

# CHAPTER ONE



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Let us begin, then, with an historical overview. One may ask: for what purpose was philosophy created in the sixth century B.C.E. on the islands between Greece and Asia Minor? Why is there any beginning at all to its history? Why didn't it always exist among people everywhere, rather than merely among the Greeks at a certain historical moment? Philosophy was created when man's consciousness reached a certain level of development. It is a well-established fact in the history of man (one on which scientists normally do not place sufficient emphasis) that over time man's consciousness has fundamentally changed. If you permit me to use a term from biology (metaphorically, of course), a *mutation*, or sudden change, occurs from time to time in the consciousness of man. We often hear of radioactivity causing biological mutations or leaps in the life cycle. Something similar to this happens in man's consciousness. Around the beginning of the sixth century such a radical change occurred in Greek consciousness. Before then it was mythical; the Greeks animated their world with imaginative, mythical, or symbolic forms. Their awareness was like that of the poet or the dreamer today. At a certain moment in time this mythical consciousness was transformed into *cognitive* awareness.

Abstract thought appeared on the altar of man's consciousness—a phenomenon especially well described at the beginning of Rudolph Steiner's book *Die Ratsel der Philosophie*.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that such a change did not occur all at once. The history and development of Greek philosophy reflects the struggle of Greek thinkers with the new form of cognitive consciousness

and the slow extrication from mythical, imaginative and symbolic consciousness, until eventually mythical experiences were replaced by a world-view consisting entirely of abstract thought. To appreciate the gap separating mythic from cognitive consciousness, one need merely recall the function of the oracle in Greek culture. When mythical man wished to know his destiny, he asked the oracle and received an answer in symbols and riddles, mediated by a priest or priestess. The Greeks who learned to think abstractly inquired into their own thoughts and felt bound by their thoughts to universal reason.

The change that occurred in the consciousness of Greek man also affected his relationship to the environment. Clear and distinct thoughts slowly extinguished and eliminated the imaginings of the mythical period in a way not unlike the familiar experience when we awake from sleep and clear thoughts erase and silence the dreams that absorbed us during sleep. It is not inconceivable that what we experience daily, each morning, is but a recapitulation of the enormous change that occurred in the consciousness of man.

Furthermore, mythical man, who lived through emblems and symbols, apparently was at one with his natural environment; he saw nature in much the same way we see our bodies, as part of himself. With the development of rational thought, man felt separated and estranged from nature, which became an alien object for him. What is important to us in this short historical survey of the development of the self is that rational thought brought about the awakening of man's spirit to autonomous life, to self-consciousness. At the same time, however, man's spirit is closed off from the outer world by a wall. Hence questions arise as to the relationship of the thinking individual and thought to the external world from which he has become separated. Plato provided an answer: The external world is nothing but a shadow of our thoughts. Thoughts and ideas constitute the real world, and the external world is only a reflection of this cognitive reality.

In the philosophy of Plato's pupil, Aristotle, treatment of this fundamental question moved toward a certain point of equilibrium: in response to Plato, Aristotle maintained that thoughts are both in the mind of man and in the external world

where they exist as 'forms' of the world. Every wolf is a wolf by virtue of assuming the form of 'wolfness,' as it were. The wolf that ate the lamb does not thereby become a lamb, because he cannot eat the 'form' of the lamb and it is the form that makes the lamb a lamb and the wolf a wolf. Thinking abstractly, man extracts, as it were, the forms that materialized in the world, and can think them purely. Therefore, what is created by man's abstract thought—pure form—is to be found in the world. In this manner the form, or abstract thought, functions as a bridge between consciousness and the world.

Nevertheless, the 'I' of man, by means of the abstract thought that now characterizes his consciousness, has achieved an unprecedented independence. Obviously, this process of the transforming of consciousness took generations, during which time mythical consciousness returned again and again to reconquer its lost ground. The process has not ended even today; fortunately, there still remains a place for imaginative awareness in our lives.

