

KIERKEGAARD'S RELATIONS TO  
HEGEL RECONSIDERED

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the research community in the English-speaking world has witnessed a new wave of interest in Kierkegaard's work over the last several years, the secondary literature has remained somewhat uneven, often treating him as a figure isolated from the intellectual tradition and context out of which his thought was born. Few of the major commentators do much to situate his thought vis-à-vis the tradition of German idealism which preceded him or the Danish philosophical milieu in which he was educated, and it is here that many issues and connections remain to be explored. One of the issues that has hitherto been treated most unevenly is the complex relation of Kierkegaard's philosophy to that of Hegel. The general importance of a study of this relation should be self-evident to any student of Kierkegaard's thought. References to Hegel occur throughout his literary corpus from his earliest works, and his contact with Hegelianism has often been seen as one of the most important dimensions of his biography and intellectual development. Many aspects of Kierkegaard's thinking, such as his conception of stages, his dialectical methodology, and his understanding of Socrates and Antigone, seem to recall key doctrines and analyses from Hegel's philosophy. While many scholars would agree that much of Kierkegaard's rich and diverse thought is best understood as being in a sort of dialogue with Hegel's philosophy, few have done much to establish the concrete points of contact in a historical fashion. Thus, for anyone even mildly familiar with Kierkegaard, the value of an investigation of his relation to Hegel and German idealism should be obvious and in no need of justification.

There are any number of reasons why this issue, so central to understanding Kierkegaard, has not been treated more often or more rigorously than it has. First, in a number of his books, there are several passages in which Kierkegaard assumes a tone of animosity towards Hegelian philosophy. Some of his criticisms seem straightforwardly *ad hominem* in character and at times resemble those of other contemporaries who were simply trying to vilify Hegel without a serious examination of his thought.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is Kierkegaard's little-known comedy from his student days entitled, *The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*. There he caricatures the Danish Hegelians with whom he was familiar and satirizes Hegel's stilted philosophical jargon. This clearly belongs to Kierkegaard's *juvenilia* and thus is by no means a representative text; nonetheless, some of its satirical character survives in scattered passages in the mature works. Kierkegaard's own negative rhetoric with respect to Hegel and above all to Hegelians would seem to imply that his thought has little or nothing in common with that of Hegel and that any comparative study would simply be misguided. Whatever else it might mean, Kierkegaard's animated tone testifies to the historical importance of Hegel's philosophy and the need for learned persons of the day to come to terms with it. There were enthusiastic admirers and bitter critics, but there was no way of avoiding taking some position on the philosopher who dominated much of academic life in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s at first in his own person and later through the agency of his students. In any case, most commentators have simply taken Kierkegaard at what seems to have been his word and have subsequently interpreted his appraisal of Hegel as universally negative. Few scholars have been able to look past Kierkegaard's rhetoric to see if it is in accordance with the actual content of his analyses of Hegel's thought.

Another reason why Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel has not been analyzed more critically than it has is that a number of issues between Hegel and Kierkegaard appear to be cut and dry and seem to assign the two thinkers to opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. One example can be found in their respective views on systematic philosophy. For Hegel, systematic or speculative philosophy is the kind of thinking that conceives of all cognitive categories and notions of truth in their organic relation to one another. This conception of philosophy stands in contrast to what Hegel calls "dogmatism,"<sup>1</sup> which abstracts categories and notions from their context and sees them in isolation. According to Hegel, concepts, propositions, and individual analyses fit together like tiles in a mosaic, each needing the others and the whole in order to be meaningful. Thus, the universal perspective of absolute knowing, which constitutes a panoptic, objective view, transcending all individual and partial perspectives, necessarily implies a speculative conception of all the various finite notions of truth. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, this objective view is simply an impossible, self-deceptive abstraction from the particular individual and is ultimately incommensurable with experience and truth as lived by the human subject. Thus, according to his view, truth is necessarily subjective and individual and cannot be demonstrated by discursive or conceptual thought. Second, Hegel's methodology seems

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *EL*, § 32, Remark; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 106.

to imply that no individual notion of truth is absolute in itself, but rather such notions are continually mediated by others. Any given notion or concept is invariably dissolved or *aufgehoben* into other concepts. However, for Kierkegaard, the individual existing subject is absolute and stubbornly resists reduction or mediation of any kind. Given these radically different presuppositions concerning objective and subjective reflection, objective and subjective truth, and the reduction and mediation of concepts, it seems as though the two thinkers have nothing in common since they use diametrically opposed first premises as their respective points of departure.

