

**AN APPRAISAL OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S ETHICAL THOUGHT
SURROUNDING HIS CONCEPT OF DECISIONAL PROCESS**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY IN PHILOSOPHY**

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION, THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Kierkegaard has been referred to as the father of existentialism, a view which he seems not to subscribe to. In his philosophy, he claims to have presented a clear ethical position concerning his usage of the decisional process which he presents as subjective in nature. But a closer reading of his works reveal that, he not only uses it as he claims but also, presents it as collective in nature; hence, he presents an apparent logical contradiction. This variation seemingly makes him appear to contradict himself consequently raising the question of lack of clarity. In the context of this, there is need to critically appraise Kierkegaard's sentiments as reflected in his decisional process. In the milieu of this, the study critically appraises Kierkegaard's ethical thought surrounding his concept of the decisional process so that it can be clarified. Specific objectives were to; determine whether or not Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy is subjective or collective in nature, and examine the extent to which the decisional process influences Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy. The conceptual framework that guided the study was adopted from Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction and Jean-Paul Sartre's existence as preceding essence for human beings. Common to these two is that phenomenology works with the data of consciousness and its goal is a penetration to the essence of things. The phenomena of freedom which informs Kierkegaard's ethical thought, supposedly lies in consciousness, and thus ought to be examined in such a way that its essences are revealed. The study relied on primary texts authored by Kierkegaard and secondary texts consisting of a critical survey of written works on his personality. The study engaged the critical, dialectical and evaluative methods of philosophical inquiry. The study found out that: Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy is collective in nature; and, that the decisional process influences the ethical subject to the extent that it actualizes itself. The study recommends that; Kierkegaard's collectivity should embrace social existence to grant his ethical thought a humanistic tinge; Kierkegaard's affirmation of the universalistic character of ethics on account of its irrational character is unwarranted; and, the role of reason should be appreciated in giving the ethical individual the bearing he seeks to pursue. The findings may enhance understanding of Kierkegaardian ethics among scholars and thus foster curriculum development. The study proposes cross-cultural philosophical dialogues as an area for further research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

It is generally agreed that philosophical statements should be as clear as possible inviting no contradictions at all (Wheatley; 1970, 20). A similar notion is expressed in Logic where in the event of discovery of a single instance of a contradiction in a statement or discourse, then the whole of it should be subjected to scrutiny (Albert & Ulrich; 1980, 34). The foregoing sentiments apply to Kierkegaard whose ethical philosophy, closely read, appears to be ambivalent and self-stultifying thus informing the basis of this study.

In a bid to give a critical explanation of the task in question, this study chose the personality of Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who has been acclaimed as the 'father of existentialism' (Auden, 1999; Blackham, 1977) although; he himself never used the term Existentialism (Chamberlain & Ree; 1998). It is apt to observe that, while Kierkegaard's philosophical activity originated in the problematic predicaments of his life; the study sought a wider resolution by analyzing how this informed his ethical philosophy particularly, his decisional process is invoked in this study to show that he ambivalently uses it between subjectivity and collectivity, hence, raising the possibility of a logical contradiction. To this end, to regard his submission as solely being concerned with his own existence is mistaken.

Kierkegaard was not only a religious writer, as Martin Heidegger (2000) calls him, but also in his religious writings the existentialist philosophy was present and many modern existentialists have derived their philosophy from his works (Golomb; 1995). It would thus be difficult to separate

Kierkegaard from existential philosophy. Kierkegaard was what he was because he had to struggle to transcend his master, Hegel, whose thought permeates his whole work (Heidegger; 2000).

Existentialism is defined as a philosophical movement that holds reality as consisting of living and that man makes himself what he is and is responsible personally only to himself for what he makes himself (Cooper; 1990). Existentialism has the following as its major postulates; existence is always particular and individual. It is always concerned with 'my existence', 'your existence', 'his existence'; is concerned primarily with the problem of existence, that is, the mode of being. The investigation of existence is continually faced with diverse possibilities from among which the existent [i.e., man] must make a selection, to which he may commit himself. Because these possibilities are constituted by man's relationships with things and with other men, existence is always a being-in-the-world, which is, in a concrete and historically determined situation that limits or conditions human choice (Craig; 1998, 244). On the overall, Existentialism strives to make manifest the darkness in man's understanding of the human situation and has as its major tenet concepts of the conscious/unconscious which are of decisive importance as a way of looking at man.

Kierkegaard's exposition on the ethical reality of the concrete human existence forms the basis of his existential thought. Kierkegaard's most significant contribution to existential philosophy is his concept of the decisional process, which he presents variably as subjectivity and collectivity. These two [subjectivity and collectivity] acquire an ethical dimension in his thought, with the main trait being the establishment of ultimate sources of fundamental moral values in

man which lies in the subject of consciousness (Kierkegaard; 1990). In the presentation of the ethical, Kierkegaard sometimes is not entirely clear and uses some concepts which border 'existentialism' to refer to his ethics essentially linked with existence (Kierkegaard; 1992, 302). He was convinced that pure thinking without involving the ethical experience of the human being cannot explain existence. Ethics for him is not a matter of seeing the good the way Plato holds (Wood; 2001) but of making a decision. By the decisional process, Kierkegaard attributes the notion of choice on the part of the individual as the defining (Kierkegaard; 1990). In this, he opines that it is the individual alone who is responsible for choosing his source of life. This he attaches to the subjective individual. Thus to him, the subjective individual is the individual who exists on his own, hence his concept of subjectivity. He proposed subjectivity not only as the essence of human existence, but also emphasized it to be the foundation of human freedom and responsibility (*Ibid.*) Freedom and responsibility being the fundamental ethical concepts in Existentialism is ultimately derived from subjectivity itself (Kierkegaard; 1938).

But elsewhere, (*Ibid.*, 35) his basic ethical concern of human race was to have a universal dimension that cut across the spatio-temporal and cultural lines of demarcation. However, it is important to note that a key tenet of Existentialism is that an individual is supposed to choose for himself his course of life (Cooper; 1990). The foregoing Kierkegaardian sentiment in this respect goes against the grain of Existentialism. It is hence revealed that he seems to be alluding to the collective individual instead of sticking to the subjective individual. As a result, this presents a difficulty in understanding him for at one time he seems to be talking of one thing, yet at another, subscribing to a different position. This is telling of a contradiction, which is not

proper in the logical sphere. This further makes it difficult for one to categorize him as an Existentialist philosopher.

In respect to the foregoing, it is evident that clarity lacks as to whether or not the subjective or the collective individual should be given prominence in the decisional process. This is a clear case of inconsistency in philosophical discourse worth examining. The latter day reader may get confused and therefore unable to understand him for it appears as though he has two faces. It was against this background that this study sought to appraise Kierkegaard's ethical thought.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Kierkegaard has been referred to as the father of Existentialism (Auden, 1999; Blackham, 1977) a view which he seems not to subscribe to (Chamberlain & Ree; 1998). In his philosophy, he claims to have presented a clear ethical position concerning his usage of the decisional process which he presents as subjective in nature. But a closer reading of his works reveals that he not only uses it, as he claims, but also presents it as collective in nature; hence, he presents an apparent logical contradiction. This variation seemingly makes him appear to contradict himself consequently raising the question of lack of clarity. In the context of this, there is need to critically appraise Kierkegaard's sentiments as reflected in his decisional process.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were advanced:

- a) Is Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy collective in its nature?
- b) To what extent is Kierkegaard's philosophy influenced by the decisional process?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following alternative hypotheses were advanced:

- a) Kierkegaard's philosophy is collective in nature.
- b) Kierkegaard's philosophy is influenced by the decisional process.

1.5 Objectives

The overall objective of the study was to critically appraise Kierkegaard's ethical thought surrounding his concept of the decisional process so that it can be clarified. Specific objectives were to:

- a) Determine whether or not Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy is collective in nature.
- b) Examine the extent to which the decisional process influences Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

The study intended to make an appraisal of Kierkegaard's ethical thought with the express aim of making his concept of the decisional process clear. The study also took note that he was a key figure in existential thought. The study limited itself to examining his ethical philosophy though reference was occasionally made to Existentialism, given that he at times used concepts bordering it. Given his usage of such concepts bordering on Existentialism, we were limited in terms of establishing whether or not it is proper to classify him as an existentialist philosopher in the strict sense of the term.

As much as Kierkegaard claims not to be an existentialist, it is clear that he was influenced by the existential philosophy and, to some extent; it was prudent for this study to have a look at key tenets in Existentialism. In doing this, the work did not make an evaluative study of the intellectual climate in which this philosophy had its own origin. Doing this would have required a separate study of its own nature. Instead, we picked on areas of existentialism that were relevant in addressing the question of existence either at the subjective or the collective level, and examined how they informed Kierkegaard's ethical thought. This was from the premise that Existentialism is generally thought to be a philosophy of the concrete man (Bhadra; 1990). In doing this, it does not want to understand man as the manifestation of a pre-given cluster of qualities known as essence, nor does it want to inquire into the nature of man as bound by the logical rules of a system. Existentialism does not think that the scientific study of the detailed life – functions of man can give us a proper vision of the deeper nature of man and that reason only tries to give us an idea of man in general, not that of the uniqueness of the individual man (*loc.cit.*).

With regard to the foregoing, the study did not limit itself to the existentialist understanding of reason, which appears narrow in approach. Instead, an attempt was made to bring out the unparalleled supremacy of reason as an instrument of knowledge in this appraisal. This meant that we did not limit ourselves to the existential view that reason is insufficient to reveal the uniqueness of the subjective or collective man. However it would be proper to acknowledge that some of these tendencies got a crystallized shape in Existentialism.

1.7 Justification

The justification for this study was grounded on efforts to clarify and understand the philosophy of Kierkegaard who is a key figure in existential thought. Delving deep into the philosophical examination of Kierkegaard we can assert that when we talk of human freedom, we talk of the human person as the one experiencing it.

Kierkegaard is a case in point because of the uniqueness of his life and thought. His approach was not only convincing, but he also demonstrated it with his own life. He renounced normal life to dedicate himself to examining the 'truth' about ethical human existence.

At the outset, Kierkegaard found himself deeply confused as to the proper anchor for his quest to form his own identity. When people are confused as to their self-identity, a serious quest for genuine self can begin. Against this background, Kierkegaard's most significant contribution to Existentialism is his concept of subjectivity and collectivity in the decisional process regarding human freedom. In talking about the decisional process, Kierkegaard appears inconsistent as to which between the subjective individual and the collective individual should be given prominence in the decisional process, thus clearly driving him into some sort of contradiction. In the process a reader would be confused as to whether or not it is the subjective individual or the collective individual that is being referred to by Kierkegaard. It was this kind of lack of clarity that this study sought to address. As logic has it, a single instance of a contradiction in an argument or a discourse is reason enough to subject it to scrutiny, which justifies this inquiry. To this end the justification lies in the following questions: should one be freely allowed to

engage in self-stultification? Is it possible to return to the origins of fundamental moral values within man in the decisional process? These questions ought to be answered to justify our case.

On the overall this study, which is a reflection on Kierkegaard's philosophical quest to establish what it means to be an individual in a world full of mystery, hopes to shed some light thus giving meaning to life. We hope the results of this study may help us to understand why man ought to live an actual life rather than a possible one. Besides this, it is also geared towards contributing to the existing body of knowledge regarding freedom in human existence. The findings may enhance understanding of Kierkegaard, particularly among scholars and hopefully intensify the task of curriculum development.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by concepts of Phenomenology and Existentialism that specifically touched on the subject of consciousness. Key among these is Edmund Husserl's (1973) phenomenological reduction and Jean-Paul Sartre's (1989) existence preceding essence for human beings.

In general, it can be observed that Phenomenology has the data of consciousness with which it works and that its goal is a penetration to the essence of things (Farber; 1966). As a concept, the phenomenological method was suited for this study since we were dealing with the phenomenon of existence that purportedly lies in consciousness. Thus the phenomenon of existence ought to be examined in such a way that the essence in it is revealed.

The process of making essences stand out in consciousness, begins with an 'original' phenomenon, which may be given either in perception or imagination (Husserl; 1973). This original appearance serves merely as an 'example' upon which the process of ideation can be built. It consists in submitting the original perception or imagination to a series of 'free' variations, wherein the object is viewed from various points such as that of an individual or more.

Husserl observes, in line with phenomenological reduction the thesis that in view of the natural standpoint the real world has its 'Being' out there as a fact would and, is not always expressed in explicit existential judgment. It is and remains implicit during the entire time it is adopted (Husserl; 1964). This thesis can be compared to Descartes' attempt to doubt everything in his Cartesian, although we may observe that the attempt to doubt everything is a characteristic of man's freedom at any moment. We can attempt to doubt everything, even though we are convinced of things that we doubt, and the evidence that is given to us is totally adequate. This concept helped in questioning Kierkegaard's ability of the possibility of getting behind the natural standpoint to identify an invariant intentional structure. This was from the premise that perhaps one could be hallucinating and hence has a perception that could be mistaken or uncertain regarding human freedom.

A person in his doubt, in Husserl's opinion, tries to doubt some form or other of Being. In other words we cannot at the same time doubt and hold certain one and the same quality of Being. In phenomenological reduction, the attempt to give to consciousness any object with regard to its being there necessarily implies a certain suspension of the natural thesis. This is precisely what

concerned us in this study. In this concept, the suspension does not transform the thesis into anti-thesis or doubt. Rather, it is something unique, that is, the thesis is experience as lived. As it happens in similar experience, we are dealing here with indicators, as Husserl would say, which point to a definite but unique form of consciousness, which “clamps on the original thesis and trans-values it in a quite peculiar way” (Husserl; 1964). This transformation of value is a concern of our full freedom insofar as it enables us understand existence.

In Sartre’s existence preceding essence for human beings, Being-for-itself is the being of human consciousness that at every moment is freely choosing its future. This consciousness, he notes, arises by virtue of its power of negation based on freedom: “[consciousness] constitutes itself in its own flesh as the nihilation of a possibility which another human reality projects as its possibility. For that reason it must arise in the world as a not” (Sartre; 1989). Individual consciousness constitutes itself by freely rejecting all roles that others try to force upon it. It is precisely in the act of saying ‘no’ to all attempts to make one into a being-in-itself that one creates oneself as a being-for-itself.

In creating oneself, one does not choose what he will become on the basis of preexisting values. To him, there are no eternal values, no givens for one to use. Dostoevsky’s character, Ivan Karamazov had claimed, “If there is no God, all things are lawful” (Dostoevsky; 1912). Sartre concurred with Dostoevsky and added that since there was no God, all things are, indeed lawful (*op.cit.*). In fact, there is no possible justification for any choice that one might make, since justification implies appeal to given values. To this end, one is free to choose one’s values without any external justification.

While this freedom is complete, it has to be observed that, it is not absolute. In the first place, as a free being, one encounters other free beings. Sartre observes in line with these that, "My world is interrupted when the 'other' gives me 'the look'". By looking at me, the other objectifies me, makes me a part of his world, part of his freedom and "thus being-seen constitutes me as a being without defenses for a freedom which is not my freedom" (Sartre; 1989). Sartre posits a way for regaining back his freedom, namely, by looking back and by an act of will transforming the other into an object for him. This led him to exclaim, "Hell is other people" (*Ibid.*). Our project is to find out whether or not Kierkegaard held the same view in relation to the world of people – objects.

From the foregoing, in acknowledging the 'facticity' found in existence one should still let his freedom prevail by creating means, which, in turn, should create the world in which one lives. It remains to be seen whether or not Kierkegaard is willing or unwilling to face up to this radical freedom and instead turn his power of negation inward upon consciousness itself. According to Guignon and Pereboom (1994), Sartre calls this negative turn 'bad faith' and to him, to live in bad faith is to deny oneself as a being-for-itself in order to become a being-in-itself. Being-in-itself is complete in itself, 'solid', fixed and totally given: "uncreated, without reason for being, without connection with any other being, being-in-itself is superfluous for all eternity" (Warnock: 1965).

Consequently, with regard to Kierkegaard this mode of being seems to be bad faith because it refuses to acknowledge that only the individual determines the meanings of externals and instead

seems to blame others or circumstances for what one has become. Furthermore, one always has alternatives no matter the circumstances and so one's choice ought to be always free. We thus concur with Sartre's assertion that man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. To this end, we subjected Kierkegaard to a rational inquiry to determine to what extent one's anguish, despair and identity bring about the primacy of freedom.

In conclusion, with regard to the foregoing phenomenological realm, we have to keep our eyes on the sphere of consciousness and to study what we find immanent in it. In this regard, it was necessary to subject the very essence of the sphere of consciousness to a systematic analysis. This was with the hope that we will arrive at the full insight of that consciousness in itself as having a being of its own, which is absolutely unique as a phenomenological residuum. Since we are dealing with the phenomenon of existence, the aforementioned phenomenological orientation was suitable to grant us sufficient if not 'pure' consciousness of the entire phenomenological region inaccessible to us.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

All the works of Kierkegaard are focused on ethical thought and existence, and on philosophy and Christianity. It is important to observe that nearly all of Kierkegaard's works were published under various pseudonyms. Perhaps this peculiarity was intended to persuade the reader that the ideas he proposed were not to be taken as the pronouncements of an authority, but presented as various modes of life for the reader's judgment and choice. The literature in this section shall be reviewed in light of Kierkegaard's works and what other phenomenologist and existentialist thinkers have in regard to his work. Such thinkers include Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche among others.

2.2 Works of Søren Aabye Kierkegaard

By taking a brief sweep on some of his reputed writings, we singled out the relevant texts for this work. Some of his eminent works are as discussed below.

Fear and Trembling (1843) and *Repetition* (1843). Both of these deal with faith and with the idea of sacrifice. He talks of how Abraham sacrifices his son Isaac and, alludes this to his affair with Regine, his short lived wife. The texts *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) are also Kierkegaard's writings. The former is an attempt to present Christianity, as it should be if it is to have any meaning. It aims particularly at presenting Christianity as a form of existence that presupposes free will, without which everything else becomes meaningless. But before he did so, he felt the need to extend his ideas concerning the

philosophy of freedom into the sphere of psychology. The result was extraordinarily penetrating, it is perhaps the first work of depth psychology ever published. *Stages on life's Way* (1988) is a logical consequence of the ideas embodied in his former works, which aimed at exposing the inadequacy of human ethics as a way of life. It exposes the three spheres of existence as seen by Kierkegaard and, demonstrates how it had all come to nothing and, the kind of disillusionment that emerges. He does this in the first part of *Stages on Life's Way*, called 'The Banquet', which contains a biting sarcasm and scathing contempt for women in general.

Another work of Kierkegaard is the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* (1992), in which he shows his disappointment with those critics who never understood his writings. *Works of Love* (1962b) and *Edifying Discourses*. (1958) are also part of his collections. In 1983 he published the *Sickness unto Death*, and in 1974 *Christian Discourses*, in which he depicted Christianity sterner and more uncompromising than in any of his other writings. This book was a disguised attack on the heads of the Danish Church, whom he accused had become civil servants than followers of Christ.

Given the thematic concerns of the writings of Kierkegaard above, the text *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1990), was central in our study. In this book, Kierkegaard offers the alternatives to an aesthetic or an ethical view of life. The work addresses the question of subjectivity and collectivity in the decisional process albeit in a manner that raises inconsistencies that informed the study. It is on the basis of this inconsistencies and thematic relevance, as will be noted, that emphasis is laid on this text.

He dedicates most of his works to human suffering and existence which to him, defines man in his concreteness. The content of most of his works are central to his ethical thought. Most of his books seem to have much in common, although at times there is ambiguity in his explanations, and some of his ideas are never elaborated. However, the works are based on the concept of man as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the subjective and the collective. Their contents are vital for our study for they form the basis upon which we shall further analyze his ethical philosophy.

Kierkegaard's understanding of existence is so much interwoven with his concept of Christianity and suffering that he thinks it nonsensical to speak of anything else except in the context of Christianity and the personality of God (Kierkegaard; 1992). For him, speaking of an ethical existence outside the sphere of Christianity, amounts to dethroning Christianity from its credentials (Kierkegaard; 1938). He takes this as the real truth of everything that should be the point of departure for any other assertion in life. One cannot arrive to this subjective truth unless one passes through suffering. The search for subjectivity begins with the desperate journal entry, dated 1 August 1835, "the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die" (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

Kierkegaard was not talking about objective cognitive truth; nor was he referring to the intellectual act of rationally explicating some kind of philosophy. He wanted to create a quality of life, a pattern of life, which would be true for him and would enable him to be true to himself. He alludes that the creation of a subjective life is an existential vocation and it has nothing to do with theoretical speculation. Kierkegaard stresses this point in the next entry in his journal, claiming that he wants:

to lead a complete human life and not merely one of the understanding, so that I should not ...base the development of my thought upon something that is called objective...but upon something which grows together with the deepest roots of my life (Ibid., p.16).

He asks, "What is truth but to live for an idea?" Here we encounter the insight that authentic life has less to do with a specific concrete content, a 'what', than with some particular path, with a 'how'.

From the foregoing, an existential leitmotif hinted at is the bond, which links the act of philosophizing with the personal life of the philosopher. This is based on the notion that doctrine and life at times must overlap. Given that much of what has been mentioned points to his (Kierkegaard) fronting for an individual life, then the question that lingers is: should one insist on making the process of philosophizing a relevant and formative force in his own life?

