of his temporality, but he has to move consciously beyond it.

(ii) **Reasoning in Kierkegaard’s Personality**

The due recognition of the temporal by Kierkegaard may also be seen as the place of reasoning in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. This is a point that may not have been sufficiently highlighted by the Kierkegaardian scholars, who are never tired of branding Kierkegaard as an “anti-intellectualist”. His anti-intellectualism perhaps is to be pitted against the Hegelian exclusivist and absolutistic rationalism rather than an outright hostility to reason. If the latter were the case, we could not consider him to be a philosopher at all, but an obscurantist. But this would at once make all his reasoning in his copious works an exercise in futility. The point then is that reasoning is required to a certain point by the individual. Abraham is not less aware, or less reasoning, than his contemporaries. Like anyone else, he too reasons about his stepping into the realm of risk.
taking and decision making. He is in such a situation that he should be able to endure all
the repercussions of his decisions. But he is also aware of the respective demands of the
temporal and the eternal in him. The individual becomes a true individual, only when he
is aware of the eternal and temporal aspects of his life, and of the need to strike a
harmony between them.

He knows that the synthesis between the two does not emerge without the element
of striving and risk. Through his reasoning, he clearly understands his situation in the
world. Any existential analysis of one's situation demands the full light of reasoning. But,
after this point, he has also decided to venture into the eternal, with the help of which he
is prepared to give up the temporal. Abraham, being the knight of faith, clearly exhibits
by his personality that he has struck a balance, however tight-rope walking it be, between
the two aspects of his being. The risk involved is the violation of the ethical, which
would, in common parlance, make him a "murderer". But, because of his conviction of
God's command, he is prepared to risk everything. The spirit triumphs over the matter,
the subjectivity triumphs over the objectivity of the temporal. For Abraham, the physical
world does indeed exist, he is in the physical world, but he risks to choose the eternal.
Not to choose a thing does not mean it is put out of existence, it can be teleologically
suspended; the physical world exists, but that which is of paramount significance to
Abraham is the eternal. If he is ever to be justified of his decision and act, it cannot be by
the temporal but the eternal. Reason has its full sway, but Kierkegaard refuses to either
"idealize" or "idolize" reason over against the divine.

(iii) Perfected Personality is not Immoral

We would be sorely mistaken if we read in Kierkegaard's teleological suspension
of the ethical a moral holiday, much less an utter disregard for the ethical in the divine
name. Kierkegaard advocates that the ethical is suspended for a while, for a certain telos,
or goal. The word, "suspend", in the dictionary meaning, conveys that something is
"brought to a halt temporarily". By this it is clear that the ethical is brought to a halt for
some time only, and not completely brought to a stop in one's life, much less the
disvaluation of the ethical. The becoming individual chooses to do what God demands,
instead of the ethical call. He however goes on living as a moral being, satisfying ethical
obligations, after his religious duty. More often than usual, the ethical is seen as the
extension of the religious. Its variance with the religious is more an exception than a rule.
The individual, after obeying God, is back in the temporal to continue to satisfy all
ethical obligations, as if the latter is equally divinely ordained. Thus Kierkegaard uses the
word, "suspend" to represent his acknowledgement of the temporality as necessary in
perfecting man's individuality.

While the temporal is much needed for human life, because it is a constituent of
his nature, it may also serve as the "temptation", occasionally, and is then much required
for the test of faith, in order that man may make the right choice. The religious man is
constantly in tension, "fear and trembling", because there is always the possibility of
falling into temptation, since he is surrounded by the temporal that may become
temptation any moment. In order that he successfully fight them, he should acknowledge
the temporal, but must choose the eternal, believing in the paradox. God may test the
individual again and again, and the individual may have to choose God again and again.
The knight of faith is in eternal vigilance, unlike the tragic hero who performs the heroic
act once and for all. Kierkegaard observes,

The Knight of faith, on the other hand, is kept
sleepless, for he is constantly tried, and every instant
there is the possibility of being able to return
repentantly to the universal. 72

Obviously, the repentance that is referred to here is the ethical repentance, that will revert
the individual from the particular to the universal, causing the loss of the religious
existence.
G. The Paradox and Perfected Personality

By making the qualitative decision to hold on to the eternal, and not the temporal, the individual comes to discover that the spiritual law is quite different from the commercial law. It is in losing everything that one gains everything, that it is in the dying that one is born to eternal life. In renouncing the temporal and the finite, he comes to gain it, now, invested with meaning for him. In rejecting the finite, he has made the infinite choice. This is a paradox of religious life, because the individual can have faith only when he believes in the paradox. To the rational man, the paradox is unacceptable, absurd and unbelievable. But paradox is exactly what he has got to believe in order to truly exist. That is why faith is possible only is passion, not in detached reasoning. The individual is once again faced with choice whether to be merely rational or to follow his passion. The choice he makes will have a bearing on his personality. If he chooses the former, he would be an observer; if the latter, he would be a believer. To believe and accept what he cannot objectively identify demands everything from the individual, so much so that he is left with nothing but only God to rest on.

