

DISCIPLINE FILOSOFICHE

Anno XXXIV, numero 1, 2024

Quodlibet

Jon Stewart

The Views of the Early Kierkegaard on Actuality and “Life”: A Flashpoint in the Conflict of the Nature of Philosophy*

Abstract: *The Views of the Early Kierkegaard on Actuality and “Life”*

In the history of philosophy, the nature and proper methodology of the discipline has always been a point of dispute. Today we know this, for example, in the conflict between analytic and Continental philosophy. The present paper focuses on one episode in this conflict. Kierkegaard is well-known for his critical view of how the speculative thinker forgets his own existence, while neglecting or misunderstanding actuality. One of his purported criticisms of Hegelian philosophy is that it is overly abstract and thus fails to capture “actuality” or “existence.” I argue that the young Kierkegaard in fact is not a critic of Hegel’s abstraction at all but, on the contrary, an advocate of it. This is demonstrated by an analysis of his early works *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *The Concept of Irony* as well as his reading of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

Keywords: Conflict, Existence, From the Papers of One Still Living, Hegel’s Lectures on Aesthetics, The Concept of Irony.

1. Introduction

As is well known, Hegel treats the category of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) in both the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* and the *Science of Logic* (Hegel 1817, 213-235, 319-352, 541-553, 677-696). His speculative analysis aims to demonstrate the necessary connections among the categories. His concern is thus with a conceptual analysis of actuality, which he wishes to interpret in a speculative manner in accordance with his general methodological approach. His doctrine of the Concept (*Begriff*) claims that the universal is not merely confined to the realm of thought. Instead, universality is necessarily connected to its opposite, particularity, which is the sphere of perception. Therefore, actuality consists of the unity of the universal and the particular and thus appears in the world. This doctrine represents an important element of Hegel’s metaphysics or what he himself calls his “logic”.

* This work was supported by the Agency VEGA Agency VEGA under the project “The Principle of Humanity in the Context of Contemporary Conflicts. Existential and Phenomenological Challenges” VEGA 2/0130/23.

Standard works on Kierkegaard tend to rehearse the view that the Dane's criticism of Hegel's abstract system marks a major contribution to the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century. Kierkegaard is well-known for his critical view of how the speculative thinker forgets his own existence (see SKS 7, 54-61; CUP1, 50-57; SKS 7, 103-120; CUP1, 106-125; SKS 7, 121-131; CUP1, 129-141), while neglecting or misunderstanding actuality. One of Kierkegaard's frequent and celebrated criticisms of Hegelian philosophy is that it is overly abstract and thus fails to capture "actuality" or "existence" (see SKS 4, 317-318; CA, 9-10; SKS 4, 324n; CA, 16n; SKS 7, 118; CUP1, 122-123). Kierkegaard tends to associate actuality (*Virkelighed*) with the general term "life" which is intended as the opposite of a concept or abstract idea. Life is concrete and develops in space and time in contrast to concepts. It is often thought that Kierkegaard's reinterpretation of the category of actuality justifies his well-known title as the father or founder of existentialism. The Dane's focus on the irreducible life of the individual in contrast to abstract conceptual analysis is hailed as a revolutionary shift in philosophical thinking that had a wide influence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the present paper, I wish to argue that there are many misunderstandings surrounding this point. I will claim that the young Kierkegaard in fact is not a critic of Hegel's abstraction at all but, on the contrary, an advocate of it. This will be demonstrated by an analysis of his early works *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *The Concept of Irony* as well as his reading of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. What emerges from the analysis is a picture of Kierkegaard that is entirely dissonant with that depicted in the secondary literature, which portrays him as a virulent critic of Hegel's conception of actuality.

2. *From the Papers of One Still Living*

Kierkegaard's debut book, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, appeared in 1838 (Kierkegaard 1838, 166-175). As is well known, it is a book review of Hans Christian Andersen's novel, *Only a Fiddler* from 1837 (Andersen 1837). This review was originally intended to be published in the second issue of Johan Ludvig Heiberg's Hegelian journal *Perseus* (see Kondrup 1997, in SKS K1, 68-72; Schreiber 2012, 171-198), which in itself would suggest a positive disposition towards Hegel.

The work begins with an overt praise of Hegel. The first few pages contain a couple of different Hegelian elements, including a reference to the beginning of philosophy with the concept of pure being as Hegel proposes in his logic. In this context Kierkegaard discusses the concept of actuality:

The extraordinary willingness and readiness, the almost gracious obligingness, with which thousands in our own day, as soon as a reasonable word has been spoken, ever stand ready to misunderstand it, has also been in tireless activity here. Its extent can easily be determined by everyone who has observed that the entire recent literature is, on the one hand, so completely preoccupied with prefacing and writing introductions. It has forgotten that the beginning with nothing of which Hegel speaks was mastered by himself in the system and was by no means a failure to appreciate the great richness actuality has (SKS 1, 18; EPW, 62).

