

# Kierkegaard's Remarks on Philosophy

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THOUGH AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH for almost twenty-five years Kierkegaard has yet to exert any significant influence upon Anglo-Saxon philosophy. More seriously, his interesting and often perceptive philosophical remarks have usually passed almost unnoticed;<sup>1</sup> certainly they have not received the careful critical attention they rightly deserve. One reason is that most of these remarks occur within the context of a vast and wide ranging literature not itself primarily philosophical, at least in the narrow sense of that term. Indeed one can imagine that for many philosophers, searching for material in Kierkegaard must be rather like looking for needles in a literary-psychological-religious haystack. I know that he planned it thus and of course I should like to respect his intentions. On the other hand he has left much valuable philosophical material which should be explored and developed. With some hesitation I have therefore decided to produce this report indicating where and roughly to what extent he discusses various philosophical names and topics in his different works. I hope that this may encourage others to explore his remarks, at least in those areas in which they are particularly interested. I also hope that it may prove useful to graduate students and thesis directors who, overwhelmed by the complexity of the authorship, are puzzled where to begin or, indeed, whether to begin at all.

The material in this report represents the tiniest fraction of the data generated in the course of producing the various volumes in *The Kierkegaard Indices*, two of which have already appeared.<sup>2</sup> More precisely, it represents a very few brief extracts from our frequency-by-title-and-year tape, the format of which corresponds roughly to that of the data in this report.

Our data array is self-explanatory but three brief comments should remove any possible confusion. The title codes printed across the top of the page represent the different works in Kierkegaard's authorship arranged, with one exception,<sup>3</sup> accord-

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<sup>1</sup> Of course I do not mean to deny that there have been significant philosophical studies of Kierkegaard in English and in fact would mention the following: James Collins, "Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegel," *Thought*, 22 (1943), 100ff.; John Durkan, "Kierkegaard and Aristotle: A Parallel," *Dublin Review*, 213 (1943), 136-148; Richard Kröner, "Kierkegaard or Hegel?," *Rev. Int. Phil.*, 6 (1952), 79-96; W. R. Curtis Larson, "Kierkegaard and Sartre," *Personalist*, 35 (1954), 128-136; Richard H. Popkin, "Hume and Kierkegaard," *Journ. Rel.*, 31 (1951), 274-281; and John Wild, "Kierkegaard and Classic Philosophy," *Phil. Rev.*, 49 (1940), 536-551.

<sup>2</sup> *Kierkegaard in Translation/en Traduction/in Übersetzung*, compiled by Alastair McKinnon (Leiden: Brill, 1970) and *Konkordans til Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, compiled by Alastair McKinnon (Leiden: Brill, 1971). The third volume, *index Verborum til Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, should be available within a year.

<sup>3</sup> The exception is *Bladartikler, der staar i Forhold til „Forfatterskabet“*, a collection of short pieces extending over half of the authorship and which cannot therefore be assigned to any single point within it.

ing to their date of publication. The words in the left hand column represent names or topics of particular philosophical interest. The figure in the intersection of any two columns indicates the number of times that word (plus, in certain cases, some variants) occurs in that particular work. Where variants are included their number is indicated in brackets following the root.

The title codes mentioned above are detailed in the Appendix. As an elementary precaution, the title codes of the pseudonymous works are there printed in bold. Works not available in English translation in March 1969 are cited in Danish.

As any simple translation of many of these terms would pose particular difficulties and be of only doubtful value, I have used the original Danish and provided a rough English equivalent only where the complete unfamiliarity of the original made this imperative.

Lest the reader think our present frequency reports a poor substitute for the detailed location references to be provided in the *Konkordans* and the *Index Verborum*, I hasten to add that considerations of space alone would make the provision of such references quite impossible. But space is only one consideration. While the above two volumes are for the serious Kierkegaard scholar, the present piece is intended primarily for those who have a more limited knowledge of Kierkegaard and his works and to whom a brief, overall view is therefore of primary importance. I assume, of course, that such persons will wish to read at least the whole of the work or works in which their particular interests are most widely discussed and that, among other things, they will wish to know where they may best begin.<sup>4</sup>

The preceding is a full and, I believe, accurate record of Kierkegaard's references to these particular names and topics in the various titles of his *Samlede Værker* but there is other interesting philosophical material outside this collection. Of course, many of these same matters are discussed, sometimes at length, in his unpublished diaries and papers, a much more complete English translation of which should be available in the relatively near future.<sup>5</sup> Those seeking to understand Kierkegaard's philosophical development and indeed many of his central concepts might be advised to study a work now published in English under the title *Johannes Climacus* or *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*<sup>6</sup> and which, both chronologically and intellectually, stands between *The Concept of Irony* and the early pseudonymous authorship. Finally, those interested in the outlines of his social philosophy should certainly read his book on Adler now translated into English under the title *On Authority and Revelation*.<sup>7</sup>

It is tempting to reflect upon the extent to which the discussion of these philosophical matters occurs mainly in the early and, particularly, the pseudonymous "aesthetic" works. It is equally tempting to try to show by specific examples how such data might be used to defeat existing interpretations of Kierkegaard and, equally important, to suggest others in their stead. But, my original purpose accom-

<sup>4</sup> I should perhaps add that in my view everyone should begin with *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* or, if they can bear its compression, the "A First and Last Declaration" appended to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Of course, as their names suggest, these pieces are about the authorship rather than integral parts of it.

<sup>5</sup> *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, edited and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press).

<sup>6</sup> Trans. T. H. Croxall (London: A. & C. Black, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> Trans. and ed. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

plished, I resist all such temptations and instead conclude with a rather different but nevertheless important consideration.

Many Kierkegaard scholars, including some of the best, will no doubt object strenuously to this kind of report. They will point out, quite rightly, that Kierkegaard is not to be seen in terms of "results," whether philosophical or any other kind. They will note, again rightly, that the authorship has its own deliberately contrived strategy part of the aim of which is to keep the mere philistine (the detached scholar, the disinterested Ph.D. candidate) beyond the walls. And, they may add, this account is mere treason, inside information permitting the mere scholar to work this material on his own terms free of the strictures and limitations, indeed of the spiritual discipline, which Kierkegaard intends to impose upon his true "reader." I sympathise with these objections and, in another context, might add some of my own. However, I believe that these protests underestimate Kierkegaard's subtlety and, particularly, his literary and psychological skills. I believe that Kierkegaard is quite capable of defending his works against the merely dispassionate scholar and, particularly, that he will do so successfully just to the extent that such a scholar shows the true intellectual toughness and thoroughness which he so much admired and which this report is specifically intended to foster. I believe we should encourage scholarly investigation of Kierkegaard because I believe that anyone who works diligently and honestly with his text will come to see the point of his strategy, will learn to understand why he is not to be taken simply in the form of results, will come to appreciate why his specifically philosophical remarks normally occur within a much wider and perhaps richer context, even, if he looks deeply enough, may make at least within himself some small progress in resolving the difficulties and uncertainties about the profession which now increasingly disturb more and more of its members.

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