A note written by Kierkegaard four years before his death indicates the practical objective of his philosophizing: "my task has continually been to provide the existential corrective by poetically presenting the ideals and inciting people" (Kierkegaard; 1967). Indeed, the passage points to three main themes dominating the literature on subjectivity: (1) the existential, as opposed to purely theoretical, aim of changing the reader's life; (2) the poetic-literary means employed by the philosopher to achieve this aim; (3) the indirect tactics used to incite and entice the reader to seek subjectivity. But if these are his intents, then he should strive to achieve it without confusing the reader. He should be as clear as possible and ensure that the reader he targets gets to embrace subjectivity without much ado.

2.3 Works by Phenomenologist and Existentialist Thinkers

By drawing a parallel amongst Kierkegaard and these philosophers, we notice that there is a fundamental difference on their ethical thought basing on human freedom.

2.3.1 Kant Vs Kierkegaard

The ethical thought of Kierkegaard needs to be distinguished from the Kantian conception of will and practical reason which is granted much greater autonomy by Kant in comparison with Kierkegaard (Beck; 1960). Kantian ethical thought, while emphasizing the autonomy of will ultimately reduces will to reason by emphasizing its rational character. According to Kant, the will that creates obligations is nothing but the "Rational will". This emphasis on the rational character of the will by Kant excludes any element of arbitrariness or choice in determining what may be termed as right (Kant; 1956). Thus, Kant believed that while human beings played an important role in bringing value into the world on account of exercising their will, by thinking to act, the will itself was subjected to absolute moral laws called the categorical imperative (*Ibid.*). Men must exercise their will in conformity with these laws and act accordingly, in order that their acts may be termed morally good. This belief in absolute law was the point of departure for Kantian conception of rational ethics, for it insisted on the rational, universal and necessary character of the categorical imperative.

This much is a well-known fact of the Kantian rational ethical system. What must be noted, however, is the significance of Kant's attempt to derive the absoluteness of the moral law from the will itself. There is no external source from which absolute character of the moral law is derived (Beck; 1960). The absolute nature of the moral law was traced by Kant to the will itself,

which was considered by him both as its subject and ultimate authority. What gave will the authority to legislate absolute moral principles was its rational character. Kant maintained that the dictates of reason and the dictates of good will were ultimately identical. From a given set of premises, if one derives logically through rational analysis a certain ethically valid conclusion, then another one would too, going through the same argument come to a similar conclusion. As a result, if two people confront similar circumstances and exercise their 'will' rationally, they will both be prompted to act similarly (Kant; 1956, *Theorem III*). They will do the same thing. Thus the moral law is both created by the agent and at the same time binds everyone in an absolute and objective fashion, precisely because it is the law of reason. The unique contribution and the distinguishing features of Kantian rational ethics consists in its interpretation of rationality of will, not in terms of its acceptance and translation into actions; but as moral truths that the intellect apprehends as objectively valid. The will itself is conceived as the author of its rational character by exercising rational and logical control on itself (*Ibid., Theorem III, Problem II*). Thus any maxim of conduct that is accepted by the will, while conforming to its own essential nature becomes *ipso facto* morally right.

The excursion into Kant's conception of Ethical thought, undertaken here, has the specific objective of suggesting both dissimilarity and a certain specific affinity between Kant and Kierkegaard. One need not exercise oneself too much over this particular suggestion that Kantian ethics constituted the immediate source of Kierkegaard's conception of ethical voluntarism. One needs to note that the ethical life, with its emphasis on universality and duty, in other words morality, signified for Kierkegaard, the basic orientation of Kantian ethics. It is quite easy to discern the possibility of the development of an ethical theory which while

emphasizing the dynamic and creative character of human will in creation of values by choosing to act in the world, at the same time renounce the position that the will, in order to be good must be rational and legislate absolutely and universally. This particular line of development of the twentieth century Existentialism is a direct outcome of mediation of Kantian thought to Sartre's Existentialism via Kierkegaard.

However, in Kierkegaard himself, one still sees a somewhat more pronounced affinity with Kant's rational ethics, as far as the ethical system of Kierkegaard is concerned. It is only when one makes a dialectical transition to the ethics of subjectivity in Kierkegaard, that one sees the ultimate roots of contemporary existential ethics declaring man to be the ultimate author and creator of values in the world.

The ethical system conceptualized by Kierkegaard, is reflective of Kantian ethics in many significant ways. Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical sphere of life, is an affirmation of the contrast of the ethical life to that of the aesthetic and religious. The aesthetic life consists in one's submission to sporadic whims and momentary passion, reflective of a fragmented will without any unifying principle (Kierkegaard; 1990, 183). Religious life, on the other hand, is the life of total commitment, reflected in a leap of faith in which will is not guided by the ideals of this world of Reason. On the contrary, the ethical sphere of life is characterized by universal rational principles that transcend the individual without any exception. Primarily, the ethical life is distinguished from the aesthetic in terms of its acceptance of universal rational principles as the guiding force of the will (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, religious life is distinguished from

ethical life in its rejection of the worldly morality as an expression of one's acceptance of norms and values that appear to be secular in character.

The ethical life is the societal life. It is the life of an individual situated in a community context, whereby he lives as a member of the community. He follows the dictum to treat each individual as an end in himself, and surrenders self interest to moral duty. Kierkegaard accepts thus the features of universality and duty, which according to Kant; characterize the ethical sphere of human existence, as a normative. These features characterizing morality signify for Kierkegaard as for Hegel, the ethics of Kant.

While Kierkegaard does not exclude non-Kantian ethics from his conception of the ethical sphere of life, it is also evident that the system of values which constitute his primary concern at this stage, are directly reflective of the ethical concern stipulated by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. To Kierkegaard, it appeared axiomatic that the ethical life consists of living for the good of men – 'community': in Kantian terminology, in a 'kingdom of ends'. The Kantian dictum, duty for duty's sake, is ultimately translated into Kierkegaardian emphasis on making personal interests subservient to the morality of a community life. Ethical then consists in living for ends that transcend the individual and as such, is teleological in its orientation. This Kierkegaard does not accept, but is implied in his ethical philosophy.

Kierkegaard argues, like Kant, that the distinguishing feature of the ethical sphere is universality, which can only be apprehended as operation of rationality in the ethical sphere. The universality

and rationality that defines the ethical stage of life, allows no exception and asks for ultimate subjection of the individual will to rational principles. In Kierkegaard's words:

The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it is applied at all times. It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its *Teleos* [end, purpose], but is itself the *Teleos* for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has absorbed this into itself, it goes not further. The single individual sensately and physically, immediately is the individual who has *Teleos* in the universal, and it is the ethical task continually to express himself in this to annul his singularity in order to become the universal (Kierkegaard; 1990, 185).

Individual existence has to be subsumed under the universal in order that the societal ethical existence can become possible. However, this stance on the ethical stage of life must not be construed as an assertion of anti-individuality or unqualified and absolute surrender to the society. In a truly Kantian fashion, Kierkegaard acknowledges the autonomous character of morality. The universal moral principles have value and significance only in the context of the individual and the individual must adhere to these principles even if he encounters resistance from the society in upholding these moral principles. It is in this unfaltering adherence to self-generated universal principles that the morality of man consists.

The community of moral beings that Kierkegaard visualizes is not the community that is given to 'crowd morality'. The ethical life with its value on community is different from a totalitarian conception of society that imposes itself on the individual and infringes on his moral freedom. The ethical man must be concerned with social wellbeing, but social wellbeing and social concern does not imply surrendering the moral freedom of man, which, according to Kierkegaard, is the very essence of human existence. The community of moral beings, ultimately is the community of free moral beings who are an end unto themselves. In the final analysis, there is no teleological suspension of the ethical in the social sphere because the *Teleos*

does not lie outside the existing human being. There is a strong parallelism between the Kantian 'kingdom of ends' and Kierkegaardian conception of the 'community of moral beings'. The thematic affinity that we have suggested between Kierkegaard and Kant comes to end here. And Kierkegaard, the existentialist, parts company with Kant's rationalist ethics.

Kierkegaard does not completely appropriate Kant's ethical philosophy as he sees it to be conflicting with his conception of the dialectic of Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious that characterizes human existence (Kierkegaard; 1988). In spite of the Kantian emphasis on will, as the source of human values and moral principles, there is in Kant a strong tendency to interpret the will in terms of reason. The characteristic thesis of Kant that every rational creature will recognize universal moral principles as categorical imperatives in himself, is derived from Kant's characterization of Reason as practical reason. Kierkegaard prefers to conceive this character of Reason, whereby Reason is seen to provide justification for ultimate moral principles. Kierkegaard rejects the characteristic Kantian position that every 'rational character' autonomously derives the principles of morality.

In Kant, there is a tendency to suggest that the justification of moral principles coalesces with the moral principles themselves, as a derivative of rational will. But the Kierkegaardian scheme tends to distinguish the Kantian position regarding the justification of moral principles from the principles themselves. The ethical sphere of life conceptualized by Kierkegaard, involves an acceptance of the categorical imperatives as ultimate values. These may be seen, as Kant would hold, emanating from 'practical reasons'. However, Kierkegaard argues that the acceptance of these moral values as ultimate in themselves does not constitute the ultimate justification of

moral principles. Hence, Kantian demonstration of the rationality of the moral principles does not suffice. This is not a rejection of the acceptance of universality as the characteristic feature of ethical life. Universality is the necessary requirement that is seminal to ethical life.

It is wrong on Kant's part to assume, that the claim to justifiability of these universal principles consist in rational will and constitutes the central theme of ethical life. True, the ethical life consists in the subordination of the individual interests to the demand of the universal principles. But, to seek the ultimate source or justification of these principles, or even the specific contents of these principles in the rational will amounts to elimination of the existential dialectic of the ethical life. At this point there is no sufficient evidence to call Kierkegaard's ethical thought, ethical rationalism.

The ethical rationalism of Kant was to have a significant impact on the future development of ethical theory. The philosopher who felt the Kantian ethics to be sterile and empty formation that needed to be corrected was Hegel. Kant had maintained that not only the form but also the substance of morality was an autonomous expression of human freedom. Both form and content of morality, according to Kant, were ultimately derived from the moral will of autonomous human beings. Hegel interpreted this Kantian scheme to be purely formal in character and insufficient for yielding the concrete elements of morality. The Hegelian solution to this problem lay in transferring the concept of autonomy, that according to Kant was the exclusive prerogative of individual human beings and their will, to the concretely existing historical community (Reybur; 1971).

Though Kant was under criticism by Hegel, he nevertheless influenced Kierkegaard's ethical thought as revealed from the foregoing. Kierkegaard was equally influenced by Hegel.

2.3.2 Hegel Vs Kierkegaard

While for Hegel freedom is an attribute that ultimately refers to God, for Kierkegaard freedom is an intrinsic dimension of human reality (Macquarrie; 1972). Hegel tends to confine ethics to man's unquestioning following of dictates of the Spirit, that is, God to whose will man must submit his own will. Hegel was quite eloquent in suggesting that the will of God takes the form of law of a state or nation. These particularized expressions of God's will constitute the ethical context for the human person. The human persons tend to appropriate and internalize these mandates for conduct and behaviour in ways that these ultimately appear to them as their personal aim – as their true being. Man ultimately is not free to choose, to reflect selectively and act accordingly. Freedom here consists simply in one's living in accordance with the principle of necessity mediated by the Spirit. As Hegel (1973, 119-120) puts it, "thus without any selective reflection, the person performs his duty as his own and as something which is and in this necessity he had himself and his actual freedom". Thus from the foregoing, man is truly free in Hegelian terminology specifically when he is not really free. His freedom consists in submission to necessity.

Hegel felt that the content of morality did not belong to the sphere of autonomous human being. Autonomy, according to Hegel, is a feature of the historically existing moral community, which was constituted of individual beings who derived the substance of morality from such a community (*Ibid.*). In this regard, individuals were ultimately dependent on the historical

community for their ethical substance. Hegel's relationship to Kant becomes problematic if one sees that the Hegelian scheme, even though a rejection of Kantian ethical thought, contains elements which put him under the same rubric of ethical rationalism that Kant belongs. Hegel maintained that moral autonomy as a feature of the historical community is actually an attribute ultimately reserved only for God or the Absolute (Hegel; 1973).

It is true that Hegel accords to individuals a certain limited kind of freedom or autonomy, which they can achieve on account of their participation in the state or the historical community. However, if one analyzes precisely the meaning of the concept of human freedom as postulated by Hegel, one comes to recognize the utter meaninglessness of the concept of freedom as used by Hegel. Hegel defines freedom of the individual in terms of his submission of his will to the will of God as expressed in the historical community of the state or nation as laws which command absolute submission of the individuals will (Lowenberg; 1979, 337). Hegel maintained that God's will that is manifested as laws or spirit of a nation provides the ultimate context of the freedom of individual human being; for freedom consists in recognizing the necessity of conforming the will of men to the will of God (Knox; 1968). God's will becomes particularized manifestations within the individuals and become an ingredient of their personality. What is alarming is Hegel's contention that God's will completely and absolutely dominates the persons from within. Individual members who constitute the nation take this spirit immanent in them and appearing to them in the form of a personal goal as their true being. Thus Hegel says, "Without any selective reflection, the person performs, its duty as his own and as something which is; and in this necessity he has himself and his actual freedom" (Hegel; 1973, 120).

It is apparent that the Hegelian ethical philosophy raises certain specific problems regarding the nature of ethics and morality. The first problem that one perceives is how to interpret this ethical rationalism, the ultimate datum of which is not the will of individual human beings but the will of God or the Absolute which is manifested through particularized human entities and completely dominate them. Olafson (1967; 45) opines, "it may be defined as theological voluntarism with ethical overtones; a philosopher's attempt to give a theological solution in the disguise of philosophy." It is surprising that Olafson has put Hegel under philosophical voluntarism rather than theological voluntarism. But to a larger extent, no ethics of any consequence to concretely existing human beings, can be derived from such a position. In the Hegelian scheme, the individual is free, precisely when he is not free.

The Kierkegaardian ethical philosophy is a response to and corrective of such a lopsided scheme of ethics which ultimately relativises the individual and reduces his ethical reality to a mere phantom. It is equally important to note that the Hegelian attempt to correct Kant, by suggesting that the content of morality is derived from the historical community, ultimately comes to a big halt. This is so if one realizes that the historical community of state or nation is nothing but the manifestation of the absolute and the objective laws of state are mere expressions of the Absolute's will. The Hegelian solution to Kant's problem is ultimately grounded in abstract reason that appears as absolute, and as such, it cannot integrate the 'how' and the 'what' of ethical life. The chasm that separates thought and reality in Kant is not really bridged in Hegel; rather, concrete reality is dissolved to make room for abstract thought.

Kierkegaard tries to correct this very mistake of Hegel by building an ethics from the ground level of human existence, rather than from the upper flight of abstract thought. How would Kierkegaard approach this Hegelian absolute determination of ethical will of the individual by the will of the Absolute as expressed in the impersonal institutions of the state and the nation? Kierkegaard's is the reiterated thesis that Hegel has forgotten what it means to be a concretely existing human being. It is this forgetfulness which is at the root of the exclusion of the truly ethical question in Hegel (Kierkegaard; 1990, 180). It may be argued, on behalf of Hegel, that Hegel's position was a true attempt at a restoration of the unity of thought and action in the concrete life of the spirit. That Hegel's outcry for the Absolute, in which the individual must participate, was a philosophical vision which sought to restore the unity of thought and action in history precisely because it is in history that the fragmentation of the spirit has taken place. And what Hegel was asking for was an effort on the part of the individual through self-reflective activities of reason to make himself authentic by conscious participation in the historical Absolute. One may find support for this interpretation of Hegel in the following statement:

The very essence of spirit is activity: it realizes its potentiality – makes itself its own deed, its own mark – and thus it becomes an object to itself. Thus it is with the spirit of a people, which erects itself into an objective world – a complex of institutions.... The rotation of the individual to that spirit is that it appropriates to himself this substantial existence; that it becomes his character and capability, enabling him to have a definite place in the world – to be something. For he finds the being of the people to which he belongs an already established, firm world – objectively present to him – with which he has to incorporate himself (Blackham; 1977, 19).

The individual so conceived, Kierkegaard would argue, is an individual in abstraction for ultimately Hegel looks at this individual, primarily characterized by powers of thought, reason or mind. Hegel had completely disavowed that the ultimate end of knowledge was to ascertain the reality of the individual, characterized by the passions and emotions peculiarly the individual's

own. For Hegel, it was not the task of philosophy to grasp the individual by trying to "...lay bare what are called the recesses of the human heart...information of this kind is, for one thing, meaningless unless on the assumption that we know the universal man as man, and that always must be, as mind" (Hegel; 1973,3).

Kierkegaard rejects this conception of the individual in explicit terms. The Hegelian understanding of man fails to recognize the true import of existing human beings by defining man primarily in terms of reason. While Hegel commends man to actualize his potentiality, by suggesting that the essence of the spirit is activity, he fails to develop a fully evolved ethical philosophy which will take cognizance of the will factor as the essential principle of human activity and creativity. Kierkegaard's denunciations of the Hegelian understanding of man, as essential mind, is primarily an implicit criticism of the failure of the Hegelian philosophy to offer a valid ground for ethical conduct and responsibility. What is equally objectionable in Hegel, according to Kierkegaard, is his emphatic affirmation of the Absolute in man. Kierkegaard considers the existing individual in his concreteness and particularity, of paramount importance.

As he says:

For my task was as a humble servant...to provoke, if possible, to invite, to stir up the many to press through this defile of the 'individual', through which however no one case passes except by becoming the individual.... (Kierkegaard; 1962, 130-31).

Kierkegaard rejected Hegel's conception of the individual as particularized fragmentations of absolute thought on a purely logical ground. An individual remains an insignificant entity with limited capacity, and as such, absolute thought is inaccessible to the existing individual. The individual who is immersed in the world history as a limited finite point lacks a comprehensive perspective and the Absolute thought remains inaccessible. One can have a comprehensive

panoramic view of the totality of existence, only if one stands outside and beyond the 'world – historical'. As immersed in the process of becoming, the individual is incapable of knowing the goal of the process of the unfolding world historical and is thus unable to get a comprehensive perspective of the totality. Individual as mind, functions within the realm of the immanent reason. It can suffice to reveal only the next step of the process of world historical unfolding. There simply can be no awareness of the end and accordingly the will cannot be directed towards achieving that end. Hence no sense of responsibility accrues within the Hegelian system. Voicing his unqualified disagreement with the Hegelian ethical scheme which tends to absolve the individual of his ethical responsibility, Kierkegaard observes:

For a thinker as such it may be quite in order to think man in general; but qua existing individual, he is ethically forbidden to forget himself, or to forget that he is an individual. The ethical is so far from celebrating the advent of each new thinker with a paean of joy that it makes the thinker morally responsible for the use he makes of his existence in order to think and asks him for a justification of such devotion of his energies, in precisely the same sense that it makes every one else responsible for the use to which he puts his life, without permitting itself to be blinded by appearances (Kierkegaard; 1992, 307).

Kierkegaard's opposition to the Hegelian brand of ethical formalism is final and absolute. Hegel sought the seat of ethical dimension in the Absolute will, which appears as the law of the nation and the state – and controls the individual from within. In the Hegelian scheme, the individual as a mere cog in the world historical process is not ultimately responsible for their action. Individuals are led to perform their duty in accordance with the dictates of the spirit, which immanently controls them from within. Kierkegaard, however ensures individuality and its autonomous status by asserting that the individual's ethical reality is exclusively his own (Kierkegaard; 1990, 264). It cannot be relegated, as Hegel does, to a subsidiary or secondary position.

The Hegelian system, according to Kierkegaard, robs the individual of his ethical autonomy by reducing him to a mere vessel of divine will, which is manifested in the world historical process. Kierkegaard's structure against the speculative philosophy, by asserting the absoluteness of the spirit and its manifestation in the world historical, deprives man of his concrete selfhood and transforms the concretely existing individual into a metaphysical determination. Thus immanently conceived, there is a sort of categorical designation for the relation between cause and effect. Bringing out the fundamental difference between his own position and that of Hegel, Kierkegaard points out:

From the standpoint of world history, the individual subject is indeed unimportant; but then it must be remembered that the world-historical is an extraneous addition. Ethically, the individual subject is infinitely important (Kierkegaard; 1992, 132).

The speculative system of Hegel, maintains Kierkegaard, proposes in Ethics to have a living individual act by virtue of a theory of immanence of the Absolute will, which ultimately translates into a position that men, deprived of their autonomous will, are supposed to act by inaction for what moves is not their will. This, according to Kierkegaard, is a caricature of the concretely existing individual human being and his ultimate ethical responsibility. It is the individual will argues Kierkegaard, its autonomy that gives ethical meaning and significance to human life and conduct.

2.3.3 Nietzsche Vs Kierkegaard

Among the proponents of ethical voluntarism, Nietzsche occupies a unique position for his affirmation of total autonomy of the human will. It is precisely this assertion that qualifies Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to be the foremost precursors of the existentialist approach to humanistic ethics.

The ethical philosophy of both thinkers is closely linked with their respective theories of truth. Ethics, for both of them, does not stand in isolation but constitutes an integral element of their wider philosophical perspective. Nietzsche was not even aware of the Kierkegaardian approach to truth as subjectivity and affirmation of will as the primary factor in human life. However, significant affinities are perceptible between their philosophical positions in spite of Nietzsche's avowed atheism and Kierkegaard's strong theological stance. The affinities have been noted by prominent students of existentialist tradition who have sought in this one influence of these two important nineteenth century thinkers on the twentieth century existentialist thought (Blackham; 1977, 23).

