

Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*

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One of the best-known parts of *The Sickness unto Death* is Kierkegaard's analysis of the different stages of despair in section C of Part One, entitled, »The Forms of this Sickness.« Some commentators have noted that this series of stages bears a resemblance to that traced in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ Likewise, section B, »The Continuance of Sin,« from Part Two also contains a triadic series which has the look of a Hegelian dialectic. Kierkegaard refers to his methodology here several times explicitly as a dialectical movement or to despair as a dialectical concept.² This would seem to lead one to the conclusion that Kierkegaard at this point in the authorship makes use of Hegel's phenomenological methodology for his own ends. It is this issue that I wish to address here. To what degree is Kierkegaard's method dialectical or phenomenological in Hegel's sense? In order to answer this question, we must see what Hegel means by »phenomenological« and how his method proceeds. This will occupy us in the first part of this essay. Then in my second section, I will turn to Kierkegaard's account in Part One of *The Sickness unto Death* in »The Forms of this Sickness« and to its similarities with Hegel's method. I will argue that we have two different kinds of dialectical movement at work here, both of which have affinities with Hegel's method. This will lead us to the third section which discusses the tri-

¹ E.g., Arne Grøn »Kierkegaards Phänomenologie?« in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 91-116. F.-E. Wilde »Die Entwicklung des dialektischen Denkens bei Kierkegaard« in *Kierkegaard and Speculative Idealism*, ed. Niels Thulstrup, [Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, volume 4] Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel 1979, pp. 7-55.

² *SUD*, p. 6; *SD*, p. 118. *SUD*, p. 24; *SD*, p. 138. *SUD*, p. 116fn.; *SD*, p. 226fn.

adic movement of sin in Part Two in the analysis, »The Continuance of Sin.« Here I will argue that a third distinct dialectical methodology can be discerned, which of the three movements is the closest to Hegel's dialectical method in the *Phenomenology*. In the final section I will evaluate the meaning and implications of Kierkegaard's use of this method. What I would like to argue is that the fact that Kierkegaard avails himself of Hegel's philosophical methodology here indicates a change of position with respect to his earlier negative assessments of Hegel's principles of *Aufhebung* in the realm of existence and movement in the realm of logic.

A. Hegel's Phenomenological Method

In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel explains in some detail his phenomenological method. He indicates that this method is above all an attempt to reconceive the variables of the epistemological picture presented by Kant in order to avoid the skeptical problem generated by the split between representation and thing-in-itself. He discusses first the correspondence theory of truth according to which a claim is true when it matches an independent reality. This appears to be precisely the position to which Kant's view unintentionally leads by positing a thing-in-itself which is independent of consciousness. According to the correspondence theory of truth, the criterion for truth is the object or something external, which exists on its own, independent of the perceiving consciousness. On this view, our representations are merely finite attempts to understand what already exists beforehand. Our ways of trying to understand the independent object is what Hegel refers to as »the Notion« [*der Begriff*]. The Notion serves to organize and order the world so that it is intelligible or determinate in the first place. In the absence of such a Notion, it would be impossible to pick out a thing as an object or to distinguish it from another object. In this sense, Hegel's term »the Notion« can be elucidated by a comparison with contemporary concepts such as a conceptual scheme, a scientific paradigm³ or a world-view. The Notion, like these modern terms, is intended to stand for any given set or network of beliefs that hang together more or less coherently to offer collectively a certain conception of reality. The view that Kant seems to end

³ For this comparison, see John McCumber »Scientific Progress and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*« in *Idealistic Studies* 13 1983, pp. 1-10.

up with is one that requires a comparison of our representation or Notion with a thing-in-itself. This leads to the skeptical suspicion that our representations are inadequate models of the thing-in-itself. Hegel then suggests that we proceed in a different matter in order to obviate this skeptical problem: »But if we call the *essence* or the in-itself of the *object* the *Notion*, and on the other hand understand by the *object* the Notion itself as *object*, viz. as it exists *for an other*, then the examination consists in seeing whether the object corresponds to its Notion.«⁴ Hegel proposes that, instead of viewing some independent entity as the criterion for truth, we regard our own Notion as the criterion. In this way the comparison is not between a representation and a thing-in-itself independent of the human subject, but rather between a certain conception of the object, i.e. the Notion, and what we actually perceive given this way of carving up the world. The object that is given is the result of a certain Notion or theory of objectivity in general. We can then test this result against the original Notion in order to see if they hang together coherently. Thus, Hegel proposes that we move away from a correspondence theory of truth, according to which a given representation is thought to correspond to some external reality, and to a coherence theory, according to which different beliefs are mutually consistent.

Now it becomes a question of comparing our representations with our Notion in order to determine if they are consistent. The test is to determine whether the belief about a given object is in harmony with the rest of the beliefs in the Notion. Thus, Hegel's idea of a phenomenology is to examine a given object for consciousness and compare it with the general Notion or theory which generates it as an object. Hegel explains this as follows,

Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself ... the essential point to bear in mind throughout the whole investigation is that these two moments, »Notion« and »object,« »being-for-another« and »being-in-itself,« both fall *within* that knowledge which we are investigating.⁵

Now a genuine comparison of the two terms, i.e. the object and the Notion, is possible. Unlike representations and the thing-in-itself, the

⁴ Hegel *PhS* §84; *PhG*, p. 59. (*PhS* = *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977; *PhG* = *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 9 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by the Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1968ff.)

⁵ Hegel *PhS* §84; *PhG*, p. 59.

two terms, the object and the Notion, are both for consciousness. The criterion for truth is not thought to dwell in another sphere beyond the perceiving subject. The advantage of a phenomenological analysis is that there is no need to posit a thing-in-itself in order to explain how truth or our representations are possible. Thus, Hegel's solution to the Kantian problem of the thing-in-itself is to put the criteria for objectivity inside consciousness itself. Given that both terms can be found within the same consciousness, we can easily compare them to see if they are consistent.⁶

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel makes use of a theoretical subject in order to illustrate the various dualistic views which are examined on the road to what he refers to as »science.« He calls this subject »natural consciousness« [*natürliches Bewußtsein*].⁷ This theoretical subject is employed as a kind of phenomenological actor, who defends the various dualistic positions and then works through the dialectical movements in which these conceptions are rendered contradictory. The *Phenomenology* thus operates with two different perspectives, i.e. that of natural consciousness, which has a first person perspective on the various dualistic conceptions, and that of the readers or philosophical audience, who look on as observers of the dialectical movement.⁸ The contrasting term to natural consciousness which Hegel uses to refer to the philosophical audience is the expression »for us.«⁹ It is clear that natural consciousness is not intended to represent any particular per-

⁶ Hegel *PhS* §84; *PhG*, p. 59: »we do not need to import *criteria*, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry.« (my italics)

⁷ Cf. Heribert Boeder »Das natürliche Bewußtsein« in *Hegel-Studien* 12 1977, pp. 157-178. Cf. Gerhard Krüger »Die dialektische Erfahrung des natürlichen Bewußtseins bei Hegel« in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner, Conrad Cramer, Reiner Wiehl, Tübingen: Mohr 1970, pp. 285-303.

