

KIERKEGAARD'S RELATION TO HEGEL AND *QUELLENFORSCHUNG*: SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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STEWART, J.: Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel and *Quellenforschung*: Some Methodological Considerations
FILOZOFIA 68, 2013 No 1, p. 17

This article attempts to demonstrate the advantages of using the methodology of *Quellenforschung* or source work research when approaching the *corpus* of Søren Kierkegaard. The field of Kierkegaard studies has long been dominated by a number of misconceptions concerning the Danish thinker's relation to Hegel, which has almost invariably been portrayed as singularly negative and critical. This article applies source work research to three different passages from Kierkegaard's primary texts, where his alleged polemic with Hegel is thought to be in evidence. However, when the actual sources of his criticisms are determined, an entirely different picture emerges and the role of Hegel fades into the background.

Keywords: Source work research – Methodology – Danish Golden Age – G. W. F. Hegel – H. L. Martensen – J. L. Heiberg

To become cognizant of the progress that has taken place in Kierkegaard studies over the last several years, one need only compare one of the older publications by or about him with what is available today. New research tools such as indices, detailed bibliographies, and electronic versions of the texts give the modern researcher an enormous advantage over his or her colleagues from previous times.

One thing that is particularly striking is the number of distortions, inaccuracies and errors that seem to run rampant in some of the earlier publications. These have resulted in what Henning Fenger has aptly called “the Kierkegaard myths.”¹ There is, for example, the myth that Kierkegaard wrote his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, in an ironic fashion in order to fool a cadre of doctrinaire Hegelians at the University of Copenhagen. Another myth is that Kierkegaard argued that life or thought progressed through a mechanical series of stages – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. There is the myth that Kierkegaard was a Jew (which presumably had its origin in a confusion between the Danish words “*jøde*,” meaning Jew, and “*fyde*,” that is, someone from Jutland). Finally,

¹ Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard-Myter og Kierkegaard-Kilder* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1976). In English as *Kierkegaard: The Myths and their Origins*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

there is the myth that Kierkegaard was an irrationalist who rejected all forms of reason and discursive rationality. Many others, both biographical and philosophical, abound.

These myths date from the pioneering days of Kierkegaard research when few scholars outside Denmark knew anything about Kierkegaard. At that time any mistaken information that was presented in one of the few books about Kierkegaard available to the international reader was sure to be repeated several times by subsequent authors, thus ensconcing the mistaken view. Thus it is not surprising to find that works such as Walter Lowrie's influential biography *Kierkegaard* from 1938,² despite its merits, is rife with both clichés and myths that have endured to this very day.

One tendency in the field was that many scholars interpreted Kierkegaard not in terms of his own time and place but in terms of what they themselves were familiar with or interested in. Thus, Kierkegaard research was generally confined to understanding him as a part of the existentialist movement, as a forerunner of post-modernism and so forth. In this manner he was removed from his original time and context and thrust into later movements that were topical at the time the research took place. Needless to say, this resulted in a number of distortions of his thought since there was inevitably much twisting and turning involved in the appropriation of him for the given trend, which almost always had a set of goals and methodology completely different from Kierkegaard himself.

Many of these myths arose due to inadequate knowledge of Danish, lack of familiarity with the historical context, and inadequate access to the source materials necessary for their refutation. One way to correct this problem is to approach Kierkegaard's thought by means of the methodology of *Quellenforschung*, that is, the attempt to identify and evaluate its original sources or *Quellen*. Kierkegaard is constantly in dialogue with his Danish contemporaries and is in this sense a rather local or parochial thinker. The problem today is that many of his sources have been forgotten. The goal is then to reconstruct the horizon of Kierkegaard's world and see it as he did at the time. This involves in some measure setting aside later scholarship and taking into account a tremendous amount of material from long-forgotten thinkers.