A careful examination of the current state of affairs in the secondary literature reveals that the need for a detailed study of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel is more acute than might otherwise have been thought. Many commentators allude to Kierkegaard's enmity towards Hegel's philosophy as a fact given in advance of any investigation. Due to the history of reception of the issue, the agreed upon presupposition is that Kierkegaard was one of the major critics of Hegel. Some commentators briefly note that he attended Schelling's lectures in Berlin where he received a somewhat jaded picture of Hegel's philosophy, but few have explored Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel in a fashion that truly takes into account the cultural context and historical setting in which Kierkegaard was writing. Most comparative studies tend to abstract both Hegel and Kierkegaard from their respective historical contexts and analyze their positions directly vis-à-vis one another without taking into consideration other possible influences. This has led commentators to seize upon and develop what they perceive to be points of comparison and contrast, but once the historical background becomes clear, it is obvious that these points in fact have little to do with Kierkegaard's actual intentions or his own understanding of his relation to Hegel. Thus, what is needed is a somewhat more historically oriented approach that looks at the issue afresh, unencumbered by the old misconceptions and prejudices.

#### I. THE STANDARD VIEW OF KIERKEGAARD'S RELATION TO HEGEL

There seems to be a standard view of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, which has today become firmly ensconced as a result of any number of factors in the history of scholarly reception. The standard view regards this relation as a purely negative one. Kierkegaard is thus thought to have rejected Hegel's philosophy wholesale and to have used aspects of it only to ridicule them, often ironically. He is thought to have been entirely original and to have taken leave of his philosophical predecessor right from the beginning. Moreover, a part of his criticism of Hegel is characterized by a strikingly personal tone. Unlike Aristotle's criticism of Plato

or Fichte's criticism of Kant, there is thought to be a strong personal element in Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. He is conceived as having criticized not just Hegel's thought on its own terms but also the way in which that thought led Hegel himself to a misguided life. Kierkegaard is thus said to have waged a rabid campaign against both Hegel's philosophy and his person. This is, generally speaking, what I understand by "the standard view" in the understanding of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. This view has been around virtually since the beginning of the twentieth-century reception of Kierkegaard's thought at the time when he began to become known internationally. In what follows, I wish to review very briefly some typical examples of this view. The history of the reception of this issue is quite large, and what follows is to be regarded only as a cursory overview, the goal of which is merely to highlight what I take to have been the general tendency in the interpretation of the issue by some of the leading names in the scholarship.

With regard to the Danish reception, this standard view of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel plays at least a minor role in Eduard Geismar's influential work, *Søren Kierkegaard. Hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed* from 1927–28.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be said that the issue of Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel is the central one in Geismar's study as a whole, but it does come up in his discussions of *The Concept of Irony*<sup>3</sup> and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>4</sup> While Geismar is willing to admit that there is some ambiguity in Kierkegaard's use of Hegel in the *Concept of Irony*, regarding the work as displaying a "partial Hegelianism,"<sup>5</sup> he nonetheless sees in Kierkegaard's authorship a deep criticism of Hegel that begins even prior to this text.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Geismar sees the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as an open struggle against Hegel himself, among other things, against Hegel's pantheism and against Hegel's principle of the unity of the inner and the outer, of Christianity and culture. While Geismar's account is mercifully free of any personal anti-Hegel element, he nonetheless understands much of Kierkegaard's polemics as being directed against Hegel himself and sees the two thinkers as occupying diametrically opposed positions.<sup>7</sup> Despite underscoring this polemic with Hegel, Geismar was criticized for making Kierkegaard too Hegelian.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Eduard Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard. Hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, vols. 1–2, Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag 1927–28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, første del, pp. 90–101.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, tredje del, pp. 5–21, pp. 44–91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, første del, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, første del, pp. 97–98.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, tredje del, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> See K. Olesen Larsen's article, "Noget om Afgørelsen i Øjeblikket," in *Søren Kierkegaard læst af K. Olesen Larsen*, ed. by Vibeke Olesen Larsen and Tage Wilhjelm, vols. 1–2, Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad 1966, vol. 1, pp. 21–73, especially pp. 27–59. See also Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaards Verhåtnis zu Hegel. Forschungsgeschichte*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer 1969, pp. 90–99.

