



EFFORT AND ACTION:KEY TO SELF-FULFILLMENT

Dr. Uday Singh

Associate Professor (Philosophy),

Government Girls' College, Chittorgarh

ABSTRACT: In this paper I would argue that in the philosophy of Kierkegaard the generic aim of subjectivity, truth, faith, and inwardness is effort and action. In fact, it is seemingly uncontroversial that faith comprises effort and action. Perhaps, Kierkegaard is of the view or rather he endorses that the movement of life-view from one stage to another is not discontinuous with effort and action. Emotions: fear, dread, despair, melancholy are considered under the ambit of faith - religious life-view. I would engage and discuss and clarify the religious life-view.

KEYWORDS: Effort, Action, Life-view

INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity and truth are synonymous terms in Kierkegaard's thought and he uses them interchangeably for the more familiar Kierkegaard an term 'faith'. According to Kierkegaard reason has no compatibility in the super mundane sphere of human existence where man chooses himself before God to relate to God. However, this should not be misconstrued that Kierkegaard is undermining the role of reason. His concern is that objectivity or reason should not be dragged in realm of faith or in the sphere of subjectivity. For Kierkegaard subjective truths are of greater value to man in comparison to scientific truths. Subjective truths are of prime significance in comparison to the entire sensational results produced by scientific experiments and research. One of the ways in which Kierkegaard defines truth is: "*An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.*"¹

EXISTENCE AND INWARDNESS

In the philosophy of Kierkegaard, truth is subjectivity and subjectivity is truth. Truth is the ability to choose an objective uncertainty. Subjectivity is always in the process of becoming. It never finishes. It never ceases to become. It is perpetually renewing itself and that is the beauty of truth or subjectivity. Subjectivity comprises in giving meaning and direction to



human existence which is a free process of becoming. This becoming is in action rather than in thought.

Indubitably, subjectivity in Kierkegaard's thought implies practice and action as to how one can enter into a relationship with God. This God-relation is rendered possible through extreme inwardness or subjectivity that is by faith. Faith is completely an inner experience, a personal experience. God-relation cannot be formed through a middle-ground compromise or mediation, because a compromise would rob this relationship of its vitality. To preserve this relationship between God and man, at times it may require from a person an action which contravenes reason such as that which was performed by the knight of faith—Abraham. Kierkegaard is trying to emphasize that since love of God for man is absolute, God may put before man to do something which requires an absolute commitment on the part of man. God in order to make a real difference in man's life, Kierkegaard says that God may go against human reason, against human will, against human consideration, and even against human conscience. If God was unable to go against human reason or conscience, God would become redundant. As and when God contravenes human reason or conscience it is the responsibility of man either to freely choose God or to freely deny Him. At this juncture the choice man would make would be the daring venture of the self or subjectivity. The choice at this point is not grounded in reason; it is not orderly for this choice contains elements of absurdity, illusions and paradox. Subjectivity according to Kierkegaard is a constant striving for seeking fulfillment in the eternal. This fulfillment can be attained by the individual by experiencing a power which is beyond objective knowledge. Human existence cannot be defended and justified on the grounds of rational comprehensibility as existence contains paradoxical elements in it. To objectify human existence would imply depriving human existence of its vigour and vitality. Objectivity would trammel subjectivity and freedom. It would deprive man of the very inwardness or freedom to choose the way of life he wishes to live. Kierkegaard stated that man is subjective and can freely choose radically different ways of living. Subjectivity is also human freedom to choose the way of life.

LIFE-VIEW AND ACTION

According to Kierkegaard man can choose any of the three stages or spheres of life—the aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious. These three modes of existence Kierkegaard calls life-views. *Livs-Anskvelse*(Life-view) in Kierkegaard's philosophy is personal. It is gained by



personal effort and action. In being personal it implies an emphasis on inwardness and the effort or action involved implies an emphasis on exterior life that is emphasis on conduct or human behavior. It is the life-view that gives meaning and direction to human life which is fundamentally a process of becoming. In the Dane's own words, "an existing individual is constantly in process of becoming."² Therefore it is action rather than thought which he is emphasizing. Human existence for Kierkegaard is constant striving seeking accomplishment in the eternal, this fulfillment is possible by faith which is beyond reason.