I would like to try to illustrate the virtues of *Quellenforschung* as a methodology with respect to Hegel and Kierkegaard by means of examples from three texts which have been interpreted as a part of Kierkegaard's anti-Hegel campaign.³ However, by means of *Quellenforschung* I wish to demonstrate that the criticisms contained in these texts are not directed against Hegel but against Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries. This is not to say that he agreed with Hegel, but it in any case results in a quite different picture of his relation to Hegel than the one that has enjoyed such wide currency in the history of Kierkegaard studies.

² Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938).

³ The paradigm case for this view is, for course, the work of Niels Thulstrup. See in particular his *Kierkegaards forhold til Hegel og til den spekulative idealisme indtil 1846* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1967). In English as *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

1. Kierkegaard's Critique of Universal Doubt: Martensen. Kierkegaard frequently makes sarcastic use of the Latin slogan, “*de omnibus dubitandum est*”⁴ or “one must doubt everything.” It first appears in his early student comedy, *The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*, from the beginning of 1838.⁵ Around 1843 he wrote a draft of a satirical novel which uses this slogan in its very title: *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*. This phrase has been thought to refer critically to Hegel's dialectical method in the *Science of Logic*, the *Encyclopaedia Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which calls for eliminating all presuppositions and in order to begin with the most fundamental and immediate of all categories that is, being. Thus, this slogan is quickly brought into connection with Kierkegaard's critical account of the purportedly foundational claims about the beginning of philosophy in Hegel.⁶ However, a closer examination of the matter points to another source.

The history of this formulation is somewhat complex. It originates with Descartes who in the *Principles of Philosophy* proposes to doubt everything to ensure that no prejudices or illicit beliefs are adopted without them first being subjected to critical reasoning.⁷ To effect this, he writes, “It seems that the only way of freeing ourselves from these opinions [sc. prejudices] is to make the effort, once in the course of our life, to doubt everything which we find to contain even the smallest suspicion of uncertainty.”⁸ Another variant of the formulation which is similar to but not identical with Kierkegaard's can be found in the heading to the opening paragraph: “The seeker after truth must, once in the course of his life, doubt everything [*de omnibus...esse dubitandum*], as far as is possible.”⁹ Thus, the original formulation is found in Descartes' discussion of universal doubt, a fact that Kierkegaard, via his pseudonymous author, notes in *Fear and Trembling*.¹⁰

Hegel's posthumously published *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,¹¹ includes

⁴ See SKS 17, 288, DD:208 / KJN 1, 279. SKS 17, 291, DD:208 / KJN 1, 283. SKS 17, 292, DD:208 / KJN 1, 284. SKS 3, 97 / EO2, 95. SKS 4, 101-102 / FT, 5-6. SKS 4, 281 / PF, 82. SKS 4, 510 / P, 49. SKS 4, 482 / P, 18. SKS 6, 38 / SLW, 34. SKS 6, 114 / SLW, 120. Pap. V B 175.4 / SLW, Supplement, p. 540. SKS 7, 179 / CUP1, 195. SKS 7, 184 / CUP1, 200. SKS 7, 231 / CUP1, 255. SKS 7, 240 / CUP1, 264f. SKS 7, 369 / CUP1, 405. B&A, vol. 1, p. 235 / LD, Letter 149, p. 213. B&A, vol. 1, p. 239 / LD, Letter 150, p. 215.

⁵ SKS 17, 291, DD:208 / KJN 1, 283. SKS 17, 292, DD:208 / KJN 1, 284. See Jon Stewart, “The Dating of Kierkegaard's *The Conflict between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*: A New Proposal,” *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 24, 2007, 220-244.

⁶ See SKS 9, 220f. / WL, 218. SKS 27, 237f., Papir 264:11 / JP 3, 3281. SKS 18, 217, JJ:239 / KJN 2, 199. SKS 7, 103-120 / CUP1, 106-125.

⁷ See SKS K4, 583-584.

⁸ Quoted from *Principles of Philosophy in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, et al., vols. 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. 1, 193.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, 193.

