

Sören Kierkegaard (1813-1855) — A little Introduction

I.

By means of a few broad pencil-sketches, behold, I present Sören Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher-theologian-poet, and cartographer of the mind. I say "sketches" because, whether in his journals or in his books, the writings of Kierkegaard and the thought of Kierkegaard comprise a large collection of sketches on a multiplicity of subjects: faith, existence, doubt, fear, aloneness before the God, ethics, aesthetics, Hegelian dialectics, the outer limits of reason, freedom, God, love and death, women, self, love and death—they do sound like they add up to the title of a Woody Allen movie, don't they? Doubtless Mr. Allen has been (almost?) conscious of the great Dane, depending, of course, upon your definition of 'almost' or 'consciousness'. Actually, these topics or themes do comprise much of what has come to fall under the heading "existential philosophy," thus the common appellation given to Kierkegaard: "the father of modern existentialism."

Without some invention on the part of the inquirer, one does not find in the works of Kierkegaard an all-inclusive exposition on or a systematic construction of any of the subjects above mentioned. To a great extent Kierkegaard's works present a kind of collage of the qualifications of existence in an appeal to the world, or in his own words, to

"The masses": that is really the aim of my polemic; and I learnt that from Socrates. I wish to make people aware, so that they do not squander and dissipate their lives. (1847) [*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, Alexander Dru, ed., New York, 1959, p. 118.]

And concerning his massive output of writings and harangues against the mediocre, the comfortable, the dispassionate religion of his day, Kierkegaard insisted that

After my death no one will find among my papers a single explanation as to what really filled my life (that is my consolation); no one will find the words that explain everything and which often made what the world would call a bagatelle [or trifle] into an event of tremendous importance to me, and what I look upon as something insignificant when I take away the secret gloss which explains all. (1842) [*Journals*, p. 85.]

II.

The philosopher Friedrich Schelling drew a distinction between negative and positive philosophy. Negative philosophy was concerned with the realm of ideas, with a deduction of concepts, whereas positive philosophy was concerned with the realm of things, with existence. According to Schelling, Hegel was the chief modern representative of negative philosophy, by-passing questions of existence. Explains historian Frederick Copleston, "For the way in which the German thinker [Schelling] developed his own ideas of positive philosophy Kierkegaard had little sympathy . . . but he was in full agreement with Schelling's attack on Hegel" (Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, v. 7, New York, 1965, p. 105).

Kierkegaard believed that "to exist" meant to realize oneself through self-commitment to the choices one makes as a free subjective individual (humanist and existentialist psychologists often use the term "self-actualization," drawing heavily on Kierkegaard's analysis of the subjective individual; cf. Rollo May's marvellous work, *Psychology and the Human Dilemma*, New York, 1967). True existence, as the goal of life, as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, means becoming more and more a self-conscious, responsible person. To Kierkegaard, Hegel's vast processual system—where one's self is universalized—such a system left no place for the individual, left no place for personal responsibility and "authentic," self-conscious existence.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the "Philosophic Fragments"* (published in 1846 under his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, and being what he called "an existential contribution"), Kierkegaard

had this to say concerning the possibility of an existential, philosophical system:

An existential system cannot be formulated. Does this mean that no such system exists? By no means; nor is this implied in our assertion. Existence itself is a system—for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen, from a purely abstract point of view, that system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing. Existence separates and holds the various moments of existence discretely apart; systematic thought consists of the finality which brings them together. [Robert Bretall, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, New York, 1946, p. 201.]

Here Kierkegaard is thinking of the Hegelian dialectic system being relevant to an observer contemplating the world-process from outside that process. Hegel's system correspondingly stands in direct opposition to the existential dialectic which is relevant to an individual confronting the future as an active participant in the present. As David Swenson explains, "The Hegelian dialectic registers a compromise or synthesis of opposites which is supposed to preserve the essence of both while annihilating them in their separateness; its watchword is: 'both-and'. The existential dialectic operates with qualitative distinctions and discovers absolute disjunctions which cannot be mediated; its watchword is therefore: 'either-or'" (David F. Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, Minneapolis, 1941, p. 79).