⁸ Cf. *PR* §32, Addition; *RP*, p. 83: »This is not our procedure; we only wish to look on at the way in which the concept determines itself and to restrain ourselves from adding thereto anything of our thoughts and opinions.« (*PR* = *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952; *RP* = *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*, vol. 7 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1927-1940.) Cf. *PhS* §85; *PhG*, p. 59: »But not only is a contribution by us superfluous, since Notion and object, the criterion and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself, but we are also spared the trouble of comparing the two and really *testing* them, so that, since what consciousness examines is its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply look on.«

⁹ See Joseph Gauvin »Für uns dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*« in *Archives de Philosophie* 33 1970, pp. 829-854. Kenley Dove »Hegel's Phenomenological Method« in *Review of Metaphysics* 23 1969-70, pp. 627ff.

son but instead is a sort of universal consciousness which is fraught with all the manifold prejudices of common sense.¹⁰ By using a universalized, ideal subject, Hegel underscores the immanent logic of the movement of thought itself. It does not matter who the subject is since the contradictions exposed by the logical movement would be recognized and accepted by any rational agent whatsoever. Hegel uses the term »natural« for this exponent of common sense in order to underscore the prevalence of the dualistic notions of common sense.¹¹ Dualism is our »natural,« pre-philosophical comprehension of reality and the world around us. Natural consciousness is then Hegel's vehicle for exploring the various Notions or conceptions of objectivity.

The beginning of the dialectic takes place when natural consciousness posits a given Notion or account of objectivity. This Notion represents the first criterion for truth which is examined for consistency. When internal contradictions are uncovered, natural consciousness is obliged to find a new Notion with which to replace the old contradictory one. Each new Notion posits a new criterion for truth and thus determines objectivity in a different way. As we have mentioned, the dialectical movement is characterized by a comparison of the given criterion for objectivity with the actual experience of the object. Since both are objects of consciousness, »it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not.«¹² When the object and its criterion do not hang together consistently, then natural consciousness must posit a new criterion.¹³

As we have seen, Hegel's phenomenological procedure must rely exclusively on internal criteria for truth, that is, criteria that are con-

¹⁰ Hegel *PhS* §28; *PhG*, p. 24: »The task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge had to be seen in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual, self-conscious Spirit, whose formative education had to be studied. As regards the relation between them, every moment, as it gains concrete form and a shape of its own, displays itself in the universal individual.«

¹¹ Cf. Graeser's discussion of the term »natural« in this context. Andreas Graeser *Einleitung zur Phänomenologie des Geistes. Kommentar*, Stuttgart: Reclam 1988, pp. 25-26. Cf. Hegel's discussion of »natural existence« and »natural will« in *Phil. of Hist*, p. 25; *VPG*, p. 54. (*Phil. of Hist* = *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree, New York: Willey Book Co. 1944; *VPG* = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, vol. 11 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1927-1940.)

¹² Hegel *PhS* §85; *PhG*, p. 59.

¹³ Hegel *PhS* §85; *PhG*, p. 60: »If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object.«

tained within consciousness itself. It can have no reference to something beyond consciousness if it is to resolve the skeptical problems generated by the thing-in-itself. It will be useful here to enumerate these internal criteria which constitute the dialectical movement. I will here discuss the following: (1) internal consistency, (2) completeness and (3) the determinate alternative. These are self-contained criteria which characterize the Hegelian dialectic.

(1) The most obvious criterion is that of internal consistency. This is a fundamental criterion for any coherence theory of truth, according to which individual beliefs have their meaning only in relation to a larger network of truth claims. It is the collective set of beliefs which determines what is true and what is false, and these beliefs must be in harmony with one another. The task of natural consciousness is to examine the individual accounts of objectivity for consistency. Any network of beliefs must strive to maintain internal consistency since contradictions in a given Notion will ultimately cause it to collapse. Thus, the defender of a given theory must try to keep the individual truth claims mutually consistent. When this is not possible, then the Notion must be abandoned and replaced by a new, more consistent one. With the criterion of internal consistency, we have only a logical procedure for adjudicating between individual isolated Notions, but important aspects of the dialectical procedure are still lacking. From the criterion of internal consistency alone, there is still no waxing effect or developmental aspect in the movement since one Notion simply replaces another.

(2) The second criterion, completeness, ensures the cumulative effect in the movement. All Notions rely on hidden presuppositions. These presuppositions are made explicit in the course of the dialectical movement. When they come to the surface, then they show the necessity of further accounts and explanations of things which the original Notion took for granted. For example, any given account of objectivity necessarily implies an account of the thinking subject. Likewise, any account of a given subject implies a larger account of several thinking subjects which mutually shape and determine each other, and in this way each Notion becomes »higher and richer than its predecessor.«¹⁴ Thus, Hegel's dialectical methodology evinces a de-

¹⁴ Hegel *SL* p. 54; *WL I*, p. 51. (*SL* = *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller, London: George Allen and Unwin 1989; *WL I-II* = *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vols. 4-5 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1927-1940.)

developmental aspect which must be traced and examined in a developmental fashion. Even though the dialectical movement becomes richer and more comprehensive, it is still conceivable that it could develop in different ways. The third criterion ensures that the dialectic can only follow a single path.

(3) According to Hegel, when one Notion is rendered contradictory, the next Notion follows from it necessarily. He thus denies the possibility that there could be equally plausible alternative Notions. There is thus a necessary logic or teleology in the course of the dialectical development. On Hegel's view, new Notions are generated from the contradictions of their predecessors. In other words, a given Notion must successfully overcome the contradictions that caused its predecessor's downfall. A new Notion is thus constructed expressly in order to overcome the previous contradictions. Thus, the procedure for determining the successor Notions is not an arbitrary one or one with several possibilities. In addition, the determination of the successor theory must also obey the other internal criteria, i.e. the successor theory must be internally consistent and add a new element of completeness.

These three criteria supply natural consciousness with all that is necessary to determine truth and objectivity. It is these three criteria which give Hegel's dialectical methodology its characteristic form. First, all of the criteria are internal to consciousness itself, and there is no external point of reference. Second, the dialectical movement works its way toward completeness and consistency. Hegel's innovation with this dialectical procedure is the idea that truth claims change and develop over time, i.e. that there is not one static criterion for truth or a single Notion which remains fixed eternally. All truth claims are finite and limited since they are determined by individual Notions of truth. Only the perspective of absolute knowing, which sees all truth claims in their organic interrelations, is an absolute perspective. The dialectic is Hegel's procedure for reaching this absolute perspective. It allows him to expose the contradictions and inadequacies of all finite Notions of truth. In this way the perspective of absolute knowing or science is on his view justified. As he tells us, this is the task of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