The young Kierkegaard here indicates that he is aware of the criticisms of Hegel's philosophy that it ignores or fails to 'appreciate the great richness actuality has.' He defends Hegel's beginning of philosophy with the dialectic of being and nothing, which he believes in fact captures this richness that Hegel's critics find missing. He thus voices the view of a follower of Hegel, claiming that Hegel's system includes the positive content of actuality. Kierkegaard claims that Hegel's concept of negation is not empty or abstract but instead a productive tool used to uncover actuality: 'the whole negation is still only a movement inside the system's own limits, undertaken precisely in the interest of retrieving the *gediegnе* abundance of existence' (SKS 1, 17; EPW, 61). Here the term 'abundance of existence' replaces 'the great richness [of] actuality,' but it is clear that Kierkegaard is referring to the same thing. Indeed, he often uses the terms 'existence' and 'actuality' synonymously.

While Kierkegaard is positively disposed towards Hegel's understanding of actuality, he is critical of Hegel's followers and what he takes to be their confused presentation of it. He complains that Hegel's account of actuality 'is too greatly afflicted by these hysterical cases of brilliance' (SKS 1, 18; EPW, 62). This is an allusion to the young theologian Hans Martensen who was at the time giving his popular lectures at the University of Copenhagen in which Hegel played a key role. Kierkegaard frequently mocks Martensen in this way for his affected attempts at profundity in the lecture hall (see SKS 19, 136, Not4:9; KJN 3, 135). In a footnote, Kierkegaard again refers to Hegel's followers who have misunderstood the account of actuality in the *Science of Logic*:

The Hegelians, however, must not be taken altogether literally when they mention their relation to actuality, for when in this respect they refer to their master's immortal work (*his Logic*), it seems to me to be like the rules governing rank and precedence, in which, beginning with secretaries (*Seyn*, pure being), one then through "other secretaries" (*das Andre, das Besondere, Nichts* – therefore it is also said that other secretaries *sind so viel wie Nichts*) – lets the category "actual secretaries etc." appear, without therefore being entitled to conclude that there is in actuality a single "actual secretary" (SKS 1, 18n; EPW, 62n. A precursor to this passage is SKS 17, 49, AA:37; KJN 1, 43).

This rather cryptic reference presupposes some familiarity with the Danish system of ranks at the time.¹ The point is that Hegel's followers have failed to appreciate the nature of actuality. Instead, they misrepresent Hegel's view by understanding actuality as an abstract concept that is derived from the abstract category of pure being. While the system moves from category to category, Hegel's followers understand this as leading to an abstract concept of actuality. By contrast, Hegel's actual view is one that appreciates and captures the richness of actuality.

What readers will find surprising here is that Kierkegaard, instead of criticizing Hegel's account of actuality for being too abstract, praises it for capturing 'the richness' of the empirical world and 'the abundance of existence'. By contrast, he criticizes Hegel's followers for misunderstanding this and reducing Hegel's notion of actuality to an abstract concept. In short, the young Kierkegaard appears here in this early work as an orthodox Hegelian who wants to save Hegel from the distortions of his philosophy promulgated by his own followers.

3. *The Concept of Irony*

Søren Kierkegaard's master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* was published and publicly defended on September 29, 1841 (SKS 1, 59-357). In this work Kierkegaard directly cites and makes extensive use of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1840) and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Hegel 1833-36). Much of his language is Hegelian, and many of his analyses closely follow those found in Hegel's works. It should be noted that the view that this work is profoundly influenced by Hegel is by no means new; in fact, it has been argued by several scholars (see Høffding 1909, 151; Himmelstrup, 1924, 42-84; Hirsch, 1933, 572-602; Fenger, 1980, 147; Alderks, 2020, 215-225; Carlsson, 2016, 629-650; Stewart, 2003, 132-181).

Hegel's notion of actuality plays an especially important role in this work. Particularly worthy of attention is Kierkegaard's Introduction, where he gives an account of his methodology, which follows Hegel's method in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In the very first sentence of the book Kierkegaard writes, 'If there is anything that must be praised in the modern philosophical endeavor in its magnificent manifestation, it certainly is the power of genius with which it seizes and holds on to the phenomenon' (SKS 1, 71; CI, 9. Translation slightly modified). The phrase 'the modern philosophical endeavor' is a reference to Hegel's philosophy. Strikingly, Hegel is praised for capturing

¹ For an explanation of this complicated reference, see the commentary to this passage in SKS K1, 83, "Rangforordning".

the phenomenal sphere or actuality, although Kierkegaard is usually thought to criticize Hegel for abstraction from actuality.