So adamant was Kierkegaard about all this stuff, that he regarded this "either-or" to be the key to heaven, and "both-and" the road to hell. Later in the Postscript he noted two ways open for the individual:

either he can do his utmost to forget he is an existing individual, by which he becomes a comic figure, since existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not . . . or he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual. [Bretall, pp. 202-3.]

In typically witty fashion, Kierkegaard puts forward a major objection to what he saw as modern philosophy, i.e., not strictly speaking that it has a mistaken presupposition, but that it has a comical one. Modern philosophy is comical in that it has forgotten what it means to be a human being,

not indeed, what it means to be a human being in general; for this is the sort of thing that one might even induce a speculative philosopher to agree to; but what it means that you and I and he are human beings, each one for himself. [Bretall, p. 203.]

III.

So who is this guy, really? Who is Søren Kierkegaard? Well, to begin with, generally speaking, he was born in Copenhagen on May 5, 1813. More specifically, he was born to Ane Sörensdatter Lund Kierkegaard and Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard. Søren was baptized on June 3 of the same year. In 1841, on July 16, his dissertation for the Magister degree, *The Concept of Irony*, with "Constant Reference to Socrates," was accepted. On August 11 of that same year he returned Regine Olsen's engagement ring, and three months later, on October 11, he broke off his engagement with her. There!

As spoken of by his numerous biographers, Kierkegaard was much affected by the spiritual influences of his father, the struggle against the spiritually stagnant religious establishment of The Danish Lutheran Church, and the difficulties of his romance and broken engagement with Regine Olsen. I say these things affected him, they do not explain him—does anything explain anybody? A few selections from his Journals will give one a better idea of Søren Kierkegaard the individual.

Again the same scene today—nevertheless I got out to the Rordams—merciful God, why should that inclination awaken just now—oh, how I feel that I am alone—oh,

cursed be that arrogant satisfaction in standing alone—all will despise me now—but thou, O my God, take not thy hand from me now. (1837) [*Journals*, Dru, p. 55.]

Kierkegaard expressed this feeling of aloneness, and aloneness before the God, throughout his life. Yet he also felt the burden of his own intellect, a feeling which cannot be better expressed than he did himself:

slight, delicate, and weak, denied in almost every respect the physical requirements in order to be able to pass for a complete man as compared with others; melancholy, soul-sick, profoundly and absolutely a failure in many ways, one thing was given to me: a pre-eminent intelligence. . . . Even as a child I was conscious of my intelligence. (1854) [*Journals*, p. 243.]

This very intellect was both his strength and his opponent. He added, in the same entry, "It was intelligence and nothing else that had to be opposed. Presumably that is why I, who have had the job, was armed with an immense intelligence" (*Ibid*).

His intelligence, his aloneness, his "melancholy burden of existence" all blended together. As William Hubben renders it so well, "His spiritual abode was the same melancholy that had haunted his father" (William Hubben, *Four Prophets of our Destiny*, New York, 1960, p. 8). Kierkegaard himself wrote, "I can say of my sorrow what the Englishman says of his house: my sorrow is my castle" (*Journals*, 1839, p. 62).

In another place (*Journals*, 9 March 1846) Kierkegaard leaks out a little more of his own understanding of himself and his massive literary output.

To be the greatest philosopher in Denmark is on the very borderline of satire—rather like being the greatest—just think of it—the greatest of the traveling actors—in Odense. [*Journals*, p. 105.]

If this confession of Kierkegaard's betrays in a way both his status and his task of existence as he understood it, the following passage from his journals can be seen as a kind of psychological analysis of his subjective individuality. I am in the profoundest sense an unhappy individuality which from its earliest years has been nailed fast to some suffering or other, bordering upon madness, and which must have its deeper roots in a disproportion between soul and body; for (and that is what is extraordinary) it has no relation to my mind. On the contrary, perhaps because of the strained relation between soul and body my mind has received a tensile strength that is rare. [*Journals*, p. 105.]

