

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

**ANTITHESIS.** See also *Irrationalism*. Antithesis as a term in modern discussions almost always has an Hegelian background. For Hegel truth resided in concepts rather than in propositions. Therefore his philosophy is a system of concepts.

The first concept, because it is the most universal, is Being. Plants and stones are qualified beings; pure, universal Being has no qualities. It is neither living nor inanimate, red nor blue, heavy or any other predicate. Therefore it is Nothing.

Being was the *thesis*; Nothing is the *antithesis*, obtained by the *dialectic* process of analyzing the thesis. By Aristotelian logic the process should end here in the mutual exclusiveness of contradictions. But Hegel adds a *synthesis* in which the contradictories are reconciled, elevated, or preserved (*aufgehoben*). In this case, since Being became Nothing, the synthesis is Becoming. There are some two hundred such triads in Hegel's system.

Soren Kierkegaard reacted violently against the seeming omniscience and existential emptiness of "The System," and operated with a two-term dialectic of thesis and antithesis, without any synthesis. "Misled by the constant reference to a continued process in which opposites are combined into a higher unity... the System lacks an Ethic" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 272).

Kierkegaard also rejected Aristotle's position that one of two contradictories must be false. The principle of *Paradox* requires them both to be "true." Christian faith therefore consists in believing what is demonstrably *absurd*.

But if Hegel's System allows no Ethic, is Kierkegaard's repudiation of System better? One would then have to praise both theft and honesty, both adultery and fidelity.

This irrationalism characterizes atheistic existentialism and the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and his followers.

Gordon H. Clark