B. Phenomenology and Dialectic in »The Forms of this Sickness«

When we examine Kierkegaard's analysis in section C of Part One, entitled »The Forms of this Sickness,« it is clear that a number of the salient features of Hegel's dialectical methodology are present. Before we can appreciate the affinities with Hegel's method, it is, however, crucial to determine the respective roles of the two parts of this section, namely, »A. Despair Considered Without Regard to its Being Conscious or Not,« and »B. Despair as Defined by Consciousness.« Kierkegaard explains the relationship between these two parts of the section in a draft in which he writes the following under the heading »C. The Forms of Despair«: »In this section I shall give a psychological description of the forms of despair as these appear in actuality, in actual persons, whereas in A¹⁵ despair was treated abstractly, as if it were not the despair of any person, and in B¹⁶ was developed in terms of consciousness as decisive in the definition of despair.«¹⁷ According to this account, the key is the distinction between an abstract analysis and a concrete one: section A will examine despair abstractly, while section B will give a concrete analysis or will be concerned with what Kierkegaard calls »actuality.« What does Kierkegaard understand by »abstract« and »concrete« in this context? In his introductory words to section C as a whole, he explains that an abstract analysis will examine despair in terms of its component categories:

The forms of despair may be arrived at abstractly by reflecting upon the constituents of which the self as a synthesis is composed. The self is composed of infinitude and finitude. However, this synthesis is a relation, and a relation that, even though it is derived, relates itself to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity.¹⁸

The abstract analysis of despair that is carried out in the first part, namely A, will analyze despair according to the categories of infinitude and finitude, possibility and necessity. These are abstract categories, and for this reason the analysis is abstract. In order to give this abstract analysis, one must abstract from consciousness. By contrast, in order to give a concrete analysis, one must concentrate on consciousness and allow it to determine the order of the discussion. This

¹⁵ I.e. »Despair Considered Without Regard to its Being Conscious or Not,« *SUD*, pp. 29-42; *SD*, pp. 142-153.

¹⁶ I.e. »Despair as Defined by Consciousness,« *SUD*, pp. 42-49; *SD*, pp. 154-161.

¹⁷ *SUD* Supplement, p. 151; *Pap.* VIII 2 B 151, n.d. 1848.

¹⁸ *SUD*, p. 29; *SD*, p. 142.

is precisely what happens in the second analysis, i.e. in section B. There despair is considered in terms of various forms of consciousness. Both sections A and B display different elements of the Hegelian dialectic.¹⁹ We will examine each of these in turn.

Section A

The dialectic of section A concerns despair analyzed according to the abstract categories of first finitude and infinitude and then possibility and necessity. The conception of a human being as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude can be found in earlier works.²⁰ The result rendered by these categories is two sets of positions which are examined in order:

- a. Despair as Defined by Finitude/Infinitude
 - a. Infinitude's Despair is to lack Finitude
 - b. Finitude's Despair is to lack Infinitude
- b. Despair as Defined by Possibility/Necessity
 - a. Possibility's Despair is to lack Necessity
 - b. Necessity's Despair is to lack Possibility

There is clearly a movement here that is characteristic of the movement in Hegel's dialectic. Just as the central principle of the *Phenomenology* is dynamical movement, so also for Kierkegaard there is a movement in the categories of despair. As we have seen, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, none of the given finite Notions is absolute. When particular Notions prove to be contradictory, then they are replaced by other ones. Thus, instead of a single static or fixed standard for truth, Hegel's dialectic displays several standards which are in a fluid movement. So also here for Kierkegaard several different categories or forms of despair are examined. For Kierkegaard, this movement is the key to the correct picture of a human subject which is not something fixed or completed.

But yet while this dialectic is characterized by a dynamic movement, it is not the same kind of progressive movement as that which is found in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Rather, the dialectic of this sec-

¹⁹ Kierkegaard says of these sections »Both forms are forms of an unhappy consciousness« (*SUD* Supplement, p. 150; *Pap.* VIII 2 B 150:8, n.d. 1848). Despite this direct reference to Hegel's concept of the unhappy consciousness, there is little in common with the actual content of Hegel's analysis.

²⁰ *CUP* I, p. 221, *AE*, p.186. *CUP* I, p. 302; *AE*, p.259.

tion resembles the movement of *The Science of Logic* where categories are determined in relation to one another. In *The Science of Logic* there is a movement in that one category determines the next and thus dictates a movement beyond itself. To use the most famous triad as an example, being determines nothing, and both together determine the category of becoming. Thus, new categories follow from previous ones. While the categories purportedly move from immediacy, i.e. pure being, to determinate objectivity, there is not the same sense of accretion or accumulation as in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the *Phenomenology* there is a movement from the microlevel, i.e. pure being, to the macrolevel, i.e. world-historical peoples. The dialectical movement becomes richer and richer as it progresses and takes on a wider and wider perspective. By contrast in *The Science of Logic* the categories are all on the same level, i.e. the level of science. Here they are analytically related and thus can flow into one another. The question is merely one of determining their exact interrelations. The categories are deduced analytically from the original starting point of pure being. By contrast, the Notions of the *Phenomenology* are synthetically related, and new information is added and incorporated. Thus, although there is movement, there is no genuine sense of a developmental progression in this dialectic. There is no obvious relation between the move from the categories of finitude/infinity to those of possibility/necessity. The one category determines the other, i.e. finitude and infinity mutually determine each other as do possibility and necessity, but there is no attempt to establish a logical connection or transition between these pairs. The movements here seem to be simply replacement changes and not a movement dictated by the logic of the dialectic itself. Due to this fact, there is no sense of accretion or increasing levels of sophistication here. The categories imply one another reciprocally, but no new information is added. The Notion of despair does not become higher or richer. Thus, the order of these analyses is more or less interchangeable. It does not matter if finitude is treated before or after infinity, or if these two categories are treated before or after the categories of possibility and necessity.

Section B

Section B, »Despair as Defined by Consciousness,« has more affinities with the Hegelian dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is here that we find a genuine phenomenological analysis along

Hegelian lines. Now the dialectic is no longer determined by specific categories; instead, it is consciousness which is the determining factor. The different stages represent increasingly higher levels of consciousness of despair. Given that consciousness is the key, this analysis can be seen as Kierkegaard's phenomenology. The previous analysis was dialectical but not phenomenological, i.e. although there was a kind of dialectical movement within the pairs of categories, the discussion was not primarily concerned with tracing the developing forms of consciousness. Here the dialectic runs through the following stages:

- a. The Despair that is ignorant of being despair, or the despairing ignorance of having a self and an eternal self.
- b. The Despair that is conscious of being despair and therefore is conscious of having a self in which there is something eternal and then either in despair does not will to be itself or in despair wills to be itself.
 - a. In Despair not to will to be oneself: Despair in weakness
 - (1) Despair over the earthly or over something earthly
 - (2) Despair of the eternal or over oneself
 - b. In Despair to will to be oneself: Defiance

Like the previous dialectical movement, this analysis also moves by virtue of opposite terms: first being ignorant of being despair and then being conscious of being despair, then in despair first *not* to will to be oneself and then to will to be oneself, and finally first despair over the earthly and then despair of the eternal. While these are all opposite terms, they are not abstract categories such as those examined in A. In spite of this similarity, this dialectical movement is qualitatively different from the previous one. Here there is more at work than simply the replacement of individual categories with others. There seems to be a determinate linear progression, and the order of the stages cannot be changed or revised without harming the developmental movement of thought. In contrast to the previous account, this dialectical movement has several similarities with the dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

(1) Unlike the previous one, this dialectic is characterized by a genuinely progressive dynamic movement. Just as the forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* become more and more sophisticated and elaborate as the dialectic progresses, so also the levels of despair increase gradually in Kierkegaard's phenomenology. The criterion for the level of despair is that of self-consciousness. Kierkegaard explains, »The ever increasing intensity of despair depends upon the degree of consciousness or is proportionate to its increase: the greater the degree of consciousness, the more intensive the de-

spair.«²¹ For Hegel, the Notion becomes more and more sophisticated as natural consciousness works its way through the various stages. For Kierkegaard, each level of despair is more intense as the level of consciousness increases with it. The cumulative or progressive aspect of Hegel's dialectic is also present in Kierkegaard's dialectic of despair. There is a sense of one stage leading to another. In describing the relation between two forms of despair here, Kierkegaard writes, »there is also an essential advance in consciousness of the self. This formula, to despair over the earthly, is then a dialectical initial expression for the next form of despair.«²² This formulation implies that the forms of despair contain points of continuity and are not simply replacement changes. On the contrary, they develop out of one another.