Upon realizing this great discord between the psychical and the physical, what he called his thorn in the flesh, Kierkegaard made his choice.

From that moment I made my choice. That sad discord with its attendant suffering (which without doubt would have driven most of those with sense enough to understand it to suicide) I have always looked upon as my thorn in the flesh, my limit, and my cross; I have looked upon it as the high price at which Almighty God sold me an intellectual power which has found no equal among my contemporaries. That does not puff me up for I am already ground to dust; my desire has become to me a bitter pain and a daily humiliation. [*Journals*, p. 107.]

If this all sounds a bit egocentric (the ravings of an melancholic egomaniac) we should keep in mind that—with twenty volumes of *Journals* and *Papers* and over twenty published books, not to mentioned numerous profound parables, sermons, prayers, editorials to contemporary papers—Søren Kierkegaard is considered today the finest literary figure in Danish history by religious and non-religious scholars and critics alike.

In considering his own literary merit, Kierkegaard expressed what he believed to be his main accomplishment as well as a deep disappointment.

I have set forth the decisive qualification of the whole compass of existence with such dialectical clarity and so originally as has not, so far as I know, been done in any other literature; neither have I had any books to help me nor upon which to draw for advice ...; but no one has time to read and study seriously and to that extent my production is for the moment wasted, like putting exquisite dishes in front of peasants. [*Journals*, p. 108; S.K. never let himself be burdened by political correctitude, ouch!]

Sören Kierkegaard died on November 4, 1855 at forty-two years of age. His bequest to humankind was an atlas of the inner life of the individual as subjective, responsible, passionate, and standing alone before the creator of the universe! Besides this accomplishment, he left us many remarkable and deeply searching prayers (see *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Perry LeFevre, ed., University of Chicago Press, 1976). Possibly, one prayer alone stands out as central to all of Kierkegaard's life, as paradigmatically indicative of that place toward which his heart continually strove and eventually found its rest.

Father in Heaven! What are we without Thee! What is all that we know, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if we do not know Thee! What is all our striving, could it even encompass a world, but a half-finished work if we do not know Thee: Thee the One, who art one thing and who art all! So may Thou give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing; to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that wills only one thing. [from *Purity of Heart*, Douglas V. Steere, translator, New York, 1956, pp. 31+218 (gender neutralization by K. D. Kragen, GenderEtics, KaveDragen Ink.).]

Sören Kierkegaard And Christian Faith: The Epistemology Of The Absurd

A most striking thing about Kierkegaard's view of Christian faith is its close affinity to that of Luther's, at least in two major respects. One, faith is a gift of God. And two, the significance of the distinction between fallen reason and divine reason or reason from God's perspective is especially crucial in terms of the relation between faith and reason. One finds discussion of these aspects of faith and reason both in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings as well as in his later, specifically religious works.

Although the subjective, existential choice to believe God characterizes the human side of the moment of faith (in terms of the deeper personal commitment of what Kierkegaard calls "religiousness B"), behind or undergirding that decisive moment is *the condition*, which is supplied by God and makes faith possible.

That the God has once for all given man the requisite condition is the eternal Socratic presupposition, which comes into no hostile collision with time, but is incommensurable with the temporal and its determinations. The contradiction of our hypothesis [in other words, Climacus' view of Christianity] is that man receives the condition in the Moment, the same condition which, since it is requisite for the understanding of the eternal Truth, is *eo ipso* an eternal condition.¹

This condition from God, by God's grace, is needed precisely because of the paradoxical nature (and offense) of Christianity. As the *Fragments* point out, the absolute paradox of the Incarnation, the focal point of Christianity, goes against all human expectation and understanding. Human beings, in their sinfulness, can never have the faith (by means of their own non-existentially conditioned will) to overcome the paradox and to believe God. Paradox has set reason aside, explains Climacus in the *Fragments*, and, as Luther would say, one's will is bound by one's corrupt and fallen intellect:

How does the learner then become a believer or disciple? When the Reason is set aside and he receives the condition. When does he receive the condition? In the Moment. What does this condition condition? The understanding of the Eternal.... It is in the

Moment that he receives [the eternal condition], and from the Teacher himself.²

Climacus also sees the paradox-generated need for God's condition as an advantage. Faith is that condition which makes belief possible, and this condition is a gift from God. All people, therefore, have an equal chance, whatever their intellectual capacity, for attaining existential commitment and saving faith precisely because this faith does not derive from historical or intellectual speculative evidence, but rather is generated out of the God-given condition for it.

