

Kierkegaard and His
Danish Contemporaries
Tome I: Philosophy, Politics
and Social Theory

Edited by
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Rasmus Nielsen:

From the Object of “Prodigious Concern” to a “Windbag”

Jon Stewart

The name Rasmus Nielsen (1809–84) is not well known to Kierkegaard scholars, even though he was an important figure in his own right; indeed, Nielsen was one of Denmark’s greatest philosophers during a period that witnessed a blooming of Danish philosophy. Moreover, Nielsen played a role in most every phase of Kierkegaard’s life. Kierkegaard owned several of Nielsen’s works, and his journals are full of references to him. There also survives a fairly extensive correspondence of letters that passed between them.

In what follows, I wish to explore the significance of Nielsen for the development of Kierkegaard’s thought. It is conventional to divide this relationship into three discernible phases. First, in his early years Kierkegaard was suspicious and perhaps even a bit envious of Nielsen. Second, in time, however, when Nielsen expressed an interest in Kierkegaard’s writings, the two became friends. Third and finally, when Nielsen attempted to defend Kierkegaard’s works in a way that displeased the latter, an irreparable break took place. In what follows I will trace each of these stages in turn; I wish to modify the general conception that the third stage ended in a clean break since there is clear evidence that they continued their relation for some time after thus. I will, however, begin by giving a brief overview of Nielsen’s biography and writings. I wish to argue that despite the extensive degree to which Kierkegaard was exercised by Nielsen, there is very little that one can say about Nielsen as a source for Kierkegaard’s thought. Most of Kierkegaard’s reflections on Nielsen are of a rather personal nature, and although it is clear that he read Nielsen’s works, only very rarely does he engage with them in a scholarly manner. In general, Kierkegaard seems to have maintained a rather dismissive stance with regard to Nielsen, and this prevented him from making use of Nielsen’s writings in a more productive manner. By contrast, Nielsen actively made use of Kierkegaard’s works both during the period of their friendship and even long after the latter’s death.

I. Nielsen's Life and Work

Rasmus Nielsen was born on July 4, 1809 on the island of Funen in a small town called Rorslev.¹ Although he came from a family of uneducated farmers, his intellectual gifts were recognized early, and he was placed in the foster care of the pastor Erik Friisenberg Thorup, who gave him his earliest education. From 1829 he attended Viborg Cathedral School, where he received his first formal education. In a short period of time he caught up with the material that he had missed the previous years.

Nielsen completed his schooling and was admitted to the University of Copenhagen in 1832. He first studied philology, attending the lectures of Johan Nicolai Madvig (1804–86). Then he turned to both philosophy and theology; in the former field he was particularly inspired by the lectures of Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872) and in the latter by those of Henrik Nicolai Clausen (1793–1877). He received his initial degree in theology in 1837. Three years later, in 1840, he defended his licentiate thesis with a work written in Latin under the title, *The Use of the Speculative Method in Sacred History*, a work that Kierkegaard owned.² This degree qualified Nielsen to give lectures at the university, which he did immediately thereafter in winter semester 1840–41, as *Privatdocent* in theology. He also received special permission to give lectures in the field of philosophy. In April 1841 he was finally awarded a permanent position, being named *professor extraordinarius* in Moral Philosophy, which was the position held by Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838) until his death.

During the initial period of his professorship, Nielsen was influenced by the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), which had been introduced into Denmark in the mid-1820s by the poet and critic Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860). More importantly, by this time Hegel's philosophy had become a popular trend among the students at the University of Copenhagen due to the lectures of Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–84).³ Nielsen is reported to have asked the professors of philosophy

¹ See V. Klein and P.A. Rosenberg, *Mindeskription over Rasmus Nielsen*, Copenhagen: Schønberg 1909; Eduard Asmussen, *Entwicklungsgang und Grundprobleme der Philosophie Rasmus Niensens*, Flensburg: Laban & Larsen 1911; P.A. Rosenberg, *Rasmus Nielsen. Nordens Filosof. En almenfattelig Fremstilling*, Copenhagen: Karl Schønberg 1903; V. Klein, *Oversigt over Rasmus Niensens Skrifter*, Copenhagen: Nationale Forfatteres Forlag 1912; Frederik Algreen-Ussing, *Rasmus Nielsen, Professor i Philosophien. Et biographisk Forsøg*, Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri 1864; Harald Høffding, "Rasmus Nielsen," in his *Danske Filosofer*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1909, pp. 184–95; Vilhelm Birkedal, "Rasmus Nielsen," in his *Personlige Oplevelser i et langt Liv*, vols. 1–3, Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag 1890–91, vol. 2, pp. 239–53; Carl Henrik Koch, "Rasmus Nielsen," in his *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 379–434; K. Kroman, "Rasmus Nielsen," in *K. Kroman. Træk af en dansk filosofis liv og tankeverden*, ed. by Valdemar Hansen, Copenhagen: Skandinavisk Bogforlag 1955, pp. 159–65.

² Rasmus Nielsen, *De speculativa historiae sacrae tractando metodo*, Copenhagen: Fabritius de Tegnagel 1840 (ASKB 697). (In Danish as *Om den spekulative Methodes Anvendelse paa den hellige Historie*, trans. by B.C. Bøggild, Copenhagen: H.C. Klein 1842.)

³ See Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, *The Martensen Period: 1837–1842*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 3), pp. 1–11.

at the university, Sibbern and Møller, for help with Hegel's philosophy, knowing that both of them were quite familiar with it.⁴ In his memoirs Martensen recalls that when in July of 1837, he had the oral defense of his dissertation, *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*,⁵ he met Nielsen for the first time, when the latter, along with Heiberg, raised questions from the audience.⁶ At the beginning of the 1840s Nielsen and Martensen were perceived as the two most important junior faculty members, who helped to promote Hegel's thought in the fields of philosophy and theology.

Nielsen was a profoundly productive author. In the same year as his appointment, he published a Bible commentary, entitled *Paul's Letter to the Romans*.⁷ Also in 1841 he began the first installment of his *Speculative Logic in its Essentials*.⁸ This work was the first unambiguous sign of Nielsen's Hegelian alignment since it represents a speculative logic following the model of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.⁹ Nielsen's logic appeared in a series of installments until 1844. He continued his work on Hegelian logic in the following year with an extensive book entitled the *Propaedeutic Logic*.¹⁰ This text covered the material not yet treated in his previous one. Kierkegaard owned a copy of this latter work and clearly read the former as well; indeed, he refers to the *Propaedeutic Logic* in a positive manner in his journals.¹¹ Both of Nielsen's books on logic were apparently outgrowths of lectures that he gave in the context of his usual teaching at the University of Copenhagen. In 1843 he published a work on church history,¹² and in 1849 a series of lectures on the life of Jesus.¹³

⁴ See P.A. Rosenberg, *Rasmus Nielsen. Nordens Filosof. En almenfattelig Fremstilling*, p. 28.

⁵ Hans Lassen Martensen, *De autonomia conscientiae sui humanae in theologiam dogmaticam nostri temporis introducta*, Copenhagen: I.D. Quist 1837 (ASKB 651).

⁶ See Hans Lassen Martensen, *Af mit Levnet*, vols. 1–3, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1882–83, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁷ Rasmus Nielsen, *Pauli Brev til Romerne*, Copenhagen: [Forfatterens Forlag] 1841.

⁸ Rasmus Nielsen, *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*, Copenhagen: n.p. 1841–44; no. 1, 1841, pp. 1–64; no. 2, 1842, pp. 65–96; no. 3, 1843, pp. 97–144; no. 4, 1844, pp. 145–96.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Band. Die objective Logik*, Nürnberg: Johann Leonard Schrag 1812; *Wissenschaft der Logik. Erster Band. Die objective Logik. Zweytes Buch. Die Lehre vom Wesen*, Nürnberg: Johann Leonard Schrag 1813; *Wissenschaft der Logik. Zweiter Band. Die subjective Logik oder Lehre vom Begriff*, Nürnberg: Johann Leonard Schrag 1816.

¹⁰ Rasmus Nielsen, *Den propædeutiske Logik*, Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen 1845 (ASKB 699).

¹¹ *Pap. VIC 1/JP 5, 5798*: "The distinction between το εἶναι—and το οὐν. The confusion in Hegelian philosophy; a fitting observation on this by R. Nielsen in his *Propaedeutic Logic*."

¹² Rasmus Nielsen, *Forelæsningsparagrafer til Kirkehistoriens Philosophie. Et Schema for Tilhørere*, Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen 1843 (ASKB 698).

¹³ Rasmus Nielsen, *Evangelietroen og den moderne Bevidsthed. Forelæsninger over Jesu Liv*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1849 (ASKB 700). See also his *Evangelietroen og Theologien. Tolv Forelæsninger holdt ved Universitetet i Kjøbenhavn i Vinteren 1849–50*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1850 (ASKB 702).

In the same year a controversy broke out when Martensen published his *Christian Dogmatics*.¹⁴ This work was followed by a series of critical reviews.¹⁵ In this context Nielsen, who had been sympathetic to Kierkegaard's views, wrote what purported to be a joint review of Martensen's new work and Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, although only the former was really under critical consideration.¹⁶ This review was one of the works that was the cause for Kierkegaard's dissatisfaction with Nielsen for reasons that we will explore below. Also in the context of this debate Nielsen published a short pamphlet, *A Few Words on Occasion of Prof. Scharling's Defense of Dr. Martensen's Dogmatics and Dr. H. Martensen's Dogmatic Elucidations Illuminated*.¹⁷

In 1850 Nielsen was named *professor ordinarius*, and his productivity continued unbroken. In 1853 he published *On Fate and Providence*,¹⁸ a work that Meir Goldschmidt (1819–87) compared with Kierkegaard's articles on the attack on the Church.¹⁹ In the same year appeared Nielsen's only work of fiction, *A Life in the Underworld*, signed by the pseudonym Walther Paying.²⁰ In 1854 he published a work entitled *On Personal Truth and True Personality*, based on lectures that he gave at the University of Copenhagen.²¹ At this time Nielsen reviewed Kierkegaard's *For Self-Examination in Fædrelandet*.²² Here in the midst of Kierkegaard's attack on the Danish church, Nielsen under the cover of a book review indirectly defends his former friend and attempts to explain his motivations. However, he does not himself say much in this context since the review article consists primarily of quotations from Kierkegaard's text. Also in this context Nielsen published an article in 1855

¹⁴ Hans Lassen Martensen, *Den christelige Dogmatik*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1849 (ASKB 653).

¹⁵ For an overview, see Niels Thulstrup, "Martensen's *Dogmatics* and its Reception," in *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 10), pp. 181–202.

¹⁶ Rasmus Nielsen, *Mag. S. Kierkegaards "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensens "Christelige Dogmatik."* *En undersøgende Anmeldelse*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1849 (ASKB 701).

¹⁷ Rasmus Nielsen, *Et Par Ord i Anledning af Prof. Scharlings Apologie for Dr. Martensens Dogmatik*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1850; *Dr. H. Martensens dogmatiske Oplysninger belyste*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1850 (ASKB 703).

¹⁸ Rasmus Nielsen, *Om Skjæbne og Forsyn*, Copenhagen: Otto Schwartz 1853 (ASKB 704).

¹⁹ Meir Goldschmidt, "Dagbog," entry from April 15, 1855, *Nord og Syd. Ny Række*, vol. 8, p. 42. (English translation in *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen By His Contemporaries*, trans. and ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996, p. 108.)

