Hegel's Presence in *The Concept of Irony*

By Jon Stewart

Abstract

In this article it is argued that although the formal structure of *The Concept of Irony* does not, as has been claimed, follow any particularly Hegelian pattern with the categories of possibility, actuality, and necessity, which appear in the titles of the individual chapters, nevertheless the content of the work follows very closely Hegel's analysis of Socrates in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. The thesis is thus that much of the interpretation of Socrates that Kierkegaard presents in the work is derived from Hegel.

Kierkegaard's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates* (1841), is the first work in which there are clear signs of a careful study of Hegel's primary texts. Up until this point in Kierkegaard's incipient literary career, the references to Hegel are vague, and there are no extended textual analyses of his works. By contrast, *The Concept of Irony* contains several quotations from a number of Hegel's writings and lectures as well as detailed discussions of a number of his most famous analyses. The absence of such quotations and analyses in the works prior to this makes it difficult to evaluate with any certainty what Kierkegaard actually knew of Hegel, but here for the first time one has a wealth of material which can be evaluated. In this work Kierkegaard cites extensively Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, *History of Philosophy* and *Aesthetics* as well as the *Philosophy of Right* and Hegel's review of Solger's posthumous writings.

In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard's main object of study is irony as employed by Socrates. This analysis occupies all of Part One and some of Part Two of the work. But the text goes beyond a study of the figure of Socrates himself. Kierkegaard also examines the views on irony of a number of German writers such as Friedrich von Schlegel, Tieck, Solger and Hegel himself. Part One of the work con-

sists of three chapters: in the lengthy first chapter, "The View Made Possible," Kierkegaard analyzes the person of Socrates based on the various pictures of him presented by the primary sources, Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes, and attempts to bring to the fore hints of Socratic irony found there. He consistently interprets Socratic irony as something essentially negative in character, which repeatedly refutes and destroys arguments, customs, traditions, etc., without having any positive content with which to replace them. There are some occasional references to Hegel in this chapter,[1] but, compared with other parts of the text, these are limited. In Chapter 2, "The Actualization of the View," Kierkegaard analyzes the daimon as well as Socrates' trial and condemnation, and attempts to extend his interpretation of Socratic irony to these subjects. Hegel plays a particularly important role in this discussion and indeed can be said to dominate it. In Chapter 3, "The View Made Necessary," Kierkegaard discusses the Greek Sophistic movement and the schools of Greek thought influenced by Socrates. In this context he interprets Socrates as a world-historical individual in the transformation of Greek culture. There he argues in a Hegelian fashion that Socrates' irony is necessary in the movement of world history. Here as well Hegel is cited frequently and is an important figure in the discussion. Part One is followed by an appendix entitled, "Hegel's View of Socrates," which will also be examined in some detail below.

While the first part of the dissertation treats the figure of Socrates historically and takes up the issue of his relation to irony, the second discusses the concept of irony on its own terms. In this context Kierkegaard examines the notion of irony of the German romantics, which he contrasts to Hegel's view of Socratic irony. Kierkegaard follows Hegel here and interprets Socratic irony as being world-historically necessary and thus justified in contrast to the irony of the romantics which is merely flippant. For Kierkegaard, the irony of Tieck and Schlegel was merely indiscriminate, nihilistic criticism of everything in contrast to that of Socrates which was aimed only at those aspects of Greek culture which he considered to be self-contradictory. Kierkegaard's discussion of both the figure of Socrates and irony in the German romantics is largely shaped by Hegel to whom he constantly refers throughout this part of the text.

---

[1] E.g. *CI*, p. 35 / *BI*, p. 96. *CI*, p. 46 / *BI*, p. 107. *CI*, p. 101 / *BI*, pp. 154-155. *CI*, p. 132 / *BI*, p. 183. *CI*, p. 135fn. / *BI*, p. 186fn. *CI*, p. 152fn. / *BI*, p. 202fn. All references to Kierkegaard's works in Danish are, unless otherwise noted, to *SKS*.

Although there have been a number of disputes about the role and status of Hegel in this work, there is overwhelming evidence that *The Concept of Irony* is a deeply Hegelian text. Indeed, Høffding argues that *The Concept of Irony* is of little value since Kierkegaard at the time was so much under Hegel's sway.[2] According to his view, this Hegelian orientation caused Kierkegaard to misinterpret the figure of Socrates. Following Høffding, Himmelstrup argues that Kierkegaard was essentially Hegelian when he wrote this text and therefore his understanding of Socrates was largely shaped by Hegel.[3] Likewise, Hirsch[4] and Fenger[5] also argue for a strong Hegelian influence in this work. The main dissenting opinion in this debate is clearly Thulstrup.[6] In the present article, I would like to support the view of the commentators prior to Thulstrup: I wish to argue that, whatever Kierkegaard's later relation to Hegel might have been, here in his student years he was clearly infatuated by aspects of Hegel's philosophy which he unapologetically adopted and employed. Evidence for this thesis can be found in both the content and structure of the work itself and in Kierkegaard's later comments on it.

