

[From the Gordon-Conwell Lectures on Apologetics, 1981.]

Irrationalism

“The morbid Dane illustrates the dialectical difficulties. The evaporation of one truth into another.”

And of course you’ve heard this in your studies of theology, I guess. I hope, at any rate.

“The virgin birth was true in the first century, but it is not true today. And this, that, and the other thing was true in the fifth century, and it’s not true today. And what is true today will not be true next century, and so on and so on.”

“The morbid Dane illustrates the dialectical difficulties. The evaporation of one truth into another. Both as they occur in Romanism, with its ultimate appeal to the church, and in Protestantism with its ultimate appeal to the Bible. The latter was as comical and Don Quixote. Its passion was good, but its object was wrong.”

“The first dialectical difficulty with the Bible is that it is an historical document. And the resulting troubles have already been mentioned. You can’t trust historical documents. To avoid them Romanism appeals to the church. The church is not an historical document. It is a present reality that needs no proof. Yet the Romanists claim that the present church is the apostolic church. Therefore, questions of history are not avoided. Historical proof is needed. And the approximation process begins over again. It would be necessary to prove historically the primitive and apostolic character of the Council of Trent and of the church as a whole in every movement through eighteen centuries where criticism will stumble on difficulties that the bible theory never knew.”

“A person who bases his eternal happiness on the church is as comic as Don Quixote. Not because of his passion (that is good) but because the objectivity of the church theory is incommensurable with his interest.”

Here, let us pause to catch our breath. The argument on historical research is acutely embarrassing to that type of apologetics which is chiefly Lutheran and is best exemplified by my good friend, what’s his name, John Warwick Montgomery. To that type of apologetics and prolegomena that tries to prove various Christian theses by archaeology or historical investigation.

It is impossible by historical methods to prove beyond all doubt that Jesus was crucified. And incidentally, I have written a book of some pages on *Historiography, Secular and Religion* and you can guess the main thesis of it. It’s anti-empirical. And if you want to read the details of my

historiography, you'll find them in that book. But we can't do everything in these three weeks. The days may be long, but three weeks are terribly short.

It is impossible by historical methods to prove beyond all doubt that Jesus was crucified. Even if the crucifixion be probable, though what probability means is not easily ... these people who talk about probability apparently have no notion of what probability means. You all, of course ... did I use this example before? ... you all, of course, know how to shoot craps. And you know what the probability of throwing twelve is. Or the probability of throwing seven. And you know what probability is, but if you talk about the probability of some historical event, you just have no ... even a vague idea of what probability is. What's the numerator of it? What's the denominator of it? And people refuse to face these problems. They prefer to be vague and meaningless.

Even if the crucifixion be probable, though what probability means is not easily explained, empirical history could never prove that his death, now assumed to be historical accuracy, was a propitiatory sacrifice. And without this latter belief, the former cannot save. But such difficulties as these do not embarrass any Christian who rejects empirical methodology. The impossibilities that attach to sensation and memory in all instances, naturally attach also in the case of history. Besides, history has further difficulties of its own. Kierkegaard therefore seems to be justified in repudiating empirical historical methodology. Though he may be quite mistaken in thinking that this eliminates historical events from religion.

One must not minimize, nor extenuate, Kierkegaard's skepticism. He makes the point quite clear. "The positive in the sphere of thought comes under the head of certainty in sense perception, in historical knowledge, and in speculative results." But all this positiveness is sheer falsity. The certainty afforded by sense perception is a deception as one may learn from a study of the Greek skeptics, and from the entire treatment of this subject in the writings of modern Idealism, which is very instructive. The positiveness of historical knowledge is illusory, since it is approximation knowledge. The speculative result is a delusion.

Reason is as illusory as sensation. Scattered throughout his writings are various attacks on reason or rationality. For example, reason cannot begin. It entails an infinite regress. If everything must be reasoned out there can be no unreasoned first premise. Hence reason cannot begin. This line of argument may or may not have some force against Euclid or Spinoza. But the objection sounds much more formidable when directed against Hegel.