Somewhat in the Kierkegaardian fashion, Nietzsche too emphatically expressed his opposition to the principle of objectivity as the defining feature of truth and knowledge. He declared objectivity to be a myth based on the false assumption that there are hard identifiable facts in the world which constitute the subject matter of definite statements. These statements in themselves are seen to have an objective character because there is a definite correspondence between those statements and facts that they describe or represent. Rejecting this position, Nietzsche maintained that there are no ultimate objective truths independent of the human subject (Nietzsche; 1967a). Human subjects are the creators of truth and values, for ultimately all concepts employed for the purpose of describing the world and predicting its behaviour are impositions upon it by the individual subject.

Basically, Nietzsche's conception of truth is a rejection of the dualism on 'correspondence' theories of truth which tend to define truth in terms of a relation of correspondence between definite statements and objects or facts that may be defined as independent entities or 'things-in-

themselves' (*Ibid.*, 558). The characteristic Nietzschean position is that our ideas and beliefs cannot be considered as reflections or representations of independently existing self-subsistent order of things (Nietzsche; 1967 b., 481). Rather they must be regarded, Nietzsche maintains, as creations of human beings who somehow impose their perspectives on the world of experience. Neither are there objective facts nor any objective statements. The human mind, actively using its own concepts in exercise of its choice, organizes and dominates the world in a specific way suiting its own will. This in a nutshell is the theory of perspectivism of truth, as opposed to objectivism, proposed by Nietzsche. Absolute objective truth is an illusion according to Nietzsche.

The truth, world perspectives and values are not objective in nature for they are the products of human will and choice. Human beings are free to choose and adopt whatever world perspective they may prefer (Nietzsche; 1960, 235-36). What is significant about Nietzsche's position, is that he does not draw a clear line of demarcation between acts of description and evaluation. So much so, that he is not willing to concede this distinction even in the cases of scientific knowledge. There is always an element of choice, of preference or rejection in the purely objective and scientific descriptions of the phenomena.

In affirming that the descriptive functions of mind are also evaluative in their orientation, Nietzsche clearly affirms the pre-eminence of will as the characteristic feature of man. Descriptions and evaluations are concomitant features of human will. Cognition and action are not two different and separate functions, but are parts of the same operation, that is, the operation of the will.

Thus, the will in the Nietzschean scheme of things acquires a much more significant position than it has in the Kantian philosophy. For Kant, the autonomy of will was significant in the realm of Ethics; but for Nietzsche, will is relevant to all dimensions of human life. The human will is important to the totality of human existence, be it cognitive, ethical, practical or creative aspects of life. Will is ultimately defined as the power that human beings have to change things, organize and manipulate realities both in the external and inner world to suit human ends and purposes. Hence according to Nietzsche the will is, the will to power. And as will to power, it is the source of not only classificatory and descriptive decisions regarding the world but is also the source from which stem all our decisions pertaining to our behaviour. What we consider to be evaluative activity, which designates things as good or bad, does not emanate from our cognitions of things as good or bad, but from an exercise of human will in the form of volition (Nietzsche; 1960, 235). Will is the source of all values and ethics then consists not in discovering and appropriating eternally valid ethical principles and norms, which are transcendent to human beings. Just as there are no absolute objective truths in the realm of science or metaphysics, so also there are no objectively valid moral truths. Thus according to Nietzsche, there are no moral phenomena but only a moral interpretation of these phenomena.

One must then give up all hopes of discovering the eternal principles of morality, "as though values were inherent in things so that all one had to do were to keep a grip on them" (Nietzsche; 1956, 447). The function of moralists then consists in legislation of moral principles, not by discovering them but by creating them. All evaluative judgments are ultimately 'active' in character, and, as such, the values that we discern in the world are ultimately derivative of the interpretive function of the will. If such is the nature of moral values, then any attempt to discern

the element of universality in the realm of morality is a self-deceptive exercise. As Nietzsche says, "to demand that our human interpretations and values should be general, and perhaps even constitutive values, belongs among the hereditary idiocies of human pride" (*Ibid.*, 914).

The aforesaid position of Nietzsche clearly excludes the possibility of universal ethics, either by discovering eternal moral principles or by creating values that are general in nature. This, however, seems to run contrary to the classic Nietzschean injunction that the philosophers, that is, moralists should be legislators of human values. According to Nietzsche, men with will to power create moral values. The function of the moralist then consists in his legislation of moral principles, not by discovering them but by creating them.

To what end does the moralist or the philosopher direct his will for legislating moral values, if such moral values are not expected to be absolute or to have general application? This is where Nietzsche's famous distinction of the 'master morality' and the 'slave morality' becomes relevant (Nietzsche; 1964, 362). To substantialize values, to impose them on unsuspecting masses by presenting them as categories with ontological character, the moralist or the philosopher asserts his supremacy over the rest.

Nietzsche celebrates the accomplishments of such men, with absolute will to power, who see through the deceptive character of such reification of values and still continue to do that with an unequivocal sense of self-awareness. On the other hand, Nietzsche condemns in the most stringent terms, when individuals fail to ontologize and reify values as values to be imposed on others in a self-conscious way. If the will fails in creating and imposing its own values on

others, then the will suffers an inherent weakness expressive of its incapacity for autonomous ethical creativity. For such weaklings, Nietzsche has no sympathy, for he sees them as men of no consequence to this world. As he says, "the belief that the world as it should be really exists as a belief of those unproductive persons who do not create a world as it should be" (Nietzsche; 1956, 549).

Nietzsche is in agreement with Kant that morality primarily consisted in the operation of laws to which men of weak character will conform. Such is the nature of slave morality. Laws are the instruments of the will through which those who can will absolutely impose their will in the world. However, in arguing that moral laws as categorical imperatives are expressions of the will to power possessed by men of strong will subjugating the others to such moral laws, Nietzsche did not contribute to the Kantian doctrine of universalizability of the moral law. It is for this reason that Nietzsche refuses to concede to the Kantian assertion that the individual in willing wills universally.

There is a strong affinity between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard; for both, will is an expression of the individual freedom and this creative will belongs only to the realm of concretely existing individual human beings who will for themselves. However, where Kierkegaard parts company with Nietzsche is precisely the latter's affirmation that structurally, human will has the right and authority to choose itself as absolute and thereby those who can choose themselves as absolute can also impose their will on others. For Kierkegaard, the self has not only the freedom to choose itself absolutely, but impose itself on others. The ethical individual is not only capable of choosing itself absolutely, but it is its absolute ethical task (Kierkegaard; 1992, 262). This task of

choosing one self absolutely consists man's true ethical nature. The choosing of one self absolutely does not mean choosing oneself as absolute. That would, according to Kierkegaard, amount to blasphemy.

The ethical voluntarism of Kierkegaard differs from Nietzsche precisely in its recognition of the autonomy and the sovereignty of the human will without any exception. Nietzsche in principle recognizes the autonomy of will but in practice he thinks of the possibility of the subjugation of weak wills to the strong wills. This is not only a possibility, but his prescription, and *inter alia*, highest valuation of strong wills is involved in such an exercise. The ethical voluntarism of Nietzsche becomes compromised at this point, whereas Kierkegaard's retains its true character by constantly affirming the autonomy and sovereignty of individual human wills (*Ibid.*, 256). This sovereignty of the individual must not even be relinquished according to Kierkegaard.

Universalizability of will and its implications for morality is problematic for both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. It is true that both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are in fundamental agreement with Kant in asserting that the ethical belongs to the realm of will and that the theoretical intellect does not have the right and authority to legislate for human action. However, as earlier noted, Nietzsche clearly disavows an ethical position, which would accord rightness of an action, only if it were right for all human beings. Nietzsche rejects the Kantian assertion that universalizability is a necessary and sufficient condition of an action's rightness in a highly contemptuous fashion.

Kierkegaard, however, is closer to Kant, though there are important differences between them in this respect. For Nietzsche, there is no logical link between the autonomy of the will and the injunction that the rightness of actions consists in conforming to universal principles. This would imply, according to Nietzsche, compromising the autonomy of the will by subjecting it to an external master whom in this case might not be God, but our fellow beings or 'society'. Thus social morality becomes problematic for Nietzsche. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, is willing to concede the important place of social morality and the universal dimension in man's ethical mode of existence (Kierkegaard; 1990, 212). However, the way he seeks to incorporate universality as an essential feature of ethical existence situates him in a conflicting relationship to Nietzsche. According to Kierkegaard, universality in an ethical subject's orientation to social morality is not the function of rational will, as Kant would have it. Kierkegaard does not concur with Nietzsche's view that with the will being the absolute determinant of morality, there is no possibility of universal ethics.

In Kierkegaard's scheme of things, the absoluteness of the will's choice refers to the first level of decision at which the will reflectively chooses itself and in the process constitutes itself as the ethical subject (*Ibid.*, 227). Thus the absoluteness of the will's choice consists in its capacity to become aware of and accept itself in its actuality as the ground of all responsibilities and obligations. Having thus emerged as the ethical subject of responsibility, the will directs itself to choose among several of the possibilities in accordance with certain universal laws of moral obligations. This is where Kierkegaard differs with Nietzsche in a significant way. Choosing, according to universal laws of moral obligations, Kierkegaard maintains, takes place at the second level of the decision of the will (*Ibid.*, 223).

It is significant, however, that the universal moral obligations according to Kant are not extrinsic to the human subject. These are not the Kantian categorical imperatives, existing independently of individual human beings as kingdom of ends that constitutes the reference point for the rational will which rationally perceives their universality. The universal appears within man as his conscience, as intrinsic to his concreteness and actuality (Kierkegaard; 1990, 260). But the recognition of this universal as the conscience of the concretely existing human being is concomitant with the emergence of the ethical subject by choosing oneself absolutely. The difference is that Nietzsche's is absolute in this respect. However, in all fairness to these two thinkers, it must be pointed out that both seek the ultimate source of value in human will.

2.4 Critique of the Literature Review

Hegel (1977) observes that while 'being' and 'nothing' are both identical and yet contradictory, "the truth of Being and Nothing is...the unity of the two: and this unity is BECOMING." The unity of Becoming does not obliterate Being and Nothing, but holds both in tension in a higher truth. The two parts of the contradiction, together with that which unites or overcomes them, make up a triad. This method of overcoming contradictions by moving to a higher level of truth is known as the 'dialectic'. Hegel proposed to develop a complete dialectical system of reality based on the three foundational triads of 'Being-Nothing-Becoming', 'Being-Essence-Notion', and 'Idea-Nature-Spirit'. Though he developed several proposals for this system, he never completed any of them, but he did use the dialectical method to explain consciousness in individuals.

Hegel (1973) explains one stage in the dialectical development of consciousness. He begins by pointing out that only by acknowledging an 'other' is self-consciousness possible. But if there is an other, then the original self-consciousness feels threatened and asserts its freedom by trying to dominate that other and force acknowledgement of its dominance. The ensuing struggle results in a lord who dominates and a bondsman who is dominated. The solution to this contradiction is to acknowledge that neither lord nor bondsman is free and that freedom is not possible in relations about domination. In the light of the foregoing, it remains to be seen whether or not Kierkegaard strenuously objects to the devaluing of the individual, questions the implicit optimism of the dialectic or mocks the incompleteness of Hegel's 'System' in unmasking the essence of human existence. The study shall also strive to see how Kierkegaard perceives the consciousness of an individual and, whether or not it is the subjective or the collective individual.

In the first essay of *'Genealogy of Morals'* (Nietzsche; 1964), Nietzsche shows the development of a limiting morality as he distinguishes between 'master morality' and 'slave morality'. Master morality is basically affirmative and defines itself on its own terms. In this morality 'good' means that which is noble, powerful, and beautiful and belongs to the highest ranks; and 'bad' signifies that which is base, low-minded, and unworthy of greatness. On the other hand, slave morality is basically negative and claims to find values 'out there', ordained by God. It is born out of resentment and identifies the 'good' with such base sentiments as humility and pity. Instead of 'bad', this morality uses the vindictive term 'evil' to castigate all who would stand against it. In affirming the master morality, the creative genius must begin by proclaiming the

death of God. With the death of God, slave morality – and all values dependent on God – collapses and the individual is free to create self-defined values.

Once freed from the constraints of slave morality and the external values imposed by God, the individual could become a 'superman'. Such a 'superman' would be a this-world antithesis to God and would affirm life without any resentment (Nietzsche; 1967). But, most importantly, the superman would be one who acknowledges and celebrates the will to power. With regard to Kierkegaard, the inquiry shall attempt to find out whether or not the will to power is better expressed within the subjective or the collective individual. That is, more than gaining power over others, can the will to power lead to power over the self through a conscious decisional process?

Heidegger in *Being and Time* announced the interest that would dominate his writings throughout his life, that is, "the question of the meaning of Being" (Heidegger; 2000). According to Heidegger, the Pre-Socratics had understood Being, but subsequent Western thinkers had forgotten Being itself by focusing too intently on individual beings. As a result, contemporary metaphysics no longer recalled the seminal question of Being. This question of Being can be put in stark terms: "Why is there any Being at all and not rather Nothing?" This might seem an odd question to us, but it is odd only because we have lost our original amazement in the very presence of Being itself.

In order to gain some understanding of Being, Heidegger suggests we examine the one being with which we are intimately acquainted: human being. Sallis (1992), observes that the

phenomenological method, which 'unconceals' the data of experience by allowing these data to 'show themselves', provides the way to such an examination. Using this method to examine the self, one discovers one's self as a 'being-in-the-world' or *Dasein* ('being there').

Dasein is different from other realities. First, 'in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it': that is, *Dasein* is aware of Being. Second, the kind of Being of which *Dasein* is aware is called 'existence'. Human existence is not to be grasped the way one understands the existence of rocks or planets, but in the special ways of anticipation of, and decision for, possibilities. As the self confronts its choices, it especially recognizes that with death, 'being-in-the-world' eventually becomes 'no-longer-being-there'. This awareness of *Dasein* as 'being-toward-death' is filled with dread. Kierkegaard defines dread as a "desire for which one fears, a sympathetic antipathetic antipathy which takes hold of the individual, and yet one cannot extricate oneself from it because what one fears attracts one" (Kierkegaard; 1938, 80). Borrowing Kierkegaard's analysis of dread (Kierkegaard; 1985), Heidegger says that the self can try to avoid this dread by losing the 'I' in the 'they' – that is, by ignoring its individuality and becoming part of the crowd. But a 'they' existence is 'inauthentic' and removed from Being according to Kierkegaard thus providing room for a contradiction. For him, authentic being – 'being-toward-death' – can reveal to *Dasein* a 'freedom' that releases it from the 'illusions of the 'they' and allows it to embrace dread. Kierkegaard should perhaps insist on the subjective individual and not confuse the reader by making reference to the collective individual. This inconsistency provides the lacunae the study intends to fill.

The study questions whether Kierkegaard's analysis of dread is legitimate as an existential trait. If so, has he given an adequate account of the conditions of its use, for instance, does it apply to the subjective individual or the collective individual? Can man not despair or dread because of lack of ready made absolute values to choose from? After all, he does have himself and can create his own values. Can't he build a reality according to his own individual needs, and then make life become authentic?

Franz Brentano (1989) criticized British Empiricism for its tendency to present consciousness in terms of ideas or representations. Brentano argued that the key constituent of mental states is intentionality – thought's correlation rather than its immobile state. In order to have consciousness, one must be conscious of something. One cannot just think, one must think about something. Similarly, one cannot just be aware, one must be aware of something. In each case the 'something' is the 'intentional object' of consciousness. Contrary to Kierkegaard, Brentano held that consciousness does not construct these objects, it only points to them. Thus it remains in our judgment to carefully decide whether or not Kierkegaard exclusively focuses on objects of consciousness, ignoring consciousness itself. In other words, was there need for Kierkegaard to have examined the nature of consciousness itself? Does Kierkegaard in his perception of consciousness construct these objects instead of pointing to them?

Rene Descartes's philosophical goal was to achieve absolute certainty in his conclusions. In doing this, he decided to accept as true only what he could verify with his own rational powers (Descartes; 1990). The fact that an idea had been traditionally accepted was no guarantee of its truth. Neither the authority of the great philosophers of the past nor the religious authority of the

Catholic Church to which he belonged, could give him the kind of certainty he sought. Consequently he moved to construct a system of thought whose various principles were true and were related to each other in such a clear way that the mind could move easily from one true principle to another.

Descartes found that our minds naturally possess the powers of intuition and deduction. These are to him “the most certain routes to knowledge” (*Ibid.*) and can be used entirely without fear of illusion. By intuition Descartes means the activity of grasping some simple truth with clarity that there is no room for doubt. Unlike sensations and the products of our imagination, which are vague and constantly changing, intuitions are clear and unchanging. By ‘deduction’ Descartes means “all necessary inference from facts that are known with certainty”. In the light of this, we shall assess whether Kierkegaard breaks with the past by finding the basis of intellectual certainty in his own reason, and, if so, can this basis be used as a secure foundation for establishing the throes surrounding human freedom.

Immanuel Kant (1929) has twelve categories of understanding which synthesize the many representations of objects that one receives, giving coherence to its multiplicity thus making thought about objects possible. The twelve categories are unity, plurality, totality, reality, negation, limitation, substance-accident, cause-effect, community, possibility/impossibility, existence/nonexistence, and necessity/contingency. The category of the understanding that perhaps best illustrates Kant’s epistemology is cause-effect. Our mind is structured in such a way that when we think about events, we necessarily think about them in terms of cause and effect. It is impossible for us to think about something just happening, without having a cause.

Although one cannot know whether the world in itself operates on the principle of causality, one knows *a priori* that s/he will always understand events in terms of cause-effect because of the structure of his/her mind.

Kant's theory about the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding leads him to distinguish *phenomena* from *noumena* (*Ibid.*). Phenomena are appearances – our experiences of things, as filtered through the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding. *Noumena* are things in themselves – things as they exist independently of the mind. Human experience is necessarily limited to phenomena; we can never know *noumena* because our experience is always mediated through the structure of our mind. By putting the emphasis on reality as it appears to us and the way it is in itself, we make it a criterion of adequacy for understanding human existence. To this end, the study subjects Kierkegaard to scrutiny to determine whether or not he subscribes to any of the categories in making our knowledge of human existence clear. If not, does he have his own category that he subscribes to?

Albert Camus is well known for his statement that, “there is only one really serious philosophical problem, that of suicide” (Camus; 1942). To judge that life is or is not worth the trouble of being lived is to reply to the fundamental question of philosophy. On the face of it this may seem a very eccentric view of philosophy. The presupposition however is that man seeks a meaning in the world and in human life and history which would ground and support his ideals and values. Man wants to be assured that reality is an intelligible teleological process, comprising an objective moral order. Differently put man desires a metaphysical assurance that his life is part of an intelligible process, directed to an ideal goal, and that in striving after his personal ideals he

has the backing and support, so to speak, of the universe or of reality as a whole. With regard to Kierkegaard who also tackles the same problem, we raise these questions; is there any sort of absurd confrontation arising between man's appeal and the irrational silence of the world? Can the feeling of the absurd arise in a variety of ways, for example, through the perception of Nature's indifference to man's values and ideals, through recognition of the finality of death, or through the shock caused by the sudden perception of the pointlessness of life's routine? Can one pursue a policy of escapism as an alternative?

Gabriel Marcel found the term 'mystery' to be misleading at times. To Marcel, the term neither refers to mysteries in the sense in which theologians have used the word, namely truths revealed by God which cannot be proved by reason alone and which transcend the comprehension of the human mind, nor does the term mean the unknowable (Marcel; 1970). Marcel describes a mystery as "a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem." Elsewhere he gives the same description and adds that, "a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and which is therefore thinkable only as a sphere where the distinction between what is before me loses its significance and its initial validity" (*Ibid.*). While Kierkegaard's analysis shows submission to the person of God, one may be interested in seeing how he treats Him. Does he regard God as a mystery? Does he need some second reflection to be able to understand the existence of the human being as comprising the unity of oneself only from within? These are some of the questions that can be raised to understand the subject at hand much better.

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2.5 Conclusion of Literature Review

In concluding the literature review, it can be noted that, there is a certain amount of ambiguity that permeates Kierkegaard's attempt to build a universal ethics, on the basis of ethical willingness that constitutes his fundamental concern. In recognizing the autonomy of the concretely existing human being and seeking to define ethical existence in terms of the decisional character of the will, in choosing itself absolutely, Kierkegaard definitely achieves a veritable advancement over both Kant and Hegel. We may allude to the problems inherent in both Kant and Hegel. Hegel compromises the ethical autonomy of concretely existing human being by reducing him to the level of a vessel of the absolute will. Kant's, probably, is the first attempt to conceive the autonomy of the will as foundational to ethical existence. But his definition of will as rational will makes him problematic for the voluntaristic tradition. In this respect, Kierkegaard succeeds in overcoming the difficulties created by the systems of both the thinkers.

Kant, however, definitely stands on a firmer footing in his attempt to build a universalistic ethics. Kant, by suggesting that the will that creates obligations is the 'rational will', takes the element of contingency out of ethical existence. Kant's conceptions of the nature of rational will successfully eliminates only the element of arbitrariness of choice in the determination of what is right. Universality of ethical categories is the irreducible element in Kantian ethics, distinctively, because the practical reason is seen to be foundational to ethics. Kant defines the rationality of the will in terms of its self-consistency. This implies the maxim that a universalization proved to be self-contradictory or self-destructive would have to be reflected by the rational will. Thus, for

Kant, universality is a derivative of rationality and as such, constitutes a necessary and sufficient condition for determining the rightness of an act.

Kierkegaard's conscious exclusion of the element of rationality from the ethical life makes it difficult for him to account for the criterion of the universality, which he does emphasize, as a necessary feature of the ethical mode of existence. Kierkegaard has tried to overcome the difficulty by affirming universality as a structural element of the will itself. However, in his conception of the immanent nature of the universal human, Kierkegaard seems to be moving towards the radical conception of ethical voluntarism. It is probably for this reason that successive existentialist thinkers, while proceeding from Kierkegaard's premise of the subjectivity and inwardness of truth, looked up to Nietzsche for a firmer ground for ethical voluntarism. The contemporary existentialist tradition is undoubtedly on the side of Nietzsche, rather than Kierkegaard, in its conscious rejection of the notion of strict universalizability as a criterion of rightness of an act.