I. The Structure of the Text

It has been claimed that the very structure of *The Concept of Irony* itself is Hegelian in nature.[7] Specifically, it is argued that there is a

---

[2] Harald Høffding *Søren Kierkegaard som Filosof,* Copenhagen and Kristiania: Gydendalske Boghandel 1892, his *Den Store Humor,* Copenhagen 1916, and his "Søren Kierkegaard" in his *Danske Filosofer,* Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1909, p. 151. He too argues that Kierkegaard had a Hegelian phase early in his career.

[3] Jens Himmelstrup *Søren Kierkegaards Opfattelse af Sokrates,* Copenhagen: Arnold Busck 1924, pp. 42-84.

[4] Emanuel Hirsch *Kierkegaard-Studien*, vols. I-II, Gütersloh: C. Bertlesmann 1930-33, vol. II, pp. 572-602.

[5] Henning Fenger *Kierkegaard: The Myths and their Origins*, tr. by George C. Schoolfield, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1980, p. 147: "As a historian, one can also read Kierkegaard's dissertation as a piece of Hegelian writing which – without following Hegel in all its details – must be regarded all the same as a respectable piece of work in the spirit of the Hegelian school."

[6] Niels Thulstrup *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, tr. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 213-261.

[7] This apparently goes back to Eduard Geismar's work, *Søren Kierkegaard. Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, vols. I-II, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 1926-27, vol. I, pp. 95-103. Geismar merely suggests this correlation without fleshing it out in

Hegelian triad of categories in the movement of the three chapters which constitute Part One. According to this view, in the titles of these chapters – "The View Made Possible," "The Actualization of the View," and "The View Made Necessary" – Kierkegaard makes use of the purportedly Hegelian categories, possibility, actuality and necessity, to structure his work. Thus, he seems to want to convey the idea that there is a Hegelian methodology operative in the work. The issue is, however, a complicated one since these categories are, of course, not original in Hegel but rather go back to Aristotle. It was Trendelenburg's treatment of precisely these modal categories which interested Kierkegaard so avidly after his return from Berlin in 1842.[8] During this same period, Kierkegaard also made a study of Aristotle's works on logic with an eye towards this issue.

It is Kant's understanding of the categories which is most important for the issue at hand. In his table of categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant lays out twelve categories in four different groups. He assigns under the categories of modality the following pairs: possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence and necessity/contingency. With the exception of the second category of existence ("*Dasein*" instead of "*Wirklichkeit*"), these categories fit Kierkegaard's scheme exactly. Kant indicates that there is an organic relation between the categories in each of the four groups. Specifically, he claims that the third category in each group is always a combination of the first and the second. Thus, with respect to the categories of quantity – unity, plurality, totality – the last category, *totality*, can be seen as a combination of the two preceding categories, i.e. as the *unity* of a *plurality*. Similarly, for the categories of quality, *limitation* is the combination of *reality* and *negation*. So also with respect to the modal categories, Kant claims, *necessity* is "the *existence* which is given through *possibility* itself."[9] Kant seems to mean that of the large set of things that are possible, there is a subset of things which are necessary, and these in fact do *exist*. Thus, necessity is possibility realized in the realm of existence. Later Kierkegaard will come to criticize this position (i.e. that necessity is the combination of exist-

---

any detail. See also Hong in his "Historical Introduction" in his translation of *CI*, p. xvi: "In Part One of *Irony*, the Hegelian pattern is followed: possibility, actuality and necessity."

[8] Cf. Arnold B. Come *Trendelenburg's Influence on Kierkegaard's Modal Categories*, Montreal: Inter Editions 1991.

[9] Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. New York: St. Martin's Press 1963, B 112, p. 116. (My italics.)

ence and possibility), which has been mistakenly attributed to Hegel.[10]

Hegel takes the insight about the logical interrelation of the categories and develops it in his own idiosyncratic fashion in the *Science of Logic*. In the section entitled, "Actuality," (which constitutes the third part of the *Wesenslogik* or "The Doctrine of Essence,") he treats these categories and attempts to demonstrate their organic relation to one another. In the second chapter of that section he works through an elaborate analysis of the different aspects of, in order, actuality, possibility and necessity. There he tries to demonstrate that these categories mutually imply and thus reciprocally condition one another in contrast to the unilateral Kantian conception according to which the third in the group is the combination of the first and the second. Here it must be noted that Kierkegaard's sequence – possibility, actuality, necessity – is not, strictly speaking, Hegel's. Moreover, in his analysis Hegel distinguishes a number of variants of the three categories, such as "formal actuality," "relative necessity," "real possibility" and "absolute necessity," and supplements the three original modal categories with others such as "contingency." Thus, the matter in Hegel is much more complicated than either Kant's table of categories or Kierkegaard's scheme. It is not necessary to examine Hegel's intricate analyses in detail since Kierkegaard is not, strictly speaking, interested in an account of these categories for logic and does not draw on this aspect of Hegel's philosophy at all in his dissertation.