The individual, who chooses to be in passion, also gives up the temporal in favour of the absurd, the paradox. Though the temporal serves as a temptation to lure him away from the absurd, the individual however succeeds in making the right choice of renouncing the temporal and accepting the paradox. Paradoxically, in this act of choice, he gains back the temporal, the finite. He gains back the finite, no more as tempting, but as meaningful to him. Earlier the individual could view the finite only from the viewpoint of fulfilling his personality in temporality, but now that he has made the choice, the individual sees the significance of the temporal for his eternality. He sees that the temporal becomes meaningful, if viewed in relation with the infinite. From now on the temporal becomes a significant part of his life, that is how the individual gets back the finite. Now, everything around the individual becomes divinely meaningful. Kierkegaard observes,
For the moment of faith must constantly be made by virtue of the absurd, yet in such a way, be it observed, that one does not lose the finite but gains it every inch. 23

To the man of faith, the temporal, in a sense, becomes a necessity, in as much as it is integral to his nature. If the individual does not exist in space and time, then, his activity, as a true religious man, will have no significance. Man of faith is a citizen of the dual world: he is in the world without being of the world. When he continues to engage himself in the temporal, he does so with deeper meaning and a unity of divine purpose. In other words, the temporal itself serves as an instrument for the individual to realize his existence. The task of becoming individual is arduous: Renouncing the universal, one has to step into the realm of the particular, which however is possible only in faith.

Kierkegaard further elaborates on being justified by faith. First of all, in faith man is reconciled with God, which helps him in transforming into a personality more "acceptable" before God. This acceptable personality is one of passion, intensity and activity. Because man is a synthesis of the body-mind complex, held in unity by the spirit, he may best be understood through his actions. This also gives us a rare insight in Kierkegaard's philosophy of action.

II. A Philosophy of Action

Action is opposite to mere wishing. If our life were to revolve around wishes only, then, life would be nothing more than day-dreaming, devoid of all value. Further, if whatever man wishes for were to automatically come true, then, too, man can neither claim credit nor blame for anything in life. Man would not be responsible for any of his actions, because there would indeed be no actions at all to his credit. One can lay claim to his actions only if one were a conscious, responsible agent. Faith, or the religious stage of life, is an action in its full significance. Faith can never be a mere wish, the passion of faith is an intense action. It is the trust and belief that man positively and personally entertains. Just because it is experienced within as a passion, one may not think that it is
action, whereas it is a "passion" that is at once an intense action. Through it man's possibilities within realize into actualities. Man can be responsible for only those things he does, and not for those which happen. Faith is an action, it is not an event that happens. It conduces to one's greatness precisely because it is not a "happenstance", but a positive action. Kierkegaard observes,

For it is not what happens to me that makes me great, but it is what I do, and there is surely no one who thinks that a man becomes great because he won the great prize in the lottery. 24

Only those who strive, aspire and suffer achieve greatness. Striving, aspiring and consciously suffering are positive actions. Man of faith does all these continually, so that he can achieve greatness in the eyes of the absolute, which, in other words, is nothing but perfecting his personality. In faith, man is taught by the absolute to harmoniously synthesize the diverse elements of his personality. Because of the synthesis, man is able to exercise his freedom in his actions, and be responsible for his actions. Therefore in every decision making, he learns more about himself, his own personality as rooted in God. Like fish, which can survive only in water, man can exist only in faith. Faith provides the ground, or the condition for man for his activity.

