

Kierkegaard Studies
Yearbook 2008



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Edited on behalf of the
Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre
by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

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Preface

The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre had another productive year in 2007. Once again, the Centre helped organize conferences devoted to Kierkegaard's relationship to other thinkers. Among these was a seminar, devoted to the German idealist J. G. Fichte's real and apparent influence on Kierkegaard held in Copenhagen in October, 2007. Likewise, the annual Research Seminar at the Kierkegaard Research Centre was held in August at Vartov in Copenhagen. The theme of the seminar was one of Kierkegaard's most flexible and influential works, *Either/Or*, which was published in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 2 and 3.

As is our practice, the papers delivered at the Research Seminar make up the first section of the *Yearbook*. These articles are representative of the versatility and interdisciplinary appeal of *Either/Or*, ranging from interpretations in the existential tradition, to psychological readings of Part 1, to literary readings exploring gender issues, to the theological implications of the "Ultimatum," and finally to a pseudonymous letter that reopens the relationship of the ethical and the religious for Wilhelm. Several articles re-examine A's insight into Mozart's Don Giovanni, as well.

The second section, which contains the reception histories of *Either/Or* in a number of different languages and regions, is extensive in this volume given the fact that *Either/Or* has received such great attention in the secondary literature.

Other 2007 publications affiliated with the Centre are worth noting. The publication of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* continued with the June publication of vols. 23 and 23K, comprising Kierkegaard's journals NB15-NB20, and the November publication of vols. 24 and K24, made up of journals NB21-NB25. The Centre also oversaw the publication of the first two volumes of a new research series, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*. These first volumes are made up of articles treating Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological contemporaries in the German speaking world. In addition, the

first three books in the *Danish Golden Age Studies Series* were published, along two more monographs in the *Monograph* series.

The year 2007 also saw the publication of *Either/Or* in Spanish, *O lo uno o lo orto*, part of the continuing series *Escritos Søren Kierkegaard*. The first volume of the French translation of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* was published, *Journaux et Cahiers de Notes*, which contains *Journals* AA, BB, CC, and DD based on the text and explanatory notes in *SKS* vols. 17 and K17. The English translation continued with the publication of volume two of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*.

We would like to thank philological assistant Irene Ring for her enormous help and support with the textual editing and production of this volume. We likewise wish to express our gratitude to Walter de Gruyter Verlag for their continued cooperation with the publication of *Kierkegaard Studies* and to express special thanks to Dr. Albrecht Döhnert, the Editor-in-Chief responsible for Kierkegaard-related publications.

April 2008

NIELS JØRGEN CAPPELØRN HERMANN DEUSER K. BRIAN SÖDERQUIST

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The Papers of B as the Modern Answer to both Aristotle and Kant¹

By AGNES HELLER

Philosophers have never invented ethics. They have simply presented the model of the ethical world of their own age. This was usually an idealized model insofar as they presented moral perfection. Philosophers have never cherished the illusion that this moral perfection is generally achieved or even achieved at all. Yet moral philosophers are not moralists. Their main business is not to ridicule or to criticize the vices of their contemporaries, but to create the “moral center” around which men and women can approximate. If no moral center is presented, human beings will not even know whether they have approximated the center or ended far behind. The center presents the image of the “good person,” the one who may serve as a yardstick for all the others. The presentation of the idealized moral of an age functions as a measure concerning good and evil. Yet, I repeat, this center is not the artifact of a clever philosopher, but rather the image of morality embodied by living persons the philosopher knows, usually people of their own age, city, or family, people of pure morals, decent and upright human beings, perhaps the philosopher’s friends or at least the people a philosopher would like to have as friends.

There is tradition for contrasting virtue ethics with divine command ethics. It became typical with the Greeks, and later with Christian Europe. There is another important difference between the ancients and the moderns, which is best illustrated with Aristotle and Kant. I choose Aristotle and Kant because in my view it is Aristotle who best presents all the basic features of ancient ethics, whereas Kant presents in its purest version the moral philosophy of early modernity: the best

¹ The editors of *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook* would like to thank Summer Henderson for her careful and thoughtful editorial work on this article.

philosophical answer to the collapse of ancient and Christian virtue ethics. But, different as they are, both Aristotle and Kant have organically embedded their moral philosophy in a metaphysical system. As a result their ethics conform to their epistemology and are inserted into a holistic world picture. Moreover, this holistic world picture remains immanent, or, to refer to Heidegger's formula, oblivious to ontological difference.

Let me now present Kierkegaard's existential ethic as it appears in the papers of B, though this paper will not embrace all the moral issues Kierkegaard reflected upon. Kierkegaard abandons metaphysics early on in *Either/Or*, especially in the papers of B, and the so-called ontological difference occupies a central place only in his *Fear and Trembling* in the discussion of the teleological suspension of the ethical, in the papers of the young man in *Repetition*, and in the works of the pseudonyms Climacus and Anti-Climacus. Still, I believe that B formulated most clearly the fundamental issues for a post-metaphysical ethic – a kind of post-metaphysical ethic that can lay claim to universality, that is, a modern ethic accessible to all. B's frequently repeated claim that the individual (the singular) is the universal presents the reader with a catchphrase. Every single individual can become the universal. This is a different interpretation of universality than the one presented in *Fear and Trembling*, where the question is whether the singular stands higher than the universal (the teleological suspension of the ethical) or the universal stands higher than the singular (the case of tragedy).

In this paper, I will limit myself to B's papers, and the proposition that the singular (the individual) is the universal. His letters to A present the archetype of post-metaphysical ethics as it appears in post-metaphysical philosophy and literature after Kierkegaard (regardless of whether the authors knew the work of Kierkegaard or not). What Kierkegaard presents in the letters of B is the first formulation of an ethics of personality. Thus Kierkegaard (or, in this paper, B) did not invent an ethic. He simply devises an ethic in the same way his predecessors did: He presents the moral center for modern men and women, a center which was also already in *statu nascendi* in his time. He may have had models such as P.M. Møller or even himself. Or better yet – his own predicament. He could not, however, understand himself as a moral person, which he certainly was, within the categories of Aristotelian or Kantian ethics. To break his engagement with Regine cannot be described as an ethical gesture in terms of any traditional moral philosophy. It was neither a "virtuous" act, nor does he wish

that everyone should act similarly. And since he was a thinker, he had to ruminate on why traditional moral philosophies could not offer a yardstick for his morally justifiable decision. He justified it with the papers of B – by devising a new moral center. He simultaneously presented a new ethic while answering the post-modern question of how an individual can become the universal.

One can break with tradition absolutely. Or one can break with tradition while reformulating the questions of the tradition. Speaking of ethics, the second proposition is the viable one. After all, the answer to the question about who is a decent person has not drastically changed in the last two thousand years. Socrates formulated it like this: It is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice. We can still subscribe to this principle and add that a person who suffers rather than commits injustice is a just, decent, honest, and good person. It still holds that a decent person gives preference to the choice between good and evil as well as the choice between useful and harmful and pleasant and unpleasant.

In answering the question of “becoming” Kierkegaard preserves the teleological concept of ethics of Aristotle while rejecting the Kantian absolute causal nexus, (causality by freedom). Yet he preserves the Kantian claim for moral universality against the socially/politically embedded ethics of Aristotle.

B develops his idea in letters written to A, his alter-ego. One of the letters is entitled “The Balance between the Aesthetic and the Ethical.” Despite the absence of interruptions and some indications that A might have asked several questions in between, the text gives the impression that all this might have happened with clarifications and hypothetical responses. That is, the fundamental conception is presented right from the beginning, but there are initially lacunae in the conception, and we are left with some undigested issues. I cannot answer the question of whether Kierkegaard himself asked those questions while writing and specifically worked out his answers underway, or whether this step-by-step procedure was a shrewd strategy, a kind of theoretical hide and seek where the trump card is played only at the end. At any rate, the reflections on existential choice are always interrupted by other issues. First and foremost, there are other kinds of issues concerning the relation between the aesthetical and the ethical, and only after some time does B return to the interrupted ruminations.

Either/Or shouts B’s advice to A from the outset. The either/or is uttered with pathos, yet remains traditional. There are crossroads in every person’s life, suggests B, where these words have absolute

meaning: “namely, every time truth, justice, and sanctity appear on one side and lust and natural inclination, dark passions, and perdition on the other side.”² This warning, of course, sounds like preaching. The either/or seems here to be the choice between the seven vices and seven virtues, not even between aesthetic and ethical life since the aesthetic way of life A presents is far more complicated than this simple choice suggests. B even reassures A that the momentous choice is already behind him, although only “to a certain degree.”³ All readers of Kierkegaard will notice that the sentence is ironical as one cannot choose *absolutely* yet to a “certain degree.”

There is either/or, there is choice, not just between the aesthetic and the ethical (which, as I tried to show, is rather banal) yet also an either/or within the aesthetic “sphere” and an entirely different one within the ethical “sphere.” The aesthetic either/or is very poetically and rhetorically presented in the papers of A. No matter what one chooses, one will regret one’s choice. The kind of choice presented there as “aesthetic” can be described as an entirely contingent choice. For example, I choose by lot, thus whatever I chose has nothing to do with me and my preferences at all. This is merely a pseudo choice and my character is not involved in choosing. I regret both for neither choice is “me.” There can be an interpretation of this either/or where the choice itself is not pseudo. I choose what I really prefer. For example, I choose one mask instead of another. Since I am choosing, my character is a part of the choice. The choice seems to be free. Why then do I regret all my choices? Because they are not built into my character; because at every new choice I begin again at point zero. As my sense of self is not increasing, the choice is not upbuilding. In another sense, the choice remains contingent. Yet, this kind of choice is not without worth or interest, for choosing the most beautiful, interesting, or amusing alternative based on aesthetic preference is still a free preference. B suggests, however, that the subject of such a choice remains unhappy. Finally, we tend to let others choose for us instead choosing for ourselves. In principle, this is also a pseudo choice, yet, unlike the choice by chance, it does not display even the semblance of freedom. Nietzsche would call the “subject” of such a choice “the last man.” It is at this point that B slowly turns to his endorsement of the ethical choice.

² EO2, 157.

³ EO2, 163ff.

First, B declares that the ethical choice is at the same time easier and more difficult than the aesthetic one. At this point he immediately departs from his formulation at the beginning of his letter. Here he says that it is first and foremost not what “a person chooses that makes his choice ethically relevant,” but the way one chooses, namely “the energy, the earnestness and the pathos with which one chooses.”⁴ And he adds that choosing in earnestness means “that the personality declares itself in its inner infinity and in turn the personality is thereby consolidated.”⁵ Even if the person chooses the wrong thing, “by virtue of the energy with which he chose, he will discover that he chose the wrong thing.”⁶ And little later he continues: “Rather than designating the choice between good and evil, my either/or designates the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules that out. Here the question is under what qualifications one will view all existence and personally live.”⁷ The question of what we choose is organically linked with the question of how we choose. Better yet, the “how” of the choice has preference over the “what” of the choice, although the latter is by no means unimportant. For he immediately adds that he who chooses between good and evil will learn to choose good rather than evil.

At this point there is a strong similarity with Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Here Kant proposes an understanding of radical evil as the reversal of the hierarchy of maxims. At the top of the hierarchy are the maxims concerning good and evil, lower in the hierarchy are the maxims concerning pleasant/unpleasant, useful/harmful and even beautiful/ugly. If one chooses by the guidance of beautiful/ugly and only afterwards considers the maxims concerning good and evil, this in itself suggests that the choice, the action, is “radically evil.” Kierkegaard, that is B, also speaks of a hierarchy between the ethical and the aesthetic, where the ethical is fundamental. The priority cannot be reversed. Yet he never mentions maxims. He talks about the choice, about the earnest choice which reaches the infinite interiority of our personality; he never speaks of maxims. How do we then choose good over evil after having already chosen the choice between good and evil? We see that as a result of our pathos and earnestness, we have chosen wrongly. But what are the criteria of this self judgment? We must wait for an answer.

⁴ EO2, 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ EO2, 169.

Instead of an answer, a long theoretical detour follows. The detour is about Hegelian philosophy, Hegel in general, and philosophy in general. He ridicules the philosopher who constantly mediates, who has no eye for immediacy, who contemplates the past instead of answering the ever urgent questions of actors, who remains outside and has nothing to tell us about interior actions. Then B speaks about himself, about being a married man with children, about practicing a profession as a judge; he speaks of himself as a man who needs an answer to the question “what I am supposed to do?”

We cannot avoid the detour because it is also a circuit that leads us back to our question. Not to mention that it is only one thread which will assume great significance both in philosophy and literature. In particular, the importance of the portrayal of interior action such as Ibsen’s dramas, where dialogues breath out interior actions, and in Proust or Joyce where interior action makes up the backbone of the novels.

Finally B returns to the either/or, “his” either/or. The “personification” of philosophy challenges Hegel. B (who is not a philosopher) does not present his own concern as “the” universal truth, as the outcome of human history, but as his personal truth. The last sentence of *Either/Or*, which was not written by B, also suggests the personification of truth as a conclusion: “Only the truth which edifies is truth for you.”⁸

What takes precedence in my either/or, he says, is the ethical. The point is not the reality of that which is chosen but rather the reality of choosing.⁹ Seemingly nothing happened, for B seems to repeat what he has already said. Yet something has changed. B has already made a case for internal action. It is the conception of internal action that allows him to juxtapose two kinds of realities: the reality of choosing and the reality of what is chosen.