There is a certain agreement among major exponents of existentialist ethics, to opt for the view that standards and ideals of conduct are necessarily plural (Warnock; 1980, 14). This is the only logical conclusion to which strict ethical voluntarism based on the principle of autonomy of individual human will leads to. The universality of ideals and morals, the existentialists argue, is a fictitious construction of reason and can have a limited relevance to be the ideals that the dominant class imposes upon all as already 'willed for them'. In that case, the morality becomes 'inauthentic' or product of 'bad faith'. There definitely is sufficient ground to trace the roots of existentialist position on morality to Nietzsche in many respects. Perhaps it is for this reason that

Kierkegaard curiously never used the term Existentialism despite being acclaimed as the 'father'. Kierkegaard's claim to be regarded as the seminal source of existentialist ethics, however, cannot easily be rejected.

The most significant contribution of Kierkegaard to the existentialist brand of ethics consists in his concept of choice and decision emanating from the autonomy of the human will. The characteristic feature of his analysis of decisional process consists in his assertion that choice is free as an act of self-transcendence by which the individual constitutes his ethical reality by choosing himself absolutely. The first level of decision, as an act of autonomous will, takes place outside the framework of any universal or public morality claiming the individual's allegiance on rational grounds. There is no universal necessity that determines the act as choosing himself by the subject. The autonomy of the will reigns as the first level of choice for not only do we choose ourselves but we also choose to choose.

Thus basing on the foregoing, Kierkegaardian ethics may broadly be classified as ethical voluntarism apparently because of the weight he places on the individual in the decision making process. What justifies this claim for Kierkegaard's ethical system is his unqualified deploration of the rationalist tendency that underrates the significance of non-rational components through human action. Such rational tendencies deprecate the role of emotions and reduce the will to a function of reason. Kierkegaard rejects the rationalist account of man's ethical behaviour primarily in terms of reason's capacity to apprehend the universal ethical principles and norms and inform and direct the will accordingly.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used in this study. The chapter is divided into the following sections: study context; study design; data collection and modes of analysis. Each section is explained in detail below.

3.2 Study Context

Given the nature of the subject of study, this study is a philosophical inquiry that is grounded in Metaphysics as a sub-branch of Philosophy. The question of being and the decisional process can only get meaningful interpretation since they have been relegated to the metaphysical world which is removed from us and, can only be accessible through speculation. To this end, it is this context in our case, which gave out the possibility of meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space. This helped in assisting us avoid confusion that would otherwise have crept into meanings of various phenomena under focus thus distorting our work.

3.3 Study Design

The research adopted a qualitative research design that is mainly based on Critical Discourse Analysis. This mode analyses the frequency of occurrence of a concept or an idea within the body of the text being looked at, thus ascertaining its significance. This mode was largely explanatory given the nature of the underlying account that it envisaged. This is commonly used

in preliminary and exploratory studies as it gathers information, summarizes and interprets for the purpose of classification (Orodho: 2000). Furthermore, descriptive research can be used for attitudes and opinions which enable one to identify and describe the variability in different phenomena (Saunders: 2009). It was useful in portraying an accurate profile of concepts and explanations that were encountered.

3.4 Data Collection

This appraisal relied on document and content analysis as a tool for data collection. In this, primary and secondary texts were read. According to Kothari (2004), this tool shall be handy to the researcher by making available accurate and faster data. The primary texts comprised of Kierkegaard's authorship. Secondary texts consisted of a critical survey of written works on the personality of Kierkegaard and other publications by phenomenologists and existentialists.

3.5 Modes of Analysis

Mwanje (2001; 43) observes that, unlike in quantitative inquiry, in qualitative inquiries it is often problematic to have a clear distinction between data gathering and data analysis.

For example, from a hermeneutic perspective it is assumed that the researcher's presuppositions affect the gathering of the data. What this implies is that the analysis affects the data and the data affects the analysis in significant ways. Because of this, one should be speaking about 'modes of analysis' rather than 'data analysis' in qualitative research.

Basically, these methods of analysis are different approaches to gathering, analysing and interpreting qualitative data. Since our study is qualitative and philosophical in nature, the following modes of analysis were employed to yield textual information.

The study engaged the critical, hermeneutical, dialectical, evaluative and inductive analytical methods of philosophical inquiry as discussed below.

3.5.1 Critical Method

By critical is meant a factually grounded or informative analysis. This is opposed to the normative, prescriptive or emotive approach. In this method, we analyzed ideas developed about the problem of our subject as we came across them in the study. We examined the content and arguments of the different philosophers and philosophies that were encountered. The method involved an analysis of our subject concerning its ethical existential status since this is a philosophical problem. In this, it was important to note that the question of existence is the question of the 'why' of the things affecting man and thus its nature was of importance. The overall question here was, if we could explain the problem in a rational manner.

3.5.2 Hermeneutical Method

Hermeneutics is an underlying philosophy in the qualitative paradigm. Kothari (2004) observes, it is an approach to human understanding as it provides the philosophical grounding for interpretivism. As a mode of analysis, it suggests a way of understanding textual data. In this perspective, it is primarily concerned with the meaning of a text. It helps achieve the dialectic between the understanding of the text as a whole, and the interpretation of its parts in which

descriptions are guided by anticipated explanations. In our case, the mode is applicable given that we are dealing with explanations about the decisional process.

3.5.3 Dialectical Method

The dialectical method helped in discussing and resolving conflicts between different existential views of life. As a method it was apt for it explicated an already given content by elevating it from the obscure and indefinite complex, which contains a destructive antithesis to it. It involved an inner progress from one state to another by an inner dynamics. In regard to this study, the target of the dialectical process was shifted from the totality of the universe to the solitary inwardness of the individual towards an authentic self.

3.5.4 Evaluative Method

The evaluative method consisted of an examination and judgment of the subject at hand concerning its quality and significance as a way of explaining the problem of human existence. We therefore assessed the existential status of our subject with the aim of explaining its relevance to human endeavour.

3.5.5 Inductive Analytical Method

Finally, the inductive analytical method consisted of breaking statement(s) or idea(s) into parts so as to prove its validity. This commenced with detailed observations of the speculative world and, culminated in abstract generalizations by embracing the refining of concepts and identifying relationships. This method helped in the immersion of the specific details of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships. In our case, the method was

appropriate for the concept of the decisional process needed to be broken into subjectivity and collectivity for better apprehension.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBJECTIVITY VERSUS COLLECTIVITY IN KIERKEGAARD'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

4.1 Introduction

The notion of subjectivity constitutes the crux of Kierkegaard's philosophical reflections. He has been both exalted and condemned for his assertion that subjectivity is the truth and *interalia* the primary datum for an existential analysis of the ethical phenomena. His notion of subjectivity has posed great challenge to both theologians and philosophers. Notwithstanding problems associated with any meaningful analysis of Kierkegaard's philosophical reflections, one may discern the principle of subjectivity as constituting the running theme of Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy. However, from our study it is evident that in as much as he claims his work is subjective in nature, there are overtones insinuating that it is also collective in nature. Thus, against this background, it would be proper to carry out an examination into this section to uncover the use of subjectivity and collectivity. This section will hence look at: the principle of subjectivity; the ethical implications of the idea of subjectivity; the temporality of the ethical subject; and, collectivity in Kierkegaard.

4.2 Kierkegaard and the Principle of Subjectivity

For Kierkegaard, subjectivity is integral to human existence and it constitutes the very core of human reality. Externality, outwardness – a reference to realities that are transcendent, ultimately alienates human existence from its own inwardness, which, according to Kierkegaard, is the basic truth of human existence (Kierkegaard; 1990). It is in the inwardness of man, in his existential concreteness that the ultimate truth of morality dawns.

Kierkegaard proposed subjectivity not only as the essence of human existence but also emphasized subjectivity to be the foundation of human freedom and responsibility. Freedom and responsibility, being the fundamental ethical concepts, are ultimately derived from subjectivity itself. Hence, for Kierkegaard, subjectivity is the ethical reality.

In Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy, the existent human being as a subject occupies a very important place. An individual in his all-consuming individuality stands out as the ultimate reference for Kierkegaard's humanistic ethics. An observation worth noting is that, when contrasted with the Kantian and Hegelian attempts to establish the objective necessity of the belief in God, Kierkegaard clearly discusses untenability of such an objective belief. Kierkegaard refuses to concede the possibility of any rational demonstration which objectively establishes either the existence or non-existence of God as an object of belief. Thus, in the wake of this 'objective uncertainty' implying that the existence of God can neither be proved nor disproved, the ultimate locus of ethics is the individual himself. To believe in God in the face of uncertainty is a matter of choice for the individual himself. This belief itself becomes an ethical act as an expression of one's essential freedom to choose. Hence, Kierkegaard observes, "For me – not personally, but as thinker this matter of the individual is the most decisive thing" (Kierkegaard; 1962, 124).

One may find Kierkegaard's usage of the term individual somewhat ambiguous with different layers of meaning. However, what appears as ambiguity is really reflective of Kierkegaard's dialectical approach to the category of individuals, wherein the individual is seen as both a realm of possibility and actuality. In the aesthetic realm, the individual appears entangled in a world of

possibilities. There is no ultimate choice and hence there is no concrete actuality. The aesthetic response varies, for individuals vary in terms of differences “between man and man with respect to intellect, culture etcetera” (*Ibid.*, 162).

However, in the realm of actuality, the individual is defined in terms of ultimate commitment and choice. In the exercise of one’s freedom, the individual constitutes himself as the fundamental category of the ethical mode of existence. This contrasts with the aesthetic mode of existence, precisely because, as an ethical reality, the individual exists as an actuality. This ethical reality is the only reality which does not become a mere possibility through being known, and which can be known only through being thought; for it is the individual’s own reality (Kierkegaard; 1992, 284).

There are no options, no choices to be made out of innumerable possibilities of varying degrees. Rather, the existing human reality as an actuality expresses individual’s ultimate choice to chose oneself and act accordingly. Hence, “the ethical reality of the individual is the only reality” (*Ibid.*, 291).

The two approaches to ‘individual’ seemingly involve a contradiction. It appears as if Kierkegaard is giving two different meanings to the notion of individual. To common sense, the aesthetic individual appears as the existing individual involved in the world of living choices, and the individual with ultimate commitment is an equivalent to an ideality. However, in Kierkegaard’s radical thinking it is precisely the other way round. Moreover, the two meanings

for him are not mutually exclusive; they are seen in the dialectical relationship. Thus

Kierkegaard maintains:

This double meaning is precisely the dialectic of 'the single individual'. 'The single individual' can mean the one and only, and 'the single individual' can mean every man. So if one would provoke attention dialectically, one should use the category of 'the individual' with a double lash to it. The pride in the one thought incites some, the humility in the second thought deters others, but the confusion involved in the double meaning provokes attention dialectically...(Kierkegaard; 1962, 126).

These are not two types of individuals, nor are they two independently operative parallel modes of existence. Rather these are two dimensions of existence characterizing one single entity called the individual human being. It is in this concretely existing human being that one can discern the ultimate significance of all that matters. "The 'individual' is the category through which...this all age history, the human race as a whole must pass...with the category of 'the individual' is bound up any ethical importance 'I' may have" (*Ibid.*, 127).

The Kierkegaardian thesis of the *sui-generis* character of individual subject stands in radical contrast to the Hegelian perspective on the nature of self. Kierkegaard affirms the uniqueness of each concretely existing self as the irreducible datum of the ethical life. In a truly Lutheran fashion, Kierkegaard maintains that ethics has meaning and significance only in the context of the concretely existing human self (Jolivet; 1980, 206).

On the contrary, the Hegelian approach to the nature of self tends to desubstantiate the very concreteness of self. Presenting his notion of the self, Hegel observes:

By the terms 'I' I mean myself, a single and altogether determinate person, and yet I really utter nothing peculiar to myself, for everyone else is an 'I' or 'Ego', and when I call myself 'I', though I indubitably mean the single person 'myself', I express a thorough universal. 'I', therefore, is mere being for self, in which everything peculiar or marked is renounced and buried out of sight; it is as it were the ultimate and unanalyzable

point of consciousness. We may say [that] 'I' and thought are the same or, more definitely, [that] 'I' is thought as a thinker (Hegel; 1991, 51-2).

The implication of the Hegelian position has far reaching consequences. Hegel, clearly identifies 'I', the self as the thought. The 'I' of Hegel is not the thinking self, which is a substance, characterized by the essential attitude of thought. On the contrary, the 'I' is the thought and as the thought that 'I' is not a particular intellectual activity of an existing individual but the universal thought. In Hegel's philosophy, the 'I' as thought is peculiarly its own and is thereby reduced to the level of ultimate and unanalyzable point of absolute consciousness. Thus, in Hegelianism, the concretely existing individual human entity becomes a non-entity.

Kierkegaard rejects this conception of the self in unequivocal terms. For him, the concreteness of the individual constitutes the fundamental category of ethics. Neither can ethics be meaningful nor the context of the Hegelian system obvious to Kierkegaard. He laments that the Hegelian system lacks an ethical dimension. He is wary about Hegelian dissolution of the ethical subject. He correctly perceives that the self, as presented by Hegel, is a universal thinker in general, not a particular thinker. The thought that what Hegel presents as the 'I', is not a concrete individual's thought but pure thought, thought in abstraction. It is not surprising that Kierkegaard finds the Hegelian position unacceptable, for in Hegel "the existing subjectivity tends more and more to evaporate" (Kierkegaard; 1992, 112).

Kierkegaard's rejection of the Hegelian approach to self is not merely common sense concerned with the presentation of individuality and variety. It is a philosopher's cry for an ontological basis of ethics. Is the self really a universal that somehow contains or retains within itself a set of particulars the way Hegel would have it? Would it not be closer to truth to approach the self

as living in its particular concreteness? Kierkegaard goes even one step further by suggesting not only the particular identity of the self but the ethical significance of the concreteness of human subject; for subjectivity is the very essence of the ethical reality of self. According to Kierkegaard, the ethical cannot be grasped by man, except in a concrete situation and at a particular moment, and he cannot be possessed of the ethical truth in any other way than through a decision by action; subjectivity is the ethical truth. For Kierkegaard, the concrete individual is the ontological basis of meaningful ethics.

4.2.1 Ethical Implications of the Idea of Subjectivity

Having demonstrated the significance of the category of the individual for Kierkegaard, we need to discuss the ethical implications of his assertions. This perspective of Kierkegaard on the ethical connotation of the category of the individual suggests that ethics does not consist in a systematic body of doctrinal assertions affirmed in abstraction from the concretely existing individual.

In a typical Socratic fashion, Kierkegaard conceives ethics primarily in the life context of the individual. It is not a form of doctrine but a way of life (Kierkegaard; 1990, 172). Ethics consists in man's response to life situation. Kierkegaard is not out to build up a systematic ethics, a tendency noticeable in many moralists and ethicists, Kant being the classic case. His primary concern is not to offer a system of categorical imperatives as universal principles of morality, but to ascertain what it does mean to live ethically for a concretely existing human being (Kierkegaard; 1992, 284).

Another important corollary of this is that ethics is a matter of personal relevance. Religious institutions and theological systems are ultimately irrelevant for the ethical individual. An individual alone can discern and assent in himself as to what is ethically relevant (Kierkegaard; 1990, 259). Ethics is not a matter of believing in theological and institutional injunctions. What matters most is the individual's perception of what he sees to be significant and relevant for his life, for ultimately the ethical life involves the individual in a very specific and concrete sense (Kierkegaard; 1992, 61). Hence, it is the individual who must find his eternal reality (Kierkegaard; 1990, 259).

Finding one's ethical reality does not consist in knowing certain ethical principles in an *apriori* way, or acting out according to the dictates of institutional authority. The ethical reality, as a personal matter, is not something that can be acquired in the ways one learns about objective truths. Ethics, in the true sense, is not an objective phenomenon about which one can obtain information in an objective fashion. Ethics is basically subjective in orientation. Hence as Kierkegaard puts it, "existential reality is incommunicable, and the subjective thinker finds his reality in his own ethical existence" (Kierkegaard; 1990, 320).

These considerations led Kierkegaard to assert that subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality. The reality and the truth of the individual is Kierkegaard's fundamental basis of existential ethics. The individual is the ultimate category in terms of which Kierkegaard tries to understand the dynamics of ethical life. He maintains that there is a constant inner striving in the will that moves the individual towards expression of the inner truth in the ethical mode of existence. Ethics is a function of the will, the free exercise of which enables the self to constitute its ethical

reality. The ethical is “that by which a man becomes what he becomes” (Kierkegaard; 1990). Will is the primary factor in the making of the ethical subject. There appears to be a certain agreement between Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer who recognize the primacy of the will in the conscious moral life of man (Fulford; 1911, 3).

However, Schopenhauer advocates confinement of the will, as an irrational element, to the contemplative domain of philosophical reflection (Gardiner; 1963). On the other hand, Kierkegaard glorifies the element of inner striving of the will as the ultimate expression of the life of the spirit. In this regard, Kierkegaard makes a radical departure from the dominant trend of the Western thought, which exalts reason as the ultimate master of human passions. He makes a fundamental leap within the Western intellectual tradition when he virtually denies the determinate role of reason in the ethical life of the human subject. Subjectivity, as the ethical category, does not function in ways that may be characterized as ways of reason.

In asserting that truth is subjectivity or that subjectivity is truth, Kierkegaard would reject either a coherence or correspondence theory of truth (Kierkegaard; 1992, 169). There is a clear disagreement with Hegel who tends to accept the coherence theory of truth. To Hegel, truth does not consist in the agreement of an object with our conception of it. For Hegel, truth consists in logical coherence of thought pattern. Reflecting on the notion of truth, Hegel (1951, 51-2) says, “In the philosophical sense of the word, on the other hand, truth may be described, in general abstract terms, as the agreement of a thought content with itself...untrue in this sense means the same as bad, or self discordant.”

Thus for Hegel, truth is not propositional or epistemological in character. Truth, according to Hegel, is an ontological phenomenon of truth, according to which, a thing is true if its character is in accordance with its notion, its essence and its function. Kierkegaard, however, does not accept this ontological notion of truth, which makes truth contingent upon the inner coherence of thought pattern to which reality is mediated (Kierkegaard; 1992, 169). For him, there is no question of reality being mediated by rational categories. His subjectivistic notion of truth insists that truth is an essential and integral element of the human existence as subject. As such, the question of truth cannot be regarded as an objective question in the manner Hegel does. As to subjective truth, Kierkegaard maintains, is not a fantasy of individual whims, rather it is an ontological necessity. It is structurally related to the actual concrete existence of a living individual who does not dream in abstraction and generalities unfounded in the actuality of life.

Hegel's conception of truth, derived from the abstract character of thought, is merely an exercise in phantasmal flight of an abstract thinker (Thulstrup; 1980). Kierkegaard, rejecting the Hegelian approach to truth, which divests truth from its concrete actuality, calls for a reorientation in our understanding of the notion of truth in terms of subjective individual. In Kierkegaardian perspective then what characterizes subjective notion of truth is not the content of belief and its self-coherence, but the manner in which one comes to believe what one believes and acts out what one believes. The essence of truth consists in the subjectivity of the individual who is conceived by Kierkegaard not as a particularized concrete manifestation of the Absolute. The individual is a unique individual who exists as the concrete individual thinker of a thought, which he need not think but does think for himself.

Kierkegaard is fully aware of the paradoxical nature of this conception of truth from a purely objective point of view. From the objective perspective, the subjective truth is no truth. However, by asserting that the subjective truth is objectively paradoxical, Kierkegaard takes a stand that this offers its own autonomous defence against the objective of Hegelian scheme which Kierkegaard rightly perceives to be grounded in abstract thought (Kierkegaard; 1992, 112). Asking the question what is the abstract thought Kierkegaard points out:

It is thought without a thinker. Abstract thought ignores every thing except the thought, and only the thought is, and in its own medium...Existence is not devoid of thought but in existence thought is in a foreign medium. What can it then mean to ask in the language of abstraction about reality in the sense of existence, seeing that abstract thought abstracts precisely from existence (Ibid., 296).

Kierkegaard's subjective notion of truth also stands in radical contrast to the contemporary correspondence theory of truth, whose chief exponent may be regarded as Bertrand Russell for whom truth was once a correspondence between belief and fact (Russell; 1959, 123). This conception of truth differs from Hegel drastically in its insistence upon the agreement of a true idea with a corresponding concrete reality. Truth then, from this perspective, does not consist in the perception of the coherence that may characterize thought patterns expressing objective unfolding of the Absolute or Spirit. The correspondence theory of truth stands in opposition to Hegelian perspective, especially in its rejection of abstract character of thought and in its affirmation of the concrete actuality of things that provides the criterion for truth. However, Kierkegaard would oppose this scheme of things on the ground that this perspective degrades the thinker, the concretely existing individual into a non-entity of no relevance to the whole question of truth (Kierkegaard; 1992, 169).

This objective approach to truth tends to minimize the question of the relationship between the thinker and the object of thought. All that matters is whether there is an object to which the thought corresponds. Kierkegaard's resolution of the problem consists in his assertion that the subjectivity of the thinker is the most significant issue as far as the question of truth is concerned (*Ibid.*, 178). Thus he makes a valid distinction between objective and subjective truth in the following manner:

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focussed on the relationship, however but upon the question whether it is truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directly subjective to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true (Kierkegaard; 1990, 356).