The use of these categories in the chapter titles of Part One of *The Concept of Irony* seems to imply that the phenomenon of Socratic irony, which Kierkegaard designates as "the view," will be analyzed in terms of each of these three categories. Yet, at first glance, it is not obvious how Kierkegaard's chapters reflect a dialectical movement in

---

[10] Cf. Hong's note 12, p. 299 to *PF*, also note 35, p. 175 to *SD*. Hong attributes this to Hegel on the basis of the following passage in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*: "It is true that necessity has been rightly defined as the unity of possibility and actuality." But Hong fails to quote what Hegel says immediately after this: "But when it is expressed only in this way, this determination is superficial, and therefore unintelligible"(*EL* § 147 / *Enz.* I, pp. 330-331). Hegel draws on this view but departs from it in significant ways. (*EL* = *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, tr. by T.F. Gerats, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett 1991. Cited by paragraph number (§). *Enz.* I-III = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. Jub.* vols. 8-10. Cited by volume and page number. *Jub.* = *Sämtliche Werke*. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1927-40.)

terms of these categories. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the titles reflect the actual content of the individual chapters at all. Fortunately, Kierkegaard provides a few scattered explanatory remarks on this question. At the end of Chapter 1, which purports to deal with possibility, he says by way of clarification,

> I have allowed the whole development to reach a point of final confrontation. I have thereby procured a possibility of being able to explain the discrepancy among these three views [sc. Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes] by a view of Socrates corresponding to it. But with all this I still have come no further than the possibility, for even though the explanation propounded is able to reconcile the opposing powers, it by no means follows that this explanation is therefore entirely correct. If, however, it could not reconcile them, then it could not possibly be correct. Now, however, it is possible.[11]

Here the use of the category of possibility concerns the possibility of explaining the discrepancies in the account of Socrates given by the three major primary sources. Kierkegaard tries to do this by means of an interpretation of Socrates as ironic. The idea seems to be that he has merely suggested this interpretation without proof and that at this point in the text it is merely one interpretative possibility among others.

Chapter 2 then purportedly interprets the irony of Socrates under the aspect of a new category, namely, actuality. Kierkegaard explains the shift in the analysis and his employment of this category as follows: "From this point on, the investigation will take another form. I shall deal with some phenomena that as historical facts do not need to be provided through a mistaken view but merely need to be kept in their inviolate innocence and thereupon explained....This section could be called 'The Actualization of the View,' because it actualizes itself through all these historical data."[12] Kierkegaard reminds the reader again and again in this section that he is no longer concerned with private interpretations of the authors, Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes, but rather is now interested in actual historical facts, such as Socrates' daimon and his condemnation by his fellow Athenians.[13] The historical information is then interpreted as indicative of Socratic irony, presumably in order to support the claim about the mere possibility of that irony, which was established in the first chapter. Thus, the agreed upon historical facts of Socrates' existence transform the thesis from one of mere possibility to concrete actuality.

---

[11] *CI*, p. 155 / *BI*, p. 205.
[12] *CI*, p. 156 / *BI*, p. 206. Cf. also *CI*, pp. 259-264 / *BI*, pp. 297-302.
[13] *CI*, p. 157 / *BI*, p. 207. *CI*, p. 167 / *BI*, p. 215.

In the final chapter of Part One, Socrates' use of irony is considered as necessary, i.e. necessary from the world-historical point of view. The older order of Greek life was no longer viable, and Socrates' use of irony as a negative tool set loose the historical forces that ultimately destroyed it. His role in the historical movement is seen in hindsight as necessary for the dissolution of classical Greek culture: "Early Greek culture had outlived itself, a new principle had to emerge, but before it could appear in its truth, all the prolific weeds of misunderstanding's pernicious anticipations had to be plowed under, destroyed down to the deepest roots. The new principle must contend; world history needs an *accoucheur*. Socrates fills this place."[14] Seen in this fashion, the irony of Socrates is not merely one actual historical fact among others but rather was a *necessity* of world history. In the chapter, "The World-Historical Validity of Irony," from Part Two of the work, Kierkegaard once again takes up the notion of historical necessity in strongly Hegelian terms:

> Even though world spirit in any process is continually in itself, this is not the case with the generation at a certain time and with given individuals at a certain time in the same generation. For them, a given *actuality* does not present itself as something that they are able to reject, because the world process leads the person who is willing to go along and sweeps the unwilling one along with it. But insofar as the idea is concrete in itself, it is *necessary* for it to become continually what it is – that is, become concrete.[15]

Here he understands there to be a historical necessity in the destruction of the actuality of any given historical period. There is a necessity not in every historical detail but only in those changes of history that conform to the Idea. Given that Socratic reflection and skepticism correspond to the radical changes in the Idea of world spirit at the time, they were historically necessary. Thus, necessity replaces actuality as the relevant category in the analysis.

