Kierkegaard Research:
Sources, Reception and Resources

Volume 9

Kierkegaard and Existentialism

Edited by

Jon Stewart

KIERKEGAARD AND EXISTENTIALISM

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Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources
is a publication of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre

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JON STEWART

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Kierkegaard and existentialism. – (Kierkegaard research : sources, reception and resources v. 9)
1. Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855. 2. Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855 – Influence. 3. Existentialism.
I. Series II. Stewart, Jon (Jon Bartley)
198.9–dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kierkegaard and existentialism / [edited by] Jon Stewart.
p. cm.— (Kierkegaard research ; v. 9)
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 978-1-4094-2641-7 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855.
2. Existentialism. I. Stewart, Jon (Jon Bartley)
B4377.K4525 2010
198'.9—dc22

2010043839

ISBN 9781409426417 (hbk)

Cover design by Katalin Nun

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Preface

The term "existentialism" has traditionally been notoriously difficult to define due to the fact that the word has been attached to the work of so many different thinkers with such diverse agendas and writings. However, there can be no doubt that most of the thinkers who are usually associated with the existentialist tradition, for whatever their actual doctrines, were in one way or another influenced by the writings of Kierkegaard. This influence is so great that it can be fairly stated that the existentialist movement was in large part responsible for the major advance in Kierkegaard's international reception that took place in the twentieth century. It was with existentialism that Kierkegaard first entered the standard canon of Western philosophy. From that point on it has been customary to begin introductory courses on existentialism with a lecture on Kierkegaard or to include a snippet from his works in anthologies of existentialist writers.

The special importance of Kierkegaard for this tradition can be found in a number of different aspects of his writings. Perhaps most significantly his rejection of German idealism as a model for philosophical analysis and his focus instead on the lived experience of the individual were key sources of inspiration for the existentialist writers. They, too, sought to develop a new kind of philosophy that was more in touch with the actual problems of human life and existence, while rejecting what they regarded as abstract conceptual analysis for its own sake.

A part of Kierkegaard's criticism of the tradition of German philosophy was his rejection of what he regarded as their arid form of writing. Instead, he pioneered different kinds of genres in order to find a suitable expression for his thought and also to distance himself from then mainstream philosophy. Kierkegaard's unique style and playful use of genre also exercised an influence on the existentialists. Many of the major figures of the existentialist movement, such as Sartre, Camus, Unamuno, and de Beauvoir also attempted to present their ideas in literary forms and not just philosophical treatises.

In Kierkegaard's writings one can find a rich array of concepts that became central to the existentialists' palette. His analyses of concepts such as anxiety, despair, freedom, sin, the crowd, and sickness all came to be standard motifs in existentialist literature. Despite the profoundly religious nature of his thought, his writings had a broad appeal to many secular thinkers, who simply imported his ideas into their contexts, while abstracting from their religious aspects.

While it has been argued that some thinkers associated with existentialism, such as Heidegger, consciously attempted to hide the importance of Kierkegaard for their thought, others openly acknowledged it by bringing him explicitly into their own analyses. Indeed, it can be said that Sartre was in large measure responsible for

canonizing Kierkegaard as one of the forerunners of existentialism by casting him in this role in his influential lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* from 1945. At that time immediately after the Second World War, some thinkers felt the need to consolidate the movement known as "existentialism." This was due to the fact that the word had quickly attained a wide currency in cultural life and was being bandied about so irresponsibly that it was in danger of becoming completely meaningless. Thus, in this work Sartre makes an attempt to define the fundamental doctrine of the school, which he declares to be the thesis "existence precedes essence."[1] It was claimed by some critics that existentialism was not a genuine philosophical school of thought, and so it was natural for Sartre to attempt to create a tradition for it by looking back to thinkers such as Kierkegaard in order to find forerunners and precursors. In this way Sartre attempts to incorporate Kierkegaard into the existentialist movement.

However, recent scholarship has been attentive to the ideological use of Kierkegaard in this context. Indeed, Sartre seemed to be exploiting Kierkegaard for his own purposes and not accurately representing the thought of the Dane in its original nineteenth-century philosophical milieu. For example, it has been common to point out that Kierkegaard would not even agree with Sartre's own stated first principle of existentialism quoted above. Suspicions of misrepresentation and distortions have led many commentators to go back and reexamine the complex relation between Kierkegaard and the existentialist thinkers. This project is continued in the articles featured in the present volume.

Given this profound history of influence, it was decided that it would be appropriate to dedicate a full volume to this tradition of reception on its own, instead of incorporating these articles into the volumes dedicated to the reception of Kierkegaard in philosophy, theology, literature, the social sciences, and social-political thought, although these articles would also fit well in these other volumes. The articles in the present volume feature figures from the French, German, Spanish, and Russian traditions of existentialism. They examine the rich and varied use of Kierkegaard by these later thinkers, and, most importantly, they problematize his purported role in this famous intellectual movement.

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris: Nagel 1961, p. 17. (English translation: *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet, London: Methuen 1948, p. 26.)

Acknowledgements

In addition to the authors themselves, several people have been involved in the production of this volume, and their selfless efforts are greatly appreciated. Peter Šajda did the enormous preliminary bibliographical work for all the articles not just in this volume but in all the volumes of the "Reception" part of the series. His outstanding bibliographies have been a great aid to all of the contributing authors. A number of other scholars have helped to locate older texts, check references, and evaluate articles. Here I would like to express my gratitude to Lee C. Barrett, Ingrid Basso, María J. Binetti, István Czakó, Darya Loungina, Markus Kleinert, David D. Possen, Heiko Schulz, Gerhard Schreiber, and Gerhard Thonhauser. I am deeply grateful to Yusuke Suzuki for his help with the Japanese titles and to Tamar Aylat-Yaguri for her help with the Hebrew and Arabic ones. This volume would never have been realized if it were not for the tireless editorial work of Katalin Nun. As usual, Finn Gredal Jensen has been of great assistance with checking the proofs and ferreting out the tiniest of errors and inconsistencies. I would like to thank our copyeditor Philip Hillyer and our typesetter Nicholas Wain for making the production process so smooth. On behalf of the members of the editorial and advisory boards, I would like to thank the staff at Ashgate Publishing for their continued support of the series. Finally, my deepest thanks goes to the contributors of this volume who consistently responded to our often demanding and time-consuming requests with patience and kindness. Their efforts have made this volume an important contribution to the understanding of Kierkegaard's complex relation to the existentialist movement.

List of Abbreviations

Danish Abbreviations

B&A *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup, vols. 1–2, Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1953–54.

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

EP *Af Søren Kierkegaards Efterladte Papirer*, vols. 1–9, ed. by H.P. Barfod and Hermann Gottsched, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1869–81.

Pap. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vols. I to XI–3, ed. by Peter Andreas Heiberg, Victor Kuhr and Einer Torsting, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1909–48; second, expanded ed., vols. I to XI–3, by Niels Thulstrup, vols. XII to XIII supplementary volumes, ed. by Niels Thulstrup, vols. XIV to XVI index by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1968–78.

SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1–28, vols. K1–K28, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1997ff.

SV1 *Samlede Værker*, ed. by A.B. Drachmann, Johan Ludvig Heiberg and H.O. Lange, vols. I–XIV, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag 1901–06.

English Abbreviations

AN *Armed Neutrality*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

AR *On Authority and Revelation*, *The Book on Adler,* trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1955.

ASKB *The Auctioneer's Sales Record of the Library of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by H.P. Rohde, Copenhagen: The Royal Library 1967.

BA *The Book on Adler*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

C *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.

CA *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.

CD *Christian Discourses*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.

CI *The Concept of Irony*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989.

CIC *The Concept of Irony*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Lee M. Capel, London: Collins 1966.

COR *The Corsair Affair*; *Articles Related to the Writings*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982.

CUP1 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982.

CUP2 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 2, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982.

CUPH *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2009.

EO1 *Either/Or*, Part I, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987.

EO2 *Either/Or*, Part II, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987.

EOP *Either/Or*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1992.

EPW *Early Polemical Writings*, among others: *From the Papers of One Still Living*; *Articles from Student Days*; *The Battle Between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*, trans. by Julia Watkin, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990.

EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990.

FSE *For Self-Examination*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990.

FT *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983.

FTP *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1985.

JC *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985.

JFY *Judge for Yourself!*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990.

JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1–6, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (vol. 7, Index and Composite Collation), Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1967–78.

KAC *Kierkegaard's Attack upon "Christendom," 1854–1855*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1944.

KJN *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1–11, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007ff.

LD *Letters and Documents*, trans. by Henrik Rosenmeier, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978.

