

GREGOR MALANTSCHUK
EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
HOWARD V. HONG
AND EDNA H. HONG

Kierkegaard's Thought



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KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT
by Gregor Malantschuk

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HOWARD V. HONG
AND
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*Dedicated to the
Memory of Charlotte Reeh
(née Voss Schrader)*

ὁ μὲν γὰρ συνοπτικὸς διαλεκτικός

He who can view things in their connexion
is a dialectician.

Plato, *Republic*, VII, 537 c

Foreword

When this book by Gregor Malantschuk appeared in Danish, Professor N. H. S e wrote in a review: "Kierkegaard study has been enriched by a brilliant work. It ought to be translated very soon into a world language."

After reading the book, we agreed on both points, and now we are happy to have a hand in extending the range of this superb work, the best book currently available on Kierkegaard in any language.

What makes this a good book? In his *Kierkegaards Verhaltnis zu Hegel* (Stuttgart, 1969) Niels Thulstrup accounts for the merits of the book by saying that it is "one of the best substantiated and best worked out studies in the entire literature on Kierkegaard" and in pointing out that "the composition is tight, the method sure," and that "every detail, as well as the whole, is well considered."

All this is the case—and more. For one thing, although this book is the yield of a lifetime of careful, sensitive reading of Kierkegaard's works as well as the journals and papers, Gregor Malantschuk does not tell us what Kierkegaard "really means" but rather uses Kierkegaard to interpret Kierkegaard. Of course, the writer is present, but the reader, rather than being served the writer's special version of Kierkegaard, is continually presented with the rich, insightful substance of Kierkegaard's thought in all its movement and interrelations. Furthermore, he is invited to approach and to read Kierkegaard organically and collaterally, not linearly or atomistically as some hapless writers on Kierkegaard have suggested, using a single work (usually a pseudonymous work) as the basis of interpretation and critique.

Another merit is that this book centers on Kierkegaard's

thought, a rarity among the plethora of pieces committed to the genetic fallacy of psychologizing and historicizing Kierkegaard's works as autobiography, purportedly "explaining" them thereby. No thinker and writer ever tried as Kierkegaard did to leave the reader alone with the work. The dialectic of thought and existence is properly that of the reader with the work, not of the reader's curious interest in the writer. Therefore Gregor Malantschuk concentrates on the thought in its interconnectedness and wholeness and on its relation to personal, human existence. At the same time, with some deft, telling aside about Søren Kierkegaard, he makes us aware that for Kierkegaard himself the dialectic of thought was as penetrating and existential as it should be and can be for the reader who is freed, as Kierkegaard says, from gossipy interest in the writer.

In preparation of the English edition, we have been aided first of all by the author, who has clarified some knotty points, by Gail Sundem and Dorothy Bolton, who have helped at various stages of the typing and retyping, and by Carol Orr of Princeton University Press, who has seen the manuscript through the intricacies of publication. Our thanks to them all.

Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong

St. Olaf College
October 19, 1970

Preface

In my study of Søren Kierkegaard's writings I have been especially interested in exploring the points of departure and the basic underlying principles of his thought, since in my opinion intimate knowledge of these presuppositions can lead to a new understanding of Kierkegaard's intentions with his authorship and also make it possible to assess the value of that authorship.

My work, therefore, is first of all an attempt to penetrate the authorship on this primary basis, without at this time intermingling my own views. In that respect I more or less follow the instruction Kierkegaard himself gave for any eventual interpretation of his works when he has such an imaginary interpreter say: "No, whether the author gets angry about it or not, I will convert everything into direct communication and myself into a serviceable interpreter." Moreover, since I do not belong to "the bustlers and the hustlers in the world of the spirit," this procedure, when it involves a thinker of Kierkegaard's stature, has been the only viable one for me.

With this point of view in mind, I have concentrated on giving an account of Kierkegaard's own understanding of his authorship and have not allowed myself to take a position in any extensive way on the many contributions Kierkegaard research has yielded to the interpretation of Kierkegaard's works up to now. To do so would not only have greatly increased the length of this book, but it would also give the present account a completely different character. In many ways, however, the conclusions advanced in the book do indirectly express a position with regard to other conceptions of Søren Kierkegaard's life and works.

I am deeply grateful to the Carlsberg Fund for financial

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assistance in this work and to both the Carlsberg Fund and the Rask-Ørsted Fund for aid in the publication of this book. I also express my gratitude to the University of Copenhagen for awarding me a research fellowship and giving me the possibility for additional scholarly work. May I use this opportunity to thank the Swenson-Kierkegaard Memorial Fund of Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A., whose grant at the time was a special encouragement to me in that it was the first I received for my work with Søren Kierkegaard.

A warm thank you to Professor F. J. Billeskov Jansen for the interest he has shown in my work. I thank Pastor Otto Bertelsen for scrutinizing the manuscript and Grethe Kjær for her help by typing the manuscript and reading proof.

Gregor Malantschuk

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Kierkegaard's Thought

Introduction

Exploring Søren Kierkegaard's authorship and clarifying its intentions involve great difficulties. These are due not only to the special themes which are his concern and his characteristic manner of stating the problems but also to his conscious attempt to make a penetration of his work more difficult, something he expresses in many places, both directly and indirectly. For example, Kierkegaard's principal pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, very significantly declares that he has understood it as his "task to create difficulties everywhere."¹ In referring to the structure of *Stages on Life's Way* he says, "It is thus left to the reader himself to put two and two together, if he so desires, but nothing is done to minister to a reader's indolence."²

The difficulties we encounter in Kierkegaard's authorship can be classified under the following points:

1. As a result of his personal experiences and his strictly logical reasoning Kierkegaard "discovered regions which do not exist as such for others";³ but since he has not given a coherent account of these discoveries it is as if he has "thrown away the key" to this great "treasure," as he himself metaphorically expresses it.