Let us return to the historical overview. With the end of the Greco-Roman period, the Christian era began. It was an era that arose out of an encounter of the Greek with the Judaeo-Christian world. Speculative thought during this period (until the first half of the Middle Ages, approximately the year 1000) turned its attention to the same problem Plato and Aristotle had faced, the question of the validity of man's own thought about the external world. But in the interim the fortification of the self, the process we have been following, had progressed. Man now claimed that thought is primarily an autonomous creation, whereas with the Greeks thought was primarily objective, the form of things existing outside of man's mind. Thus was created that controversy between the Realists and the Nominalists which became an Ariadne's thread running through the entire philosophy of the second half of the Middle Ages.

The question is of the alleged validity of general concepts. Three answers were given to this problematic question of the Middle Ages: (1) The Realists claimed that the generic concept 'wolf' had an independent existence outside of particular wolves. In the first chapter of Genesis it is said that God "created living creatures according to their kind" (1:24). The Realists saw

this as proof that universals were created separately and exist apart from particulars. (2) The Nominalists maintained that only particulars exist and that concepts have only a methodological function in cognition; they are a kind of shorthand for tying together many particulars. The concept itself has no independent existence. (3) The Conceptualists hold a middle position between these two schools, maintaining that while it is true that genus and species have no independent existence, they do exist in the rational soul. When Maimonides writes in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, "it is known that no species exists outside the mind, but that the species and the other universals are, as you know, mental notions and that every existent outside the mind is an individual or a group of individuals,"<sup>4</sup> he is advocating a middle position. The question of the existence or nonexistence of concepts is of considerable importance in Christian theology. If man exists apart from particular men, that ideal man is Christ. This was the view of Nicolaus Cusanus in the fifteenth century. Moreover, Christian theology is based upon the Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Each one is a God. Does this mean there are three Gods, in the way that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are three men? The Conceptualists were forced to answer in the affirmative. The Nominalists, who did not admit the existence of concepts and explained them as mere linguistic productions, had difficulty with the conclusion that there are in fact three persons, three separate Gods. The Realists concluded that there is a single God above and beyond the three figures. This division of opinion shows that the self has grown in intensity to the point that thought is regarded as its creation. Now it is the validity of thought apart from the mind that is problematic.

*Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant*

The process of the magnification of the self reaches its climax in the modern period. One can illustrate this by turning to three thinkers: Descartes, Leibnitz and Kant. Descartes begins from the well-known proposition: "I think, therefore I am." The 'I,' particularly the thinking 'I,' is the definitive start-

ing point from which he derives the reality of God. Since the reality of the world cannot be derived from thought, he has to base it on his faith in God. It is impossible that God would wish to deceive us, and if he produces images of an external world, we can be certain that that world exists. The independence of the self has become so entrenched that it functions as a point of departure for the entire system, which is constructed around the ego, and now the tables are turned—the world has become problematic. One must further stress the idea that this ego, whose reality has become so assured, is the abstract, thinking ego, not the actual ego of Mr. Descartes; there is no place for Mr. Descartes in his system.

Leibnitz sees the world as a habitation of souls, which he calls 'monads.' There is no physical world at all; there are only souls or monads. Each one of us is a single monad, and there are no 'openings' connecting the monads. Each of us is self-contained. "Monads have no windows," says Leibnitz. On the one hand, the self has reached maximum inviolability, with each ego a self-sufficient entity and the world a world of egos. On the other hand, there is no conceivable connecting relationship between them. Each monad is self-contained, drawing all its life from itself. There is no dialogue in the world.