Kierkegaard embarks on a discussion about the relation between philosophy and history. While philosophy is primarily concerned with concepts and ideas, history is concerned with the empirical phenomena. Like Hegel, Kierkegaard wishes to argue for the importance of both elements: the abstract idea and the concrete historical event. Philosophy must identify a specific idea that it wants to trace in history. This is what makes historiography a coherent narrative. Without a guiding idea, history is just a large amount of data with no continuity or organizing principle. However, the historians are right to focus on these data in minute detail and not to leap to conclusions based on abstract ideas. Without a close look at the data, the ideas of history would have no anchor in reality and could be applied to any given period or event. Kierkegaard, like Hegel, thus insists that both sides of this dialectical relation receive their due:

[philosophy and history] ought to have their rights so that, on the one hand, the phenomenon has its rights and is not to be intimidated and discouraged by philosophy's superiority, and philosophy, on the other hand, is not to let itself be infatuated by the charms of the particular, is not to be distracted by the superabundance of the particular. The same holds for the concept of irony: philosophy is not to look too long at one particular side of its phenomenological existence and above all at its appearance but is to see the truth of the concept in and with the phenomenological.² (SKS 1, 72-73; CI, 10-11)

Here Kierkegaard in effect states that he wishes to follow a Hegelian methodology in his approach to the historical concept of irony. What is surprising is that this purported champion of concrete actuality and existence warns against becoming too fixated on the empirical and the particular, urging that the investigation keep to the abstract or, more specifically, see the abstract concept in the actual empirical entities.³ This could hardly be said

² See also SKS 1, 71 / CI, 9: 'Therefore, even if the observer does bring the concept along with him, it is still of great importance that the phenomenon remain inviolate and that the concept be seen as coming into existence through the phenomenon'.

³ See SKS 27, 233, Papir 264.1; KJN 11.1, 236: 'Now, it is certainly the case that the abstract, the metaphysical, ought continually be more and more foreshortened and abbreviated... but metaphysical thinking deceives itself in maintaining that, in thinking, it also thinks historical actuality. After the system has in fact completed itself and come to the category of actuality, the new doubt emerges, the new contradiction, the final and deepest one, whereby metaphysical actuality determines historical actuality (therefore the Hegelians distinguish between existence and actuality: the external phenomenon exists, but to the extent that it is taken up into the idea, it is actual. Now, this is quite correct, but Hegelians do not define the boundary, the degree to which every phenomenon can become actual in this way; this is because they see the phenomenon from the bird's-eye perspective of the metaphysical and thus do not see the metaphysical in

better by Hegel himself. Kierkegaard clearly understands and respects the value of abstract concepts and ideas *vis-à-vis* empirical actuality. This is entirely in harmony with what he wrote in *From the Papers of One Still Living* a few years earlier.

In his introductory comments to Part Two, Kierkegaard continues his methodological considerations with which he began the book:

Therefore, just as in the first part of the dissertation the concept always hovered in the background with a continual craving to take shape in the phenomenon, so also in this part of the dissertation the phenomenal manifestation of the concept, as a continual possibility to take up residence among us, will accompany the progress of the discussion. These two factors are inseparable, because if the concept were not in the phenomenon or, more correctly, if the phenomenon were not understandable, actual, only in and with the concept, and if the phenomenon were not in the concept or, more correctly, if from the outset the concept were not understandable, actual, in and with the phenomenon, then all knowledge would be impossible, inasmuch as I in the first case would be lacking the truth and in the second case the actuality (SKS 1, 281-282; CI, 241-242).

Here Kierkegaard reaffirms what he already said in the Introduction to the book. He states the straightforwardly Hegelian view that the truth consists in finding the concept in the empirical appearances. In this case, the concept that Kierkegaard is tracing historically is, of course, irony. Like Hegel, he insists on the dialectical relation between these two elements and on the need to keep the two in balance. The empirical side of irony had the upper hand in the first part, and now the conceptual side of irony will be the focus, but both aspects are always present in the analyses.

The first substantial chapter in Part Two is entitled “The World-Historical Validity of Irony, the Irony of Socrates”.⁴ This chapter continues the discussion of the methodological issues that were raised in the Introduction. Moreover, it makes extensive use of Hegel. The main issue in this chapter is a comparison of Socratic irony with Romantic irony according to the criterion of what Kierkegaard calls their historical “validity”. While Socratic irony was directed against specific truth claims, Romantic irony, by contrast, is universal and thus directed indiscriminately against the entire existing order, which Kierkegaard refers to as “actuality” (SKS 1, 297; CI, 259). While the former is “world-historically justified” insofar as there are always antiquated or unjust institutions and practices which are deserving of irony’s criticism,

the phenomenon from the perspective of the phenomenon). The historical is namely the unity of the metaphysical and the accidental’.