At this point, a weakness may be seen to arise out of Climacus' exposition of Christian faith; that is, he never deals with the *implications* of faith as a gift of God, and related issues of divine sovereignty and predestination. However, such theological issues are simply not Climacus' concern here (cf. Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourse "The Unchangeableness of God," in *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, Walter Lowrie, translator, Princeton, 1974, pp. 223-240). Rather, Kierkegaard makes it clear from the start that his investigation centers on the question of how one becomes a Christian, "the question of the individual's relationship to Christianity,"³ not with the question "What is Christianity?" or "How does one formulate the Christian worldview?"

An understanding of Kierkegaard's notion of paradox is necessary for any consideration of his view of reason, these being inexorably intertwined. Simply put, Christianity is the religion of transcendence, as opposed to the ethical and natural religious realms of immanence. The paradoxical content of Christianity as existence-communication goes *beyond* the bounds of reason, not against the intellect (as the dialectical proves) but against intellectualism, against an arrogant human philosophico-speculative religion.⁴

Climacus is careful not to intimate that belief is in no way an intellectual act, but rather, that it is not *just* an intellectual act, for belief also includes the passionate decision, the "leap of faith." Of course this leap is neither "blind" nor "completely in the dark," for the individual must know (hence the dialectic) to what they are leaping; reason alone is simply inadequate, there being no quiet and purely rational crossing over to Christianity. The individual must at least understand Christianity as the paradox of the Transcendent God entering into history as Christ incarnate, and must also know why one needs to leap over the mystery and the offense of Christianity as paradox, i.e., because of one's own sin of alienation from God ("independence") and the reliance upon one's rational ideals and capabilities.

Therefore, for Kierkegaard, *neither* is Christianity irrational (though it does in many ways surpass reason) *nor* is it exhausted by reason (thus the paradox). This is not a paradox for God, who is able to possess system and the complete integration of subjective and objective (system and existence), but only for the individual human being caught up in the egocentric predicament.⁵

Climacus draws an analogy: birth is incomprehensible to the newborn, but surely, conceptually speaking, that is not the case for the one having long since passed from birth to adulthood.⁶ Likewise then, faith may be seen to lead to understanding (a view not inconsistent with Luther or Augustine, i.e., "faith leads to understanding and understanding builds faith"). Faith as God's gift leads to spiritual regeneration as well as to intellectual regeneration of the mind and the rational capacities: "one gives up, as he says, the understanding in order to believe—but then he acquires a higher understanding."⁷ In this passage as well, Climacus shuns any sort of irrationalism and "blind leaps." Note: Kierkegaard—is—not—an—irrationalist!

Kierkegaard holds that the content of faith is the absurd for the unbeliever, yet for the believer, in the tension of the dialectical, faith is not finally in the absurd, but in Christ. Climacus, nonetheless, dialectically refers to Christ as absurd in His transcendence-incarnation, that seeming contradiction (from the human perspective) singular to Christianity.⁸

In an illuminating journal entry of 1850, Søren Kierkegaard elucidates the paradox and the absurd. He explains,

Hugo de St. Victor states a correct thesis (Helfferich, *Mystik*, Vol. I, p. 368): "faith is really not supported by the things which go beyond reason, by any reason, because

reason does not comprehend what faith believes; but never-theless there is something here by which reason becomes determined or is conditioned to honor the faith which still does not perfectly succeed in grasp-ing." This is what I have developed (for example, in *Concluding Postscript* [pp. 503-504])—that not every absurdity is the absurd or the paradox. The activity of reason is to distinguish the paradox negatively—but no more.⁹