The development of modern European philosophy reaches its highest point with the philosophy of Kant (1724–1804). We can see with utmost clarity in Kant how the stabilization of the self (characterizing the modern development of philosophy) is articulated. Kant is responsible for the Copernican Revolution in philosophy, as he called it. Philosophy before Kant assumed that knowledge must conform to objects; Kant wished to demonstrate that objects must conform to our knowledge. In the center of the world in which we live is the ego, with the forms of sensible intuition and understanding, and it creates the world with the aid of these forms. Reason does not draw the laws of nature from nature. On the contrary, it imposes laws upon nature. The external world, the world of 'things-in-themselves,' cannot be known at all. We can never know whether such a world of things-in-themselves actually exists, and it is unimportant whether we know anything about such a world, since we have no contact with it. The world we live in is a world of our construc-

tion. What happens outside my experience when a stone falls, I cannot know; however, I do know the laws of gravity, and they are determined by my cognitive structure. It is my mental set-up that constitutes the world.

Mathematics and natural science are also constructed according to the laws of our mind. Therefore, if we want to understand the meaning of the world of mathematics and natural science we must inquire into the laws of our mental make-up. The contrary is also true. Science teaches us the laws of the mental structure of our self because science is a crystallization of our cognitive structure.

All that we know are mental phenomena. Kant tried to fortify science from the attacks of the skeptics by placing the world in the mind of man. The ego becomes the definitive focal point of the entire world. This ego, of course, is not the individual ego of Immanuel Kant, the professor in Königsberg, etc. One is not referring to that individual here. The same was true for Descartes when he said, "I think, therefore I am." He was not talking about his private self. The existence of the individual man remained outside the system in the dog house or the caretaker's "shack," as Kierkegaard had described it. The individual has no place in the splendid castle of the philosophical system itself. True, Kant continually talked about the ego, but, as Kierkegaard says, the more one talks about the ego, the more impoverished it becomes until it turns into a ghost and vanishes. The fate of Kant's ego, according to Kierkegaard, is similar to the fate of the crow in the fable, who listened enraptured to the wolf's praises until the cheese fell from its mouth. The 'cheese' that the ego has lost is the reality of the empirical ego, which has steadily evaporated. For Kant and those who followed him, the ego became a world-encompassing 'universal spirit' which created the world from within itself. The relationship between the empirical ego and the world ego (the pure ego) is central to the philosophical disputes after Kant.

### *Fichte and Hegel*

Fichte (1762-1814) denies this relationship with his ethical theory. The transcendental ego, purged completely of empirical

reality, becomes for Fichte the goal and moral destiny of the empirical ego. The vocation of the empirical ego is to overcome the world, or, as Fichte puts it, to subdue the 'not-I' and free itself entirely from the determinism and limitations imposed on it by the object. The empirical ego—for example, Mr. Immanuel Kant, professor from Königsberg—is always dependent upon the 'not-I,' the environment, and is conditioned by it. This dependency is expressed by Fichte in the equation 'I = not-I.' The sign of equivalence means 'depends upon' or 'is determined by.' Dependency, according to Fichte, is immoral, and the 'I' must liberate itself from it. It must be dependent only on itself. Now one can formulate the moral law in the following way: the equation 'I = not-I' must be replaced by 'I = I'; however, the total independence of the ego from its objects is only possible for God, not for man. The function of ethics—the transformation of the 'not-I' to 'I'—is therefore infinite; one must continually aspire to reach this goal even though it can never be reached. In every concrete situation one must overcome the difficulties the environment imposes and become an absolute and self-determining individual. This is the way Fichte perceives the relationship between the empirical ego and the transcendental ego. The universal ego is the function, goal and imperative; it is what ought to be rather than what is; and what is—namely the empirical ego—is not worthy of existing.

Fichte did not succeed in reconciling the empirical with the transcendental, divine ego. He only posited an infinite aspiration, an infinite imperative—or, as Kierkegaard put it, using an Hegelian term—a 'negative infinite.' What he lacked was a 'positive infinite,' since the ego can overcome only those difficulties that are thrust before it at a specific moment. When one subdues them, however, other obstacles arise; thus one never achieves the peace and happiness formulated by the equation 'I = I.' However, says Kierkegaard, precisely because Fichte maintains an attitude of 'negative infinity,' of reaching without limit, his position demands infinite zeal and flexibility. He demands unflagging alertness despite and precisely because of man's inability to reach his goal of peace and security. Since Fichte is forced to settle for infinite negations, he cannot have an affirmative relation to reality, to the world. The function of the world is simply to continually awaken the moral action of the self in the same

manner that obstacles placed in the path of a galloping horse preparing for a steeplechase are used to strengthen his muscles and train him to jump higher and higher. The reality which is given to man and of which he is a part has only a negative purpose; in and of itself it need not exist. Reality for Fichte is therefore pallid. His philosophy, according to Kierkegaard, is acosmic; it is an annihilation of the world within the absolute ego.