"The system, so it is said, begins with the immediate. Hence without any presuppositions. And hence, absolutely. The beginning of the system is an absolute beginning. But, how does the system begin with the immediate? Does it begin with it immediately? The answer to this question must be an unconditional negative. If the system is presumed to come after existence, then the system is, of course, *ex post facto*, and so then does not begin immediately with the immediacy with which existence began. Although in another sense it may be said that existence

did not begin with the immediate, since the immediate never is as such, but is transcended as soon as it is. The beginning which begins with the immediate is thus itself reached by means of a process of reflection.”

He is accusing Hegel of self-contradiction.

Kierkegaard regards this as a fatal objection to Hegelianism. And he takes the opportunity to point up its application to the existing individual. If reflection has no first premise, no conclusion, and can never end, the professor can never become a human being. No conclusion means, particularly means, no decision. The professor cannot decide to stop reflecting and go to dinner. In order to act, a human being must stop reasoning. To act is to break through reflection in an arbitrary act of will.

Kierkegaard, however, is not destructive and negative only, he obviously is an advocate of something. This advocacy and this something require attention. In the place of objectivity Kierkegaard presupposes subjectivity, faith, and infinite passion. Now, ordinarily faith means a belief in something, if only in the efficacy of curing warts by drinking vinegar. But the something that Kierkegaard proposes as the object of faith is neither so definite nor so intellectual as a belief in the virtues of vinegar. Faith does not need the Bible, faith does not need theology, knowing that something is true only harms and destroys faith. What then does the neurotic Dane mean by faith? Does the phrase “infinite passion” answer this question? What is infinite passion? Surely Kierkegaard cannot want us to know what faith and passion are because if we knew we would have destroyed them.

Many pages later in the book its author defines faith as “the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held by the passion of inwardness intensified to the utmost degree.” Now that’s what faith is.

Something now yet needs to be said about absurdity. But subject to this further explanation, does this definition of faith convey any meaning whatever? To an extent, possibly to a large extent, Kierkegaard realized that he had not, and could not, communicate anything. How can a man, he asked, how can a man communicate the conviction that truth is subjectivity and inwardness? Therefore Kierkegaard relies on an indirect communication. Socratic irony, jesting, ridicule, may possibly suggest what cannot possibly be said. But is this so? Or has Kierkegaard misunderstood Socrates? Socrates used irony as a pedagogical device. It held the attention of those who otherwise would shut their ears in fatuous self-satisfaction. Socrates also used dialectical questioning to draw the truth out of the young but serious students. His dialectic however was not Hegelian dialectics in which all is Heraclitean flux. Socrates was sharp in his ridicule of those who could not step into the same thought twice, but were always changing their opinions. And no matter how ironic or indirect his method was, he did not aim to produce an unintelligent

and unintelligible infinite passion. Socrates aimed to produce clear-cut definitions which could be memorized. A phrase with which Kierkegaard sarcastically castigates intellectualists.

Perhaps, however, insistence on the fact that Kierkegaard has misunderstood Socrates as much as he has misunderstood Christianity, is irrelevant. He has his own theory of indirect communication and it is this that one must examine.

Now, supposing that Kierkegaard could, by his indirect method, somehow stimulate an infinite passion in his pupil he could not know that his pupil's passion was infinite nor could the pupil know that he had now experienced what Kierkegaard intended. Still even though neither could know it, just perhaps the infinite passion has been aroused. Then what? What good is it? Does it, as the gospel information claims to do, lead to eternal happiness? What makes Kierkegaard think that it does? Did he ever receive from God the intellectually understood information, that information was worthless and passion guaranteed heaven? Surely Kierkegaard's embarrassment here is more quixotic than church, bible, or even Hegel.