Geismar's analyses are almost entirely immanent to Kierkegaard's own works, and he does very little by way of *Quellenforschung*; indeed, he sticks so closely to Kierkegaard's primary texts that some of his analyses border on paraphrase. While Geismar mentions the names of the main Danish Hegelians, he does not do much to trace Kierkegaard's criticisms of their texts but instead assumes them to be directly related to key doctrines in Hegel's own works.

Another important figure in the history of the Danish reception was the Professor of Theology, N. H. Sørensen, whose history of philosophy, *Fra Renæssancen til vore Dage* from 1945,<sup>9</sup> was highly influential due in part to the fact that it was used for years as a textbook. In this work Sørensen includes sections on both Hegel and Kierkegaard. The latter is of particular importance since Kierkegaard's work and authorship are portrayed as being determined by Hegel and specifically as being critical of him. There is a tendency in Sørensen to evaluate the matter in Kierkegaard's own language and from his perspective. It is not difficult to see the author's partisanship in passages like the following: "On the whole Kierkegaard is not only Hegel's most important . . . theological opponent, but his thoughts have their lasting validity for all times."<sup>10</sup> Finally, the nature of Sørensen's work, as a history of Western philosophy since the Renaissance, determines the character and agenda of his analysis of Kierkegaard, who is portrayed as one figure in the series of great thinkers from Descartes to then contemporary French existentialism. Sørensen writes, "The first significant theologian, who understood Hegel and then declared open war on him, was S. Kierkegaard."<sup>11</sup> Thus, for the sake of his historical overview, Sørensen has an interest in seeing Kierkegaard in relation to Hegel, one of the towering figures in the tradition. But this causes him to ignore entirely Kierkegaard's contemporary Danish context. No attempt is made to evaluate Kierkegaard's relation to the Danish Hegelians, who were presumably deemed unworthy of inclusion. This work has seen several reprints and has been influential for many years.

Sørensen's work is also illustrative of another aspect of the history of reception of the issue of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. It is a platitude to say that research changes with the political climate of the day, and it would be naive to think that it is ever completely free of some ideological investment. The ideological commitments of a given body of research are usually more or less invisible to those immediately involved with it, and they usually only become apparent years later when the political landscape has changed enough to make a sufficient contrast with the past. Thus, the contours of previous ideologies gradually come into focus. Kierkegaard

<sup>9</sup> N. H. Sørensen, *Fra Renæssancen til vore Dage. Filosofisk tænkning med særligt henblik på de moralske og religiøse problemer*, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1945. Fourth revised edition 1964.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, fourth edition, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, fourth edition, p. 151fn.

research has been no exception. Kierkegaard has often been held up as the heroic advocate of freedom, equality, the individual, and human rights against all possible forces of oppression. With regard to the issue of his relation to Hegel, this usually comes out in the form that Hegel is cast in the role of one of the foremost representatives of these oppressive forces. Writing in 1945, Søren introduces Hegel as follows: "He is thus a main presupposition both for K. Marx and for the view of life of modern Nazi Germany."<sup>12</sup> Here Hegel is made responsible for the abuses of both extremes of the political spectrum. It is odd to read this kind of thing today, but at the time it was precisely thinking of this sort that hindered genuine research on Hegel's thought from gaining a foothold in either the Danish or the anglophone literature.