⁴ Kierkegaard (SKS 1, 297-308; CI, 259-271) in this section refers primarily to Hegel (1833-36) in Hegel’s *Werke*, vol. 14, 58-70. (*Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 1, 397-406; *Jub.*, vol. 18, 58-70.)

the latter is indiscriminate, criticizing everything, and thus never justified (SKS 1, 308; CI, 271).

The chapter begins with a discussion that recalls many of the elements of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Here Kierkegaard describes the dynamic of the historical process in a way that is quite similar to Hegel's lectures. For example, the historical process is propelled forward by contradictions in institutions and customs:

a contradiction appears, by means of which the world process takes place. The given actuality at a certain time is the actuality valid for the generation and the individuals in that generation, and yet, if there is a reluctance to say that the process is over, this actuality must be displaced by another actuality (SKS 1, 297-280; CI, 260).

Through the course of time contradictions appear in the conceptual framework and ethical life of a people. This signals the beginning of a conflict and the move to a new framework. Through history unviable concepts thus have a limited lifespan, and after they have been worked through to their conclusion, they are rejected. Kierkegaard continues, 'Here we see how intrinsically consistent the world process is, for as the more true actuality presses onward, it nevertheless itself esteems the past; it is not a revolution but an evolution' (SKS 1, 297-280; CI, 260). This is Kierkegaard's way of saying that the previous historical forms are not simply destroyed but rather *aufgehoben*. Each previous stage is important in its own right and has a role to play in the development of the idea. Although Hegel is not mentioned by name here in the initial pages of this chapter, Kierkegaard closely follows his conception of historical development. Like Hegel, he understands actuality to be the world-view of a people that contains its own logos. While the world-view is an abstract idea, it is embodied in concrete institutions and practices. Actuality is thus the combination of the two.

It should be noted that this account of history was presented in 1833 by Heiberg in *On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age* (Heiberg 1833, 83-119). One of the main objections to Heiberg's Hegelianism in this treatise was that the Idea was too abstract and therefore did not adequately capture the essential features of, among other things, religious life (see Mynster 1833, 241-258; Tryde 1833, 649-660; 681-692; 697-704). In response to these charges, Heiberg attempted to argue that in fact the Hegelian Idea was indeed concrete since it had concrete content (Heiberg 1833, 765-780). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Kierkegaard, in *The Concept of Irony*, seems to support him in this. Here he writes, 'insofar as the Idea is concrete in itself, it is necessary for it to become continually what it is-that is, become concrete' (SKS 1, 297; CI, 259). Here Kierkegaard seems straightforwardly to have grasped the nature of the Hegelian Idea in history and indeed to subscribe to it as Heiberg did. In *On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age*,

Heiberg talked about the geniuses of the time such as Hegel and Goethe, who had the ability to see beyond their present age and glimpse a new concept or direction in the future (Heiberg 1833, 36). Kierkegaard characterizes the ironist in much the same terms, i.e., as one who is able clearly to discern the contradictions in the present age:

inasmuch as the new [*sc.* age] must forge ahead, here we meet the prophetic individual who spies the new in the distance, in dim and undefined contours. The prophetic individual does not possess the future – he has only a presentiment of it... He battles for the new and strives to destroy what for him is a vanishing actuality, but his task is still not so much to destroy as to advance the new and thereby destroy the past indirectly. But the old must be superseded; the old must be perceived in all its imperfection. Here we meet the ironic subject. For the ironic subject, the given actuality has lost its validity entirely (SKS 1, 298; CI, 260-261).

The role of the ironist in history is thus to precipitate the changes by underscoring and insisting on the contradictions in the present. This was the role that Socrates played in Athens, and thus he was responsible for the destruction of traditional Greek ethical life. However, in contrast to the prophet or genius, the ironist does not have any determinate vision of the future: 'he does not possess the new. He knows only that the present does not match the idea' (SKS 1, 298; CI, 261). The ironist clearly perceives the contradictions, absurdities, and hypocrisies of the present actuality and works to expose them. There is thus no positive idea or conception in the ironist, who wants to move the spirit of the age forward by means of their negation of everything.

In his account of the Romantic irony, Kierkegaard follows Hegel's treatment without criticism or variation. The German ironists indiscriminate criticism of everything is illegitimate. The criticism should be aimed at specific aspects of the present age which are contradictory and not at everything. With regard to Hegel's criticism of the Romantics, Kierkegaard writes, 'We also perceive here that this irony was totally unjustified and that Hegel's hostile behavior toward it is entirely in order' (Kierkegaard, SKS 1, 311 / CI, 275). A few pages later, in connection with Schlegel, Kierkegaard continues in the same tone:

It was against this judging and denouncing conduct on the part of Friedrich Schlegel that Hegel declaims in particular (*Werke*, XVI, 465). In this connection, Hegel's great service to the understanding of the historical past cannot be sufficiently acknowledged. He does not reject the past but comprehends it; he does not repudiate other scholarly positions but surpasses them (SKS 1, 314; CI, 278).