LR *A Literary Review*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 2001.

M *The Moment and Late Writings*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

P *Prefaces / Writing Sampler*, trans. by Todd W. Nichol, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.

PC *Practice in Christianity*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991.

PF *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985.

PJ *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1996.

PLR *Prefaces: Light Reading for Certain Classes as the Occasion May Require*, trans. by William McDonald, Tallahassee: Florida State University Press 1989.

PLS *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1941.

PV *The Point of View* including *On My Work as an Author*, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, and *Armed Neutrality*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

PVL *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* including *On My Work as an Author*, trans. by Walter Lowrie, New York and London: Oxford University Press 1939.

R *Repetition*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983.

SBL *Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989.

SLW *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988.

SUD *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.

SUDP *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, London and New York: Penguin Books 1989.

TA *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978.

TD *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993.

UD *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993.

WA *Without Authority* including *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, *An Upbuilding Discourse*, *Two Discourses at the Communion on*

Fridays, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.

WL *Works of Love*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995.

WS *Writing Sampler*, trans. by Todd W. Nichol, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997.

Simone de Beauvoir:

A Founding Feminist's Appreciation of Kierkegaard

Ronald M. Green and Mary Jean Green

> " 'What a curse to be a woman! And yet the very worst curse when one is a woman is, in fact, not to understand that it is one.' Kierkegaard"
>
> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, Epigraph[1]

I. Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is widely regarded as the founding text of the modern feminist movement. In this work, Beauvoir combines her extensive reading in philosophy and literary texts with insights drawn from the French existentialist philosopher (and her lifelong partner), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), to offer a view of woman as "the Other," a being defined not in her own right, but only as one who is regarded negatively in relation to man. "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute. She is the Other."[2] Throughout this text, and the philosophical writings and novels that surround it in her authorship, Beauvoir expresses a philosophical and ethical perspective based on the existentialist philosophy she shared with Jean-Paul Sartre. According to this, the human condition is marked by ambiguity. Each of us, regardless of our sex, plays out "[t]he same drama of flesh and spirit, and of finitude and transcendence."[3] As expressed in her well-known assertion, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman,"[4] Beauvoir contends that femininity is not a given of biology, but rather a *situation* produced by "civilization as a whole"[5]:

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1 The French original reads: "*Quel malheur que d'être femme! et pourtant le pire malheur quand on est femme est au fond de ne pas comprendre que c'en est un*."—Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vols. 1–2, Paris: Gallimard 1949, vol. 2, p. 7. (English translation: *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2010, p. 277.)

2 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, p. 15. (*The Second Sex*, p. 6.)

3 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 573. (*The Second Sex*, p. 763.)

4 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 13. (*The Second Sex*, p. 283.)

5 Ibid.

> what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all other humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other....Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential; and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential.[6]

In developing her argument in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir several times mentions Kierkegaard and draws on his writings. Her use of the quotation attributed to Kierkegaard as an epigraph for the second volume of the original French publication typifies her references to the Danish thinker in this work. Beauvoir repeatedly appears to present Kierkegaard as a writer offering disparaging views of women. As in the epigraph, the quotations drawn from Kierkegaard's writings and the references to him portray woman as belonging to the weaker sex; she lacks a full measure of reason and reflectivity, and she is prone to illusions. Her greatest value is to stir aspirations to ideality in man—she is an idea into which man projects his own transcendence—but actual relations with her, as in marriage, have the opposite effect of dampening man's self-transcendence. The 1952 H.M. Parshley English translation of *The Second Sex*, which influenced Anglo-American readings of Beauvoir's understanding of Kierkegaard, omits the epigraph attributed to Kierkegaard, although it retains almost all of these seemingly negative citations from and references to Kierkegaard. This epigraph is restored in the recent 2010 translation, complete and unabridged, by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. However, neither Beauvoir nor her translators mention the pseudonymous sources of the Kierkegaard references.[7] Since *The Second Sex* is Beauvoir's most widely read work, especially in the Parshley translation, many of her readers could reasonably conclude that the sum of Beauvoir's debt to Kierkegaard was to regard him as epitomizing nineteenth-century male attitudes toward women.[8]

This conclusion, however, is seriously misleading. Beauvoir was far from being merely a critic of Kierkegaard. She was clearly familiar with Kierkegaard's place

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[6] Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, p. 31. (*The Second Sex*, p. 17.)

[7] Sonia Sikka, in a brief mention of Beauvoir's use of Kierkegaard in her "The Delightful Other: Portraits of the Feminine in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Levinas," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Tina Chanter, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press 2001, p. 117, note 3, notes that Beauvoir, "frequently attributes remarks made from the aesthetic point of view in Kierkegaard's works to Kierkegaard himself, mistakenly assuming that they can be counted among the opinions that Kierkegaard holds."

[8] A notable exception here is Sylvia Walsh. In her article, "Feminine Devotion and Self-Abandonment: Simone de Beauvoir and Søren Kierkegaard on the Woman in Love," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 42 Supplement, 1998, pp. 35–40, Walsh argues (on p. 35) that "Beauvoir's phenomenological description and critique of feminine devotion and self-abandonment in this text [*The Second Sex*], especially in the chapter on 'The Woman in Love,' bear a close affinity with Kierkegaard's treatment of these qualities in two of his most important writings, *The Sickness unto Death* and *Works of Love*." This may be true. However, apart from a mention of *The Sickness unto Death* in a letter by Sartre to her (see below, note 44), Beauvoir never indicates that she has read *The Sickness unto Death*, and she nowhere cites it. The same is true of *Works of Love*, which was not published in a French translation until 1945.

in the emergence of existentialist thinking. She drew from him key insights about the human condition, ethics, and the relations of men and women. Even her use of Kierkegaard's writings in *The Second Sex* is far more nuanced than it seems to be. Not only does she appear to recognize the ironic distancing that permeates many of her Kierkegaard references, she was deeply appreciative of Kierkegaard use of fictional literature as a philosophical tool and as a means of exploring gender relations. Indeed, in some respects, *The Second Sex* builds on work begun by Kierkegaard in his own explorations of gender relations in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*.

II. Beauvoir's Reading of Kierkegaard

We have two main sources for ascertaining Beauvoir's familiarity with Kierkegaard. The first are remarks in her autobiographical writings, principally *La force de l'âge* translated as *The Prime of Life* published in 1960,[9] her autobiographical account of the 1930s and 1940s, the years during which she began her intensive encounter with Kierkegaard's writings. These remarks are supported by statements in her diary and in her correspondence with Sartre during this period. The second are explicit references to Kierkegaard's writings in her published works. Additionally, a small number of remarks in other published correspondence or interviews mention Kierkegaard in general terms or as one of the key figures in the development of existentialism.[10] By triangulating information from these sources, we can develop a solid idea of what Beauvoir read.

Beauvoir's personal discovery of Kierkegaard reflected the changes in her philosophical outlook brought about by the War and the Nazi occupation of France. It was during the winter of 1939–40 that she began her serious study of Kierkegaard's writings. Speaking of this wartime period in *The Prime of Life*, she writes:

> I went on reading Hegel, and was now beginning to understand him rather better. His amplitude of detail dazzled me, and his system as a whole made me feel giddy. It was, indeed, tempting to abolish one's individual self and merge with Universal Being, to observe one's own life in the perspective of Historical Necessity...But the least flutter of my heart gave such speculations the lie. Hate, anger, expectation or misery would assert themselves against all my efforts to by-pass them, and this "flight into the Universal" merely formed one further episode in my private development. I turned back to Kierkegaard and began to read him with passionate interest. The type of "truth" that he postulated defied doubt no less triumphantly than Descartes' use of "evidence." Neither History, nor the Hegelian System could any more than the Devil in person, upset the living certainty of "I am, I exist, here and now. I am myself."[11]

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[9] Simone de Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, Paris: Gallimard 1960. (English translation: *The Prime of Life*, trans. by Peter Green, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1960.)

[10] In a letter to Nelson Algren dated August 3, 1947, Beauvoir asserts that Kierkegaard, along with Hans Christian Andersen, is "the great man of Denmark." Simone de Beauvoir, *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, New York: The New Press 1997, p. 55.

[11] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 537. (*The Prime of Life*, pp. 468–9.)