Now B continues: “And yet the point here is a choice, indeed, an absolute choice, for only by choosing absolutely can one choose the ethical....The Either/Or I have advanced is, therefore, in a certain sense absolute, for it is between choosing and not choosing.... But since the choice is an absolute choice, the Either/Or is absolute. In another sense, the absolute Either/Or does not make its appearance until the choice, because now the choice between good and evil appears.”¹⁰ Instead of finally getting to the resolution of the issue, we poor readers become more and more confused.

⁸ EO2, 354.

⁹ EO2, 176.

¹⁰ EO2, 177, 178.

This is the first time B makes the crucial point about the word “absolute,” a Hegelian favorite. B is not speaking of an absolute idea, of course, but rather about the absolute choice. We know what makes an idea absolute, namely that it is fully determined. Obviously the same makes the choice absolute – it must also be fully determined. But what determines a choice? A choice is free if one can also choose something else. Kant could interrupt at this point and warn us that as far as morality is concerned there is only one free choice (which is really not a choice at all): obedience to the law. Is there only one kind of free choice as well in B’s advice? Is this choice also absolutely determined? This does not sound like Kierkegaard. Yet maybe the choice is absolute because it is the end, the goal, the final result, and because it is irrevocable. This sounds more like Kierkegaard. Yet there are still more questions than answers here.

Up to this point, we have been led to believe that the ethical either/or meant the choice of good and evil. What does B mean when he asserts that absolute choice, the choice between good and evil, makes its appearance in and with choice itself, that only when I choose absolutely will the choice between good and evil appear?

What do I choose absolutely? I choose the choice? This is not a circular argument, but a circular phenomenon. I could go on and say that I choose to choose the choice absolutely. A married man with children and a profession who wants to know how he ought to act can hardly feel comfort in this answer.

Kierkegaard, that is B, leaves us in a state of confusion. Perhaps because he himself needed time to rethink the issue, or perhaps because he was teasing us. But he will not forget us. We must still wait before B proceeds towards a philosophical answer.

The second detour, just like the first, is not a real detour. B makes a decisive philosophical step by distinguishing between doubt and despair. He already suggested that we need to choose absolutely, but he now adds that the absolute is not doubt but despair.¹¹ And then he proceeds: “I go back to the category of choosing. When I choose absolutely I choose despair, and in despair I choose the absolute, and I myself am the absolute.”¹² It is here, for the first time, that the central thought of the existential choice gets formulated. While choosing absolutely I do not choose good and evil, neither good nor evil, for the object of my choice is never absolute. I choose rather myself, in

¹¹ EO2, 211-213.

¹² EO2, 213.

despair, for I alone am the absolute. It becomes obvious that Kierkegaard confirms the credo of modern ethics that is expressed radically in Kant's moral philosophy. In choosing something outside of ourselves, we can never choose the absolute. Kant would say that such a choice is never autonomous, and B goes on to say that while doing so one is always in doubt, which practically speaking, though not theoretically, is the same. We can choose the absolute by choosing something internal; for the right external choice can also result only from internal choice. There is, however, one essential difference between Kant and Kierkegaard. With Kant, one chooses the universal as humankind in us, against our individual contingent nature and singularity; with Kierkegaard, we choose ourselves as such, the universal and the singular in one gesture. For in ethics, B insists, the singular is the universal.

This is the decisive step in overcoming metaphysics. Kant can make his conception work by dividing human beings in two parts: *homo noumenon* and *homo phenomenon*. This gambit requires the division of the world into Freedom and Nature, into "thing in itself" and phenomena; it requires a metaphysical solution. In ethics, if the universal is the individual and vice versa, metaphysics is overcome while the Kantian answer to the modern problem is preserved. It is not factual truths that are chosen, nor is it "virtues" or "goods" as in Aristotle's time or the Christian tradition, but the individual chooses herself, because the individual is the absolute; there is no doubt here. Yet there is despair. The question remains whether this strategy works.

B thus returns to his category of despair. In despair one chooses the absolute and oneself as the absolute. One chooses oneself, and in the moment of absolute isolation one becomes another self, myself in my "eternal validity."¹³ The self I choose is the most concrete and the most abstract: it is freedom.¹⁴

B proceeds dialectically. One remains oneself the chooser and one becomes oneself, a different self, the chosen self. But the chooser and the chosen are the same. The chooser does not determine the chosen, but it is the chooser. Between the chooser and the chosen is the leap, or the choice itself. The chooser cannot determine the chosen because there would be no leap. And the chosen, although entirely different, remains identical to the chooser for it is the chooser who leaps. In addition to their similarities, a crucial difference between Kant and

¹³ EO2, 211.

¹⁴ EO2, 214.

Kierkegaard becomes evident here. Regarding freedom, autonomy is the alfa and the omega of morality. But in Kant freedom is non-temporal. It is eternal, whereas in Kierkegaard freedom is becoming. It must be so, for there is no transcendental freedom for B; freedom is namely personal because only the single individual can become free. And he becomes free if he chooses himself in despair absolutely.

While several aspects of B's argument are clarified, some questions remain. How can a person become free absolutely, as a concrete individual person, as a whole? Imagine a person with infirmities, neuroses, temporal determinations, which cannot be annulled or abandoned? Does he not need an imperative power? How can he be the person who has chosen the choice between good and evil and be good?

B takes up this issue. He suggests that the person who isolates himself in his absolute choice repents himself back into his family, his time, his infirmities, his cleverness or stupidity, his childhood – back into all of his contingencies, and finally to God. For B, and for Kierkegaard, it is essential that the person who chooses himself absolutely repents himself to God. Otherwise the pathos of the minister from Jutland – who preaches about the uplifting idea that before God we are always in the wrong – would not be essentially connected with the so-called category of existential choice. Yet because the proposition of B turned out to be the basic structure of the ethics of personality of the late modern age in general, both in philosophy and literature, I will now deal only with the general conception. No question about it: If one finally repents oneself back to God, the existential choice results in grace, even if it does not require grace. The fundamental conception can work, however, without resulting in grace.

For if a person who chooses herself as a decent person, as someone who distinguishes between good and evil and chooses the good absolutely, she need only choose herself back into her family, age, her own infirmities, her own childhood; for if she did not do so, she would never be free. If at any time she does something out of character, she can say that she has not chosen it. Yet if she repented back into all of her life contingencies she could never say that she did something because she was determined by this or that, because she has chosen all her contingencies freely; thus nothing could determine her from the outside.

To choose ourselves back to all our contingencies has, also for B, further ramifications. A person who chooses himself as a concretion chooses himself in his continuity. I have already mentioned that in Kierkegaard, inner history is of great existential importance. Personal

history is concretion, especially interior history.¹⁵ Think again about Ibsen or Proust. History is a self-chosen person's actuality, yet it is also possibility, but a different possibility than the one open for men and women who let others chose for them. A contingent personality sees possibilities everywhere. This is why he can regret all his choices. For an individual who lives ethically, possibility appears as a task, a goal, or an objective. We have thus moved from the Kantian moment in B's papers to the Aristotelian moment.

It is not necessary to think of something external when one thinks of a task or an objective: Just as history can be internal, so also can goals and objectives. The historical development of an ethical individual is teleological. Yet, as we know, the ethical individual has repented himself back into outside contingencies. His development will be free, internal, but not unrelated to the outside. He remains open to the outside as he develops from the inside. For how could one choose the good without being related to others? To quote B again: "The individual has his teleology within himself, has inner teleology, is himself his teleology, his self is then the goal towards which he strives....His self must open itself according to its total concretion....In this way his movement becomes a move from himself through the world to himself."¹⁶ This is the act of freedom as an immanent teleology. "To become what I am" sums up, with Nietzsche, the teleology of his life.

In his famous book *After Virtue*, MacIntyre admits that objective ethical teleology has been lost since Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This, indeed, seems to be the case. In Aristotle's time, for example, men and women were thrown by birth into a social world where they received the telos of their life already in the cradle. If you were born a free man and citizen (and Aristotle devised his ethics for free men and citizens) you would have received a list of virtues the moment you started to speak and understand language. To achieve those virtues, to become virtuous, became the purpose of your life. Your subjective and objective purposes coincided. Knowledge and good education were the conditions for living up to those virtues. Teleology was subjective; for you were striving, even if you were not always successful in the end. It was also objective; for the virtues were there and also the models of men who already practiced them. There were sceptics like Plato's Socrates who doubted that anyone ever could be perfectly good, yet no one doubted that there is goodness and that it consists

¹⁵ EO2, 216.

¹⁶ EO2, 274.

of the practice of the sum total of commonly known virtues. No one questioned the notion that it becomes easier and easier to be virtuous as one practices virtues, and that a character can arrive at the state of perfection where he will only be able to act virtuously.

In the modern world, where men and women are thrown into freedom – to express myself in the terms of one of Kierkegaard's philosophical grandchildren – they do not receive their life paths in their cradle. The modern world gives the feeling that we are thrown into nothing, and objective teleology is seemingly lost forever. Subjective teleology certainly persists as both a freedom and a burden. B, though exaggerating a bit, says something important when he describes this merely subjective (aesthetical) teleology as a web of infinite possibilities and quasi choices among the variety of choices whose results we always regret. Heidegger's *das Man* is also a good and picturesque description of this modern vicissitude. This merely subjective teleology, as long as it remains on the level of presenting mere subjective possibilities, presents mere objective possibilities without any kind of objective teleology.

As mentioned, Kant contrasts these possibilities with the necessity and objectivity of the moral law. While I cannot discuss Kant's important contributions to the philosophy of teleology in this paper, I do want to remind the audience that he excludes it from moral philosophy, *sensu stricto*. He doubts whether the teleology of nature can ever bridge the abyss between Nature and Freedom, but there is no doubt in his mind that this coincidence remains impossible for the single individual unless we presuppose the immortality of the soul. And here enters Kierkegaard or, better, here enters B.

The letters of B offer a new kind of moral teleology, where objective and subjective purposes almost merge without presupposing the pre-existence of an "outside" purpose or inner determination. Modern men and women are, indeed, thrown into contingencies at birth; they do not receive "objective," that is valid, virtues from the cradle. They are, indeed, open possibilities in "negative" freedom. Yet those open possibilities can transform possibilities into destiny. They can destine themselves through an absolute choice; for while choosing absolutely they choose themselves. To choose absolutely is itself a leap. Not birth, but the leap, that is, the second birth, is the beginning of becoming, or the teleology of a personality. Through the leap and through the choice to choose ourselves, we begin to become what we are. This is an ethic of personality.

In B's letters, the ethic of personality was identified with ethical choice or with the choice of the ethical. B has formulated the exis-

tential choice in a polemic against the credo of an aesthetic form of life, thereby also claiming aesthetic validity for the ethical. Yet even Kierkegaard has not remained entirely with B. The leap into the religious sphere, which he devised while discussing the sacrifice of Abraham, is not identical with the leap into the ethical (although the structure is almost the same). New and different approaches appear again in the work of Taciturnus and Climacus.

In the aftermath of Kierkegaard, from Ibsen via Nietzsche to the present day, the "category" of the existential choice has been expanded.

It is no longer identical with choosing to distinguish good from evil, but it applies to all kinds of self-choice. One can choose oneself as a writer, as a painter, as a statesman, as a lover, as anything; one must simply choose absolutely and become what one is. One can, of course, also choose oneself as a good decent human being and also as a knight of faith, again becoming what one is or what one has chosen to be. Absolute choice remains the choice of the absolute, and thus remains irrevocable. If one revokes it, then one fails as a personality. Absolute choice excludes many succeeding choices and opens up the possibility for others. Every modern personality, as far as she is a personality, has chosen herself in order to "become," whether he or not she is aware of it or not. Interestingly, more often than not, modern personalities are at least remotely aware of having made such a choice, and sometimes even know when and where the choice was made.

Is there anything "ethical," then, in absolute choice of self if Napoleon or Rothschild fit into the picture as well as Nietzsche, Proust, or Mother Teresa? I think that there remains something "ethical" also in the non-ethical choices of choosing ourselves, which might include lying to oneself or remaining true to oneself. Yet we know from experience, as well as from literature, how thin the ice is on which we dance. Peer Gynt, for example, could not distinguish between the moral imperative to "be yourself!" and the egositic moaxim to "be sufficeint unto yourself" and thus became an existential failure.

The combination of Kant and Aristotle in B's letters as an ethics of personality preserves its validity. Becoming what we are, that is, the teleology of personality, preserves a grain of the Aristotelian heritage. The absolute choice of ourselves as men and women involved in distinguishing good from evil preserves a grain of Kantian ethics. There are other philosophical solutions as good as B's, but I do not know better practical advice.

Let me return to the beginning of this paper. Philosophers have never invented ethics, they have simply systematized the ethics prac-

ticed by the best people of their age. If they rejected systems, they nonetheless reflected upon the moral predicaments of their times. Kierkegaard, alias B, reflected upon an ethics in *statu nascendi*. Since then, we have lived with it.