Kierkegaard refers to Hegel's review of Solger's posthumous writings as reprinted in Hegel's collected works (Hegel 1834, 465; 372-373; 161). He emphasizes again that Hegel's philosophy in fact comprehends the past in its fullness and richness. Hegel has an eye towards actuality. Given this, it is

evident that Kierkegaard is positively disposed towards the actual content of Hegel's criticism of Schlegel. By contrast, however, he is critical of those who imitate Hegel or attempt to exploit his results for their own purposes. He continues as follows:

Thus Hegel has put a stop to all this continual chatter that now world history was going to begin, as if it were going to begin at precisely four o'clock or at least by five o'clock. And if one or another Hegelian has attained such enormous world-historical momentum that he cannot stop but at a dreadful speed steers to the back of beyond, then Hegel is not to blame for that. And when it comes to contemplation, if even more can be done than Hegel has done, no one who has any concept of the meaning of actuality would be so ungrateful as to go beyond Hegel so fast that he forgets what he owes to him, that is, if he has been familiar with him at all (SKS 1, 314-315; CI, 278-279).

This seems to be a hidden jab at Martensen, with the phrase about going 'beyond Hegel' being the clue (see Pap. V B 60, 137; CA, Supplement, 207; Martensen 1882-83, 4; Stewart 2024, 31, 272). This passage is informative about Kierkegaard's general disposition to the Hegelian movement in Denmark at the time. In virtually his entire book, he is in a generally positive and productive critical dialogue with Hegel himself. By contrast, he has great disdain for Martensen and his students who make such a public show of their Hegelianism.⁵ Making use of Hegel so extensively in his dissertation, he ran the risk of being associated with Martensen and as being understood as one of his followers. For this reason, Kierkegaard had to sharpen his polemic in order to distinguish himself as much as possible from him. Of particular importance here is that Kierkegaard points out specifically for praise Hegel's account of actuality. One should appreciate Hegel's conception of actuality in contrast to the purported Hegelians who want to improve on the work of their master in this regard. This is a far cry from the usual understanding of him as criticizing Hegel's concept of actuality as overly abstract.

4. *Kierkegaard's References to Actuality in Connection with Hegel's Aesthetics*

Shortly after defending his dissertation, Kierkegaard went to Berlin in order to hear the lectures of Schelling. The question of the nature of actuality continued to be of great interest to him. In fact, this was exactly the

⁵ See also Pap. III B 2; JP 5, 5484: 'Moreover, I wonder whether I may have been too prolix at times, and since Hegel says with authority that the mind is the best epitomizer (see the introduction to his *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 8), let me be judged modestly and without any demands, but I will not be judged by boys.' Here the "boys" are clearly Martensen's students.

issue that Kierkegaard was so excited about upon hearing Schelling's first few lectures. He writes in his *Notebook 8*:

I am so glad to have heard *Schelling's* 2nd lecture – indescribable. I have been sighing, and the thoughts within me have been groaning long enough; when he mentioned the word “*actuality*” concerning philosophy's relation to the actual, the child of thought leaped for joy within me... After that I remember almost every word he said. Perhaps here there can be clarity. This one word, it reminded me of all my philosophical pains and agonies (SKS 19, 235, Not8:33; KJN 3, 229).

He believed that he found in Schelling a way to overcome the split that he experienced between abstraction and his own concerns with the immediate lived experience and one's existential condition.

However, Kierkegaard soon became disappointed with Schelling's account of actuality, which proved to be overly abstract. From his comments in letters to friends and family back in Copenhagen, Kierkegaard's disenchantment with Schelling is clear: 'Schelling talks endless nonsense both in an extensive and an intensive sense' (Kierkegaard, SKS 28, 168, Brev 86 / LD, 139, Letter 69). In another letter, he writes, 'I am too old to attend lectures, just as Schelling is too old to give them' (Kierkegaard, SKS 28, 17, Brev 4 / LD, 141, Letter 70). In frustration, Kierkegaard stopped taking notes to the lectures⁶ and returned to Copenhagen on March 6, 1842, without even waiting for the end of the course. Clearly an important part of what alienated him from the lectures was the feeling of being betrayed by what Schelling subsequently went on to say about actuality (Stewart 2011, 237-253).