Another exponent of the standard view was Søren Holm, the Professor of Theology at the University of Copenhagen, whose numerous publications span a period of some forty years from the 1920s to the 1960s. Holm never made any single study of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, but he did have occasion to treat this issue, albeit briefly, in his two main works on Kierkegaard (i.e., *Søren Kierkegaards Historiefilosofi* from 1952<sup>13</sup> and *Grundtvig und Kierkegaard* from 1956<sup>14</sup>). In the latter, Holm's comparative study, Hegel comes up frequently as an important point of orientation for understanding the positions of Kierkegaard and Grundtvig. Holm's general view is that although Kierkegaard knew Hegel's philosophy well and was influenced by its language and its general constellation of problems, nevertheless he was "the sharpest opponent of this philosophy."<sup>15</sup> Holm goes on to treat Kierkegaard's criticism of mediation,<sup>16</sup> the system,<sup>17</sup> objective thinking,<sup>18</sup> and necessity in history,<sup>19</sup> all of which he takes to be essential parts of a Hegel critique.

Holm's work on Kierkegaard's philosophy of history is above all a study of the *Philosophical Fragments*, although he includes accounts of individual discussions from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Practice in Christianity*. Holm's understanding of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel with respect to the topic under consideration is expressed as follows in the Preface: "Kierkegaard's philosophy of history and his subsequent understanding of Christianity arose in a polemic against Hegel's philosophy."<sup>20</sup> Given this, one would expect to find an extended analysis of Hegel's philosophy of history, but Holm disappoints the reader in

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., fourth edition, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> Søren Holm, *Søren Kierkegaards Historiefilosofi*, Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck 1952.

<sup>14</sup> Søren Holm, *Grundtvig und Kierkegaard. Parallelen und Kontraste*, tr. by Günter Jungbluth, Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck; Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag 1956.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 25ff.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 35ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 57ff.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 82ff.

<sup>20</sup> Søren Holm, *Søren Kierkegaards Historiefilosofi*, op. cit., p. 6.

this expectation. With only the most cursory account of Hegel's philosophy of history, Holm goes through Kierkegaard's well-known discussions of, among other things, movement in logic,<sup>21</sup> the transition from possibility to actuality,<sup>22</sup> and the god-man,<sup>23</sup> all of which are taken to be criticisms of key doctrines in Hegel. Holm embodies the standard view quite well since there is no real attempt to examine Hegel's philosophy on its own terms, and the whole discussion is presented from what is taken to be Kierkegaard's perspective. Moreover, very little is done to trace other possible sources, and when the aforementioned doctrines are discussed, there is no suspicion that Kierkegaard might be in dialogue with other authors besides Hegel. Thus, in the absence of any real research either on Hegel's own philosophy or on the contemporary authors writing about it, Holm simply conveys what seems to be the agreed upon view of Kierkegaard's critical relation to Hegel.

Another important figure in the Danish history of the reception of the issue of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel was the Ukrainian-born philosopher Gregor Malantschuk. While Malantschuk never dedicated any single work to exploring this relation, he does treat aspects of it in several of his books. In his general introduction to Kierkegaard entitled, *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth*, Malantschuk portrays Hegel as the representative of the modern trend of secular rationalism, which has imperiled Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Hegel is seen as one of the leading causes of the spiritual destruction of the age, which Kierkegaard dedicates himself to combatting. Thus, Malantschuk juxtaposes Kierkegaard to Hegel, portraying the two as single-minded opponents representing two opposing principles and world-views. In his work *Kierkegaard's Thought*, Malantschuk is somewhat more even-handed. He originally characterizes the relation as follows: "Generally speaking Kierkegaard took a negative position toward Hegelian 'speculation,' but it is interesting to note that he was able to use much of what he learned from Hegel."<sup>25</sup> After this Malantschuk goes on to list a series of familiar objections that Kierkegaard purportedly had to Hegel's philosophy,<sup>26</sup> which is followed by a few examples of Kierkegaard's positive co-opting of specific analyses from Hegel. Finally, Malantschuk concludes that Kierkegaard is best seen as a Hegel-critic. He

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48ff., pp. 107ff.