Reading *Either/Or* in Tehran: Either Kierkegaard or Fundamentalism

By RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

Abstract

The essay investigates the theory of dialogical individualism in Kierkegaard's philosophy, which stands in opposition to all forms of fundamentalism. With an eye to Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, I will focus not only on the Socratic task of Kierkegaard's philosophy, but also on philosophy as a form of dissident thinking opposed to the monolithic and one-dimensional discourses of political tyrannies. The aim of this essay is to show that a political power conceiving of itself as the embodiment of an ideology and the summit of philosophy cannot tolerate any philosophical thinking. With this sketch in mind, reading Kierkegaard in Tehran is an encouragement to look for signals of individuality in everyday human experience under tyranny. It is a commitment to the individual in its fullest potential and fallibility.

1. Introduction

Since Plato, philosophers have strived to imagine societies and political systems in which it would be safe to philosophize. In their effort to examine life, philosophers have always presented some kind of a danger to the status quo. Socrates' example has been in many ways a guide for philosophers throughout the ages. The idea that one can examine life by asking questions, timeless and universal questions, is still as revolutionary today as it was in Socrates' day. Plato came to believe that teaching philosophy was dangerous. The experience of tyrannies in history and, more specifically totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, showed that a political power conceiving itself as the embodiment of an ideology and the summit of philosophy can tolerate no philosophical thinking. Philosophy, however, has always survived both its martyrs and its persecutors. As Friedrich Schlegel wrote in his *Athenaeum*:

The fact that one can annihilate a philosophy...or that one can prove that a philosophy annihilates itself is of little consequence. If it's really philosophy, then, like the phoenix, it will always rise again from its own ashes.¹

This possibility raises the specter of a larger problem: philosophy is a task, but merely a sub-task of the larger task. Life itself is the larger task. Kierkegaard's understanding of his "task" provides us with a model, if not a recommendation, for philosophizing under tyrannies. Kierkegaard set himself up as absolutely different from other theologians and philosophers. As such he turned to Socrates in order to understand his own philosophical undertaking. "My task is returning to the Socratic,"² he affirmed in *Philosophical Fragments*. Kierkegaard's concern with Socratic methodology is an expression of his conception of philosophy. The idea of philosophy against which he is reacting is that of the search for foundations and the construction of a unified understanding of the world. Kierkegaard's use of Socratic methodology is a step in the breakdown of a monolithic philosophy which seeks to unify the world in understanding and action. In Kierkegaard the actual features of "knowing," "understanding," "judging," and "acting" denote a strategy of differentiation which serves both to connect forms of life and to separate them. The motto behind all Kierkegaard's writings is "I'll teach you differences." For instance, in *Either/Or* the title has distinct meanings for the aesthete (who uses the term ironically), the ethicist (who demands lawful choice) and the religious figure (who negates the ethical choice, which can only be rediscovered in faith through grace).

The recognition of this differentiation by Kierkegaard is intended to suggest a "philosophical therapy" against the monolithic discourse of philosophy, theology and politics. He tries to grasp the world in its difference and variety. Therefore, "understanding" and "judging" are relativized simply by the introduction of the project of grasping the world in its variety. The mere fact that such a project could be conceived, and an attempt made to carry it through, demonstrates that for Kierkegaard the major question taken up by a philosopher is: "where must philosophy leave off?" Kierkegaard recognizes that abstaining from "going further" in philosophical discourse does not eliminate the necessity of "going on" in philosophy. For him this necessity is rooted in the essential difficulty and existential necessity

¹ Friedrich Schlegel *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1991, p. 30.

² *PF*, 105.

of philosophy as a Socratic task. As such, Kierkegaard's philosophical attitude shares many features with Socrates' analysis of philosophy as an unachieved task which, despite its constant drive for explanations of the world, never achieves its goal as a philosophy of totality, and ultimately remains aporetic.

Kierkegaard's reasons to "go on" in philosophy are existential, if no less dialogical. New problems are always arising in the course of life. Thus even if one is able to stop doing philosophy when one wants, there will constantly be new occasions to make philosophical decisions, and constant temptation to return to philosophical questioning. The aim is not an increase in the quantity of knowledge, but a continuous effort to expand the variety of the world. In other words, Kierkegaard's criticism of objectivity presents itself as a project of re-grasping the world at the level of its differences. Philosophy "leaves the world unchanged," but it allows us to see things differently.

It is important to understand that in the case of Kierkegaard, this shift in perspective is not a metaphysical demand. Rather, it is a call for a shift in emphasis away from the metaphysical in general. Such a shift suggests a radical change in the place of philosophical thinking in life. Rather than being normative and foundational, it remains "ethical" in a broad sense. Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" is an ethical decision in this sense. It is a decision made by the individual in spite (not to say in defiance) of the public opinion. Kierkegaard's understanding of this feature is expressed in the statement that "subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality." Subjective existence is the mode of fullest actualization. This is what Kierkegaard calls the "truth for me" which "must come alive in me." What gives this commitment significance is Kierkegaard's intention to shout his resolution to everyone he meets. As Kierkegaard affirms in *The Sickness unto Death*: "The self is a relation that relates itself."³ The emphasis in this relation is not placed in the existing self, but rather in the constant task of entering a dialogue with the world. Only in its relational capacity does the self enter philosophy, because the positing of a new philosophy would actually be the positing of a new self. Under such an active paradigm, philosophy could at most only be called a task. It could even be called a tool in the service of life. Philosophy's progress then becomes a continual process of ethical self-realization and self-transcendence. The Kierkegaardian individual consciously chooses to find oneself in a free dialogue with God and the world. If, for Kierkegaard, dialogue is

³ *SDP*, 43.

to stand, it must stand outside of the theological-political, in the area of philosophy as a task of life. As such, for Kierkegaard ontology is still a possibility for philosophy to cut beneath the traditional conception of human nature as something pre-established and given once and for all. In this sense, we can say that Kierkegaard argues for not an essentialist, but a dialogical mode of identity.

Kierkegaard uses the “dialogical” manner of being against what he calls the “numerical” mode of existence. For him, the individual is always against the crowd. “The crowd is untruth” proclaims Kierkegaard in his dedication to That Single Individual, because the crowd destroys the individual’s capacity to make decisions and makes him/her totally irresponsible. According to Joachim Garff, in his *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, when in 1848 thousands demonstrated in the streets of Copenhagen to demand labor reforms and constitutional government, Kierkegaard assured his readers:

Every movement and change that takes place with the help of 100,000 or 10,000 or 1,000 noisy, grumbling, rumbling, and yodeling people ... is eo ipso untruth, a fake, a retrogression A mediocre ruler is a much better constitution than this abstraction, 100,000 rumbling nonhumans.⁴

Kierkegaard absolutely hated the idea of a government of the crowd, by the crowd and for the crowd. Yet his fear of a possible authoritarian outcome of a herd ideal and his dissent against any fundamentalist religiosity does not prevent him from thinking of responsible dialogical citizenship. The Kierkegaardian subject is not a monological individual who oscillates among the false either/or of a possessive individualism, (which claims that I can find my identity in my private sphere), and a radical consensualism, (which leaves no space for the existential self-choice of the subject). Kierkegaard is neither in favor of individualist atomism, nor any kind of social holism. The true Kierkegaardian either/or is that of an opposition between moral individualism and fundamentalism. This gives the Kierkegaardian individual an anti-totality or a kind of an anti-totalitarian reflex. The ethical self-understanding of the Kierkegaardian self does not absolutely belong to the inward perspective of the individual. Individual ethical continuity provides the individual with an intensification of his/her self-choice.

In self-choice, the individual discovers his/her self-activating principle on the move. Therefore, self-choice is not necessarily a choice

⁴ Joachim Garff *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton University Press 2005, p. 494.

between good and evil, but rather a choice to exist as a dialogical self who is capable of a sustained ethical judgment. As Kierkegaard affirms admirably in *Either/Or*, “The greatness is not to be this or that but to be oneself.”⁵ Choosing oneself is prior to values conflicts. It is the existential condition of the ideal possibility of entering a dialogical actuality. Kierkegaard’s dialogical either/or brings a corrective to arbitrary modes of either/or which present forms of non-choice. Kierkegaard’s defense of a radical self-choice presents the individual with a well-formed identity and provides him/her with a check and balance on the totalitarian drives that threaten his/her freedom. This is a leitmotif that runs from Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* to anti-totalitarian and anti-fundamentalist dissent in our times. *Either/Or*, as the title implies, is obviously about choice, but it is also about the possibility of change, not only from the aesthetic to the ethical, and from the ethical to the religious but also about change that aims at achieving the equilibrium necessary for moving against a fundamentalist view of faith and life.

2. *Fundamentalism and Dialogical Individualism*

The term “fundamentalism” denotes a certain religious response to post-Enlightenment modernity. It criticizes the adaptation of religious tradition to the dictates of modern thought. In other words, fundamentalism emerges very often as a violent rejection of modernity and as retrogression to pre-modern religious fundamentals. But I think the most important feature of “fundamentalism” in our world is the politicization of religion and the ideologization of the tradition. In the case of many religions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity, fundamentalists advocate the religious rendering of the existing order through the revolutionary seizure of power or through social reforms. Fundamentalism designates religious movements that strive to reestablish the core elements of a religious tradition, socially, culturally and politically. Therefore, fundamentalism reacts defensively toward value pluralism and hermeneutical methodology applied to religious traditions; instead, in fundamentalist movements, there is an affirmation of the absolute validity of the fundamentals of a tradition. This is why it is easier to establish a fundamentalist movement where core principles are spelled out explicitly in a sacred text.

⁵ EO2, 157.

The authoritarian and absolutist dimensions of fundamentalist movements manifest themselves in the ideological manipulation of a religious tradition. In the eyes of most religious fundamentalists, societies must be constituted on the basis of religious community. There ought to be neither singular identities nor idiosyncratic quests for personal meaning. In other words, all individuals must belong to a religious collective, and their everyday lives must be governed by the normative traditions of such collectives. As such, Kierkegaard's postulate concerning dialogical individualism is rejected by all forms of fundamentalist thinking. In their eyes hermeneutical dialogue and individualism are diseases from which people require protection. This is not to say that any contemporary movement uncomfortable with Kierkegaard's view of dialogical individualism is purely and simply fundamentalist. But religious and political movements inspired by defiance of this postulate are very often considered to be fundamentalist. Continued reaction to dialogical culture and a philosophy of self-choice makes a measure of religious fundamentalism the common undercurrent of all contemporary fundamentalisms. In their own eyes, the fundamentalists are people of dialogue and individual choice. In their commitment to the revelation of the religious tradition, they are pitted in a fight against dialogue and individual choice. Fundamentalists lay claim to exclusive possession of the divine truth and therefore proceed to show the "right path" to everybody.

The impact of fundamentalist discourse can be witnessed all over the Muslim world today. Given the acuteness of the anxiety evoked by the problems of modern world, for younger generations of Muslims the orientation toward Islam provides a ready standard against which modern urban society is judged. The rise of fundamentalism and its violence against modernity does not absolve the "project of modernity" of its sins, but it does serve as an alarm to all those who, plagued by the philosophical ills of modernity, come to hope that the reassertion of religion will help create a new ethical community. This is where reading Kierkegaard can help us see the ontological difference between being critical of modernity, and remaining true to Kierkegaard's radical self-choice, which requires the ongoing Socratic task of bringing inwardness into political life as a lived corrective to fundamentalism.

3. Reading Kierkegaard in Tehran

How might reading Kierkegaard affect a person living under fundamentalist rule here and now? In other words, how can one read *Either/Or* or any other writings of Kierkegaard in Tehran? As odd as it may sound, reading Kierkegaard in Tehran can not only be spiritually comforting, but also philosophically empowering. It is an open challenge to the monologism of fundamentalism, but it is also an invitation to become a responsibly dialogical self in a culture that has systematically sheltered itself from the Socratic task of learning through asking questions and “living in truth.” How can we make sense of this? Is it not probable that in a fundamentalist society in which everyone is forced to be religious and wherein theological authorities are worshipped, one has her hands full with the single task of becoming an individual? Is not Kierkegaard’s appeal that one become a responsible self in order to inhabit value spheres as an individual capable of a moral point of view, a philosophical offense to fundamentalist societies?

Kierkegaard raises a relevant question for a fundamentalist society: what would it take to abandon or to transgress a fundamentalist view of human nature and to begin to learn from existence? The task is to maintain a radically honest distance from one’s traditions in order to find one’s place in the ethical sphere of existence. Distancing prompts self-choice, which, in turn, calls for an exodus from tradition. This repeated exile from tradition means that the self must reexamine the immediacy of its fundamentalist identity. As such, Fundamentalism is maieutically exposed by Kierkegaard as a form of self-forgetfulness. However, Kierkegaard opposes here the “self-forgetfulness” of the crowd to what he describes in *Either/Or* as a “forgetfulness” which “depends upon how one experiences actuality.” “To be able to forget,” writes Kierkegaard, “depends upon how one remembers, but how one remembers depends upon how one experiences actuality.”⁶ One who practices self-forgetfulness is blind to the character of one’s life, as opposed to the individual who cultivates a Socratic concern with self-knowledge. The idea that the philosopher in our age has “forgotten what it means to exist” is a central topic in Kierkegaard’s anti-fundamentalist mode of thinking. According to Kierkegaard, the philosopher tends to fail to bring his own life properly into imagination when philosophizing about what goes into the ethical or religious life – he

⁶ *EOI*, 293.

is unable to recognize the disparity between how he actually lives and what he says about how one should live. Kierkegaard's general term for this contradiction between one's life and how one describes one's life is hypocrisy. It is by no means a problem that he holds to be peculiar to philosophers. Indeed, he writes: "Hypocrisy is quite as inseparable from being human as sliminess is from being a fish."⁷ Surprisingly, Kierkegaard does not oppose hypocrisy to a demands for an outward sign seen by men, but insists that one's inwardness is unnoticed. Surely, we can say that secret inwardness is the cure for fundamentalism.