Although French translations of Kierkegaard's major works had appeared throughout the 1930s, in *The Prime of Life* Beauvoir admits that neither she nor Sartre had evidenced much interest in them. While stating that they read "omnivorously" during the early 1930s,[12] Beauvoir admits that they "paid no especial attention to Kierkegaard's *Journal of a Tempter*,"[13] which was a French translation of "Diary of a Seducer" in 1929.[14] Speaking of the period 1933–34, Beauvoir confesses their mutual indifference to Kierkegaard: "The first translations of Kierkegaard appeared about this time; we had no particular incentive to read them, and left them untouched."[15]

It was, however, in the atmosphere of impending war in 1939, and particularly following the shock of the German entry into Paris in June of 1940, that Beauvoir undertook a serious reading of Kierkegaard. In her autobiography, she attempts to explain what she calls the "metamorphosis" that occurred during the period when she was writing what would become her first published novel *L'invitée* (*She Came to Stay*), from October 1938 to the late spring of 1941:

> But while I was so laboriously conjuring this novel from the void, the weather broke, the sun moved on, and I became a different person. Hitherto my sole concern had been to enrich my personal life and learn the art of converting it into words. Little by little I had abandoned the quasi-solipsism and illusory autonomy I cherished as a girl of twenty; though I had come to recognize the fact of other people's existence, it was still my individual relationships with separate people that mattered most to me, and I still yearned fiercely for happiness. Then, suddenly, History burst over me, and I dissolved into fragments. I woke to find myself scattered over the four quarters of the globe, linked by every nerve in me to each and every other individual. All my ideas and values were turned upside down; even the pursuit of happiness lost its importance.[16]

In her introduction to the English translation of Beauvoir's *Wartime Diary*, Margaret A. Simons sees Beauvoir's philosophical turn from Hegel to Kierkegaard as expressing itself in Kierkegaardian language when Beauvoir writes on January 9, 1941: "I have become conscious again of my individuality and of the metaphysical being that is opposed to this historical infinity where Hegel optimistically dilutes all things. Anguish."[17]

In 1939 the absence of Sartre and other male friends, called up for military service during the *drôle de guerre*, left Beauvoir plenty of time for reading. On November 28, 1939, her daily letter informs Sartre that she has borrowed *The Concept of Anxiety* from the library at her lycée where she was then teaching, and she offers to send it on

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12 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 57. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 46.)

13 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 59. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 48.)

14 Søren Kierkegaard, *Le journal du séducteur*, trans. and introduced by Jean J. Gateau, Paris: Stock, Delamain & Boutelleau 1929 (*Le cabinet cosmopolite, série scandinave*, vol. 43).

15 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 157. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 135.)

16 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 423. (*The Prime of Life*, pp. 369–70.)

17 Simone de Beauvoir, *Journal de guerre: Septembre 1939–Janvier 1941*, Paris: Gallimard 1990, p. 361. (English translation: *Wartime Diary*, trans. by Anne Deing Cordero, ed. by Margaret A. Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2008, p. 28.)

to him. Her initial comment on the book may betray her lack of prior acquaintance with Kierkegaard's work: "in any case, I'll look it over to find out what it's about."[18] It is not clear, however, when (or whether) she read it.

Soon after this initial encounter with *The Concept of Anxiety*, Beauvoir was invited to dinner by her politically-engaged friend Colette Audry and had the opportunity to meet Jean Wahl (1888–1974), the French scholar whose prefaces and commentaries on Kierkegaard's work had been crucial in introducing the Danish philosopher to a French public. Unfortunately, in neither this nor subsequent meetings with Wahl does Beauvoir tell us what they may have said to each other about Kierkegaard, although we know she finally read what she termed "Wahl's essays on him" in November 1939.[19]

It is only Beauvoir's discovery of *Fear and Trembling*, lent to her by Colette Audry in March 1940 that finally seems to awaken her interest. Although she criticizes the writing ("it's badly constructed and long-winded"), Beauvoir expresses her enthusiasm to Sartre: "that fellow did realize what an existential ethics was—and you can already sense there what Kafka [a writer much admired by both Beauvoir and Sartre] owes to him...he interests me more than I expected."[20]

After the disruption of her life caused by the German invasion in the summer of 1940, Beauvoir gets back to sustained philosophical reading only when she finds herself spending the Christmas vacation of 1940 alone in Paris while Sartre is a prisoner of war in Germany. Freed from teaching, she prepares for the break by arming herself with a number of books by Kierkegaard, which she proceeds to read in her favorite hangout, the Café de Flore. As she tells Sartre, she is happy to get back to reading Kierkegaard, and she lingers on the description of her solitary Christmas day: "Outside the weather's beautifully cold and dry, and Paris has a deserted, country look. I feel comfortable because I'm going to spend quite a while reading Kierkegaard, then I'll go to the concert...."[21]

Although the only title she refers to in these letters is, again, *The Concept of Anxiety*, she is clearly reading several other works, as well as the commentaries by Jean Wahl, probably his *Études kierkegaardiennes*, a 750-page introduction to Kierkegaard published in 1938.[22] This volume, which draws heavily on German secondary writings on Kierkegaard, has substantial appendices dealing with Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel and his influence on both Heidegger and Jaspers. It also includes nearly ninety pages of extracts from Kierkegaard's journals and papers.

Since Beauvoir was writing her novel *She Came to Stay* at this time, it is tempting to think that she may have found parallels between Kierkegaard's "Diary

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[18] Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre 1930–1939*, ed. by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard 1990, p. 310. The translation here is ours; this portion of the letter is not included in the English translation of the letters.

[19] Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre 1930–1939*, p. 312. This portion of the letter is not included in the English translation of the letters.

[20] Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre 1940–1963*, ed. by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard 1990, p. 146. (English translation: *Letters to Sartre*, trans. by Quintin Hoare, New York: Arcade 1990, p. 304.)

[21] Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre 1940–1963,* pp. 214–15. (*Letters to Sartre*, pp. 357–8.)

[22] Jean Wahl, *Études kierkegaardiennes*, Paris: F. Aubier 1938.

of a Seducer" and the rather cold-blooded seduction of a younger woman undertaken by the novel's leading male character, Pierre. In one passage, Pierre, describes his seduction of the young woman, Xavière, in terms reminiscent of the "Diary." It is not, he says, sensual enjoyment that he seeks but rather to be the sole object of her attention.[23] However, Beauvoir's own accounts of the novel's conception fail to mention Kierkegaard; rather, they ground the seduction scenes in her own experience with a love triangle she had experienced with Sartre and one of her own students.

However, the influence of Kierkegaard is evident in the conception of her novel, *The Blood of Others*, written during the war years and published in 1945. The novel is centered on the moral decisions facing a small group of Resistance fighters, whose leader, the novel's protagonist, Jean Blomart, struggles with the anguish of moral choice: by his actions or failure to act in the face of German oppression, he finds himself responsible for the lives of others. Describing the development of her character, Beauvoir comments in *The Prime of Life*:

> He gave up trying to untie the Gordian knot, and slashed it through. After years of pacifism, he now accepted violence and organized guerilla "outrages" in the teeth of possible reprisals. This resolution did not bring him peace of mind, but peace of mind he no longer aspired to; he resigned himself to a life of mental agony. (I had been very struck by Kierkegaard's idea that a *genuinely* moral person could never have an easy conscience, and only pledges his liberty in "fear and trembling.")[24]

Later in the autobiography, Beauvoir invokes Kierkegaard while discussing her wartime play, *Les Bouches Inutiles,* where she again confronts the moral problem of sacrificing innocent people for a higher cause: "The heroine's question, 'Why should we choose peace?' reflects—as does the end of *The Blood of Others*—the moral implicit in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*."[25]

As she finished *The Blood of Others*, published after the Liberation with great success, Beauvoir was forced to confront the question of her relationship to "existentialism," a term that had been inserted into French philosophical discussions by the Christian thinker Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973). When she was introduced by Sartre to the philosopher Jean Grenier (1898–1971), who was planning a series of essays on contemporary philosophical trends, Grenier immediately asked Beauvoir to define her philosophical position: " 'What about you, madame' [Grenier] enquired. 'Are *you* an existentialist?' "[26] Her understanding of the term, at this point in 1944, was vague at best, although she immediately identifies it with Kierkegaard: "I can still recall my embarrassment at this question. I had read Kierkegaard, and the term 'existential philosophy' had been in circulation for some time apropos of Heidegger; but I didn't understand the meaning of the word 'existentialist,' which Gabriel Marcel had recently coined."[27] Nevertheless,

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[23] Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Invitée*, Paris: Gallimard 1943, p. 228. (English translation: *She Came to Stay*, trans. by Ivonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse, New York: W.W. Norton 1954, p. 208.)

[24] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 619. (*The Prime of Life*, pp. 541–2.)

[25] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 673. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 589.)

[26] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 625. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 547.)

