

LESSON 9

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE EVOLUTION REVOLUTION

Introduction

The leading thinkers of the nineteenth century produced some scientific theories and hypotheses that superceded many of the philosophical presuppositions of the past. Some philosophers and scientists became iconoclastic toward the religion that was so closely related to the outmoded philosophy. The struggle was so intense that some mistakenly feared that the Christian faith would disappear. "When Christianity is so wedded to a particular philosophy, and when that philosophy passes out of fashion or is shown to be inadequate, then there are those who fall into the mistake of concluding that Christianity itself has been disposed of."¹

Leading Nineteenth-Century Philosophers

Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

The above quotation expresses the environment of the works of Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher was a graduate of a Moravian seminary at Barby. He read Kant and reacted against his pietistic training. He studied at Halle and Berlin after which he served for a while as private tutor. He then returned to Berlin as chaplain of the Charity Hospital.² Attaching himself to a group of brilliant writers and poets of the Romantic school, he published *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) in which he rejected much of the Enlightenment.

He became a professor on the theological faculty of the University of Berlin where he developed what is sometimes called *positive theology*.

For Schleiermacher the Bible had lost its importance for "proof-text dogmatism." However, he held that it was a record of religious experience, and this was a key to the many theological questions demanding interpretation at a time when rationalism was seriously on the wane. This task meant that he no longer had to deal with the veracity of every detail of the Bible. He believed that he now had grounds for a new apologetic based on human experience in religion. He concluded that "the essence of religion was neither activity nor knowledge but something common to both . . . The common element . . . of piety . . . is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, . . . of

Schleiermacher reacted against the _____
training of _____
(pietistic, Kant)

Is the following statement true or false?

In his *On religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*,
Hegel fully embraced the Enlightenment. _____
(false)

Schleiermacher developed _____
_____ while at the University of _____

(positive theology, Berlin)

¹Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 109.

being in relation with God. The essence of religion lies in our *sense of absolute dependence*.³

If there is any one thing that the sophisticated scientific and natural philosophers of the nineteenth century could not refute, it was the testimony of personal experience in religion. They could call it nonsense, but there it remained after they had finished their attacks—a matter of faith. And Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1890) insisted that faith leads to firm religious knowledge.

In this chapter as in the others, we must limit the development of thought to characteristic trends for the period because there are so many important thinkers who emerged on the scene.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in Stuttgart. He studied at Tübingen and received his Doctor of Philosophy at age twenty.⁴ At twenty-three he received his certificate in theology. The professors at Tübingen said that Hegel possessed only mediocre knowledge and was inadequate in philosophy.

Hegel went to Switzerland and became a tutor. There he spent many hours mastering Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1794). In 1797 he moved to Frankfurt Am Main where he continued as a private tutor until 1800. He was named *Privatdocent* in Philosophy in 1801 at Jena.

His relationship with Schelling helped him to secure a professorship in philosophy at Jena where they served as colleagues. But Hegel was egotistical and Schelling was jealous, so they soon were at odds with one another. In 1806 Napoleon invaded Germany, and Hegel had to move to Bamberg where he edited a newspaper for a short while.⁵

In 1809 Hegel was named director of the *Gimnasium* of Nür(n)berg, where he worked until 1816. There he wrote *The Science of Logic*.

In that same year he was called to Heidelberg where he became professor of philosophy for two years. In 1818, he followed Fichte in the chair of philosophy in Berlin and remained there until his death in 1831. His works fill twenty volumes. Among them are *The Phenomenology of the Mind* (1806), *The Science of Logic* (1812-1816) and his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1817). "After his death devoted students put together their lecture notes which were sometimes collated with . . . his . . . and these were . . . published. Such volumes include *The Philosophy of History*, *The History of Philosophy* and *The Philosophy of Religion*."⁶

As Hegel himself wrote, Hegelianism is as much a method as it is a system of thought. Logically the thought and the method are inseparable. The method is the exclusive expression of the thought. For this very reason, it

³Ibid., p. 111.

⁴Frederick Mayer, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: American Book Company, 1951), p. 353.

⁵Dagobert D. Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Totowa, N. J.: Littlefield, Adams and Company, 1967), p. 123.

⁶Colin Brown, pp. 119, 120.

One's personal testimony remains a matter of _____.

(faith)

Hegel received his Doctor of Philosophy degree when he was _____.

(twenty)

Hegel's works fill _____ volumes.

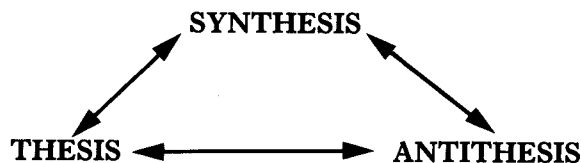
(twenty)

Hegel himself stated that Hegelianism is as much a _____ as it is a system of _____.

(method, thought)

is next to impossible to interpret Hegelianism accurately like Hegel conceived it.⁷

The *method* is "the dialectic." It is a system of contrast and tension which is often represented like this:



Hegel uses this formal apparatus profusely in his logical writings. But in his other writings he uses the dialectic very little except when he wishes to introduce a broader interpretation of his materials.