It is easy to see that fundamentalism could not serve as a foundation for Kierkegaard's ethical view of life. The situation of voluntarily being part of a "herd" public is the polar opposite of the "either/or" self-choice with which Kierkegaard confronts the individual. Taking Kierkegaard's path of attacking mass identity, one can say that it is at the same time a standpoint which is endowed with a hermeneutical awareness. That is to say, in Kierkegaard's thought individualism and intersubjectivity are inextricably intertwined, so that one cannot exist without the other, but that when there is conflict between individual self-choice and social beliefs, the individual must always take precedence over the masses. In this sense, Kierkegaard's dialogical individualism is diametrically opposed to a fundamentalist standpoint which assumes that the teachings of a particular religious tradition represent an absolute truth and that consequently all other religious and individual interpretations are in error and in need of being corrected. It is, therefore, not surprising that Kierkegaard's category of the individual is closely related to responsibility and is aimed either against possessive individualism or religious and political fundamentalisms.

Singularity is always already obliged. This is to say, for Kierkegaard, community happens in the dialogical, not in the monological. To think community is to think singularity in-between [*inter-esse*] human beings. It is, then, an action that requires existential transformation, an opening of the self to the other. That is why Kierkegaard substitutes "love as obligation" for "legal obligation," because it is a love that at all times makes singularity responsible to the other, to all others, in spite of their differences. Individual choice and obligation of the self toward the other become the building blocks for a Kierkegaardian dialogical philosophy. As such, Kierkegaard diminishes the

⁷ S. Kierkegaard "Journals, 1853-1855" in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Josiah Thompson, Garden City: Doubleday 1972, p. 165.

role of divine law by underlining the role of the human. It would not be incorrect to say that Kierkegaard brings back philosophy to the human level, but Kierkegaard moves beyond the Romantic thinkers in his rejection of their extreme isolation of the individual. For Kierkegaard, a human becomes truly human in his/her exercise of choice in a truly inhabited world. This falling away from a Romantic view of the individual is coupled in Kierkegaard with a process of dialogue that is generative of a relational view which includes all voices. Kierkegaard aspires through such a dialogical view of the individual to stand in opposition to fundamentalisms of all types.

4. *Philosophy and Tyranny*

With this sketch in mind, let us return to the challenge of philosophy in a tyrannical society. Anxious times make the Socratic task of philosophy all the more necessary, and can make some persons living under tyranny more receptive to its lessons. It is not so much a fact or a doctrine as it is a sense of reality – one particularly worth cultivating – that crises when life suddenly seems much more uncertain, and much less frivolous than it did before. How does the Socratic philosopher find his/her task in a fundamentalist regime? How does he/she move from indecision to decision? From either “indecision” or “a pre-chosen decision” to either “fundamentalist authority” or “individual choice-making”?

The result of such a choice-making is a concrete consciousness in history which, as a result of the choice, gains a history. Any other approach to life, according to Kierkegaard, is unreflective and inauthentic. If one can say that for Kierkegaard the human person is a being who can grasp the eternal by choosing himself ethically in the present, then reading Kierkegaard under a theocratic tyranny would simply mean defending an ethical stand that has a metaphysical anchor in eternity. Kierkegaard explains this process as the very moment of conversion from “untruth” to “truth” from “not to be” to “to be.” “The continued striving is the great thing; it is a proud task,”⁸ Kierkegaard affirms in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Philosophy under tyranny is an awakened knowledge of our untruth and the movement to a lived truth. That a seemingly powerless entity such as philosophy is actually able to overcome tyranny is indeed surprising and heartening. The

⁸ *EUD*, 357.

assumption of power by Socrates and Kierkegaard is a genuine spiritual revolution. It is much different from most social revolutions in which new political forces struggle for power against older ones. It is a radical call to spiritual regeneration of the individual. The rejection of Manichean views is particularly significant when it comes to reading Kierkegaard under fundamentalist rule. Fundamentalism draws rhetorical strength from the assertion of the distinctions between “us” and “them.” Such distinctions help the imposition of a monistic vision, thematizing a collective destiny. Reading Kierkegaard under fundamentalist rule creates the need to retain a focus upon the real capabilities of individuals, a focus frequently obscured by inflated Manichean agendas. Nothing is more salutary in this respect than engaging in a Kierkegaardian task of philosophizing under fundamentalism, the form of politics in which the individual has never mattered less. Reading Kierkegaard in Tehran is an encouragement to look for “signals of humanity” (to use a concept used by Todorov) in everyday human experiences. It is this commitment to the full potential and fallibility of the individual that makes Kierkegaardian philosophy a suitable context for dissident thinking in an age of fundamentalist enclaves, where amoral angels can seize the rule of a society to its detriment and final destruction.

Either/Or: Kierkegaard's Great Overture

By RONALD M. GREEN

Abstract

Either/Or was written not only as the first work in Kierkegaard's authorship, but also in some ways as a deliberate prelude to that authorship. More precisely, it serves as a keynote or overture to the authorship. Using the Latin word for work, *Either/Or* is the overture to Kierkegaard's *opera*. I examine here the evaluative account of an overture offered in *Either/Or* in connection with the discussion of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. By focusing on several key sections of the *Either/Or*, I also show that in many ways *Either/Or* fulfills the requirements that it establishes for a good overture.

Even among the diverse formats and approaches found in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, *Either/Or* stands out. It presents a collage of different contents and styles, ranging from the pithy and cynical reflections of the "Diapsalmata" to Judge William's book-length philosophical treatises. This diversity of formats and approaches coheres with the pseudonymous editor Victor Eremita's claim that the published volume represents his arrangement of a loose collection of papers that he had discovered in the hidden compartment of a second-hand writing desk.

Despite Eremita's comments, of course, *Either/Or* is by no means a haphazard collection of texts. Both in style and content, the book reflects careful authorial design. The young aesthete's worldview shines forth in both the form and content of the materials of the first part and culminates in the narrative of a love-exploiting, love-destroying relationship of "The Diary of Seducer." This provides occasion in the second part for the Judge to use romance and marriage as the springboard for his own defense of the ethical, while the Judge's confidence that one can live ethically is called into question at the close by the country pastor's sermon.

Kierkegaard himself not only viewed the book as a coherent statement, but also perceived it as an appropriate start to his authorship. In

The Point of View for my Work as an Author, he repeatedly describes the nearly simultaneous appearance in 1843 of the pseudonymous *Either/Or* and the signed *Two Upbuilding Discourses* as the foundations of the dialectical structure of his total authorship. Furthermore, although Kierkegaard in *The Point of View* explicitly denies that he had a fully accurate idea of the authorship from the beginning, he acknowledges that he reflected carefully on every step he took along the way.¹

What I would like to suggest today is that *Either/Or* was written not only as the first work in Kierkegaard's authorship, but also in some ways as a deliberate prelude to that authorship. More precisely, it serves as a keynote or overture to the authorship. Using the Latin word for work, *Either/Or* is the overture to Kierkegaard's *opera*.

Remarkably, *Either/Or* itself reveals that Kierkegaard gave considerable thought to what constitutes the appropriate prelude to a creative body of work. In the essay about Mozart's *Don Giovanni* entitled "The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical-Erotic," the young aesthete spends a good deal of time specifically developing the concept of an operatic overture and distinguishing a good overture from a bad one. "The overture," he tells us there, "generally provides a profound glimpse into the composer and his psychical relation to his music." If the author "does not have a profound rapport with the basic mood of the opera, then this will unmistakably betray itself in the overture." Such a poorly crafted overture is merely "an assemblage of the salient points" but "not the totality that contains ... the most penetrating elucidation of the content of the music."²

"The overture," the aesthete continues, "frequently is a dangerous temptation for minor composers" who are "easily prompted to plagiarize themselves" and "steal from their own pockets." A good overture, he adds, "should not have the same content as the opera," but neither should it "contain something absolutely different." Instead, "it should have the same content of the opera, but in another way." It should grip the listener "with the full power of what is central."³ Illustrating his point, the aesthete draws our attention to the "perfect masterpiece" that is the overture to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. "This overture is no mingling together [*Mellemhverandre*] of themes." It is "concise, defined, strongly structured, and, above all, impregnated with the

¹ *PV*, 76ff.

² *EOI*, 126.

³ *Ibid.*

essence of the whole opera.” Furthermore, this is not attained “by sucking the blood of the opera; on the contrary, it is rather a prophecy in relation to the opera.”⁴

One must be cautious about applying this recipe for a good overture to Kierkegaard’s achievement in *Either/Or*. The aesthete himself tells us “it is appropriate that the overture is composed last so that the artist can be really saturated with the music.” Obviously, *Either/Or* is not a deliberate summation of Kierkegaard’s work because it predates that work. Nevertheless, like the good overture the aesthete describes, whose “intended effect is to evoke a mood,” *Either/Or* does provide a lyrical anticipation of the pseudonymous writings that follow. It accomplishes this, moreover, without “sucking the blood” from those writings. Although some of the leading themes of Kierkegaard’s subsequent works make their appearance, and even in some cases are partly developed in *Either/Or*, these treatments are only suggestive. Even the illustrations used are very different from those offered in the later works. Like a good overture, *Either/Or* “sets the mood” for and prophecies what follows, but it avoids creating a situation where any part of the authorship plagiarizes another.

Much of what I am saying will be familiar to students of Kierkegaard who have long perceived important harbingers of the authorship in *Either/Or*. What I want to do, however, is tease out a few of the major themes that make their appearance here to illustrate just how well *Either/Or* manages to evoke the mood of the authorship without anticipatorily stealing anything from the later writings. I organize this brief overview in terms of some of the key themes emerging in later works that make their first appearance in discreet sections of *Either/Or*. Within the latter, I particularly want to focus on the description of the modern Antigone that appears in *Either/Or*, Part 1 and Judge William’s long letter/discourse on the “Esthetic Validity of Marriage” in *Either/Or*, Part 2.

The Modern Antigone

Immediately following his treatment of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, the aesthete offers a lecture on “The Tragic in Ancient Drama.” Embedded within this lecture is an imaginative “modern” re-invention of Antigone, a reframing of the ancient drama in which “everything is

⁴ *EOI*, 127.

the same and yet everything is different.”⁵ As in the Greek drama, Oedipus is hailed and admired by the Thebans, who he has liberated, and he is happy in his marriage with Jocasta. But in a deviation from the original, Antigone alone knows about her father's past: that he has killed his father and married his mother. This secret is Antigone's burden. While the tragedy of the Greek heroine lies in a young woman's being destined to be “alive in a place of corpses, never at home with the living nor the dead,” the modern Antigone must say this of her entire life, since she bears within her heart an awful secret that she can reveal to no one. As a result, her life “is essentially at an end.”⁶

The modern Antigone cannot even break out of her solitude by commiserating with her father. “She loves her father with all her soul, and this love draws her out of herself into her father's guilt. As the fruit of such a love she feels alien to humankind. She feels her guilt the more she loves her father.” Antigone would gladly confide in Oedipus. But not only can she not do this now that he is dead, “but while her father was living, she could not confide her sorrow to him, for she indeed did not know whether he knew it, and consequently there was the possibility of immersing him in a similar pain.”⁷ In the aesthete's imagination, this tormented solitude pursues Antigone throughout her most intimate relationships. He imagines her as falling in love, but in that case “her dowry is her pain.” “Without this dowry, she cannot belong to any man.” To conceal this past “would be impossible; to wish to have concealed it would be a breach of her love – but with it can she belong to him?”⁸ Antigone “struggles with herself; she has been willing to sacrifice her life for her secret, but now her love is demanded as a sacrifice.” To this is added one further collision: her sympathetic love for her beloved. “With every protestation of love, he increases her pain; with every sigh, he plunges the arrow of grief deeper into her heart.... He beseeches her in the name of the love she has for her father ... placing all his hope in this means, not knowing that he has actually worked against himself.”⁹

Close readers of Kierkegaard's work will see that while this modern Antigone cannot wed, her story is nevertheless pregnant with many of the ideas developed later in the authorship. For one thing, she anticipates the several ill-starred lovers depicted in *Fear and Trembling*

⁵ *EOI*, 154.

⁶ *EOI*, 156.

⁷ *EOI*, 161.

⁸ *EOI*, 163.

⁹ *EOI*, 164.

who silently bear a tragic secret. Like the young swain whose decision to wed could destroy a family, or like Sarah of the Book of Tobit all of whose previous grooms have perished in the bridal chamber,¹⁰ the modern Antigone inherits a legacy of familial misfortune that blocks the way to marriage. Like them, she is caught between the ethical mandate to reveal everything to the beloved and the compassionate instinct to spare the beloved suffering, an instinct that in some case requires the necessary cruelty of breach, deception, or concealment.

The narratives of tragic love in *Fear and Trembling* are central to the book's argument. On one level, they are used to illustrate the pseudonymous author's point about the required communicability of the ethical (in contrast to the incommunicability of its teleological suspension). A lover aesthetically defies the ethical by failing to communicate with the beloved. Abraham religiously transcends the ethical by abstaining from open discourse with others. As Abraham's impassioned defender Johannes de Silentio reminds us (and as his name suggests), silence and solitude may have a place in esthetics and are hallmarks of faith, but they are forbidden by the ethical.