[27] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 625. (*The Prime of Life*, pp. 547–8.)

at Sartre's urging, Beauvoir accepted Grenier's invitation to write a short piece for his collection, an essay that became *Pyrrhus et Cinéas.*

Following the Liberation of France in 1944, Beauvoir was again forced to define her philosophical identity when *The Blood of Others* was greeted not only as a novel of the Resistance but also as an "existentialist novel," a label also applied to Sartre's newly-published novels, *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve*. After some hesitation, both embarked on what Beauvoir terms in her autobiography an "existentialist offensive,"[28] with Sartre writing his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* and Beauvoir delivering a lecture on literature and metaphysics to the students of Gabriel Marcel. This lecture was later published in 1946, along with three other essays, as part of a series in Sartre and Beauvoir's newly-formed journal, *Les Temps Modernes*.[29] If the name of Kierkegaard is frequently invoked in Beauvoir's short philosophical writings of this period, it is because the Danish philosopher is important in explaining how her own thinking and that of Sartre can be defined as a form of existentialism. Kierkegaard continues to play the role of founding father of her own existentialist movement for many years. In an interview aired on Australian radio in early 1975, for example, Beauvoir responds to a question by Pierre Vicary about the Existentialist movement of the 1940s and 1950s: "existentialism as such began long before then. The first Existentialists were Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Jaspers. Then came the Christian Existentialism of Gabriel Marcel and the atheistic Existentialism of Sartre."[30]

Our second, and perhaps most important source of information on Beauvoir's familiarity with Kierkegaard are explicit quotations from his writings in her published works. Proceeding chronologically, there are two mentions of Kierkegaard in her 1944 philosophical essay, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*. The first is at best an uncertain reference to *The Concept of Anxiety* (in French, *Le concept de l'angoisse*), which we know from her autobiography she was reading during the *drôle de guerre*:

> The nothingness that anguish (*angoisse*) reveals to me is not the nothingness of my death. It is the negativity at the heart of my life that allows me to constantly transcend all transcendence. And the consciousness of this power is translated not by the assumption of my death, but rather by this "irony" of which Kierkegaard or Nietzsche speaks: even though I would be immortal, even though I would try to identify myself with immortal humanity, every end would remain a departure, every surpassing an object to surpass, and that in this game of relationships there is no other absolute than the totality of these very relationships, emerging in the void, without support.[31]

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[28] Simone de Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, vols. 1–2, Paris: Gallimard 1962, vol. 1, p. 60. (English translation: *Force of Circumstance*, vols. 1–2, trans. by Richard Howard, New York: Paragon House 1992 [1963], vol. 1, p. 38.)

[29] Simone de Beauvoir, "Littérature et métaphysique," *Les Temps Modernes*, vol. 1, no. 7, 1946, pp. 1153–63.

[30] This interview is presented in Max Charlesworth, *The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1975, pp. 5–6.

[31] Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Paris: Gallimard 1944, p. 63. (English translation in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann, and Mary Beth Mader, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press 2004, pp. 114–15.)

This attempt to imagine oneself as immortal, here identified with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, does suggest the plot of Beauvoir's third published novel, *All Men Are Mortal*, in which Fosca, the protagonist, indeed exemplifies the situation of a man who becomes immortal. However, we are not convinced by the attempt made by Barbara Klaw to link Beauvoir's character of Régine with Kierkegaard's Regine.[32] Although Klaw's article makes many important points about Beauvoir's project throughout the novel of destroying the myth of woman, Beauvoir's own description of the role of Régine in *All Men Are Mortal* in her autobiographical writings does not correspond to any portrait we have of Kierkegaard's former fiancée.[33]

In *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* Beauvoir's identification of Kierkegaard with the concept of irony could point to many of his works, although Beauvoir's text pins none of these down. One candidate is *Fear and Trembling*, which is explicitly mentioned in the second quotation from *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*:

> Even in my heart, this order I hear is ambiguous. There lies the source of Abraham's anguish (*angoisse*), which Kierkegaard describes in *Fear and Trembling*. Who knows if it's not a question of a temptation of the devil or my pride? Is it really God who is speaking? Who will distinguish the saint from the heretic?[34]

Our next references appear in works that arose from four essays that Beauvoir published between November 1945 and April 1946 in *Les Temps Modernes*. These essays were published in 1948 and again in 2008 under the title *La Sagesse de Nations*.[35] One of the essays in this volume, "Littérature et métaphysique," refers to Kierkegaard. The same essay also later became a source for a separate volume published in 1947 as *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*;[36] it contains three references to Kierkegaard.

The first two of the three references in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* give no hint of their specific source in Kierkegaard's writings:

> From the very beginning, existentialism defined itself as a philosophy of ambiguity. It was by affirming the irreducible character of ambiguity that Kierkegaard opposed

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[32] Barbara Klaw, "Intertextuality and Destroying the Myth of Woman in Simone de Beauvoir's *Tous Les Hommes Sont Mortels*," *Romanic Review*, vol. 89, no. 4, November 1998, pp. 549–66.

[33] Beauvoir, *La force des choses*, vol. 1, pp. 96–7. (*Force of Circumstance*, vol. 1, pp. 65–6.)

[34] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, p. 42. (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 105.)

[35] Simone de Beauvoir, *L'existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, Paris: Gallimard 2008. The four essays published in this volume are "L'existentialisme et la sagesse des nations"; "Idéalisme moral et réalisme politique"; "Littérature et métaphysique"; and "Oeil pour oeil." These appear in Beauvoir's *Philosophical Writings* as "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom," pp. 203–20; "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," pp. 175–93; "Literature and Metaphysics," pp. 269–77; and "An Eye for an Eye," pp. 245–60.

[36] Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, Paris: Gallimard 1947. (English translation: *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman, Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press 1948.)

> himself to Hegel, and it is by ambiguity that, in our own generation, Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, fundamentally defined man, that being whose being is not to be....[37]
>
> After Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also railed at the deceitful stupidity of the serious man and his universe. And *Being and Nothingness* is in large part a description of the serious man and his universe.[38]

The third reference suggests that *Fear and Trembling* is once again the source of Beauvoir's thinking about these matters:

> We have seen that this recourse to the serious is a lie; it entails the sacrifice of man to the Thing, of freedom to the Cause. In order for the return to the positive to be genuine it must involve negativity, it must not conceal the antinomies between means and end, present and future; they must be lived in a permanent tension; one must retreat from neither the outrage of violence nor deny it, or, which amounts to the same thing, assume it lightly. Kierkegaard has said that what distinguishes the pharisee from the genuinely moral man is that the former considers his anguish as a sure sign of his virtue; from the fact that he asks himself, "Am I Abraham?" he concludes, "I am Abraham;" but morality resides in the painfulness of an indefinite questioning. The problem which we are posing is not the same as that of Kierkegaard; the important thing to us is to know whether, in given conditions, Isaac must be killed or not. But we also think that what distinguishes the tyrant from the man of good will is that the first rests in the certainty of his aims, whereas the second keeps asking himself, "Am I really working for the liberation of men?"[39]

Beauvoir's mention of the Pharisee here is interesting. Kierkegaard discusses the ethics of the Pharisee and his relation to sin in several places in his writings, including *The Sickness unto Death*.[40] However, there is no mention of the Pharisee in *Fear and Trembling* and no mention anywhere else in Kierkegaard's writings of the Pharisee in connection with Abraham. Beauvoir may have been crafting her own interpretation here of Kierkegaard's positions on these matters.

The essay "Littérature et métaphysique" in *La sagesse de nations* has only one reference to Kierkegaard:

> The more actively a philosopher highlights the role and the value of subjectivity, the more he will be led to describe the metaphysical experience within a form that is singular and temporal. Not only does Kierkegaard, like Hegel, have recourse to literary myths, but in *Fear and Trembling* he recreates the story of Abraham's sacrifice in a manner that touches on the form of the novel, and in the *Seducer's Diary* he delivers his original experience in its dramatic singularity.[41]

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[37] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 14. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 9–10.)

[38] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 60. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 46.)

[39] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 165. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* p. 133.)

[40] *SKS* 11, 82 / *SUD*, 82.