¹⁰ SKS 4, 101f. / FT, 5f.

¹¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols. 1-3, ed. Karl Ludwig Michelet (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833-36), vols. 13-15 in *Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols. 1-18 (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1832-45) (ASKB 557-559).

a discussion of Descartes' method of universal doubt and makes use of the phrase in question: "Descartes argues that we must begin from thought as such alone, by saying that we must doubt everything (*De omnibus dubitandum est*); and that is an absolute beginning."¹² Kierkegaard refers to this account in a draft to *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*. There he writes, "He [Johannes Climacus] had already been struck by Hegel's and Spinoza's saying that Descartes did not doubt as a skeptic *for the sake of* doubting, but *for the sake of* finding truth."¹³ While Kierkegaard associates the slogan with Hegel, he understands it as pertaining to Hegel's discussion of Descartes' philosophy rather than his own.

A look at the other sources of this phrase reveals that the target of Kierkegaard's criticism is, however, much closer to home. The theologian Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-84) was the subject of Kierkegaard's life-long animosity for a number of reasons.¹⁴ This animosity came to open expression in Kierkegaard's attack on the church after Martensen's appointment as Bishop of Zealand in 1854. Martensen was one of the most important figures in the Danish Hegel reception in Denmark and used the phrase "*de omnibus dubitandum est*" repeatedly. Martensen's first such use appears in a review he wrote in 1836 of the poet, dramatist and philosopher, Johan Ludvig Heiberg's Hegelian treatise, *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course at the Royal Military College*.¹⁵ This review was probably one of the motivations for Kierkegaard to write *De Omnibus* in the first place.¹⁶ In it, Martensen gives a somewhat pretentious overview of the history of philosophy which he suggests is little more than a preamble to Hegel's system. He contrasts the philosophy of the Middle Ages, which was based on faith, and that of the modern world, which is based on reason. Like Hegel, he takes Descartes to be the initiator of this modern movement. Thus he writes, "doubt is the beginning of wisdom...Descartes had indeed expressed this thought and advanced the demand for a presuppositionless philosophy, but a long time was needed before the thought could be developed into a concept and before the expressed demand for a presuppositionless philosophy could actually be fulfilled. The demand '*de omnibus dubitandum est*' is easier said than done, for what is required is not finite doubt, not the popular doubt about this or that particular thing, with which one re-

¹² Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, 224 / *Jub.*, vol. 19, 335.

¹³ *Pap. IV B 2.16 / JC*, Supplement, 246.

¹⁴ See Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialectic: A Study of the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007) (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 2). Curtis L. Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One: Why Martensen Mattered to Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2008) (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 4).

¹⁵ Hans Lassen Martensen, "Indledningsforedrag til det i November 1834 begyndte logiske *Cursus paa den kongelige militaire Høiskole*. Af J.L. Heiberg," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 16, 1836, 515-528. (In English as "Review of the *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course at the Royal Military College that Began in November 1834*," in *Heiberg's Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. Jon Stewart (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007) (*Texts from Golden Age Denmark*, vol. 3), 75-86.)

¹⁶ See Leon Jurnow and Kim Ravn, "Tekstredigelse" to *Journalen DD* in *SKS K17*, 361-364.

serves something for oneself which cannot be called into doubt.”¹⁷



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Martensen thus suggests that not until Hegel was Descartes' principle of critical rationality fully developed. Martensen claims that Hegel's philosophy genuinely succeeded at beginning with pure reason and without any prior presuppositions.