In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard contrasts the ethical mode of existence with the aesthetic. He views the aesthetic man as a man of sensory impulse and emotion. For the aesthetic man there are no fixed universal moral norms. He is devoid of religious faith and has the desire to enjoy all emotive and sense experience. In the aesthetic plane the individual does not seek to give unity to his life which therefore remains fragmentary and directionless. In the ethical sphere, the individual no longer lives by accident, he becomes more inward, more true to himself, not so much by ascending the ethical plane of existence but by the fact of choosing the ethical. It is choice, according to Kierkegaard, which is the content of personality. To be oneself that is to be committed to oneself is of prime importance for Kierkegaard. An ordinary frame of mind would be quite content with the aesthetic level, whereas an individual who is subjective and inward would initiate new aspect of life by transfiguring his existence from aesthetic to ethical. The choice of ethical enriches the personality of the individual, as the choice is suffused with commitment. In the ethical stage the individual freely abides by the social and moral standards. At the ethical level the person has a feeling of duty towards himself and towards society. However, the ethical stage cannot satisfy the spirit, it cannot satisfy the inwardness of the person who seeks the eternal, "for nothing finite, even the whole world can satisfy the soul of one who feels a need for the eternal."³ The personal existence of the individual yet remains incomplete at this stage. He feels certain incompleteness; due to this incompleteness there arises in him despair. He becomes melancholic and sets a new view of life which is more developed than the ethical. And this new and renewed view of life is the religious mode of existence, in which the individual ventures or leaps.

For Kierkegaard the religious life-view is the authentic *Livs-Anskuelse*(life-view) towards which the soul naturally moves overcoming melancholy, despair and dread. He views these feelings and emotions as the practical modes of awareness of existence and the world. They



are concrete, immediate, subjective experiences. It is his conviction that existence cannot be grasped by thought. Feelings of melancholy, dread and despair direct the soul of man to the religious *Livs-Anskuelse*. Irony is the first feeling experienced by an individual which brings about a rift between him and the world in which he is immersed in the aesthetic stage of life. He comes to see that momentary experiences of pleasures do not satisfy the deeper yearnings of his spirit. They are always followed by dread or anguish and a sense of emptiness; therefore he rejects the temporal and finite and moves towards the infinite and the eternal. Though this is a higher stage of consciousness yet the individual's existence loses meaning for a while. Kierkegaard refers to this stage as negative. The individual gains his subjectivity by this rejection. He is estranged from the mass and becomes an individual with a subjective inwardness. Subjective inwardness is a positive content which heightens his negativity. "The subjective existing thinker who has the infinite in his soul has it always, and for this reason his form is always negative. When it is the case that he actually reflects existentially the structure of existence in his own existence, he will always be precisely as negative as he is positive; for his positiveness consists in the continuous realization of the inwardness through which he becomes conscious of the negative."⁴

The individual moves further towards a higher subjectivity. Irony in a way announces a possibility of higher development of a personality. The aesthete gets world-weary. He is tired of leading a worldly life. He does not wish now wealth or power, but he wishes for the passion of the possible, because possibility is not disappointing. The aesthete is melancholic. Melancholy is an awakening without movement. "It is hysteria of the spirit."⁵ It is the refusal of the spirit to get transformed but yet without melancholy there can be no metamorphosis of the personality. "People whose souls have no acquaintance with melancholy are those whose souls have no presentiment of metamorphosis."⁶ Melancholy points to a personality with a spiritual dimension but with a spirit still asleep. Awakening comes through an inner movement within the personality.

Melancholy is transcended through the movement of despair. This is the first movement of choice. In Kierkegaard's view when one despairs one chooses oneself in one's eternal validity. Dread precedes the feelings of irony, melancholy and despair. Kierkegaard distinguishes between fear and dread. Fear is always about something, it has an object, dread on the other hand has no object, it has 'nothing' has its object.



CONCLUSION: There are many recurring themes in the philosophical terrain of Kierkegaard. I have given some indication that one of the most prominent themes is the religious life-view which comprises action and which further leads to self-fulfillment.

NOTES

1. Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, translated and with an introduction by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Classics, London, England, 1992, p.603
2. Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, trsl. David F. Swenson, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1944, p.79.
3. Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye, *Fear and Trembling*, translated and with an introduction by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Books, Hammondsworth, 1985, p.506.
4. Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, trsl. David F. Swenson, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1944, p.78.
5. Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye, *Fear and Trembling*, translated and with an introduction by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Books, Hammondsworth, 1985, p.499.
6. Ibid., p.500.

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