[41] Simone de Beauvoir, "Littérature et métaphysique," pp. 80–1. (Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 274.) To better reflect the meaning of the French "*il livre dans sa singularité dramatique son expérience originelle*," we have changed the translators' "he delivers the

We will return to this remark later when we try to plumb the depths of Beauvoir's debt to Kierkegaard in *The Second Sex*. On this basis of this reference to "The Seducer's Diary" we can also be reasonably sure that Beauvoir was familiar with the content of this work, which had been translated and published apart from *Either/Or* in 1929. Hélène Politis observes that it was common in cheap republications of *The Diary* and in reviews of it for the *Diary* to be treated as an autobiographical extract from an intended biography by Kierkegaard.[42] This may explain Beauvoir's remark that in the *Diary*, Kierkegaard "delivers" his original experience. Apart from the *Seducer's Diary*, however, there is no evidence that Beauvoir was familiar with other portions of *Either/Or*.[43]

The remainder of Beauvoir's explicit citations from Kierkegaard are drawn from *Stages on Life's Way*. These include the epigraph to volume two of *The Second Sex*; and five additional references to "In Vino Veritas." One other quotation is drawn from "Reflections on Marriage." In every case, Beauvoir attributes the quotation or position she is citing to "Kierkegaard," not to a pseudonym or character in the work. We will return to these quotations when we examine the impact of Kierkegaard on *The Second Sex*.

By 1943, when Beauvoir embarked on her own authorship, almost all of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, some of his discourses, and extracts from his journals had been published in French translations. However, apart from the four works we have mentioned, "The Seducer's Diary," *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and the first two sections of *Stages on Life's Way*, we cannot say whether Beauvoir read any more of Kierkegaard. Of these four works we are most certain, based on intersecting references, of her familiarity with *Fear and Trembling* and *Stages*, and less so for the others. In a letter by Sartre to Beauvoir during his military service he asks her to send him *The Sickness unto Death*, perhaps suggesting that they each had an opportunity to examine this work.[44] However, Sartre never mentions reading it, nor does Beauvoir.

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original experience in its dramatic singularity" to "he delivers his original experience in its dramatic singularity."

[42] Hélène Politis, *Kierkegaard en France au XX^e siècle: archéologie d'une réception*, Paris: Éditions Kimé 2005, p. 202. It is noteworthy that the introduction to *Le journal* by the translator, Gateau, presents the work throughout as based substantially on the biographical details of Kierkegaard's breach with Regine. Thus, he remarks, "However artificial it may appear, the Johannes-Edouard-Cordelia intrigue repeats the real novel where Kierkegaard supplants for Regine a first lover—and reappears after the rupture." See *Le Journal du séducteur*, p. xxv. It is true that in this same introduction (p. xxix), Gateau quotes Kierkegaard's remark in his *Journal* that there is not a single word by him in the pseudonymous writings. Nevertheless, her readings in these translations may have primed Beauvoir to regard all of Kierkegaard's writings as autobiographical.

[43] The first French translation of the full text of *Either/Or* was published in 1943, see *Ou bien...ou bien*, trans. by F. Prior, O. Prior, and M.H. Guignot, Paris: Gallimard 1943.

[44] Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et quelques autres*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Simone de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard 1983, vol. 2 (1940–63), p. 200.

III. Kierkegaard's Influence on Beauvoir

The record of Beauvoir's reading in Kierkegaard suggests themes and issues that attracted her interest and eventually entered into her own philosophical and literary production. As Edward and Kate Fullbrook note, some of the key questions that interested Beauvoir were also those that interested Kierkegaard: "What is the relation between an individual's freedom and the givenness of his or her situation?...How is the individual related to society?...How does one make moral choices without a set of universal moral absolutes? What is the relation between truth and the knowing subject?"[45] Here, we proceed thematically to further develop the ways in which Beauvoir's answers to these questions may have drawn on Kierkegaard's writings.

A. Going Beyond Hegel

At the same time in 1939–40 as she was exploring Kierkegaard, Beauvoir was also immersed in reading Hegel, particularly the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Like Sartre, she was greatly influenced by Hegel's idea that the self needs to confront the other to define itself as a subject, such that the category of otherness is necessary for the constitution of the self as a self. This idea is given extreme expression in the epigraph of *She Came to Stay*, a quotation from Hegel that "Each conscience seeks the death of the other."[46] It forms an essential component of her argument in *The Second Sex*. Nevertheless, as the remarks about Hegel in *The Prime of Life* quoted above show, Beauvoir also grew deeply uncomfortable with Hegel's indifference to the life of the individual existing subject.[47] As she says, "Hate, anger, expectation or misery would assert themselves against all my efforts to by-pass them, and this 'flight into the Universal' merely formed one further episode in my private development. I turned back to Kierkegaard and began to read him with passionate interest."[48] She may have found support for her developing view in Kierkegaard's explicit rejections of Hegel in *Fear and Trembling* and elsewhere.

B. Freedom

Along with her preference for the life of the individual, Beauvoir was drawn to Kierkegaard's strong affirmations of individual choice, freedom, and responsibility. In *The Prime of Life,* she again makes her attraction to Kierkegaard explicit:

> Against sluggish reason, and the void, and everything else, I set up the incontrovertible evidence of a *living affirmative*. If it seemed perfectly natural for me to accept the ideas of Kierkegaard and Sartre, and to become an "existentialist," that was because my whole past history had prepared me for it. Ever since I was a child my temperament had inclined

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45 Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1998, p. 61.

46 Beauvoir, *L'Invitée*, p. 8. (*She Came to Stay*, p. 7.)

47 Beauvoir expresses similar discomfort with Hegel and an appreciation of Kierkegaard in her *Journal de guerre*, see p. 361 (*Wartime Diary*, p. 319).

48 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 537. (*The Prime of Life* p. 469.)

> me to trust my wishes and desires, and from all the doctrines which contributed to my intellectual development I selected those which served to strengthen this disposition in me. By the age of nineteen I was already convinced that man, and man alone, is responsible for the direction of his life, and can direct it adequately.[49]

Kierkegaard's understanding of human nature as a "psychical-physical synthesis," as spelled out in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death* is captured on the opening page of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, her key philosophical essay from this period:

> "Rational animal," "thinking reed," he escapes from his natural condition without, however, freeing himself from it. He is still part of this world of which he is a consciousness....This privilege, which he alone possesses of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow men.[50]

Kierkegaard may also have influenced Beauvoir's conception of how two human freedoms interact. In "The Seducer's Diary," we find Johannes describing his goal in seducing Cordelia as bringing her to the point "where she has but one task for her freedom, to give herself…so that she practically begs for this devotedness and yet is free."[51] Very similarly, in *She Came to Stay*, Beauvoir describes the motives of the young female character who is engaged in a complex mutual seduction with the older Pierre: "Xavière would have liked to feel that Pierre was free and belonged to her alone."[52] The idea that romantic relationships involve the paradoxical objective of wanting to control another's freedom was shared by Sartre and Beauvoir. It appears throughout their writings and was shaped, in part, by their reading in Hegel. Nevertheless, if we can assume that Beauvoir paid close attention to "The Seducer's Diary" at the time she was writing her first novel, something that is far from certain, Kierkegaard's account of the role of freedom in erotic love may have helped shape her thinking here.

C. The Critique of "Seriousness"

While *The Ethics of Ambiguity* starts with the affirmation of freedom, it devotes most of its attention to the complex strategies that people employ to evade their responsibility for choosing their values and direction in life. Beauvoir terms one of these "The aesthetic attitude." The individual who adopts it, Beauvoir states:

> claims to have no other relation with the world than that of detached contemplation; outside of time and far from other men, he faces history, which he thinks he does not belong to, like a pure beholding; this impersonal version equalizes all situations; it apprehends them only in the indifference of their differences; it excludes any preference.[53]

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49 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 628. (*The Prime of Life*, p. 550.)

50 Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 11. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 7.)

51 *SKS* 2, 331 / *EO1*, 342.

52 Beauvoir, *L'Invitée*, p. 294. (*She Came to Stay*, p. 235.)

53 Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 94. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 74–5.)

She adds: "such an attitude appears in moments of discouragement and confusion; in fact, it is a position of withdrawal, a way of fleeing from the truth of the present…. But the present is not a potential past; it is the moment of choice and action…."[54] Some might argue that Beauvoir's reference to the aesthetic evidences Kierkegaard's influence. We are not certain that we agree. Apart from the fact that there is no reason to believe that Beauvoir read the works in which Kierkegaard most discussed or presented the aesthetic as a mode of life, her concept of the aesthetic differs significantly from his. Although it, too, is an evasion of freedom and responsibility, it is less, as it is for Kierkegaard, an entire way of life in which the self submits to control by inner and outer forces than it is a stance taken by some of her artistically inclined acquaintances who chose to escape the tumultuous events of the German occupation by fleeing into a world of pure aesthetic creativity.

