

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

IRRATIONALISM. Irrationalism was a nineteenth century reaction against Hegel that has grown into the secular existentialism (q.v.) and religious dialectical (cf. *Dialectical Ethics*) theology of the present.

Hegel, by eliminating the impossibilities of Kant's unknowables, claimed, or seemed to claim, that he had produced the final, rational solution to all philosophic problems.

Kierkegaard (q.v.) insisted that Hegel had lost the existing individual- not merely the individual pen or desk, but much more seriously the living, suffering, dying, human individual. Man is basically emotional and irrational. His destiny requires Christian salvation, and this depends on a passionate and deliberate choice to believe absurdities, for there is no rational explanation of the Incarnation.

Nietzsche (q.v.) was a secular or atheistic irrationalist. There is no such thing as a mind. What Descartes mistook for an ego is a multiplicity of conflicting desires and urges- a theory Freud took over. The whole apparatus of knowing is a simplifying device, directed not at truth but at the utilization of the world for our purposes. Logic, whose basic principle is the law of contradiction, is an evolutionary product. At a prior date the law had not developed, and even yet frogs and fish do not think as we do. At the moment we cannot think otherwise, for evolution has imposed our logic on us. In the future we shall outgrow the law of contradiction, for evolution has not stopped. But neither ancient, modern, nor future logic can be considered true no such law is a law of reality. Logic is simply our way of handling the universe.

This is essentially the view of Williams James (q.v.) and John Dewey (q.v.) also. French existentialism is equally illogical but inherits from Kierkegaard a greater emphasis on irrational decision in moral affairs.

Among theologians Karl Barth (q.v.) accepted Kierkegaard's view of Paradox, and though in his later writings he restricted its extent, he never repudiated it. In the early pages of his *Church Dogmatics* he says that the law of contradiction is acceptable in theology only upon conditions that are scarcely tolerable to a scientific theologian. Emil

Brunner (q.v.) more pointedly held that faith should curb logic: we must believe certain things and disbelieve what they necessarily imply.

Besides these recent developments, we always have with us the mystics and all those who think of religion as essentially emotion and non-doctrinal.

In conclusion, it should be made clear that if with Kierkegaard we must believe absurdities, we are at liberty to believe any absurdity we choose, for there is no *reason* for thinking that one is better than another.

Nietzsche should be warned that if logic distorts reality, the arguments by which he tried to establish his philosophy distort reality, and therefore his evolutionism cannot be true.

If faith curbs reason, no reasonable limit can be set for the curbing. We could have faith that Jesus is truly God, but refuse to draw the inference that he is eternal or omnipotent. In other words, faith justifies insanity.

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