²⁰ [Walther Paying], *Et Levnetsløb i Underverdenen*, Copenhagen: Otto Schwartz 1853 (ASKB 716).

²¹ Rasmus Nielsen, *Om personlig Sandhed og sand Personlighed. Tolv Forelæsninger for dannede Tilhørere af begge Kjøen ved Universitetet i Vinteren 1854*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1854 (ASKB 705).

²² Rasmus Nielsen, "Til Selvprøvelse, Samtiden anbefalet af S. Kierkegaard; en uproductiv Anmeldelse," *Fædrelandet*, vol. 15, no. 303, December 29, 1854, p. 1215.

entitled "A Good Deed," in which he defends Kierkegaard.²³ This was followed by a work on the French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715).²⁴

Nielsen is reported to have attended Kierkegaard's funeral on November 18, 1855, and to have been witness to the scandalous scene caused there by Kierkegaard's nephew Henrik Lund (1825–89).²⁵ After Kierkegaard's death in 1855, Nielsen continued to publish works on his person and thought. In 1857 Nielsen provided the service of editing the various articles that Kierkegaard had published in the different newspapers during his lifetime and printing them in a single volume.²⁶ In 1858 Nielsen published an article "On Kierkegaard's Mental Condition,"²⁷ in which he tries to show that there is a consistency in Kierkegaard's position that can be traced in his writings and that the criticism of the church was no mere *ad hominem* attack on Mynster. In 1860 he published a short collection entitled *On Kierkegaardian "Stages," A Picture of Life*, which featured extracts from Kierkegaard's texts.²⁸

Nielsen had a long career at the university and continued to publish without pause virtually until the end, penning works on a number of different fields of philosophy.²⁹ As before, many of his publications during this late period were based on lectures that he had given in different contexts. Between the years 1869 and 1873 he was coeditor of *For Ide og Virkelighed*, an important philosophical journal of the

²³ Rasmus Nielsen, "En god Gjerning," *Fædrelandet*, no. 8, January 10, 1855, pp. 29–30.

²⁴ Rasmus Nielsen, *Om Theologiens Naturbegreb med særligt Hensyn til Malbranche: De la recherche de la vérité*, Copenhagen: Trykt i det Schultziske Officin 1855.

²⁵ See *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, p. 135; p. 191; p. 192.

²⁶ Rasmus Nielsen, *S. Kierkegaard's Bladartikler, med Bilag samlede efter Forfatterens Død, udgivne som Supplement til hans øvrige Skrifter*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1857.

²⁷ Rasmus Nielsen, "Om S. Kierkegaards 'mentale Tilstand,'" *Nordisk Universitet-Tidskrift*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1858, pp. 1–29.

²⁸ Rasmus Nielsen, *Paa Kierkegaardske "Stadier", et Livsbillede*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1860.

²⁹ See for example, Rasmus Nielsen, *Philosophie og Matematik. En propædeutisk Afhandling*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1857; *Philosophisk Propædeutik i Grundtræk*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1857; *Mathematik og Dialektik. En filosofisk Afhandling*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1859; *Forelæsninger over "Philosophisk Propædeutik" fra Universitetsaaret 1860–61*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1862; *Forelæsninger over "Philosophisk Propædeutik" fra Universitetsaaret 1861–62*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1863; *Grundideernes Logik*, vols. 1–2, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1864–66; *Propædeutik og Psychologie. Cursus for Universitetsaaret 1866–67*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1866; *Propædeutik og Logik. Cursus for Universitetsaaret 1868–69*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1868; *Om Hindringer og Betingelser for det aandelig Liv i Nutiden. Sexten Forelæsninger holdte ved Universitet i Christiania September–Oktober 1867*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1868; *Religionsphilosophie*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1869; *Logik og Psychologie. Cursus for Universitetsaaret 1871–72*, Copenhagen: J.H. Schubothes Boghandel 1871; *Natur og Aand. Bidrag til en med Physiken stemmende Naturphilosophie*, Copenhagen: J.H. Schubothes Boghandel 1873; *Om Liv og Haab. Sex Forelæsninger*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1875; *Almindelig Videnskabslære i Grundtræk*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1880.

day.³⁰ He ultimately retired in 1883 and died in Copenhagen on September 30 the following year.

II. Kierkegaard and Nielsen until 1848: The Initial Period of Alienation

Kierkegaard's references to Nielsen in the period corresponding to the first part of the authorship are fairly sparse. In a marginal note in his *Journal EE* from the year 1839, Kierkegaard makes a satirical reference to Nielsen. On August 29, 1839 Nielsen published an advertisement in *Kjøbenhavnsposten* in which he announced that he was going to be publishing a book with the title *Basic Elements of Christian Morality*.³¹ With this advertisement he invites interested parties to subscribe to buy a copy of the work when it appears. Apparently in reaction to this, Kierkegaard writes somewhat enigmatically in his journal: "Rasmus Nielsen's sure and trusty Morality found in Mads Madsen's Chest or The World Seen from a Cellar Steps."³² Nielsen's book never appeared.

Kierkegaard presumably knew Nielsen from the period when they were both students at the University of Copenhagen. As was noted above, Nielsen received his degree in 1840, with Kierkegaard receiving his master's degree for *The Concept of Irony* the following year. At some point after Nielsen received his appointment in April 1841, Sibbern spoke with Kierkegaard in order to encourage him to apply for a vacant post at the University of Copenhagen. The conversation, recorded by Hans Brøchner (1820–75), is said to have run as follows:

Once he [Kierkegaard] told me that Sibbern had suggested he apply for a position as a lecturer in philosophy. Kierkegaard had replied that in that case he would have to insist on a couple of years in which to prepare himself. "Oh! How can you imagine that they would hire you under such conditions?" asked Sibbern. "Yes, of course, I could do like Rasmus Nielsen and let them hire me unprepared." Sibbern became cross and said: "You always have to pick on Nielsen!"³³

This comment clearly evidences the young Kierkegaard's lack of respect for Nielsen at this time. He straightforwardly implies that Nielsen is not qualified for his new position. The academic world then as now was small, and Nielsen learned of Kierkegaard's remark. When Sibbern was looking among his colleagues for committee members for Kierkegaard's dissertation, he asked Nielsen, who declined the offer, although he would have been a natural choice.³⁴

³⁰ *For Ide og Virkelighed: et Tidsskrift*, vols. 1–8, ed. by Rasmus Nielsen, Bjørnsterne Bjørnson and Rudolf Schmidt, Copenhagen: Christian Steen 1869–73.

³¹ *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, no. 229, August 21, 1839, p. 920.

³² SKS 18, 58, EE:167.a / *KJN* 2, 53.

³³ Hans Brøchner, "Erindringer om Søren Kierkegaard," in *Det Nittende Aarhundrede, Maanedsskrift for Literatur og Kritik*, March, 1876–77, § 21. (English translation cited from *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, p. 235.)

³⁴ See Carl Weltzer, "Omkring Søren Kierkegaards Disputats," in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger, Sjette Række*, ed. by J. Oskar Andersen and Bjørn Kørnerup, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 1948–50, p. 286.

Despite this personal animosity, there are elements in Nielsen's early works that must have appealed to Kierkegaard. Although Nielsen was interested in Hegel's philosophy and particularly the dialectical method, he was in fact critical of some of Hegel's Danish followers, as was Kierkegaard. In *The Use of the Speculative Method in Sacred History*, he explicitly criticizes Heiberg and Martensen.³⁵ He argues against the application of speculative philosophy or, as he writes, "panlogism" to dogmatics. He argues that the Concept cannot take the place of the Christian God. Since speculative philosophy regards the Concept as the highest and thus in effect holds it in veneration, it "has a false god."³⁶ Nielsen argues that the truth of the situation is the other way around. The Concept does not ground God, but God grounds the Concept: "it is a positive power of God which grounds the whole of real existence and thus puts the ontological forms immanently in all things."³⁷ Already here one can hear echoes of Kierkegaard's well-known criticisms.

Nielsen argues that speculative philosophy is unsuccessful in bringing about the reconciliation that it desires. Speculation offers only an apparent reconciliation since the terms of its opposition are not genuine, but rather are merely terms of thought. By contrast, Christian dogmatics posits a genuine and real contrast between God and the world, which Nielsen refers to the "absolute opposition."³⁸ Here again we can discern the faint outlines of Kierkegaard's doctrine of absolute difference in *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript*.³⁹ Moreover, Nielsen is, like Kierkegaard, aware of the dangers of reducing or eliminating the individual in a speculative system of thought. He claims that the natural result of panlogism is that it "must sacrifice individual self-consciousness."⁴⁰ Here he refers explicitly to the controversial matter of the absence of a doctrine of immortality in Hegel's philosophy. Christian dogmatics, he argues, provides just such a doctrine and thus preserves the integrity of the individual.

Although Kierkegaard might have had reason to be sympathetic to parts of this work, he was presumably alienated by claims made about it two years later when it was translated from Latin into Danish.⁴¹ The translation was the work of one Balthasar Christopher Bøggild (1816–92), who was quite zealous in his statements about Nielsen's book and the impact it had had on intellectual life in Denmark. He claims that Nielsen has "labored for the speculative development of theology" and has been "the organ for an almost wholly new consciousness in our fatherland."⁴²

³⁵ Nielsen, *De speculativa historiae sacrae tractando metodo*, p. 138, note.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³⁹ See *SKS* 4, 249 / *PF*, 44–5. See also *SKS* 7, 374–5 / *CUPI*, 412: "But between God and a human being (let speculative thought just keep humankind to perform tricks with) there is an absolute difference; therefore a person's absolute relationship with God must specifically express the absolute difference, and the direct likeness becomes impudence, conceited pretense, presumption, and the like."

⁴⁰ Nielsen, *De speculativa historiae sacrae tractando metodo*, p. 139.

⁴¹ Rasmus Nielsen, *Om den spekulative Methodes Anvendelse paa den hellige Historie*, trans. by B.C. Bøggild. Copenhagen: H.C. Klein 1842.

⁴² Nielsen, *Om den spekulative Methodes Anvendelse paa den hellige Historie*, [p. i] (the preface consists of two unnumbered pages).

This tone sounds suspiciously like the kind of ambitious statements that were being made about Martensen's work five years earlier,⁴³ and the parallel does not go unnoticed here. Bøggild states explicitly that Nielsen is in effect working alongside Martensen and continuing the latter's project from *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology*. Both are portrayed as criticizing various forms of rationalism: while Martensen criticizes Kant and Schleiermacher, Nielsen criticizes D.F. Strauss as well as right Hegelianism.

One of Nielsen's works that clearly caught Kierkegaard's eye was his *Speculative Logic in its Essentials*, which appeared in a series of four installments, beginning in 1841.⁴⁴ This work was based on lectures that Nielsen gave, and he seems to have added new installments as he worked through the material in the course. Due to the fact that the text was printed in arks, that is, 16 pages at a time, the individual installments were not cleanly divided into discrete chapters or sections but rather simply ended when the ark ended; as a result each installment stopped, as it were, *in medias res*, right in the middle of a sentence that would only be continued with the next installment.