But if there is reason to question Beauvoir's debt to Kierkegaard in her treatment of the aesthetic in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, there can be no doubt that she was directly influenced by Kierkegaard in her sustained critique in this work of "the spirit of seriousness." Although Kierkegaard does not use the term "seriousness" to label evasions of freedom and responsibility or flights from freedom into a world of socially defined values, the criticisms of such evasions permeate his writings. They inform the humorous treatment of the pastor in *Fear and Trembling* who, while preaching sermons lauding Abraham, is quick to vilify anyone who actually chooses the patriarch's path.[55] They reappear in *The Sickness unto Death* in the discussion of the "despairing narrowness" that permits itself "to be tricked out of its self by 'the others' and which, "surrounded by hordes of men…does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man."[56]

Beauvoir's serious man similarly flees from the responsibility of choosing his own values and, through them, himself. "To avoid the anguish of this permanent choice, one may attempt to flee into the object itself, to engulf one's own presence in it. In the servitude of the serious, the original spontaneity strives to deny itself."[57] The serious man "escapes the anguish of freedom."[58] "He is afraid of engaging himself in a project….[and] is thereby led to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world."[59]

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir makes clear that she understood and appreciated these same motifs in Kierkegaard's writings:

> After Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also railed at the deceitful stupidity of the serious man and his universe. And *Being and Nothingness* is in large part a description of the serious man and his universe. The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which would be unconditioned. He imagines that the accession

[54] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 96. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 76.)
[55] *SKS* 4, 151–2 / *FT*, 28–9.
[56] *SKS* 11, 149–50 / *SUD*, 33–4.
[57] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 35. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 26.)
[58] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 66. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 51.)
[59] Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 62. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 44.)

to these values likewise permanently confers value upon himself. Shielded with "rights," he fulfills himself as a *being* who is escaping from the stress of existence.[60]

D. The Ambiguity of Ethics

Part of "the stress of existence" which the serious individual flees is the daunting responsibility of ethical choice. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir states that such choice is inherently ambiguous, taking place amidst a series of inescapable antinomies. The individual's own freedom must be expressed while preserving the freedom of others; the claims of individual human beings must be balanced against those of the many; the demands of the present must be weighed against those of the future; and, as someone involved with the French Resistance knew all too well, there is the constant tension between means and ends. Even the use of violence against another person, seemingly the antithesis of respect for that person's freedom, was sometimes necessary to advance the cause of freedom. All these antinomies defy easy acceptance of absolute moral rules or of moral standards handed from without. Beauvoir rejects as forms of "seriousness" both Christian absolutes and Marxist expediency in the name of a utopian future. There is only the responsibility of individual choice without guidance by moral recipes. "There must be a trial and decision in each case."[61]

In developing this view of ethics, Beauvoir turns to Kierkegaard. In the quotation from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* offered above, she points to *Fear and Trembling* in support of her view. Rejecting "the sacrifice of man to the Thing, of freedom to the Cause," she rejects attempts to "conceal the antinomies between means and end, present and future." Moral life must be lived "in a permanent tension." Here she invokes Kierkegaard's treatment of Abraham to highlight the conclusion that "morality resides in the painfulness of an indefinite questioning."[62] A remark in *The Prime of Life* makes even clearer her understanding of *Fear and Trembling* as a work that brings to the fore the essential ambiguity of any kind of positive human moral self-estimate. Speaking of her novel, *The Blood of Others*, she says, "I had been very struck by Kierkegaard's idea that a *genuinely* moral person could never have an easy conscience, and only pledges his liberty in 'fear and trembling.' "[63]

Fear and Trembling is not a work that comes immediately to mind in connection with the construction of an atheistic existential ethic. Certainly, Beauvoir in no way shares Kierkegaard/Johannes de silentio's admiration of Abraham's obedience to God above all human ethical considerations, nor does she apparently share the view that human life must be lived in relation to God. But in reading *Fear and Trembling*—and Kierkegaard—such matters were not on Beauvoir's mind. What interested her and confirmed her own convictions was Kierkegaard's unrelenting focus on individual moral choice and responsibility in circumstances deprived of certainty and support, and often in the face of opposition. Beauvoir's appreciation of

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60 Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 60. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 46.)

61 Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 167. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 134.)

62 Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p. 165. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 133.)

63 Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, p. 619, note 1 (*The Prime of Life*, pp. 541–2.)

Fear and Trembling illustrates her creative appropriation of Kierkegaard's work, and her willingness to go beyond surface differences to perceive deeper affinities.

E. Woman's Situation

As we have seen, Beauvoir makes a number of references to Kierkegaard in her postwar philosophical writings, where she stresses the impact his work had exerted on her own response to life in the difficult wartime years. At a time when she herself was becoming personally aware of the anguish of moral choice, *Fear and Trembling* was, understandably, her most frequently cited Kierkegaard text. In 1946, as she sits down to write *The Second Sex*, however, she turns to another aspect of Kierkegaard's thought, the numerous—and often unflattering—observations about women that appear in *Stages on Life's Way*.

Beauvoir begins her study of what it means to be a woman by setting forth her philosophical understanding of woman as the Other, and then goes on to explore the image of woman provided by science and history. The lengthy third section that completes the first volume, however, is devoted to the study of myths that have defined women's identity throughout the ages, with examples drawn from sources ranging from ancient mythology to modern literature. If woman does not define herself but is "always defined as the Other,"[64] as Beauvoir insists, it is indeed an important part of Beauvoir's project to examine the various and often contradictory views of women that men have devised. In this project she finds a unique philosophical predecessor in Kierkegaard, in the brief fictional monologues and dialogues that appear in *Stages on Life's Way*. She pays particular attention to "In Vino Veritas," where a group of men gather for a sumptuous meal and take turns presenting their views of women, one more unflattering than the other.

As she introduces her study of man's images of woman, Beauvoir emphasizes their contradictory nature: "The object fluctuates so much and is so contradictory that its unity is not at first discerned: Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena, woman is both Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness."[65] In making her point, she immediately turns to Kierkegaard: " 'To be a woman,' says Kierkegaard, 'is something so strange, so confused, and so complicated, that no one predicate can express it, and the multiple predicates that might be used contradict each other in such a way that only a woman could put up with it.' "[66] In her own voice, Beauvoir goes on to comment: "This comes from not being considered not positively, as she is for herself, but negatively, such as she appears to man."[67]

This reference to Kierkegaard is perfectly appropriate to Beauvoir's project: she needs to emphasize the contradictory nature of the myths she is examining, which do indeed represent woman "negatively, such as she appears to man." "In Vino Veritas," the source from which this particular quotation is taken, is thus a precursor

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64 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, p. 236. (*The Second Sex*, p. 162.)

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

to Beauvoir's own, feminist project, since it brings together a group of men, each of whom presents a different male perspective on woman. As we saw in her remark in "Littérature et métaphysique," this philosophical use of fictional form, grounded in texts like Plato's *Symposium*, was clearly an aspect of Kierkegaard that appealed to Beauvoir, who, by the time she undertook *The Second Sex*, had published three novels and a play, in which philosophical problems were worked out through the interaction of characters representing different viewpoints. Indeed, it is this aspect of Kierkegaard's writings that Sara Heinämaa finds the major source of his influence on Beauvoir:

> Beauvoir found in Kierkegaard's works a way of combining her philosophical and literary aspirations. For Kierkegaard, such a combination was not just possible, but necessary. He saw fictional constructions as indispensable for philosophical writing.
>
> Kierkegaard held that, through writing and reading, we can experience in the horizon of ideality what we have lived in actuality. This does not mean that the experience is reflected on a new level but rather that it is opened up, that its possible variations are unwound. In writing, due to different dialogical positions and examples, experience can be modified and examined in its different forms. Thus, its ideal components can be disclosed and seen….The fictional context frees the first person experience from its insularity without compromising its absolute character.[68]

However much Beauvoir may have been attracted to Kierkegaard's evident fictionalization of philosophical viewpoints, in her citations she often fails to distinguish between reality and fiction: views and sentiments expressed by a fictional character—in this example, Victor Eremita—appear to be attributed to Kierkegaard himself. In the second quotation in this section, Beauvoir goes even further. She first presents another aphoristic pronouncement:

> "Through woman," wrote Kierkegaard, "ideality enters into life and what would man be without her? Many a man has become a genius through a young girl…but none has become a genius through the young girl he married…."
>
> "It is only by a negative relation to her that man is rendered productive in his ideal endeavors. Negative relations with woman can make us infinite...positive relations with woman make the man finite to a far greater extent."[69]

Although here Beauvoir identifies the source as "In Vino Veritas"—perhaps alerting those familiar with Kierkegaard's work that the words should not be attributed to the author himself—she does not attribute the opinion to Victor Eremita, and she goes on to find corroboration of the statement in Kierkegaard's own life: "In refusing to marry his fiancée, Kierkegaard believes he has established the only valid relation with woman. And he is right in the sense that the myth of woman posited as infinite Other immediately entails its opposite."[70] And it is to this view of Kierkegaard's thought that Beauvoir returns as she concludes the section: "And thanks to the

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[68] Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2003, pp. 6–7.