While feeling cheated and disappointed by Schelling, Kierkegaard returned to Hegel for insight into the notion of actuality. While still in Berlin, Kierkegaard makes some observations on Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* also in his *Notebook 8* (see SKS 19, 245, Not8:51; KJN 3, 239; SKS 19, 246, Not8:53; KJN 3, 240; SKS 19, 237, Not8.39.1; KJN 3, 231; Thulstrup 1980, 276-277). Kierkegaard had previously made use of these lectures in *The Concept of Irony*. He seems to have continued to work with this text before his departure for the Prussian capital and then during his stay there.⁷ Some of these entries in *Notebook 8* appear from the back of the journal, and in another entry at the beginning of *Notebook 10*, which is also from this period,

⁶ SKS 28, 167, Brev 85; LD, 138, Letter 68: 'I have completely given up on Schelling. I merely listen to him, write nothing down either there or at home'.

⁷ There are two references to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which Kierkegaard wrote in his printed copy of *The Concept of Irony*. These are dated October 17, 1841, i.e., immediately before his departure. See Pap. III B 28; CI, Supplement, 446. Pap. III B 29; CI, Supplement, 447. Kierkegaard defended his dissertation on September 29, 1841, and departed for Berlin on October 25.

Kierkegaard takes extensive notes from his reading of these same lectures (SKS 19, 285-286, Not10:1; KJN 3, 281-282).

These notes are important since they show Kierkegaard looking for answers about the nature of actuality in Hegel's text. The entries about Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* concern primarily this question and not any obvious topic for a theory of art. In the first entry, dated December 6 [1841], Kierkegaard writes, 'An observation which contributes to the question of the relationship of philosophy to actuality [*Virkeligheden*] according to Hegel's thought, which one frequently grasps best in his occasional utterances, is found in his *Aesthetics*, vol. III, p. 243' (SKS 19, 245, Not8:51; KJN 3, 239). Here Kierkegaard simply notes for himself a reference to Hegel's lectures. The passage that he refers to reads as follows:

Thinking, however, results in thoughts alone; it evaporates the form of reality into the form of the pure Concept, and even if it grasps and apprehends real things in their particular character and real existence, it nevertheless lifts even this particular sphere into the element of the universal and ideal wherein alone thinking is at home with itself. Consequently, contrasted with the world of appearance, a new realm arises which is indeed the truth of reality, but this is a truth which is not made *manifest* again in the real world itself as its formative power and as its own soul. Thinking is only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself. But poetic creation and formation is a reconciliation in the form of a real phenomenon itself, even if this form be presented only spiritually (Hegel 1835-38, 242-243; *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, 976; *Jub.*, vol. 14, 242-243).

This passage appears in Hegel's account of poetry. Hegel distinguishes the realm of thought and philosophy from the empirical realm of feeling and intuition, which contains objects of art. Hegel's general view of art is that it presents the Concept to the faculty of sense or perception. This stands in contrast to philosophical cognition, which eliminates the sensible aspect and grasps the structure of the Concept on its own. Kierkegaard is aware that Hegel has been criticized for focusing exclusively on the former and ignoring the latter. However, here Hegel is surprisingly guarded in his claims about the power of thought. It is no wonder that this passage caught Kierkegaard's eye. In a rather Kierkegaardian manner, Hegel grants, 'Thinking is only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself'. This seems to imply a natural limitation of thinking with respect to its ability to capture the wealth and fullness of the empirical sphere. The following claim, that 'poetic creation and formation is a reconciliation in the form of a real phenomenon itself,' seems to ascribe to poetry a positive role and indeed the ability to effect a reconciliation with empirical reality that pure thinking cannot achieve. Hegel seems to recognize the irreducibility of specific aspects of sensible intuition and grant them their due.

In the other entry in *Notebook 8* where Kierkegaard refers to Hegel's *Aesthetics*, the issue is exactly the same. There he writes:

A passage where Hegel himself seems to suggest the deficiency of pure thought, that not even philosophy is alone the adequate expression for human life, or that consequently personal life does not find its fulfillment in thought alone but in a totality of kinds of existence and modes of expression (SKS 19, 246, Not8:53; KJN 3, 240; see *Aesthetics*, vol. III, 440, bottom of page).

Here Kierkegaard refers to the following passage in the lectures, where Hegel again treats the art of poetry:

From these two earlier stages we may now distinguish a third, in the following way. Folk-song precedes the proper development and presence of a prosaic type of consciousness; whereas genuinely lyric poetry, as art, tears itself free from this already existent world of prose, and out of an imagination now become subjectively independent creates a new poetic world of subjective mediation and feeling whereby alone it generates in a living way the true contents of the inner life of man and the true way of expressing them. But thirdly, there is a form of the spirit which, in one aspect, outsoars the imagination of the heart and vision because it can bring its content into free self-consciousness in a more decisively universal way and in more necessary connectedness than is possible for any art at all. I mean philosophical thinking. Yet this form, conversely, is burdened with the abstraction of developing solely in the province of thinking, i.e., of purely ideal universality, so that man in the concrete may find himself forced to express the contents and results of his philosophical mind in a concrete way as penetrated by his heart and vision, his imagination and feeling, in order in this way to have and provide a total expression of his whole inner life (Hegel 1835-38, vol. 10.3, 440-441; *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, 1127-1128; *Jub.*, vol. 14, 440-441).