Christian life, Kierkegaard reminds, is a serious striving. To live a Christian life is not without its strains and hardships. Only with a devoted faith can man live up to the expectations of God. A Christian is accountable for all his actions. Kierkegaard keeps wondering, "Why are strict Christians ... easily tempted by little things?" 25 Man's serious concern should be his commitment to God, lest he lose that which gives meaning to his life. Hence, in faith, man is continually striving to be in touch with God. He needs the constant affirmation from God that he is on the right path.
I. Grace and Personality

The question of the divine grace in perfecting the human personality is also important to Kierkegaard. He reminds us that the realization of one’s existence is not a trivial matter. Coming to existence is not possible without the grace of God, which helps man respond to even the softest voice possible within him. Through grace man gets finely tuned, acutely alert, to respond to the divine voice. Kierkegaard writes,

For precisely this is the seriousness of existence, that thou art placed into a world where the voice which calls thee to the right path speaks very softly, ... that this voice speaks softly because it would test thee, whether thou wilt listen to even the slightest whisper.²⁶

God speaks to man softly, and to be able to listen to him, man should be intense in his inwardness. In responding to the slightest whisper, man gets divinely educated, for divine education is said to come in near silence; grace operates silently in human soul:

Once a man acts in a decisive sense and comes out into reality, existence can get a grip on him and providence educates him.²⁷

Because of grace, man sees life in a new light. The divine light helps him to interpret what is communicated to him through the whisper. Man, by right interpretation, finds himself active in freedom, which contributes immensely towards realizing the existence. Grace also assures that man’s interpretation is in the right path. Therefore man stands in need of grace all the time.

J. Integrated Personality

From the foregoing discussion on the dynamic personality, it is clear that despite the temporal element in his nature, human existence is a continuity, because it is in the process of making. While the temporal element, that is its being conditioned to space and
time, implies that man is in reality, its continuity is implied in its being the spirit open to the actualization of possibilities by way of freedom. Being real implies that the individual undergoes all the mechanical laws making him endure the process of changes. But being a continuity implies that it is also a spirit in close association with the divine spirit. This at once suggests that man is a being-in-the-making, a process. If he were a finished product, then he would not be affected by the freedom of the spirit, but the determinism of events. Precisely because he is open to the becoming in freedom, there is room for improvement, so as to grow in a dynamic personality. But, because of the indissoluble union of the temporal and eternal in him, the eternal interests are catered to through the medium of time in which man lives. Therefore human life by definition is a process.

For Kierkegaard, the Christian philosopher that he is, life is a journey of expectations, and man expects to see the eternal by the end of the journey. Man is endowed with a spirit to pursue the journey. The spirit in him may be divine image, but man is not God, therefore he can never comprehend the mystery that God is. All his knowledge of God is through faith. But the more he knows God, the less does he know the absolute even in a single attribute, say, forgiving mercy. Kierkegaard says,

But I cannot understand the divine mercy which is able to forgive sins; the more vividly I believe it, the less am I able to understand it.

But this is as it ought to be in respect of the mystery that God is. If man is able to understand God completely, such a reality would not be God; moreover, there would no more be faith for man. Because man cannot understand, he chooses faith, and the inherent suffering in it. But there is the hope of overcoming the suffering of faith, because, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.” (Romans, 8:6). For man can set his mind on spirit, if he chooses to do so.

Human existence is more than being in space and time. The aesthetic man is immersed in space and time. The ethical man, though in space and time, occasionally
transcends them by the commitment to the universal. Neither of them however is considered to be a genuine human existence by Kierkegaard. To him, genuine existence can be truly realized only when the individual transcends the two stages, and experiences religious faith in his inwardness. To exist means to understand in depth the true reality of one's being, as ontologically rooted in the divine. This can be achieved through relating oneself in particularity to God, rather than immersing oneself into the crowd. This would involve a considerable amount of self-examination, commitment in passion, faith and trust in God, action for self-edification, and the improvement of one's personality. The religious stage results in a radical change of attitude towards oneself and everything that affects one's sensitivity. Man, no doubt, is sensitive to all that is in spatio-temporal world, but the religious man develops sensitivity to his inner reality and extends that sensitivity to the outer world. Such a sensitivity is due to the fact that, deep within his own being, he has encountered the feeling of awe towards God, the ground of his being. Even an atheist does encounter such power within him, though he refrains from terming it as God. This is not to deny in man, after he has embarked on the religious stage of existence, the temporal elements of body and mind. He rather harmoniously synthesizes the temporal and the eternal elements within him, so that he can truly exist. In the absence of the harmony between the two, there is an inner conflict. Because he fails to acknowledge his dual nature, he chooses often the easy way out, he chooses the temporal and the "known", and leaves out the eternal and the unknown. But the one, integral human existence is not to be considered in parts, it should be taken as a whole. Such a synthesized and total view of human nature is made possible in the religious stage of existence.