Whereas Fichte established the empirical ego as the vantage point from which to observe the unreachable, transcendental ego, the position of Hegel (1770–1831) was based on the idea of the infinite ego, the world spirit. The world spirit—in Fichte’s terminology, ‘I = I’—is the sole reality. To be sure, finite things also exist, but their existence, when perceived in their particularity and separateness, is derivative. Things are merely representations of the Divine; they are the manifestations of God. Clearly, Hegel was decisively influenced by Spinoza. Like Spinoza, he is a pantheist, though the God he identifies with the world is an absolute spirit. The world is but an evolution of this spirit. Everything that happens in the world happens with logical necessity, and the essence of all things is reason. All that is rational, and only the rational exists. In the words of Hegel, “What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.” Therefore, the philosopher must penetrate the inner essence of things and deduce their existence from the imperatives of reason.

For Hegel, the absolute or pure ego is not something that transcends the world; it is not a goal we are bound to realize, as for Fichte. The spirit has enough force in it to realize and actualize itself. It exists not beyond, but rather within the world in which it realizes itself. For Hegel there is no ‘ought’ that has not changed into an ‘is.’ For Fichte, the ‘I = not-I’ exists in fact, whereas the ‘I = I’ should exist but does not since it is only a goal. What actually exists is the relative and the limited. In place of Fichte’s ardent, dynamic striving toward a goal, Hegel introduces the static that always reaches its objective and rests there. What is momentous about the static is that it contains the dynamic. Within the infinite of Hegel the finite has a worthy place, because finitude is the means by which the infinite spirit



manifests itself and becomes actual. The finite, with all its limitations and partiality, is a manifestation of the infinite. God does not reside beyond the process of the world; he lives in the world process, within history.

The revelation of the infinite within the finite occurs in a strictly logical manner, though this is not ordinary logic but a higher, dialectical logic that recognizes the existence of contradiction and justifies it. Contradictions are the essence of reality; yet reality also contains the reconciliation and completion of opposites in a higher unity. The rhythm of reality is affirmation, negation, and their cancellations within a higher unity—or, in other words, thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Every concept changes into its opposite out of metaphysical necessity, and from the synthesis of the opposites comes a higher unity and a more comprehensive concept. The process then begins again in relation to the higher concept. The synthesis again becomes the thesis on a higher level of development, creating a new antithesis and thereby finally reaching a new synthesis. This entire logical process is not merely a subjective matter involving human thinking; it is at the same time an objective process unfolding in actuality, for the concept is the essence of actuality. The forms of the spirit, in their logical-dialectical development, are also the forms of unfolding actuality. The infinitely manifold forms of actuality, of the world, and of history, are nothing more than the mode in which the absolute spirit appears and reveals itself. The infinite spirit, the 'I = I,' exists and actualizes itself through the infinitely manifold forms of the finite, through the 'I = not-I.'

There is no opposition here between God and the world as with Fichte; on the contrary, one finds a unity between the two. God exists because the world exists; the infinite exists by virtue of the finite in its unlimited plurality. History is the manifestation of God. Thus the philosophy of Hegel is an historical world-view, but at the same time it is anthropocentric. Man is at the center of the world, and his evolution is also the embodiment of the infinite spirit.