[69] Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, p. 295. (*The Second Sex*, p. 203.)

[70] Ibid.

mystery, this negative relation that seemed to Kierkegaard infinitely preferable to positive possession is perpetuated;…this subjective game that can range from vice to mystical ecstasy is for many a more attractive experience than an authentic relation with a human being."[71] It is somewhat ironic that Beauvoir is here caught doing what she deplores in critics of her own work: attributing the ideas of fictional characters to their author. Yet, in the end, she takes from "In Vino Veritas" an important point in support of her own argument: the type of relationship with woman voiced by Kierkegaard's character tellingly illustrates the way in which such idealization of woman prevents authentic relationships between men and women.

A reference to Kierkegaard somewhat later in Beauvoir's text reveals the same conflation of author and character, as the comments on marriage made by the Married Man in "Reflections on Marriage" (and, to some extent, by Victor Eremita in "In Vino Veritas") are presented as Kierkegaard's own:

> This underlines that loving is not marrying and it is quite difficult to understand how love can become duty. But paradoxes do not faze Kierkegaard: his whole essay on marriage is an attempt to elucidate this mystery. It is true, he agrees: "Reflection is the angel of death for spontaneity...." But "decision is a new spontaneity obtained through reflection....Decision is a religious view of life constructed upon ethical presuppositions, and must, so to speak, pave the way for falling in love and securing it against any danger, exterior or interior." [72]

As Beauvoir's description continues, not only does Kierkegaard absorb the thoughts of his characters, he also assumes their dim view of women: " 'a husband, a real husband, is himself a miracle!…As for the wife, reason is not her lot, she is without 'reflection'; so 'she goes from the immediacy of love to the immediacy of the religious.' "[73]

These references to Kierkegaard play an important role for Beauvoir as she undertakes a project that represents a radical departure from her own philosophical training, enabling her to ground some of her arguments in statements by the founding father of the existentialist movement with which she and Sartre had chosen to identify themselves. Even more important, they provide an important precedent for her own philosophical reflection on the situation of women, a project in which Beauvoir herself has been credited with blazing the way. Indeed, in the European philosophical tradition in which she and Sartre based their own work, Kierkegaard emerges as the only thinker who gave sustained attention to the question of woman. It is certainly for these reasons that a quotation from Kierkegaard is placed alongside a citation from Sartre as the twin epigraphs of the second published volume of *The Second Sex*, the one that begins with the often-quoted words with which Beauvoir summarizes her argument: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."[74] In the original French edition these words are preceded by the quotation from Kierkegaard with which we began our discussion: "What a curse to be a woman! And yet the very

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71 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, p. 387. (*The Second Sex*, p. 269.)
72 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, pp. 213–14. (*The Second Sex*, pp. 455–6.)
73 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe,* vol. 2, p. 214. (*The Second Sex*, p. 456.)
74 Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 13. (*The Second Sex*, p. 283.)

worst curse when one is a woman is, in fact, not to understand that it is one." This epigraph is followed by a brief statement from Sartre: "Half victim, half accomplice, like everyone."[75] The references to both Kierkegaard and Sartre provide important philosophical validation for the definition of woman's contemporary situation that Beauvoir is about to provide in her concluding volume of the study, and their words seem to resonate with each other. Here, as in earlier references, the statement is attributed directly to Kierkegaard, although in the fiction it is uttered by Victor Eremita. And, like earlier Kierkegaard references, it has been interpreted by many readers of Beauvoir as demeaning to women, as it seems to offer further evidence of women's inability to engage in serious thought.

Yet, Beauvoir will return to this epigraph in the brief but memorable concluding chapter where she indicates the way to a true experience of liberation: "it is when the slavery of half of humanity is abolished and with it the whole hypocritical system it implies that the 'division' of humanity will reveal its authentic meaning and the human couple will discover its true form."[76] For both men and women, in Beauvoir's view, freedom lies in recognition of the false situation in which women now find themselves, one that has already been recognized by "many men," the first of whom is Kierkegaard: "That she is mystified is something of which many men are conscious. 'What a curse to be a woman! And yet the very worst curse when one is a woman is, in fact, not to understand that it is one,' says Kierkegaard."[77] Here Kierkegaard's message appears in its true light, pointing not to women's lack of reasoning power, but to their inability to recognize the truth of a situation they have been taught to misread, as Beauvoir has now shown, at every stage of their development. Kierkegaard's words here attain their true significance as a condemnation of the values dominating the bourgeois society of his time, a condemnation which, as we have seen, had already attracted Beauvoir's attention.[78]

IV. Conclusion

We began by noting Beauvoir's use of Kierkegaard in an epigraph for *The Second Sex* as an apparent spokesman for traditional male attitudes toward women and marriage.

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[75] Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 7. (*The Second Sex*, p. 277.)

[76] Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 576. (*The Second Sex*, p. 766.)

[77] Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2, p. 564. (*The Second Sex*, p. 756.)

[78] Here we agree with Sylvia Walsh's characterization of Kierkegaard's attitude toward gender relations: "If both woman and man are structured to become spirit, as Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, with great ambivalence, want to claim, then both must possess and be encouraged to develop the capacities essential to such an existence. This suggests that, rather than emphasizing gender and sexual differences between man and woman, as Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, in conformity with the trend of the time, frequently did, the present age needs to recognize and promote their common humanity, a goal that Kierkegaard himself, in his clearest and finest moments of insight, also embraced."—"Issues that Divide: Interpreting Kierkegaard on Woman and Gender," in *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference "Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It," Copenhagen, May 5–9*, 1996, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 1), p. 205.

This impression continues in all her utilizations of Kierkegaard throughout this work, where it is accentuated by the absence of clear acknowledgment on her part that all of the remarks she is quoting were uttered by one of Kierkegaard's characters, Victor Eremita in the case of the quotations drawn from "In Vino Veritas," and the Married Man for those from "Reflections on Marriage." This utilization of Kierkegaard would certainly lead many of Beauvoir's readers to conclude that she held a rather one-dimensional and largely negative view of the Danish thinker.

Our examination of Beauvoir's debt to Kierkegaard reveals just the opposite. She was powerfully influenced by Kierkegaard at key moments in the development of her thought. Reading *Fear and Trembling* accelerated her abandonment of Hegel and reinforced her commitment to anguished ethical involvement in history. Subsequently, Kierkegaard's literary treatments of gender in "The Seducer's Diary" and *Stages on Life's Way* provided a model for her own groundbreaking explorations of woman's situation in *The Second Sex*. Although Beauvoir did not claim to be a scholar of Kierkegaard, she openly identified herself with the existentialist tradition he helped create, and she was profoundly influenced by both the form and content of his work.

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Nicholas Berdyaev:

Kierkegaard amongst the Artists, Mystics, and Solitary Thinkers

George Pattison

Lev Shestov's (1866–1938) own account of his "discovery" of Kierkegaard makes clear that it was through Shestov that Berdyaev was alerted to the existence of Kierkegaard. Nicholas Alexandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) was six years younger than Shestov. Although of aristocratic background, he had like many of his generation espoused left-wing causes in his youth and served a period of three years' internal exile for subversive activities. In the early 1900s he established himself as a leading figure of the Russian religious renaissance, whilst maintaining a dialogue with Marxism. Partly filtered through the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), a defining figure for the religious renaissance, Berdyaev was strongly influenced by German idealism, especially by Fichte and Schelling and, through them, Jacob Böhme. Nietzsche was another significant influence, but he was also importantly shaped by his engagement with Russian literature and ideas, above all Dostoevsky. Unlike Shestov he did not leave Russia immediately after the Revolution, but stayed on until 1922, when he was one of the intellectuals famously deported by Lenin on the so-called "philosophy steamer." After a period in Berlin he settled in Paris, where he associated with many Catholic intellectuals (including Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973)) as well as with fellow émigrés (with many of whom, however, he had strained relations due to political and religious differences). Although Berdyaev's thought had dualistic tendencies, these were not as extreme as Shestov's, and there is a counterbalancing synthesizing movement. Nevertheless, as for Shestov, everything depends on freedom, and any synthesis of the manifold polarities of human existence that is not based on freedom will, he believes, end in slavery. Yet there is also a theogonic dimension to Berdyaev's thought, such that—unlike in Shestov—God is not conceived as entirely external to human beings, but human beings' actualization of their potential freedom is seen as the way in which God's freedom is made actual in the world.