The category of the absurd as grasped through the dialectic is used by Kierkegaard to carefully delineate the boundary between knowledge and faith. This is the sense in which faith is seen to have the absurd as its object ("paradox" and "the absurd" are fairly interchangeable here). The absurd is definitely *not* nonsense, for S.K. the absurd is a carefully-crafted concept:

It is nothing but superficiality to think that the absurd is not a concept, that all sorts of absurdities are equally at home in the absurd The absurd, the paradox, is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense Human reason has boundaries; that is where the negative concepts are to be found. Boundary disputes are negative, constraining. But people have a rattle-brained, conceited notion about human reason, especially in our age, when one never thinks of a thinker, a reasonable man, but thinks of pure reason and the like, which simply does not exist, since no one is pure reason. Pure reason is something fantastical, and the limitless fantastical belongs at home where there are no negative concepts, and one understands everything like the sorcerer who ended by eating his own stomach.¹⁰

Faith cannot be produced by rational investigation, yet clearly rational thought, *vis-a-vis* the dialectic, is not inconsistent with faith, and in fact can build up already existing faith (again, cf. Augustine and Luther, both of whom Kierkegaard admired):

For dialectics is in its truth a benevolent helper, which discovers and assists in finding where the absolute object of faith and worship is—there, namely, where the difference between knowledge and ignorance collapses in absolute worship with a consciousness of ignorance [reasoned through or reasoned out ignorance, understood ignorance], there where the resistance of an objective uncertainty tortures forth the passionate certainty of faith, there where the conflict of right and wrong [the ethical stage] collapses in absolute worship with absolute subjection. Dialectics itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual up to it, and says: "Here it must be, that I guarantee; when you worship here, you worship God." But worship itself is not dialectics [but rather, it is the daily end of becoming a Christian].¹¹

In his discussion of the intermediary, non-committal, "humorous-comic stage" between the ethical and religiousness A stages, Climacus says, "the comical is no more than the dialectical an enemy of the religious, which everything on the contrary serves and obeys."¹² While dialectics must be put into the service of and submission to Christian faith, logic and its principles are never questioned or denigrated by Climacus.¹³ Rather, Climacus acknowledges that logic and its principles are utterly essential for understanding the limits of human reason.

The ideas considered thus far, as with Kierkegaard studies generally, must always be kept in the perspective of the following: (1) the literary forms in which they are presented (both in terms of indirect communication and direct communication); (2) the whole program of Kierkegaard's polemic, including his utilization of the pseudonyms; and (3) to whom and to what, at any particular time, he directed his massive literary output, e.g., Danish Lutheranism, the individual seeking God, and so on. One should especially keep in mind Kierkegaard's use of hyperbole or exaggeration—a major element in his method

of indirect communication.¹⁴

Kierkegaard spent much of his life jumping up and down madly on the raised end of a teeter-toter, that is, the out-of-kilter state of Christendom and the life-out-of-balance of society in general. By this mad bouncing he was trying to get things back in balance—the active-passionate balance between reason and faith, between the temporal and the eternal, between the objective content and the subjective-existential content which constitutes true Christianity. True Christianity is not a mindless irrational faith, but an epistemically humble theism lived out with both passion and intellect by the individual standing in a subjective relationship to God through the rationally inexhaustible Christ.¹⁵