<sup>24</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth. An Introduction to the Authorship of Søren Kierkegaard*, tr. by Mary Michelsen, Montreal: Inter Editions 1987, pp. 13–16.

<sup>25</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, *Dialektik og Eksistens hos Søren Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag 1968, p. 60. Quoted from the English translation: *Kierkegaard's Thought*, tr. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1971, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> A similar series of Hegel criticisms can be found in Malantschuk's *Fra Individ til den Enkelt. Problemer omkring Friheden og det etiske hos Søren Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel 1978, pp. 250–257.

writes, "Hegel's great influence upon Kierkegaard was, however, indirect. The errors Kierkegaard discovered in Hegel's system and which had a decisive negative influence upon his understanding of central philosophical and theological themes had to be corrected, and Kierkegaard saw this as one of his tasks."<sup>27</sup> Thus, the struggle against Hegel is conceived as one of the main goals of Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole.

Malantschuk's research, like that of S e before him, gives clear expression to the ideological commitments of the day. He portrays Hegel as the forerunner of the totalitarian communist states with his purported absorption of ethics into the state and his glorification of the monarch as the highest power. Malantschuk traces the line from Strauss to Feuerbach and then claims:

The next step happens with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who with their consistently executed materialistic life-view end up as declared opponents of Christianity. It was not only the dialectic in modified form but also the view of freedom, the ethical and the individual as a disappearing moment, which Marx and Engels could take over from Hegel and incorporate into their philosophy. Thus, Marx and Engels could, with the help of the central concepts in Hegel's philosophy . . . construct a system, whose actualization ultimately would mean the death of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

Hegel is made responsible for the anti-Christian nature of Marxism and set in the immediate context of the debate about Marxism, which was taking place in Denmark at the time. He is portrayed as a thinker hostile to Christianity both from this Marxist side and from the side of Nietzsche: "It must further be noted that Friedrich Nietzsche's atheistic and anti-Christian life view is only completely understandable against the background of the foundation of paganism which Hegel's philosophy had prepared."<sup>29</sup>

From very early in the history of reception, this standard view was constantly reinforced in countless reference works, anthologies, commentaries, and so on. Robert Bretall's well-known work, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*,<sup>30</sup> which originally appeared in 1938, has served as an introductory textbook for anglophone students of Kierkegaard for many years now. In both the general introduction to the work as a whole and in the introductions to the various selections, Bretall is careful to point out how the

<sup>27</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, *Dialektik og Eksistens*, op. cit., p. 66. *Kierkegaard's Thought*, op. cit., p. 65f.

<sup>28</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, *Fra Individ til den Enkelt*, op. cit., p. 257. See also his *Den kontroversielle Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Vintens Forlag 1976, p. 66f. English translation: *The Controversial Kierkegaard*, tr. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1980, pp. 22–23, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1946. Previously Harper and Brothers 1938; Augsburg Publishing House 1943.

passages selected are illustrative of Kierkegaard's disdain for Hegelianism, which, we are told, "he hated above all else."<sup>31</sup> For Hegel's principle of mediation Kierkegaard is said to have had "an unyielding hatred."<sup>32</sup> Characterizing the content of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Bretall writes, "Hegel and his cohorts are attacked with every weapon in S. K.'s armory."<sup>33</sup> One can hardly help but notice the personal tone in these descriptions of what are purportedly philosophical points of disagreement between two thinkers. Through this anthology, generations of anglophone students have had it ingrained into them that a central part of Kierkegaard's work was a thoroughgoing anti-Hegel campaign.