The notion of truth as subjectivity, which is essentially the edifying dimension of human existence, has been clearly formulated by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* (1990, 357). The basic prescription for the ethical man in *Either/Or* was not blind acceptance of religious injunctions or institutional demands. Rather the demand is to direct the will's primary orientation to oneself as the foundation of edifying ethics. This inward orientation of the subject, according to Kierkegaard, constitutes a subject's ultimate relationship to itself and defines the essence of the human being as the ethical subject. In Kierkegaard's words:

For one may have known a thing many times and acknowledged it, one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it and yet it is only the deep inward movements, only by the indescribable emotions of the heart, that for the first time you are convinced that what you have known belongs to you, that no power can take it from you, for only the truth which edifies is truth for you (*Ibid.*, 356).

The upshot of Kierkegaard's contention is that the truth that matters for ethical existence is not the objective truth but the subjective truth. The subjective truth is the essential knowledge, for it

stands in an essential relationship to the ethical subjects. All other forms of knowledge not related to the ethical subject in its inwardness are basically contingent and inessential. The fundamental difference between the objective truth and the subjective knowledge is that, the objective reflection is directed towards abstract objective truth such as in mathematics and metaphysics. In this realm, the existing subject becomes inconsequential; his existence or non-existence makes no difference. The truth in this sphere becomes indifferent and this indifference is its objective value.

On the contrary, subjective knowledge demands personal appropriation as the part of the existing subject. In subjective reflection, the subject is actively involved in the process of inward appropriation of the truth and thereby truth becomes subjectivity. Thus, in the inward appropriation of subjectivity alone, truth and existence coincide. Hence, 'truth is subjectivity', means that the subjective truth is grounded in the concrete existence of the individual subject.

The subjective truth concerns man's ethical being in its intricate relationship with passion and will, it is the mode of being of the self that reflects, chooses, decides and is responsible to itself. Thus the significance of subjectivity lies in its ethical orientation to the world. By affirming the truth of subjectivity, Kierkegaard affirms the essentially ethical character of subjectivity. Subjectivity emerges through the exercise of the freedom to choose the self absolutely. This freedom, Kierkegaard regards as the essential freedom of the self as an autonomous category.

The primacy that Kierkegaard accords to freedom as the essence of human subject puts him in sharp contrast to Hegel. Hegel virtually precludes any possibility of freedom of the self by

asserting that man is free only in conforming to the necessity. In his own words, "thus, without any selective reflection, the person performs his duty as his own and as something which is; and in this necessity he has himself and his actual freedom" (Hegel; 1973, 119-20). In the context of this conception of freedom, asserting that man is free precisely when he is not makes ethics become a misnomer. Hence Kierkegaard rightly censures Hegel for the dissolution of the ethical self which must be a responsible self, responsibility being a function of freedom. Subjectivity, whose essence is freedom, which is reflected in its absolute choosing of itself, alone can be the basis of a meaningful ethics. Hence, Kierkegaard sees in ethics, "the highest task encountered by human being, the task of becoming subjective, as achieving the truth of man" (Kierkegaard; 1992, 183).

Man's essential freedom is an existential fact without which no ethics can be contemplated. Man is essentially free as a subject, because he is a decisional being. As a decisional being, he acts in accordance with his own inward truth. He does not have to take recourse to law, to rules or to the standards of history and science. As a decisional being, man is an island unto himself: there are no external supports of objective truth available to man which can have any significance for the decisional character of the ethical mode of existence, for the whole responsibility of deciding how to live rests with man. By affirming truth as subjectivity with one stroke, Kierkegaard has recommended all the props of civilization, the support of morality, the law, and institutionalized relation and learning. The ethical man is the self-governing being. More importantly, he is a dynamic creative being who constitutes himself in the fact that he is discovering the truth for himself, in his inwardness.

4.2.2 Temporality of the Ethical Subject

From the outset, individual human beings exist in time, and time constitutes an important element in the self-definition of human beings. Existing human beings live and operate within the framework of time. Individual history cannot be conceived without considering the temporal context for it is the very mode of being of human subjects and as such, acquires infinite significance for any valid delineation of the ethical dimension of human existence. The term temporality is here being used to connote both the fact of change and finitude of phenomenal existence, as well as its subjective experience.

Ethics, being primarily concerned with the human subject, does not belong to the realm of eternal. Ethics itself is structurally related to the human subject characterized by temporality, in the sense defined above. Temporality is a feature of existence as a structure of world involvement. Properly articulated, the problem of temporality turns out to be the problem of the ethical subject.

The problem of time at the ethical stage, as conceived by Kierkegaard, becomes quite complicated on account of Kierkegaard's distinction between internal history [or time] and external history [or time]. Rejecting the Hegelian approach to time and history, that dissolves this distinction between internal time and external time, Kierkegaard observes:

The Hegelian philosophy culminates in the proposition that the outward is the inward and the inward is the outward. With this Hegel virtually finishes. But this principle is essentially an aesthetic metaphysical one, and in this way, the Hegelian philosophy is happily finished, or is fraudulently finished by lumping everything (including the ethical and the religious) indiscriminately in the aesthetic metaphysical. Even the ethical posits opposition of a sort between the inward and the outward in as much as it regards the outward as neutral. Outwardness, as the material of action, is neutral, for what the ethical accentuates is purpose, and it is simply immoral to be concerned about the result,

outwardness proves nothing at all ethically, for ethically a question is raised only about the inward... (Kierkegaard; 1992, 263-4).

Thus it is the internal time, that is, the temporality of the subject that is significant at the ethical stage, for it is the ethical subject involved in the decisional process, for which temporality becomes problematic. The outer time, for the external history is relevant only with reference to the objective outcome of the particular act, ensuing from the subject's decision. But as far as the individual's decision is concerned, his exercise of freedom is concerned; it is internal time that is of relevance. External time is the realm of objectivity in which the outer consequences of one's deeds are manifested; but Kierkegaard suggests, since the outer consequence of one's deed is not within one's power, the ethical individual is responsible only for his purpose, or his intention (Kierkegaard; 1990, 142). It is the inner intention, emanating from the will of the subject, which is of central importance for the ethical subject.

Kierkegaard insists that the ethical stage of existence is concerned with the inner time of purposeful decision, rather than the objective time in which the results of the decision are fructified. Time according to Kierkegaard, is intricately related to individual's intentional activity and, as such, he argues that the emergence of decisional process at the ethical stage coincides with the emergence of life-time. By life-time, Kierkegaard understands a continuity of the temporal process that is constituted by the ethical subject in exercise of its will. It is precisely this continuity of the temporal process that distinguishes the ethical mode of existence from the aesthetic mode of existence. The aesthetic mode of existence is exclusively concerned with the moment of the present without any reference to past and future. For the aesthetic individual, life becomes concentrated in the moment of the present. It is in the present that the

aesthetic individual seeks his fulfilment (*Ibid.*, 234). And since the moment of the present is constantly fleeting, the self of the aesthetic individual suffers a certain fissuration and dispersion (*Ibid.*, 142). Life is lived by the aesthetic individual in the moment of the present without any purpose that is oriented to the future as a project, and the past as meaningful history.

Inter-penetration or co-inherence of the past, present and future characterizes the ethical mode of existence. All the three moments of time are significant for the ethical subject who holds them together in a unity through the exercise of the will. Emphasizing the value of time for the ethical orientation of the will that unites them in the moment of the present, Kierkegaard observes:

Men are divided into great classes: those who predominantly live in hope, and those who predominantly live in recollection. Both have a wrong relation to time. The healthy individual lives at once both in hope and in recollection, and only thereby does his life acquire true continuity (*Ibid.*, 1990).

Time for Kierkegaard is a medium of progressive growth, in which the ethical subject constitutes itself. Hence mere recollection or hope oriented to the past or future respectively, cannot be the context of the ethical subject who must give a unity in the moment of the present. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard argues that the 'true present' is a 'unity of hope and recollection'. The Ethical person, through the act of the will and decision, constitutes this unity of the temporal moments and thereby gives them continuity. For the ethical person, the past, the present and the future interpenetrate and co-inhere in such a way that their mutual exclusion cannot be conceived without the loss of the ethical character itself.

According to Kierkegaard, the structure of life-time is basically the structure of the constitution of subjectivity. The Ethical Self constitutes itself in time and, in the process, time acquires

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ethical significance. The intimate relationship between the self and time is specifically evident at the ethical stage and Kierkegaard's analysis succeeds in showing the significance of the time component for the constitution of the selfhood, of the ethical subject.

In Kierkegaard's analysis, the three moments of time are co-related with the structural components of the self. The self's actuality (its history) is related to the past; future moment connotes the self's possibilities; and the present is the moment to which the decisional character of the self belongs. Thus, the ethical ideal that Kierkegaard proposed for the self consists in a demand to impart to the self continuity through its decisions. The ethical self must recognize and acknowledge its own actuality. It must accept this actuality in a responsible way and proceed in a decisive way to choose specific possibilities as relating to its own actuality. The actuality of the self conditions its possibilities, and the possibilities that are realized constitute the self's actuality. The ethical significance lies in the self's acceptance of the responsibility for its actuality, on account of the decisional factor which characterizes the self's autonomy. It is the self's decision to accept its actuality, conditioned by the past moment and its possibilities in the moment of the future, that gives ethical significance to the self.

If one takes into account the parallelism between the components of the self and the modes of time, it becomes quite evident that the tenses of time interpenetrate and co-inhere at the ethical stage. The decisions of the self in the moment of the present must acknowledge the self's past and be directed towards the self's future. The responsible self is the self that accomplishes this unity of the past and the future in the present moment of decision. The ethical person is enjoined by Kierkegaard to accomplish this ideal of the unity of the tenses of time and the three

components of the self, that is, actuality, decisiveness and possibility (Kierkegaard; 1991). The ethical person differs from the aesthetic person solely because, for the aesthetic, there is no unity of self and no co-inherence of time's tenses. However, the ethical person, in and through the present decisions, seeks to achieve self-unity through establishing an inter-relationship between past and future.

Kierkegaard's analysis of the temporal process has direct relevance to his understanding of the nature of the ethical person. Time is seen as an enemy by the aesthetic individual because of his exclusive concentration on the moment of the present, which constantly eludes him. Inevitably the sensuous present disappears leaving the aesthetic individual in a lurch. Since he lives only by momentary desires and seeks not unity through the exercise of the will, his self is constantly diffused. In effect, there is no subjectivity at the aesthetic stage. But the ethical person gives meaning and significance to his life through a temporal continuity, which is a creation of his own will. Temporal continuity belongs to the inwardness of the inwardness of the self-reflective subject, and as such internal time and history become significant to the ethical individual.

According to Kierkegaard, for the ethical person:

Internal history is the only true history, but true history contends with that which is the life principle of history, that is, with time. But when one contends with time, then the temporal and every little moment of it acquires for this fact immense reality (Kierkegaard; 1990, 137).

The beginning of the internal history of the individual, according to Kierkegaard, is the very moment of the emergence of the ethical self through self-revelation in exercise of the will. The individual who is closed within himself, who does not open up in the act of self-revelation, does not have an internal history. He can only have an external history. Thus the ethical dimension of

existence acquires a historical significance for the self. The importance of time for the ethical person, is that time becomes for him, a moment of self-definition. The self defines itself in the medium of time, which it inwardly appropriates through decision and thus constitutes its internal history.

The ethical person and the internal temporal process are not two independent categories, but are somehow related to each other; rather the ethical person is the temporal process that gives continuity to life history from the ethical point of view. The self realizes itself in purposeful decision. Purposeful decision has intrinsic relationship to the self's past and future. The self confers upon it continuity, resulting from its own decision to preserve, by choosing its own actuality of the past and relating it to the possibilities of the future. Thus for purposeful striving and perseverance of the self, interiorization of time is a necessity.

4.3 Kierkegaard and Collectivity

Kierkegaard's collective concerns are expressed in the context of objective uncertainty of the decisional process to which we have already alluded. However, his ideas have a larger significance in view of his assertion of an intrinsic relationship between the ethical dimension of existence and the nature of subjectivity.

Collectivity, for Kierkegaard, is the category that gives meaning and significance to the ethical life (Kierkegaard; 1990). He was convinced that Ethics could neither be derived nor grounded in either an objective truth of religion or an abstract principle of spirit. Both of these, according to him, belong to the realm of objectivity of which there can only be cognitive awareness. But

cognitively apprehended truth or reality assumes an objective character of which there can only be historical knowledge, which to Kierkegaard is necessarily contingent. Objectivity is characterized by contingency and, as such, cannot be the ultimate foundation of ethics (Kierkegaard; 1992, 119).

Collectivity, then, is a fundamental category for an existential ethics. Ethics, to Kierkegaard, is a matter of ultimate commitment and involves the principle of decisiveness on the part of the collective. Decisiveness is a function of an existentially determined human being that espouses it to express his living concerns. Accordingly, collectivity remains the most relevant dimension of human existence with ultimate significance for ethics.

To grasp its significance for ethics, all philosophical considerations perhaps ought to exclude any question that is posed in an objective fashion and can be resolved in an objective way with reference to either historical knowledge or an unfolding of the historical process. Thus Kierkegaard categorically asks for an unqualified elimination of any objective issue from a meaningful discussion of ethics. As he puts it:

For since the problem in question poses a decision, and since all decisiveness, as shown above, inheres in collectivity, it is essential that every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated. If any such trace remains, it is at once a sign that the collective subject seeks to shirk something of the pain and crisis of the decision; that is, he seeks to make the problem to some degree objective (Ibid., 119).

From the foregoing, it is evident that Kierkegaard is not clear where preference should be given between the subjective and the collective individual. From the previous sections, it was clear that he preferred the subjective individual. But suddenly there is a shift towards the collective individual thus easily misleading a not so keen reader. Extracting a few lines from the above

quotation would illustrate this point. For instance, the first sentence "...For since the problem in question poses a decision, and since all decisiveness, as shown above, inheres in collectivity, it is essential that every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated" is misleading. In Logic, it is unacceptable to claim one thing and then assert another. Such an erroneous statement should be discarded because it kind of nullifies itself. In the second sentence, he makes reference to the 'collective subject'. This in itself is a contradiction for what is implied is that many individuals can become one, which is an impossibility. Thus to this extent, it would be proper for Kierkegaard to be consistent so as to shed away such kinds of misleading ideas. Hence the question of rationality/irrationality is at stake.

The rational or the irrational constructions are ultimately objective in character depending on how they are employed. In regard of the foregoing, they fail to meet Kierkegaard's criterion of subjective truth because it deprives ethics of its autonomous character, thus compromising man's essential freedom to choose. This is so because it is not clear how they should be employed. Should it be on the subjective individual or the collective individual? But the true mode of the ethical subject's existence does not consist in his acceptance of objectively established positions.

Kierkegaard expresses strong contempt for such overtures, which seem to be based on the illusory understanding of the fundamental nature of subjectivity and its essential freedom for decisiveness. Such a stance demoralizes the subject by absolving it of its responsibility for decisiveness and inner commitment. With such a strong defence on the part of Kierkegaard for the subjective individual, then, the objective approach to ethics is bound to be frustrated in

grasping the true character of the ethical mode of existence as an exercise in determining freedom in the decisional process.

The objective approach deludes itself into believing that subjective acceptance of the ethical truth, mediated by religion, is a direct transition ensuing from the rational deliberations on established objective ethical truths. The decisive factor in ethics is the subject's direct apprehension and appropriation of the ethical in personal life that can only be designated as subjective. Perhaps again this is precisely because it makes a fundamental difference to the subject's existence. But at this point, the assertion 'no religious truth or dogma can divest man of his freedom to be ethical' is still open to criticism. It cannot be a closed chapter as Kierkegaard would want us to believe.

In rejecting the claim of religion to legislate ethically, Kierkegaard argues for autonomy of both the ethical and the religious. Ethics for him is an autonomous sphere and its *telos* does not lie outside ethics itself. As he says, "It reposes immanently in itself, it has nothing without itself which is its *telos*, but is itself *telos* for everything outside it, and when this has been incorporated by the ethical it can go no further" (Kierkegaard; 1985, 54). It is worth noting that for religion to legislate ethically, then it does not only look at the subjective individual but the collective individual as well. That is why there are norms that regulate societal behaviour because it is a truism that no man can exist as an island. To this end, the ethical should not be subjugated to religion, but within its immanent region, the ethical is the supreme.

In Kierkegaard's proposition that truth is collectivity and that subjectivity constitutes itself (Kierkegaard; 1992) there is an apparent contradiction, although there is an echo of the Socratic mode of thinking. Kierkegaard celebrates the Socratic approach to truth as inwardness. For Socrates, inwardness was his whole life thus his famous dictum, better be a man dissatisfied than a pig satisfied (Stumpf & Abel; 2002). His philosophical method, his dialectical thinking directed towards questioning the prevalent presuppositions and pretensions of knowledge are designed primarily to demonstrate the ultimate invalidity of perceived truths. The immediate result of this mode of Socratic inquiry was a certain sense of confusion and bewilderment but in a most significant way his dialectical method succeeded in revealing truth in the inwardness of the human subject. Thus observes Kierkegaard:

In the principle that subjectivity, outwardness, is the truth, thus is comprehended the Socratic wisdom, whose everlasting merit it was to have to become aware of the essential significance of existence, of the fact that the knower is an existing individual. For this reason, Socrates was in the truth by virtue of his ignorance, in the highest sense in which this was possible (Kierkegaard; 1992, 183).

The ultimate source of the proverbial Socratic ignorance was Socrates' self awareness as an individual thinking being, searching the truth on his own in his utter loneliness without the support of the rules or laws of sophist methods. The philosophical value of the Socratic method consists in its ability to employ the dialectical approach, not for the purely negative objective of demolishing the fragile edifice of accepted presuppositions of knowledge and truth, but to re-orient individuals to thinking in a way that the truth becomes apparent to man in his own inwardness. But closely looking at the above quotation from Kierkegaard, again an inconsistency is revealed. This is so especially when he talks of 'outwardness' with respect to the 'subjective' individual. Thus applying Socrates' dialectics, we may be justified to say that Kierkegaard is either ignorant or not keen on what he says thus further disorientating his readers.

In this instance, it would have been wise of him to talk of 'inwardness' rather than 'outwardness' with respect to the subjective individual. The latter should be applicable to the concept of collectivity.

The basic assumption of Kierkegaard's dialectical approach is the Socratic approach, that man will find in himself the positive lament on the basis of which his negatively emancipating dialectic works. Thus, all that can be accomplished by means of this dialectic which aims at disintegrating all positive knowledge, is to refer back man to himself. Kierkegaard's admiration for the great mode of thinking is nowhere more vividly demonstrated than in his conception of dialectic of existence which asserts that: "every philosophy which begins with a certain presupposition naturally concludes with the same presupposition" (Kierkegaard; 1991, 132). Again Kierkegaard goes against this grain and makes us wonder whether he was aware of what he was talking about. He seems to be mixed up in his own philosophy.

It is true of both Socrates and Kierkegaard that they proceed with the assumption that man, in search of truth, must already have a relationship with the truth, for without this relationship the seeking cannot take place. What is important, however, is to note that one becomes aware of the truth, only in the process of dialectical thinking grounded in the concrete existential situation of the individual human being. Hence it is the individual that is the ultimate starting point of Kierkegaard's philosophical investigation; and it is the individual that is the ultimate objective of this philosophical investigation. Hence the paradoxical nature of the truth of subjectivity, as Kierkegaard puts it:

The eternal essential truth, that is, truth which is vitally related to an existent personality, because it essentially concerns existence [all other knowledge is from a Socratic point of

view contingent and its ground and extent a matter of indifference] is paradoxical. Nevertheless, the external essential truth itself is by no means a paradox, but becomes paradoxical through its relation to existence (Kierkegaard; 1992, 170).

The paradox that the dialectical thinking encounters becomes resolved only when the subject comes to 'choose oneself' absolutely. The Kierkegaardian maxim, that the ethical subject only in the process of choosing oneself realizes the outwardness of subjective truth, is a variation of the Socratic maxim 'know thyself'. The celebrated hero of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, Judge William, correctly observes that to choose oneself is "a somewhat modernized Greek category" (Kierkegaard; 1988, 126). That the Kierkegaardian model of ethics is essentially Socratic is revealed most eloquently in his observation:

The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge is not a mere contemplation, it is a reflection upon himself which itself is an action, therefore I have deliberately preferred to use the expression 'choose oneself' instead of 'know oneself' (Kierkegaard; 1990, 263).

In this particular statement, Kierkegaard expresses his acknowledgement of the Socratic model and at the same time distinguishes himself from the Socratic contemplative mode of existence. outwardness of truth, for Kierkegaard, is the moving force behind an ethical subject's positive orientation to this world, a theme that permeates his ethical thought as developed in *Either/Or*. The dialectic reasserts itself. The individual begins by rejecting the world of externality and takes a full circle back through his inwardness to affirm the world. As Kierkegaard points out:

He who has ethically chosen and found himself possesses himself as he is determined in his whole concretion. But although he himself is his aim, this aim is nevertheless another, for the self which is the aim is not an abstract self which fits everywhere and hence nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in reciprocal relations with these surroundings, these conditions of life, his natural order (Kierkegaard; 1990, 263).

From philosophical analysis, it is thus evident that Kierkegaard throws in the towel in the above quote. By asserting what he has in the quote, he implicitly reaffirms that "in choosing oneself one chooses the other and thus acquires an ethical character". This begs the question what was he really subscribing to. Is it the subjective or the collective individual?