Hegel points out that for every *thesis* of knowledge or action, tension builds up when the contrariety or the *antithesis* appears. Neither overcomes and a *synthesis* made up of both occurs. "The synthesis is positive throughout."⁸ In turn, synthesis becomes thesis and another antithesis occurs to repeat the dialectic. "Dialectical analysis is possible only within systems which are factual, that is, constituted by statements of fact and statements of possibility grounded in fact."⁹

The basic idea in Hegel's thought is *Geist* (mind or spirit). Hegel himself says: "Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is *per se*; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself—it is externality otherness, and exists for itself; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself—it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once . . . it is Substance spiritual."¹⁰ "Hegel saw the Dialectic of the Spirit in everything."¹¹

The doctrine that Hegel affirms is often called "Absolute Idealism." Hegel speaks of the Absolute Idea which is the "truth" of *Being*. This category can best be understood by means of Hegel's method. "In general it is the structure of fact, possibility and value as determined by dialectical negation."¹²

Nature is the Absolute Idea externalized and particularized. Its primal unity has disappeared and it is struggling to regain unity and self-identity. The three stages of this struggle are mechanics, physics and organic life. Spirit is manifested in the subjective, objective and absolute stages. Progress is present everywhere. Great personalities and great peoples are the means whereby the universal spirit, the Absolute, realizes its ends.¹³ Philosophy is the final goal of all development for Hegel.¹⁴

⁷Dagobert D. Runes, p. 123.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Colin Brown, p. 120.

¹¹Ibid., p. 121.

¹²Dagobert D. Runes, p. 124.

¹³Albert E. Avey, *Handbook in the History of Philosophy*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1961), pp. 180, 181.

¹⁴Ibid.

The method is the _____.

(dialectic)

Illustrate Hegel's idea of the dialectic.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Dialectical analysis is possible only within systems which are _____.

(factual)

Hegel's basic idea is _____.

(Geist)

Hegel's doctrine is often called "_____."

(Absolute Idealism)

Hegel included an extreme amount of rationalism. What is real is rational and what is rational is real. Hegel gave philosophy a higher value than he gave the Christian faith. His category of Providence as being in absolute control of history seems rare beside the almost omniscience he grants to the human intellect to discern the necessity and rational nature of historical events. Reality and thought are identical for him. Reason, Nature and Man are the manifestations of the unique Absolute Spirit (*Geist*).

Hegel's monistic idealism contains the following:

—It denies the doctrine of Creation, or at least the distinction between the Creator and Creation. There is an inherent pantheism present in this thought.

—Man is a finite spirit who participates in the infinite Absolute Spirit.

—There is a tendency toward reducing God to the level of man.

—Man is exalted too much, and at the same time is reduced.

—Hegel's religion was ontological but he destroys man's personality in order that God may realize Himself in man.

—It rejects the role of faith and reduces man to the level of an "instrument."

—Religion is passive, subject to the dialectical process.

Søren A. Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

The antithesis of Absolute Idealism was the Existentialism of Søren A. Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was born in Denmark in 1813. In Copenhagen Hegel's philosophy was exceedingly popular. Kierkegaard's father had a profound effect on him. The elder Kierkegaard was a rich eccentric in the small-town aristocracy of Copenhagen. His dealings with Søren in the early years of his life had a lasting effect upon him. It instilled pietistic viewpoints and a sense of duty from which Kierkegaard was never to escape.

The young philosopher was keenly interested in philosophy, theology, the arts, literature and the theatre.

Early in his life Kierkegaard became miserable over an attempt of his father to "evangelize" him after confessing a belief that he (the father) might have committed the unpardonable sin of venting his anger upon God. It may be that the father confided some other sinister family secret, because shortly afterward Kierkegaard broke off his engagement with his beautiful fiancé, Regina Olsen. The people of Copenhagen were appalled by this brusque, unexpected move. Regina was the daughter of an important government official. The gossip was further exaggerated in the *Corsair*, a local newspaper, and life became impossible in Copenhagen for Kierkegaard. He himself had been caustically critical of others, and now their scorn was turned on him. He was falsely accused of acting as a scoundrel toward the young lady, Regina Olsen, whom he never ceased to love at a distance, according to his writings.

Hegel gave _____ a higher value than he gave to the _____

(philosophy, Christian faith)

List the ingredients of Hegel's monistic idealism.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Identify Søren Kierkegaard.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Kierkegaard fled to Berlin where he audited Hegel and Schelling, the arch-enemies of the German metropolis. They once collaborated, publishing a critical journal of philosophy, but they had quarrelled and had become bitter enemies. Schelling had come to Berlin to "counteract the philosophical influence of Hegel."¹⁵ Kierkegaard learned the negative sides of Absolute Idealism and German Romanticism from the most important current advocates of the two systems. He rejected them both as the mistakes which resulted from rationalistically-bound philosophy.

Kierkegaard now placed his highest priority on religion and theology. He was a Lutheran, and Martin Luther's obsession about salvation now became of prime importance to Kierkegaard.