Similarly, any number of the entries concerning Hegel's philosophy listed in Jens Himmelstrup's "*Terminologisk Register*," which appeared in 1936 as part of a supplement volume to the second Danish edition of Kierkegaard's complete works,<sup>34</sup> clearly manifest the same general tendency in interpretation. The editors of this second edition were conscious of the fact that their commentaries were woefully inadequate, and to compensate in part for this they decided to include the "*Terminologisk Register*," the goal of which was to provide the reader with at least some help in sorting out the difficult concepts. But the entries did not shrink from interpretation and presented a very definite picture of Kierkegaard, a picture that reflected the view not so much of Kierkegaard but of their author. For example, under the entry "mediation," one reads, "Kierkegaard, who thinks that there are oppositions which cannot be bridged, has, as a sharp opponent of Hegel and his mediating method, caustic statements about mediation."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in the related entry on the law of excluded middle, the reader is told, that "[i]t is Kierkegaard's impassioned claim that the Hegelian conception of the law of contradiction is incorrect."<sup>36</sup> Here it is emphatically confirmed that Kierkegaard was a critic of Hegel, and this point about mediation is illustration of this, even though the issue is considerably more complicated, as will be seen in the body of this study.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, in Himmelstrup's entry on "the leap," the same presumed anti-Hegel polemic is in evidence. There one reads, "It is Kierkegaard's impassioned claim that this form of transition [sc. the leap] in Hegel's logic rests on an error; no reflection on concepts can produce any movement; mediation is a chimera, and Kierkegaard especially emphasizes

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>34</sup> *Samlede Værker*, second edition, ed. by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange, vols. 1–15, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1920–36. Volume 15 contains a "*Sagregister*" by A. Ibsen and the "*Terminologisk Register*" by Jens Himmelstrup.

<sup>35</sup> "*Terminologisk Register*" in *SV2*, vol. 15, p. 633.

<sup>36</sup> "*Terminologisk Register*" in *SV2*, vol. 15, p. 757.

<sup>37</sup> Chapter 4, Sections I and II; Chapter 11, Section IX.

that it is an error pure and simple when Hegel's system believes that it has a so-called 'absolute' or presuppositionless beginning."<sup>38</sup> In this entry the leap is portrayed as a point of profound discontinuity between Hegel and Kierkegaard. It is one of Kierkegaard's explicit points of criticism of Hegel; moreover, it is immediately associated with other well-known criticisms, such as that of mediation and the absolute beginning. But no mention is made of the fact that Hegel was one of the original sources of the concept of the leap and that it was from him, among others, that Kierkegaard in fact appropriated it.<sup>39</sup> Thus, while a more impartial treatment might see this as a positive point of influence of Hegel on Kierkegaard, Himmelstrup portrays it as an unambiguous point of critique.

Under the entry, "actuality" (i.e., "*Virkelighed*"), one finds a similar example. The term is explained once again as a part of Kierkegaard's general campaign against Hegel. In order to illustrate the fact that Kierkegaard's use of this term is critical of Hegel, Himmelstrup cites the following passage from *The Concept of Anxiety*: "Thus when an author entitles the last section of the *Logic* 'Actuality,' he thereby gains the advantage of making it appear that in logic the highest has already been achieved, or if one prefers, the lowest."<sup>40</sup> The astute reader will notice that nowhere in this passage is Hegel's name mentioned. Himmelstrup seems not to be aware of the fact that the concept of actuality in Hegel (i.e., "*Wirklichkeit*") does not appear as the last section of his *Science of Logic* but rather in an undistinguished section midway through the second (of three) books. Himmelstrup thus makes an interpretative leap for the reader by quoting this passage as a criticism of Hegel. As will be demonstrated later, there is clear evidence that in this passage Kierkegaard in fact has in mind another target and that the criticism has nothing to do with Hegel himself.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the entry on "the System" is extremely misleading along the same lines. The first thing that the reader is told is the following: "As a rule this expression in Kierkegaard is synonymous with Hegel's philosophical system."<sup>42</sup> This, however, forgets the innumerable passages in which Kierkegaard criticizes his Danish contemporaries for writing "the system." For example, in *Prefaces*, there is a criticism of various unnamed writers of the system:

I assume that Mr. A. A., whose promises supposedly have not weakened him, went to work and wrote the system. . . . [T]herefore *posito* I assume that if Mr. A. A. did not write the system, then Mr. B. B. wrote it – then

<sup>38</sup> "*Terminologisk Register*" in *SV2*, vol. 15, pp. 697–98.

<sup>39</sup> Treated in Chapter 9, Section V.

<sup>40</sup> *CA*, pp. 9–10; *SKS*, vol. 4, pp. 317–318.