Nevertheless Kierkegaard is not altogether opposed to intellectual understanding. He even insists on its necessity. But its role may at first occasion some surprise. The matter is connected with the mention of absurdity in his definition of faith. Passionate inwardness holds fast to the absurd in faith. But to hold to the absurd, because it is absurd, requires clear understanding. In one place his explanation goes like this: "Without risk, there is no faith. And the greater the risk, the greater the faith. When Socrates believed that there was a god, he held fast to the objective uncertainty with the whole passion of his inwardness and it is precisely in this contradiction and in the risk, that faith is rooted. Now it is otherwise. Instead of objective uncertainty, there is here a certainty, mainly, that objectively it is absurd. And this absurdity, held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith. The Socratic ignorance is as a witty jest in comparison with the inwardness of facing the absurd". What now is the absurd? "The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into being in time - that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth."

Kierkegaard does not mean that the incarnation, and whatever other Christian doctrines he may have in mind, are surprising or psychologically incredible to heathen peasants and German philosophers. It is not as if the common sense of the sinful human race never expected atonement and resurrection. This is not what Kierkegaard means by paradox and absurdity. He means precisely that the doctrines are self-contradictory, therefore meaningless, therefore absurd.

This is why a certain amount of intellectual ability and activity must accompany faith. He (a Christian), he may very well have understanding, indeed he must have it, in order to believe against understanding. [Student Question: how does Van Till's concept of paradox differ from Kierkegaard here?] I hope to talk about Van Till before the semester is over, let me say this, my impression is, I could mention some differences between the two, but my impression is that in spite of the fact that Van Till denies he is an neo-orthodox apologete, I think he has been very

deeply influenced by neo-orthodoxy, and unwittingly supports their position. But let that do for the present and I'll try to explain it further when we get to sometime... Later on, maybe after the break, if there some parts of this you want to ask questions about, as to what they mean and so on, further explanation, I'll be glad to do it. But, uh, I say I want to get over a few pages to make sure that the important parts are not missed.

At any rate, he defends the necessity of having an intellectual understanding, because you can't believe absurdities unless you know what absurdities are. And hence you must be able to show that the Christian doctrines contradict each other. Now when you understand that the doctrines of Christianity contradict each other, and can't possibly be true, then you must believe them – and that's faith. And unless you deliberately believe absurdities, you have no faith.

This is a point to be noticed. Orthodox or traditional theologians, have often said that the truths of revelation, are not against reason, but above reason. For Kierkegaard, “the above” has no particular meaning, and faith is strictly against reason. This is why understanding and reason are essential. Every man can qualitatively distinguish between what he understands and what he does not understand. When he stakes his life on the absurd, he makes the motion in virtue of the absurd. And he is essentially deceived in case the absurd he has chosen can be proved to be not the absurd. To act in ignorance is not to act against reason; acting against reason requires a clear cut understanding that two propositions are contradictory, and a voluntary belief in both. So a Christian may very well have understanding, indeed he must have it in order to believe against understanding.

Kierkegaard mentions many examples of absurd Christian doctrines. His chief examples, perhaps in a sense all his examples, depend on the impossibility, of a mixture of time and eternity. “God is eternal, therefore it is logically impossible for God to appear or act in time”. Though one might not think of it at first, not only the incarnation, but forgiveness of sin also, is impossible for the same reason. Forgiveness involves a relationship between eternal truth and an existing individual. It purports to be an eternal decision in time with retroactive power, to annul the past. If however, forgiveness is not a paradox, it cannot be believed. And the believer must believe it. The individual existing human being, must feel himself a sinner, with all the strength of his mind. He must try to understand the forgiveness of sins. Thus the simple man will doubtless say, “ the more vividly I believe it, the less am I able to understand it”.