4.4 Concluding Observations

From the foregoing, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between the 'subject' (a subject of a sort) and 'subjectivity' (being a subject). For him, a 'subject of a sort' constantly endeavours to accentuate its own being by incessant appropriation of all sorts of objectives. In our selfish desire to claim all objects for ourselves, our eccentricity always goes beyond itself to treat other human beings not as subjects but as objects. This mode of existence of 'subject of some sort' tends to make the human reality constantly oriented towards objectivity, the objectivity that characterizes external realities or entities. This is an inauthentic mode of existence and deserves condemnation of the highest kind. This cannot be the mode of existence of truly ethical significance, for the subjective thinker finds his reality in his own ethical existence. This is what Kierkegaard should be defending. The authentic mode of subjective existence or what Kierkegaard calls the mode of subjectivity, consists precisely in the affirmation of this ethical reality of the human subject, who must overcome his alienation from his own subjectivity by re-orienting himself from the world of objective to the world of subjective.

Thus Kierkegaard embraces subjectivism which affirms the self-important claim of the finite self to appropriate all that there is for itself. His existential ethics denies the supremacy of egoistic orientation of the 'subject of some sort'. True, it is easy to live in this mode of subjective

existence, and it is mere tautology to say that the human being is a subject. But what Kierkegaard affirms as subjectivity, is not that mode of existence which one is, but that, which one existentially becomes. Becoming a subject, in authentic sense, is the highest ethical task that Kierkegaard sets for human beings. The ethical task of the affirmation of human subjectivity must become a passion with man and, therefore, man has to relate with other men. This implies that the collective individual should be reified over the subjective individual.

What constitutes the ultimate claim for subjectivity is the ethical demand for it. Subjectivity is the irreducible datum for existential ethics, for ethics may do away with everything but cannot reduce the subjectivity of the existing human being to nothingness. The subjective individual may abstract himself from everything else but cannot abstract from himself. Concreteness of the human existence cannot be annihilated. The ethical truth, in the face of objective uncertainty of dogmas and creed, is a living relation with myself and others. The ethical truth, then, is the truth that I must discover for myself. Neither is this discovery the discovery of a truth that has its objective justification in external confirmation nor is it one that touches the periphery of my life as do the truths objectively discovered. Discovery of objective truths may be irrelevant to myself or may have relevance to all. When for instance, a scientific proposition is established through objective discovery, it does not have direct relevance to the inner life of the discoverer. Its validity is external and its relevance is universal. On the contrary, the truth of subjectivity has inner validity and its relevance is to me alone. Thus writes Kierkegaard:

The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. What would be the use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and being...to show up the inconsistencies within each system; what good would it do me to be able to construct a world in which I do not live but only hold up for the view of others; what good would it do me to be able to explain

the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and my life... (Kierkegaard; 1938, 22).

The ethical truth then of necessity, is the truth of and for subjectivity. In its discovery and appropriation the subject becomes what it essentially is. This ethical transfiguration of the subject is the function of a transformative character of the truth of subjectivity. The transformation in itself is an act of edification performed as an act of the will's freedom to not choose itself absolutely but in the context of other individuals. The mundane character of the 'so-called subject', its involvement and entanglement with the world of objectivity is transformed into an edifying mode of the ethical existence of subjectivity and collectivity. This informs the verdict of this conclusion which also holds that Kierkegaard is using the subjective and the collective variantly. Thus it would be ideal that they be looked at in the context of the decisional process so as to be well understood.

CHAPTER FIVE

DECISIONAL PROCESS AND THE ETHICAL SUBJECT

5.1 Introduction

From the previous chapter, Kierkegaard regards the decisional factor grounded in the freedom of the will of the subject to be constitutive of the ethical individual. He accords significant place to the exercise of decisional factor in the growth of the ethical individual. The operation of the decisional factor marks the transition from the aesthetic mode of life to the ethical mode of life. It is important to note that this transition is not merely a movement from one stage to another stage; rather it implies a qualitative progression making the growth of the selfhood.

Against this background, this chapter seeks to analyze Kierkegaard's conception of the phenomenon of decisional process and its significance for understanding the concepts of subjectivity and collectivity as a unique structure of the ethical subject. The emergence of the self's freedom and decision constituted the central feature of the ethical stage. The ethical stage of existence contrasts with the aesthetic stage of existence in respect of the presence of the exercise of the self's freedom of decision in the former case and its absence in the latter, and thus deserves special attention.

5.2 The Decisional Process

From the outset, it is important to note that Kierkegaard uses choice and decision as interchangeable terms. We shall follow Kierkegaard's use in this respect to indicate his own preference to undermine the distinction. The ideas pertaining to the notion of decisiveness and choice are presented through an imaginary character named Judge William who is the central character in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1990). Judge William reappears in *Stages on Life's Way* (1988), as the ultimate significance of the ethical stage for human existence. Kierkegaard presents his ideas in constant dialogue with the characteristic stance of the aesthetic stage.

Kierkegaard has recognized the importance of the category of decision and choice in the ethical stage of existence in unequivocal terms. However, it must be noted that the category in question is not an undimensional term. Rather Kierkegaard clearly distinguishes between two separate but closely related levels of decision. At the first level, decision refers to what Kierkegaard terms as the choice of oneself (Kierkegaard; 1990, 179). This constitutes a necessary condition for the emergence of the second level of decision, which is characterized by the conscious deliberate resolve to exert for achievement of a particular goal (*Ibid.*, 227). The two forms of decision together constitute an individual's subjectivity. Individual existence assumes the character of the subjectivity only in the exercise of the freedom of decision and choice apart from which the ethical subject has no reality (Kierkegaard; 1988, 124). But the ethical subject truly speaking, has a reality that arises out of its interaction with other human beings. Thus the subjective and the collective are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other.

At this juncture, one may ask, what is the significance for the ethical stage of existence of what Kierkegaard calls the decision “to choose oneself?” The phrase has caused immense difficulty for commentators such as Guignon and Pereboom (1994), and Jolivet (1980) who have tried to unravel its true importance in Kierkegaard’s thought. We may refer to the authority of Judge William himself for a somewhat intelligible understanding of this seminal category in Kierkegaard’s thought. Judge William traces this category to the Socratic mode of existence and describes it as a modernized Greek category (*Ibid.*, 124). Elaborating upon this category he points out:

The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge is not a mere contemplation for that which the individual is determined by his necessity. It is a reflection upon himself, which itself is an action, therefore I have deliberately preferred to you the expression ‘choose oneself’ instead of ‘know oneself’ (*Ibid.*).

From the foregoing, it is thus apparent that Kierkegaard’s category of ‘to choose oneself’ is a variant of the well-known Socratic maxim ‘know thyself’ (Kierkegaard; 1990, 263).

However, the issue is not that simple, for Kierkegaard has further complicated it by a qualification that he adds to choosing oneself. Kierkegaard specifically commends the ethical subject to “choose oneself in his eternal validity” (*Ibid.*, 218). By eternal validity of the self, Kierkegaard does not intend to suggest absolute and unrestricted freedom of the self. For Kierkegaard never regards the self as an abstraction with unlimited possibilities. On the contrary, the ethical subject is always conceived in its concreteness, imbued with certain actualities that tend to condition the infinite options that constitute the realm of possibilities for the self. The self is constituted of a certain actuality and possibility which are connected with

each other by the means of freedom characterizing the moment of decision. Concreteness of the self is a given fact and that mitigates the absolute and unrestricted character of the ethical subject (*Ibid.*, 255-66). In order to understand and appreciate the implication of disposition, it is permissible that we refer to Kierkegaard himself for a clarification of this particular issue.

To this end, we need to be involved in an exegetical exercise of a very important passage where Kierkegaard affirms the concreteness of the self, as well as the realm of possibility that is conditioned by this concreteness. On choosing oneself by the ethical subject, Kierkegaard says the following:

He chooses himself, not in a finite sense but in an absolute sense; and yet in fact, he chooses himself and not another. This self which he then chooses is infinitely concrete, for it is in fact himself and yet it is absolutely distinct from his former self, for he has chosen it absolutely. This self did not exist previously for it came into existence by means of the choice, and yet it did exist, for it was in fact 'himself' ...that which is chosen does not exist and comes into existence with the choice; that which is chosen exists otherwise there would not be a choice. For in case what I choose did not exist but absolutely came into existence with the choice, I would not be choosing, I would be creating, but I do not create myself, I choose myself. Therefore, while nature is created out of nothing, I myself as an immediate personality created out of nothing, as a free spirit, am born of the principle of contradiction, or born by the fact that I choose myself (*Ibid.*, 219-20).

The passage quoted above makes it clear that Kierkegaard wants to strike the balance between two conceptions, of self and its relationship to itself. The first conception of self is Socratic with its emphasis on the gnostic character of the subject emphasizing the goal of knowing oneself. In Socratic understanding, this is the highest ideal or *summum bonum* that constitutes the ultimate end of the ethical subject; the second conception is more voluntaristic in its orientation, emphasizing the creative dimension of the self, whereby the ethical subject is commended to

create itself in the exercise of its ultimate freedom, which is absolute in character. This is characteristically the Nietzschean position.

Kierkegaard opts for a middle course between the two alternative approaches, for neither of them is correct. The ethical subject cannot constitute the self itself; for ultimately, according to Kierkegaard, God constitutes the self. Equally important is the fact that the ethical subject is a concretely existing reality, which is intricately related to its socio-physical environment. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard accords significance to the individual's relationship to parents, family members and larger human race in the growth and sustenance of the ethical subject (*Ibid.*, 212). These constitute an important dimension of reality to which the ethical subject is related in significant ways. The life at the ethical stage, Kierkegaard argues, acquires meaning and significance that has universal reference on account of this particular element in the structure of the ethical subject.

Thus for Kierkegaard, the self's ontological dependence on God and its structural relationship to the societal environment, together define the structure of the ethical subject. They are part of the self's actuality and, as such, are the intrinsic elements of ethical subject's structure. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard reflects on the notion of the ethical subject's absolute freedom as a creator of itself. The elements described above condition the ethical subject's freedom of decision (*Ibid.*, 220). The freedom of decision does recognize the immense possibilities within which the ethical subject operates and as such is responsible for its own decision. But the realms of possibilities are conditioned by the factor of actuality described above. Such factors indicate

that it is not a possibility that man exists with other men but rather an actuality. This can be empirically proven.

Thus by 'eternal validity' Kierkegaard means that the particular aspect of the self's existence which is structurally a given fact, and not a derivative of the action of the self exercising its freedom of decision as a free agent. It is this dimension of the self's existence that Heidegger calls the facticity of the self. The self always becomes aware of itself as already having been (Heidegger; 2000, 424).

For Kierkegaard, eternal validity refers to the actuality of the self constituting its completeness, of which the ethical is not the author. The divine source of the constitution of the self, in conjunction with the given circumstance in social and actual environment that transcends the self, defines the fundamental postulates of the existence of the ethical self. In that sense, it may be argued that the ethical self does not exist prior to the moment of decisiveness of the first level at which the self exercises its freedom 'to choose oneself'. However, the paradoxical character of this assertion consists in the affirmation of the fact that, as an actuality, the self was always existent. The first level of decision implies the self's awareness of its own actuality defined by the two aforesaid elements and the self's commitment to them.

In choosing oneself, the self acknowledges the divine and societal sources of its actuality in an ethical fashion. These are no more mere conditions of the self's actuality but these become the

object of the self's commitment when the self chooses an ethical fashion. Thus the decision of the first level is not mere self-awareness of gnostic kind implied in the Socratic injunction to 'know thyself'. Rather, from self-awareness must ensue the self's choosing oneself. This distinction is of fundamental import for the proper appreciation of Kierkegaard's statement that choosing oneself at the first level is a necessary condition for the emergence of the ethical self. This ethical subject, according to Kierkegaard, is the true individual, the proper subject of decision at the second level.

While the Socratic model is clearly discernible in Kierkegaard, the latter takes great pains to distinguish his position from the Socratic position by emphasizing the distinction between knowing oneself and choosing oneself. As he says:

...I have deliberately preferred use of the expression 'choose oneself' instead of 'know oneself'. So when the individual knows himself, he is not through; on the contrary, this knowledge is in the highest degree truthful and from it proceeds the true individual (Kierkegaard; 1990, 163).

Thus choosing oneself must follow knowing oneself; will take precedence over reason. Perhaps Kierkegaard is now realizing the importance of other players in the collective individuals.

The fundamental significance of choosing oneself consists in the assumption of responsibility in the exercise of the freedom of the will. To choose oneself in the sense suggested by Kierkegaard involves acceptance of responsibility for oneself. There is the acknowledgement of actuality of the self resulting from forces transcending the powers of the self. But significantly enough, by

committing oneself to the actuality of the self in the exercise of the freedom of decision, the self accepts this actuality as a given condition and does not refuse to be responsible for itself. This, indeed, is the primary condition for the ethical dimension of the self's existence. This is the moment of the emergence of the ethical self for, according to Kierkegaard, the self assumes responsibility for its concrete actuality.

Ethical self does not exist in complete isolation from the given context of its own concreteness. Its emergence is marked by isolation from the continuity with the transcendent postulating its own concrete actuality.

Thus at the instant of choice he is in the most complete isolation, for he withdraws with the surroundings; and yet at the same moment he is in absolute continuity, for he chooses himself as product; and this choice is the choice of freedom, so that when he chooses himself as product he can just as well be said to produce himself (Kierkegaard, 1991, 232).

One discerns here, the seeds of future development of existentialist thought as well as the phenomenological movement. In both, Husserl (1960; 33) and Sartre, there is the recognition of the self-constitutive character of the subject. In the view of the two thinkers, the self is not a product or a given entity created by external powers. On the contrary, the self creates itself in a dynamic way (Sartre; 1989).

Kierkegaard proposes a somewhat similar scheme. However, the fundamental difference between him on the one hand, and Sartre and Husserl on the other, lies quite in Kierkegaard's affirmation of the divine source of the concrete actuality of the self. It is only the self as a

possibility, that is, the ethical self involved in the process of decision making by opting for itself, which can be considered to be self-constituted. In other words, Kierkegaard affirms the paradoxical character of the self, which both exists and does not exist prior to choosing itself and thereby constituting itself as the ethical self. As Kierkegaard puts it:

In this case choice performs at one and the same time the two dialectical movements: that which is chosen does not exist and comes into existence with the choice; that which is chosen exists, otherwise there would not be a choice. For in case what I choose did not exist but absolutely came into existence with the choice, I would not be choosing. I would be creating; but I do not create myself, I choose myself. Therefore, while nature is created out of nothing, while I myself as an immediate personality am created out of nothing, as a free spirit, I am born of the principle of contradiction, or born by the fact that I choose myself (Kierkegaard; 1990, 230).

Thus, the paradoxical character of the self as an existential structure is apparent. The paradox concerns the fact that the self, both is and is not prior to the moment of choice. The assertion of the self's existence prior to the moment of choice is an affirmation of its concreteness and actuality and the potential for purposeful decision. This is the basic presupposition without which a meaningful discussion of decisional character of the self cannot take place. However, the givenness of the concrete self prior to the moment of decision does not affirm the ethical character of the self, for the self merely is without either awareness or commitment to its truly existential character. Hence, prior to the moment of decision the self is not, for it does not have an awareness of itself nor does it have a sense of responsibility that ensues from exercise of freedom and choice. The self is and is not prior to this moment of choice. Choice and decision of the self then mark precisely this movement from the preceding state of contradiction involved in the structure of self itself to the succeeding state of the resolution of contradiction in the emergence of the ethical subject as a fully responsible being (*Ibid.*, 265).

The decision to choose then is not an exercise in choosing to be or not to be, for the self always is. The decision basically is an ethical act for it involves a commitment to be in a particular way, that is, to appropriate one's own existence in the exercise of one's freedom of choice *vis-à-vis* the collective community. The exercise of the freedom of choice then is not an act of creation of the self. It is an act of the constitution of the ethical dimension of the self. A significant change must be affected in the very character of the self (Kierkegaard; 1967, 90-1). Self ceases to be a mere actuality: it builds its own ethical reality, but the essence of this ethical reality lies in its freedom to choose what is a possibility. Choosing in itself is an ethical act, for it is an act of realization of that which is an ideal possibility. Without the recognition of the decisional character of the self, its potentiality for realizing the ideal possibility, the self will remain constantly immersed in the aesthetic mode of life, which is living by fleeing desires, rather than the exercise of ultimate freedom and choice. The ethical subject both subjective and collective constitutes itself through the decision of choice.

The decisional character of the self ensues from the freedom of will, the exercise of which enables the self to choose itself. The element of choosing gives the self its ethical character. In a self that chooses itself in the exercise of its freedom, there remains the same self, for ultimately the self has chosen itself. But in another sense, it may be argued that the self becomes a different self than the one existing, prior to the moment of choosing in the exercise of one's freedom (Kierkegaard; 1990, 227). What distinguishes this stage is precisely the emergence of the self as a self-conscious responsible being in and through the moment of choice (*Ibid.*, 264). This, according to Kierkegaard, is the fundamental difference in the orientation of the self, characterizing the transition from concrete existence to the ethical existence.

The transition leading to the emergence of the ethical character of the self, in the form of the element of responsibility as an integral element of the self's structure, has been presented by Kierkegaard as a transition from the self's existence in the mode of possibility to the mode of actuality. Prior to choosing oneself, the self exists aesthetically as totally immersed in the possibilities that the self perceives everywhere. The self simply relates to these possibilities in an unreflective and instinctive way.

However, self at the ethical stage transforms these possibilities into an actuality of itself by consciously choosing a particular possibility in the exercise of its own freedom. In other words, that which appears as a possibility of specific moment engulfing the self at the aesthetic stage becomes actuality of concreteness at the ethical stage. Now the self chooses the particular possibility and appropriates it as an element of its concrete ethical actuality. The self becomes responsible for itself and thereby becomes actual. It can be argued that this concretion is the individual's actuality, but as he chooses it in accord with his freedom one can also say that it is his possibility, or that it is his task. For he who lives aesthetically sees only possibilities everywhere, he who lives ethically sees tasks everywhere, which can only be realized by the recognition of other beings as well.

5.3 Analysis of Actuality and Possibility

There is a taint of ambiguity in Kierkegaard's use of the term actuality. In the first place, he sees actuality to be the very character of the self as a given fact or concreteness. Kierkegaard has argued that prior to choosing oneself, the self exists as an actuality on account of its being

constituted by the divine and societal environmental forces. In that sense, the self's existence is conditioned and limited by the actualities of these two kinds. These are integral to the general structure of the selfhood. In other words, the self is not the author of its own actuality because the elements of actuality and concreteness of the self are determined by the factors beyond self-control. In this sense, actuality, according to Kierkegaard, refers to concreteness of the self as an existing entity prior to the act of choosing the self. In this particular sense, the self is not the author of the actuality of its own structure.

The dialectic of the actuality and possibility that Kierkegaard points out is a notion of fundamental importance for proper appreciation of the dynamics of the decisional process. The subject emerges as ethical by opting to choose its own actuality. This actuality of the self is the original possibility for the self-choosing self. In other words, the self apprehends itself both as the actual and the ideal self. As he puts it:

The self which an individual knows is at once the actual and the ideal self which the individual has outside himself as the picture in the likeness to which he has to form himself and which, on the other hand, he nevertheless has in him since it is the self. Only within him has the individual the goal after which he has to strive, and yet he has this goal outside him, in as much as he strives after it...Hence the ethical life has this duplex character, that the individual has his self outside himself and in himself (Ibid., 263).

The significance of the above statement lies in its recognition of the limitations imposed on the possibilities of the self on account of the factors of actuality. Both, the structure of selfhood as constituted in its concreteness by the divine, which is its eternal validity, and the environmental factors having the formative influence on the self in significant ways, limit the possibilities of the self. But this limitation does not preclude the self from exercising its freedom. All that it

suggests is that the self does not have absolute and unlimited freedom. The self does not have freedom to will its own being; for the self's reality in its concreteness is dependent upon God. Similarly, the socio-cultural and the historical contexts determine, to a great extent, the kinds of possibilities that the self has available to itself. All these are ultimately factors of actuality that define the self's existence in its concreteness. The decisional factor becomes important, precisely because the first level of decision consists in the recognition of the self's actuality and thereby a clear awareness of the kinds of possibilities available to the self for choosing at the second level. This is the significance of Kierkegaard's statement that the "individual has his self outside himself and in himself".

The self's freedom of will must operate within the realm of possibilities that are closely linked with and conditioned by its actuality, understood as the givenness of its existence (*Ibid.*, 155). An understanding of the true character of 'Is' is a necessary condition of the truly ethical orientation to 'ought'. 'Is' refers to the self's actuality as concreteness and 'ought' refers to the self's possibilities that must be transformed into the self's actuality through exercise of freedom of choice and decision in regard of socio-environmental factors.

Kierkegaard gives a somewhat different connotation to actuality and possibility when he argues that actuality in the first sense of concreteness is a given condition, which really appears as the possibility to be chosen by the self. It is the self in its concreteness, that is, its historical, social and cultural context has to be chosen by the self in order to be responsible for itself. On the other hand, the self existing at the aesthetic stage assumes the character of the ethical existence

precisely by constituting itself as actuality, by transforming the possibilities of the aesthetic stage into actualities through the exercise of freedom and decision. Thus actuality in the first level means concreteness of the self's existence of which the self is not the author; for actuality here is defined by the general structure of selfhood, namely the divine and the societal environmental factors. But the self is the author of its ethical actuality, that is, it constitutes its ethical structure by consciously choosing one or several of the possibilities that confront and engulf the self at the aesthetic stage.