When we attempt to analyze and understand Hegel's philosophy by contrasting it with Plato's and Aristotle's, we can see that ideas or forms do not exist beyond the world, as in Plato, but in the world. The world is the embodiment of the

forms, as in Aristotle. Hegel's 'objective spirit,' that is to say, law, morality, the family, society and the state, are all objective realizations of the world ego. This is particularly true with reference to the state. The state is the embodiment of reason. Here one can find evidence of Hegel's dependence on Greek culture, since his conception of the state as an absolute realization of universal reason is in stark contrast to the miserable condition of the German political life of his time. (Germany was then fragmented into numerous states and principalities.) His political philosophy had a decisive influence on German history and, through Marx, on world history.

Turning now to the position of the empirical ego, we see that for Hegel it is but an appearance of the infinite ego. Empirical egos have no importance per se, since the universal ego uses them as its instruments. The individual empirical ego is given its impetus by its own self-centered desire. It seeks to become actual and to actualize its aspirations. But this is only "the cunning of reason," says Hegel in a famous phrase. The individual who pursues his objectives and thinks that he is realizing his plans is actually only realizing the projects of the universal ego.

### *Kierkegaard and Hegel*

Kierkegaard begins his philosophy with Hegel. Hegel provided him with the loom upon which he would weave his intellectual and spiritual development, so it is impossible to understand Kierkegaard without Hegel, and we will have to return to Hegel from time to time as we describe Kierkegaard's thinking. In Hegel's terms, Kierkegaard provided the antithesis of Hegelianism. Kierkegaard fought on behalf of the individual against Hegel's collectivist view. For Kierkegaard the individual is the most important category. Only for the individual are there religious life and religious categories, especially sin. He also attacks Hegel's overestimation of the importance of the state and the influence of history. By justifying contradiction, Hegel created a philosophy that weakened the moral polarities instead of stressing their validity. Kierkegaard criticizes Hegel for viewing the history of man as a manifestation of God. This would

eliminate the difference between man and God that is the foundation of religion. Hegel's position, we have seen, depends on perceiving reality by reference to the universal spirit, and he views the world from the perspective of infinity. According to Kierkegaard, this is impossible and is forbidden to man. Whereas thought and being are interchangeable for Hegel, who wished to see things from a divine vantage point, Kierkegaard stresses the view that, for man, thought and being are not identical. To think about Christianity is something completely different from being a Christian. The thoughts of God create, says Kierkegaard; for God thought is actual. For the finite self an abyss separates thought from actuality.

Hegel viewed the development of the world (which is the manifestation of God) as a necessary process in accord with the laws of dialectical logic. Kierkegaard vehemently opposes this approach in order to assert the freedom of the individual as a unique person. Only if such freedom exists is there a place for the religious categories of sin and forgiveness. The transition from possibility to actuality is not a necessary one for Kierkegaard. It occurs voluntarily. It is a jump, a leap.

### *Romanticism and the Cult of Genius*

The relationship of the empirical ego to the philosophical system is the problem underlying our discussion. In Hegel's system the empirical ego has no independent standing. The individual is of no significance in relation to the universal. Hegel lived during the Romantic period, and the Romantics also struggled with the problem of the individual. We said that Fichte's point of departure was the individual ego that forever turns toward the infinite ego, and that for Hegel the infinite ego, the world spirit, incorporates the individual ego. We may now state that for representatives of the Romantic school the empirical ego incorporates the divine ego. Man set himself up as God. The cult of genius, so typical of German Romanticism, had emerged. Its representative is Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829).

In his youth Schlegel was an advocate of a radical subjectivism that recognized no inhibition or restraint. Whereas for

Hegel the objective, the universal principle, absorbs the total individual in all his particularity, for Schlegel the process is reversed. The subjective empirical ego breaks through all laws and constraints of objectivity. Real man is Romantic man, who acknowledges no norms except those he imposes upon himself by his own free imagination. Where Fichte perceives reality as the raw material of moral obligation, Schlegel sees the world as the ground for his aesthetic game. The temperament that recognizes the sovereignty of the ego is called by the Romantics the 'ironic temperament.' Thus irony was defined by the theoretician K. W. F. Solger (1780-1819) as "the view that hovers above all and eliminates all."