This line of procedure might seem to help the critic to understand what Kierkegaard meant by faith. To ordinary people, faith is belief that something is so – like vinegar cures warts”. Now the critic discovers that Kierkegaard's faith, begins by understanding that two propositions, for example, God is eternal, and God became man, are contradictories. They cannot in any way be harmonized. Now you asked about Van Til, when I come to this lecture, I'm going to use Frame (John Frame) for a certain purpose, and uh, he says something like this, he insists that every proposition in the bible is self-contradictory...[yeah we will come to that], they cannot in any

way be harmonized. Faith now has an object, two objects, it believes both contradictories. The Christian believes that God became man, and he believes with equal fervor that God could not possibly have become man. Rather obviously, Kierkegaard is not the spokesman for Christianity. Who in the whole history of the church ever believed these two contradictories? Where in the bible are they asserted? One may, from an atheistic standpoint, condemn Christians for being stupid enough to believe in God. Or from a mildly religious standpoint, one may call him superstitious for believing the impossible. But who with a straight face can characterize the Christian movement as a belief in contradictories? Christians believe God became incarnate. They emphatically do not believe that he could not become incarnate. What Kierkegaard means by faith is totally at variance with the Christian meaning of faith.

The reason Christians do not believe contradictories, is that no one can. A non-Christian critic of Kierkegaard will soon discover that he the critic is rational and not insane. And unless one is insane, it is impossible by any act of will to believe both of two contradictories, knowing them to be contradictories. True enough one may hold opposing propositions without knowing it, but when another points out the inconsistency, the victim will try to harmonize the two, and argue that they do not conflict, or he will cease to believe one or both. Yet Kierkegaard supposes it possible to understand clearly that 'vinegar cures warts' and 'vinegar does not cure warts' are two contradictories, and with this clear understanding, decide to believe both.

This matter of the repudiation of the laws of logic calls for a little additional emphasis. Although Kierkegaard has a flare for literary style, waxes rhetorical at times, and pillories his opponents with sarcasm, satire, and scorn, his frequent references to contradictories must be taken at literal face value. To make it clear that the absurd is not just something queer and unfamiliar to popular opinion, he very soberly and earnestly defines it as contradictory, "In so far as the absurd comprehends within itself the factor of becoming, one way of approximation will be that which confuses the absurd fact of such a becoming (which is the object of faith) with a simple historical fact and hence seeks historical certainty for that which is absurd because it involved the contradiction that something which can become historical only in direct opposition to all human reason has become historical. It is this contradiction which constitutes the absurd and which can only be believed."

Once this explicit rejection of the fundamental law of logic is seen, none of the passages on the absolute paradox can be misunderstood. For Kierkegaard a paradox is not something that at first seems puzzling or even impossible to common sense, but which can clearly be explained. This is the meaning of the word in ordinary language – for example, a student of elementary physics is puzzled when told that the weight of water in one container exerts a pressure of x pounds on its bottom, but that half the weight in another container, exerts the same pressure or even $2x$ pounds. The physics professor can easily explain it. College students regularly come up against similar paradoxes in other classes – they are dumbfounded to learn that there are just as many prime numbers as there are numbers. Does this not mean that the part is equal to the whole? And is that

not impossible? Other supposedly more advanced in college students find it incredible that a day (the rotation of the earth), a month (the revolution of the moon), and a year (the revolution of the earth around the sun), if all three at any time began simultaneously (the same split second), could never again through all eternity, begin at the same instant. [29:01 unintelligible]...for they are incommensurable velocities – they are paradoxes as the word is used in ordinary language. But Kierkegaard alters linguistic usage and speaks of paradox as inexplicable. The definition of paradox which appeals to me the most is that a paradox is a charlie horse between the ears. But that is not what Kierkegaard meant. For Kierkegaard a paradox is a complete contradiction. We'll talk about what Van Till or what Frame thinks of paradoxes, at any rate, they both think it is impossible to harmonize (at least by us – maybe they can be harmonized by God, we'll see).

The absolute paradox therefore is the absolute contradiction. Kierkegaard far from shrinking back at the thought of denying the laws of logic and becoming irrational, glories in it. The point is important, not only for a correct understanding of Kierkegaard, but also for a correct understanding of Karl Barth, and the type of religion he has popularized since World War One.