Kierkegaard's *De Omnibus* is basically a satire of Martensen and his students. In it he refers to the above passage, writing, "Another time [Johannes Climacus] heard one of the philosophizers, one whose utterances people especially trusted, express himself this way: 'To doubt everything is no easy matter; it is, namely, not doubt about one thing and another, about this or that, about something and something else, but is a speculative doubt about everything, which is by no means an easy matter.'" ¹⁸ In an earlier draft of this passage, Kierkegaard identifies Martensen explicitly as the actual target of his allusion: "Professor Martensen made an exception. He explains that it is no *easy matter*, that one can

understand, if it would only be of some help."¹⁹

Martensen's book review of Heiberg's work was published around the beginning of 1837, and a few months later the phrase appeared again in his dissertation, *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*. This work makes many of the same points about the development of the history of philosophy and the distinction between medieval and modern philosophy and states: "Descartes, who may be seen as the founder of modern philosophy, since he wanted to construct science from the ground up, arrived at the proposition, *de omnibus dubitandum est*."²⁰ Kierkegaard also owned a copy of this work.

¹⁷ Hans Lassen Martensen, "Indledningsforedrag," 518f. "Review of the *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course*," 77ff.

¹⁸ *Pap. IV B 1*, pp. 143-144 / *JC*, 164-165. See *SKS 1*, 286 / *CI*, 247: "there is a qualitative difference between speculative doubt and common doubt about this or about that." See also *SKS 1*, 292 / *CI*, 254; *SKS 1*, 297 / *CI*, 259.

¹⁹ *Pap. IV B 2.7 / JC*, Supplement, 249.

²⁰ Hans Lassen Martensen, *De autonomia conscientiae sui humanae in theologiam dogmaticam nostri temporis introducta* (Copenhagen: I.D. Quist, 1837), § 5, 19 (*ASKB 648*). (*The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology*, in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), § 5, 85. Translation slightly modified.)

This phrase appears again in a lecture course, entitled “Introduction to Speculative Dogmatics,” that Martensen gave at the University of Copenhagen in 1837-38. These lectures were tremendously popular, much to Kierkegaard’s irritation. In his notes, Kierkegaard writes, “Descartes (d. 1650) said: *cogito ergo sum* and *de omnibus dubitandum est*. He thereby produced the principle for modern Protestant subjectivity. By means of the latter proposition – *de omnibus dubitandum est* – he gave his essential watchword, for he thereby denoted a doubt not about this or that but about everything.”²¹ A year later in a different lecture under the title, “Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy from Kant to Hegel,” Martensen again used these Latin slogans. Notes from these lectures in someone else’s hand appear in Kierkegaard’s *Papirer*.²² Thus, Kierkegaard had ample opportunity to observe Martensen use this formulation both orally and in writing.

That Martensen rather than Hegel was his intended target is confirmed by his *Journal NB21* from 1850 where Martensen is named directly. In one entry, for example, he writes, “Martensen was just as dogmatically rigid when he lectured on *de omnibus dubitandum* as when he lectured on a dogma.”²³ Note that Kierkegaard clearly associates the phrase with Martensen, with no reference to Hegel. Thus, although the phrase originated with Hegel’s discussion of Descartes, Kierkegaard uses it to allude to Martensen. His contemporaries were familiar with Martensen’s constant use of it, and Kierkegaard rightly assumed they would associate the phrase with Martensen. By not naming him directly, he could carry on his polemic in a much more clever and discrete fashion. This example illustrates how knowledge of the local Danish literary and philosophical world is a prerequisite for understanding Kierkegaard’s texts. The absence of such knowledge has led to the erroneous conclusion that Kierkegaard associated the formulation “*de omnibus dubitandum est*” with Hegel himself. Only when Kierkegaard’s indirect allusions and references are uncovered is the true target of his polemic revealed, and only in this way can the polemic be correctly understood.

2. Actuality in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*: Adler. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous work *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) has often been understood as including criticisms of Hegel’s thought. For example, the discussion at the beginning of the Introduction has been thought to focus on aspects of Hegel’s conception of logic. The Introduction begins by objecting to the use of the existential category of actuality (*Virkelighed*) in an abstract system of logic. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Vigilius Haufniensis claims that actuality is best understood as being concerned with ethics in the life of the individual. It is thus inappropriate to regard it as an abstract category of metaphysics. In the Introduction Haufniensis states, “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. In the meantime, the loss is obvious, for neither logic nor actuality is served by placing actuality in the *Logic*.”