Shestov's account of his discovery of Kierkegaard strongly suggests that it was through Shestov that Berdyaev learned about the Danish writer and that he did not begin reading him before 1928, by which time the main elements of Berdyaev's mature thought were well established and had been articulated in such major works as *The*

Meaning of History,[1] the book on Dostoevsky,[2] and *Freedom and the Spirit* (published in 1928 this was probably finished before he became acquainted with Kierkegaard, and there are, in any cases, no references to the latter in this book).[3] Even after this time, references to him are fairly thinly scattered in the various works in which he is mentioned, and there are important works, such as *Spirit and Reality* (1937)[4] in which the Danish thinker is not mentioned at all. In the Preface to *The Beginning and the End* (written in 1941 but not published until after the War),[5] Berdyaev begins by stating that "I have for a long while wanted to write a book in which I should describe my metaphysical position as a whole."[6] He immediately qualifies this by saying that he does not understand the term "metaphysics" in "its traditional and academic meaning." Rather, he is "concerned with the kind of metaphysics which is disclosed in the spirit of, for instance, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Pascal, Böhme, St. Augustine and similar writers, that is to say, as they put it nowadays, with existential metaphysics."[7] Yet if he here acknowledges a conscious kinship with Kierkegaard, he also notes in his autobiography that Kierkegaard was never a decisive thinker for him and in several of his comments about the Dane we can see something of the reasons for this reserve.

The Destiny of Man is perhaps the first work to include significant references to Kierkegaard,[8] which are focused on the latter's account of the Fall. Berdyaev is especially attentive here to the role of anxiety, although this appears in the English translation of the Russian *cmpax* as "fear." The search for knowledge, Berdyaev says,

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1 Николай Бердяев [Nicholas Berdyaev], *Смысл истории*, Berlin: Obelisk 1923. (English translation: *The Meaning of History*, trans. by George Reavy, London: Geoffry Bles 1936.)

2 Николай Бердяев [Nicholas Berdyaev], *Миросозерцание Достоевского*, Prague: YMCA Press 1923. (English translation: *Dostoevsky*, trans. by Donald Attwater, London: Sheed and Ward 1934.)

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6 Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, p. v.

7 Ibid. Similarly, Kierkegaard is listed amongst the "great artists, mystics and a few solitary and unrecognized thinkers" who "have done more for the understanding of human nature than academic philosophers and learned psychologists and sociologists." Others include, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Stendhal, Proust, St. Augustine, Böhme, Pascal, Bachofen, Feuerbach, and Max Scheler; see Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, p. 49.

8 Николай Бердяев [Nicholas Berdyaev], *О назначении человека. Опыт парадоксальной этики* [On the Destiny of Man: An Experiment of Paradoxical Ethics], Paris: Sovremennyye Zapiski 1931. (English translation: *The Destiny of Man*, trans. by N. Doddington, London: Geoffrey Bles 1937.)

"always means transcendence of the object and creative possession of it," adding that "reality is enriched by knowledge" and that "moral knowledge inevitably strives to better reality."[9] Yet precisely because knowledge involves the transcendence of the knowing subject over its object, God cannot be an object of knowledge and, consequently, there is a tragic dimension in the human quest to know God. If moral knowledge is creative, religious knowledge is only ever responsive. Knowledge demands fearlessness, and "those who stand in awe of traditional moral ideas and valuations…are incapable of creative moral knowledge."[10] But victory over fear does not mean that fear is not lived through. On the contrary, "it may be deeply felt, as was the case with Kierkegaard."[11] Moreover, the fruits of the conquest of fear, the knowledge of good and evil, are bitter. "In our world-aeon knowledge means exile from Eden, the loss of paradisiacal bliss."[12] Yet Berdyaev refuses to regard knowledge as unqualifiedly sinful (as Shestov appears to have done). Rather, what is evil in the Fall has to do with humanity's resistance to or refusal of the divine call.

In a further, somewhat ambiguous comment on Kierkegaard, Berdyaev notes that "Kierkegaard says that fear [i.e., anxiety], which he regards as a very important religious phenomenon, is connected with the awakening of spirit."[13] But, Berdyaev continues, "fear is a consequence of the Fall. So long as there is sin, there is bound to be fear—fear of God, fear of His judgment. And yet fear must be overcome, for perfect love casteth out fear."[14] It is hard to tell here whether Berdyaev is fully aware of Kierkegaard's distinction between the relationship between anxiety before the Fall and the consequent intensification of anxiety subsequent to the postlapsarian quantitative accumulation of sin, although his remarks do not exclude such awareness. Later, he returns to the topic, to comment that "Kierkegaard, who was a remarkable psychologist, takes fear or terror to be the essential characteristic of man. Fear or terror (*Angst*) is an expression of man's spirituality, of his inability to be content with himself, of his relation to a transcendent God, of his sinfulness and consequently of his fall from a higher state."[15] A couple of lines later he identifies the Kierkegaardian "groundless fear, awe before the transcendental mystery of existence" with Rudolf Otto's (1869–1937) idea of the *Mysterium Tremendum*.[16] This leads to a "tragic and paradoxical" view of human existence, which is also said shortly afterwards to have inspired the "belittling" of human beings in the theology of Karl Barth (1886–1968).[17]

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9 Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, p. 14.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 41.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 51.

16 Ibid., pp. 51–2. This is highly contestable, since Otto's idea seems precisely to be connected with the encounter with that which is Other, external to the self, whereas anxiety is a feature of the self's self-development. A full treatment of this point would, of course, require a much more extensive discussion than is possible here.

17 Ibid., p. 53.

If we might be thinking that Berdyaev has not grasped Kierkegaard's distinction between fear and anxiety, he later discusses just this point, alluding also to an analogous issue in Heidegger. He says:

> Fear [*страх*], is the state of the shuddering, trembling, fallen creature on the low plane of existence, threatened with dangers on all sides. Fear is the expectation of helpless suffering, illness, poverty, blows, privations, attacks of enemies….The experience of fear has no reference to the heights of being which man longs to attain and in separation from which he suffers.[18]

However, "A different meaning attaches to what I should call anguish [*тоска*] and terror [*ужас*]. In contradistinction to fear, anguish implies yearning, striving upwards and pain from being down below."[19] These have nothing in common with fear; the "terror before the mystery of existence" that is experienced here is more akin to the "biblical; fear of God" and it is this that Kierkegaard understood when "he brought into anguish and mystic terror an element of fear." Yet Berdyaev nevertheless finds "fear of God" a misleading expression: "There may be fear of wild beasts or infectious disease, but not of God. One may be afraid of the powers of this world, of tsars, commissars or gendarmes, but not of God. Our attitude to Him may be one of terror or yearning, but not of fear. This is an important and far-reaching distinction."[20] Is there, then, an implicit criticism of Kierkegaard for, so to speak, overloading the dice in favor of fear rather than anguish, even if he himself is aware of this distinction? It is unclear, but it seems that something like this is operative in Berdyaev's reserve vis-à-vis the Danish thinker.

In *Solitude and Society* (1934),[21] Berdyaev is attentive to Kierkegaard as a thinker who, in contrast to Hegel, emphasized "the subjective and personal character of every philosophy, [and] the living presence of the philosopher in the act of speculation."[22] In this respect he is compared to Dostoevsky and the critic and thinker Vissarion Belinsky (1811–48). Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity is further mentioned in a passage distinguishing the connection between objective truth and the collectivity, on the one hand, and the communication of subjective truth as a triumph of personality over egocentricity, on the other.[23] Similarly, some pages later, Berdyaev declares that "Kierkegaard laid the foundations of Existential philosophy by challenging the Hegelian universal concept and its fatal effect on the individual."[24] He was led to

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[18] Ibid., p. 174.

[19] Ibid., p. 175. With reference to the mention of Kierkegaard here, *тоска* can also be translated "melancholy," although it is unclear whether Berdyaev is intending this to be taken as an allusion to Kierkegaard in this context.

[20] Ibid., p. 176.

[21] Николай Бердяев [Nicholas Berdyaev], *Я и мир объектов. Опыт философии одиночества и общения*, Paris: YMCA Press 1934. (English translation: *Solitude and Society*, trans. by George Reavey, London: Geoffrey Bles 1947 [1938].)

[22] Berdyaev, *Solitude and Society*, p. 19.

[23] Ibid., p. 32.

[24] Ibid., p. 36. The reference this time is explicitly to *Philosophical Fragments*—Berdyaev gives the German version of the title, and we must assume that, like Shestov, he mostly read Kierkegaard in the Schrempf translation.