As before Nielsen offered a subscription scheme for interested readers. At the beginning of the very first installment he writes, in a kind of preface:

This outline is to be regarded as a fragment of a philosophical methodology, the first part of which will contain the logic with a preliminary introduction. The necessity of having a printed guide for the oral lecture has hastened the publication. The remaining installments will follow eventually as the lecture announced in the catalogue of courses approaches.

Copenhagen, the 10th of November 1841.

R. Nielsen.⁴⁵

This work was never completed, and the fourth installment ends right in the middle of an unfinished sentence. Kierkegaard seizes upon this and satirizes it in a couple of different places. The absurdity, he believes, lies in the contradiction between Nielsen's pretension of creating a complete system of logic along the lines of Hegel but yet leaving the system incomplete by failing to follow up on all the promised installments of the work.⁴⁶

In his article "Public Confession" from *Fædrelandet* on June 12, 1842, Kierkegaard refers satirically to Nielsen's text.⁴⁷ Alluding specifically to the passage quoted above, he writes:

⁴³ See Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, *The Martensen Period: 1837–1842*, pp. 1–11.

⁴⁴ Nielsen, *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*; see Koch, "Rasmus Nielsen," in his *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, pp. 379–434.

⁴⁵ Nielsen *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*, overleaf to the first volume, 1841.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard returns to this again and again, criticizing Nielsen for promising a philosophical system that he never delivers on. *SKS* 7, 118 / *CUP1*, 122. *SKS* 7, 103 / *CUP1*, 106. *SKS* 7, 104 / *CUP1*, 107. *SKS* 7, 198 / *CUP1*, 216. *SVI* XIII, 399f. / *COR*, 5–6. *Pap.* III B 192 / *JP* 3, 3288. *Pap.* VII–1 B 88, p. 294 / *CUP2*, Supplement, p. 134. *SKS* 20, 417, NB5:115. *Pap.* X–6 B 88, p. 94. *Pap.* X–6 B 89, p. 98.

⁴⁷ *SVI* XIII, 397–406 / *COR*, 3–12.

Prof. R. Nielsen already has published twenty-one logical §§ that constitute the first part of a logic that in turn constitutes the first part of an all-encompassing encyclopaedia, as intimated on the jacket, although its size is not more explicitly given, presumably not to intimidate....It has often been encouraging to me to think that Professor R. Nielsen is writing such a book. He has already written twenty-one §§ and several years ago he published a subscription prospectus for a systematic ethics that will amount to at least twenty-four printed sheets when it is finished.⁴⁸

This same criticism is taken up again a few years later in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in 1846.⁴⁹ In one passage, for example, Kierkegaard has Johannes Climacus write: "When someone goes on continually writing or dictating sections of a work, with promises that everything will become clear at the end, it becomes more and more difficult to discover where the beginning of the confusion lies and to acquire a firm point of departure."⁵⁰ Kierkegaard constantly harps on the promises to complete the system at some indeterminate point in the future: "When I for the last time very innocently said to one of the initiates, 'Now tell me honestly, is it [sc. the system] indeed completely finished, because if that is the case, I will prostrate myself, even if I should ruin a pair of trousers' ...I would invariably receive the answer, 'No, it is not entirely finished yet.'"⁵¹ In the printed text itself Kierkegaard conceals the specific target of this satire, but in earlier drafts Nielsen's name does in fact appear.⁵²

Nielsen's work somewhat enigmatically begins on page 1 with § 11 and has no introduction as such. The reason for this is unclear, but it might be that since the entire work was being printed incrementally in installments, Nielsen simply intended to go back and add §§ 1–10 at some later point. Indeed, in the passage quoted above, where Nielsen mentions his subscription scheme, he refers to "a preliminary introduction" which was to be added to the text later.⁵³ In "Public Confession" Kierkegaard also makes sport of this unfortunate element of Nielsen's text. He refers to the fact that Nielsen has written the first 21 paragraphs of a system, but then in a footnote, he qualifies this claim as follows: "Well, not actually twenty-one paragraphs in all, since the first ten are missing, but in recompense he has dramatically hurled us headlong into the system."⁵⁴

Despite these satirical remarks, there were elements in Nielsen's text that would have appealed to Kierkegaard. For example, Nielsen anticipates Kierkegaard's juxtaposition of Hegelian mediation with the problem of motion in the Eleatics.⁵⁵ Nielsen also speaks of a qualitative leap in connection with his account of Hegel's

⁴⁸ *SVI XIII*, 399–400 / *COR*, 5–6.

⁴⁹ *SKS 7*, 114 / *CUP1*, 117. *SKS 7*, 304 / *CUP1*, 333.

⁵⁰ *SKS 7*, 299 / *CUP1*, 327.

⁵¹ *SKS 7*, 104 / *CUP1*, 107. *SKS 7*, 103 / *CUP1*, 106. Cf. "Similarly, a professor publishes the outline of a system, assuming that the work, by being reviewed and debated, will come out sooner or later in a new and totally revised form" (*SKS 7*, 198 / *CUP1*, 216). See also *SKS 4*, 305–6 / *PF*, 109–10.

⁵² *Pap. VI B 40:7* / *CUP2*, Supplement, pp. 42–3.

⁵³ Nielsen, *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*, no. 1, overleaf.

⁵⁴ *SVI XIII*, 400, note / *COR*, 5, note.

⁵⁵ Nielsen, *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*, no. 1, § 14, pp. 28ff.

analysis of this idea.⁵⁶ It is quite possible that the inspiration for some of Kierkegaard's criticisms of speculative logic is to be found in this text.

Given these scattered remarks, it seems clear that up to the publication of the *Postscript* in 1846 Kierkegaard did not take Nielsen seriously as a thinker. Nielsen is ridiculed along the same lines as the other Danish Hegelians, Heiberg and Martensen. This raises the question of why Kierkegaard later was amenable to entering into such a close relation to Nielsen and even staking his hopes on Nielsen helping him to advance the campaign that the Kierkegaardian authorship represented. The reason for this, I believe, is that, despite his satirical comments, Kierkegaard in fact found things in Nielsen's work (as he did in Heiberg's and Martensen's) that he was receptive to and could even make use of. One often sees that open animosity in fact hides a deeper sympathy. In any case, it is probably safe to assume that Kierkegaard's disposition towards Nielsen was somewhat mixed up until this point.

III. *The Initial Period of Friendship: July 1848–May 1849*

Despite Kierkegaard's veiled and open attacks on him, Nielsen nonetheless became interested in his thought. He seems particularly to have read the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* with great interest. Kierkegaard's ideas about Christianity and the nature of faith vis-à-vis knowing made a deep impression, which enjoined Nielsen to pause and rethink his own views in a fundamental manner. With this new inspiration, he approached Kierkegaard, and the two developed a relationship that might even be designated as "friendship" during this time.⁵⁷ They took regular walks together, which gave them the opportunity to discuss key philosophical and theological issues of mutual interest. This rapprochement seems to have taken place at some point prior to July 1848, which is the time from which the first letters date that testify to the fact of their friendship. It is clear right from the start that Kierkegaard regarded his relation with Nielsen as a very special one. He was constantly evaluating it in the privacy of his own mind as is evidenced in his journals. There can be no doubt that Nielsen was a highly significant figure in his life during these few years.

Kierkegaard was positively disposed towards Nielsen once the latter had expressed his agreement with his views. Brøchner describes the relationship at this time as follows: "At a later point, when Nielsen had allied himself with Kierkegaard, he [Kierkegaard] spoke of him with more interest and acknowledged his talents. Once he said: 'Nielsen is the only one of our younger authors of this general tendency who may amount to something.'"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., no. 1, § 18, p. 62.

⁵⁷ For an account of this period of the relation between Kierkegaard and Nielsen, see Koch, "Rasmus Nielsen," in his *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, pp. 392–5; Asmussen, *Entwicklungsgang und Grundprobleme der Philosophie Rasmus Nielsens*, pp. 16–28.

⁵⁸ Brøchner, "Erindringer om Søren Kierkegaard", § 21. English translation cited from *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, p. 235.

While he was spending the summer away from Copenhagen in Taarbæk in north Zealand, Nielsen wrote a letter to Kierkegaard on July 21, 1848.⁵⁹ This letter evinces a degree of familiarity; Nielsen recounts how he was enjoying the fresh air of the country and renewing his energies by reading Hebrew. In response to this, Kierkegaard apparently wrote a letter in order to invite Nielsen for a visit upon his return to Copenhagen. This letter is not extant; however, Nielsen's response to it, from August 1848, is.⁶⁰ Here Nielsen comments in a jocular way on Kierkegaard's address: on the corner of Tornebuskegade, that is, Thornbush Street, and Rosengård that is, Rose Court, where Kierkegaard had lived since April of that year.⁶¹ In this letter Nielsen refers to his "frequent writing,"⁶² which seems to imply that there were other letters from this correspondence that are no longer extant. In any case there is a draft of a letter to Nielsen from August of 1848, in which Kierkegaard confirms his invitation from his earlier letter: "Do let me know as soon as you come to Copenhagen so that I may send for you. I place emphasis on this invitation."⁶³ The tone of this letter is quite friendly. Moreover, Kierkegaard even goes so far as to paste Nielsen's humble and thankful response to the invitation into his *Journal NB6*: "Let me thank you, oh, let me thank you for wanting to call for me. I will come soon—in silence; for I notice that with you one must be very quiet in order to hear correctly what you are saying. Your R. Nielsen."⁶⁴ Although this entry is not dated, this was presumably in August of 1848.⁶⁵

During this period Kierkegaard believed that he saw his health starting to fail, and he feared that he would soon die. At the time he had just published his article about the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg (1812–90), "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress."⁶⁶ In this context he writes in his *Journal NB6* presumably from August 1848:⁶⁷

The thought that I would soon die, the thought in which I have rested, has now been disturbed by the publication of that little article; it would disturb me if this were to be the last thing I publish. But, on the other hand, the thought of dying now was only a

⁵⁹ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 195 / *LD*, Letter 179, pp. 245–6; see also *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 193–4 / *LD*, Letter 177, p. 244.

⁶⁰ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 198–9 / *LD*, Letter 182, pp. 249–50.

⁶¹ *LD*, Notes, p. 478.

⁶² *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 199 / *LD*, Letter 182, p. 250.

⁶³ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 200 / *LD*, Letter 183, p. 252.

⁶⁴ *SKS* 21, 11, *NB6:2*. See *SKS* K21, 53.

⁶⁵ *SKS* K21, 15.

⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, "Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv, af Inter et Inter. En Artikel i Anledning af 'Romeo og Julies' Gjenoptagelse paa Repertoiret ved Nytaarstid 1847," *Fædrelandet*, vol. 9, no. 188, July 24, 1848, columns 1485–90; no. 189, July 25, 1848, columns 1493–1500; no. 190, July 26, 1848, columns 1501–6; no. 191, July 27, 1848, columns 1509–16.

⁶⁷ Kierkegaard used the *Journal NB6* from July 16 to August 21, 1848. (See Niels W. Bruun et al., "Tekstredøgørelse" to *Journal NB6* in *SKS* K21, p. 10.) His invitation to Nielsen was also presumably in August.

depressive notion—how good then that I published that little article. This very thing had to be probed—and the publication of the article served to do this.⁶⁸

Then in the margin to this he adds somewhat enigmatically, “But in my case there is R. Nielsen as one who can provide explanation.”⁶⁹ The idea seems to be that if Kierkegaard were to die and “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress” proved to be his last published work, Rasmus Nielsen would be there to explain its role with respect to the authorship as a whole.