²¹ SKS 19, 131, Not4:7.

²² *Pap.* II C 25, in *Pap.* XII, 282.

²³ SKS 24, 64, NB21:102 / JP 3, 3107.

Actuality is not served thereby, for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual, cannot be admitted within the realm of logic. Logic is not served thereby, for if logic has thought actuality, it has included something that it cannot assimilate, it has appropriated at the beginning what it should only *praedisponere*. The penalty is obvious. Every deliberation about the nature of actuality is rendered difficult, and for a long time perhaps made impossible, since the word ‘actuality’ must first have time to collect itself, time to forget the mistake.”²⁴

The idea seems to be that actuality belongs to the sphere of freedom and ethics and not to logic, which is governed by necessity. This is generally interpreted as a part of Kierkegaard’s larger polemic against Hegel’s works on logic.

Yet Haufniensis refers to an author who “entitles the last section of the *Logic* ‘Actuality.’” By making actuality his culminating section, the unnamed author ascribes to it a position of prominence in the system of logic. This key position only exacerbates Haufniensis’ criticism that it is not a logical category. The problem with understanding this criticism as aimed against Hegel is that neither of his works on logic, the *Science of Logic* or the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, concludes with a treatment of or a chapter entitled “actuality.” Rather, he treats it in “The Doctrine of Essence,” that is, the second of three parts of the logic,²⁵ where it does not occupy any particular privileged position. There is thus no basis for regarding Hegel as the target of the criticism.

In a related footnote Haufniensis again emphasizes that actuality is the final category in the system he is criticizing. There he writes: “If this is considered more carefully, there will be occasions enough to notice the brilliance of heading the last section of the *Logic* ‘Actuality,’ inasmuch as ethics never reaches it. The actuality with which logic ends means, therefore, no more in regard to actuality than the ‘being’ with which it begins.”²⁶ The fact that actuality occupies the final position is thus central to the criticism.

A study of the contemporary sources reveals that Kierkegaard’s true target was the pastor Adolph Peter Adler (1812 –1869), who later became the subject of Kierkegaard’s *The Book on Adler*. The latter work deals with Adler’s claim to have experienced a divine revelation, but here the object of his criticism is Adler’s book from 1842, *Popular Lectures on Hegel’s Objective Logic*.²⁷ As the title indicates, Adler’s lectures were based on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. Like many commentaries on Hegel’s *Logic*, Adler’s work fails to treat all the material in Hegel’s massive book. Adler manages to work through two thirds of it, thus covering “The Doctrine of Being” and “The Doctrine of Essence.” The final part, “The Doctrine of the Concept,” remains untouched by Adler’s account. Adler thus concludes his commentary with a treatment of the concept of actuality. The word “actuality” figures in the title of not just the last paragraph of the work but the last three

²⁴ SKS 4, 317f. / CA, 9f.

²⁵ Hegel, *SL*, 541-553; *Jub.*, vol. 4, 677-696. *EL*, §§ 142-159; *Jub.*, vol. 8, 319-352.

²⁶ SKS 4, 324n / CA, 16n. See also SKS 7, 118 / CUP1, 122f.

²⁷ Adolph Peter Adler, *Populaire Foredrag over Hegels objective Logik* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1842) (ASKB 383).

paragraphs.²⁸ It is thus Adler rather than Hegel who is the target of Kierkegaard's critique.

There is additional evidence that supports this conclusion. In the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis refers to "the slogan 'method and manifestation,' " used by "Hegel and his school."²⁹ Although mention is made directly of Hegel, the German philosopher never uses this phrase. Instead, the source is Adler's Introduction, where we read: "In this the movement is already given, and since it thus does not come from without but from a difference existing in the identity, it is also self-movement, that is, it is at once matter's and thought's self-movement and objective reflection, at once manifestation and method."³⁰ Thus, there can be no doubt that the criticism is in fact aimed at Adler and not at Hegel.