But these stories about ill-starred lovers in *Fear and Trembling's* third Problema also have a much deeper relationship to the meaning of the text. In a series of published articles I have repeatedly argued that *Fear and Trembling* is *not* about ethics.¹¹ By this, I mean to say that it is not primarily aimed at depicting and justifying a suspension of paternal (or other) moral duty in the name of obedience to God. Rather, it is a text, which, in a long tradition of Christian writing, uses Abraham as a "figure" for the God-Christ dynamic of salvation. On this account, the "teleological suspension of the ethical" points not to the human suspension of moral duty, but to God's suspension of humans' deserved punishment for sin through the atoning sacrifice of God's own beloved son. *Fear and Trembling*, in other words, belongs more to the literature of soteriology than it does to ethics.

When *Fear and Trembling* is read primarily as a text dealing with the theme of human sin and its forgiveness, many of its specific features assume a different meaning. For example, the relationship to

¹⁰ *FT*, 85, 102-107.

¹¹ "Deciphering Fear and Trembling's Secret Message" in *Religious Studies* 22, 1986, pp. 95-111; "Enough Is Enough! Fear and Trembling is Not about Ethics" and "A Reply to Gene Outka" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21/2, Fall 1993, pp. 191-209, 217-220; "'Developing' Fear and Trembling" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. by Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 257-281.

Kierkegaard's own life, usually seen as an undercurrent in the text, undergoes significant change and deepening in meaning. When the primary theme is taken as the tension between human moral duty (in the form of family obligations) and the relationship to God, the text points to Kierkegaard's breaking of his engagement to Regine in order to pursue his vocation as a religious author. But when sin is the issue, then the breach with his fiancée becomes only the consequence of a much deeper problem: the Kierkegaard family's own tradition of sin, begun by Kierkegaard's melancholy father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard. As the book's epigraph suggests, *Fear and Trembling* then becomes a secret message between father and son about their mutual involvement in sin and about the possibility – indeed, the hope – that God's gracious forgiveness can redeem even such a tragic lineage. On this reading, Regine Olsen becomes a secondary secret reader who learns not that she was dropped in the name of a life devoted to God, but that Kierkegaard could not dare to involve her in this dark family history of melancholy and sin. On this reading, Regine is not Isaac to Søren's Abraham. Rather, Søren is the sacrificed but possibly redeemed son while Regine is both a bystander and further victim of this family drama.¹²

This reading also makes much deeper sense of the repeated tales of obstructed love in the book. It is not just the fact that something intervenes to prevent the consummation of a union that is noteworthy. Rather what intervenes in almost all these cases – from the tale of Sarah and Tobias to that of Agnes and the Merman – is a destructive prior history of death or sin. These tales of impossible love, then, are not just asides introduced to make some subordinate point about ethical silence or openness. They are essentially related to the Kierkegaardian family drama that animates the book's main preoccupation: sin and its forgiveness.

This returns us to *Either/Or's* modern Antigone. What initially seemed to be an imaginative discourse on the nature of tragedy now reveals itself as a window into the world of concerns that animates Kierkegaard's authorship from start to finish. How is sin to be comprehended? How is it occasioned and transmitted? What are its consequences for the inner life of the individual and for his relationship to others, especially to intimates? What is the role of silence and soli-

¹² For a treatment of the importance of Søren's relationship to his father, including its connections to Søren's thinking about hereditary sin, see Joakim Garff *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. By Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000, p. 346ff.

tude in the life of a sinner and of the religious individual? And yet, while this brief treatment of Antigone hints at all these questions, it does not answer them. Kierkegaard's overture does not plagiarize the opera. The lyric note is sounded for those willing to listen, but the longer arias lie ahead.

The connection of these passages in *Either/Or* to Kierkegaard's larger authorship becomes even clearer when we note how prevalent within the treatment of Antigone are the themes of hereditary sin and anxiety. These themes, of course, are picked up and greatly expanded in *The Concept of Anxiety*, but they are also suggested here. For example, the aesthete uses the Antigone story to identify a further similarity and a difference between the ancient and modern narratives. Both heroines are shaped by their family's history. The outer train of events, the inevitable workings of fate initiated by her father's deeds, crush the classic heroine. "In her childlike piety the Greek Antigone participates in her father's guilt." For her, however, "the father's guilt and suffering are an external fact, an unshakable fact that her sorrow does not move. But for our Antigone it is different." Her love for her father actively implicates her in his sin and makes her a willing participant in it. Whether because she "did not have the courage to confide in him," or because "she is continually in conflict with her surrounding world," she does not merely inherit his sin, in the sense that she falls victim to his guilty deeds. Her life is a willed recovery and reappropriation of his guilt.

Ettore Rocca significantly amplifies the possible meaning of the aesthete's discussion by drawing our attention to the sexual motifs implicit in the aesthete's treatment of Antigone. "Antigone," Rocca observes, "is the bride of her dead father's recollection and, in her sorrow, she expresses her love for him. In this love there is almost the symmetrical guilt of Oedipus: Antigone is the bride of her father's sorrow, i.e., in inwardness she is the bride of her father. Therefore she becomes 'equally guilty' as Oedipus, guilty of the same crime: incest; a modern incest, of course, an incest of reflection, but still an incest. And the fruit of this love must be kept secret and hidden from the eyes of all, because it is the sign of the deepest possible guilt."¹³

The modern Antigone is also familiar with anxiety. "At an early age, before she had reached maturity, dark hints of this horrible secret

¹³ Ettore Rocca "The Secret: Communication Denied, Communication of Domination," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word: Essays on Hermeneutics and Communication*, ed. by Poul Houe and Gordon D. Marino, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel 2003, pp. 116-124.

had momentarily gripped her soul, until certainty hurled her with one blow into the arms of anxiety." Anxiety, the aesthete explains, "is the vehicle by which the subject appropriates sorrow and assimilates it." It is "the motive power by which sorrow penetrates a person's heart." As an erotic glance craves its object, "so anxiety looks cravingly on sorrow." But unlike lust or love, "anxiety has an added factor that makes it cling even harder to its object, for it both loves and fears it."¹⁴ Anxiety also contains a reflection on time. "I cannot be anxious about the present but only about the past or the future." The past, in the form of her father's unfortunate fate rests like an "impregnable sorrow" on her, and it is also the source of the forebodings about her own fate. The modern Antigone's Greek counterpart also sorrows, but her sorrow is about the present. It is a deeper sorrow, "but the pain is less."¹⁵

Readers of *The Concept of Anxiety* will see here anticipations of that work. Antigone's ambivalent attraction to/repulsion from her sorrow becomes in the latter work anxiety's "sympathetic antipathy and antipathetic sympathy."¹⁶ Anxiety's relationship to past and future takes form in the concept of anxiety as "freedom's possibility." In *The Concept of Anxiety* we learn that, like the modern Antigone, we can be anxious about our past, because a past that is not once and for all repented always "stands in a relation of possibility to me." I can be anxious about a past "because I have not placed it in an essential relation to myself as past and have in some deceitful way or another prevented it from being past."¹⁷

Compared with *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Either/Or's* treatment of anxiety in connection with Antigone is only a promissory note, only a hint. In his discussion of Mozart's overture the aesthete particularly draws our attention of the sensuous-erotic motif that represents Don Giovanni. He remarks that "the beginning of it is admirably expressed. We hear it so faintly, so cryptically suggested. We hear it, but it is over so swiftly that it is as if we had heard something we had not heard. It requires an alert ear, an erotic ear, to notice the first time the hint is given in the overture of the light play of this desire that is so richly expressed later in all its lavish profusion."¹⁸ The same could be

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 154ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁶ *CA*, 42.

¹⁷ *CA*, 91ff.

¹⁸ *EOI*, 128. Nils Holger Petersen believes that he is able to identify the precise point in the overture to which the aesthete refers. He believes that this is the anxious set of violin motifs occurring from bar 11 to bar 14 of the slow d minor introduction to the

said of the motifs sounded only briefly in the treatment of the modern Antigone. It requires an alert ear, an ethico-religious ear to perceive them. Bringing together in a single illustration the key Kierkegaardian themes of hereditary sin, sexual transgression, spiritual isolation, silence, and the relationship between time and eternity, this brief discussion in *Either/Or* sets the tone for the works to come.

By displaying the essential relationship between all these ideas, the treatment of Antigone also provides a key to understanding them as they are later developed. Gordon Marino has observed that *The Concept of Anxiety* is a “maddeningly difficult book,” in which, he says “there are many passages ... the meaning of which completely escapes me.”¹⁹ Many of us have shared Marino’s frustration with this difficult work. But listening carefully to Kierkegaard’s overture at this fleeting moment, however, we can gather additional insight for the score that follows.

The “Aesthetic Validity of Marriage”

In his review of *Don Giovanni*, the aesthete comments on the movement or progression of the opera’s overture. It begins, he says, “with a few, deep, even earnest notes.” These signify the Commendatore. But the interest of the opera is Don Giovanni alone, “not Don Giovanni and the Commendatore.” For this reason, “Mozart seems to have deliberately designed it in such a way that the deep voice that rings out in the beginning gradually becomes weaker and weaker.” It “must hurry to keep pace with the demonic speed that evades it” and that “gradually creates the transition to the opera itself.”²⁰ In this respect, the overture is like a sunrise. “So it is in nature that one sometimes sees the horizon dark and clouded,” hiding everything in the obscurity of night. “Then in the most distant heavens, far off on the horizon, one sees a flash.” This slowly gathers strength until it begins to illumi-

overture, motifs which reappear much later in Don Giovanni’s surprised response in the second act to the arrival of the statue of the Commendatore. For Petersen the association of this motif with the Commendatore confirms the aesthete’s view that Don Giovanni’s sensuality betrays anxiety. See his “Søren Kierkegaard’s Aestheticist and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*” in *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, ed. by Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund and Erik Hedling, Amsterdam: Rodopi 1997, p. 176.

¹⁹ Gordon Marino “Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, pp. 308-328, p. 308.

²⁰ *EOI*, 127.

nate the entire heaven with its flame and "it seems as if the darkness itself has lost its composure and is beginning to move."²¹ Don Giovanni represents "the full force of the sensuous." After Mozart has had him come into existence this way, "his life now develops for us in the dancing strains of the violin, in which he lightly, fleetingly speeds on over the abyss...jubilating during his brief span."²²

Implicit in this description of the overture is the idea that a good overture should, in its development and progression, evidence the dominant theme of the opera, and, once again, Kierkegaard seems to have heeded the aesthete's advice. The directionality of *Either/Or* also betrays the dominant motif of the authorship as a whole. But here the progression is in exactly the opposite direction of *Don Giovanni*. Since Mozart's opera epitomizes the musical-erotic, it moves from moral gravity – earnestness – to utter sensuousness. Don Giovanni's voice comes to eclipse that of the Commendatore. But in *Either/Or*, it is the light, cynical, bantering voice of the aesthete that is progressively overcome and eclipsed by earnestness.

This progression is already evident in the papers of the aesthete. Beginning with a tone of haughty cynicism in the "Diapsalmata," they conclude on the last pages of the "Seducer's Diary" with a note of revulsion. The esthetic approach to life has lost its charm. The love object has utterly "lost her fragrance."²³

The way is thus prepared for the devastating critique of the purely sensual-erotic life in the Judge's treatment of the "Aesthetic Validity of Marriage." Elsewhere, I have argued that this treatise seems be modeled on a Kantian transcendental deduction.²⁴ Like such a deduction, it takes a given aspect of empirical experience and shows that that aspect cannot be given in experience without the presupposition of some prior, non-empirical, conceptual reality. In Kant's case, this "not without" argument is used repeatedly in his writings to vindicate the a priori nature of space and time, the necessity of the categories of cognition, the moral law and human freedom.

In the case of Judge William, the argument proceeds from a different starting point. It is not cognitive/moral experience but emotional/moral experience. The Judge focuses on what the aesthete repeatedly

²¹ *EOI*, 129.

²² *EOI*, 129ff.

²³ *EOI*, 445.

²⁴ Ronald M. Green "Kierkegaard's Great Critique: *Either/Or* as a Kantian Transcendental Deduction" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or II*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 1995, pp. 139-153.

admits is the pinnacle of sensuous-emotional life: the experience of first love. First love is distinguished above all by its relation to time. As the Judge puts it, such love “bears a stamp of eternity.” From the first moment that they see one another, the lovers are convinced that they have always been destined for one another and are also meant to stay together forever. The seducer expresses this sensibility when he asks, “What does erotic love love? Infinity. – What does erotic love fear? Boundaries.”²⁵ The Judge agrees when he observes that all love, “whether it is superstitious, romantic, chivalrous love or the deeper moral, religious love filled with a vigorous and vital conviction, has precisely the qualification of eternity in it.”²⁶ First love, he adds, “has an element of the sensuous, an element of beauty, but nevertheless it is not simply sensuous.... This is the necessity of first love. Like everything eternal, it has implicit the duplexity of positing itself backward into all eternity and forward into all eternity.”²⁷ Elsewhere, in terms reminiscent of Kant’s deductions, the Judge describes this sense of infinitude as “the apriority, that the first love has.”²⁸

It is true that the aesthete also sometimes appears to deny the reality of this transtemporal romantic experience. In his review of Scribe’s drama entitled “The First Love,” the aesthete observes that all talk about first love evidences a “sophistical thesis” because, when it is convenient, first love is presented quantitatively, as the first in a series. But at other times it is used qualitatively so that any intense infatuation, however late in a series, is offered up as a “first love.” These confusions, the aesthete observes, are laughingly displayed in the case of the widower and widow, each with five children, who “combine forces” and “nevertheless assure one another on the wedding day that this love is their first love.”²⁹

But this derision of first love does not reflect the aesthete’s deepest beliefs. No less than the young lovers in the romances that he chronicles, the aesthete acknowledges the reality and power of the experience of first love. He never denies that first love presents itself as unique and timeless, and he exalts and pursues the experience of falling in love for its own sake. The seducer confesses that, although he “had not expected to be able to taste once again the first fruits of falling in love,” he is now dazed by the experience and has “gone under in

²⁵ *EO2*, 442.