A few entries later Kierkegaard writes at length in a retrospective manner about his authorship, referring to the importance of governance in his development. He fears that his poor health will not allow him to finish and publish the books that he is currently working on:

My energies, that is, my physical energies, are declining; the state of my health varies terribly. I hardly see my way even to publishing the essentially decisive works I have ready (“A Cycle of Essays,” “The Sickness unto Death,” “Come All You Who Labor and Are Heavy Laden,” “Blessed Is He Who Is Not Offended”).⁷⁰

Given his concern for his health and his new friendship with Nielsen, Kierkegaard wished to designate the latter as the posthumous editor of his *Nachlass*.⁷¹ He refers positively to Nielsen as someone who might be entrusted with the task of the publication of these works: “I live in the faith that God will place the accent of governance on the life of an extremely unhappy, humanly understood, man who nevertheless by the help of God has felt indescribably blessed—but my wish is that now R. Nielsen might be relied on.”⁷² While this statement is admittedly somewhat cryptic, this is a key entry. Kierkegaard brings Nielsen into relation with the concept of governance. As we know from *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard believed that divine governance was steering his life and his authorship. Thus, his authorship was conceived as a form of service for God. With his health failing, Kierkegaard was concerned with what would happen to his authorship if he should die. Thus now Nielsen enters the picture. Nielsen can now be relied upon to take care for the proper understanding of the authorship after Kierkegaard’s death. This also seems to mean that Nielsen is to be given the responsibility for the publication of Kierkegaard’s posthumous works.

In the next entry Kierkegaard states even more directly what he means by this: “Now add the thought of death to the publication of that little article! If I were to die without that: indeed, anyone could publish my posthumous papers, and in any case

⁶⁸ SKS 21, 50, NB6:67 / JP 6, 6232.

⁶⁹ SKS 21, 50, NB6:67.a / JP 6, 6233.

⁷⁰ SKS 21, 56, NB6:74 / JP 6, 6238.

⁷¹ See Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup, *Written Images. Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals, Notebooks, Booklets, Sheets, Scraps and Slips of Paper*, trans. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2003, pp. 30–42; pp. 64–5; p. 69. This is clear from a note found later where Kierkegaard designates Nielsen as the one responsible for the publication of this material. See the picture of this note in *Written Images*, pp. 22–3.

⁷² SKS 21, 57, NB6:74 / JP 6, 6238.

R. Nielsen would be there."⁷³ Most clearly, he writes, "It is my wish that after my death *Prof. Nielsen* do whatever is necessary with respect to the publication of the entirety of my literary remains, manuscripts, journals, etc., which are to be turned over to him."⁷⁴ This statement seemed to have the tone of a kind of last will and testament, and for this reason it caused great vexation when it was discovered by Hans Peter Barfod (1834–92), the first editor of Kierkegaard's posthumous works.⁷⁵

In a long journal entry Kierkegaard discusses in detail his relation to Nielsen. He clearly shows some reservations about Nielsen's understanding of his works. Kierkegaard originally intended to finish the aesthetic authorship with the *Postscript* and *A Literary Review*, and now, in the midst of the religious authorship, a new aesthetic work appears, "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress." He ponders how Nielsen will understand this:

The relationship to R. Nielsen in this matter has made me very uneasy in fear and trembling. I had given R. N. a direct communication. But on the other hand, to what extent R. N. had really understood me, to what extent he was capable of venturing something for the truth, is not at all clear to me. Here was the opportunity to make a test, and I felt that I owed it to the cause, to him, and to myself. Fortunately he was staying in the country. He has maintained constantly that he had understood the aesthetic to have been used as an enticement and an incognito. He has also maintained that he understood that it always depended entirely upon involvement. But whether that is entirely true, he never did really put to the test. He scarcely understood the significance of *Either/Or* and of the two upbuilding discourses. Not until much later, especially when I became an exclusively religious author, and when I drew him to me did he understand it. Well, fine, that means he did not understand it in the form of reduplication; he understood it as a direct communication, that I explained to him that it was done that way. We must now find out; the question of what he thinks of this seemingly suddenly aesthetic article about an actress must be put to him.⁷⁶

One way in which Kierkegaard wishes to test Nielsen is to see if he is attentive to a critical remark about Martensen. Given Nielsen's previous association with Martensen, Kierkegaard was naturally apprehensive about their current relation. Thus, it is understandable that Kierkegaard would wish to confirm that Nielsen is now critical of his colleague:

Furthermore, the article contains a little allusion to Martensen. If R. Nielsen in some way wants to avoid holding a judgment in common with the persons concerned, that is up to him. In brief, for a moment he must stand entirely alone so that I can see where we are. It is something entirely different to talk afterwards about this reduplication, consequently in direct form, than to have to pass judgment at the moment oneself.⁷⁷

⁷³ SKS 21, 57, NB6:75 / C, Supplement, p. 421.

⁷⁴ H. Gottsched (ed.), *Af Søren Kierkegaards Efterladte Papirer. 1849*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag 1880, p. 637. Note that this entry does not appear in the *Papirer* edition.

⁷⁵ See Cappelørn, Garff, and Kondrup, *Written Images. Søren Kierkegaard's Journals, Notebooks, Booklets, Sheets, Scraps and Slips of Paper*, pp. 30–42.

⁷⁶ SKS 21, 58, NB6:76 / JP 6, 6239.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Here it seems that “The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress” and not the *Postscript* is the key piece of writing that was the occasion for Nielsen and Kierkegaard to come together. Moreover, it should be noted that Kierkegaard, quite coy in this relation, takes the credit for the relationship, saying that he drew Nielsen to himself. In any case, Kierkegaard is particularly interested in whether or not Nielsen is able to independently appropriate what he has learned in his own concrete lived existence as a form of “reduplication.”

Kierkegaard continues the entry, noting how much he appreciated the fact that Nielsen had understood him:

Oh, it is very strenuous to serve the truth in self-denial. I had given many people in many ways the impression that I was a devotional author—and then to disturb this impression myself. I did cherish R. Nielsen’s having understood me as much as he did—and then to have to lose all this.

Yes, it is very strenuous to serve the truth in this way, constantly exposing oneself to misunderstanding—in order if possible to keep men awake, in order that the religious may not again become an indolent habit, and it might be like that for R. N. I must in fear and trembling let God judge between him and me, so that he does not attach himself too much to me but to God. But, humanly speaking, it is hard for me to work against myself in this way simply in order to serve the truth....

Oh, R. N. scarcely dreams of how he has occupied me on this occasion, and why? Because he has become involved in my God-relation. That is infinitely crucial. In this way I am strong and weak. Actually there is not a man living with whom I would not dare to take this up, relying on my superiority over him—and any man, whoever he is, who comes in touch with my God relationship, becomes a prodigious concern to me.⁷⁸

Of profound interest is Kierkegaard’s claim that he took Nielsen into his own “God-relation.” This is particularly perplexing since Kierkegaard is well known for his insistent claims that one’s God-relation is always deeply personal and individual. What could it mean that Nielsen plays a role in his God-relation? In order to understand this one must recall that Kierkegaard believed that his authorship was a part of his God-relation since it was steered by governance. Nielsen is brought into this relation since Kierkegaard chooses him to be responsible for carrying on this work of the authorship after his death, either by publishing it or giving the correct interpretation of it. Thus, just as Kierkegaard believes that he is directed by governance, since he has chosen Nielsen for this special role, Nielsen is also directed by governance to a second degree, so to speak. Occupying this special relation like few other people in Kierkegaard’s life, Nielsen thus becomes “a prodigious concern” for him.

Kierkegaard continues his considerations of Nielsen in a couple of entries in *NB7*, which Kierkegaard used from August 21 to November 26, 1848.⁷⁹ Here he worries that his friendship with Nielsen might turn into a faction or “coterie.” This seems to echo Brøchner’s formulation, quoted above, about how Nielsen “allied” himself with Kierkegaard, as if the goal were to launch a common campaign. Kierkegaard writes:

⁷⁸ SKS 21, 58–9, NB6:76 / JP 6, 6239.

⁷⁹ See Garff et al., “Tekstreddegørelse” to *Journal NB7* in SKS K21, p. 64.

R. Nielsen is a curious fellow. We had an agreement or understanding that there should be a relationship between us but that it by no means may become a coterie. But what is a coterie? It implies an advance agreement among the persons concerned about future action and a mutual judgment about what has been done, which is then broadcast. Consequently that must not be done. So I write a note to him, an altogether proper one, and yet—and this certainly was not unfortunate—yet done in such a way that it was sufficient to maintain the relationship while it became an alienating factor with respect to that little thing I wrote, something of such great importance to my whole authorship that I scarcely dared communicate anything about it directly right away. Had I done so, I would have lost myself, become saddled with an inconsistency which I perhaps never would have lived down. But R. N. was offended—and then chooses not to answer at all, so I actually had to believe that he had not received the letter.⁸⁰

Here Kierkegaard attributes great significance to the relation and is profoundly exercised by it. He is clearly troubled by the lack of response by Nielsen and is afraid that he has alienated him. In the next entry he is relieved since Nielsen has returned and Kierkegaard has discussed the matter with him in person: "Finally he has come to town, and I have spoken with him and assured myself of the situation. There was hardly much danger here. But the *summa summarum* is, as I understood it from the beginning, it is me who should be brought up to learn something. For this a person is always used whom I take into my God-relation."⁸¹ Thus Nielsen is to be used by Kierkegaard as a tool to some purpose in Kierkegaard's God-relation. The purpose clearly has to do with Nielsen's role in promoting the authorship.

Seeing Nielsen in person seems only to have given Kierkegaard a temporary reprieve. He is still vexed since he feels that he still does not know exactly where Nielsen stands. The situation is made particularly acute given Kierkegaard's conviction that he will soon die. In an entry not without a somewhat melodramatic tone, Kierkegaard writes:

How I have suffered because of this relation to R. N. To have him out there in suspense, perhaps even offended, and then to have my responsibility and my fear and trembling—and yet unable to have acted or to act otherwise! And then not to be able to get to see the actual situation because he was out in the country. And then to know that the danger was probably not so great, humanly speaking, but yet before God to have to hold out alone all that time with the most dreadful possibilities! Frightful! And a dying man like me, who was so quiet and calm and reconciled to the thought of death—and now suddenly to suffer and endure so long the torture of not being able to die because I must first see his situation and my responsibility. Frightful!

...God be praised that I published that article, God be praised that I kept R. N. in suspense and did not weaken and give him direct communication; but above all God be praised that God is to me what he has always been: love. Now I can die tomorrow and I can go on living—everything is in order.⁸²

Here Kierkegaard is quite vexed by the idea that he is dying and that certain things between him and Nielsen have not yet been cleared up. Kierkegaard seems proud

⁸⁰ SKS 21, 78–9, NB7:6 / JP 6, 6246.

⁸¹ SKS 21, 79, NB7:7.