Once again a familiarity with Kierkegaard's original sources is required to interpret the passages in question. Even at the time Adler's *Popular Lectures on Hegel's Objective Logic*, was all but unknown outside Denmark, and, in any case, it was quickly forgotten with the result that later scholars erroneously overlooked it as the true target of Kierkegaard's criticism. This accident of the history of reception led scholars to ascribe much to Hegel that in fact has nothing to do with him.

3. References to the System in Prefaces: Heiberg. In the first of the eight *Prefaces* (1844), Kierkegaard has his pseudonymous author Nicolaus Notabene take up the question of the philosophical system. Towards the end, he writes, "generations to come will not even need to learn to write, because there will be nothing more to write, but only to read – the system."³¹ Predictably, this statement has been taken to be a direct criticism of Hegel's philosophical system, even though it does not name Hegel. However, *Prefaces* in general is a polemical treatise aimed not against Hegel but against Johan Ludvig Heiberg, who wrote a negative book-review of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*,³² and criticized his *Repetition*.³³

In the passage in question, Kierkegaard has his pseudonymous author write, "Therefore I vow: as soon as possible to realize a plan envisaged for thirty years, to publish a system of logic, and as soon as possible to fulfill my promise, made ten years ago of a system of aesthetics; furthermore, I promise a system of ethics and dogmatics, and finally *the system*."³⁴ This passage satirically refers to the introductory comments that Heiberg made in an article entitled, "The System of Logic," which appeared in 1838 in his Hegelian journal *Perseus*. In it Heiberg writes by way of introduction, "The author

²⁸ I.e., "§ 28 The Whole and the Parts – Force and Expression – Actuality," "§ 29 Formal Actuality – Possibility – Accident," and "§ 30 Real Actuality – Real Possibility – Absolute Necessity."

²⁹ SKS 4, 319 / CA, 11.

³⁰ Adolph Peter Adler, *Populaire Foredrag*, 14. See SKS K4, 355-356.

³¹ SKS 4, 478 / P, 14. Translation slightly modified.

³² Johan Ludvig Heiberg, "Litterær Vintersæd," *Intelligensblade*, vol. 2, no. 24, March 1, 1843, 285-292.

³³ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, "Det astronomiske Aar," *Urania*, 1844, 77-160. In Heiberg's *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 9, 51-130.

³⁴ SKS 4, 478 / P, 14. Translation slightly modified.

allows himself to present herewith the first contribution to the working out of a long nourished plan, namely, to expound the system of logic...Furthermore, he has the goal with the present exposition and its continuation to clear the way for an aesthetics, which he for a long time has wished to write, but which he cannot send out into the world without ahead of time having given it the support in logic upon which it can rest."³⁵

Heiberg's subsequent failure to deliver the rest of the system that he promised exposed him to the ridicule of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author.

There is a similar reference to this statement by Heiberg in a draft of an article that Kierkegaard began writing in response to Heiberg's criticisms of *Repetition* in the journal *Urania*. In this draft, entitled, "A Little Contribution by Constantin Constantius, Author of *Repetition*,"³⁶ Kierkegaard names Heiberg directly. There he writes, "Of late [Heiberg] has turned his gaze to the far-flung yonder, where, staring prophetically ahead like a brooding genius, he beheld the system, the realization of long contemplated plans."³⁷ Kierkegaard's footnote to this passage refers the reader unambiguously to Heiberg's article: "See the Preface to the 23 logical §§ in *Perseus*."³⁸

The system alluded to is thus Heiberg's rather than Hegel's. Moreover, it is not a criticism of any system *per se* but rather of Heiberg's failure to deliver his promised system, a failure of which Hegel was not guilty. This example offers yet another illustration of how a lack of familiarity with Kierkegaard's own sources has led to errors. Scholars simply assumed "the system," pertained to Hegel since they were unaware of Heiberg's promise to deliver one. Fundamental errors of this sort cannot be mitigated by assertions that it does not ultimately matter if the criticism is consciously aimed at Hegel or some local Danish Hegelian since Kierkegaard rejected Hegel and Hegelianism wholesale. To make such assertions is to disregard the fact that many such criticisms only make sense when they are understood as being directed at the Danish Hegelians rather than at Hegel himself. The very point of the criticism has nothing to do with Hegel.