The incapacity at understanding the oneness of human existence is at the root of dichotomizing the realms of our activities as "sacred" and "secular". This has often done damage to human existence. It is often sought to separate man's life into two sets of activities. We often tend to think that a politician belongs to the mundane world, while a priest represents the sacred life. But it should not be forgotten that both the politician and the priest are very much in this world, and yet both transcend it. The politician cannot
ignore his religious needs, so also the priest cannot ignore his secular needs. It is a fault on the part of man to divide the unity of life into fragments of the sacred and secular. This is what Kierkegaard was against, when he rose against Christendom, that reduced the sacred to the rituals in the church during his days. The separation of man’s activities into secular and sacred did not in any way bring meaning to life. To exist humanly is to live as a spirit in a body. It is being the denizen of both worlds at the same time. Man often leads only a pseudo-existence because he fails to understand what it means to truly exist. He can make his life meaningful, and thereby truly exist, only when he can bring together the sacred and the secular, because that synthesis is primordially within himself. His own human reality is a synthesis. To understand religious life as constituting only sacred activities is a parody of human existence. Being religious does not mean performing religious rituals exclusively. It should also involve the whole concern of the individual in his day to day life. Whatever the religious man performs must be done with passion, earnestness and commitment. Religion is an atmosphere that “informs” everything that man does. Kierkegaard says that a person, praying in a temple with his mind in the market place, is secular; even so a brick-layer, who does his work with devotion and total dedication, is truly sacred.

The key to the required synthesis is human freedom. It needs only passion and commitment on the part of the individual to believe and accept his reality with its givenness and possibilities. The religious has the power to directly edify; it has the power to transform the secular so that the latter too can indirectly edify human life. The secular will no longer be viewed then as foreign to him, but his own, indeed, a part of his existence. He will be able to see the beauty of both the sacred and the secular, once he overcomes the conflict by a free act of acknowledging the two realities as integral to his existence.

Existence involves the emotional commitments as well as the givenness of the spatio-temporal aspect of the individual, which are subject to mechanical and chemical laws. To acknowledge the one and deny the other would not do justice to the total
existence, because man has his reality rooted both in God and the spatio-temporal world. To be religious means to be sensitive to both the realities, the spirit and the non-spirit in man. Therefore, the religious man is sensitive to his religious needs as well as his secular needs. If the individual views his life only from a secular angle, he will fail to see beyond it, and not see the sacred. It will be the death of the spirit in man, that is to say, the desiccation of the sacred aspect of his life. Such an approach will not make his life meaningful. Likewise, if the individual views his life only from a sacred perspective, he will not be able to do justice to the givenness of the secular. This again will not make his life meaningful; indeed, it will be wholly unrealistic. Secular activities too should be done with commitment and dedication. The secular is the field of action to the soul-making of the spirit. The main ingredient in all actions, to count it as an action, is commitment and involvement, which can be provided, if man is in faith, because faith is all about commitment and involvement. In faith he has a higher level of consciousness, self-observation, without doing any injustice to the secular. Faith is a commitment made by a human spirit in body and mind to the divine spirit. Existence can be achieved by man, only when he takes into account both the sacred and the secular.

To conclude. It can be said that for man, to exist is a project, a process of becoming by way of the choice of freedom continually. It involves self-knowledge that he is a synthesis of body, mind and spirit. Man can have an identity of his own, and not that of a crowd, if only he cares to assert his particularity in his particular relation with the absolute. In synthesizing the temporal and eternal elements within his nature, he discovers meaning in life, and, to this extent, forms his own dynamic personality. Man perfects his personality in faith, in God, and, in doing so, he retains both the eternal and temporal element in his personality. In working out the dynamic personality, he passes through the stages of existence, aesthetic, ethical and, finally, the religious. In the aesthetic stage, man has only the temporal as his goal. In the ethical stage he displays a commitment to the universal, as distinct from the frivolity of the aesthetic flitting, but it is not good enough for the formation of the dynamic personality. But only in the religious stage, man attains his total, integral existence, retaining the temporal and eternal aspects
of his personality. By retaining his temporal and eternal element man comes to realize his existence primarily as a process, a being-in-the-making. Thus, Kierkegaard is conclusive in saying,

If man had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, they had doubtless also forgotten what it means to exist as human beings. 29