While at the aesthetic stage, the possibilities control the self by overwhelming it, at the ethical stage the self is in command of itself. And thus, the self consciously chooses one or several of the possibilities and thereby constitutes its ethical actuality. Thus, as far as the decisional character of self is concerned, the self's actuality as concreteness appears as the original possibility that a self must choose and become responsible for it at the first level of choosing. At the second level of choosing, the world of possibilities engulfing the self at the aesthetic stage becomes transformed into the ethical actuality of the self through exercising freedom of choice and decision. Emergence of ethical self through decision is not dissolution of the concreteness of the self as actuality, rather, it is transformation of the self into a new mode of actuality where actuality is not merely a given fact, but is a product of self-knowledge and self-acceptance of a responsible self, exercising its freedom in decision of choice (*Ibid.*, 227).

To sum up Kierkegaard's analysis of the decision as an existential exercise in the freedom of the will and choice, he distinguishes two moments of decision. The first moment of decision

identified by Kierkegaard as the first level of choice consists in the self's choice of oneself in his eternal validity. This moment of decision is of paramount significance for the emergence of ethical subject. The self acquires self-reflection and accepts this concrete actuality as its own. Concreteness of the given structure of a self combined with its historical dimension reflected in the social environmental situation of the self, together become the object of the self's choosing. It consists of the self's full awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, and its intricate relationship to the existing world context. Only when the self comes to understand itself in this way and commits itself to its actuality by owning all that defines its actuality, can the self move to the second level of decision.

The second moment of decision consists of the fully deliberate resolve to make efforts towards the realization of one's possibilities. At the second level of decision, the will is directed to achieve ends consciously chosen by the self out of several possibilities (Kierkegaard; 1991, 107). In both the moments of decision, the self's freedom to choose is a necessary factor. It is the decisional factor that makes the self, an ethical reality.

Emergence of the ethical self, assuming the responsibility for one self is not the *terminus a quo* or the *terminus ad quem* point of the decisional process. Rather it is the beginning of a truly ethical life that is lived in accordance with one's ultimate choice. To exercise one's freedom, to actualize the possibilities that one considers being worth actualizing through conscious self-reflection and decision is the characteristic of the ethical self:

When one has attained clarity about oneself, when one has had courage to will to see one self, it by no means follows that now the history of the self is finished, for now it begins, now for the first time it acquires real significance for the fact that every individual moment experienced lead on to this total view (Kierkegaard; 1990, 120).

It is only then that the self assumes the character of ethical responsibility. It is only then that the truly ethical human being comes to be existent and acquires a fundamentally different and important character, for here the ideal and the actual becomes one, ideal becomes actual and the actual becomes ideal. The ethical self appears as the true hero of the existential drama by assuming full responsibility for itself.

From the foregoing, the self's autonomy, its freedom to choose, as has been observed is an irreducible assumption of Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy. The ethical life, according to Kierkegaard, is self-producing; it consists in the making of the ethical self through decision in the exercise of one's freedom. Ethical then does not belong to the outer world; it does not consist of one's subjection and subjugation to externally existing universal principles compliance to which is considered obligatory for ethical mode of life. Against this backdrop, the notion of duty and universal ethics deserves special mention.

5.4 Duty and Universal Ethics

From the outset, there is a certain sense of contradiction involved in the conception of the autonomy of the will and its subjection to what one considers being moral duties or obligations. Kierkegaard addresses himself to this particular dimension of the ethical enigma that confronts

any ethical theory built on the principle of the autonomy of the will. The enigma, Kierkegaard maintains, has its root in the conception of a morality that looks at moral obligations and duty as externally determining the will of the agent and thereby limiting the freedom of the agent.

This conception of duty somehow scares the individual and generates a fear of the ethical as external. The external itself is presented as an abstraction, to which the concretely existing individual cannot relate in his concreteness and actuality. Commenting on this notion of duty, Kierkegaard (1990; 258) observes: "Commonly one regards the ethical quite abstractly and therefore has a secret horror of it. The ethical is thus regarded as something foreign to the personality, and one shrinks from abandoning oneself to it"

There is an implied criticism of what Kierkegaard perceives characteristically to be the Kantian conception of duty. Duty, according to Kant, consists in conforming to universal moral principles that appear as categorical imperative (Rachels; 1993, 117). The problem with such a conception of duty, Kierkegaard maintains, is, "that the individual is placed in an outward relation to duty, the ethical is defined as duty, and duty in turn is defined as a congeries of particular propositions, but the individual and duty stand outside of one another" (Kierkegaard; 1990, 258).

This external relationship of man to duty, Kierkegaard finds unacceptable. The basic defect of such a position is that it has a somewhat misconstrued understanding of the nature of the subject as an agent of action, of conception of man that fails to see the intrinsic relationship of the ethical

to the very core and depth of one's inner dimensions, which would present duty in a fashion that seems to restrict and limit man's essential freedom. Though Kierkegaard often alludes to Kant's tendency for universalizability of an action as valid, there is an important difference in the way the two thinkers explain this universal dimension in one's duty. For Kierkegaard, universal is a structural element of human freedom. Men are free because they will the Universal human in their action. But Kant on the other hand, looks at universalizability as a necessary restriction of Man's freedom (Kant, 1930).

From the foregoing, such a life of duty necessarily would appear as uncomely and tiresome. Expressing his unqualified rejection of such a conception of man and his duty, Kierkegaard observes:

It is strange that the word duty can suggest an outward relation, in as much as the very derivation of the word (plight) indicates an inward relation, for what is incumbent upon me, not as this fortuitous individual but in accordance with my true nature, that surely stands in the most inward relation to my self. For duty is not an imposition (*paaleg*) but something which is incumbent (*paaliger*) (Kierkegaard; 1990, 259).

Kierkegaardian resolution of the ethical dilemma consisting of the dichotomy of duty and autonomy of the will involves a conception of man as an ethical reality. Duty is not compliance with externally existing particular propositions of conduct, but it is an expression of the true nature of man in his concrete existence. Duty seen from this perspective, is an indication signifying correct orientation of man in his true inwardness. For such a man, duty does not appear as congeries of particular definition to which he must stand in an outward relation, for he has clad himself in duty which is the expression of his inmost nature (*Ibid.*, 260). Oriented in this way, man truly becomes absorbed in the ethical and does not need to exert himself

breathlessly after the fulfilment of his duties. The more profoundly a man has planned his life ethically, the less he will feel the need of talking every instant as to whether he has fulfilled it, of taking counsel every instant with others about what his duty is.

Kierkegaard discerns three forms in which duty is perceived in abstractness. These are laws, morals and customs (*Ibid.*, 260). In all these forms, duty appears as external to the subject on account of its abstractness. It always appears as prohibitive. In its most abstract form, duty is mediated as law. Legal injunctions as positive commands do not have any relationship to concreteness of the individual, for the truth that may mediate is truth in abstraction, without any regard for particular context of the individual subject. An individual subject looks at these abstract conceptions of duty as objectively existing independent of the individual. Its externality, both alienates him from those laws and makes him obey under the constraints of objectively existing realities, over which he does not have any control (Kierkegaard; 1985, 54-67).

When the duty in abstraction, as law, becomes more concrete, it passes over into the definition of morals and customs. Even though morals and customs are somewhat more concrete and the element of abstraction becomes dissipated partially, still the strength of such morals and customs as duty lies in its externality and their external impositions on the individual. The individual so subjected to morals, customs and their constraining power, argues Kierkegaard, is not the true individual in subjectivity, but a national individuality (Kierkegaard; 1990, 260). As such, morals and customs too are inhibitive to the true individual subject's freedom and autonomy. Hence, an ethical life oriented to duty in its abstractness either as law, morals or customs is not seen

conducive to the inward oriented ethical subject. Even though these appear as a universal, they are not truly universal for, according to Kierkegaard, their abstraction from the concrete individual mitigates their universality. Thus Kierkegaard argues against a conception of ethical duty as external and abstract:

The ethical is still abstract and cannot be fully realized because it lies outside the individual. Only when the individual himself is the universal, it is not possible to realize the ethical...he who regards life ethically sees the universal, and he who lives ethically expresses the universal in his life, he makes himself the universal way, not by divesting himself of his concretion, for then he becomes nothing, but by clothing himself with it and permeating it with the universal. For universal man is not a phantom, but every man as such is the universal man, that is to say, to every man the way is assigned by which he becomes the universal man (Ibid., 262).

This raises a very important question regarding the dimension of universality in the ethical sphere. The problem that Kierkegaard faces is how to incorporate universal dimension in Ethics that is based on voluntarism of the will and rejection of the universal categories of reason. It is to this issue that we turn our attention to now.

5.5 Duty as Universal: The Ethical Task of Subjectivity

Duty, Kierkegaard argues, in order to be duty in the absolute sense must be universal, that is expressed within the individual in his inwardness and internality. Such a conception of duty, Kierkegaard calls 'Task'. Universal duty is the universal task that the subject has as his ultimate goal that does not lie without him but within him; the individual has within him the goal that he seeks, and yet he has this goal outside him inasmuch as he seeks it. If the individual labours under the impression that the universal is without him, that it will come to him from without, then he is disoriented, and he has an abstract conception and his method is always an abstract

annihilation of the original self (*Ibid.*, 262). Hence the supreme task, the highest ethical duty is to choose oneself in one's concreteness, "He who chooses himself ethically has himself as his task and not as a possibility merely, not as a toy to be played with arbitrarily. He can choose himself ethically only when he chooses himself as a task which is manifoldly designed" (*Ibid.*, 263).

Thus the ethical task as absolute duty does not consist in the assertion of one's isolation from the concrete context of one's existence. By choosing one self, one chooses himself in continuity with his concrete social environment of interpersonal human relationship with concretely existing individual human beings. The ethical self in performance of its highest duty as task, is in relationship of mutual reciprocity with other concretely existing human beings. Hence the manifoldness does not obliterate or volatilize the self, for manifoldness defines the self in its concrete existence and actuality. This manifoldness is the expression of the self's decisiveness to enter into creative interpersonal relationship with other concretely existing human beings.

It is this relationship of continuity with the manifoldness of concretely existing human beings that Kierkegaard understands, as the universal within man. The ethical man must not then isolate himself from the manifoldness, for this isolation amounts to a concealment of one's true self. Hence Kierkegaard argues that choosing oneself is the highest ethical task, which is simultaneously the process of revealing oneself in the universal: "So his [the ethical man's] ethical task is to develop out of his concealment and to reveal himself in the universal" (Kierkegaard; 1985, 91).

The notion of duty as task involves the notion of responsibility (Kierkegaard; 1991, 167). The pursuance of his task, the ethical individual is determined by no other constraints but his own decisiveness and freedom. In performance of one's task as absolute duty, the ethical individual constitutes himself and in that sense he is the editor of his own existence. But that does not mean that he is absolved of his responsibility, for duty and responsibility are integrally related. In choosing oneself, in performing one's absolute task, one becomes absolutely responsible to himself (Kierkegaard; 1990, 265). And it is the sense of responsibility that makes the task even more significant for the self-definition of the ethical. As Kierkegaard puts it:

The ethical individual, to be sure, may venture to use the expression that he is his own editor, but all the same time he is fully conscious that he is responsible – responsible to himself personally, in as much as what he chooses will have decisive influence upon him, responsible in view of the order of things in which he lives... (Ibid., 264).

In the task of choosing oneself absolutely, the absolute duty to strive for the universal within oneself ensues into a sense of absolute responsibility, not only to oneself but also for the order of things with which the ethical individual has a relationship of continuity and reciprocity. Thus, the task that the ethical individual seeks for himself is to transform himself into the universal man:

But to transform oneself into the universal man is only possible if already *kata dunamin* I have this in myself. For this universal can very well co-exist with and in the particular without consuming it. If the universal man is situated outside me, only one method is possible, and that is to divest myself of my own concretion (Ibid., 266).

This will be dissolution of the ethical subject, which can exist only in its concreteness in relationship to the manifoldness.

It is significant to note that in defining the ethical man in terms of his absolute task, to realize oneself as universal, Kierkegaard is able to relate his conception of the autonomy of the self to the demands of social ethics and morality. By suggesting that the self, in choosing itself, has the absolute duty and task to choose itself as universal, Kierkegaard is providing an ontological basis for civil morality. For him, the self that chooses itself is the concrete self and not an abstract self. The self as the goal of its own choice is not merely a personal self but a social, a civil self.

Thus he observes:

Here the aim of his activity [of choosing] is himself, but not as arbitrarily determined, for he has himself as a task which is set for him, even though it has become his by the fact that he has chosen it. But although he himself is his aim, this aim is nevertheless another, for the self which the aim is not an abstract self which fits everywhere and hence nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in reciprocal relations with these surroundings, these conditions of life, this natural order. This self which is the aim is not merely personal self but a social, a civil self (Ibid., 267).

This exonerates Kierkegaard of the charge of subjectivism. His ethics is not an ethics of relativism of the individual idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. It is not an ethics that makes man, in his fleeting individuality, the measure of goodness and right. The personal life of the individual is not seen in isolation from the civil life, for the task that the individual has is to translate himself into the civic, and from this back into the personal. The personal life as such was in isolation and hence imperfect; in the fact that through the civic life he comes back into his personality, the personal life manifests itself as the absolute which has its teleology in itself.

5.6 Three Forms of Duty as Task

As derivative of the absolute duty, to choose oneself as the fundamental task of the ethical individual, Kierkegaard discerns three kinds of duty that relate to his understanding of the

universal dimension of the ethical mode of existence. These are calling, love and friendship. All the three are conceived by Kierkegaard as having civic relevance and, at the same time, constituting the essential task of an ethical individual striving to realize the universal within him.

A Calling, according to Kierkegaard, is the individual's civil responsibility as a functional member of the civic community (Kierkegaard; 1990, 292). Calling is man's choosing of the way that he wishes to fulfil the requirements of the daily living, in and through work. Work in itself, appears as a mundane activity without any ethical relevance and of no consequence to the individual's ethical mode of life. Work may be seen as a way of coping with the drudgery of life by meeting the instantaneous demands of particular moments; or it may appear to be highly enchanting and attractive to an individual who is totally engrossed in his work, since he perceives it as an opportunity to sharpen and perfect his own inherent talents. Kierkegaard rejects both the approaches to work as expressions of the aesthetic mode of existence, which seeks to orient life to specific and particular needs of the moment without regard for a holistic perspective on life.

The aesthetic perspective on life, Kierkegaard maintains, lacks a sense of unity and always implies differences which are not qualitative but quantitative in nature (*Ibid.*, 296). Thus the proponent of the aesthetic perspective affirms the distinctions between men and their worth, in terms of their talents, which are distinguished primarily by qualitative determination. Given this understanding, the aesthetic perspective cannot validly declare one calling superior to the other, for the distinction of quantity can only be an arbitrary basis for affirmation of qualitative differences. And it is for this reason that an individual in the aesthetic mode of existence posits a

discord in existence which he finds impossible to resolve (*Ibid.*, 296). This results in the incessant pursuit of goods, wealth and such other rewards as confirmation of his fulfilment in his work. This alienates one from work because work is not fulfilling; and what fulfils are what are seen to be the external rewards from the pursuit of work. Hence work in itself, appears to be completely a moral. It appears as individual and personal, as a way of meeting one's personal needs and expectations. It does not have any civic relevance.

Kierkegaard gives a completely unique work by designating it as calling, which has ethical connotations and civic relevance. A calling, Kierkegaard maintains, instead of alienating man from himself and life, reconciles man with life, by enabling him to translate that which appears as personal into the universal. In his own words:

Every man has a calling. He does not do away with the differences, but he says, in all the differences there is a common factor left that each is a calling. The most insignificant individual has a calling, he shall not be cast out, not be reduced to living on a par with the beasts, he does not stand outside of the universal human, he has a calling (*Ibid.*, 297).

Basically the Kierkegaardian thesis that every man has a calling affirms the existence of a universal order of things, which provide a place for each individual person in a unique way. However, what is important about calling is that it is not an imposition on an individual; rather it is an expression of his own freedom, for he specifically chooses his calling. In choosing one's calling, in willing to do what one wants to do in conscious recognition of the universal rational order of things, the individual reconciles himself with life through his calling. This is thus captured:

The ethical thesis that every man has a calling is the expression for the fact that there is a rational order of things in which every man, if he will, fills his place in such a way that he expresses at once the universal-human and the individual (*Ibid.*, 297).

The implication of the above statement, for the ethical individual, is that work as a calling is an absolute duty with infinite significance for civic life. Since the work becomes his calling by exercise of the will and freedom, the individual has a sense of accomplishment in the work that results in the fulfilment of his whole personality.

Love too, maintains Kierkegaard, is a universal expression of duty, or the ethical task that man has an essential belonging to his inner ethical life. Love, in the ethical sense, must be distinguished from the aesthetic involvement in momentary expression of one's carnal desire directed towards another person by making him or her an object of one's desire. Love, at the aesthetic level, is sheer expression of the incessant demand for self-gratification (Kierkegaard; 1991, 59). There is no sense of continuity in love at the aesthetic level, and the self is constantly diffused and dispersed in seeking its gratification in varying objects of love. Moreover, love for the aesthetic individual, lacks any universal dimension. The aesthetic individual claims love for himself, and it is extremely important for him that at a particular moment he loves the way no other man has loved (Kierkegaard; 1990, 260). This self-deception by the aesthetic individual emanates from his rejection of love as universal. In pursuing his aesthetic vagrancy, the aesthetic individual seeks his justification for the ultimacy of his love of the moment by relativizing love in others. Though motivated by an accidental momentary desire for love, the aesthetic person conceives himself as absolute lover.

In contrast with this, the ethical person who marries in love realizes love as the universal. In love he sees the expression of universal human and thus, he does not despise the concrete expression of love in other human beings. Love becomes an ethical task that the ethical man

lives with, not in any particular moment, but as an expression of an inner commitment to the universal love within himself, which he chooses absolutely (Kierkegaard; 1991, 206). Love is man's duty, but love as duty cannot be the seeking of an aesthetic man, for he seeks the universal, he lacks the continuity, he lacks reciprocity. Since the immediate aesthetic seeks fulfilment of his love in the momentary sensual satisfaction of a given instant, marriage and love appear to him to be contradictory (Kierkegaard; 1990, 151). In marriage, the ethical demand is for continuity, for constant faithfulness even beyond the moment of sensual enjoyment; since marriage obligates one to transcend the present moment of the sensuous love and constitutes an ethical continuity in love, the aesthetic man despises marriage and avoids it. To him, marriage is a duty, an obstruction imposed on the individual and as such he is afraid of marriage and abhors it. He sees a fundamental conflict between marriage as duty and love (*Ibid.*, 149).

For the ethical individual, Kierkegaard argues, there is no conflict between duty and love. The ethical hero of *Either/Or* (1990) Judge William, expresses this unity of love and duty in the most succinct way, "For me duty is not one climate and love another, but for me duty makes love the true temperate climate, and perfection consists in this unity" (*Ibid.*, 1991, 206). In a most eloquent way, Judge William argues for universal validity of love as duty. For him, duty is not the enemy of love, and if duty is the enemy of love and love cannot vanquish this enemy, then love is not the true conqueror. It is not surprising then, that the aesthetic lover lurches love the moment it appears as duty. But the ethical lover loves, "with all his soul and with all his strength and with all his might" (*Ibid.*, 1990, 151). But when he loves, he does not love because duty prescribed it. Duty as prescription, as an external injunction, as a compulsion imposed on the

individual from external sources, definitely is the enemy of love, but this is not Kierkegaard's conception of duty. As he says:

Let us not be confused by the talk of those who have the notion that duty is only a congeries of ceremonial prescriptions. Duty is only one: to love truly with the inward movement of the heart; and duty is as protean in its forms as is love itself, and it pronounces everything good when it is of love, and denounces everything, however beautiful and specious it may be, if it is not of love (*Ibid.*, 1990).

What is significant about Kierkegaard's conception of love as duty, is his assertion of the creative responsibility and freedom of decision exercised by the individual subject that makes love an ethical duty, a task, for the subject love. For both, the aesthetic and ethical individual begins as an accidental phenomenon, as an expression of momentary infatuation that excites momentary desire. However, the aesthetic individual gets all consumed up in particular momentary desires and as a result, the self is dissolved into multiplicity. On the other hand, an ethical person, for whom also love begins in an accidental infatuation expressed in momentary desire, through a resolution of the will, he transforms the first of love into an everlasting inner commitment and thereby achieves a continuity and unity of the self.

Bringing out the ethical dimension of love, as an expression of the autonomy of the will to choose in the exercise of its essential freedom, Kierkegaard observes:

Love is the unfathomable bottom which is hidden in obscurity but resolution (*besluthinge*) is the victor which like Orpheus fetches love out to the light of day, for resolution is love's true form, its true transfiguration; hence marriage is holy and blessed by God. It is civic, for thereby the lovers belong to the State and fatherland and the concerns of their fellow citizens. It is poetic, ineffably poetic, as love is, but resolution is the conscientious translator who translates enthusiasm into reality, and is precise, oh, so precise! Love's voice in 'sounds like that of fairies from the grottoes of midsummer night', but resolution has the earnestness of perseverance which resounds through the fleeting and the transitory. Love's gait is light as the feet dance upon the meadow, but resolution holds the tired one till the dance begins again. Such is marriage (Kierkegaard; 1988, 121).

Love as duty is man's own making; it is an expression of man's essential freedom to choose, and in this choosing man chooses the universal human. It is the exercise of the will that constitutes the essentially ethical dimension of love as duty. Acceptance of love as duty does not consist in conformity to any religious demands or institutional expectations. It is not a duty that is restrictive of essential human freedom, imposed on the human subject by external powers. It is self-constituted by the ethical man as subjectivity. It is this element of self-determination of love, as duty, that gives it its true ethical character.

