

4. Faith in its subjectivity is totally unique. The existential experience is unique, and is incapable of being doubted or imitated. It is thus self-authenticating.

What is Human Existence?

1. Human existence is not a state of being, but a process of becoming. Being can be conceived of in logical categories, but becoming defies every logical analysis. Since human existence is pre-eminently a process of becoming, it cannot be systematized logically, and is therefore irrational. Scientific history deals with actualized reality, but genuine history, historical becoming, eludes any such scientific approach.

2. Human existence is a free self-actualization, a becoming one's-self in freedom. Man is the free cause of his "becoming". (Here Romanticism influenced S. K.)

3. Human existence is marked by a dialectic. (Here Hegelianism influenced S. K.) Man is a tension between finitude and infinite, between relative and absolute. His task as finite is to realize himself as an infinite self.

4. Human existence, thus including both human freedom and human tension, involves man in anxiety, pathos, existential passion. This passion is man's anxious concern to attain his own infinity, his absolute self, and his eternal salvation.

5. In the process and passion of human existence, man ought to be preoccupied with himself. He realizes his self through self-reflection. He is thus at the same time becoming a self and becoming conscious of himself.

On the Stages of Life's Way

S. K. developed his conception of the process of becoming a Christian in terms of a movement, an evolution, proceeding in stadia (stages) from human existence to the Absolute Paradox. He introduces three stadia, involving four steps.

First Stadium: The aesthetic. Typified by the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure of non-Christian Romanticists. Characterized by spontaneity, non-reflectiveness.

Second Stadium: The ethical. Typified by the universal categorical imperative of Kantian ethics, and the decadence of the State Church. Characterized by non-spontaneity and very little reflectiveness.

Third Stadium: The religious. Includes two steps:

Religiosity A: Typified by the idealistic philosophy of religion of Hegel.

Characterized by both spontaneity and reflectiveness, but knows nothing of a concrete revelation of God in history, in the man Christ Jesus.

Religiosity B: Typified by Kierkegaard's "Christian faith". Characterized by both spontaneity and reflectiveness, in which the Absolute Paradox confronts a man, and concentrates the religious passion upon Christ alone, who in his historical aspect confronts us as a sign which points beyond it to the becoming of God.

This account of the history of salvation, moving from the pole of human existence to the pole of the Absolute Paradox, views each stadium as being (in principle) independent, but structured in a hierarchical order. Transition from an inferior to a superior stadium is accomplished by a leap, made in passion.