NOTES

1. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 77.
2. Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, p. 79.
3. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 18-19.
4. William P. Alston has similarly spoken against such "intellectualism," or what he has denoted "fully reflective justification" (that is, within the general context of belief formation and justification). In his paper, "Epistemic Circularity" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, v. XLVII, n. 1, Sept. 1986, pp. 5, 24-25), Alston explains, There is a certain kind of circularity, "epistemic circularity," into which we frequently fall when we set out to adduce reasons for the reliability of a belief source [p. 5]. . . . The quest of FRJ [fully reflective justification] is undertaken just when we ignore, or lose interest in, merely being justified [in favor of justifying]. To demand FRJ is to demand that any premise we use in justifying a belief itself be justified by argument [p. 24]. . . . It is clear that either this quest for FRJ generates an infinite regress and cannot succeed for that reason, or at some point it is vitiated by circularity, either because we encounter a basic source or because our reasons for a given source are obtained from a source we were relying on at an earlier stage. Whichever of these possibilities is realized we get the same conclusion that FRJ of any principle of reliability is impossible, and hence that FRJ of any belief is impossible; [note that] . . . this argument, with its alternatives of circularity and infinite regress, is very similar to the standard argument for foundationalism [p. 25].
For further helpful discussions, see also Alston's "Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles" (*History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 2, pp. 435-52, Oct. 1985), and "Concepts of Epistemic Justification" (*Monist*, 62, pp. 57-89, Jan. 1985).
5. See Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, pp. 99-113.
6. Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, pp. 24-25.
7. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 501.
8. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 188.
9. *Kierkegaard's Journals And Papers*, v. 1, Hong, Howard V., & Edna H. Hong, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 4, #7.
10. *Ibid*; see also immediately following journal entry #8.
11. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, pp. 438-39.
12. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, p. 465.
13. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, pp. 99-100.
14. Serious work in Kierkegaard requires both a significant amount of study of his own voluminous output, as well as at least a familiarity with recent secondary sources. Underlying the present study are the following primary and secondary sources. By Søren Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling* (Johannes de Silentio, 1843), Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton University Press, 1974); *Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus, 1845), D. F. Swenson & H. V. Hong, trans.,

(Princeton University Press, 1974); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Johannes Climacus, 1846), David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton University Press, 1974); *Purity of Heart* (1846), Douglas V. Steer, trans., (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956); *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves* (1851-55), Walter Lowrie, trans., (Princeton University Press, 1958); and *Sören Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 7 vols., Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967).

Relevant secondary sources: William P. Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," in *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, v. XLVII, n. 1, (Sept. 1986), pp. 1-30; Elmer H. Duncan, *Sören Kierkegaard*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Pub., 1979); C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, (Humanities Press, 1983); Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, (Princeton University Press, 1974); Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index*, (New Jersey: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953); Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity*, (The University of Alabama Press, 1984); Brita K. Stendahl, *Sören Kierkegaard*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, of G. K. Hall & Co., 1976); F. Russell Sullivan Jr., *Faith and Reason In Kierkegaard*, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1978); Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, George L. Stengren, trans., (Princeton University Press, 1980); Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard as Prophetic Philosopher," in *Christian Scholar's Review*, vol. VII, no. 2.3, (1977).

15. It is interesting to note what Niels Thulstrup says in his book *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (Princeton University Press, 1980):

P. A. Heiberg has maintained that Kierkegaard's story was not the story of a sickness but rather the history of a cure. This thesis can also be utilized concerning Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, provided, of course, that we emphasize equally the two elements 'cure' and 'history'. If he was never himself especially severely attacked by the sickness, viz. speculative philosophy particularly in the version of Hegel, if he was at most exposed to its attack during a brief period in his youth and quite superficially infected here and there in his world of thought, then at least he cured himself with harsh medications of his own and others' devising, and sought through his writings to give his worthy contemporaries a drastic remedy against Hegel. In his Authorship demolition and construction . . . went together, and if we wish to understand this, the most relevant approach will be to follow the process step by step; that is, we must take each work individually before we can even speak of a systematic synthesis [p. 322].

And concerning what Thulstrup considers to be some of Sören Kierkegaard's particularly key works, he writes,

The Concept of Dread, in addition to whatever else the book is, is a contribution to conceptual clarification. This clarification was not necessary for Kierkegaard himself, since he had already undertaken it in his private notes In his view, however, the clarification was far from superfluous for his esteemed contemporaries. Entirely the same intention is found in *Philosophical Fragments*, and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and just as in these works, so also in *The Concept of Dread* in a conspicuous degree at that, Kierkegaard employed his opponents' terminology and form. He even remarked later that this was the reason why *The Concept of Dread* was the only one of the pseudonymous writings that 'found a little favor in the eyes of the Docents' [p. 352].