²⁶ *EO2*, 32.

²⁷ *EO2*, 42-43.

²⁸ *EO2*, 60.

²⁹ *EO1*, 254.

love-rapture.”³⁰ The aesthete's problem, here and everywhere, is that his basic understanding of human existence does not permit him to make sense of this experience in any way short of deriding it.

This deep internal contradiction in the aesthete's worldview furnishes the occasion for the Judge's “not-without” transcendental deduction. He writes his young friend, “However you twist and turn at this point, you must admit that the task is to preserve love in time. If this is impossible, then love is an impossibility.”³¹ But can something as immediate and sensuous as romantic rapture be preserved? Can it survive the evanescence of human moods and feelings?

The Judge believes that the answer to these questions resides in marriage. The very *ought* of first love, the overwhelming sense that it *must* continue, finds expression in the marriage vows. Furthermore, the fact that these vows can be meaningfully uttered, tells us that they are capable of fulfillment. In Kantian terms, ought implies can. For lovers, making these vows and obeying them is not the hard stick of duty that crushes and replaces emotion – what the cynical aesthete calls the birch switch (or “Master Erik”) that appears once love is gone. Instead, the vows are the promised fulfillment of love's deepest impulse. In the Judge's words,

[M]arital love...in the ethical and the religious already has duty within itself, and when duty manifests itself to them it is not a stranger, a shameless outsider, who nevertheless has such an authority that by virtue of the secrecy of love one does not dare to show him the door. No, he comes as an old intimate, as a friend, as a confidant whom the lovers both know in the deepest secrecy of their love....To them it would not be sufficient for duty to say encouragingly, “It can be done, love can be preserved”; but because he says: It shall be preserved,” there is an implicit authority that corresponds to the inwardness of their wish. Love casts out fear, but if love nevertheless fears for itself a moment, for its own salvation, then duty is precisely the divine nourishment love needs, for duty says, “Fear not; you shall [*skal*] conquer” – says it not in the future sense, for then it is only a hope, but in the imperative mood, and therein rests a conviction that nothing can shake.”³²

This discovery of the imperative to faithfulness at the heart of romantic love completes the Judge's transcendental deduction. He has demonstrated that the fulfillment of the sensual erotic cannot occur

³⁰ *EOI*, 324.

³¹ *EO2*, 141.

³² *EO2*, 145.

without a movement from a life based on a passive response to satisfactions and moods to one based on active ethical commitment and resolve. The aesthetic sphere of existence points to its successor, but the transition is made not by staying within aesthetic presuppositions but only by a willed decision to replace enjoyment with imperturbable ethical resolve. One cannot reach the certainty of love's persistence by what Kierkegaard later describes as an "approximating transition" – by some ever-greater refinement of mood or feeling. One can only do so by a qualitative shift in one's guiding premises, by a leap.

In this ethical resolve, the married person also conquers time. Not only can love be made to abide, but time itself is recovered and permeated with the eternal. No longer the "dangerous enemy" of human finitude, time now lends meaning to human life. The married man, the Judge tells us, "has not killed time but has rescued it and preserved it in eternity." He "truly lives poetically" and "solves the great riddle, to live in eternity and yet hear the cabinet clock strike in such a way that its striking does not shorten but lengthens his eternity."³³

Readers of Kierkegaard will see all the motifs introduced here as crucial to his authorship as whole. The Judge's deduction of love's need for marriage provides the authorship's first illustration of the leap as the "category of decision."³⁴ While *Fear and Trembling* and the *Postscript* will take these concepts to new heights and apply them across the whole compass of existence spheres, the Judge's argument here provides a glimpse into the basic dynamics that Kierkegaard develops into a philosophy of existence. Indeed, at the very close of *Either/Or*, the sermon by the country pastor calls into question the Judge's own tranquil confidence in his ethical integrity and fidelity, suggesting the religious leap that becomes the principal focus of *Fear and Trembling* and the *Postscript*. Judge William has already sounded the note and set the mood.

The theme of time and its relationship to eternity that will become a leitmotif of the authorship also makes its appearance, but in an inverted form. Here the problem is how eternity can be experienced in time; how eternity can recover time, how love can survive the ravages of aging and death. In the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, however, the problem is how an event in time, specifically the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can be thought essential to an eternal destiny. In the words of the *Fragments'* epigraph, the questions are: "Can a his-

³³ EO2, 138.

³⁴ CUP1, 91.

torical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?"³⁵ Despite this different angle of approach, however, the underlying problem is the same. How can human beings, as creatures living at the intersection of time and eternity, make sense of their lives? How can we validate both time and eternity without fleeing from the eternal into the temporal or the temporal into the eternal?

On this point I will conclude. There is much more that could be said. Woven throughout the texts of *Either/Or* are many more pointers to the authorship to come. For example, the theme of despair, not fully developed until near the end of the pseudonymous authorship in the *Sickness unto Death*, makes a repeated appearance even in this early work. We find it in the tale of the "Unhappiest Man." In not being able to die, not being able to "slip down into a grave,"³⁶ it offers a premonition of the later work's assertion that "the torment of despair is precisely the inability to die."³⁷ And in the Judge's assertion that the person who wills despair "is truly beyond despair,"³⁸ we find an anticipation of Anti-Climacus's paradoxical assurance that "it is the worst misfortune never to have had that sickness" and "a true godsend to get it."³⁹

In his treatment of the overture of *Don Giovanni*, the aesthete remarks: "To anyone hearing the overture after he has become more familiar with the opera, it may seem as if he had penetrated the hidden workshop where the forces he has learned to identify in the opera move with a primitive power, where they wrestle with one another with all their might."⁴⁰ Much the same can be said of *Either/Or*. Although a youthful work in every sense it boldly anticipates the sophisticated body of work to follow. Re-reading it from the perspective of the later work, we truly feel that we have "penetrated the hidden workshop" of Kierkegaard's creative endeavor.

³⁵ *PF*, 1.

³⁶ *EOI*, 220.

³⁷ *SUD*, 18.

³⁸ *EO2*, 213.

³⁹ *EO2*, 26.

⁴⁰ *EOI*, 127.

Innen und Außen

Zu Kierkegaards Auseinandersetzung mit der romantischen Ironie vor dem Hintergrund der Mitteilungsform von *Entweder/Oder*

Von PHILIPP SCHWAB

Abstract

Kierkegaard's relation to romanticism and to romantic irony is usually taken into consideration with emphasis on Kierkegaard's criticism of the romantic-aesthetic form of existence. At the same time, however, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works obviously make broad use of romantic irony. Based on the communicational form of *Either/Or* the article is supposed to elaborate that Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication, which is considered the decisive principle of his thought, is closely related to the structure of romantic irony. As well as romantic irony, although under different circumstances, indirect communication works as a representation of the unrepresentable (Darstellung des Undarstellbaren) which is constantly aware of the limitations of its own approaches and perspectives and necessarily makes use of refracted and hovering forms.

I. Romantische Ironie und indirekte Mitteilung

Fragt man nach dem Verhältnis Kierkegaards zur Romantik und insbesondere zur romantischen Ironie, so tritt zunächst der Aspekt der Kritik in den Blick.¹ Schon in der Magister-Dissertation *Über den*

¹ Dies ist auch die dominierende Perspektive insbesondere der älteren Forschung. Vgl. Anna Paulsen „Kierkegaard in seinem Verhältnis zur deutschen Romantik: Einfluss und Überwindung“ in *Kierkegaardiana* 3, 1959, S. 38-47; Gerhard vom Hofe *Die Romantikskritik Sören Kierkegaards*, Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum-Verlag 1972. Differenzierter sind Hagemann und Feger, vgl. Tim Hagemann *Reden und Existieren: Kierkegaards antipersuasive Rhetorik*, Berlin: Philo Verlag 2001, S. 26; Hans Feger „Kierkegaards Kritik der romantischen Ironie als Wegbereiter einer

Begriff der Ironie hatte Kierkegaard in zweifacher Hinsicht Kritik an der romantischen Ironie geübt. Einerseits sucht Kierkegaard in enger Anlehnung an Hegel den Nachweis zu führen, die romantische Ironie sei ‚welthistorisch unberechtigt‘,² andererseits lässt sich in der Ironieschrift eine Perspektive aufweisen, die den romantischen Ironiker als *Typus* einer scheiternden Existenzform kritisiert, der es an Wirklichkeitsvollzug fehle, – die „*Wirklichkeit der Ironie*“ sei „*bloße Möglichkeit*.“³ Dieser zweite Aspekt zieht sich von *Entweder/Oder* und der *Wiederholung* an durch das gesamte pseudonyme Werk hindurch und findet schließlich ihre schärfste und begrifflich dichteste Formulierung in der *Krankheit zum Tode*. Was Anti-Climacus in den Abschnitten über die Verzweiflung der Unendlichkeit und die Verzweiflung der Möglichkeit als Modus scheiternder Existenz vorführt, ist der Entwurf des wirklichkeitsfremden Phantasten, der sich im unendlichen Möglichkeitsspielraum immer neuer poetischer Konstruktionen ergeht und so einen gelingenden, konkreten Selbstvollzug beständig verfehlen muss.⁴

Angesichts dieser ebenso nachdrücklichen wie weit gespannten Kritik muss es zunächst verwunderlich erscheinen, dass Kierkegaards pseudonyme Werke in augenscheinlicher Weise von den Darstellungsformen romantischer Ironie geprägt sind. Die virtuose Verschachtelung pseudonymer Autoren, das multiplizierte Spiel der Brechungen, die Heterogenität der Darstellungsform und nicht zuletzt der sprunghafte und bis in die feinsten Nuancen durchreflektierte Stil Kierkegaards, all dies sind zweifellos Merkmale romantischer Ironie.⁵ Dabei verdankt sich Kierkegaards greifbare Anverwandlung der künstlerischen Gestaltungsmittel romantischer Ironie nicht einem äußeren, beiläufigen Umstand und kann auch nicht als persönliche stilistische Eigenart oder verschwindende dichterische Einkleidung seiner Schriften marginalisiert werden.

negativen Ästhetik“ in *Fichte-Studien* 19, 2002, S. 149-184. Feger hält fest: „Bei aller Kritik bleibt Kierkegaard der Tradition romantischer Ironie verbunden. Seine Ironiekritik ist hier selbst noch Bestandteil der Entwicklung, zu der sie sich kritisch verhält.“ (*Ebd.*, S. 172)

² Vgl. *BI*, 247 u. 280 / *SKS* 1, 282 u. 311.

³ *BI*, 285 / *SKS* 1, 315.

⁴ Vgl. *KT*, 26-29 u. 32-34 / *SKS* 11, 146-148 u. 151-153.

⁵ Exemplarisch ist diese Aufnahme romantischer Motive und Textpraktiken von Hagemann nachgewiesen worden in einem Vergleich des Vorworts der *Elixire des Teufels* von E.T.A. Hoffmann und der „Fundanzeige“ der *Stadien auf des Lebens Weg* (vgl. Hagemann *Reden und Existieren*, S. 28).

Die folgenden Ausführungen sollen vielmehr die These erhärten, dass Kierkegaard bei aller Polemik gegen den romantisch-ästhetischen Existenztypus die *Struktur* romantischer Ironie produktiv in seine eigene, von ihm selbst mehrfach hervorgehobene und reflektierte Methode einer indirekten Mitteilung übersetzt. Diese Aneignung ist deswegen möglich, weil Kierkegaards denkerisches Verfahren strukturell von einer Ambivalenz der Darstellungsform lebt, die auch für die romantische Ironie konstitutiv ist, nämlich einer *Darstellung des Undarstellbaren*.