By assigning responsibility for love as duty to the will of the human subject, Kierkegaard takes love out of the realm of contingency and succeeds in transforming it into a continuity that lasts beyond the moment of desire. The moment of sensuous desire that characterizes aesthetic or romantic love is transitory. The fleeting succession of time inevitably leads to its annihilation. The power of desire limited by the moment of the present cannot hold love beyond the moment of desire. The moment the specific desire is fulfilled, the aesthetic love disintegrates. It is the will, which is not confined to the moment of present and is oriented to the future, which gives human subject the power to hold love within its grasp even beyond the moment of the present. The will's resolution, to love another person, is expressive of its intention to maintain constancy in one's love.

The will with the resolution to love takes love beyond the compass of passing moods. When the ethical self, the resolute self wills love as duty, it is no longer subjective to the multiplicity of moods and possibilities. Love as duty becomes an actuality on account of the exercise of the will

and, as such, assumes a historical significance for the concretely existing human subject. Thus by duty, the way is clear for the forces, and it is our conviction that it is for this reason that duty is expressed by the future tense to suggest its historical implication.

The will, in the act of choosing, expresses its intention to be committed beyond the moment of the present. In accepting love as duty, the will expresses its decisive character and endows its conduct with continuity that transcends the moment of the present. This, according to Kierkegaard consists the historical implication of duty (Kierkegaard; 1990, 152).

According to Kierkegaard, all forms of duty as the ethical task are modes of self-revelation and friendship and are no exception. Friendship as duty is founded on this ontological conception of man as a constant process of revelation. To inhibit or prohibit revelation of particular man is unethical as it is the concealment of man. He thus says:

Ethics says that it is the significance of life and of reality that every man becomes revealed...the aesthetist, on the contrary will not attribute significance to reality. He remains constantly concealed, becomes frequent and however much he gives himself up to the world, he never does it totally, there always remains something that he keeps back; if he were to do it totally, he would be doing it ethically. But this thing of playing hide and seek always avenges itself, and of course it does so by the fact that one becomes enigmatical to oneself (*Ibid.*, 327).

As an act of self-revelation in the exercise of the will's freedom to choose this revelation, friendship involves mutual reciprocity in recognition of the universal human. Hence he who regards friendship ethically sees it as a duty. Thus Kierkegaard enjoins upon every one to cultivate friendship as an ethical duty. The ethical element in friendship, that distinguishes it from the aesthetic mode of acquaintance, is the absolute ethical duty to reveal oneself by choosing oneself absolutely in one's concrete situation. Unlike aesthetic concealment of the self

Friendship thus requires a positive view of life. But it is impossible to conceive a positive view of life unless it has in it an ethical factor. Friendship acquires significance as duty of the universal human, only because it is founded on the ethical factor in life's perspective. The ethical factor in the life perspective is reflected in agreement in the normal view, among those who are bound by the relation of friendship (*Ibid.*, 324). In the absence of this agreement on a moral perspective on life as an expression of universal human, the notion of friendship becomes defunct. Friendship then, is the expression of morality in its most acute form for it is founded on the principle of autonomy of individual human being whose essence is freedom. Friendship as reciprocity is precisely the recognition of the autonomy of human beings and their essential freedom. If one regards friendship thus, one regards it ethically and therefore with a view to its duty. It thus acquires both significance and beauty.

Kierkegaard seeks confirmation of his assertion of friendship as the ethical dimension of man in none other than Aristotle himself. The points of departure of Aristotle's choice, Kierkegaard maintains, is the very principle of friendship that affirms the autonomy of men and their equality (Aristotle; 1962). It is this consideration which led Aristotle to base the concept of justice upon the idea of friendship, "for with friendship, he [Aristotle] says, the concept of justice are so broached that they coalesce with it" (*Ibid.*). Kierkegaard finds as the basis of justice, the Aristotelian approach to friendship, more appropriate in view of its root in concrete human situation. This, he holds to be more perfect than the Kantian view, which bases justice upon

duty, that Kierkegaard regards only as an abstract categorical. Clearly opting for the Aristotelian position against the Kantian interpretation of the ethical, Kierkegaard exalts Aristotle for perceiving the ennobling element of friendship that contributes to one's affirmation of the ethical reality of the subject. Hence, "he who regards friendship ethically sees it as a duty. I might therefore say that it is every man's duty to have a friend" (Kierkegaard; 1990).

5.7 Concluding Observations

Kierkegaard's voluntarism is not a rejection of universalistic ethics. On several occasions Kierkegaard has alluded to Kant's notion of categorical imperative offering a certain scheme for the universalization of the ethical conduct. Kierkegaard, in his attempt to define the characteristic feature of ethical mode of existence, appears to be influenced by Kant even though explicitly rejects what he conceives to be Kantian separation of thought and reality. The value of Kantian scheme, according to Kierkegaard, consists precisely in seeking the idea of universalization of ethical principles in the will of the agent himself. The universalization of ethical principles and its intrinsic relationship to the will of the agent, is the characteristic Kantian notion that one can trace in Kierkegaard inspite of his denunciation of the broad features of Kantian system. This arises from Kierkegaard's major criticism of Kant that he is an ethical rigorist, an enthusiast for a formal, abstract freedom.

Kierkegaard concretely defines the specific content of an universal ethics that constitutes the context of a subject's life orientation at the ethical stage. Kierkegaard is quite specific in defining the meaning of the universal principle of morality. The moral life, characteristic of the ethical stage, consists of moral obligations which are ultimately understood as the individual's

conscientious commitment, and acting out of this commitment, primarily as they relate to civic obligations (Kierkegaard; 1990, 260). An ethical man is the one who in the act of choice, deliberately and consciously directs his will to the fulfilment of civic obligations. Such obligations include fulfilling social responsibilities, responsibilities of a married life and the responsibility of a family man. The ideal life, at the ethical stage, consists of deliberate commitment to these modes of civic obligations as a specific object of one's choice and translation of that choice into a concrete existential ethical reality.

The man who lives by these principles, which are universal principles governing civic life, is not an ordinary man, for he has chosen to be what he is in the exercise of his own freedom to will. It is not the compulsion of objective morality, fear of social ostracization or divine punishment that prompts the ethical man to act the way he acts. Rather it is his own inner urge and inwardness of universal ethical principles that translates into external mode of conduct. This external translation is accomplished by a free act of decision. Such a man is the true hero in Kierkegaard's eyes, for he wills truly as a free agent. Giving expression to his understanding of the ethical point of view, Kierkegaard pronounces:

I will here pronounce at once my view of what an extraordinary man is. The truly extraordinary man is the truly ordinary man. The more of the universal human an individual is able to realize his life, the more extraordinary he is. The less of the universal he is able to take into his life, the more imperfect he is. He is then an extraordinary man to be sure but not in good sense (Kierkegaard; 1991, 294).

Universality according to Kierkegaard, is not a function of reason as Kant would have it, nor is it to be conceived as a feature of the absolute that becomes limited and particularized in the individual as Hegel suggests. On the contrary, universal is concretely present within the individual as an ethical category structurally ingrained in the will. It is this conception of the

emanate nature of universal, that is at the root of Kierkegaard's distinction between the ethical existence and the aesthetic existence. One who lives aesthetically, Kierkegaard maintains, is the accidental man, for such a person takes his fleeting momentary desires as ultimate objects of his pursuit. Such an individual does not live by the will, but by inclinations. He labours under the false illusion that he is the perfect man with the absolute autonomy to do what he wishes. Thus he believes himself to be the perfect man by reason of the fact that he is the only man. This is the basis of the egoistic orientation of the aesthetic individual. He, however, who lives ethically, Kierkegaard maintains, endeavours to become a universal man.

Kierkegaard has amply illustrated this fundamental distinction between the aesthetic and ethical mode of existence, by suggesting the difference between aesthetic and ethical approaches to love. A man who is aesthetically in love perceives himself, however adventitiously may be playing the role of a lover as no one else has played. It is a matter of great importance to him that in fulfilling his need for love at a particular moment, he loves the way no one has ever loved. Though motivated by an accidental momentary desire for love, he misconceives himself as the absolute lover. In contrast, the ethical person, who marries in love, realizes love as the universal. In love, he sees a revelation of a universal human and thus does not despise the concrete expression of the love in other human beings as inferior to his love (Kierkegaard; 1990, 261). Love then becomes an ethical task for the ethical man.

The ethical man lives not in any particular, but in continuity as an expression of his inner commitment to the universal within him, which he chooses absolutely. He says: "So the ethical

individual has duty, not outside him but in him; at the moment of despair, it makes its appearance and then works itself out through the aesthetical in it and with it" (*Ibid.*, 261).

One can say of the ethical individual that he is like still waters, which run deep, whereas he who lives aesthetically is only superficially moved. Hence, when the ethical individual has completed his task, he fought the good fight, he has become the one man, that is to say, that there is no other man altogether like him; and at the same time he has become the universal man. To be the one man is not in itself anything so great, for that everybody has in common with every product of nature, but to be that in such a way he is also the universal man the true art of living.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1 General Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to appraise Kierkegaard's ethical thought with the aim of clarifying his concept of the decisional process. The study also endeavoured to determine whether or not Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy is subjective or collective in nature; and, examined the extent to which the decisional process influences his ethical philosophy.

Our analysis of Kierkegaard makes it amply clear that he looked at the ethical life as life of self-perfection. He has analyzed human personality and its various components with the specific objective of showing their interrelationship and significance for the growth of ethical personality. In his own way he has emphasized the value of personal growth and maturity of the ethical subject, by constantly reiterating the growth of personality or the transfiguration of the self as the ethical task of men. Thus from the very beginning he tends to suggest self-realization as the ultimate goal of man's ethical endeavour. In analyzing the ethical philosophy of Kierkegaard, we have affirmed this very dimension in his respective perception. It is our contention that upon ultimate analysis his existential philosophy is concerned with self-realization as the ultimate ethical goal of human beings.

Kierkegaard argues against the rationalist overtones in his ethical theory by pointing out the unbalanced character of the same. He points out that the rationalists or formalists fail to give proper recognition to the affective side of human psyche and make volition contingent upon

reason. But this approach, Kierkegaard suggests, lacks an appreciation of the significant role that passions play in shaping the individual's ethical outlook. Passions in Kierkegaard's ethical system, do not concern only the emotive element in human make-up but are specifically related to human will: and any ethical theory that ignores its contribution to the ethical orientation of man, reduces man to a fragmentary being. Human passion, according to Kierkegaard, is a function of the will and a valid ethical system can only be built on the premise of the primacy of the will granted the precepts of choice. In this regard the study established that the brand of ethics Kierkegaard seems to profess is voluntary in nature and consequently ethical voluntarism.

The ethical voluntarism of Kierkegaard is not a rejection of the value of reason completely. Rather it is an honest attempt to conceive the reality of man in its actual dynamism that draws its strength from powers other than reason. Herein lies the strength and persuasiveness of Kierkegaard's ethical system, that takes an existential direction by defining human existence in terms of man's essential freedom which consists in the exercise of the will. Kierkegaard's ethical voluntarism is an attempt to widen the philosophical horizon by conceiving man as consisting of all the relevant components of the human personality.

According to Kierkegaard, ethical life is primarily a life of self-realization. Through decisional process, in the exercise of one's own freedom to choose, the human subject realizes its own essential nature. Ethics does not consist in following dictates of external authority or living in accordance with certain empty formal laws. Rather, it primarily consists in a kind of self-reflection that enables the individual to actualize all the ethical possibilities inherent within him. Thus the ultimate end that the ethical self has for itself is the actualization of the self.

Actualization of the Self according to our analysis of Kierkegaard, consists in realization of the ideal and social self.

In order to show the intimate connection between the ideal self and the social self, Kierkegaard developed the concept of self-revelation as the mechanism of accomplishing the ethical goal of self-realization. In other words, the individual ethical subject, by revealing its ideal self, opens itself up for ethical intercourse with other concretely existing human beings who partake in the nature of the universal human. Self-realization basically should be an act of self-revelation through which the ideal self comes to define itself as the social self having a relationship of continuity with other concretely existing human beings. Self-realization consists in the realization of one's given social context and its relationship to one's ideal self. In this sense, the ethical meaning of self-realization differs fundamentally from the religious meaning of the term. Within the religious context, self-realization implies isolation from the given social context and withdrawal into one's inwardness, although this was not the domain of our study.

Kierkegaard's conception of self-realization is essentially an affirmation of the social context of ethical life. Self-realization is thus the realization of the social self through the exercise of one's essential freedom that is the very nature of one's ideal self. The ideal and the social self through the exercise of one's essential freedom are not two independently existing realities or modes of being. These are two intricately connected dimensions of human existence, which can properly be expressed only through self-revelation or self-realization. The ethical philosophy of Kierkegaard hails the ideal of self-realization or self-fulfilment in contrast with self-gratification or self-sacrifice. Attention is drawn to Kierkegaard's emphasis on personal ethical perfection

through assuming a sense of responsibility and translating that ethical responsibility in one's relationship to the external world. This is what Kierkegaard implies in choosing oneself, in one's eternal validity.

The notion of the self that we find in Kierkegaard is not an abstract notion that divests the self of its concreteness. It has a concrete view of the self, whereby the self is postulated as the concretely existing subject that combines the sentient as well as nonsentient elements. And, accordingly, he affirms the realization of the complete, total self as the highest good.

Kierkegaard makes a distinction between the aesthetic mode of life and ethical mode of life by suggesting that the aesthetic mode is primarily concerned with the sentient aspect of human self. Ethical mode of existence is not given to the life of sensibility, momentary desires and their fulfilment. Thus the ethical appears to be a negation of the aesthetic which may be seen to be the immediate concern of the lower self. However, Kierkegaard clearly mentions that the emergence of the ethical self through choosing oneself in one's concreteness, that is, one's self realization, does not imply elimination or annihilation of the aesthetic self. Rather, the immediate concern of the aesthetic life is relativized and brought under the control of the ethical. Self-realization does not imply dissolution of the sentient self. It is not the rejection of one's physical and sentient dimensions. The claims of desires and demands of sensibilities are not denied; these are seen to be integral to human personality. The demand of the ethical is not the destruction of the aesthetic, but its transfiguration. The self by becoming self-reflective recognizes the true nature and limitations of the life of sensibility. Instead of letting the lower sentient dimensions of one's

personality take over and dominate one's life, the ethical makes them subservient to the higher, the nobler aspect of personality therefore actualizing itself.

In Kierkegaard, we discern a tendency to recognize the rights of sensibility in a restricted way. He gives secondary place to self-gratification in the ethical life of man. His ethical philosophy unequivocally posits the ideal of self-realization or self-fulfilment in contrast with self-gratification or self-sacrifice. He constantly reminds us about the hazard of leading a life of aesthetical pursuit that incessantly seeks fulfilment of momentary desires with the specific objective of obtaining maximum pleasure in life.

The problem with the aesthetic perspective is that it ultimately results in diffusion and dispersion of the self. One living at the aesthetical stage has his orientation towards external entities and things in which he seeks fulfilment. Thus the individual effectively relinquishes his sovereignty and autonomy. Since all pleasure is instantaneous, individuals seeking such pleasure live in a morbid fear of losing the pleasure the moment they have it. Hence, Kierkegaard's prescription to the ethical individual is to rise above this mode of life. The principle of self-gratification is ultimately self-defeating. The life of self-gratification is hence a diffused life, precisely because one lives in the moment without any sense of continuity.

The ethical life on the other hand, enjoins upon the individual to elevate himself above the moment of the present in which the aesthetic self unsuccessfully seeks its fulfilment. What Kierkegaard suggests is not elimination of the desire of the self and its self-gratification. Rather, the desire for self-gratification is accorded a secondary place so that the self is no longer

completely the creature of desire. The ethical individual in a self-conscious way brings desire under the control of the individual's will. Thus, self-realization takes precedence over self-gratification, not by eliminating it, but by transfiguring it.

6.2 Findings of the Study

The following are the findings of the study:

- a) Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy is collective in nature.
- b) The decisional process influences the ethical subject to the extent that it actualizes itself

6.3 Recommendations of the Study

The study makes the following recommendations:

a) Recommendation on Kierkegaard's Collectivity

In his rendition of the ethical, Kierkegaard was convinced that pure thinking without involving the ethical experience of the human being could not say much about existence. At the heart of his ethical thought is his bias towards the subjective individual and not the collective individual. It is important that Kierkegaard appreciates the role that can be played by the collective individual. This is because the collective individual plays a pivotal role in giving the subjective individual the bearing he might seek to pursue. The study thus recommends that Kierkegaard's portrayal of the ethical subject should embrace the collective individual so as to enable the subjective individual reflect about his individuality. This is necessitated by the fact that, as much as 'existence precedes essence', the subject 'plays' his/her existence in essences, variantly identified as social norms, rules, ethics etcetera.

b) Recommendation on Non-Rationalistic Element in the Decisional Process

Kierkegaard's irrationalistic approach to ethics seeks to affirm and justify the irrational character of universal ethical principles. The rationalistic approach to morality tries to justify such universalistic ethical principles by appeal to Reason. On account of their rational character these universal ethical principles are seen to be ultimate in themselves. Why should individuals follow these universal principles of ethics? The Rationalists answer is that these universal rational principles are ultimate and are rationally apprehended as such. Being rational in character these principles can be apprehended by human reason in a logical fashion under all circumstances. Human reason is the only faculty, which is capable of apprehending such universal moral truths. Kierkegaard rejects such overtures of Reason to be the ultimate tribunal for morality.

Basing on the foregoing, the study recommends that Kierkegaard's affirmation of the universalistic character of ethics on account of its irrational character is unwarranted. Thus in an *apriori* way the rational element is a *conditio sine qua non* for embracing universalistic ethics. This is based on the grounds that persons reasoning logically from a given set of premises and following a similar process of argument would arrive at a similar conclusion. Hence two individuals in similar circumstances, if they exercise their will rationally, are bound to act in more or less similar fashion. Thus rationality seems to be justified for choosing what is right or wrong, good or bad and should be integral to the decisional process.

c) Recommendation on Kierkegaard's Subjectivistic Orientation

Inwardness of ethical values, a rejection of the distinction of external and internal in the realm of the Ethical, and recognition of man's capacity and ability to realize ethical values within him,

constitute the fundamental assumptions of Kierkegaard's ethical thought. He rejects any philosophical tendency that seeks to ground ethics in external sources, such as institutional dictates and external legal injunctions. In relation to this, one of the basic problems facing the ethical philosophy of Kierkegaard relates to its status of social morality.

The highest ethical duty, according to Kierkegaard, consists in choosing oneself absolutely as foundation of all values. For him the individual is the ultimate ethical category. This raises the fundamental question as to how does an ethical philosophy affirming individualistic voluntarism account for social morality. If each individual is an island unto himself and the truth resides within him, then ethics appears as subjectivistic and moral values become relativized. Under such a circumstance, no room is left for universalistic ethics.

One of the most severe critiques that have been leveled against subjectivism is the fact that they are self-defeating. If the subjectivist, like Kierkegaard, is arguing that we should follow subjective ethics, then logically he is universalizing it to be followed by everybody, which makes it objective, hence, collective. Consequently, this study recommends that an indepth study be carried in the works of Kierkegaard before anyone would conclude that he was a subjectivist.

The study recommends, in line with the foregoing, that the context of social existence be embraced to grant his ethical thought a humanistic tinge. This is from the premise that morality does not consist in seeking one's own fulfilment without regard for other. It is this social context that defines him as man, and thus it is the world affirming character which recognizes both the autonomy and the mutual reciprocity of all human beings that should be sought. Morality does

not consist in seeking one's own fulfilment without regard for other; for ultimately man, as an individual, has the concrete context of social existence, and it is this social context that defines him as man. He should embrace the principle of continuity that relates man to other men, otherwise the individual is reduced to a naught.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The preceding dimensions have tried to suggest a significant level of insight in the ethical philosophy of Kierkegaard with the revelation that his ethical philosophy is voluntary in nature. This concern with the existential dimension of human beings is amply reflected in the assertion of a close link between thought and practice. His ethical ideas are not ideas in the abstract but ideas, which have concrete relevance to the individual's life. To this end, the contribution to knowledge lies in the affirmation of the dialectical nature of ethical existence, which glorifies self-cultivation as the ultimate ideal. It also posits ethics not just a matter of willing choices, but, more importantly, it consists in the sense of responsibility that one has towards himself as well as others. By and large, the study helps us understand why man ought to live an actual life rather than a possible one. Finally an understanding of Ethical Existentialism in Kierkegaard and, in particular, among scholars of philosophy is made easier hopefully facilitating curriculum development.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Research

From our study, it has been established that the ethical truth then of necessity, is the truth of and for subjectivity. This discovery is what makes a subject become what it essentially is through appropriation. In line with this, the study suggests for further research, that an investigation be

done to determine whether or not, the ethical transfiguration of the subject can be a function of a transformative character of the truth of subjectivity.

The study has also established that Kierkegaard's decisional process with regard to voluntarism is not a rejection of universalistic ethics. Kierkegaard alludes to the idea of universalization of ethical principles and its intrinsic relationship to the will of the agent. With regard to these, the study suggests for further research, the exploration of whether civic meaning can be given in the search of a universal principle of morality, which can be understood as an individuals' conscientious commitment to civic obligations.

Lastly, a study concentrating on cross-fertilization of philosophical ideas would be a valid academic enterprise to be undertaken independently. The possibility of a global perspective in philosophy aiming at fusing philosophical ideas emanating from different cultural contexts would be a creative venture. For instance a cross-cultural philosophical dialogue between Kierkegaard and an African or Oriental philosopher on existential ethics would be fruitful.

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