Here again Hegel is surprisingly open about the limitations of philosophical thinking to capture what we might term the existential dimensions of life and the immediate lived experience. Again this Kierkegaardian Hegel openly concedes that some aspects of the human experience are not adequately expressed by abstract thought. He recognizes the legitimacy of the "heart" "feeling" and "imagination" and has no pretension of reducing this kind of private, subjective experience to the Concept. As Kierkegaard points out, Hegel grants that there can be other forms of expression for this aspect of art besides philosophy. From this passage it is clear that Kierkegaard himself is aware of the fact that Hegel does not wish to eliminate, in this case, the private experience of a work of art and, by analogy, the private belief of the individual. These things simply belong to a sphere which is foreign to conceptual analysis.

These passages demonstrate that Kierkegaard was well aware of the difference between philosophy and the realm of existence and actuality; moreover, they show that he sees that Hegel is also aware of this difference and

can recognize the validity of the sphere of existence that is not subject to philosophical explanation. Immediately before his trip to Berlin, Kierkegaard indicates in *The Concept of Irony* that he is attentive to this. Considering the proper way to approach the person of Socrates, he writes:

This is the purely personal life with which science and scholarship admittedly are not involved... Whatever the case may be, grant that science and scholarship are right in ignoring such things; nevertheless, one who wants to understand the individual life cannot do so. And since Hegel himself says somewhere that with Socrates it is not so much a matter of speculation as of individual life, I dare to take this as sanction for my procedural method in my whole venture, however imperfect it may turn out because of my own deficiencies (SKS 1, 215 / CI, 166-167).

Here he acknowledges that Hegel has recognized the subjective element of the person of Socrates that can never be adequately captured by a philosophical analysis.

This suggests that Kierkegaard had a much more positive estimate of Hegel than is usually assumed. Indeed, these entries are clear evidence that Kierkegaard was reading the *Lectures on Aesthetics* in part in order to help him work out the difficult question of the relation of philosophy to actuality. Instead of criticizing or dismissing Hegel, as some would expect, Kierkegaard looks to him for inspiration on a central problem which had exercised him for many years.

5. *Kierkegaard and the Conflict about the Nature of Philosophy*

The views of the young Kierkegaard on Hegel's account of actuality complicate considerably the usual interpretations of him as a critic of Hegel on this point. Whatever criticisms he might have issued later need to be qualified by an account of these early views. This is an important issue that concerns not only the development of Kierkegaard's thinking. Indeed, what is at issue is the nature of philosophy as a discipline and its limitations. This represents a wider conflict in the history of philosophy that continues to this very day. Philosophers in the Anglophone analytic tradition tend to insist on conceptual analysis and to understand philosophy as being continuous with the sciences. By contrast, there is a strand of Continental philosophy that tends to try to find ways to capture the human experience and the nature of the world in a way that is more immediate or preconceptual. It rejects purely conceptual analysis as the final word in philosophical inquiry.

The later Kierkegaard was critical of conceptual thinking since he believed that it represented a separate sphere from religion and the lived existential experience. However, the young Kierkegaard appreciated the need for conceptual analysis in order to make sense of the experience of actuality.

This shows that the larger discussion about the nature of philosophy played itself out in the mind of Kierkegaard as he developed his thinking. His own personal struggle with this issue can be seen as anticipating the larger conflict in the history of philosophy in general. This explains why some commentators have raised the question of whether Kierkegaard himself was ever even a philosopher in the first place (Stewart 2003, 632-652; Hannay 1997, 238-253; Hannay 2000, 1-22).

Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v.v.i.

E-mail: js@jonstewart.dk

Abbreviations

Kierkegaard

- CA = *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. by R. Thomte in collaboration with A. B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- CI = *The Concept of Irony*; Schelling Lecture Notes, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- CUP1 = *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vols. 1-2, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, vol. 1.
- EPW = *Early Polemical Writings: From the Papers of One Still Living; Articles from Student Days; The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*, trans. by J. Watkin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- JP = *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1-6, ed. and trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1967-78. Cited by volume number and entry number. Index and Composite Collation, vol. 7, by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978.
- KJN = *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1-11, ed. by N. Jørgen Cappelørn, A. Hannay, D. Kangas, *et al.*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007-2020.
- LD = *Kierkegaard: Letters and Documents*, trans. by H. Rosenmeier, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Pap. = *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vols. I to XI-3, ed. by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1909-48; 2nd expanded ed., vols. I to XI-3, ed. by N. Thulstrup, vols. XII to XIII supplementary volumes, ed. by N. Thulstrup, vols. XIV to XVI index, by N. J. Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-78.
- SKS = *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1-28, K1-K28, ed. by N. Jørgen Cappelørn, J. Garff, J. Kondrup, *et al.*, Copenhagen: Gad Publishers, 1997-2012.