Dabei steht die weiter gefasste These im Hintergrund, dass Kierkegaards experimentelle Methode einer indirekten Mitteilung das bestimmende Strukturprinzip seines Denkens ausmacht, von dem her sein Werk sich überhaupt erst erschließt. Es ist Kierkegaard selbst, der auf die Wichtigkeit seiner Methode mehrfach und eindringlich hingewiesen hat. Die dichteste und nachdrücklichste Formulierung findet sich im Journal des Jahres 1847. Dort notiert Kierkegaard, bezeichnenderweise von sich selbst in der dritten Person sprechend:

Aber wenn ein Schriftsteller einen eigentümlichen Begriff davon hat, was Mitteilung ist, wenn vielleicht gerade seine ganze Eigentümlichkeit, die Realität seiner historischen Bedeutung hierin konzentriert ist, ja dann hat es gute Weile – O, Schule der Geduld. Ehe die Rede davon sein kann, etwas von dem zu verstehen, was er mitgeteilt hat, muss man ihn zuerst verstehen in der ihm eigentümlichen Dialektik der Mitteilung und sie in allem, was man versteht, mitverstehen. Und diese ihm eigentümliche Dialektik der Mitteilung kann er ja doch nicht in der traditionellen Dialektik der Mitteilung mitteilen. Das möchte die Zeit freilich von ihm verlangen, was nur natürlich ist, weil es nämlich blanker Unsinn ist.⁶

Dieser Journaleintrag gibt drei wesentliche Hinweise: *Erstens* erschließt sich, wenigstens dieser Notiz Kierkegaards zufolge, die Struktur des Werkes erst dann, wenn die Dialektik der Mitteilung nachvollzogen und stets mitverstanden wird; *zweitens* sieht Kierkegaard selbst die „Realität seiner historischen Bedeutung“, d.h. die geschichtliche Relevanz und zugleich das spezifisch Neue und Einzigartige seines Denkens in seinem Begriff der Mitteilung versammelt. *Drittens* schließlich verweist die letzte Bemerkung Kierkegaards, dass die Dialektik der Mitteilung nicht in der „überkommenen Dialektik der Mitteilung“, d.h. *direkt* mitgeteilt werden kann, auf den charak-

⁶ *TI*, 190 / *SKS* 20, 275 (*Pap.* VIII A 466), Übersetzung modifiziert nach: Tim Hagemann „Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Kierkegaards ‚Dialektik‘“ in Sören Kierkegaard *Die Dialektik der ethischen und der ethisch-religiösen Mitteilung*, aus dem Dänischen und hrsg. von Tim Hagemann, Bodenheim: Philo Verlag 1997, S. 7-13, hier S. 9f.

teristischen *Rückstoß* von Kierkegaards Methode. Nicht nur hat sich das Kierkegaardsche Denken notwendig in den gebrochenen Formen des Indirekten zu vollziehen, – auch in der Ansprache dieser Methode als solcher entzieht sie sich einer definitiven Formulierung und Systematisierung.

In dieser Hinsicht erscheint Kierkegaard außerordentlich modern: Als einer der ersten Denker der nachidealistischen Epoche entwirft er eine experimentelle, entschieden nicht-systematische Methode und antizipiert auf diesem Wege wesentliche Strömungen des späten 19. und des 20. Jahrhunderts.⁷

II. Darstellung des Undarstellbaren – Kierkegaards Anverwandlung romantischer Ironie unter umgekehrten Vorzeichen

Ogleich die indirekte Mitteilung die spezifische und originale Signatur des Kierkegaardschen Denkens ist und zudem ihre wesentliche Pointe erst im polemischen Abstoß der Systemphilosophie des Deutschen Idealismus erhält, verweist sie doch explizit wie implizit auf historische Vorbilder. Kierkegaard selbst hat in dieser Hinsicht immer wieder auf die Figur des Sokrates hingedeutet. Insbesondere vor dem Hintergrund der in der Ironieschrift aufgerufenen Konstellation, in der Kierkegaard die sokratische Ironie als welthistorisch berechtigt, die romantische Ironie hingegen als vollkommen unberechtigt vorführt, droht die untergründige strukturelle Verwandtschaft zwischen indirekter Mitteilung und romantischer Ironie aus dem Blick zu treten.

Der Verweis auf diese Verwandtschaft soll freilich keineswegs der simplifizierenden These das Wort reden, indirekte Mitteilung und romantische Ironie fielen einfach in Eines. Im Gegenteil kommt es gerade im Aufweis der strukturellen Gemeinsamkeit darauf an, die spezifischen Differenzen beider Konzeptionen hervorzuheben.

Dabei ist zunächst festzuhalten, dass die romantische Ironie im Rahmen des Problemhorizontes und Bezugsfeldes der Fichteschen

⁷ Vgl. zum Mitteilungsbegriff ausführlicher: Philipp Schwab „Der Asket im System. Zu Kierkegaards Kritik an der Kontemplation als Fundament der Ethik Schopenhauers“ in *Die Ethik Arthur Schopenhauers im Ausgang vom Deutschen Idealismus (Fichte/Schelling)*, hrsg. von Lore Hühn in redaktioneller Zusammenarbeit mit Philipp Schwab, Würzburg: Ergon 2006, S. 321-345, hier S. 337-341.

Transzendentalphilosophie formuliert wird.⁸ Schon von diesem Bezugsrahmen distanziert sich die Kierkegaardsche Existenzialphilosophie mit ihrem Ansatz beim konkret existierenden Einzelnen nachdrücklich. Zudem entfaltet sich die romantische Ironie im Kontext spezifisch poetologischer Überlegungen, die eine Aufhebung der Philosophie in Poesie zum Fluchtpunkt haben.⁹ Die Kierkegaardsche experimentelle Miteilungsform arbeitet zwar ebenfalls beständig auf einen Bereich hin, der sich von der Philosophie nicht mehr erreichen lässt; – im scharfen Kontrast zu den ästhetischen Entwürfen der Frühromantiker ist dieser Bereich aber die *Wirklichkeit*, d. h. für Kierkegaard der konkrete Existenzvollzug des Einzelnen.

Im Verhältnis zur romantischen Ironie operiert Kierkegaards Methode gleichsam unter umgekehrten Vorzeichen. Insbesondere in der Konzeption Friedrich Schlegels ist die Ironie notwendige Darstellungs- und Ausdrucksform der romantischen Poesie als „progressive[r] Universalpoesie“, die „ewig nur werden, niemals vollendet sein kann“¹⁰ und so für ein je entzogenes Absolutes einsteht.¹¹ Noch deutlicher hat Schlegel die Nichtdarstellbarkeit des Absoluten in den *Philosophischen Lehrjahren* zum Ausdruck gebracht: „Erkennen bezeichnet schon ein bedingtes Wissen. Die Nichterkennbarkeit des Absoluten ist also eine identische Trivialität.“¹²

⁸ Vgl. hierzu Manfred Frank *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik. Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1989, bes. S. 248-262; Lore Hühn „Das Schweben der Einbildungskraft. Zur frühromantischen Überbietung Fichtes“ in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 70, 1996, S. 569-599; Andreas Barth *Inverse Verkehrung der Reflexion: Ironische Textverfahren bei Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis*, Heidelberg 2001, bes. S. 59-88, und ausführlich Martin Götze *Ironie und absolute Darstellung: Philosophie und Poetik in der Frühromantik*, Paderborn u. a.: Schöningh 2001, bes. S. 73-157.

⁹ Vgl. hierzu Götze *Ironie und absolute Darstellung*, S. 13 f., S. 217-31 u. S. 337-376.

¹⁰ *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe*, hrsg. von Ernst Behler u. a., Paderborn u. a.: Schöningh 1958ff. (Im Folgenden: *KFSA*); Bd. II, S. 182 f.

¹¹ Dass die romantische Ironie wesentlich Darstellung des positiv nicht darstellbaren Absoluten ist, hat unseres Wissens zuerst Frank herausgearbeitet; vgl. Frank *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, S. 222-247, S. 287-316, zur Ironie bes. S. 247, S. 289, S. 301-305; vgl. hierzu insbesondere Lore Hühn „Das Schweben der Einbildungskraft“, S. 570-578; vgl. auch Barth *Inverse Verkehrung der Reflexion*, S. 95 u. S. 138 und Götze *Ironie und absolute Darstellung*, S. 73-80, S. 189-194 u. S. 381. Vgl. zum weiteren Horizont der Thematik: Petra Bahr *Darstellung des Undarstellbaren: Religionstheoretische Studien zum Darstellungsbegriff bei A. G. Baumgarten und I. Kant*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004.

¹² Schlegel *KFSA*, Bd. XVIII, S. 511; im gleichen Heft notiert Schlegel, das Absolute selbst sei „indemonstrabel“ (*ebd.*, S. 512).

Es ist gerade die *Unabgeschlossenheit* der auf uneinholbare Universalität abzielenden romantischen Poesie, die das schwebende Verfahren der Ironie notwendig macht:

Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen Dargestelltem und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen.¹³

Bei Kierkegaard hingegen ist die gebrochene und doppelreflektierte Form indirekter Mitteilung zwar ebenfalls notwendige Darstellungsform, aber notwendig im Bezug auf die Unabgeschlossenheit und uneinholbare Innerlichkeit des konkreten Existenzvollzugs des Einzelnen. Während die romantische Ironie gleichsam ‚nach oben‘ auf eine übergreifende, aber nur im Modus ihres Entzugs präsente *Universalität* abzielt, geht das Denken Kierkegaards gleichsam ‚nach unten‘ auf die in keiner Darstellung einholbare *Singularität* der Existenz.

Die Ausrichtung auf die Einzelheit der Existenz bringt noch eine weitere wesentliche Verschiebung mit sich: Die indirekte Mitteilung Kierkegaards zielt ihrer Struktur nach auf *Aneignung*; – das Nichtdarstellbare im Horizont von Kierkegaards Denken ist nicht ein uneinholbares Übergreifendes, sondern der wirklich gelebte Existenzvollzug, der dem Einzelnen in keiner Weise abgenommen werden kann. Dabei ist es gerade die Pointe indirekter Mitteilung, dem Leser ein Ergebnis entschieden vorzuenthalten, ihn durch die gebrochene Form in eine Stellung zu bringen, in der er auf sich selbst zurückgeworfen ist. Trotz dieser wesentlichen, von der romantischen Ironie klar absteichenden Charakteristika indirekter Mitteilung besteht die strukturelle Verwandtschaft von romantischer Ironie und indirekter Mitteilung in der *Schwebe* einer Darstellungsform,¹⁴ die auf einen Bereich abzielt, den sie *per definitionem* nicht erreichen kann.

Zudem ist der für das Kierkegaardsche Denken charakteristische Rückstoß der Methode schon in der romantischen Ironie vorgeprägt. Seine mannigfachen Bestimmungen der Ironie gibt Friedrich Schlegel nicht in einer geschlossenen, systematisierenden Abhandlung, sondern in der gebrochenen Form des Fragments. Gerade dort, wo Schle-

¹³ Schlegel *KFSa*, Bd. II, S. 183; vgl. zur Interpretation des 116. Athenäumsfragments Michael Elsässer *Friedrich Schlegels Kritik am Ding. Mit einem Geleitwort hrsg. von Werner Beierwaltes*, Hamburg: Meiner 1994, S. 27f. u. S. 35; vgl. auch Hühn „Schweben der Einbildungskraft“, S. 571f., u. Barth *Inverse Verkehrung der Reflexion*, S. 147-149.

¹⁴ Vgl. hierzu nochmals Hühn „Schweben der Einbildungskraft“.

gel scheinbar den Anspruch erhebt, die eigentümlich fragmentarische und ironische, die „unverständliche“ Form des *Athenäum* zu klären, bekommt der Leser nur einen Auszug ironischen Sprechens mehr. In dem Prosa-Stück *Über die Unverständlichkeit* entwirft Schlegel zwar eine „Übersicht vom ganzen System der Ironie“, ¹⁵ verliert sich aber dabei in immer weiteren Abschweifungen, die das eigene Vorgehen ironisch konterkarieren und brechen. ¹⁶ Wie die Kierkegaardsche Ansprache indirekter Mitteilung nie im strengen Sinne direkt und vollständig ist, so ist Schlegels Erörterung der Ironie stets ihrerseits ironisch.

III. Die inkommensurable Innerlichkeit – zum Vorwort von Entweder/Oder

Dass Kierkegaards Darstellungsverfahren in der beschriebenen Hinsicht auf die Struktur romantischer Ironie rekurriert, soll im Folgenden anhand des Vorworts von *Entweder/Oder* aufgezeigt werden. ¹⁷ Schon die verschachtelte Herausgeberfiktion, die wesentlich die *Mitteilungssituation* des Werks ausmacht, stellt eine Anleihe bei den literarischen Gestaltungsformen romantischer Ironie dar. Potenziert wird die Brechung in der Herausgeberschaft, indem Victor Eremita ausdrücklich auf sie reflektiert. Er selbst als fiktiver Herausgeber steht nämlich vor dem Problem, das der Ästhetiker A nicht seinerseits Ver-

¹⁵ Schlegel *KFSA*, Bd. II, S. 363-372, Zitat S. 369.

¹⁶ Vgl. hierzu allerdings Strohschneider-Kohrs, die trotz der konstatierten Brechung und Vielgestaltigkeit der Schlegelschen Rede die These vertritt, in *Über die Unverständlichkeit* werde keine Ironie künstlerisch gestaltet. Vgl. Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung*, 2., durchges. und erw. Auflage, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1977, S. 273-282, bes. S. 280-282.