(2) As we have seen, for Hegel, science is justified by a demonstration of the internal contradictions of all dualistic or finite Notions. Just as the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* must run through every dualistic position and expose their internal contradictions before reaching absolute knowing, so also Kierkegaard's phenomenology must run through all forms of negativity: »Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it, a new negativity. However, to reach the truth, one must go through every negativity.«²³ In order to complete the phenomenology of despair, every form of despair and negation must be treated. Thus, the negative aspect of Hegel's phenomenology is also present here in Kierkegaard's account of despair. Of course, the dialectical movement in A is also negative in the sense that the individual forms of despair are criticized, but there the negativity does not lead the dialectic anywhere determinate. Here by contrast positions are negated in order that the dialectic can progress toward »the truth.«

(3) The result of this progressive effect here is that the dialectical movement evinces a *telos* in that it moves toward a determinate end.²⁴ Just as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* aims to reach the level of science and has this as a fixed *telos*, so also Kierkegaard's dialectic has an end towards which it strives. The *telos* of the dialectic of despair is to reach consciousness of itself as despair. The movement be-

²¹ *SUD*, p. 42; *SD*, p. 154. Cf. also *SUD*, p. 29; *SD*, p. 142: »Generally speaking, consciousness – that is, self-consciousness – is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self.«

²² *SUD*, p. 60; *SD*, p. 171.

²³ *SUD*, p. 44; *SD*, pp. 156-157.

²⁴ Cf. Arne Grøn, op. cit., p. 109.

gins with consciousness being unaware of being in despair and moves through stages of greater and greater clarity until it reaches complete self-transparency in defiance. This ultimate level of despair is, for Kierkegaard, the despair of the devil. He writes, »The devil's despair is the most intensive despair, for the devil is sheer spirit and hence unqualified consciousness and transparency; there is no obscurity in the devil that could serve as a mitigating excuse. Therefore, his despair is the most absolute defiance. This is despair at its maximum.«²⁵ The absolute defiance of the devil is the end-point of the dialectic and thus the analogue to Hegel's notion of absolute knowing. It is the end towards which the dialectical movement strives.

(4) Finally, in this dialectical movement there is an analogue to Hegel's phenomenological actor, natural consciousness. Kierkegaard begins by talking about »the natural man,«²⁶ which is of course a concept from the Christian tradition which is intended to denote the pagan or the individual who has not yet heard Christ's message and become a Christian.²⁷ It is precisely the same concept that Hegel draws on with the term, »natural consciousness.« As we have seen, for Hegel, the dialectic begins with the standpoint of common sense dualism. This is the standpoint represented by natural consciousness which is unenlightened by scientific knowing. So also in Christianity, the natural man is unenlightened by the truth of Christianity. For both Hegel and Kierkegaard, the dialectic must begin with pure immediacy. Thus, Kierkegaard refers to the natural man as »the man of immediacy.«²⁸ Given this, it seems clear that there is a self-conscious imitation of this concept in Hegel's dialectic.

By virtue of these features, the analysis here in section B resembles more closely Hegel's dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* than the discussion in A. While A displays certain elements of dialectical thinking, it is not a phenomenological analysis. While the dialectic here in B maintains the binary movement between pairs of complementary terms, it, unlike A, is linear and progressive. Here the complementary pairs are themselves related and develop out of one an-

²⁵ *SUD*, p. 42; *SD*, pp. 154-155.

²⁶ *SUD*, p. 45; *SD*, p. 157. Cf also *SUD*, p. 8; *SD*, pp. 122-123.

²⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14-15: »The [natural] man [ἄνθρωπος φυσικὸς] does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.« The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version.

²⁸ *SUD*, p. 51; *SD*, p. 163.

other. Neither is their sequence interchangeable nor is the movement as a whole reversible. The points of commonality here between the dialectic in B and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* are too obvious and too numerous to be accidental. Key words that Kierkegaard employs here, such as »spirit,« »dialectic,« »immediacy« and »the natural man,« all self-consciously recall terms from Hegel's philosophical terminology. These words in a sense announce to the reader the affinities with Hegel's philosophy. Thus, Kierkegaard seems to make use of Hegel's methodology here openly and unapologetically.

C. Phenomenology and Dialectic in »The Continuance of Sin«

We must now turn to Part Two of the work and in particular Section B, »The Continuance of Sin,« which also seems to have the form of a Hegelian dialectic. Section A discusses the notion of sin generally, and section B offers a taxonomy of forms of despair in accordance with the notion of sin. The forms of despair under this heading are as follows:

A. The Sin of Despairing over One's Sin

B. The Sin of Despairing of the Forgiveness of Sins (Offense)

C. The Sin of Dismissing Christianity *modo ponendo*, of declaring it to be untruth

With respect to its form, this dialectical triad has striking similarities with the analysis of »Despair as Defined by Consciousness,« which we have just examined. Here the movement is one of increasing sinfulness or a movement away from faith.²⁹

Once again Kierkegaard is careful to distinguish between the individual analyses and to define their relationships *vis-à-vis* each other. He says that the entire first part of the work gives a secular analysis of despair in that it examines the concept only with respect to a human being. By contrast, Part Two of the work is concerned with despair from a Christian point of view and thus examines it not just in a human being but rather in the human being conceived as being before God. Kierkegaard explains the difference between the first and the second parts of the work at the beginning of Part Two as follows:

The preceding section concentrated on pointing out a gradation in the consciousness of the self ... This whole deliberation must now dialectically take a new direction. The point is that the previously considered gradation in the consciousness of the self is

²⁹ *SUD*, p. 116fn.; *SD*, p. 226fn.

within the category of the human self, or the self whose criterion is man. But this self takes on a new quality and qualification by being a self directly before God. This self is no longer the merely human self but is what I ... would call the theological self, the self directly before God.³⁰

This explains why despair is interpreted as sin in Part Two. Sin is of course a Christian category, and one can only be in sin if there is a relation to God. Thus, the discussion of Part Two is concerned primarily with the notion of despair understood as sin.