For Friedrich Schlegel, the ironist is first and foremost the poet. Schlegel attributes absolute freedom to the poet and demands the right of arbitrariness for the individual genius. What are called laws and artistic norms are merely the moods of the great artist; aesthetic enjoyment results from the artist continually delighting in the arbitrary creativeness with which he produces his art. This process, however, lacks any lawlike objectivity.

The carefree attitude of the genius also has application in ethics. Here, too, for Schlegel, the genius makes his own laws and breaks regulations, which are merely valid for 'philistines.' What Hegel regards as the "objective spirit of customs and morals" (*Sittlichkeit*), Schlegel takes to be 'philistinism.' And just as the Romantics never hesitated to liberate themselves from the prevailing morality in their private lives, Schlegel announced absolute freedom in the moral sphere first and foremost with respect to marriage in his novel *Lucinde* (1799). Instead of marriage he advocated free love, in which both the erotic and the spiritual nature of man would be expressed.

Kierkegaard struggled with the concept of irony, and he fought the battle on two fronts. Together with the Romantics he fought for the individual against the rule of the collective and for the subjective against the objective as represented by Hegel. Yet he abhorred the Romantics' tempestuousness and exaggerated subjectivism that isolated man. He strenuously sought the way to religion through the use of subjective irony.

Kierkegaard's first book is devoted to this problem: his dissertation for the master's degree was entitled "The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates" (1841).

### *Kierkegaard's Life*

Before we consider his first book, we must offer a short account of Kierkegaard's life. He was born in 1813 in Copenhagen. The person who decisively influenced his spiritual development was his father, a prosperous merchant. Kierkegaard recounts three traits which he inherited from his father: the power of imagination, the power to win in debate, and melancholy. He describes first how his father trained his imagination. Instead of going with him for a walk, his father paced back and forth with him in a room, describing the main street of the city in exact detail. After half an hour of walking, the child was more exhausted than if he had gone on an actual walk. His father's debating skill was a special source of pleasure to him. Kierkegaard recalled how in conversations with friends his father would allow them to develop their ideas at length. He would wait until they had elaborated all their arguments and it appeared that there was nothing more to add, and then he would make his move. After a short while he had refuted his partner's argument: what was at first clear was rendered doubtful or totally fallacious, and whatever his partner had rejected now became necessary and certain.

From birth Kierkegaard was subject to the tyranny of melancholy. He learned to conceal the lifelong burden that weighed on him behind a mask of cheerfulness, mischievousness and even debauchery, so that no one could guess how intensely he suffered. In 1836 he noted the following in his journal:

I have just returned from a party of which I was the life and soul; wit poured from my lips, everyone laughed and admired me—but I went away—and the dash should be as long as the earth's orbit-----and wanted to shoot myself.<sup>5</sup>

On his Gilleleje summer holiday in 1835, when he was twenty-two, he entered the "complete account" of his life in the journal. What he needed especially, he discerned, was to find the idea for which he would be willing to live and die—his own truth. He allotted himself three years to achieve his objective. He thought that he would reach his goal without regret and "not waste time grieving" (p. 20).

In these last words there is an indication of the aesthetic direction Kierkegaard was to follow during the next few years. He had entered life endowed with brilliant talents and all the appropriate outward circumstances. By virtue of his keen mind and his wit he became the center of his circle and passed his time with them in coffee houses. He neglected the theological studies he had begun at his father's urging, but his profligacy failed to divert him from his deep melancholy.

Was this melancholy congenital or the result of actual guilt, sexual guilt experienced after drinking parties with friends? We do not know. Kierkegaard repeatedly spoke about "a painful thorn in [his] flesh" in words reminiscent of Paul: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Corinthians, 12:7). Kierkegaard frequently mentions in his journal that he is pledged to silence about the thorn in the flesh and is unable to confess its existence. The thorn was the major obstacle on his way to the priesthood; it was also one of the reasons he gave for breaking his engagement. What exactly this thorn was, we do not know; perhaps it is inadvisable to try to ascertain.