<sup>41</sup> Chapter 9, Section I.

<sup>42</sup> "*Terminologisk Register*" in *SV2*, vol. 15, p. 711.

what? . . . Then one would indeed have to read it, unless Mr. C. C. would instantly be kind and philanthropic enough to promise a summary of the system and also position us in the point of view.<sup>43</sup>

As will be discussed later,<sup>44</sup> in a draft Kierkegaard specifically identifies Mr. A. A., Mr. B. B., and Mr. C. C. with three Danish contemporaries.<sup>45</sup> Thus, there can be no doubt that when he speaks of “the system” in this passage, he is not thinking of Hegel. In the entry in question Himmelstrup goes on at length to outline the structure of Hegel’s elaborate system. This again conveys the impression that Kierkegaard in his “criticism” was primarily concerned with Hegel himself. Moreover, the entry ends with an obligatory section entitled, “Kierkegaard’s Critique of Hegel’s System,” which further reinforces the idea that the system is intended to refer specifically to something in Hegel’s primary texts and not to some general conception of philosophy which Kierkegaard finds objectionable or, as previously, to some specific imitator of Hegel’s system.

The entries in Himmelstrup’s *Register* suggest that Kierkegaard wishes to issue a criticism of Hegel on the various points. But that Hegel is the intended target is by no means obvious from the passages cited by way of illustration. The fact that this *Register* accompanied the authoritative critical edition of the collected writings gave it an air of legitimacy and authority. If one wanted to know what Kierkegaard meant by specific concepts, one needed to look no further than the *Register*, which provided both a brief explanation of the individual concepts and relevant passages in Kierkegaard’s texts where they were illustrated. In this way Himmelstrup’s *Register* served in a sense to codify the individual aspects of the anti-Hegel polemic which Kierkegaard was thought to be engaged in, and thus it played a role in the establishment of a kind of Kierkegaard orthodoxy with regard to this issue.

Moreover, the way in which commentaries have traditionally been written to Kierkegaard’s works reflects the standard view that Kierkegaard was engaged in a campaign against Hegel.<sup>46</sup> It might seem a great blessing

<sup>43</sup> *P*, p. 39; *SKS*, vol. 4, pp. 500–501. See *COR*, p. 5; *SVI*, vol. 13, pp. 399–400: “It is the system toward which the age is directing its efforts. Prof. R. Nielsen already has published twenty-one logical §s that constitute the first part of a logic that in turn constitutes the first part of an all-encompassing encyclopedia.” (Cited in full in Chapter 11, Section I.) Here “the system” is associated with Rasmus Nielsen. See *COR*, p. 6; *SVI*, vol. 13, p. 400: “Who failed to notice that Dr. Beck has abolished religion in order to make room for the system?” Here the system is associated with Andreas Frederik Beck.

<sup>44</sup> Chapter 10, Section V.

<sup>45</sup> *P*, Supplement, p. 119; *Pap.* V B 96. See *SKS*, vol. K4, pp. 606–608.

<sup>46</sup> I refer here to, for example, the commentaries written by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie in the early English translations, the more extensive ones written by Howard Hong in the Princeton translation series, *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, the ones in the German translation of Kierkegaard’s collected works (*Gesammelte Werke*, tr. and ed. by Emanuel Hirsch, Hayo Gerdes, and Hans-Martin Junghans, 36 Abteilungen in 26 volumes, with Registerband. Düsseldorf, Cologne: Eugen Diederichs Verlag 1950–69; second edition,