In his explanation of what it means to exist before God, Kierkegaard implicitly draws on Hegel's notion of recognition that plays the key role in the famous dialectic of the lord and the bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As is well known, Hegel attempts to demonstrate that in order to be a human subject, intersubjective recognition from an equal is required. The irony of the position of the master is that he cannot achieve the status of personhood since the recognition of a slave is not valid. Kierkegaard refers to this notion of recognition when he discusses what it means to exist before God:

A cattleman who (if this were possible) is a self directly before his cattle is a very low self, and, similarly, a master who is a self directly before his slaves is actually no self – for in both cases a criterion is lacking. The child who previously has had only his parents as a criterion becomes a self as an adult by getting the state as a criterion, but what an infinite accent falls on the self by having God as the criterion!³¹

The allusion to the master and his slaves seems in this context to be a clear reference to Hegel's account of lordship and bondage. The notion of recognition is the key to interpreting what Kierkegaard means by the levels of consciousness before God. Given that one's own consciousness is determined by the intersubjective recognition of the other, then it follows that the status of the other is the determining factor in one's own level of consciousness. If the other is a slave or a cow as in Kierkegaard's example, then there is a low level of consciousness. If the other is God, then one's consciousness is accordingly high; moreover, there will be variations of this heightened consciousness in accordance with one's conception of God. Kierkegaard writes, »Despair is intensified in relation to the consciousness of the self, but the self is intensified in relation to the criterion for the self, infinitely when God is the criterion. In fact, the greater the concep-

³⁰ *SUD*, p. 79; *SD*, p. 191.

³¹ *SUD*, p. 79; *SD*, p. 191.

tion of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God.«³²

The dialectical movement here, like the previous one, increases in accordance with the degree of consciousness. Here once again the movement is from lesser to greater consciousness. Kierkegaard explains this as follows:

Therefore »the continuance of sin,« which is now to be discussed, does not mean the particular new sins as much as the state of sin, which in turn becomes the internal intensification of sin, a conscious remaining in the state of sin, so that the law of motion in intensification, here as everywhere else, is inward, in greater and greater intensity of consciousness.³³

This implies that despair is once again to be given a phenomenological analysis since despair and sin are analyzed in accordance with consciousness. Moreover, there will be a dialectical movement which develops from a lower to a higher level as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thus, the final stage, »The Sin of Dismissing Christianity,« is called »the highest intensity of despair.«³⁴

The interpretation of this analysis as phenomenological in Hegel's sense of the term is supported by Kierkegaard's discussion of the importance of internal consistency, which is, as we have seen, one of the most important criteria for Hegel's dialectical method. Here Kierkegaard writes, »Every existence that is within the qualification spirit, even if only on its own responsibility and at its own risk, has an essential interior consistency and a consistency in something higher, at least in an idea.«³⁵ By saying »every existence,« Kierkegaard seems to say with Hegel that every Notion is governed by internal consistency. Like Hegel, he sees the breakdown in this criterion as the breakdown of the particular figure of consciousness: »The slightest inconsistency is an enormous loss, for, after all, he loses consistency. In that very moment, the spell is perhaps broken, the mysterious power that bound all his capacities in harmony is diminished, the coiled spring is slackened; everything perhaps becomes a chaos in which the capacities in mutiny battle one another and plunge the self into suffering.«³⁶ This recalls the celebrated passage in the introduc-

³² *SUD*, p. 80; *SD*, p. 192.

³³ *SUD*, pp. 108-109; *SD*, p. 218.

³⁴ *SUD*, p. 125; *SD*, p. 234.

³⁵ *SUD*, p. 107; *SD*, p. 217.

³⁶ *SUD*, p. 107; *SD*, p. 217.

tion to the *Phenomenology* where Hegel refers to the dialectical movement as »the way of despair.«³⁷ There is a word-play at work here since the German word for despair [*Verzweiflung*] is etymologically related to the word for doubt [*Zweifel*]. The same linguistic connection exists in Danish with the words »*fortvivlelse*,« Kierkegaard's word for »despair,« and »*tvivl*« or doubt. The point in Hegel is that the doubt [*Zweifel*] caused by the internal contradictions leads natural consciousness to despair [*Verzweiflung*]. Thus, the road of dialectical doubt in the *Phenomenology* is simultaneously the »way of despair.« Here Kierkegaard seems specifically to have in mind this passage from the *Phenomenology*.

This analysis, like »Despair as Defined by Consciousness« above, is phenomenological in the sense that it examines different forms of consciousness. Moreover, it is dialectical in the same way Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is dialectical since it displays the same linear progression. The dialectic here operates explicitly with the criterion of internal consistency. In addition, it shows a sense of accumulation or accretion and has a definite teleology. Unlike the two dialectical movements in Part One, this analysis does not work with complementary pairs of opposites; instead, one notion or conception of sin seems to lead to the next organically in the way Hegel's dialectical movement in the *Phenomenology* proceeds. Thus, of the three discussions we have examined, this one follows Hegel's dialectical and phenomenological methodology most closely.

D. A Change in Kierkegaard's Position

Kierkegaard's use of Hegel's dialectical method here seems to indicate a change in his position with respect to the issue of the *Aufhebung* of the law of excluded middle in Hegel's speculative logic. This issue was debated in a series of articles by Sibbern,³⁸ Mynster,³⁹

³⁷ Hegel *PhS* §78; *PhG*, p. 56: »The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt [*Zweifel*], or more precisely as the way of despair [*Verzweiflung*].«

³⁸ Frederik C. Sibbern »Om den Maade, hvorpaa Contradictionsprincippet behandles i den hegelske Skole, med mere, som henhører til de logiske Grundbetragtninger« in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur* no. 19 1838, pp. 424-460.

³⁹ Jakob P. Mynster »Rationalisme, Supernaturalisme og principium exclusi medii« in *Tidskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* no. 1 1839, pp. 249-268. Jakob P. Mynster »Om de logiske Principer« in *Tidskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* 7 1842, pp. 325-352.

Heiberg⁴⁰ and Martensen⁴¹ in 1838-1839 and continued to be an issue into the 1840's in the works on logic by Rasmus Nielsen,⁴² Adler⁴³ and P.M. Stilling.⁴⁴ Kierkegaard mentions this debate in several of his works and takes a stand on it as early as 1843 in *Either/Or*. It will be useful to examine the nature of the debate before looking at Kierkegaard's view.

Hegel's account of the law of excluded middle draws on a long-standing discussion in the history of philosophy. In his logic, Aristotle posited three laws of thought: the first is the law of contradiction according to which nothing can be both P and not-P. The second, which can be seen as the inverse of the first, is the law of the excluded middle term, which states that everything must be either P or not-P.⁴⁵ According to this law, between contradictory judgments there can be no third, intermediate »middle« term. A thing is either P or not-P but not both. Aristotle argued for the metaphysical truth of this principle in his criticism of Plato's attempt to posit a third intermediary term between the abstract forms and the transitory world of appearances. For Aristotle, a thing must be either the one or the other but not both, and thus no mediation *via* a third term is possible. It is this law which is relevant for our purposes.

In both the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel discusses the law of excluded middle and argues that, upon closer examination, it collapses into an identity.⁴⁶ Hegel's argument is that

⁴⁰ Johan Ludvig Heiberg »En logisk Bemærkning i Anledning af h. h. hr. Biskop Dr. Mynsters Afhandling om Rationalisme og supranaturalisme i forrige hefte af dette Tidsskrift« in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* no. 1 1839, pp. 441-456.