Barthianism entered this country, I don't mean that nobody had ever heard of it before, but it entered this country, as a force in the seminaries, about 1938, when Brunner (not Barth) came to Princeton Seminary; and the seminaries in the United States, by and large accepted his points of view. Barth never came to this country until 1962, when he spoke in the Rockefeller Chapel up at the University of Chicago...and his lectures were awfully dull. I listened to them, I read some of them, and besides, the chapel at the Rockefeller Chapel, isn't it the Rockefeller Chapel? It's the Rockefeller Chapel – it's a horrible place for anyone to speak in, the acoustics are impossible. And Barth has a strong German accent, and he gargled all the way down the nave, and it resounded from all sides – and of course I was with the press, and I sat on the second row, I could hear him, I could even understand some of his words, but it's a terrible place to speak in. And poor Barth, he lectured in English, I think I could have understood him better if he had lectured in German. There was one word that took me a long time to get, he repeated, I don't know, a half dozen times or more, "vacuum", he talked about something in a "waccum", and finally it dawned on me that he meant a "vacuum". His English pronunciation wasn't too good. And something also happened there in '62, really amusing, Barth and one or two of his friends, were walking along the street after the lecture, and Van Til and one of his friends were walking and they met, and so Van Til and Barth were introduced to each other. And Barth looked at Van Til and said, "I'll never meet you in heaven". Of course Barth doesn't believe in heaven. So he was telling the truth though he didn't mean to.

We come to Barth, Brunner, et al. Before the concluding paragraphs on Soren Kierkegaard, it is useful to refer to his influence in the 20th century. Although theologians paid him scant attention during his lifetime, Karl Barth at the end of WW1, with what was then called the theology of crisis, convinced Europe of the beauty of the "Great Dane". Just before, (well I'm fond of Great Danes you know), just before WW2, Emil Brunner brought the viewpoint to America where it

flourished for two decades, in the era's intellectual confusion and moral instability. Though it has now lost some of its popularity, there are still hundreds or even thousands of seminary students, professors, and pastors, who have sacrificed their intellect and espoused the religion of irrationalism. In Barth's early writings, he made great use of paradox. Later in his church dogmatics, he reduced their extent, without eliminating them completely; and obscured but did not deny his basic irrationalism. The matter comes up as Barth tries to show that theology is not a science. Though *wissenschaft* does not have the positive overtones that science has. There's a difference between European language and American language and particularly between German and English. The German word *wissenschaft* and the English word science really don't mean the same thing. *Wissenschaft* is more extensive in its reference than the American word science. By science we ordinarily mean the positive sciences, mathematics and physics, or something like that, but *wissenschaft* means all sorts of learning. It's learning in all fields.

But at any rate, Barth lists six criteria of science, that is a *wissenschaft*. And of course *wissenschaft* includes physics, so what he says about all *wissenschaft*, applies to what we mean by science in this country. His irrationalism appears most plainly in his discussion of the first criterion, with some supporting evidence in the second and sixth. The first criterion is freedom from self-contradiction. He wants to give the criteria of knowledge – *wissenschaft*, of a professional knowledge, of scholarship. And the first criterion is freedom from self-contradiction. Now any rational person, if charged with condoning contradictions, would clearly and emphatically deny the charge. There would be no hesitation about it. But Barth begins by asserting that theology must restrict the law of contradiction, to a very limited interpretation. Note carefully what he says, for the sentence is a bit awkward, “the very minimum postulation of freedom from contradiction is acceptable by theology only upon the very limited interpretation (by the scientific theorist upon the scarcely tenable one), that theology will not assert an irremovability in principle of the contradictions it is bound to make good.” Ah (unintelligible German 37:30). It's good German but bad English. I'll read it again, “the very minimum postulative freedom from contradiction, is acceptable by theology, only to the minimum is acceptable” Oh not the maximum but just the minimum is acceptable, “only on the very limited interpretation which a scientific theorist would call a scarcely tolerable one, that theology will not assert an irremovability in principle of the contradictions it is bound to make good.”