⁸² SKS 21, 80, NB7:9 / C, Supplement, pp. 423–4.

of the fact that despite his own sufferings, he has kept Nielsen guessing and has not revealed his true intentions with direct communication. In the next entry he mentions that he has prayed for Nielsen and taken him up into his God-relation again.⁸³

At the beginning of the next year, Kierkegaard continues his deliberations about his relation to Nielsen in his *Journal NB9*, which he wrote in from January 2 to February 9, 1849.⁸⁴ In one entry he considers the unenviable prospect of his death and Nielsen carrying on in his name. He is deeply concerned that Nielsen is not well suited to this and would fail to carry on the Kierkegaardian campaign correctly since he does not understand the concept of reduplication.⁸⁵ In the next entry he writes, clearly referring to Nielsen:

The true is really always defenseless in this world, where there very rarely are even ten who have the capability, the time, the diligence, and the moral character to follow through in pursuing the truth—but here in the world the mob of contemporaries is the judge, and they are far too confused to understand the truth but understand untruth very easily. I have regarded it as my religious duty to draw a person to me in order not to leave out the human tribunal completely. He now gets communications from me which he otherwise would never get—and gets them privately. Here again is the possibility that I may become completely defenseless. If vanity and a secular mentality run away with him, he will publish this in a confused form as his own and will create an enormous furor. My efforts at reclamation would be useless. Alas, and a person who is already married, a professor, a knight—what real hope is there of his competence to serve the truth, in a more profound sense what fondness can he have for an undertaking in which all these qualifications are just so many N.B.'s, while at any moment he can turn to the other side, where these are substantiations.⁸⁶

Kierkegaard regards Nielsen as a kind of student to whom he gives information as he wishes. Again he is vexed by the prospect of Nielsen publishing works in which he claims to present Kierkegaard's position. Kierkegaard seems quite convinced that Nielsen would only present his views in a confused manner. This reflection is prophetic since this is precisely what happens and what causes the conflict between the two men later the same year.

In the next entry Kierkegaard again clearly has Nielsen in mind, without mentioning him explicitly:

If that which one has to communicate is, for example, a conception of something historical or the like, it may be a good thing for someone else to arrive at the same conception, and all one has to do is simply to work to get this idea acknowledged. But if the point of a person's activity is to do what is true: then one additional assistant professor is just a new calamity, and not least when he gets assistance privately and confidentially.⁸⁷

⁸³ SKS 21, 80–1, NB7:10 / JP 6, 6247.

⁸⁴ See Garff et al., “Tekstredogørelse” to *Journal NB9* in SKS K21, p. 170.

⁸⁵ SKS 21, 205, NB9:13.

⁸⁶ SKS 21, 206, NB9:14 / JP 6, 6301.

⁸⁷ SKS 21, 206, NB9:15 / JP 6, 6302.

Here Kierkegaard is clearly worried about the possibility that Nielsen, an assistant professor, will present his views about the private inward nature of religious faith by means of direct communication.

He continues his reflections in the *Journal NB10*, which Kierkegaard used from February 9 to May 2, 1849.⁸⁸ At the beginning of one entry Kierkegaard states that he has "not collided with the established order" and indeed that he is "suited to preserving the established order."⁸⁹ This is striking to read when one considers his violent attack on the Church some five years later. In this connection, he writes:

Now I see it more clearly—that, rightly understood, I am or ought to be the movement, the awakening, only in a soft and dormant period (for I am the more ideal established order), but in rebellious times I am quite clearly conservative. What R. Nielsen said is quite true—that in a way Bishop Mynster regards me as an exaggeration—in peacetime; but now he thinks that I am more suitable.⁹⁰

Nielsen's role in this entry seems at first glance to be fairly minimal, but upon closer inspection one can see that it is clear that Nielsen has helped Kierkegaard to understand his mission better. His goal with his writings is that of "awakening." The reference to Nielsen's account of what Mynster has said seems to imply that the two men had discussed such things privately, perhaps on their walks together. This is again clear indication that Nielsen is, at this point in time, involved in Kierkegaard's authorship in the sense that it is intended as a part of a wider campaign for religious reform.

For some unknown reason, Kierkegaard seems to have come to question his planned role for Nielsen. Somewhat later in the same journal he writes:

I have become involved with R. Nielsen because I considered it my religious duty to have at least one man, so that it could not be said that I bypassed completely this claim.

Of course he can be of no benefit to me ultimately: he is too heavy, too thick-skinned, too spoiled by the age of Christian VIII. Were I to become secular-minded, he naturally would be of advantage to me.

I have been obliged to be a little distant with him, for otherwise he prattles pleasantly about my cause, my cause which either should be intensified unconditionally or hidden in deepest silence.⁹¹

Here Kierkegaard speaks very strategically about his relation to Nielsen. He seems clearly to want to use Nielsen in the service of his general religious endeavor, but he realizes that this will not work. However, he does not seem overly irritated by the situation yet. In the next entry, Kierkegaard writes, "R. Nielsen can understand me up to a point, but he cannot resist himself, is fascinated by all this profundity, hurries home, jots it down, and communicates it—instead of first acting upon it himself. His communication of the truth will never in all eternity become action."⁹²

⁸⁸ See Niels W. Bruun et al., "Tekstredegørelse" to *Journal NB10* in *SKS K21*, p. 224.

⁸⁹ *SKS* 21, 262, NB10:14 / *JP* 6, 6335.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *SKS* 21, 273, NB10:32 / *JP* 6, 6341.

⁹² *SKS* 21, 273, NB10:33 / *JP* 6, 6342.

From these passages it is evident that even at this early period of their relationship, Kierkegaard cannot be said to have a carefree, open and amicable relation to Nielsen. He is constantly worried about offending Nielsen or about Nielsen misunderstanding or misrepresenting him. This somewhat unstable relation was merely a foreboding of things to come.

*IV. The First Test of the Friendship:
Nielsen's The Faith of the Gospels (May–September 1849)*

It was during this period that Nielsen, under Kierkegaard's influence, published his lectures *The Faith of the Gospels and Modern Consciousness. Lectures on the Life of Jesus*.⁹³ This work appeared on May 19, 1849.⁹⁴ Kierkegaard might have been aware of these lectures prior to their publication.⁹⁵ Instead of being flattered that he had inspired Nielsen, Kierkegaard was offended since he believed Nielsen to have stolen his ideas and presented them as his own. This was for Kierkegaard a warning shot in their relationship. In his *Journal NB11*, Kierkegaard reacts to this as follows:

R. Nielsen's book is out. Realizing the wrong I have suffered in the interest of truth, realizing my mastery of the circumstances, he still thought, as I suspected, that if he only enlisted my support and I stayed by him somewhat—that it could be done, that he could even gain importance, perhaps be a success.

That was the enthusiasm for the rightness of my cause.

In fact, he did come to the right one.

The writings are plundered in many ways, the pseudonyms most of all, which he never cites, perhaps with deliberate shrewdness, as the least read.

And then my conversations!⁹⁶

Kierkegaard clearly feels that Nielsen has betrayed the relationship of familiarity. Nielsen has stolen ideas both from Kierkegaard's works and from private conversations. Kierkegaard seems to believe that Nielsen's motivation for doing so was to gain success by making use of his ideas.

In a letter dated May 25, 1849, Nielsen writes to Kierkegaard, begging his pardon for an unnamed mistake.⁹⁷ This can be taken as a response to Kierkegaard's criticism of him, which he communicated either in writing or personally. In a letter with the same date, Nielsen indicates that he has something serious to discuss with Kierkegaard, but that it is of such a character that he would prefer not to discuss it on their usual walk. (They already apparently had a rendezvous for a walk.) In any case, it is clear that he is waiting for the latter to respond and feels somewhat rebuffed: "you may conclude that it is unlikely that we shall meet again until you find the time at some point and the opportunity 'to call upon me' once more. Whether this will

⁹³ Nielsen, *Evangelietroen og den moderne Bevidsthed. Forelæsninger over Jesu Liv*.

⁹⁴ See *Pap. X-6*, p. 224, note 343. *LD*, Notes, p. 483.

⁹⁵ *SKS* 21, 262, NB10:13. Already here Kierkegaard complains that Nielsen "in his production apparently makes use of what he gets from me."

⁹⁶ *SKS* 22, 32, NB11:46 / *JP* 6, 6415.

⁹⁷ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 228–9 / *LD*, Letter 208, p. 290.

ever happen, whether it happens this year or in future years, must of course depend on you: I have the time to wait."⁹⁸ From an extant draft, one can see Kierkegaard's response, in which, with a tone of being offended, he indicates that he went in vain to their designated meeting place for their walk and Nielsen did not come. He accuses Nielsen of being "somewhat artificial" by not simply showing up and saying that he had something he wanted to discuss with him that was of such a nature that he would prefer not to discuss it on their walk.⁹⁹

Kierkegaard seems to refer to Nielsen indirectly in an entry later in *NB11*, where he discusses the desire to have a "single adherent." Here he talks about how the truth gets lost in the conveying of it from one person to another. Thus, he must realize that there is a certain inevitability in Nielsen's confused presentation of his ideas. He reasons as follows:

Take the supreme example: if Christ, who was truth, had insisted absolutely upon not exposing truth to any misinterpretation, refused to become involved in any accommodation: then his whole life would have been one single monologue.

The point is that I have too profoundly understood that truth does not win by means of adherents but constantly suffers loss the more it acquires. My life's thought was the extreme consequence of that.¹⁰⁰

Here Kierkegaard seems to regret the fact that Nielsen has become his adherent since the inevitable result is that his ideas are misrepresented and communicated in a confused manner.

Nielsen's close relation to Kierkegaard meant at the same time an alienation from Martensen. Nielsen thus in effect allied himself with Kierkegaard against Martensen, to whom he had once stood so close. It was this common enemy that brought Nielsen and Kierkegaard back together again after this initial tension regarding Nielsen's *The Faith of the Gospels and Modern Consciousness*. On July 19, 1849, Martensen published his *Christian Dogmatics*. On the next day Nielsen writes the following two-sentence letter to Kierkegaard: " 'The System' has arrived. It got here the day before yesterday with 'the Omnibus.' "¹⁰¹ In response to this Kierkegaard notes the association of Nielsen's reference to "the Omnibus" and one of Kierkegaard's own favorite phrase, which he associates with Martensen, "*de omnibus dubitandum est*."¹⁰² With this letter Kierkegaard sends to Nielsen a copy of *The Sickness unto Death*, which had just appeared. Nielsen responds to this graciously with a note of thanks dated July 28, 1849.¹⁰³ Kierkegaard responds very positively to Nielsen's comments in a letter from August 4 of the same year.¹⁰⁴ From the tone of these letters it is clear that their relationship, while having experienced a few bumps in the road, had not been entirely destroyed by this point. The publication

⁹⁸ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 229 / *LD*, Letter 209, p. 291.

⁹⁹ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 229–30 / *LD*, Letter 210, p. 292.

¹⁰⁰ *SKS* 22, 60–1, NB11:107 / *JP* 6, 6402.

¹⁰¹ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 234–5 / *LD*, Letter 212, p. 298.

¹⁰² *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 235 / *LD*, Letter 213, pp. 298–9.

¹⁰³ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 238 / *LD*, Letter 215, p. 303.

¹⁰⁴ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 243–4 / *LD*, Letter 219, p. 310.

of Martensen's book seems to have reenergized the friendship, and there follows an intensive correspondence during the months of August and September since Nielsen was staying in Lyngby at the end of the summer, and his stay had to be prolonged due to illness.¹⁰⁵ Nielsen takes special pleasure in relating to Kierkegaard how he saw both Mynster and Martensen at a dinner party where he was staying.¹⁰⁶ The tone of this letter clearly bespeaks a degree of intimacy and a sense that Nielsen and Kierkegaard are working in tandem for a specific cause. In any case they both agree to get together in person once Nielsen returns to the city. In a letter dated September 20, 1849, Nielsen announces that he is back in Copenhagen.¹⁰⁷

With their agreement on their criticism of Martensen, Nielsen and Kierkegaard seem to have put their friendship back on the right track. However, the strain in their relation was to reemerge soon thereafter. This probably gave Nielsen the mistaken impression that he would have Kierkegaard's full approbation if he were to criticize Martensen publicly. He was, however, sadly mistaken on this point.