⁴¹ Hans Lassen Martensen »Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme og principium exclusi medii i Anledning af h. h. Biskop Mynsters Afhandling herom i dette Tidsskrifts forrige Hefte« in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, no. 1 1839, pp. 456-473.

⁴² Rasmus Nielsen *Den speculative Logik i dens Grundtræk*, Copenhagen 1841-1844.

⁴³ Peter Adolph Adler *Populære Foredrag over Hegels objective Logik*, Copenhagen 1842.

⁴⁴ Peter Michael Stilling *Philosophiske Betragtninger over den speculative Logiks Betydning for Videnskaben*, Copenhagen 1842.

⁴⁵ The final law of thought is the law of identity, according to which if anything is P, then it is P, or, put differently, everything is identical to itself.

⁴⁶ He introduces the law of excluded middle as follows: »Distinction in itself gives us the principle: »Everything is something essentially distinct« – or (as it has also been expressed): »Of two opposed predicates, only one belongs to something,« and »There is no third« ... The principle of the excluded third is the principle of the determinate understanding which tries to avoid the contradiction and by doing so commits it.« Hegel *EL* §119; *Enz. I*, p. 276. (*EL* = *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. by T.F. Gerats, W.A. Suchting, H.S.

seemingly contradictory pairs in fact represent a unity at the ontological level. This unity is already present in the very notion of an opposite. He uses different colors as an example:

In the doctrine of contradictory concepts, one concept is, for instance called, *blue* ... the other *not-blue*, so that this other would not be an affirmative, (like, for instance, yellow), but is just the abstractly negative that has to be held fast. – That the negative is also positive within itself ... is already implied in the determination that that which is opposed to an other is *its* other.⁴⁷

Hegel's point here is that a given concept cannot be an opposite unless it is the opposite of some other determinate concept. The first concept is determined by the second insofar as it is conceived *as an opposite*. Thus, concepts are complementary, and any given concept, insofar as it is an opposite, stands in a necessary relation to another concept. This necessary relation between concepts can be seen as a higher identity which goes beyond the individual member terms. When seen from the abstract level, there is thus a kind of arbitrariness at work in calling one concept »positive« and the other »negative,« one concept »the one« and its opposite »the other.« Each is what it is only in its relation to the other. Hegel illustrates this with a number of examples:

In the positive and the negative we think we have an absolute distinction. Both terms, however, are implicitly the same, and therefore we could call the positive »the negative« if we liked, and conversely we could call the negative »the positive« as well. Consequently, assets and debts are not two particular, independently subsisting species of assets. What is negative for the debtor is something positive for the creditor. The same applies to a road to the east: it is equally a road to the west. Thus, what is positive and what is negative are essentially conditioned by one another, and are [what they are] only in their relation to one another. There cannot be the north pole of a magnet without the south pole nor the south pole without the north pole.⁴⁸

The point here is that for any two things to be opposites, they must have something in common as a criterion or basis for comparison; otherwise, they would not be opposites in the first place since, in the absence such a criterion, it would be like comparing apples and oranges, so to speak. They must be opposites *with respect* to some particular quality or aspect. The criterion which serves as the basis for comparison simultaneously constitutes the basis for their ontological

Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett 1991; *Enz. I-III* = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, vols. 8-10 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. Hermann Glockner. Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1927-1940.)

⁴⁷ Hegel *EL* §119; *Enz. I*, p. 277.

⁴⁸ Hegel *EL* §119 Addition 1; *Enz. I*, pp. 278-279.

unity. Insofar as north and south are latitudinal directions, they are ontologically identical. Apparent opposites thus constitute an identity at the conceptual level, i.e. at the level of the Notion.

This aspect of Hegel's doctrine of contradiction was taken up in the discussion of Hegelianism in Denmark during Kierkegaard's time.⁴⁹ In 1838 Sibbern, Kierkegaard's doctoral advisor, treated extensively Hegel's criticism of the law of excluded middle in a section of his long review of Heiberg's journal *Perseus*.⁵⁰ In this article, Sibbern makes a case for classical logic against the Hegelians. In 1839 following Sibbern's article, there was a polemical discussion about Hegel's speculative logic in the journal, *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*. It was there that Mynster published his article, »Rationalism, Supernaturalism,« in which he discussed, among other things, the law of excluded middle in Hegel's philosophy. The immediate occasion for Mynster's article was Johan Alfred Bornemann's review of Martensen's dissertation.⁵¹ Bornemann, a Hegelian student of theology, claimed that the opposition between rationalism and supernaturalism had been rendered obsolete by Hegel's speculative logic which mediates or sublates such contradictory pairs.⁵² Mynster responded in his article, arguing that the laws of classical logic were still true and that between rationalism and supernaturalism no mediation was possible. Mynster thus joined forces with Sibbern in condemning the speculative logic.

Mynster's article was perceived as a provocation and a declaration of war against Hegelian philosophy. In the next number of the jour-

⁴⁹ For the whole discussion, see, V. Kuhr *Modsigelsens Grundsætning*, Copenhagen and Kristiania: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1915, pp. 7ff. Anton Hügli »The Principle of Contradiction« in *Concepts and Alternatives in Kierkegaard*, ed. Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel 1980, pp. 272-280. [Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana vol. 3]. Skat Arildsen »Striden om de logiske Principer og om Rationalismens og supranaturalismens Begreb« in his *Biskop Hans Lassen Martensen. Hans Liv, udvikling og arbejde*, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 1932, pp. 142-150. O. Waage »Strid om de logiske Principer og om Rationalismens of Supranaturalismens Begreb« in his *J.P. Mynster og de philosophiske Bevægelser paa hans Tid i Danmark*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1867, pp. 123-152.

⁵⁰ Frederik C. Sibbern »Om den Maade, hvorpaa Contradictionsprincippet behandles i den hegelske Skole, med mere, som henhører til de logiske Grundbetragtninger« in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur* no. 19 1838, pp. 424-460.

⁵¹ Johan Alfred Bornemann »Af Martensen: *de autonomia conscientiae. Sui humanae*« in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, no. 1 1839, pp. 1-40.