The thorn may have resulted not from his own guilt but from his father's. Biographers tell us that in his youth his

father was a shepherd, living in dire poverty. His condition drove him to attack heaven, and once he cursed God. The feeling of guilt accompanied him throughout his life. Was this the thorn? Or was it the fact that Kierkegaard was conceived out of wedlock, his father having married his maid (Soren's mother) after the death of his first wife, when the maid was in her fourth month of pregnancy? He speaks of the moment his father's secret was divulged to him as the "great earthquake" (p. 66).

During his youth two things linked him securely to life: his father and his religion. In the three years of his "aesthetic" period, during which he sought to reach his objective "without remorse," he was left entirely to his own resources. Yet we know from his papers that even these years of skepticism and secular living were intermingled with prayer. The thorn in his flesh at times drove him back to prayer in spite of his doubts. On the morning of May 19, 1838, something miraculous happened:

May 19, 1838, *Half-past ten in the morning*. There is an indescribable joy which enkindles us as inexplicably as the apostle's outburst comes gratuitously: "Rejoice I say unto you, and again I say unto you rejoice."—Not a joy over this or that but the soul's mighty song "with tongue and mouth, from the bottom of the heart": "I rejoice through my joy, in, at, with, over, by, and with my joy"—a heavenly refrain, as it were, suddenly breaks off our other song; a joy which cools and refreshes us like a breath of wind, a wave of air, from the trade wind which blows from the plains of Mamre to the everlasting habitations. (p. 59)

We do not know the cause of this sudden joy. The manner in which it is described, with the precise time noted, reminds one of the form in which Pascal recorded his revelation, "an event lasting from 10:30 till one halfhour after midnight." In any case, the experience of May 19 was a turning point in Kierkegaard's life. It altered his relationship to his father irreversibly. Three months later his father died. "He died for me in order that possibly I might still turn into something."<sup>6</sup> From the day of the "miracle," of the "enormous joy," we find no doubts or hesitations in his faith in God and his love for him, regardless of the cruel crisis he was to undergo.

The most difficult test occurred two years after his father's death, in 1840, when he annulled his engagement to Regine Olsen. Why did Kierkegaard break his engagement to the woman he so loved and continued to love until his death that in his will he designated her as his heir and considered himself linked to her even after she had married another man? Books and articles have been written on this question, because the history of his engagement is bound up with the history of his philosophi-

cal activity. Kierkegaard wanted to marry a woman with all his heart, but he could not do so. Was it his melancholy, the “thorn in his flesh,” that would not let him? Many years later he said, “Had I had faith I should have remained with Regine.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, his personal faith in the omnipotence of God was not strong enough for him to believe he could overcome his inner failings. This weakness in his faith, though, was part of the process of divine providence. In his final illness, a few days before his death, he confided to Emil Boesen, his devoted friend:

How are you?—“Poorly, it is death, pray for me that it may come quickly and easily. I am depressed. Like Paul, I had my ‘thorn in the flesh’; so that I was unable to enter into the usual relations of life and I therefore concluded that my task was extraordinary; and I tried to carry it out as best I could; I was the toy of providence which produced me and I was to be used; and then crash! and providence stretched out its hand and took me into the ark; that is always the life and fate of the extraordinary messenger. That was also what stood in the way of my marriage with Regine. I did think that it could be changed, but it could not, so I broke off my engagement.”<sup>8</sup>

He regarded himself as a messenger, sent to the world to teach mankind true religion, true Christianity. Dispensing with ordinary relations and with the simple life of a citizen and a husband was a sacrifice demanded from above. Kierkegaard saw himself as a soldier of the book, facing the enemy, forbidden to marry.

The period in his life after the crucial decision was one of rich literary fruition. In 1841 his dissertation on irony was published, and in 1843–46 he published eight books. These were not published under his name but with various pseudonyms—not intended to conceal the author’s identity, since everyone knew who he was, but to prevent a total identification with the content of his ‘aesthetic books.’ He knew his was a generation of aesthetes, and if he wanted to win over his readers to his true religious objectives he would have to present himself to them as an aesthetic writer. The religious discourses published at the same time appeared under his own name; however,



no one paid any attention to them, whereas his aesthetic books brought him renown as a brilliant writer throughout Denmark.