¹⁷ Vgl. zur Interpretation des Vorworts auch: Karin Pulmer *Die dementierte Alternative: Gesellschaft und Geschichte in der ästhetischen Konstruktion von Kierkegaards „Entweder-Oder“*, Frankfurt a.M. / Bern: Lang 1982, S. 45-50 u. S. 146-153; Walter Baumgartner „Natürlich, ein altes Manuskript... Die Herausgeberfiktion in Almquists *Amorina* und in Kierkegaards *Entweder-Oder* – zum fiktionalen Kommunikationsangebot zweier romantischer Romane“ in *Festschrift für Oskar Bandele. Zum 60. Geburtstag am 11. Januar 1986*, hrsg. v. Hans-Peter Naumann u.a., Frankfurt a.M. / Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn 1986, S. 265-283, bes. S. 272-274; Achim Kinter *Rezeption und Existenz: Untersuchungen zu Sören Kierkegaards „Entweder-Oder“*, Frankfurt a.M. u.a.: Lang 1991, S. 15-22, u. S. 29-31; Smail Rapić *Ethische Selbstverständigung. Kierkegaards Auseinandersetzung mit der Ethik Kants und der Rechtsphilosophie Hegel*, Bd. 16 in *KSMS*, Berlin / New York: de Gruyter 2007, S. 9-18.

fasser des „Tagebuch des Verführers“ sein will – ein Umstand, den Eremita folgendermaßen kommentiert:

Dies ist ein alter novellistischer Kniff, gegen den ich weiter nichts einzuwenden hätte, wenn er nur nicht dazu beitrüge, meine eigne Stellung überaus verwickelt zu machen: der eine Verfasser kommt nun dazu, in dem andern drinzustecken wie Schachteln in einem chinesischen Schachtelspiel.¹⁸

Der erste Satz der Schrift, der im Folgenden eingehender analysiert werden soll, ist nun gar nicht dazu angetan, dieses Schachtel- und Verwirrspiel zu lösen, er greift es vielmehr auf und gibt ihm eine zusätzliche Nuance:

Vielleicht ist es dir doch unterweilen beigekommen, lieber Leser, ein wenig an der Richtigkeit des bekannten philosophischen Satzes zu zweifeln, daß das Äußere das Innere ist, das Innere das Äußere.¹⁹

Zunächst ist in dieser Ansprache die Parodie der gelehrten Anspielung festzuhalten. Jener ‚philosophische Satz‘, auf den Victor Eremita hier anspielt, dürfte selbst einem gebildeten Leserkreis nicht so unmittelbar ‚bekannt‘ sein – schließlich steht er innerhalb des systematischen Zusammenhangs von Hegels Wesenslogik.²⁰

Zweitens fällt die forcierte Ansprache des Lesers auf. Schon im ersten Satz wird dem „lieben Leser“ deutlich gemacht, dass er als Adressat es ist, an den das Buch sich ausdrücklich wendet. Dies ist insbesondere dann von Belang, wenn man zum ersten Satz der Schrift den letzten hinzunimmt, der lautet: „denn allein die Wahrheit, die erbaut, ist Wahrheit für dich.“²¹ Das Buch *Entweder/Oder*, so lässt sich schon aus den beiden zitierten Sätzen schließen, gibt dem Leser nicht einen neutral aufzunehmenden Gehalt, es nimmt vielmehr von der ersten Zeile an den Leser mit in seinen Gang hinein.

Dass die Leseransprache im Falle von *Entweder/Oder* nicht einfach dazu dient, den Leser mit in das Erzählgeschehen einzubinden, wird deutlich, wenn *drittens* auf den Modus der Leseransprache reflektiert wird. Dem Leser wird keine Mitteilung gemacht, die er einfach aufzunehmen hätte, ihm wird auch keine Leseanweisung gegeben, an den

¹⁸ EO1, 9 / SKS 2, 16 (Übersetzung leicht modifiziert).

¹⁹ EO1, 3 / SKS 2, 11; vgl. hierzu die These von Stewart, Kierkegaards polemische Abgrenzung beziehe sich eher auf Heiberg als auf Hegel: Jon Stewart *Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel reconsidered*, Cambridge u.a.: Cambridge University Press 2003, S. 323-329.

²⁰ Vgl. G.W.F. Hegel *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832–1845 neu edierte Ausgabe, Red. Eva Moldenhauer u. Karl Markus Michel, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1969-71, Bd. 6, S. 179f.

²¹ EO2, 377 / SKS 3, 332 (Übersetzung modifiziert).

Leser wird auch nicht in irgendeiner Weise appelliert. Es ist vielmehr der hypothetische Modus der *Unterstellung*, in dem Victor Eremita den Leser zweideutig anspricht: Es sei ihm „vielleicht“ „doch“ „unterweilen“ beigesprochen, an jenem Satz „ein wenig“ zu zweifeln. Worauf der Herausgeber offensichtlich zielt, ist die eigene Erfahrung des Lesers, um diese scheint es wesentlich zu gehen.

Dies lässt sich *viertens* stützen durch Reflexion auf den Gehalt jenes Satzes, der dem Leser womöglich zweifelhaft geworden sei; Victor Eremita unterstellt nämlich, dass es sich gerade umgekehrt verhalte, dass also das Innere gerade nicht das Äußere sei, und bringt dies dem Leser, immer noch im Modus des hypothetischen „vielleicht“, folgendermaßen Nahe:

Du hast vielleicht selbst ein Geheimnis mit dir getragen, von dem du fühltest, es sei dir mit seiner Seligkeit oder seinem Schmerz zu lieb, als daß du andere darein hättest einweihen können. Dein Leben hat dich vielleicht in Berührung mit Menschen gebracht, von denen du ahntest, etwas der Art sei bei ihnen der Fall, ohne daß doch deine Gewalt oder deine Bestrickung imstande gewesen wäre, das Verborgene an den Tag zu bringen. Vielleicht passt keiner dieser Fälle auf dich und dein Leben, gleichwohl bist du nicht unbekannt mit jenem Zweifel; er ist ab und an als eine flüchtige Gestalt an deinem Geiste vorübergeschwebt. Ein solcher Zweifel kommt und geht, und niemand weiß, von wannen er kommt und wohin er fährt. Ich für mein Teil bin hinsichtlich dieses Punkts der Philosophie stets etwas ketzerisch gesinnt gewesen [...].²²

Die Unterscheidung von Innen und Außen bezieht sich also nicht auf einen beliebigen Gegenstand, sondern auf die menschliche Existenz. Hier ist es, so legt Victor Eremita wenigstens nahe, unmöglich, vom Äußeren auf das Innere zu schließen. Dass der „Widerspruch“ von Innen und Außen durch einen bruchlosen Übergang nicht einzuholen ist, ja womöglich gar nicht überbrückt werden kann, verdeutlicht die Bemerkung, das Innere sei dem Äußeren schlechterdings „inkommensurabel“.²³ Dieser Hinweis ist deswegen entscheidend, weil er die zweideutige Position unterstreicht, die der Herausgeber im Verhältnis zu den von ihm aufgefundenen Papieren einnimmt. Victor Eremita macht keineswegs den Anspruch, das geheimnisvolle Innere der Schrift durchleuchten und dem Leser aufschließen zu können, – im Gegenteil ist er in jeder Hinsicht darum bemüht, seine äußerliche Stellung zu den von ihm herausgegebenen Schriften zu markieren. Dies zeigt sich darin, dass er alle von ihm stammenden Eingriffe in die Papiere minutiös notiert und jede Interpretation von seiner Seite deutlich zurücknimmt. So heißt es bezüglich seiner Kommentierung

²² *EOI*, 3 / *SKS* 2, 11.

²³ *EOI*, 3 / *SKS* 2, 11 (Hirsch übersetzt hier „unangemessen“).

des „Tagebuchs des Verführers“: „Jedoch, ich habe meine Stellung vielleicht bereits missbraucht, um den Leser mit meinen Betrachtungen beschwerlich zu fallen.“²⁴ Auch im Bezug auf die Titelgebung hebt er die damit verbundene „Täuschung“²⁵ hervor und kommentiert sie wie folgt: „Was der Leser mit diesem Titel verlieren kann, wird nichts Großes sein; denn er kann ja bei der Lektüre den Titel ganz gut vergessen. Wenn er dann das Buch gelesen hat, kann er vielleicht an den Titel denken.“²⁶ Die beständige Selbstzurücknahme des Herausgebers, die stets darauf bedacht ist, die dem Leser angebotene Interpretation *als* Interpretation kenntlich zu machen, gipfelt schließlich in der Hervorhebung des fehlenden Resultats von *Entweder/Oder*.

In dieser Hinsicht haben diese Papiere nämlich kein Ende. Findet man, daß dies nicht in der Ordnung sei, so hätte man doch kein Recht, es einen Fehler zu nennen, sondern müßte es ein Unglück heißen. Ich für mein Teil sehe es für ein Glück an. Man trifft zuweilen auf Novellen, in denen bestimmte Personen entgegengesetzte Lebensansichten vortragen. Das endet dann gerne damit, daß der eine den andern überzeugt. Anstatt daß also die Anschauung für sich sprechen muß, wird der Leser mit dem historischen Ergebnis bereichert, daß der andre überzeugt worden ist. Ich sehe es für ein Glück an, daß in solcher Hinsicht diese Papiere eine Aufklärung nicht gewähren. [...] Wenn das Buch gelesen ist, sind A und B vergessen, lediglich die Anschauungen stehen einander gegenüber und erwarten keine endliche Entscheidung in bestimmten Persönlichkeiten.²⁷

Was Victor Eremita als „Glück“ ansieht, ist die Tatsache, dass die Papiere dem Leser kein Ergebnis, genauer, kein „historisches Ergebnis“ geben. So wird verhindert, dass der Leser in die passive Haltung ästhetisch-distanzierter Betrachtung verfällt und sich den Fortgang eines Erzählgeschehens – nicht zufällig macht der Herausgeber den Vergleich zur Novelle – bloß vom Verfasser vor Augen führen lässt.

Worauf der hervorgehobene Verzicht auf ein Resultat, die nachdrückliche Selbstzurücknahme des Herausgebers und nicht zuletzt das vollständige Fehlen einer verbindlichen Autorinstanz wesentlich abzielen, ist die *produktive Aneignung* durch den Leser. Ohne definitive Anleitung, wie der Inhalt der Papiere aufzufassen sei, sieht sich der Leser mit den einander gegenüberstehenden Existenzentwürfen konfrontiert und wird so zum tätigen Sich-Verhalten angereizt. Die ganze Kommunikationsstruktur des Werkes zielt darauf ab, den Leser in das titelgebende „Entweder – Oder“ hineinzustellen und ihm die

²⁴ EOI, 11 / SKS 2, 17.

²⁵ EOI, 14 / SKS 2, 20.

²⁶ EOI, 15 / SKS 2, 21.

²⁷ EOI, 15f. / SKS 2, 21.

Entscheidung zu überantworten; – sei es, dass er der einen oder anderen Lebensanschauung seine Zustimmung gibt, sei es, dass er beide Anschauungen verwirft.²⁸

IV. Die Undarstellbarkeit des sokratischen Standpunkts

Das aufgezeigte Spiel von Innen und Außen in der Mitteilungsform von *Entweder/Oder* erschöpft sich aber keineswegs in einer Form gebrochener Kommunikation. Vielmehr schreibt es sich zugleich von darstellungstheoretischen Erwägungen her, die die begriffliche Darstellbarkeit und sprachliche Auslotbarkeit der einzelnen Existenz problematisieren. In dieser Hinsicht ist es von Interesse, dass die unaufhebbare Dialektik von Innen und Außen in *Entweder/Oder* nicht zum ersten Mal Gegenstand des Kierkegaardschen Werks ist. Schon zu Beginn der Magisterdissertation *Über den Begriff der Ironie* hatte Kierkegaard diese Dialektik aufgerufen, um eine erste, eindringliche Schilderung der Figur des Sokrates zu geben. Bezeichnenderweise findet sich die Dialektik von Innen und Außen gerade dort, wo Kierkegaard auf die Schwierigkeit der *Darstellung* des Sokrates zu sprechen kommt:

Er [Sokrates] gehörte nämlich zu denjenigen Menschen, bei denen man nicht bei dem Äußeren als solchem stehen bleiben kann. Das Äußere deutete ständig auf ein Anderes und Entgegengesetztes hin. Mit ihm war es nicht so wie mit einem seine Anschauungen vortragenden Philosophen, bei welchem eben dieser sein Vortrag die Gegenwart der Idee ist, vielmehr bedeutet das, was Sokrates sagte, etwas anderes. Das Äußere war überhaupt nicht in harmonischer Einheit mit dem Inneren, sondern eher der Gegensatz dazu, und allein unter diesem Brechungswinkel ist er zu verstehen.²⁹

Hier ist dreierlei festzuhalten. *Erstens* formuliert Kierkegaard in dieser noch vorläufigen Darstellung – oder vielmehr: Darstellung der Nichtdarstellbarkeit – des Sokrates seinen philosophischen Ausgangspunkt am konkret existierenden Einzelnen. Gerade darin, die Ironie als *Standpunkt* des Sokrates aufzufassen, hatte Kierkegaard die Pointe seines eigenen Verständnisses gegenüber dem Hegelschen gesehen:

Man ist im Allgemeinen gewohnt, die Ironie ideal verstanden zu sehen, ihr als verschwindendes Moment im System einen Platz angewiesen und sie deshalb nur in Kürze beschrieben zu sehen; man vermag aus diesem Grunde nicht so ganz leicht zu

²⁸ Vgl. zur Mitteilungsform von *Entweder/Oder*: Tilo Wesche *Kierkegaard: Eine philosophische Einführung*, Stuttgart: Reclam 2003, S. 180-212.

²⁹ *BI*, 10 / *SKS* 1, 74.