⁵² Johan Alfred Bornemann, *ibid.*, p. 3ff.

nal, the Hegelians, Heiberg⁵³ and Martensen⁵⁴ responded to the attack. In his article, Heiberg explains that the problem at the heart of the debate lies in a misunderstanding of the scope of the law of excluded middle. He argues that the law is understood correctly when it is applied to objects in the empirical sphere. A relation of absolute, unmediated opposites »can only take place in the finite or empirical realm ... If one therefore wants to have examples for which the *principium exclusi medii* is employed, then one takes them from this sphere [sc. the empirical sphere].«⁵⁵ Here Heiberg allows that the law of excluded middle applies to the empirical sphere but claims that it is not relevant in the sphere of abstract thought. When we are concerned with speculative philosophy and the Notion, then opposites are mediated or *aufgehoben*. Heiberg continues, »In the same fashion the *principium exclusi medii* is sublated [*ophæves*] everywhere, where one takes up the standpoint of the Notion and the Idea, for this standpoint's entire activity aims at mediating opposites.«⁵⁶ Heiberg gives a number of examples of issues which are best understood from the standpoint of Hegel's speculative philosophy and where the law of excluded middle is best seen as *aufgehoben*:

But if the *principium exclusi medii* were itself not excluded from the Idea, then man, as a unity of soul and body, would be impossible; the state could not be a unity of opposing forces; Christ would be *exclusus* as *medium* between God and man; no religion, art, poetry, or philosophy could exist, for everywhere it would be manifest that the *principium exclusi medii* was the *principium exclusi Dei*.⁵⁷

It is at the abstract, theoretical level of these disciplines, e.g. theology, art, politics, that Hegel's philosophy operates, and the scope of the law of excluded middle must be understood as limited to this sphere. Heiberg argues that Mynster, by denying Hegel's speculative logic, simultaneously denies the possibility of the aforementioned doctrines, e.g. that Christ is a mediating agent between God and man. Thus, Heiberg's strategy for resolving the conflict lies in separating two

⁵³ Johan Ludvig Heiberg »En logisk Bemærkning i Anledning af h. h. hr. Biskop Dr. Mynsters Afhandling om Rationalisme og supranaturalisme i forrige hefte af dette Tidsskrift« in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* no. 1 1839, pp. 441-456.

⁵⁴ Martensen, Hans L., »Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme og *principium exclusi medii* i Anledning af h. h. Biskop Mynsters Afhandling herom i dette Tidsskrifts forrige Hefte« in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* 1 1839, pp. 456-473.

⁵⁵ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, op. cit., p. 444.

⁵⁶ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *ibid.*, p. 445.

⁵⁷ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *ibid.*, pp. 445-446.

spheres – the empirical and the speculative – and limiting the scope of the law of excluded middle to the former.

This discussion is important for our purposes since when Kierkegaard takes a stand on the issue of mediation in *Either/Or*, his solution to the problem strangely resembles that given by Heiberg. In the chapter, »The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical,« there is an extremely important discussion for understanding Kierkegaard's position on this issue.⁵⁸ Judge William discusses this doctrine of contradiction in Hegel and tries to indicate that his own views are in a certain sense consistent with it. He distinguishes between two spheres, »the sphere of thought,« which he clearly associates with Hegel and speculative philosophy, and »the sphere of freedom.«⁵⁹ He characterizes these two spheres in various ways. The sphere of freedom is »situated in the area of action, philosophy in the area of contemplation.«⁶⁰ Thought is the realm of mediation, freedom of absolute dichotomy. Thought is the realm of necessity, freedom of autonomous action. Thought examines the external deed, freedom the internal. The realm of freedom is thus designated by the expression »either/or,«⁶¹ which is intended to be the contrasting term to Hegel's *Aufhebung*. It is immediately apparent from these characterizations that the two spheres correspond to Heiberg's distinction between the empirical realm and the standpoint of the Notion.

For Judge William, the solution to the problem of mediation lies in keeping the two spheres separate in order to avoid confusion about the tension between mediation and absolute choice. So long as we keep in mind the distinction between these two spheres, the problem of the *Aufhebung* of the law of excluded middle disappears. This analysis serves the purpose of demonstrating the compatibility of Kierkegaard's doctrine of absolute choice and the absolute either/or with Hegel's doctrine of mediation and non-contradiction. With the distinction between the sphere of thought and the sphere of freedom, both doctrines get their due without contradicting each other. Thus, there is ultimately no incompatibility between the doctrine that Judge William expounds and the philosophy of the day. Finally, it should be

⁵⁸ *EO2*, pp. 170-176; *EE2*, pp. 154-160.

⁵⁹ *EO2*, p. 173; *EE2*, p. 157.

⁶⁰ *EO2*, p. 170; *EE2*, p. 154.

⁶¹ Cf. *EO2*, p. 171; *EE2*, p. 155: »But if the contradiction is present then it is an Either/Or.«

clear that this solution is precisely the one proposed by Heiberg, from whom we can infer it was derived.

This conclusion that the two spheres each have their own rights and are not incompatible is also consistent with what Kierkegaard says some three years later in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Even in this work, which is purportedly so full of anti-Hegelian polemics, Kierkegaard is careful to point out that his emphasis on the existential realm of freedom is compatible with Hegel's philosophy and his speculative doctrine of contradiction:

Hegel is perfectly and absolutely right in maintaining that, looked at eternally, *sub specie aeterni*, there is no *aut/aut* in the language of abstraction, in pure thought and pure being. Where the devil would it be, since abstraction, after all, simply removes the contradiction. The defenders of *aut/aut* are in the wrong if they push their way into the territory of pure thinking and want to defend their cause there ... the *aut / aut* of contradiction is *eo ipso* canceled when it is lifted out of existence and taken into the eternity of abstraction. On the other hand, Hegel is just as much in the wrong when he, forgetting the abstraction, plunges from it down into existence in order by hook or by crook to cancel the double *aut*.⁶²

Kierkegaard's tone is not overtly critical of Hegel's doctrines here. He grants that Hegel's view is appropriate for science and academics, but argues that it must be kept separate from the existential realm which he wants to underscore.⁶³

Here in *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard seems to change his position and to admit the validity of Hegel's sublation of the law of excluded middle even in the realm of actuality, which is the realm of despair and the sickness unto death. In the dialectical methodology of section A, »Despair Considered Without Regard to its Being Conscious or Not,« individual positions are determined by individual categories, which are each determined by their opposites. This is sig-

⁶² CUP I, p. 305; AE, p. 261.

⁶³ There Kierkegaard claimed that Hegel's analysis of Socrates missed the point since it viewed the life of Socrates as something complete. There he writes in reference to Socrates and Hegel's analysis: »This is the purely personal life with which science and scholarship admittedly are not involved ... Whatever the case may be, grant that science and scholarship are right in ignoring such things; nevertheless, one who wants to understand the individual life cannot do so. And since Hegel himself says somewhere that with Socrates it is not so much a matter of speculation as of individual life, I dare to take this as sanction for my procedural method in my whole venture, however imperfect it may turn out because of my own deficiencies.« It thus analyzed Socrates from the realm of thought. But this overlooks the existential aspects of Socrates' life and action as an individual in the realm of freedom. *CI*, pp. 166-167; *BI*, p. 250.

nificant since it is precisely what Hegel uses as an argument for his criticism of the law of excluded middle. Kierkegaard says directly that each term or aspect of despair is determined by its negation or opposite. He explains the statement, »Infinitude's Despair is to lack Finitude,« as follows:

That this is so is due to the dialectic inherent in the self as a synthesis, and therefore each constituent is its opposite. No form of despair can be defined directly (that is, undialectically), but only by reflecting upon its opposite. The condition of the person in despair can be described directly, as the poet in fact does by giving him lines to speak. But the despair can be defined only by way of its opposite, and if the lines are to have any poetic value, the coloring of the expression must contain the reflection of the dialectical opposite.⁶⁴