*V. The Second Test of the Friendship:
Nielsen's Joint Review (September 1849–April 1850)*

As has just been seen, Nielsen and Kierkegaard had discussed critically Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics* on their walks. Nielsen decided to make public his criticisms with a review of Martensen's work, which was being discussed with great animation at the time. He decided to do this with the aforementioned dual book review in which he juxtaposed Kierkegaard's *Postscript* to Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*. This work appeared as a monograph, entitled *Mag. S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics." An Investigative Review*.¹⁰⁸ It is dated September 18, 1849, and the work was presumably published in the October of that year. This monograph represented a second major blow to Nielsen's and Kierkegaard's relationship. Once again Kierkegaard felt that Nielsen had misused his ideas in the polemic against Martensen. Moreover, Nielsen failed to understand the concept of indirect communication and the use of the pseudonyms by attacking Martensen so directly.

¹⁰⁵ B&A, vol. 1, pp. 243–4 / LD, Letter 219, pp. 310–11. B&A, vol. 1, pp. 244–5 / LD, Letter 220, pp. 311–12. B&A, vol. 1, p. 245 / LD, Letter 221, pp. 312–13. B&A, vol. 1, p. 246 / LD, Letter 222, p. 313. B&A, vol. 1, p. 246 / LD, Letter 223, pp. 313–14. B&A, vol. 1, p. 247 / LD, Letter 224, pp. 314–15. B&A, vol. 1, pp. 247–8 / LD, Letter 225, pp. 315–16. B&A, vol. 1, p. 248 / LD, Letter 226, pp. 316–17. B&A, vol. 1, p. 249 / LD, Letter 227, p. 317. B&A, vol. 1, pp. 249–50 / LD, Letter 228, pp. 317–18. B&A, vol. 1, pp. 250–1 / LD, Letter 229, pp. 319–20. B&A, vol. 1, p. 251 / LD, Letter 230, p. 320. B&A, vol. 1, pp. 251–2 / LD, Letter 231, pp. 320–1.

¹⁰⁶ B&A, vol. 1, pp. 247–8 / LD, Letter 225, pp. 315–16.

¹⁰⁷ B&A, vol. 1, p. 251 / LD, Letter 230, p. 320.

¹⁰⁸ Nielsen, *Magister S. Kierkegaards "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensens "Christelige Dogmatik." En undersøgende Anmeldelse*. For an account of this work, see Niels Thulstrup, "Martensen's Dogmatics and its Reception," in *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart, pp. 187–92.

In the *Journal NB14* from 1849, which Kierkegaard wrote in from November 9, 1849 until January 6, 1850,¹⁰⁹ he makes the following comment about Nielsen's alienation from Martensen:

The day before yesterday I took a walk with Nielsen. It was the last time this year. The conversation turned in such a way that he himself acknowledged that there was some personal reason, at least in part, for his changing his course. "He felt himself to be left out in the cold compared with Martensen; for several years now Martensen had been occupying the place in The Royal Society which belonged to him," and so on. Well, it is good that he himself says this. I am hoping both that actuality will properly shape him up and that through his relationship to me he will come to a completely different view of life, and then something good might come out of it. The fact that he himself now acknowledges it indicates that some change has already taken place in him.¹¹⁰

This remark clearly reflects the fact that Martensen and his *Christian Dogmatics* were the central object of discussion during these months. In their conversations, Nielsen and Kierkegaard clearly found consolation and pleasure in criticizing him.

From their correspondence from the first months of 1850 one can again sense a degree of tension in the relationship. In letters dated January 17, 1850 Nielsen writes to tell Kierkegaard that he cannot come on their usual walk since he has caught a cold.¹¹¹ This letter is followed by another one on February 22, in which he cancels again, this time giving no explanation.¹¹²

In his *Journal NB15* from 1850 (which he used between January 6 and February 15, 1850), Kierkegaard writes the following about Nielsen, whom he compares with P.M. Stilling (1812–69):

It is sad to have an eye such as mine. I saw R. Nielsen's ideal possibility—but do not dare say it to him directly, nor can it help to do so, for then it will turn into something else entirely and in the strictest sense not be the ideal. He did not see it. I see the possibility in Stilling, and here it is the same. So also with a number of others. I yearningly anticipate the moment when an existential ideality will appear in our setting. Now if this were something reserved for only the exceptionally talented—but this is a possibility for anyone—and yet it is so rare!¹¹³

In the entry immediately prior to this he discusses the importance of avoiding forming a coterie in religious matters. Despite this, Kierkegaard is apparently on the look out for likeminded writers, who might be interested in joining forces with him. His disappointment in Nielsen has led him to consider Stilling as another possible candidate.

¹⁰⁹ See Finn Gredal Jensen and Steen Tullberg, "Tekstredøgørelse" to *Journal NB14* in *SKS K22*, p. 425.

¹¹⁰ *SKS 22*, 414, *NB14:120 / JP 6*, 6563.

¹¹¹ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 268–9. / *LD*, Letter 247, pp. 342–3.

¹¹² *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 270 / *LD*, Letter 249, p. 344.

¹¹³ *SKS 23*, 22, *NB15:23 / JP 6*, 6573.

Kierkegaard wrote in his *Journal NB17* from March 6, 1850 to May 15 of the same year.¹¹⁴ Here he complains that Nielsen, the academic philosopher, is not able to shake off his role in this capacity. This leads him to misrepresent Kierkegaard's views since he is always inclined to lecture and to give a straightforward account of his views instead of using strategies such as indirect communication. In his journal Kierkegaard writes:

R.N.'s misfortune is actually that he is warped by scholarliness and does not yet have an idea of what it is to be a person who calmly rests in his assurance of the correctness of the matter but also acts as a person....He had begun with a quite simple and straightforward explanation, in which he, speaking not without a certain decorous sense of self about the studies in philosophy that he is conscious of having made, explained that these writings had changed him in his view.¹¹⁵

In the same entry he goes on to express his disappointment at how things have developed with Nielsen. Here he gives an insightful sketch of the kind of relation he wished he could have had with him:

With all this vacillation and these errors almost two years have now passed. How much has been lost! How beautiful the whole thing could have been, how purely transparent the relationship, so wholly free, neither disciple nor the like, no, a respectable person, who in agreement with me about having found a decision in these writings, decides to work for the cause.

However, perhaps such a metamorphosis is too much to ask of a former speculative professor, at least in the first instance. And how clear has the difference from Martensen become, while now similarity is so close.

I have learned so much in the trial of patience.¹¹⁶

It is interesting that Kierkegaard states here that he was not interested in having a student or a disciple but rather another "respectable" person who could work for the cause in his own way. Thus Nielsen's ideal role is not that of a subordinate. The idea seems to be that they would have been independent partners working for a common goal. The last part of the passage is also interesting, since here Kierkegaard indirectly reproaches himself for believing that Nielsen could so radically transform himself to take up Kierkegaard's cause.

VI. The Third Test of the Friendship:

Nielsen's The Faith of the Gospels and Theology (April–September 1850)

One would think that by now Nielsen would realize the danger of publishing material that included Kierkegaard's thoughts or passages from his works. Nonetheless on April 6, 1850, he published his *The Faith of the Gospels and Theology*, which

¹¹⁴ See Bruun et al., "Tekstredøgørelse" to *Journal NB17* in *SKS K23*, p. 257.

¹¹⁵ *SKS 23*, 169, NB17:7.

¹¹⁶ *SKS 23*, 170, NB17:7.

was also based on a series of lectures that he gave.¹¹⁷ This is a very extensive work that Kierkegaard constantly refers to simply as "the big book." Once again, in Kierkegaard's eyes, Nielsen makes himself guilty of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, and once again his efforts for "the cause" seem to be wholly misdirected and ill advised.

In his *Journal NB17* from 1850, Kierkegaard writes a long entry entitled "Concerning R. Nielsen." Here he explains in detail his initial reaction to Nielsen's latest publication:

Last Thursday I took a walk with him and then finally managed to get said a little bit about the fact that I regarded his entire change of direction from the big book with the 12 lectures as an attempt by a clever person who was perhaps the most clever in a matter, and who wanted to advance the cause thus instead of serving it in a simple manner; further I said that the entire affair with Martensen was a mistake and had nothing to do with my cause but was personal animosity, moreover, that he changed it into a doctrine, and finally that he plagiarized all too much even from our conversations.¹¹⁸

Kierkegaard believes that Nielsen has departed from the correct path by allowing his personal animosity for Martensen to blind him. Instead of working for the Kierkegaardian campaign, Nielsen has engaged in needless polemics with his colleague. This kind of polemic has, in Kierkegaard's view, nothing to do with his cause. This is somewhat odd given the later attack on the Church, in which Kierkegaard quite directly criticizes precisely Martensen.

In the same entry Kierkegaard recounts how, after his critical comments, he attempted to make a reconciliation with Nielsen. He continues:

He became somewhat angry or, more correctly, testy. However, I turned away from this, led the conversation over to other things, and we walked home *in bona caritate*.

I now thought that this coming Thursday I would take up the matter again, and if he was willing to listen to reason and accept what is the truth, then perhaps I would succeed in making him feel obliged to do something for the cause in a simple manner as reviewer or the like.

But no, today I received a letter in which he renounces wanting to take a walk with me on Thursday.¹¹⁹

Kierkegaard presumably refers here to the letter from Nielsen that he received on April 18, 1850.¹²⁰ In this letter Nielsen writes to cancel their usual walk. He does so in a somewhat terse manner that leaves it an open question of what exactly his motivations are: "Under the circumstances I must now for the time being renounce going for walks

¹¹⁷ Nielsen, *Evangelietroen og Theologien. Tolv Forelæsninger holdt ved Universitetet i Kjøbenhavn i Vinteren 1849–50*.

¹¹⁸ SKS 23, 215–16, NB17:71.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 273 / *LD*, Letter 252, p. 348. This letter is dated "Thursday, March 19, 1850," which commentators believe must be an error due to the fact that March 19, 1850 was a Tuesday and not a Thursday. Moreover, Kierkegaard received this letter on April 18, 1850. See SKS K23, p. 308.

with you on Thursdays, and accordingly I must ask you not to expect me today.”¹²¹ Nielsen presumably felt somewhat offended by Kierkegaard’s rebuke and tried tactfully, albeit inauthentically, to withdraw gradually from the relationship. For Nielsen, Kierkegaard’s negative reaction must have come as a surprise since the former had been led to believe that they two were in agreement in their criticism of Martensen.

In any case, Kierkegaard clearly sensed that something was amiss. In a couple of drafts to a letter, he voices his suspicions and invites Nielsen to elaborate on what he means by “under the circumstances.”¹²² In draft to a letter, Kierkegaard indicates his irritation with Nielsen and announces that he must end their relationship:

During the years I have conversed with you, our relationship has been approximately this: with regard to every single one of your public performances (your writings), I have most firmly told you that from my point of view I could not approve of them. Furthermore, I have explained why not, and you yourself have also spoken in such a manner that I must consider myself as having been understood. Moreover, in private you have always expressed yourself very differently from the way you have in public. But you always said that I would find that your next book would be different. Therefore I have continued to wait.