2. Kierkegaard's scrupulously sustained use of pseudo-

¹ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 166.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 264-65.

³ *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, X¹ A 115 (*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, V); see Bibliography on the Danish and English editions of Kierkegaard's journals and papers. Hereafter the *Papirer* will be referred to by volume, category, and entry (X¹ A 115) together with the volume number of *Journals and Papers* (*J. and P.*, V) as well as the serial entry number, except for entries in Volumes IV and V, which are still in preparation.

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nyms makes it difficult to find an unbroken line in the authorship.

3. This pseudonymity makes it extremely difficult to determine Kierkegaard's own position at a given point. That is to say, Kierkegaard planned his authorship in such a way that his own person must be brought into the research. Regarding this he says among other things: ". . . this is why the time will come when not only my writings but my whole life, the intriguing secret of the whole machinery, will be studied and studied."⁴

4. Furthermore, Kierkegaard gave his literary production, especially in the period up to and including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "the appearance of chance and caprice"⁵ in order to baffle those with no intention of penetrating deeper into his authorship. Only a searching study can lead to the discovery of "the ingenuity" of this "major work"⁶ and show "what an exceedingly rigorous ordering"⁷ has underlaid the development of the authorship.

5. There is a special obstacle to understanding in the intentionally difficult formulations of many of the central thoughts in Kierkegaard's works. Often these formulations are developments of the aphoristic style Kierkegaard frequently used in his journal entries in his first statement of a problem.

6. Kierkegaard made his authorship hard to get at partly for pedagogical reasons also, as the following remark testifies: "The task must be made difficult, for only the difficult inspires the noble-hearted. . . ."⁸

The obstacles referred to have made it difficult even for philosophical experts⁹ to grasp the general line which runs

⁴ VIII¹ A 424 (*J. and P.*, V).

⁵ VII¹ A 104, p. 50 (*J. and P.*, V).

⁶ VII² B 235, p. 72 (omitted from *On Authority and Revelation*, p. 54).

⁷ VII¹ A 104, p. 50 (*J. and P.*, V).

⁸ VIII² B 88, pp. 184-85 (*J. and P.*, I, 656).

⁹ For example, Professor H. L. Martensen, who even in 1849 in the Foreword to his *Dogmatics* characterized Kierkegaard's

through the whole authorship and renders it the precisely thought-out "dialectical structure"¹⁰ which it is.

Kierkegaard's method of making his writings difficult succeeded so well that he eventually feared that in studying his authorship people would stop with this multiplicity of individual works without discovering that the whole should be understood within a "comprehensive plan" [*Total-Anlæg*] which puts the individual works in place in relation to each other. To prevent anyone in the future from explaining the dissimilarity of the works simply by the "poor comment that the author changed" and "to insure a comprehensive view"¹¹ of his work, Kierkegaard drafted in 1848 *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. When Kierkegaard wrote this book, he was already working with the rough draft and ideas of his two last great works: *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice [Training] in Christianity*. It can therefore be said that the notion of a "comprehensive plan" applies in a way to the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship proper, stretching from *Either/Or* to *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (August 7, 1851). This assumption is reinforced by the fact that Kierkegaard (in the later revised and abridged edition of *Point of View for my Work as an Author*, under the title *On My Work as an Author*, which came out together with *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*) seeks to encompass his authorship proper within the idea of integral unity; concerning the production all the way from *Either/Or* up to and including *Christian Discourses* he says: "This movement was completed or gone through *uno tenore*, in one breath, if I dare say so, thus the authorship, viewed *comprehensively*, is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see must see if he wants to

thinking as: ". . . thinking in axioms and aphorisms, by flashes and impulse. . . ." For Kierkegaard's reaction to Martensen's characterization of his thinking see especially X⁶ B 137, p. 187 (*J. and P.*, V) and references.

¹⁰ *The Point of View*, p. 103. ¹¹ X¹ A 116 (*J. and P.*, V).

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see."¹² This unity is also underscored by Kierkegaard in his conversation with Mynster after the latter received the two books sent to him: *On My Work as an Author* and *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. Kierkegaard quotes from his conversation with Mynster: "Yes, there is a thread to the whole,' he said, 'but spun later, but after all, you do not say any more yourself.' I answered that the thing to notice was my having been so possessed by one thing over many years and amid so much productivity that my pen had not made one single detour."¹³

Kierkegaard's emphasis on the dialectical coherence in his whole authorship, as given in the two books mentioned and later in the posthumously published book, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, can, however, only brief us on the idea of the authorship. We still have the task of showing how Kierkegaard arrives at the basic assumptions and fundamental concepts for all his thought and according to what laws he utilizes these concepts in the development of his authorship. Such an investigation will first and foremost clarify Kierkegaard's dialectical method and will unravel the "criss-crossing of the strands"¹⁴ which the great "Combinateur"¹⁵ with his dialectical talent wove into the web of his authorship.

For the elucidation of the above-mentioned relationships and for the disclosing of the structure of the authorship in defiance of Kierkegaard's consciously incorporated difficul-

¹² *On My Work as an Author*, together with *The Point of View*, p. 147.

¹³ X⁴ A 373 (*J. and P.*, V); it must be noted at the same time that in X⁴ A 380 (*J. and P.*, V) Kierkegaard is ironical about a review of the two books because the review came to the conclusion that Kierkegaard had now definitely terminated his authorship. Kierkegaard, however, regarded the publication of these two books simply as a termination of a connected period in his production without thereby feeling excluded from picking up his pen again.

¹⁴ *On My Work as an Author*, together with *The Point of View*, p. 147 (ed. tr.)

¹⁵ X² A 285 (*J. and P.*, V).

ties, it is expedient to use the procedure Kierkegaard himself recommends for checking an author's works, its truth and general thrust. This procedure consists of "imitating"¹⁶ the process of thought and the dialectical movements the author has undertaken.

With this the task for this investigation is established.

This task is carried out in three stages.

1. First of all it will be shown how Kierkegaard, while studying the various themes and subjects which were of particular interest to him, showed a tendency to concentrate on the actuality of the subject, and how he thereby gradually moved away from the objective branches of knowledge toward a steadily stronger emphasis on the subjective elements which bear on man's existential development.

2. Together with this preoccupation with the subjective in human life, Kierkegaard attempted to achieve clarity on the viewpoints which should be used in clearing up all the problems related to the actuality of subjects. These efforts resulted in his shaping the foundation for his dialectical method.

The material for the first two parts of this investigation is found primarily in Kierkegaard's journal entries from 1833 to 1843. It is apparent that both Kierkegaard's transition from technical subjects to a conscious concentration on the actuality of the subject (man's inner actuality) and his development of a basis for the dialectical method took place before the year 1843.

In the first two parts direct quotations from the journals in the period prior to the actual authorship will frequently be used to illustrate concretely his work with this problem.

3. In the third part of the book Kierkegaard's authorship will be studied in the light of his dialectical method, and it will be shown here, with the help of this method, how Kierkegaard coherently sets the individual works in place in the large context, so that even the conflict between the

¹⁶ IV B 59, p. 214 (*J. and P.*, V); *Postscript*, p. 14 (tr. "reproduce").

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principal pseudonyms, Climacus and Anti-Climacus, serves to elucidate the principal ideas of the authorship.

. Kierkegaard's first two books, *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *The Concept of Irony*, are included in the study of the works, since they can help enlighten us on the extent to which Kierkegaard, prior to beginning the actual authorship, had achieved clarity on certain fundamental features in his method. His doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), in particular can inform us more specifically of progress with respect to the dialectical method.

I

Anthropological Contemplation

Søren Kierkegaard's earliest notes give evidence that he is trying to proceed methodically and that he had set a goal for his studies and research. This goal, which he calls his "project,"¹ the Danish editors of Kierkegaard's journals and papers have described briefly as "the collection of material for a characterization of the spirit of the Middle Ages through a general historical study of the age's distinctive features in all the areas of spiritual-intellectual life, in literature, art, religion, science, and social conditions, concentrating on a more thorough and concrete study of the reflection of the folk genius of the Middle Ages in poetry, legends, fairy tales, and stories, especially on the personifications of the representative ideas rising out of the medieval folk-life's world of consciousness (see *Either/Or*, I, pp. 86-92): Don Juan, Faust, the Wandering Jew, and all this in the light of a more abstract Hegelian-philosophic parallel interest in a comprehensive delineation of the stages of intellectual-spiritual development, including 'world-history' as well as the single individual's 'Microcosm,' by way of defining concepts such as: the classical, the romantic ('dialectical'), the modern, comedy, tragedy, irony, humor, resignation, etc. etc."²

What is lacking in this compressed description is a more pronounced underscoring of the idea of unity pervading all these studies, binding together the several parts and pointing toward the recognition of man's inner actuality through introspection and all the existential possibilities it contains. Likewise missing is a special emphasis on Kierke-

¹ I C 83, p. 236 (*J. and P.*, V).

² *Papirer*, I, pp. xv-xvi.

gaard's study of works in dogmatics during this first period.³

Later Kierkegaard finds his own unifying expression for these efforts in referring to "the authentic anthropological contemplation,"⁴ which he believed to be the most urgent task for thought in his age. When he wrote these words in July, 1840, he had himself already become clear as to how this task could be carried out.

Kierkegaard's first resolve methodically to place the most weight on self-knowledge and thereby on knowledge of subjective actuality can be dated from his Gilleleje-sojourn in the summer of 1835, when he wrote these words: "One must first learn to know himself before knowing anything else (*γνωθι σεαυτον*)."⁵ Later in 1839 the idea of the centrality of human actuality in existence is clearly expressed: "Individuality is the true period in the development of creation. As everyone knows, a period is written when the meaning is completed, which can also be expressed (looking backwards) by saying that the meaning is there. Thus not until individuality is given is the meaning completed or is there meaning in creation, and in this way we see the possibility of reducing all philosophy to one single proposition."⁶ This sentence must be understood as an underscoring of the idea that truth is to be found only in the subject, which is related to the later thesis that "subjectivity is truth."⁷

In his "project" and "anthropological contemplation," Kierkegaard concentrated on essentially the same problem

³ See, for example, II C 30 (*J. and P.*, V), from the year 1838, where Kierkegaard writes that for "some years" he has been occupied with dogmatics.

⁴ III A 3 (*J. and P.*, I, 37); in this entry Kierkegaard refers to an entry from 1838 (II C 55; *J. and P.*, III, 3260) in which he inquires about "the concretions" which "have real significance for the Christian consciousness."

⁵ I A 75, p. 56 (*J. and P.*, V).

⁶ II A 474 (*J. and P.*, II, 1981).

⁷ *Postscript*, p. 182.

as Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Mind*, but in a more comprehensive and concrete way.

Before going further into Kierkegaard's interest in the above-mentioned themes, a few observations must be made to show that even before writing his journals Kierkegaard was predisposed to being led in the direction of "anthropological contemplation."

Even with a cautious estimate of Kierkegaard's or his pseudonymous authors' statements about his childhood, it must be taken for granted that his father's powerful influence was of decisive significance in developing the very aptitudes he needed as a thinker, aptitudes which he himself has emphasized as being important for him as a thinker⁸—namely, training in clear, logical explication of the content of an idea ("dialectic") and training in the creation of his own objects for cogitation ("imagination"). Kierkegaard's subsequent tremendous dialectical proficiency can be explained by the fact that he learned very early to train himself in the art "which was to be the serious business of his life."⁹

But without a doubt what especially encouraged his movement toward "anthropological contemplation" was an abundance of painful and unsolved problems, also due in part to his father's influence and upbringing. These problems and conflicts eventually called for more definite exploration and clarification. The opportunity for this presented itself after some years of study at the University. His university studies themselves were of little assistance in the problems with which he grappled, but his years as a student from 1830 to 1835 provided orientation, also in the areas to which he later gave such thorough consideration.

In the summer of 1834 Kierkegaard began in his own independent way to achieve clarification, first and fore-

⁸ IV B 1, pp. 107ff. (*Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, pp. 106-108).

⁹ IV B 1, p. 109 (*ibid.*, p. 108).

most, of his personal problems. He outlined this way in his journals (at first on slips and scraps of paper, later in notebooks), which he kept under strict discipline and in which he did not fully confide. At this point the comment must be inserted that Kierkegaard's jottings of excerpts and notes from lectures he heard as a student in this first period are not to be underestimated. These entries, too, are important in understanding his working method. But to show their special significance in preparing Kierkegaard for his own independent studies is a task in itself. The present study has its point of departure in Kierkegaard's earliest recorded ideas and reflections expressing his own attitude to themes in his sphere of interest.

The great variety of entries may be best surveyed if classified according to the following basic considerations: in a broad sense the theme "anthropological contemplation" means that an attempt is made to consider man on various levels of mental-spiritual development and from various perspectives. On this basis the material in the journals and papers may be grouped under the following headings: mythology, esthetics, anthropology, philosophy, philosophy of religion, ethics, and—first and last—theology, with its subdivisions, of which dogmatics is the most important. Such concepts as irony and humor, as well as Kierkegaard's work with the "three great ideas (Don Juan, Faust, and the Wandering Jew)"¹⁰ may also be classified under one or another of these headings. By and large it may be said that every entry can be classified under one of the headings. In this connection it is of interest to note that Kierkegaard is quickly finished with certain groups and subgroups, while other areas, such as theology and also ethics, persistently continue to be primary objects of concern, and others, again, for example, the dialectic of communication, gradually come more and more to the foreground.

Entries in the journals and papers on the above-mentioned themes of interest are intermingled, and Kierke-

¹⁰ I A 150 (*J. and P.*, I, 795).

gaard works with these areas concurrently, conditioned, as will appear later, by methodological considerations, possibly from the very beginning.

Before we look more closely at Kierkegaard's entries within the different groupings, the following must be added: Kierkegaard considers the independent notations beginning in April, 1834 as being primarily ideas and observations, usually prompted by his reading on the various themes which were the object of his study and interest.¹¹ These earliest recorded notations as yet have a twofold character; they can be considered to be the results partly of influences from an external tradition and partly of Kierkegaard's independent work with specific problems. On the possibility of considerable dependence on outside influences in the writing of his first notes Kierkegaard says: "We often deceive ourselves by embracing as our own many an idea and observation which either springs forth vividly now out of a time when we read it or lies in the consciousness of the whole age—yes, even now as I write this observation—this, too, perhaps, is a fruit of the experience of the age."¹²

But from this as yet partially derivative attempt to reflect on certain problems Kierkegaard moves toward his own characteristic manner of posing the questions and solving them. Later Kierkegaard looks critically upon his first journal entries, declaring even of his "old journal for 1839" that in it not much "really felicitous or thorough"¹³ is to be found. But precisely for this very reason those notes are important for this investigation, for they show us a Kierkegaard who is still uncertain about his "project."

The majority of Kierkegaard's early entries fall within the sphere of theology. These entries commence at the conclusion of Kierkegaard's substantial work with exegeti-

¹¹ See Niels Thulstrup's Introduction to *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. xlv-lxvii.

¹² I A 109 (*J. and P.*, V).

¹³ VIII¹ A 231 (*J. and P.*, III, 2598).

cal and dogmatic questions, of which we have evidence in the journals and papers.¹⁴ Here Kierkegaard intersperses his own observations among the excerpts, for example, those from his study of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube*.¹⁵

It is with the entry on predestination¹⁶ in May, 1834, that Kierkegaard begins to present his own attitude to theological problems. The entry reads: "A strict doctrine of predestination traces the origin of evil back to God and thereby does not remain even as consistent as Manichæism, for the latter system posits two beings; the former unites these two contradictories in one being."

Kierkegaard's reflections on predestination, beginning with this memorandum, span a considerable period of time, and he records his various thoughts about it.¹⁷ After that the reflections come to a relative termination in entries I A 295 (*J. and P.*, III, 3547) and C 40 (*J. and P.*, I, 227), in which Kierkegaard believes he has found the "solution to predestination." In following Kierkegaard's line of thought in these entries, one discovers that his critical focus on the idea of absolute predestination is connected with a growing emphasis upon the significance of "human freedom." The notes on predestination are a good example of how Kierkegaard works with a particular problem concurrently with

¹⁴ I C 1-45 (*J. and P.*, I, 227; IV; V). With regard to these various excerpts and notes and their connection with Kierkegaard's studies at the University, see Waldemar Ammundsen, *Den unge Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen, 1912), pp. 77-93.

¹⁵ *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche in Zusammenhange dargestellt*, I-II (Berlin, 2nd ed., 1830), I, pp. 3-72; see I C 20 (*J. and P.*, V) and editors' reference.

¹⁶ I A 2 (*J. and P.*, II, 1302); the entry might conceivably be regarded as an echo of Kierkegaard's reading of *Der christliche Glaube* with Martensen as tutor. On this see p. 90 in Ammundsen's book (n. 14 above).

¹⁷ See the following entries: I A 5 (*J. and P.*, II, 1230); A 7 (*J. and P.*, II, 1231); A 19 (*J. and P.*, III, 3543); A 20 (*J. and P.*, III, 3544); A 22 (*J. and P.*, III, 3545); A 43 (*J. and P.*, III, 3546); C 40 (*J. and P.*, I, 227).

others until he finds a solution, and of how working with this particular problem leads him into new trains of thought.

For example, Kierkegaard begins to jot down many different ideas touching on theological questions, and when they are not free and unattached thoughts outside the complex of deeper problems, these entries become points of departure for the study of specific theological problems.

Here we must be content to point out the most important of these theological problems, those which Kierkegaard's methodical reasoning later places into a larger context.

As early as November, 1834 Kierkegaard advances a view of Christianity which gradually develops into the nucleus of his understanding of Christianity. Kierkegaard's intention is not to concentrate on Christianity as doctrine but to take Christ's own life as the basis for a presentation of Christianity. He writes of this: "Christian dogmatics, it seems to me, must grow out of Christ's activity, and all the more so because Christ did not establish any doctrine; he acted. He *did not teach* that there was redemption for men, but he *redeemed men*. A Mohammedan dogmatics (*sit venia verbo*) would grow out of Mohammed's teaching, but a Christian dogmatics grows out of Christ's activity. Through Christ's activity (which actually was the main thing) his nature was also given; Christ's relationship to God, man, nature, and the human situation *was conditioned by his activity*. Everything else is to be regarded only as introduction."¹⁸

This quotation clearly indicates how Kierkegaard's primary interest focuses on Christ's activity and the conflicts this activity in the world must involve.

The deeper ground for Kierkegaard's preoccupation with this aspect of Christianity lies in his seeking to achieve clarity about the extent to which Christ's life should be a binding example for man, and, if so, how far man ought to go in his attempt at imitation.¹⁹ That Kierkegaard would

¹⁸ I A 27 (*J. and P.*, I, 412).

¹⁹ A clear answer to this, resting on Kierkegaard's own exis-

transfer the thought of "Christ's activity" over to the life of the individual Christian appears in these words: ". . . all Christianity is a life-course."²⁰

As time goes on, Kierkegaard gives much careful thought to these questions and discovers that they belong to "the most difficult of all" questions. He accuses "contemporary theologians and philosophers" of overlooking this problem. For Kierkegaard personally the problem becomes a burning one because he is led to it by his "anthropological contemplation," which insists upon a more concrete qualification of man's ethical and religious obligations. In the following entry we see very clearly how Kierkegaard summarizes the difficulties of the problem: "That the Son of God became man is certainly the highest metaphysical and religious paradox, but it is nevertheless not the deepest ethical paradox. Christ's appearance contains a polemic against existence. He became a human being like all others, but he stood in a polemical relationship to the concrete-ethical elements of actuality. He went about and taught the people. He owned nothing; he did not even have a place to lay his head. Truly it is uplifting to see the faith and trust in providence which makes a man carefree as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, but to what extent is this an ethical expression for a human life? Shall a man not work in order to live; is it not superior; do I dare ignore providing for tomorrow in this way? Here the most difficult problems come together. Christ's life had a negative-polemical relation to the church and state. It would be the highest ethical paradox if God's son entered into the whole of actuality, became part of it, submitted to all its triviality, for even if I have the courage and trust and faith to die of starvation, this is worthy of admiration, and in each generation there probably are not ten who have it, but all the

tential experience, is first given in entry X¹ A 134 (*J. and P.*, IV).

²⁰ II A 377 (*J. and P.*, III, 3377).

same we teach and proclaim that it would be even greater to submit to the actualities of life.

"God help the poor head which entertains this kind of doubt, the unhappy man who has sufficient passion to think, the silent letter incapable of doing anything for other men except to keep still about what he suffers and possibly to smile so that no one may detect it."²¹

There is a connection between these reflections and Kierkegaard's own existential involvement in Christianity and his subsequent strong emphasis on imitation. Through his attempt to advance "Christ's activity" as the pattern for Christian life, Kierkegaard simultaneously completes the task which he regards as the culmination of Protestantism's historical development—namely, to present Christ's life as the prototype. Of this he says: "The Middle Ages culminates in Raphael, his conception of the Madonna. Protestantism will culminate in the Christ-image; but this will be the flower of the most thorough dialectical development."²²

Another essential point of departure for Kierkegaard's work with theological questions is the relation between the human and the Christian. It is characteristic of Kierkegaard that from the beginning he advances and maintains two incompatible (so it seems) factors: (1) the justification of the human position and (2) Christianity's claim upon the whole man.

The following entry is an example of Kierkegaard's accentuation of the human side: "The trouble with philosophers in respect to Christianity is that they use continental maps when they ought to use special large-scale maps, *for every dogma is nothing but a more concrete extension of the universally human consciousness.*"²³ Kierkegaard here believes that the philosophers' error consists in speaking all

²¹ IV A 62 (*J. and P.*, III, 3076); see also IV A 47 (*J. and P.*, III, 3075) and A 103 (*J. and P.*, III, 3077).

²² IX A 110 (*J. and P.*, I, 164).

²³ II A 440 (*J. and P.*, III, 3272). See also II A 443 (*J. and P.*, I, 446).

too abstractly about man, but the more concretely a man thinks about himself, the more he discovers the conflicts which Christianity alone resolves. In an earlier journal entry Kierkegaard warns directly against occupying oneself with "speculating about dogma" before one gets clear on the human standpoint: "If one does not maintain strictly the relation between philosophy (the purely human view of the world, the *human* standpoint) and Christianity but begins straightway, without special penetrating investigations of this relation, to speculate about dogma, one can easily achieve apparently rich and satisfying results. But things can also turn out as with marl at one time, when, without having investigated it and the soil, people used it on any sort of land—and got excellent yields for a few years but afterwards found that the soil was exhausted."²⁴

But parallel with these entries Kierkegaard can give expression to the impossibility of going through "all the experiences"²⁵ mentioned by Paul before arriving at faith.

Kierkegaard then seeks to determine more explicitly the relation between the human position and Christianity. Entry III A 39 (*J. and P.*, II, 1100), which states that "faith is a more concrete qualification than immediacy, because from a purely human point of view the secret of all knowledge is to concentrate upon what is given in immediacy; in faith we assume something which is not given and can never be deduced from the preceding consciousness—for that was the consciousness of sin and the latter is the assurance of the forgiveness of sins," may be regarded as a direct continuation of reflections upon this relationship.

In a later entry Kierkegaard justifies a simultaneous adherence to the two standpoints when he says that "the two terms are equally necessary—namely, that Christianity is something which did not arise in any man's thought and yet since it is given to man is natural to him because here also God is creating."²⁶

²⁴ II A 77 (*J. and P.*, III, 3253).

²⁵ II A 190 (*J. and P.*, II, 1097). Compare I A 316 (*J. and P.*, I, 252).

²⁶ III A 211 (*J. and P.*, II, 2277).

Thereafter it becomes important for Kierkegaard to insist on the significance of both elements and at the same time to determine with the greatest exactitude the point at which the human position reaches its culmination so that the other standpoint can get a hearing. The following entry describes the condition which is an indication that the human outlook is at its critical point: "In a spiritual sense, too, there comes a moment when we feel that we ourselves achieve nothing at all, when we go as if naked out of our self-scrutiny, as we did formerly from the womb."²⁷ The way which leads man to Christianity goes through "the crushing of the individual."²⁸ In becoming aware of this relationship Kierkegaard has taken the first step in explaining one of the most central concepts within his existential thought, namely, "the double movement of infinity."

The reflections about the relation between man and Christianity are continued, and they become essentially deepened by Kierkegaard's elucidation of the relation of absolute contrast between Socrates and Christ, man and God.

These have been only a few crucial thoughts which show up clearly in the numerous theological entries. But in going through the other groupings we will still encounter entries touching on theological problems, inasmuch as Kierkegaard, in all consistency, places these spheres in relation to theology as the central point of departure.

Mythology is the subject Kierkegaard finishes first. He devotes himself especially to this subject in the year 1836, while still working simultaneously with other topics, as was his custom. In mythology, as well as in other spheres, Kierkegaard's concern is to find an adequate definition of the concept. He attempts to set up such a comprehensive concept of mythology that he can include under it not only all the phenomena which appear in national mytho-

²⁷ II A 357 (*J. and P.*, IV).

²⁸ III A 212 (*J. and P.*, II, 2278); compare II A 758 (*J. and P.*, II, 1310).

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logical figures, folk legends, and fairy stories, but also other possible manifestations of mythology in human history.

Kierkegaard certainly had some thoughts about mythology prior to 1836, but during that year he makes an effort to get a good grasp on the subject. Comments in his journal and papers specify the books on mythology of greatest interest to him that year.²⁹

In the autumn of 1836 Kierkegaard asks the following question, which already contains certain elements of a reply: "What is involved in the concept *myth* and *mythology*—does not every age have its mythology—Novalis, etc.—how is it different from poetry (the subjunctive—the novel, poetic prose)—a hypothetical proposition in the indicative."³⁰

Two entries, I A 269 (*J. and P.*, III, 2700) and 285 (*J. and P.*, IV), point to new aspects in the definition of the nature of mythology; these notations show that Kierkegaard ascribes a more comprehensive meaning to the concept "mythology" when he uses it as a foundation for his reflections on this topic. This allows him to embrace under mythology not only "genuine mythology,"³¹ the older forms of mythology, but also man's later attempts to create mythology.

The epitomizing definition of the concept "mythology" which he then gives in I A 300 (*J. and P.*, III, 2799) shows that his extension of the sphere of mythology comes legitimately out of his own selected premises. We quote this important note and add a few clarifying comments. "Mythology is the compacting (suppressed being) of the idea of eternity (the eternal idea) in the categories of time and space—in time, for example, Chiliasm, or the doctrine of

²⁹ For information on Kierkegaard's reading in mythology and fairy tales, see Carl Koch, *Søren Kierkegaard og Eventyret*, supplement to *Søren Kierkegaard og Emil Boesen* (Copenhagen, 1901), pp. 68-89, and editors' notes on this literature in the *Papirer*. See *J. and P.*, III, MYTH, MYTHOLOGY.

³⁰ I A 241 (*J. and P.*, III, 2798).

³¹ I A 285 (*J. and P.*, IV).

a kingdom of heaven which begins in time; in space, for example, an idea construed as being a finite personality. Just as the poetic is the subjunctive but does not claim to be more (poetic actuality), mythology, on the other hand, is a hypothetical statement in the indicative (see p. 1 in this book [i.e., I A 241]) and lies in the very middle of the conflict between them, because the ideal, losing its gravity, is compacted in earthly form.”³²

In this entry we find first of all the encompassing definition of the concept “mythology”: “Mythology is the compacting (suppressed being) of the idea of eternity (the eternal idea) in the categories of time and space. . . .” In mythology, then, the eternal, which is unlimited, is embraced within the categories of limitation—time and space. Therefore the eternal finds itself in mankind’s mythological period in “suppressed being,” since the nature of the eternal cannot be expressed in forms belonging to the world of limitations.

Secondly, this entry refers to examples of the development of mythological formations outside of the mythological eras in the strict sense. These developments will always fall under the two qualifying conditions of finitude—time and space. The development of mythological formations in relation to time expresses faith that the eternal eventually can be realized within time (“Chiliasm”);³³ with respect to space it expresses faith in the possibility that an individual human being is able to accommodate the fullness of eternity and thereby act as the visible representative of the eternal.³⁴

Thirdly, Kierkegaard marks the boundary between the poetic and the mythological. Mythology and poetry are

³² With regard to “the poetic” and “the subjunctive” see also II A 161 (*J. and P.*, III, 2315).

³³ This also includes “the doctrine of the kingdom of God” here on earth, all socialist utopias which promise a perfect social order.

³⁴ According to Kierkegaard it could be said only of one man that he had actualized the eternal, but the eternal in this case could not be seen directly.

similar in that both are the products of creative imagination and thereby differ from what is called factual, actual. The essential difference between them is that the poet is conscious that he operates only in the sphere of possibility, while myths come to be regarded as solid actuality by those among whom they have arisen. On the basis of this distinction Kierkegaard characterizes poetic productions as "subjunctive," since they represent possibilities created by the imagination; whereas the mythological is referred to as "a hypothetical statement in the indicative," therefore something man himself creates but nevertheless conceives as factual, actual.

With entry I A 300 Kierkegaard achieves a definition of the concept mythology which seems so adequate that he makes no more changes.

After carefully defining the nature of mythology, Kierkegaard utilizes the definition along two lines, a procedure which is gradually extended to other conceptual areas.

Kierkegaard first relates mythology to man's mental-spiritual development. Mythology, which in its first manifestation corresponds to the childhood of mankind, is set in relation to every subsequent individual, and it is assumed that mythology, as a mental-spiritual phenomenon, is repeated in foreshortened perspective in the childhood of every individual.³⁵ Knowledge of these relationships can be of significance in the rearing of children. Most likely influenced by P. M. Møller's little essay "On Telling Fairy Stories to Children," Kierkegaard gives his own practical instructions³⁶ on how to influence the child in early childhood. This interest in applying a concept to practical life is an indication of Kierkegaard's efforts to give the concepts an existential direction.

Kierkegaard's second application of the concept mythology also points to his interest in linking it to existence. Kierkegaard searches for individual representatives of the different periods in mythology and finds them in Mozart's

³⁵ I A 319 (*J. and P.*, V).

³⁶ II A 12 (*J. and P.*, I, 265).

operas. He concludes that in *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Don Juan*, Mozart in these three stages "has consummately and perfectly presented a development of love on the level of immediacy."³⁷

Kierkegaard then uses the figure of the page in *The Marriage of Figaro* and of Papageno in *The Magic Flute* as individual representatives of Oriental eroticism and of Greek eroticism, respectively, in the era of mythology. Kierkegaard portrays these two types of eroticism on the basis of essential elements in Oriental and Greek mythology; therefore it is correct to say that the page and Papageno can serve as representatives of Oriental and Greek mythology.

It should be added here that as early as October 1835, while reading Schleiermacher's *Vertraute Briefe über die Lucinde*,³⁸ Kierkegaard became excited about Schleiermacher's method of presenting the "various points of view" through several individual characters. Mozart's operas gave Kierkegaard the possibility of applying the idea he got while reading this review of Friedrich von Schlegel's *Lucinde*—namely, that of having particular individuals represent the ideas within the first sphere of interest he had just completed. Thus as early as the beginning of 1837 Kierkegaard took his first step on the way to his subsequent very comprehensive use of pseudonyms.

It is significant that seven years later Kierkegaard was able to incorporate without alteration his interpretation of the above-mentioned operas by Mozart in his great pseudonymous work *Either/Or*.

In designating "Anthropological contemplation" as an essential task for modern thought, Kierkegaard primarily focuses attention on the significance of psychology, in the wider sense, as a prerequisite for a philosophical and theological renewal. At the time Kierkegaard wrote his observation on "anthropological contemplation" he was, to repeat, already well on the way himself to working out the desig-

³⁷ I C 125, p. 304 (*J. and P.*, IV).

³⁸ I C 69 (*J. and P.*, V).

nated task. The branch of knowledge on which Kierkegaard for personal reasons concentrated at first was psychology, and the two aspects of it which occupied him most were able to provide the first foundation for completing the task he assigned to "anthropological contemplation."

One may almost say that Kierkegaard's exploration of psychology was a necessity for him.³⁹ His own complex nature and his relationship to his father compelled him early to turn his attention to the hidden mechanisms of the psyche. Thus he gradually developed into an observer of his own and his father's mental states.

This connection between the exploration of his own self and of his father had its basis not only in the idea that his deepest conflicts stemmed from his father's influence upon him but also in his presentiment of certain secrets in his father's life which were the direct cause of his father's melancholy and an indirect cause of his own. Thus, apart from Kierkegaard himself, the father became the first and most important object of his observant, spying attention. Primarily out of sympathy for his father, Kierkegaard felt impelled to ferret out the reason for his father's closed-upness and melancholy. Later he was to regard the uncovering of the hidden causalities in a man's life as the most difficult but also the principal task for the psychologist. Of this he writes: "All of us have a little psychological insight, some powers of observation, but when this science or art manifests itself in its infinitude, when it abandons minor transactions on the streets and in dwellings in order to scurry after its favorite: the person shut up within himself—then men grow weary."⁴⁰

As early as 1834 Kierkegaard may have reached the point of attempting to wrest the secret from his melancholy father, for in that year he asked himself to what extent a person, even with a good purpose, has the right to intrude into another person's private domain. This prob-

³⁹ *Stages*, p. 221; *Purity of Heart*, p. 174: ". . . he makes a virtue of necessity. . . ."

⁴⁰ V B 147 (*J. and P.*, V).

lem is treated in several journal entries of 1834 on "the idea of a master-thief."⁴¹

The striking thing about Kierkegaard's "master-thief" is "that he lives for an idea";⁴² at the same time Kierkegaard endows him with "a touch of melancholy, a closed-up-ness within himself, a dim view of life, an inner dissatisfaction" —consequently with traits apparently borrowed from Kierkegaard himself. In my opinion Kierkegaard's speculations on "the master-thief" were motivated by a desire to find moral support for his spying observation of his father.⁴³ Kierkegaard justified his quest by the fact that he did it out of love for his father.

Apart from his intensified observation of his father, there were particular presentiments which especially drew Kierkegaard's attention to several hidden elements in his father's life. It is suggestive that Kierkegaard devoted some of the notations during this period to the nature of presentiment and the modes of its manifestation.⁴⁴ Presentiment became for him the reliable occasion for a sustained investigation of hidden psychic motives.

Kierkegaard's efforts to penetrate his father's secret finally led to a result. He records this in the following entry: "Then it was that the great earthquake occurred, the frightful upheaval which suddenly drove me to a new infallible principle for interpreting all the phenomena."⁴⁵ This brief statement explains two things: first, that the discovery of the secret thread was a personal catastrophe to Kierkegaard. The reason for the upheaval the entry does not tell —only the results. Next, Kierkegaard, in the expression "a new infallible law for interpreting," reveals that already

⁴¹ See I A 11-18 (*J. and P.*, V).

⁴² I A 15 (*J. and P.*, IV).

⁴³ Kierkegaard is in a conflict which he later calls "a teleological suspension of the ethical." That objective observation without sympathy for one's object is wrong, he declares in X¹ A 223 (*J. and P.*, IV).

⁴⁴ II A 18 (*J. and P.*, I, 91); II A 584 (*J. and P.*, IV).

⁴⁵ II A 805 (*J. and P.*, V).

for some time he had been preoccupied with this problem and thought he had found the solution. But after further investigation something occurred which suddenly made him certain of his conclusions. Note that Kierkegaard says "suddenly"; it signifies that the solution came unexpectedly and with an irresistible force of conviction.

A profound irony in Kierkegaard's great achievement in the sphere of observation is apparent, for his great triumph is overshadowed by the responsibility laid upon him by this fresh knowledge; his father's guilt obliged him to come under the common guilt, whereby he was led into the same despair under which his father suffered.

In September, 1835 Kierkegaard jots down a sentence from E.T.A. Hoffmann's story *Meister Floh*, which reproduces exactly the same situation. A person in the story gets a microscopic glass in his eye which enables him to read other people's secret thoughts and thereby to become a perfect observer. But he discovers at the same time that this "gift" of being able to unveil other people's secrets leads to despair. Kierkegaard enters the following significant words from *Meister Floh* in his journal: "How did a man who searched out the most secret thoughts of his brethren speak to himself? Does not this fatal gift bring over him that frightful condition which came over the eternal Jew, who wandered through the bright tumult of the world without joy, without hope, without pain, in apathetic indifference which is the *caput mortuum* of despair, as if through an unprofitable, comfortless waste-land?"⁴⁶

Most likely Kierkegaard discovered his father's guilt before entering this quotation from Hoffmann. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that in the autumn of 1835 Kierkegaard began to remove himself from his father's strong influence. As yet he seemed to refuse to undertake the burdensome obligation of standing with his father in his guilt, but several years later he assumed this guilt as his own. It is unmistakable that Kierkegaard was fleeing from

⁴⁶ I C 60 (*J. and P.*, V). E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, I-X (Berlin, 1827-28), X, p. 287.