The Lutheran Church in Denmark had turned cold and secular by the time Kierkegaard began to turn his attention to religion. He was searching for Christian experience and he found none, so he turned on the Church and especially upon Professor Martenson who had eulogized a rather worldly bishop at his funeral.¹⁶ Kierkegaard then began to publish his own journal, *The Moment*, and criticized the Church all the more (1854). A year later he died suddenly in Copenhagen after what may have been a heart attack.

Kierkegaard wrote about Holy Week of 1848 when he was about thirty-five years old, a time when he had a personal encounter with Christ. He said, "My whole being is changed. But belief in the forgiveness of sins means to believe that here in time the sin is forgotten by God."¹⁷ He concluded that Lassing was right when he said that "accidental historical truths can never serve as proofs for the eternal truths of the reason."¹⁸ One must take a leap of faith to base an eternal truth upon historical testimony. In experience with God "The individual's eternal happiness depends upon his relation to a past historical event, but the meaning of this event must be apprehended by faith rather than proven by reason."¹⁹ (The "event" refers to the Cross.)

Kierkegaard taught that eternity is much more important to man than time. Sin is man's worst malady. Since man is self-centred and egotistical, it becomes absolutely indispensable that he experience the desperation of guilt and conviction for his sin. With the demonstration of all rational proofs for God and the truth of Christianity, "Kierkegaard proceeds in the main part of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to argue that 'subjective thinking' alone can enable one to appropriate religious truth."²⁰

Kierkegaard affirms that men who think honestly will encounter true paradoxes in their world, the greatest of all being the cross of Jesus Christ.

Kierkegaard teaches that the true ethics of the Chris-

Is the following statement true or false?

Kierkegaard rejected the philosophies of Hegel and Schelling because he considered their ideas to be mistakes made from philosophy that was too rationalistically bound. _____

(true)

Kierkegaard placed his highest priority on _____ and _____.

(religion, theology)

According to Kierkegaard, one must take a leap of _____.

(faith)

¹⁵Frederick Mayer, p. 352.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 465.

¹⁷Colin Brown, p. 126.

¹⁸George F. Thomas, *Religious Philosophies of the West* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 312, 313.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 313.

²⁰Ibid.

tian faith may be realized only beyond this present temporal world, i.e., in eternity.

Since Kierkegaard set out to oppose Hegel, it is interesting to observe that

- he exalts the individual over the “absolute.”
- he is irrational while Hegel affirms: “the real is rational; the rational is real.”
- he insists on the free agency of man; while Hegel considers man to be an effect of the Absolute or an emanation.
- he is existential; Hegel is ontological.
- he affirms true paradox and tension in reality; Hegel teaches synthesis, harmony, identity and continuity.

Those who have followed them with some agreement are as follows:

Kierkegaard

Karl Barth
Miguel de Unamuno
Emil Brunner
Jean-Paul Sartre
Martin Heidegger
Rudolf Bultmann
Albert Camus
Karl Jaspers
Gabriel Marcell

Hegel

Julius Wellhauser
German Rationalists
Josiah Royce
Ralph W. Emerson
Benedette Croce
Edward Caird
W. E. Hocking
R. H. Lotze
Karl Marx
Friedrich Engels
Vladimir I. Lenin
Mao

List ideas of Kierkegaard's that are different from Hegel's.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Place the names of followers of Kierkegaard and Hegel in the appropriate columns below.

Kierkegaard

Hegel

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read the study guide and answer the following questions:

1. What did Schleiermacher mean by “positive theology”?

2. What is there about religion that cannot be refuted?

3. Describe Hegel's idea of the “dialectic.”

4. What is the basic idea in Hegel's thought?

5. What is Hegel's "Absolute Idealism"?

6. What was Hegel's outlook toward religion?

7. Why did Kierkegaard reject the philosophies of Hegel and Schelling?

8. What was Kierkegaard's viewpoint about faith?

9. Show where Kierkegaard's thought was different from Hegel's.

10. List thinkers who have followed Kierkegaard. List those who have followed Hegel.

Supplementary activity (*Levels 2 and 3*). Read pages 107-131 of Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* and answer the following:

1. Explain Schleiermacher's reasons for rejecting German pietism and seeking a modernistic approach of *positive theology*.
2. What "new" interpretation did Schleiermacher make of the Bible? Why "absolute" dependence?
3. In what way does the German word *Geist* (mind-spirit) affect the spirituality of the Christian faith in Hegel? Explain the Dialectic of the Spirit.
4. Explain Kierkegaard's insistence upon an irrational explanation of reality.

Advanced activity (*Level 3*).

1. What is nineteenth-century Idealism? (See Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, page 117ff.)
2. What is Plato's standing in the philosophies of Green, Jowett and Caird in British Idealism?
3. Explain the importance of paradox in Kierkegaard's thought. (See Brown, page 130.)
4. Why is the "leap of faith" inevitable?

Seminar Discussion

1. Why was there a nineteenth-century struggle between Idealism and Irrationalism?
2. What was the "long-run" effect of Schleiermacher's innovations?
3. How could Hegel be considered "the reluctant father of Communism"?
4. How could Kierkegaard be claimed as the source of atheism and neo-orthodoxy at the same time?