Given that Kierkegaard wished to criticize these relatively unknown figures, that is, Martensen, Adler and Heiberg, why did he do so in such an indirect manner? Indeed, this seems to be a part of what has led many scholars astray. Since there was no explicit reference to Martensen, Adler or Heiberg in the passages in question, there seemed no reason to explore the matter further. It is typical of Kierkegaard's form of polemic that he seldom directly identifies whom he is polemicizing against. Indeed, he intentionally leaves proper names out of the final versions of his published works even though they appear in earlier drafts.³⁹ He prefers to identify his targets by means of allusions that he expected his readers

³⁵ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, "Det logiske System," *Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*, vol. 2, 1838, 3. (Reprinted in Heiberg's *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 2, 115f.)

³⁶ Kierkegaard, "A Little Contribution by Constantin Constantius, Author of *Repetition*," *Pap. IV B* 112-117, 275-300 / *R*, Supplement, 299-319.

³⁷ *Pap. IV B* 116, 278 / *R*, Supplement, 299.

³⁸ *Pap. IV B* 116, 278n / *R*, Supplement, 299n.

³⁹ For example, in a draft of the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard satirizes Heiberg under a criticism of the immanent movement in logic. But in the text his name has been omitted.

to recognize. Our problem as Kierkegaard readers today is that the contemporary horizon of the text in Kierkegaard's time has been largely lost, and it requires a bit of background research to reconstruct it. But such research is indispensable to a correct interpretation of his texts. Without such background information, the task of interpretation is like that of completing a puzzle with several pieces missing.

One problem with the tradition of Kierkegaard studies has been that students and scholars have had it instilled in them from various works in the secondary literature that Kierkegaard was engaged in an anti-Hegel campaign. With this expectation in the back of their minds, it was not difficult for them to find passages in the primary texts that seemed to confirm this view. In this way the original misunderstanding was proliferated and repeated so often as to become a more or less permanent fixture in Kierkegaard studies. Since the works of Martensen, Adler and Heiberg were written in Danish and rarely if ever translated or reprinted, they were gradually forgotten and the possibility of revising the mistaken view of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel became more remote. Hegel himself offered the most convenient candidate for the target of Kierkegaard's critique, and there was no known reason to dig deeper.

Admittedly a polemic against forgotten figures such as Martensen, Adler and Heiberg is less glamorous than one directed against someone as prominent and influential as Hegel. But that is often the way in which ideas develop. Kierkegaard's genius is not diminished because his ideas were formed in dialogue with thinkers who are less well known today.

The examples given here should suffice to emphasize the importance of returning to Kierkegaard's sources in order to understand his thought. He was an insatiable reader, who wrote texts that pulse with references and allusions to any number of authors. His thought developed in the course of his criticisms and treatments of these other works and to understand it, one must be acquainted with the ideas and thoughts that he was reacting to. If we are unable to return *ad fontes* in order to reconstruct what Kierkegaard was reacting to, we are unable to return to Kierkegaard himself.

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Pap. V B 49.5 / CA, Supplement, 180. See *SKS K4*, 364. Similarly, in a draft of *Prefaces* the Hegelians Heiberg, Rasmus Nielsen and Peter Michael Stilling are named explicitly, but in the published version their names are replaced by Mr. A.A., Mr. B.B. and Mr. C.C. respectively. *Pap. V B 96 / P*, Supplement, 119. See *SKS K4*, 606-608.