This somewhat awkward sentence first of all admits the law of contradiction, if at all, only in a very minimum application. Its full logical extent is ruled out immediately. In the second place the sentence does not really say that even a restricted use of the law is permissible. For it does not assert that contradictions can be removed. It merely asserts that it cannot be asserted that they cannot be removed. But if per chance a contradiction can be removed, then as the immediately following sentence says, “the propositions in which it asserts their removal will be propositions concerning the free action of God, and so not propositions that remove the contradiction from the world.” It is hard to see what Barth means here. Someone might wish to defend him by

supposing that although theological propositions seem to us to be contradictories, they are not contradictories in God's mind. Unfortunately the passage does not assert that God's mind is free from contradictions. Nor, even if it were, does Barth explain how a sane man, can possibly believe what he thinks is contradictory. One thing is clear however, in his various writings, Barth made use of Kierkegaard's paradox. His eternity vs. time. Infinite qualitative difference.

Now Van Til stresses qualitative difference. He doesn't use the word infinite, but uh, he is a very emphatic on qualitative difference, even though he doesn't indicate at all what the qualitative difference is. And totally other, I don't think Van Til uses the exact two words "totally other", but if you read his material you can try to find out what he does mean.

Now when Barth shows so much dependence on Kierkegaard, one would normally suppose that he remains basically irrationalistic unless he clearly and emphatically rejects the irrationalism of these terms. But by ambiguous or indefinite language he avoids both outright assertion and outright denial of contradiction. The general tendency is toward irrationalism. Consider his discussion of the 6th criterion of science, which is, "all propositions are capable of being broken up into axioms and theorems, and are susceptible of proof on this basis". Now, the student of Barth notes with interest that his volume on Anselm (*fides quaren intellectum*) seems to accept and apply this criterion. Yet his church dogmatics, rejects it utterly. "Theology can never be made systematic. God's word is not a thing to be described, nor is it a concept to be defined. It is neither a content nor an idea, nor a fixed total of revealed propositions. Theology cannot regard itself as a member of an ordered cosmos – but only as a stopgap in an unordered one".

In view of the biblical teaching that God is omniscient, that He exercises providential care, and has seen the end from the beginning, no one can regard Barth's unordered cosmos as a Christian conception. But its irrationalism cannot be mistaken. I mean you can't mistake it for something other than irrationalism. The cosmos isn't a cosmos, it's not ordered it's chaotic. Yet sometimes his procedure, not only in Anselm but even in church dogmatics, seems to utilize axioms and systemization. Once again however, when he answers Strauss, the irrationalism recurs. Strauss had argued against making the testimony of the Spirit, and the authority of scripture, the basis of all theology by asking, "who can now attest the divinity of this witness"? This he called the achilles heel of the protestant system. Barth seemingly approves of the question but replies, " what Strauss failed to see is that there is no protestant system." Thus Barth may be described as an irrationalist who wishes to obscure the fact somewhat.

Other contemporary theologians are more forthright in their irrationalism. Reinhold Niebuhr explicitly makes use of Kierkegaard's absurdity and says, "there is no escape from the rational absurdity of the real self. Because it is at once in time and beyond time. It is spatial and yet non spatial. Yet this double fact, which outrages the sense of rational coherence, is a fact of daily experience." That's a nice sentence isn't it, let me read it again. This is from Reinhold Niebuhr. I did tell you about Niebuhr going to church, didn't I? Oh, he liked to go to the Episcopal Church,