But now this will have to come to an end. I must hereby—completely without anger—break off a relationship that was indeed begun with a certain hope and that I do not give up as hopeless at this moment either.¹²³

However, Kierkegaard apparently reconsidered the matter, and this draft was discarded. Instead, in the letter that was sent, he was much more reconciliatory.¹²⁴ Here Kierkegaard expresses his fear that a misunderstanding has arisen and proposes that they meet the next day in order to sort things out. Nielsen willingly accepts the offer.¹²⁵

The meeting apparently resulted in a kind of small-scale reconciliation, which Kierkegaard records as follows in an entry with the heading “R. Nielsen”:

I wrote N. a note (so that in no way I would be the one who had done him an injustice, even the slightest). We talked together Wednesday, April 30. I told him that I wanted a freer relationship.

To hope is my element, especially when it has a touch of implausibility. I hope for him. It is still possible that he will finish properly even though he began in a wrong way. Would that he had never written the big book. His conduct after what happened between us, the way he has behaved for a year—Oh, that forced me to keep a detective’s eye on him, something so alien to me, something I never desired, even though I always have this penetrating eye but never use it. Yes, if the relationship were such that the problem was whether to do something very contrived and that he perhaps was not sufficiently ingenious—Oh, something like that does not prompt me to use this penetrating eye. But the nub was that what he should have done was very simple and uncomplicated

¹²¹ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 273 / *LD*, Letter 252, p. 348.

¹²² *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 273–4 / *LD*, Letter 253, pp. 348–9. *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 274 / *LD*, Letter 254, pp. 349–50.

¹²³ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 275–6 / *LD*, Letter 257, pp. 351–2.

¹²⁴ *B&A*, vol. 1, pp. 277–8. / *LD*, Letter 259, pp. 353–4.

¹²⁵ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 278 / *LD*, Letter 260, p. 354.

(something he himself frequently admitted he understood) and that he nevertheless continues to do something contrived instead.¹²⁶

From this account it seems that the two agreed to have a more relaxed and less intensive relationship. This seems to be the natural culmination of what Kierkegaard regarded as the repetition of mistakes in Nielsen's various publications. While Kierkegaard continued to hope that Nielsen would grasp the nature of the cause and the proper means of its communication, he was again and again disappointed with each of Nielsen's new publications, which demonstrated clearly that Nielsen had failed to understand the key points.

There follow a handful of journal entries in the *Journal NB18*, which Kierkegaard kept from May 15 until June 9, 1850,¹²⁷ which concern his relation to Nielsen or Nielsen's role in the attack on Martensen.¹²⁸ In one of these he contrasts his relation to Nielsen to that of Socrates to his student Plato:

I certainly am no Socrates and Nielsen no Plato, but the relation may still be analogous.

Take Plato, now! Indubitably Plato had a great preponderance of ideas that were his own, but he, in order to keep the point of departure clear, never hesitated to attribute everything to Socrates, he never wearied of what the people perhaps got tired of—that it was always Socrates, Socrates.

But Nielsen took the ideas and concealed where they came from; finally he gave his source but concealed the extent of his borrowing, also that I had gone out of my way to initiate him into my cause.

I have done nothing but have put everything into the hands of Governance.¹²⁹

Kierkegaard had long used Socrates as his model. Here he hits upon the comparison of Socrates and Plato with respect to his relation as a Socratic teacher of Nielsen.

On September 25, 1850 Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Practice in Christianity* was published. He then sent a copy to Nielsen with the dedication: "To Prof. R. Nielsen, Knight of the Dannebrog, Cordially from the Editor."¹³⁰ This demonstrates that the two were still on fairly good terms. But there is another dimension to this story. According to Cappelørn, Kierkegaard had originally planned to have Nielsen be the editor of both *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*.¹³¹ When Kierkegaard realized that Nielsen was incapable of playing the role that Kierkegaard had planned for him and the relation became strained, he ultimately was forced to

¹²⁶ SKS 23, 227, NB17:78 / JP 6, 6610.

¹²⁷ See Bruun et al., "Tekstredøgørelse" to *Journal NB18* in SKS K23, p. 335.

¹²⁸ SKS 23, 264–5, NB18:23. SKS 23, 266–7, NB18:26. SKS 23, 270, NB18:30. SKS 23, 282–3, NB18:49. SKS 23, 308–9, NB18:82.

¹²⁹ SKS 23, 319, NB18:93 / JP 6, 6630.

¹³⁰ See Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Fire 'nye' Kierkegaard-dedikationer. Lidt til belysning af Kierkegaards forhold til R. Nielsen og J.P. Mynster," *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 9, 1974, pp. 248–66.

¹³¹ Cappelørn argues for this based on an interpretation of SKS 21, 57, NB6:75 / C, Supplement, p. 421.

make a decision and to go ahead with the publications with himself as editor. This, according to Cappelørn, marked the decisive point in the relationship.¹³²

After this the references to Nielsen diminish substantially.¹³³ Somewhat astonishingly, the two apparently continued to take their regular walks together as is attested by a letter that Nielsen writes to Kierkegaard on February 4, 1852, in which he writes to cancel their walk due to ill health.¹³⁴ Given this, it is probably more accurate to say that, instead of breaking down in a single major conflict, the friendship simply gradually faded away over time.

VII. Drafts of Potential Polemical Works Against Nielsen

One result of the break with Nielsen was that, starting already in 1849, Kierkegaard wrote a series of drafts for polemical articles against him.¹³⁵ While none of these was ever published, by their sheer number and volume, they demonstrate how important the relationship was to him. Since they are so numerous, it would be impossible to explore all of these in this context. I will instead simply attempt to provide a general sense of their tone and content by focusing on a couple of the most insightful of these.

The first of these dates presumably already from the fall of 1849. Kierkegaard writes the following heading for his drafts:

Polemika
R. Nielsen

by

Johannes Climacus

Writing exercises in character that are not to be used.¹³⁶

From this, one might infer that Kierkegaard never intended to publish these drafts but that they were all conceived merely as "writing exercises." In any case, it seems clear that already at this early point in their relationship Kierkegaard had intended to write several different critical statements about Nielsen's person and work.

One long sketch is entitled "On Prof. Nielsen's Relationship to My Pseudonym Johannes Climacus." This is a useful sketch since in it Kierkegaard attempts to enumerate systematically his objections to Nielsen. It is doubly useful since by contrasting his writings with those of Nielsen, Kierkegaard makes clear some of his own main goals with the authorship generally. Here he begins by writing:

¹³² Cappelørn, "Fire 'nye' Kierkegaard-dedikationer," p. 258.

¹³³ See *SKS* 23, 341ff., NB19:20. *SKS* 23, 350-1, NB19:29. *SKS* 23, 356-7, NB19:36. *SKS* 23, 357-8, NB19:39. *SKS* 23, 412, NB20:36. *SKS* 23, 457, NB20:120. *SKS* 24, 70, NB21:116. *SKS* 24, 140, NB22:66. *SKS* 24, 147, NB22:85. *SKS* 24, 283, NB23:160. *SKS* 24, 392-3, NB24:114. *SKS* 24, 399ff., NB24:125. *SKS* 24, 525-6, NB25:112.

¹³⁴ *B&A*, vol. 1, p. 315 / *LD*, Letter 291, p. 400.

¹³⁵ *Pap.* X-6 B 83-102, pp. 91-125.

¹³⁶ *Pap.* X-6 B 83 / *JP* 6, 6403.

A.

What I Cannot Approve

1. "There must be no direct teaching"—in the pseudonymous writers this has found adequate expression in the abeyance of direct teaching. A μεταβασις εις αλλο γενοϋς is made in relation to teaching directly; the idea is reduplicated in the form—everything is changed into a poet-communication by a poor individual human being like most people, an experimental humorist—everything is situated in existence.

It is different with Prof. Nielsen. His presentation, his address, are more or less direct teaching, especially if compared with the pseudonym's. The numerous scholarly allusions recalled by the professor are reminiscent of "the professor," and it becomes more or less a kind of doctrine that there must be no direct teaching.

From the standpoint of the idea, the cause has retrogressed, because it has acquired a less consistent form.¹³⁷

The point here seems quite straightforward. In order for the cause to be advanced, indirect communication must be applied. Nielsen, by contrast, engages in direct communication. His works attempt to be scholarly in the way that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works do not. Therefore, the cause has suffered instead of moving forward.

The second objection that Kierkegaard raises against Nielsen concerns not the form but the content of his writings. Kierkegaard continues:

2. In the pseudonymous writings the content of Christianity has been compressed to its least possible minimum simply in order to give all the more powerful momentum toward becoming a Christian and to keep the nervous energy all the more intensively concentrated so as to be able to master the confusion and prevent the intrusion of "the parenthetical."

It is different with Prof. N. With him the contents expand. He goes into an investigation of each particular miracle etc. etc.—in short, he goes into details. At the same time it is made difficult to provide momentum and to maintain the qualitative tension, because doubt and reflection are essentially related to this dispersive trend, to the details, and they get the upper hand as soon as one gets involved in them.

From the standpoint of the idea there has been a loss, and the tension of the issue has been weakened—and yet no doubt many have now become aware of the cause.¹³⁸

Here Kierkegaard indicates that he has made a conscious effort to avoid detailed scholarly discussions about key points of Christian dogma. Instead, he has put all the emphasis on the formal nature of belief itself. By contrast, Nielsen cannot resist the need to fill out the Christian belief with a determinate content. By so doing, he, however, departs from Kierkegaard's intention and puts the emphasis in a different place. Thus, instead of working for the Kierkegaardian cause, Nielsen engages in a more traditional form of Christian dogmatics.

Kierkegaard emphasizes that the goal of the pseudonyms was not to create an abstract theory but instead to produce a lived form of Christianity in each individual. Again this constitutes a point of contrast to Nielsen's works:

¹³⁷ *Pap. X-6 B 121 / JP 6, 6574.*

¹³⁸ *Pap. X-6 B 121 / JP 6, 6574.*

3. The new direction must be away from science and scholarship, away from theory. The pseudonym does not concentrate upon this thought; the pseudonym himself is continuously this new direction; the entire work is repulsion and the new direction is into existential inwardness.

It is quite different with Prof. N. Here this thought is dwelt upon, details are gone into, the same thought is followed through in relation to the particular theological disciplines—sheer lingering. But in the very second there is one second of lingering, science and scholarship are on the way to becoming the stronger, for science and scholarship are and consist in lingering, whereas faith is itself the impetus of the existential away from that from which one is to move. But in the very second of lingering, theory thrusts itself forward and begins to take shape, for theory is and consists in lingering. And with Prof. N. the new direction is not taken; it does not find its expression qualitatively different from all theorizing. A kind of concluding paragraph is formulated so one can always remember that a new direction is to be taken. N. is much too professionally serious to be able to take a new direction as that jesting Joh. Climacus can in all consistency, because “to turn,” “to turn away,” so one always takes himself back, is impossible without the unity of jest and earnestness.