Hegel

- Aesthetics = *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vols. 1-2, trans. by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 1998.
- EL = *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. by T.F. Gerats, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.
- Hist. of Phil. = *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vols. 1-3, trans. by E.S. Haldane, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892-96; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Hegel's Werke = *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols. 1-18, ed. by L. Boumann, F. Förster, E. Gans, K. Hegel, L. von Henning, H. G. Hotho, P. Marheineke, K. L. Michelet, K. Rosenkranz, J. Schulze, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1832-45.
- Jub. = *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. by H. Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1928-41.
- MW = *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by J. Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002.
- SL = *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1989.

Other Works

- OSP = *Heiberg's On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. by J. Stewart, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2005 (*Texts from Golden Age Denmark*, vol. 1).

Bibliography

- Alderks, E.G. 2020. "Literary Answers to Social Crisis: Kierkegaardian Irony and the Ethics of World-Historical Change." In: J. Stewart and N. Kramer (eds.), *The Crisis of the Danish Golden Age and Its Modern Resonance*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 12), 215-225.
- Andersen, H.C. 1837. *Kun en Spillemand*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.
- Andersen, H.C. 1874. *Only a Fiddler: A Danish Romance*, New York: Hurd and Houghton.
- Carlsson, U. 2016. "Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Spirit", *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 24, no. 3, 629-650.
- Fenger, H. 1980. *Kierkegaard: The Myths and Their Origins*, trans. by George C. Schoolfield, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Hannay, A. 1997. "Why Should Anyone Call Kierkegaard a Philosopher?" In: N.J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 1), 238-253.
- Hannay, A. 2000. "Kierkegaard and What We Mean by 'Philosophy'" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1-22.

- Hegel, G.W.F. 1833-36. *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, I-III, Karl Ludwig Michelet (ed.), vols. 13-15, in *Hegel's Werke*.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1840. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 2nd edition, Karl Hegel (ed.), vol. 9 in *Hegel's Werke*.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1834. "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel. Herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich von Raumer. Erster Band 780 S. mit Vorr. XVI S. Zweiter Band 784 S. Leipzig, 1826", in *Vermischte Schriften*, I-II, Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann (eds.), vols. 16-17 in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 16, 436-506.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1835-38. *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, I-III, Heinrich Gustav Hotho (ed.), vols. 10.1-3, in *Hegel's Werke*.
- Heiberg, J.L. 1833a. *Om Philosophiens Betydning for den nuværende Tid. Et Indbydelses-Skrift til en Række af filosofiske Forelæsninger*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.
- Heiberg, J.L. 1833b. "I Anledning af Recensionen over mit Skrift: Om Philosophiens Betydning for den nuværende Tid. (Dansk Litt. Tid. No. 41-43)", *Dansk Litteratur-Tidende*, no. 46, 765-780.
- Himmelstrup, J. 1924. *Søren Kierkegaards Opfattelse af Sokrates*, Copenhagen: Arnold Busck.
- Hirsch, E. 1933. *Kierkegaard-Studien*, vols. 1-2, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann.
- Høffding, H. 1909. *Danske Filosofer*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, Nordisk Forlag.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1838. *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer*. Udgivet mod hans Villie af S. Kierkegaard. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.
- Kondrup, J. 1997. "Tekstredegørelse" to *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer*, in *SKS K1*, 67-76.
- Martensen, H. 1882-83. *Af mit Levnet. Meddelelser*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Mynster, J.P. 1833. "Om den religiøse Overbeviisning," *Dansk Ugeskrift*, vol. 3, nos. 76-77, 241-258.
- Schreiber, G. 2012. "Lebensanschauung und Glaube beim jungen Kierkegaard," *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook*, 171-198.
- Stewart, J. 2003. *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, J. 2011. "The Notion of Actuality in Kierkegaard and Schelling's Influence", *Ars brevis anuari de la Càtedra Ramon Llull Blanquerna*, vol. 17. Barcelona, 237-253.
- Stewart, J. 2024. *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, *The Martensen Period: 1837-1841*, 2nd revised and augmented edition, Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 14).
- Thulstrup, N. 1980. *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.
- Tryde, E.C. 1833. "Om Philosophiens Betydning for den nuværende Tid. Et Indbydelses-Skrift til en Række af filosofiske Forelæsninger. Af Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Kbhavn. 54 S. 8°," *Dansk Litteratur-Tidende*, no. 41, 649-660; no. 42, 681-692; no. 43, 697-704.