particularly he says if there was a good boy's choir – the boys choir had to be good. And then he walked out before the sermon because he only wanted the service not the sermon. Someone, and if you know the Episcopal form you know they recite the Apostles Creed, and someone twitted him for saying the Apostles Creed, when of course he didn't believe any of it, he twitted him for saying it. And he replied, "I don't say it, I sing it" [laughter]. Here is Reinhold Niebuhr, "there is no escape from the rational absurdity of the real self because it is at once in time and beyond time, it is spatial and yet non spatial. Yet this double fact which outrages the sense of rational coherence is a fact of daily experience". End of quote. Now the fact the self may be spatial in one sense and non-spatial in a different relationship, hardly outrages rational coherence. Whether the self is both temporal and eternal may be questioned, but at any rate this view does not represent Christianity. For orthodox theology teaches that man because he was created, is and always will remain temporal. But the quotation shows clearly enough the irrationality of Niebuhr's religion.

However Emil Brunner's is perhaps even more forthright than Niebuhr. Brunner is so obviously and so vigorously irrational, that only a point or two need be mentioned. He holds that God can speak his word to a man even in false propositions. That is God can tell lies, but it's still His word. He holds that the bible is consistently inconsistent. Theology is not concerned with intelligible rational truth. In German (need translation 47:37) – I think you would say that's intelligible rational truth. Further God and the medium of conceptuality (German translation needed 47:49) are mutually exclusive. The contradictions in the bible are evidences of God's condescension to us. No one can be sure of which of the several systems in the bible is the echo of the divine word because there is no ambiguous criterion (no, that's a mistake), there is no unambiguous criterion by which to distinguish them. That must be unambiguous, isn't it? Oh, that's a bad typographical error – you see that's the way sensation always deceives you. You read the manuscript and you don't see words that are there, you see words that aren't there. And so you must never trust your senses when you correct a manuscript. [Student says, "is that irrationalism creeping into the text?"]. It could have been [laughter], if it creeps [laughter].

Finally, with obvious points of dependence on Kierkegaard, Brunner makes full use of paradox. Although the present writer is reasonably confident that he has correctly stated the position of these theologians, even in details, historical accuracy is not the main point. The point is the irrationality of irrationalism. Hence the concluding subsection returns to Kierkegaard. Did you find another typographical error? [Student " yeah, accuracy, it's spelled wrong"], oh terrible, where's that? [student, "the third to last line"], Oh yeah yeah. When I publish a manuscript, its typography, its spelling and so on, are usually examined by at least two people, and three or four times. That simply shows how unreliable sensation is. Irrationalism makes it useless to ask what the object of faith is. Faith really has no object and Kierkegaard really has no faith.

The case of Pascal is an interesting comparison because Kierkegaard's disciples try to enhance his reputation with the reflection of the French philosophers luster. In their irrationalism these

disciples stress decisions in opposition to conclusions – they speak of a wager, as Brunner in particular does (and of course referring to Pascal's wager), and for other reasons claim Pascal as a kindred spirit. You all know what Pascal's wager is, don't you? Do you? Good. You ought to. But the difference between Kierkegaard and Brunner on the one hand and Pascal on the other, is rather enormous.

Pascal's wager was a mathematical calculation of odds, such as gamblers use. If you win two cents for tossing a head, and lose only one cent for tossing a tail, you should by all means gamble. It is hardly a gamble at all, for you are sure to win in the long run. Since there are just two possibilities, you will win half the time and lose half the time. But since when you win, you win twice as much, well it's pretty obvious, is it not? Now Pascal's wager was equally mathematical, but the odds were infinitely better. Either there is a god or there is not – just like heads and tails. But instead of winning two cents and losing one cent; if you bet on god, and win, you win infinitely. While if you lose, you lose nothing. Conversely if you bet against god, and win, you win nothing, but if you lose, you lose eternal life. In his wager, Pascal offers objective mathematical chance. The odds can be calculated. There's nothing irrational. The object of faith is also definite, mainly god. In particular Pascal does not ask us to believe two contradictory propositions at the same time. Pascal and Kierkegaard are poles apart.