From the standpoint of the idea, there is a loss—although no doubt more have now become aware of the cause.¹³⁹

Nielsen is accused again of being too academic. He cannot resist the temptation to develop a theory or to make a theoretical point out of each individual insight. The focus of “the cause” should rather be to lead the reader away from such theoretical reflections and towards an inward consideration of one’s own life and faith relation. From Nielsen’s perspective, many of Kierkegaard’s statements are in need of explanation and clarification. In his works, he thus attempts to provide just this. But in Kierkegaard’s eyes, this is precisely what one is to refrain from doing.

In his fourth objection to Nielsen, Kierkegaard explains the function of the pseudonyms, which he believes Nielsen has overlooked. He writes:

4. The significance of the pseudonym, as of all the pseudonyms, is: the communication of interiority. In the infinite distance of the idea from actuality, yet in another sense so close to it, interiority becomes audible. But there is no finite relation to actuality, no one is attacked, no name is named; no one is under obligation to appropriate this communication, no one is constrained, although it does not follow thereby that no one by himself has a truth-duty toward this communication.

In this context, Prof. N.’s attack on Prof. Martensen is not a forward step, especially the way it was done. Some individual theses were drawn out of the pseudonym and were transferred into subjects of dispute: whether Prof. M. is right or the pseudonym. In this way “that poor individual human being, a human being like most people,” the pseudonym (as represented by these few propositions), is changed into a kind of assistant professor who is brought into a learned dispute with the eminent Professor M. The qualitative difference is thereby lost: that it is a communication of interiority which, as the pseudonym has done it, “without authority” must be made audible at the distance of the idea or be appealed to with authority. But it is not the subject of any discussion or dispute. To want to debate about interiority means that one does not really

have interiority or has it only to a certain degree, i.e., not inwardly—which one can learn from Joh. Climacus.

The no less speculative Prof. N. cannot be in the right as opposed to Prof. Martensen, but in terms of the idea, there has been a loss for the pseudonym.¹⁴⁰

Kierkegaard claims here that the pseudonyms help to take the polemical tone out of the works. Instead, they invite the readers to turn inwardly and examine themselves. Grandstanding polemics simply distract attention from this goal. For this reason Nielsen's overt criticisms of Martensen are entirely misguided. This is somewhat striking given the fact that Kierkegaard is known for being a profoundly polemical author and he does not shirk from direct polemics in his later attack on the Church.

The fifth point seems to concern Nielsen's "plundering" of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. Here we read:

5. If I were to speak of Prof. N.'s relation to my entire work as an author or to the pseudonym on the whole, or if I were to go into the details of the professor's writings, I would have very many objections. But then this matter, which is already prolix enough, would become even more prolix. But there is, I think, one single observation that ought to be made. Even if Prof. N. himself was not immediately aware of his use of the pseudonyms, he gradually became aware of it; but to what extent will an ordinary reader of his works be able to see it, and I am probably the best reader. Essentially it is a matter of indifference. I mention it simply so it may not seem, if someone else raises the point, as if there were a definite solidarity between Prof. N. and me, inasmuch as I, who must have seen it very readily, had said nothing about it.

From the standpoint of the idea something has been lost; the matter is no longer at a point of intensity as with the pseudonym, the issue not in such qualitative tension, but instead Prof. Martensen has been attacked and a dispute about faith has been sought. But so it goes in the world. A view is always truest the first time; the next time it has already become less true, but then it extends itself, gains more and more attention and acceptability.¹⁴¹

The idea here seems to be that due to Nielsen's use of the pseudonymous writings, the naïve reader could well get the impression that Nielsen and Kierkegaard are working in league with one another in order, for example, to criticize Martensen. This is, of course, a mistaken impression that could well be damaging to the cause.

With each of these points Kierkegaard concludes by indicating that Nielsen's misunderstanding has somehow diminished the campaign and set back the cause. As he goes on to say, his hope was that Nielsen would work for the cause in a simple manner, but instead he has turned it into an academic exercise and thus undermined it.

VIII. The Final Period

In the last period of Kierkegaard's life from 1854 to 1855, he returns to Nielsen. He seems to have considered writing an article in which he officially distances himself

¹⁴⁰ *Pap. X-6 B 121 / JP 6, 6574.*

¹⁴¹ *Pap. X-6 B 121 / JP 6, 6574.*

from Nielsen's works. Under the title "Just a Word about Prof. R. Nielsen's Books after 1848," Kierkegaard writes the following rather detailed account:

Lest my silence be misinterpreted as consent, just a word: from my point of view I not only cannot give approval but must categorically take exception to Prof. Nielsen's books. Indeed, although I have had various experiences as an author which cannot rightly be called pleasant, still Prof. Nielsen's conduct is the only thing that has distressed me, even deeply distressed me.—This, then, to prevent if possible the misinterpretation of my silence as approval. Incidentally, it will readily be seen that this implies no judgment whatsoever on Prof. Nielsen's books from any other standpoint whatsoever.

Why I must categorically take exception to Prof. Nielsen's books, why Prof. Nielsen's conduct has distressed me, even deeply distressed me, I shall not elaborate. Space does not permit. Moreover, very few have the background that would enable them to understand me regarding this matter. The one best qualified is Prof. Nielsen himself, and this I have repeatedly said to him privately and may do it again.

I can, however, explain briefly why I have been silent until now. In the first place I was always personally prompted to wait and see if the "next book" would be such that from my standpoint I might be able to approve of it. In the second place, Prof. Nielsen is a man of such knowledge and talents that he bears waiting for a while. In the third place, I knew that Prof. N. had enthusiastically spent time studying my writings, by which, linguistically and stylistically, he is as if possessed. In the fourth place, Prof. Nielsen's conduct had brought him unpleasantness from a quite different quarter, and therefore I was unwilling (especially as long as the actual leader of the coterie, the old bishop, was living) to express my judgment when it could not be positive. In the fifth place, on my own account I had to give careful consideration to this step since my own experiences had taught me that to a large extent I would get the blame for it in the city where I live, where I, laughed to scorn—eyes up!—have had the honor to serve Christianity.¹⁴²

From this it is clear that Nielsen is far from forgotten. Kierkegaard seems to have felt the need to set the record straight at this point. His desire not to get drawn into the polemics between Nielsen and Martensen is perfectly understandable.

Despite this critical assessment, one could argue that Nielsen and Kierkegaard were well on their way to a reconciliation during the attack on the Church. At this time, when Kierkegaard had few friends left, Nielsen stood by him, first with the aforementioned review of *For Self-Examination*,¹⁴³ and then with an article more directly in his support. This latter piece appeared on January 10, 1855 in *Fædrelandet* under the title, "A Good Deed."¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard touches on this article briefly in his article "On Bishop Martensen's Silence" published in *Fædrelandet* on May 26, 1855.¹⁴⁵ There Nielsen's use of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to attack Martensen is also mentioned critically.¹⁴⁶ Nielsen's article is likewise mentioned in a draft dated June 1, 1855:

¹⁴² Pap. XI-3 B 13 / JP 6, 6869.

¹⁴³ Rasmus Nielsen, "Til Selvprøvelse, Samtiden anbefalet af S. Kierkegaard; en uproductiv Anmeldelse," *Fædrelandet*, no. 303, vol. 15, December 29, 1854, p. 1215.

¹⁴⁴ Rasmus Nielsen, "En god Gjerning," *Fædrelandet*, no. 8, January 10, 1855, pp. 29–30.

¹⁴⁵ SVI XIV, 99 / M, 84.

¹⁴⁶ SVI XIV, 96–7 / M, 81–2.

That, seen in the idea, I have been victorious over the "truth-witnesses" is something anyone who can see must admit if he wants to see. Nor did it at any moment ever occur to me to doubt that, understood in their way, I would be victorious, because what Prof. Nielsen said about me in *Fædrelandet*, that I have the idea, is true; I know that on a scale completely different from that on which Prof. Nielsen knows it.¹⁴⁷

Kierkegaard mentions this article on a loose paper,¹⁴⁸ and even drafted a response to it entitled "On Occasion of Prof. Nielsen's Appearance on this Occasion."¹⁴⁹

In a draft to *The Moment*, number 10, which Kierkegaard did not manage to publish before he died, he writes, somewhat surprisingly, "The only one who on occasion has said more or less true words about my significance is R. Nielsen; but this truth he has heard from me in private conversations."¹⁵⁰ This is the last statement about Nielsen from Kierkegaard's hand, and it is strikingly positive. Perhaps Nielsen's recent article in the immediate context of the attack on the Church helped to mollify Kierkegaard somewhat.

Given all his efforts, it is quite plausible that Nielsen still believed himself to be working for the cause at this point in time, even after all the conflicts the two men had had. It is not out of the question that with his later publications, both of Kierkegaard's own works and in defense of him, that Nielsen saw himself as continuing the joint campaign that he began with Kierkegaard in 1848.

Nielsen seems to have run through the entire spectrum of Kierkegaard's emotions. On the one hand, he was for Kierkegaard "a prodigious concern,"¹⁵¹ whom Kierkegaard thought to entrust with the publication of his posthumous writings; but then, on the other hand, he was mocked as a "windbag."¹⁵² Nielsen was considered to be a partner in the cause that Kierkegaard's authorship represented, yet he is reproached for not understanding certain fundamental aspects of that cause. There was clearly something very special about this relationship that both attracted and repulsed Kierkegaard. This ambiguity is reflected in a part of the description that Brøchner gives of the relation:

However, it was more N.'s intellectual talents than his character that K. appreciated. From the period in which K. struggled with himself over whether or not he should enter into polemics with the clerical establishment, there is an entry in his diary where he reflects on whether he ought to acquaint anyone with his thoughts. He mentions N., who at that time had attached himself very closely to him, and whom K. saw daily. But he rejects the thought again with these unflattering words about N.: "No! Nielsen is a windbag!"¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Pap. XI-3 B 136, p. 215 / *M*, Supplement, p. 552.

¹⁴⁸ Pap. XI-2 A 413.

¹⁴⁹ Pap. XI-3 B 101, pp. 162-4.

¹⁵⁰ *SVI* XIV, 354 / *M*, 343. This draft is dated September 1, 1855.

¹⁵¹ *SKS* 21, 58-9, NB6:76 / *JP* 6, 6239.

¹⁵² Hans Brøchner, "Erindringer om Søren Kierkegaard" in *Det Nittende Aarhundrede, Maanedsskrift for Literatur og Kritik*, March, 1876-77, § 21. English translation cited from *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, p. 235.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Despite the large amount of material that we have from Kierkegaard's hand about his relation to Nielsen, very little of it is actually insightful from a philosophical or theological perspective. By far the vast majority of pages can be characterized as purely personal or autobiographical. To be sure, these journal entries and letters offer ample material for a psychologizing biographer, but it remains to be seen how much this material helps us to a better insight into Kierkegaard's writings or thought. The fact that he was so entirely dismissive of Nielsen's works results in the fact that we are left with few principled positions or criticisms that can be evaluated. Instead, there is an abundance of material relevant for moral evaluation if one wishes to engage in this kind of thing. At best one can say that the negative example of Nielsen shows by the sharpness of his contours some of the important elements about Kierkegaard's thought and writings that are often forgotten in the academic world of today, where his authorship has been pushed and pulled in different ways in order to fit into the specific disciplinary requirements of philosophy, theology, or literature. Perhaps by studying Kierkegaard's criticisms of Nielsen, we can take a step towards returning to his own goals and intentions with his writings.

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