Likewise, in introducing the form of despair which he calls »Despair in Weakness« in section B, Kierkegaard writes, »To call this form despair in weakness already casts a reflection on the second form, b, in despair to will to be oneself. Thus the opposites are only relative.«⁶⁵ Here he states directly that opposite terms are only finite or relative, with the implication being that they can be overcome. The one form of despair implies the other. As we have seen, Hegel argues in precisely this fashion that concepts are determined by their opposites. Given that they are mutually determined, concepts exist only in binary or organic relations, and thus there is at bottom, argues Hegel, a conceptual unity of the pairs.⁶⁶ The concept north is necessarily determined by the concept of south, and at the conceptual level they are identical since they are wholly interchangeable. It is by means of this principle that Hegel claims that contradictions can be overcome. In a surprising passage here Kierkegaard argues that faith, like Hegel's dialectic, can resolve contradictions. He writes,

The believer has the ever infallible antidote for despair – possibility – because for God everything is possible at every moment. This is the good health of faith that resolves contradictions. The contradiction here is that, humanly speaking, downfall is certain, but that there is possibility nonetheless. Good health generally means the ability to resolve contradictions. For example, in the realm of the bodily or physical, a draft is a contradiction, for a draft is disparately or undialectically cold and warm, but a good healthy body resolves this contradiction and does not notice the draft. So also with faith.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *SUD*, p. 30; *SD*, p. 143. Cf. *SUD*, p. 33; *SD*, p. 146.

⁶⁵ *SUD*, p. 49; *SD*, p. 161.

⁶⁶ Hegel *SL*, p. 438; *WL I*, p. 544.

⁶⁷ *SUD*, pp. 39-40; *SD*, p. 152.

This is a remarkable passage in that Kierkegaard seems implicitly to refer to Hegel's *Aufhebung* of contradictions. But here faith, instead of conceptual thought, is understood as something which unites opposites and resolves contradictions.

One might argue that Kierkegaard is still consistent with his earlier position since section A treats despair abstractly, and in the realm of abstraction, mediation is possible. Thus, there is in principle no problem if the abstract categories infinitude and finitude, necessity and possibility determine each other and are mediated dialectically. It seems at first glance clear that section A operates at the level of abstract thought since it treats the notion of despair abstractly, and by contrast the forms of despair treated in B are in the realm of actuality, which according to Kierkegaard's earlier view, should admit of no mediation.⁶⁸ But upon further investigation, this distinction becomes rather problematic. What Kierkegaard argued formerly is that this mediation is not possible in the realm of existence. But what is surprising is that he discusses the question of faith here, which he consistently associates with the realm of actuality and free choice. Some things require an absolute choice: either one believes or one does not, and there is no mediation. As Kierkegaard argues in the *Postscript*, one cannot believe only »to a certain degree« or believe that Christianity is partly true.⁶⁹ One must make an absolute decision about faith.⁷⁰ This seems to lead to the conclusion that Kierkegaard changed his view either about the issue of dialectical mediation or about the conception and proper sphere of faith.

Along these same lines, Kierkegaard in the *Postscript* criticized speculative logic for introducing movement into the field of logic.⁷¹ There he argued that logic is a realm of fixed necessity in which everything is already finished and complete. Thus, in this sphere everything is static. By contrast human life is always in movement. The reason for the movement is that the human subject is always striving. Here Kierkegaard still believes that the subject is in a state

⁶⁸ From the passage cited above (*SUD* Supplement, p. 151; *Pap.* VIII 2 B 151, n.d. 1848) Kierkegaard seems to imply that all the forms of consciousness described in C are in the realm of actuality: »In this section I shall give a psychological description of the forms of despair as they appear in actuality, in actual persons.«

⁶⁹ *CUP* I, p. 228; *AE*, p. 192: »the most obtuse thing ever said [sc. about Christianity] is that it is true to a certain degree.«

⁷⁰ Cf. *CUP* I, p. 307; *AE*, p. 263.

⁷¹ *CUP* I, p. 109; *AE*, p. 88.

of constant change and development.⁷² What is different here is not his assessment of the subject but of the nature of logic. The movement in the forms of despair is a logical one which is, at least in A, (»Despair Considered Without Regard to its Being Conscious or Not«), dictated by logical categories. Here Kierkegaard seems to revise this criticism and to see movement in logic as legitimate.

E. Final Reflections

Although there is virtually no discussion of the content of Hegel's philosophy in *The Sickness unto Death*, the work shows a striking familiarity with Hegel's dialectical method. In many ways Kierkegaard is engaged in a much more serious discussion with Hegel here than when he mentions him by name elsewhere. What is remarkable is the fact that Hegel is not mentioned in the text and that there is no evidence of a renewed study of him or his phenomenological or dialectical method in the *Papirer*. What is most perplexing and surprising is that by employing this Hegelian methodology, Kierkegaard makes use of a number of philosophical principles, such as mediation and movement in logic, of which he was formerly critical. This indicates that he sees in Hegel's philosophy at this late stage in his career something positive which he can borrow and use to his own ends. Here he has more in common with Hegel than his earlier negative rhetoric would lead one to believe. Moreover, although there is no explicit statement of his methodology here, Kierkegaard's use of words such as »spirit,« »dialectic,« »criterion« and »immediacy,« makes it clear that he does not try to hide his appropriation of aspects of Hegel's thought or method.

The change in Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel's philosophy at this time can perhaps be explained by the change in the role that Hegelianism played in Danish intellectual life. Danish Hegelianism was at its zenith during the time Kierkegaard took his degree and in the few years immediately thereafter up until around 1845. After this time Hegelianism ceased to be an object of discussion. During the period when Hegelianism was in vogue, Kierkegaard often criticized the Danish Hegelians and often formulated his own position explicitly in

⁷² *SUD*, p. 30; *SD*, p. 142: »Yet every moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming, for the self κατά δύναμιν does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence.«

contrast to theirs. Now, however, after the *Postscript* and after Hegelianism has ceased to be the fashion, Kierkegaard's position changes with respect to Hegel. Now that there is no danger of being called a Hegelian or of being associated with the Danish Hegelians such as Martensen or Heiberg, Kierkegaard has no qualms about making use of aspects of Hegel's philosophy that suit his purposes. He can borrow from Hegel freely since he no longer feels the need to define himself in contrast to him. Thus, it seems that Kierkegaard's changing orientation with respect to Hegel's philosophy was dependent on the shifting sands of Danish intellectual life and had little to do with Hegel's thought itself. In other words, Kierkegaard's use or criticism of a given Hegelian position is dictated by the changing degree of importance of Hegel's philosophy in Denmark at the time and not by Kierkegaard's considered opinions of Hegel's thought by means of renewed study of the primary texts.

Most commentators take Kierkegaard's negative rhetoric about Hegel in the *Postscript* as indicative of a generally negative assessment of all of Hegel's thought. This approach fails to take into account the various historical factors for this rhetoric, which have precious little to do with Hegel's actual philosophy. Moreover, it presupposes that Kierkegaard had a single, fixed view of Hegel that remained unchanged throughout his intellectual development. This has caused a number of scholars of nineteenth century philosophy to fail to recognize a number of significant points of overlap in the thought of Hegel and Kierkegaard. As I have tried to indicate here, the surprising thing about *The Sickness unto Death*, which has been overlooked by so many commentators, is that it is so profoundly Hegelian in point of methodology and structure.