In January 1846 a new and difficult test came. The satirical newspaper *Corsair* attacked him in a series of articles accompanied by caricatures of his dress, his personality and his sorrow over his broken engagement. The author of the articles was his onetime friend, a drinking companion from those profligate years. Kierkegaard had hoped that his best friends would rally to his side and silence the paper, but, afraid of its sharp sting, they kept silent, and instead of displaying their loyalty to Kierkegaard, they avoided being seen with him in public. The *Corsair* made him well known. In the streets of Copenhagen, children ran after him and mocked him. Everyone remained silent; he stood betrayed. He praised God for the vulgar attacks made upon him by the rabble, stating that as long as he maintained his position, his faith, he would triumph. He knew that before God he was pure and that his strength was derived from his faith.<sup>9</sup>

The journal hints at a transformation in his religious life during that period in the late eighteen-forties. His evaluation of his suffering had changed. Inwardly he had always said that he had no right to complain to God about his suffering and that he must accept it with love. Now, though, he took decisive steps toward a new understanding of Christianity and his destiny as a Christian. Suffering was not a punishment for sins but a prerequisite to becoming a servant of God in a world which was devoid of his presence and which by its nature detested him and those who walk in his path. God not only forgave him for his sins but erased them completely in this world and the next: “. . . there suddenly broke out in my soul a wealth which I now shudder to look back upon. Therein lies my strength: my suffering constitutes my superiority.”<sup>10</sup>

In this view, Christianity is by its nature a religion of suffering, and the Christian is driven to live at odds with the masses, in fear and trembling—like Abraham, who brought his son to be sacrificed, and like Job, who despised all that had brought him satisfaction and pleasure. Kierkegaard defended this position uncompromisingly. Inevitably, this put him in opposition to the official church and its prelates, his brother among them.

Christianity was a difficult religion, and Kierkegaard's proposal to the Bible societies who distributed the New Testament by the millions was as follows:

Let us collect all the New Testaments there are in existence, let us carry them out to an open place or upon a mountain, and then while we all kneel down, let someone address God in this fashion: Take this book back; we men, such as we are now, are no good at dealing with a thing like this, it only makes us unhappy.<sup>11</sup>

Kierkegaard, in the *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, asks the following question: What has official Christianity, the religion of the State, done with this book and with this religion? It has turned it into a sweet faith of sentimental love, a religion for children. It is depicted as a comfortable and easily accessible religion that brings eternal happiness to the home of every Christian as effortlessly as water is brought by the municipality to the home of its citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Kierkegaard tried to dissuade churchgoers from crossing the church threshold. Christianity does not exist, he said. Christians have done away with it.

In the middle of this bitter war Kierkegaard died. As he lay in the hospital during his last days, his brother, the bishop, came to visit him: Kierkegaard would not receive him. To his close friend, Emil Boesen, he related how difficult this war against official religion with its bishops and priests was, and he used the following analogy:

In a wildboar hunt the huntsman has a hound, a picked animal; they know what will happen: the wildboar will be thrown, but it kills the hound that catches it.<sup>13</sup>

Kierkegaard saw himself as the hound of God.

In his last days he felt that all was ended, and in response to Emil Boesen's remark, "As you sit there and talk you look fresh and well, just as though you could get up and go away with me," Kierkegaard responded:

“Yes, there is only one difficulty, I cannot walk, though there is always the other method of locomotion: I could be carried; I have had the feeling of becoming an angel and of growing wings. Moreover, that is what is to happen: to sit astride a cloud and sing Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! . . . Of course every blockhead can say that, the whole point is how one says it.”  
“And is all that because you believe in and fly to the grace of God in Christ?” “Yes, of course, what else?”<sup>14</sup>