that editions of Kierkegaard's works, unlike those of other thinkers, have been accompanied by commentaries that aid the reader in the understanding of difficult passages and obscure references. But the commentaries written for Kierkegaard's works have not been value-neutral with respect to interpretation, and a very specific picture of Kierkegaard often emerges from them. Whenever there is a passage in one of Kierkegaard's texts that employs any kind of philosophical language, there is immediately a tendency in the commentaries to refer to Hegel, even though the language employed may be quite standard in the history of philosophy. Especially when there seems to be a critical remark, whose target is difficult to identify, there is a tendency to cite some passage in Hegel's works as the probable source. This gives the reader the mistaken impression that Kierkegaard is constantly in dialogue with Hegel's primary texts. But the true source is quite often some little-known contemporary Danish figure. The twenty-some volumes of Hegel's collected works make for fertile soil for the commentator in search of a passage that fits the required context. This search is facilitated by Glockner's *Hegel-Lexikon*,<sup>47</sup> which provides commentators with a host of ready-made passages to choose from for any given key word. The result is a series of commentaries that evoke the impression that Hegel was the only philosopher whom Kierkegaard was interested in, while other contemporaries such as Immanuel Hermann, (i.e., "the younger") Fichte or Franz von Baader, who were major figures in their day, are simply disregarded as insignificant.

The same tendency can be seen in the selection under the heading, "Hegel," in the English edition entitled, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*.<sup>48</sup> There one finds very few actual quotations from or references to Hegel's primary texts. These few are set together with a number of journal entries containing vague allusions, which are in serious need of interpretation before they can be associated with Hegel. In many of the passages the discussion is clearly about specific Hegelians, some of whom are mentioned by name, and this juxtaposition seems to imply that there is no significant difference between Hegel himself and any given Hegelian. Moreover, there are included under this same heading

36 Abteilungen in 30 volumes, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1986–95), and those written by Niels Thulstrup in his editions of individual works (*Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, ed. with Introduction and Commentary by Niels Thulstrup, vols. 1–2, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1962. In English as *Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tr. by Robert J. Widenmann. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984; *Philosophiske Smuler*, ed. with Introduction and Commentary by Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1955; C. A. Reitzel 1977, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> Hermann Glockner, *Hegel-Lexikon*, Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag, Günter Holzboog 1957, vols. 25–26 of *Jub.*

<sup>48</sup> *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1–6, ed. and tr. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1967–78, vol. 2, pp. 207–228.

a fair number of passages where neither Hegel's own name nor the word "Hegelian" appears, but where there is, apparently in the opinion of the editors, a general discussion of some aspect of Hegel's philosophy. But the interpretation involved in associating these passages with Hegel himself requires justification. Perhaps what is most unfortunate is the way in which all of these quite heterogeneous entries are categorized under the heading "Hegel." This categorization and presentation of the material leads the reader in a specific direction and conveys the impression that the various vague references and allusions contained in the passages are to be understood uniformly as referring to Hegel himself. This has been the most complete edition of Kierkegaard's *Nachlaß* or *Papirer* in English ever since it was published, and thus it has done much to shape the reception of this issue simply by the editorial decisions it has made and the way in which the material has been presented. While this edition has been important and indeed useful in making Kierkegaard's journals accessible to anglophone readers and to this extent has undeniably served an important function, nevertheless, with respect to Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, it simply repeats uncritically the standard view and has helped to calcify it in the literature.

These seemingly banal things, such as the categorization of journal entries under the heading, "Hegel," or the explanation of key concepts in Kierkegaard by means of a reference to his purported polemic with Hegel, have had a profound effect on the history of Kierkegaard reception and have served to shape the picture of his relation to Hegel. It would be impossible to enumerate all the factors in the history of reception that have led to the standard view, and thus I allow these few examples to suffice. The influence of anthologies like that of Bretall and reference works like that of Himmelstrup is intangible, but they can be seen as a kind of barometer for the reception of the issue. They give a general indication of the atmosphere of the reception of Kierkegaard's thought and set the tone for students and first time readers to understand his works.

The examples mentioned here (and one could mention many others) demonstrate that the view that Kierkegaard had a campaign against Hegel existed in the literature from the very early stage of the reception at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kierkegaard was introduced to the modern reader in part by means of his purported Hegel critique. This was natural enough given that Hegel was the well-established philosophical figure of his period. Kierkegaard's position in the history of philosophy was located and defined specifically vis-à-vis Hegel (i.e., as a Hegel critic). It will be noted that none of the works mentioned here was specifically a study of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. They focus primarily on other themes and have quite different goals and objectives. But when they come to mention Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel,