

## Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegel. Existentialist Ethics versus Hegel's Sittlichkeit in the Institutions of Civil Society of the State

Kierkegaard establishes this problem in his treatise, *The Concept of Irony*.<sup>[1]</sup> Kierkegaard and Hegel are in agreement that Socrates is the founder of morality; insofar as Socrates, through irony, creates a distanced relationship to the substantive ethical order in the Athenian city-state, and they both ascribe this as having a world-historical significance (Kierkegaard SV 1, 248 ff).<sup>[2]</sup> However, their assessment is different; for Hegel, Socrates is a tragic hero, because his fate - being executed in Athens - is determined by a collision between two equally worthy principles. He is talking about a collision between abstract right in the Athenian city-state and subjective self-determination, as it is expressed in Socrates' ironic relationship to the substantive ethical order of the city-state. A mediation or reconciliation is lacking between these two relationships. In other words, the Athenian city-state lacked an ethical order to mediate between objective right and subjective sentiment. Hegel sees Socrates as the first person to form a bridge between abstract right and the arena of morality, because he validates subjectivity. Socrates brings the individual to the point that he no longer exclusively acts from fear of the law but is conscious of why he is acting. According to Kierkegaard, this is "the principle of subjective freedom" (Kierkegaard SV 1, 252; Kierkegaard 1965: 251).

Further, according to Kierkegaard, the question is the extent to which Hegel succeeded in demonstrating that Socrates had a positive understanding of the principle of subjective freedom or whether Socrates had an exclusively negative understanding of this principle (Kierkegaard SV 1, 252).

From Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Kierkegaard refers in this context to Hegel's statement that Socrates advances the proposition in a conversation with Xenophon that it is the just who obey the laws, claiming against the objection that this cannot be absolute, since people and rulers often change them, that those who conduct war also wind up concluding with peace (Hegel 1971a: 478). According to Hegel, Socrates is referring to the fact that it is the best and happiest state in which citizens are of one mind and obey the laws. According to Kierkegaard, in this context Hegel sees an affirmative content in Socrates (Kierkegaard SV 1, 253).

It is at this point that Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's views on Socrates becomes relevant. He writes: "But this, as anyone can see, is a negative determination: it is negative towards the established [Bestaaende] as well as negative towards that deeper positivity, that which conditions both negatively and speculatively" (Kierkegaard SV 1, 250; Kierkegaard 1965: 249). Socrates denied the universal substantive ethical order of the

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Athenian city-state, but he could not sublimate this subjective appropriation of the law into a new universal, subjectively founded ethical order, a Sittlichkeit, in the city-state.

According to Kierkegaard, if Socrates was unable to create a new positive relationship to the law, it is because he could not realize his standpoint and thus could not reach the point at which he arrives, namely, the good in and for itself. Socrates permits the established to endure [lader det bestående bestå], and the positive does not follow upon his infinite negation of the established -, thus his inquiry into its validity - but follows a positivity preceding it, namely, what was established prior to the negation or his inquiry (Kierkegaard SV 1, 253). Socrates has gone beyond "immediate Hellenism", insofar as he is interested in the laws in his reflection and takes them out of their immediate givenness. But this is only a feigned movement and in no way an authentic social movement. Therefore, the positive relationship to the law mentioned can be used as documentation for the fact that Socrates did not reach a positive determination of what is moral.

According to Kierkegaard, Hegel should have attended to the fact that Socrates only made universally applicable the negative and thus indeterminate. Kierkegaard writes: "For this constriction of the universal to be stable and not accidental, for the universal to become known in its determinateness, however, is only possible in a total system of actuality. But this is what Socrates lacks. He negated the state without ever arriving again at the higher form of the state wherein infinity is affirmed, as he negatively required." (Kierkegaard SV 1, 254; Kierkegaard 1965: 253). This somewhat surprising quotation must be seen as an expression of how deeply Kierkegaard was still anchored in Hegel's way of thinking, even as he is in the process of going beyond it. For what he says is what Hegel tries to implement in his *Philosophy of Right* (1955) with the introduction of the substantive ethical order, Sittlichkeit, as a mediation between personal morality and the law. At the same time, Kierkegaard is on his way somewhere else, since he says that Socrates may very well be called the founder of morality in the sense in which Hegel takes it, and that Socrates' standpoint "could still have been irony" (Kierkegaard SV 1, 254; Kierkegaard 1965: 253). If what is moral is related to the negatively free subject, the morally good can only be understood as an infinite negativity. But it is clear that the former is a positively free subject, who can have the good as the infinitely positive as his task and realize it in practice. The negative cannot be connected with any seriousness, and the same holds true of the negatively free subject, which according to Kierkegaard is also Hegel's view. True seriousness or the positively good is only possible in a totality, wherein the subject no longer arbitrarily determines himself at each moment to continue his experiment, where he feels that the task is not something he set for himself, but as something which has been set

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for him (Kierkegaard SV 1, 254; Kierkegaard 1965: 254).

It is striking how close Kierkegaard is to Hegel, even as he is in the process of surpassing him. He writes: "It is essentially here that the difficulty with Hegel's conception of Socrates lies, namely, the attempt he has constantly made to show how Socrates has conceived the good. But what is even worse, so it seems to me, is that the direction of the current in Socrates' life is not faithfully maintained. The movement in Socrates is to come to the good. His significance for the development of the world is to arrive at this (not at one point to have arrived at this). His significance for his contemporaries is that they arrived at this." (Kierkegaard SV 1, 255; Kierkegaard 1965: 254).

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, Hegel is correct that Socrates was the founder of morality, insofar as through his inquiry he formed the distance of negativity to the given social order in the Athenian city-state, but Hegel lacks the vision to see that Socrates could do no more. Socrates could only abstractly make the good a theme as a value in itself, unconnected to the given social order; but according to Kierkegaard, he could not return from this movement of negativity and point out what the abstract good in and of itself consisted of as a concrete, and actual limited social order or Ethical Life in the city-state.

Kierkegaard summarizes this beautifully: "As Charon ferried men over from the fullness of life to the somber land of the underworld, and in order that his shallow barque might not be overburdened made the voyagers divest themselves of all the manifest determinations of the concrete life: titles, honours, purples, great speeches, sorrows, and tribulations, etc., so that only the pure man remains, so also Socrates ferried the individual from reality over to ideality, and ideal infinity, as infinite negativity, became the nothingness into which he made the whole manifold of reality disappear" (Kierkegaard SV 1, 255-256; Kierkegaard 1965: 255).

Kierkegaard concludes on this basis that Socrates had the concept of the absolute in the form of nothingness. "Actuality, by means of the absolute, became nothingness, but the absolute was in turn nothing" (Kierkegaard SV 1, 256). Socrates could maintain this radical negativity, according to Kierkegaard, because he saw himself as "a divine missionary" and it is through this that Socrates becomes a world-historical individuality, insofar as it is characteristic of world-historical individualities that their whole life belongs to the world and they have nothing for themselves. Therefore, according to Kierkegaard, the world has

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even more to thank them for (Kierkegaard SV 1, 256).

Here the relationship between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's interpretations is pushed to the extreme, since Kierkegaard ascribes his interpretation of Socrates to Hegel's whole world-historical perspective and movement, even as he demolishes this point of view from within and points towards a different understanding of morality than that we encounter in Hegel. Whereas Hegel's interpretation of Socrates points towards the emergence of morality in order then to embed it in another context – namely in *The Philosophy of Right* (1955) – as a moment in the Ethical Life of the state, Kierkegaard points towards the divine dimension and mission in Socrates' works, which, according to him, cannot be redeemed but had to remain as a radical negativity, however it would form the movement that was to be fulfilled by another world-historical individual, namely, Jesus of Nazareth. Hegel also had an eye for this second world-historical individuality, but Hegel's perspective is once again historical mediation. Whereas Kierkegaard, through many mediations scattered throughout his entire work, ultimately points towards Jesus of Nazareth as a world-historical individuality and event, Hegel points to the world-historical mediation of this individuality and event, as it is expressed in the Protestant form of Christianity. The beautiful thing about Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel is that he attempts to explode Hegel's world-historical perspective from within, with a reference to the fact that we still encounter the world spirit in Ur-Christianity, rather than in cultural Christianity. There is an amazing radicality in this critique, because it turns the movement of Hegel's world-historical spirit inside out while still maintaining the entirety of Hegel's world-historical perspective.

From this perspective, the decisive question becomes whether Kierkegaard can find his way back and thereby qualify a morality, not to speak of an Ethical Life, or whether he becomes the victim of his own critique of Socrates as radical negativity and of Hegel as a world-historical systematic thinker who neglects individuality as a moment in the movement of the world spirit.

If we look at the whole of Kierkegaard's writings, there is a running theme that the ethical relationship to another human being or morality is mediated through Christianity, insofar as the relationship to another person is mediated through one's relationship to God.<sup>[3]</sup> The ethical passes through the relationship to God to grapple with the individual's relationship to himself or herself, i.e., as a demand to be oneself in relation to God, and the individual's relationship to other human beings, understood as a demand to perform works of love.<sup>[4]</sup> In the relationship to God, love becomes the fundamental determinative essence of the

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individual human being. The ethical is made applicable in the social insofar as the individual encounters the other person in a social relationship.

However, the Ethical Life may not be derived from the ethical demand to care for one's fellow human beings. Kierkegaard's project is to clarify the independent meaning of the ethical for individuals in relation to themselves and their fellow human beings as mediated through the relationship to God in contrast to the historically determined and thus contingent Ethical Life in a given society. The demand to love is an unconditional demand. Thereby, Ethical Life is conditional and contingent.[\[5\]](#)

According to Kierkegaard, there is no mediation between the ethical and Ethical Life, and Kierkegaard sees it as his mission to make this distinction more precise.[\[6\]](#) The ethical is always tied to an immediate relationship to God, so that it is mediated through the actualization of Ur-Christianity. The ethical demand could be said to be bound to the event of Christ, whereby its entire historical mediation in cultural Christianity is, so to speak, skipped over as a veiling of the original event of Christ.[\[7\]](#)

For Kierkegaard, it is a matter of uncovering the ethical demand's special characteristics in the original Ur-Christianity, as this relationship has become veiled through Ethical Life, since it was formed through cultural Christianity. In this way, Kierkegaard's project may be said to be diametrically opposite to Hegel's. Since, Hegel's project is to account for the ethical's mediation in Ethical Life as mediated through cultural Christianity.[\[8\]](#)

Against this background, it is clear that Kierkegaard could not see any possibility for creating a mediation between the ethical and Ethical Life. It would conflict with the entire intent of his project. Thus, in Kierkegaard, Ethical Life by necessity appears as a contingent historical relationship. No mediation is possible, and any attempt to create mediation only veils the special character of the ethical. According to Kierkegaard, this is also true of the mediation that Hegel describes in his Philosophy of Right between morality and Ethical Life.

It is also here that Kierkegaard's significance in relationship to Hegel may be found. The ethical is deemed to be something independent, which does not only have meaning as mediation with respect to Ethical Life. According to Kierkegaard, the bifurcation in modern society cannot be eradicated, and it is not desirable to try to overcome it. As it is said in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, there cannot be "a conclusion or transition from the

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ethical to something non-ethical" (Kierkegaard SV 9,112; Kierkegaard 1968: 121). This would only lead to, as it is said in *The Present Age* that the ethical is destroyed in the leveling of the ethical relationship (SV 14, 78).

On the other hand, Hegel's problem of the mediation between morality and Ethical Life remains as an important problem in modern society. Kierkegaard's understanding of the ethical may have validity in the individual's immediate relationship to himself and his fellow human being. But if the ethical cannot be mediated in an Ethical Life, Ethical Life is decoupled from the ethical as an independent contingent relationship, which is defenseless against arbitrary institutional power. This will, as Hegel says in his *Philosophy of Right*, lead to an extreme loss of Ethical Life, 'Extreme verlorenen Sittlichkeit' (§184).

Upon deeper reflection, in a society where there is an extreme loss of Ethical Life or Sittlichkeit, the question is whether there is room for ethical action, which Kierkegaard speaks of. Kierkegaard says that love cannot depend on pre-ordained social relations. He may be right with respect to the immediate relationship between human beings. But as soon as an action is mediated through an institution, social relationships emerge, and Ethical Life steps in as something decisive that is also determinative of the immediate relationship between human beings. Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel bypasses Hegel's important problem of whether it is possible to found an ethical order in modern society. Hegel's problem with respect to the basis of an Ethical Life, Sittlichkeit, remains, even after Kierkegaard's critique as an important problem.

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### Notes:

[1] In my discussion of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, I take my point of departure in the young Kierkegaard's dissertation *On the Concept of Irony*, because the young Kierkegaard was so influenced by Hegel's philosophy during this period that it constitutes a critique of Hegel's spirit. See Marc Taylor's treatise on Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel, *Journeys to Selfhood. Hegel & Kierkegaard* (Taylor 1980: 8 ff). H.C. Wind in *Kierkegaard og det historiske* [Kierkegaard and the Historical] has a similar approach to the understanding of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel. Wind believes with the same justification that one must begin with the young Kierkegaard rather than the mature Kierkegaard, who has separated himself to a great degree from the Hegelian influence. Wind writes: "If a Dane wanted to know a little about Hegel - but preferably without having to deal with the man himself - they could easily go to Kierkegaard. Not the Kierkegaard who has a formidable critique of Hegel in the Postscript and countless other places, but the author of his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony*. In the foregoing, I [...] have upgraded Kierkegaard's early work, against the master's own estimation; I have also used the dissertation for a critical consideration of the mature thinker's real work" (Wind 2001: 27; 37). This view is supported by Jon Stewart in his major new treatise, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Stewart 2003). It is Stewart's view that throughout Kierkegaard's writings, there is a strong influence from Hegel's philosophy. In this connection, Stewart divides Kierkegaard's works into three periods, stating that the influence, not surprisingly, is strongest in Kierkegaard's early writings (Stewart 2003: 32 ff).

[2] This has been discussed, among others, by Pia Søltoft in *Svimmelhedens etik* [The Ethics of Giddiness] (Søltoft 2000, 127 ff).

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[3] In this context, I look at the whole of Kierkegaard's writings from this perspective, since it is Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel and Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel that has my interest. Thus, it is this particular problem I will examine in Kierkegaard's work. Therefore, like H.C. Wind, I also place the primary emphasis on the problem as formulated in Kierkegaard's early writings and use this as the guiding theme for my broader understanding of Kierkegaard's work. As a matter of form, I note that an internal theological reading of Kierkegaard's work would have to be done in a different way. Here, the hermeneutic approach would have to be different. However, this is not my task. I make reference in this context to K. E. Løgstrup's *Opgør med Kierkegaard* [Critique of Kierkegaard] (Løgstrup 1967), in which Løgstrup, from a completely different perspective, undertakes a very decided reading of Kierkegaard, which according to Løgstrup, also bypasses a number of other problems with which Kierkegaard has also been occupied. In his critique of Kierkegaard, Løgstrup claims that it is through the experience of love in the encounter with another person that we come to understand love and, thus, our relationship with God expounded in the Gospels. In Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christianity, the relationship with God is prior to love of one's neighbor; in Løgstrup's phenomenological interpretation of the essence of Christianity, the encounter with the other person is prior to the relationship of faith. This is a theological contradiction outside the framework of this treatise. Løgstrup writes:

"In my critique of Kierkegaard, I am only interested in the tendencies and consequences of his understanding of Christianity, and not in what he said in his other discourses. He said quite a bit along the way which he later abandoned and much that was at cross purposes with the driving themes in his thought. I ignore these and leave them to those who are convinced that he is the only Church Father and read him for their own edification. I am interested in the question: what is Christianity as understood controversially. For this reason, I do not stick too closely to Kierkegaard but also include the views of Jaspers and Sartre in the discussion" (Løgstrup 1967: 9). Clearly, a great classic opus such as Kierkegaard's cannot be reduced to a single perspective. It is always possible from a hermeneutic point of view to take many different perspectives on great classical works. This is precisely what makes them classics, as Wind also notes (Wind 2001: 37).

[4] The individual can only become himself in a relationship with God. Kierkegaard analyzes the psychological path to the relationship to God in *Sickness Unto Death* (Kierkegaard SV 15). In the relationship to God, there is a demand for works of love. This is stated, inter alia, in *Works of Love* (SV 12), in the speeches and sermons in *Christian Discourses* (SV 13), *An Edifying Discourse* (SV 17), *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (SV 17), *For Self-Examination* (SV 17) and *Judge for Yourself!* (SV 17), and in the edifying discourses to "whom I with pleasure and gratitude call my reader," *Eighteen Edifying Discourses* (SV 4:13; 55; 101; 73; 209; 269), *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (SV 6: 245), and *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits* (SV 11: 13; 145).

[5] It is Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel in *Fear and Trembling* that the individual in the unconditional relationship with God is placed above the universal. Kierkegaard writes:

"The ethical as such is the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times. It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its telos [end, purpose] but is itself the telos for everything outside it, and when the ethical has absorbed this into itself, it does not go any further. The

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single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy is the individual who has his telos in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this, to annul his singularity in order to become the universal. As soon as the single individual asserts himself in his singularity before the universal, he sins, and only by acknowledging this can he be reconciled again with the universal. Every time the single individual, after having entered the universal, feels an impulse to assert himself as the single individual, he is in a spiritual trial [Anfægtelse], from which he can work himself only by repentantly surrendering as the single individual in the universal. If this is the highest thing that can be said of man and his existence, then the ethical has the same nature as a person's eternal salvation, which is his telos, forevermore and at all times, since it would be a contradiction for this to be capable of being surrendered (that is, teleologically suspended), because as soon as this is suspended it is relinquished, whereas that which is suspended is not relinquished but is preserved in the higher, which is its telos. If this is the case, then Hegel is right in 'The Good and the Conscience,' where he qualifies man only as the individual and considers this qualification as a 'moral form of evil' (see especially *The Philosophy of Right*) [Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* 1955: § 139 ff.], which must be sublated [ophævet, aufgehoben] in the teleology of the moral in such a way that the single individual who remains in that stage either sins or is immersed in spiritual trial. But Hegel is wrong in speaking about faith; he is wrong in not protesting loudly and clearly against Abraham's enjoying honor and glory as a father of faith when he ought to be sent back to a lower court and shown up as a murderer. Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal - yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed. For if the ethical - that is, social morality - is the highest and if there is in a person no residual incommensurability in some way such that this incommensurability is not evil (i.e., the single individual, who is to be expressed in the universal), then no categories are needed other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be deduced from them by consistent thought. Hegel should not have concealed this, for, after all, he had studied Greek philosophy." (Kierkegaard SV 5: 51-52; Kierkegaard 1983: 54-55).

[6] It can be debated whether Kierkegaard even has a concept of *Sittlichkeit*. At any rate, Kierkegaard does not have a concept of Ethical Life as we find it in Hegel. In Hegel, the ethical is developed as an ethical relationship in the institutions of society - the family, civil society and the state. However, Kierkegaard only grapples with the development of the ethical in marriage, as seen in the contrast with the aesthetic view of life. Kierkegaard discusses this in *Either - Or* (SV 2 & 3) and in *Stages on Life's Way* (SV 7 & 8). According to Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*, marriage is an ethical relationship between two people (§161-168). Hegel speaks here of the institution of marriage as an immediate ethical relationship ("das unmittelbare sittliche Verhältnis"), which is borne, first, by the natural life-process and then transformed spiritually into self-conscious love (§161). In its way, this is the same view we encounter in Kierkegaard. There is an agreement between the ethical in Kierkegaard and the moral in Hegel understood as "das unmittelbarer sittliche Verhältnis". But, there, the waters are parted. Kierkegaard does not have any independent interest in how marriage is developed into a family. Kierkegaard focuses on the immediate in marriage, which is the obligatory ethical relationship as a contrast and critique of the aesthetic view. Kierkegaard is interested in a critique of Don Juan in *Either - Or*, not in marriage itself. The ethical becomes in this manner a stage in life's way in which a personal relationship of faith is the final religious stage. Hegel also reflects upon marriage in its immediate meaning which we also find in Kierkegaard. There is also in Hegel a personally obligatory relationship that is entered into freely and can, therefore, also be dissolved, "once [the spouses'] dispositions and actions have become hostile and contrary" (§176). But this is not what is important, according to Hegel. Rather, it is to be mentioned in order to show that

## Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegel. Existentialist Ethics versus Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* in the Institutions of Civil Society of the State

Hegel also reflects upon the limited relationship we encounter in Kierkegaard.

The important thing for Hegel is that the spontaneous ethical relationship between the spouses is developed as an ethical relationship in the family as an institution. A distinction must also be drawn, according to Hegel between marriage as an ethical relationship between two persons and the family as an institution founded when the spouses' freely-given affection bears fruit in the child. Hegel writes: "In den Kindern wird die Einheit der Ehe, welche als substantiell nur Innigkeit und Gesinnung, als existierend aber in den beiden Subjekten gesondert ist, als Einheit selbst eine für sich seiende Existenz und Gegenstand, den sie als ihre Liebe, als ihr substantielles Dasein, lieben" (§173). According to Hegel, it is not until a child is born and the parents hereafter have a special love for the child, that the unity of immediate Ethical Life takes an independent form and, therefore, according to Hegel, it is here that the family in a true sense is founded in marriage and there is a true or substantial Ethical Life. Kierkegaard never gets that far – and he never gets that far, because he would not thereby be able to move toward his next stage, i.e., religion, which is his real problem. On the other hand, the interesting thing about Hegel is that he thinks about the existential relationship as an existential relationship in Ethical Life. This is distinctly demonstrated in the way that Hegel not only discusses an ethical foundation of marriage in the family. He also speaks about an ethical dissolution of the family, when he writes: "Die sittliche Au?ösung der Familie liegt darin, daß die Kinder zur freien Persönlichkeit erzogen, in der Volljährigkeit anerkannt werden, als rechtliche Personen und fähig zu sein, teils eigenes freies Eigentum zu haben, teils eigene Familien zu stiften (§77)."

The Ethical Life in the family, thus, has its limit and the limit is "the free personality", which in the first instance enters into a relation with the Other in the family and then in a multiplicity of relations with others in civil society, which Hegel then defines as the free personality's "second family" (§238 ff; §252). On this basis, it is my view that Kierkegaard does not have a true concept of *Sittlichkeit* or, at any rate, it is incredibly weak in relation to the concept of Ethical Life to which we are introduced in Hegel. This does not mean that Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel can be ignored. The important thing for Kierkegaard is to maintain that subjective freedom cannot be mediated without being destroyed and that the institutions of civil society, therefore, cannot have a primateship in relation to subjective freedom. This is a paradox for which Hegel also had an eye, even though he could not provide a satisfactory solution to the paradox. In recent years, there has been an interest in the meaning of the ethical in Kierkegaard's work. In this connection, two works have been published that concentrate particularly on this problem. They are Pia Søltoft's *Svimmelhedens Etik* [The Ethics of Giddiness] (Søltoft 2000) and Wenche Marit Quist's *Den enkelte og det mellem menneskelige - den etiske betydning af det mellem menneskelige forhold hos Søren Kierkegaard* [The Individual and his Relation to the Other - Kierkegaard's Interpretation of the Ethical Significance of the Individual's Relation to the Other] (Quist 2000), both of which indirectly confirm my analysis that Kierkegaard does not have a true concept of *Sittlichkeit*, but only a concept of ethics. In their analysis, the ethical in Kierkegaard is expounded only in relation to the Other.

[7] Kierkegaard discusses this problem in *Training in Christianity*. Kierkegaard speaks of becoming contemporary with Christ. Kierkegaard writes: "If thou canst not prevail upon thyself to become a Christian in the situation of contemporaneousness with Him, or if He in the situation of contemporaneousness cannot move thee and draw thee to Himself – then thou wilt never become a Christian. Thou mayest honor, praise, thank, and reward with all worldly goods him who maketh thee believe thou nevertheless art a Christian – but he deceiveth thee. Thou mightest count thyself fortunate if thou wert not contemporary with anyone who dared to say this; thou canst become exasperated to frenzy at the torture, like the sting of the 'gadfly,' of being

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contemporary with one who says it. In the first case thou are deceived; in the second, thou has at least heard the truth" (Kierkegaard SV 16: 71, trans. by Walter Lowrie).

[8] The primary opposition between Kierkegaard and Hegel can be conceptualized as the opposition between Ur-Christianity and cultural Christianity. In my interpretation of Hegel, it is Christianity that draws the decisive distinction between antiquity and modern times. It is the Holy Spirit, theologically understood, that in Hegel's philosophical interpretation with its many cultural, historical mediations is the real force in the World Spirit, which breaks through in modernity. If I write that it is the Holy Spirit, theologically understood, and not Christianity, that breaks through, it is to indicate that Hegel is also quite clear about the fact that, theologically, there is a distinction between the event of Christ as a religious and existential relationship and Christianity as a cultural and historical relationship. In Hegel's view, there would not have been any cultural Christianity, if there were not also an ur-Christianity. Hegel also notes that Ur-Christianity can be a religious, an existential and a theological determination, which must be seen together with the event of Christ, and a historical determination of early Christianity and that it is the first definition that in Hegel's idealistic philosophy is decisive for the second. That is, since Luther, the fundamental understanding in Protestant theology upon which Hegel builds. The question is whether the cultural mediation of Christianity ultimately stands in the way of the religious and existential relationship. This is Kierkegaard's view. By contrast, we have Hegel's view that the religious and existential relationship can only be mediated through the cultural relationship in the institutions of modern society as an ethical relationship. According to Hegel, it is the Church's task as an institution to keep this mediation alive as a cultivation of the Spirit. But for Kierkegaard, this mediation becomes a deception that stands in the way of the religious and existential relationship. Kierkegaard summarizes his work at the end of the 1840s in, respectively, *Bladartikler, der staar i Forhold til »Forfatterskabet«* [Articles Relating to My "Authorship"] (SV 18), *On My Activity as a Writer* (SV 18) and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (SV 18) in an attempt to mediate this message "indirectly". It is also during this period that Kierkegaard in *Bladartikler 1854-55* (SV 19) and in his periodical *Øjeblikket* (SV 19) abandons the indirect statement and enters into a direct personal statement as a Christian in his struggle against the Church and cultural Christianity. With a little re-writing, one can say of Kierkegaard, what Kierkegaard said about Socrates, that Kierkegaard could only maintain his radical negativity, because in the decisive and concluding phase of his life he saw himself as an Apostle of Christ. But unlike Socrates, Kierkegaard does not hereby achieve significance as a "world-historical individuality" in Kierkegaard's sense, but it might have been his ambition. It is through what Kierkegaard himself calls his "genius" (SV 18: 183), which he displays in his writings, that he achieves significance - for cultural Christianity and, in a wider sense, for the cultivation of modern society. Thus, Kierkegaard comes to confirm Hegel's thesis in a tragic way that Ur-Christianity can only be mediated through cultural Christianity.

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