It is difficult to know exactly what to make of the claim that the organizational structure of Part One is Hegelian in character. Kierkegaard's scheme only vaguely follows the pattern of Hegel's analysis of these categories in the *Science of Logic*. Given that Hegel's discussion of the modal categories does not follow the sequence – possibility, actuality, necessity – it cannot be said that this sequence is Hegelian or that Kierkegaard's use of it is indicative of a Hegelian view.[16] Given

---

[14] *CI*, p. 211 / *BI*, pp. 255-256.

[15] *CI*, p. 259 / *BI*, p. 297. Translation slightly modified. (My italics.)

[16] The categories discussed here will become important themes in Kierkegaard's later works, particularly after he becomes familiar with Trendelenburg's logic. Cf. *PF*,

this, it is unclear why any contemporary would have thought that this aspect of the dissertation was typically Hegelian. Moreover, aside from the few explanatory comments Kierkegaard provides here, the actual content of his chapters seems only loosely related to these categories anyway. In what follows I would like to argue that there are many discussions and analyses in *The Concept of Irony* which are derived from Hegel, and thus it is not so much the work's structure as its actual content which bears the stamp of Hegel's thought.

Now that it is clear that there might be good reason to suspect that Kierkegaard's dissertation is stamped by aspects of Hegel's philosophy, I will turn to an analysis of the context of the text itself in order to determine if it bears out this hypothesis. Kierkegaard mentions Hegel several times throughout *The Concept of Irony*, often merely referring briefly to some aspect of his thought, and for this reason it would be impractical to go through every single reference serially. Therefore, it will be useful to pick out some passages as representative of his use of Hegel in the text generally. In addition to various scattered references and allusions, there are a handful of extended discussions in which Kierkegaard analyzes in detail some aspect of Hegel's thought, and it is these which will be particularly productive to examine. With an analysis of these passages, it will be possible to gain a sense for how well Kierkegaard knew Hegel's works in addition to what use he makes of him and what aspects of his philosophy he seems sympathetic to and which ones he rejects. In what follows I propose to analyze the following passages: (1) Kierkegaard's discussion of Hegel's interpretation of the daimon at the beginning of Chapter 2, "The Actualization of the View,"[17] (2) Chapter 3, "The View Made Necessary,"[18] (3) the appendix to Part One entitled, "Hegel's View of Socrates,"[19] and (4) the chapter from Part Two entitled, "The World-Historical Validity of Irony, the Irony of Socrates."[20]

---

pp. 74-78 / *PS*, pp. 274-277. *SUD*, p. 36 / *SD*, p. 149. *CUP1*, pp. 314ff. / *AE*, pp. 270ff. (*SV*1 7). *CA*, p. 49 / *BA*, p. 354. *SV1* 11. For Trendelenburg see e.g. *JP* I 199 / *Pap.* IV B 54; *JP* III 2341 / *Pap.* V A 74. But here in *The Concept of Irony*, he is not yet concerned *per se* with the general question of the conceptual or logical relations among them, although he had considered the question of the modal categories somewhat during this period. Cf. *JP* II 1592 / *Pap.* III C 31. *JP* II 1593 / *Pap.* III C 33.

[17] *CI*, pp. 161-167 / *BI*, pp. 211-215.

[18] *CI*, pp. 198-218 / *BI*, pp. 244-262.

[19] *CI*, pp. 219-237 / *BI*, pp. 263-278.

[20] *CI*, pp. 259-271 / *BI*, pp. 297-308.

II. Hegel's Account of the Daimon

The first analysis to be treated is the account of Hegel's interpretation of the daimon[21] which Kierkegaard gives at the beginning of the second chapter, "The Actualization of the View." This is the point in the discussion when Kierkegaard moves to his treatment of the life and person of Socrates. His analysis here consists of two parts: he first takes up the question of the daimon and then discusses the trial of Socrates. In the former, the discussion begins with a treatment of the references to the daimon in the texts of Xenophon and Plato and then moves on to the modern interpretations of it. Generally speaking, Kierkegaard draws heavily on Hegel here, and in fact his discussion follows exactly Hegel's own treatment in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.[22] In addition, Kierkegaard also quotes from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*[23] and, for the first time in his literary *corpus*, from the *Philosophy of Right*.[24]

Kierkegaard begins by claiming that previous writers have not been able to understand the daimon correctly due to the fact that it has always been interpreted as something external or accidental to Socrates' character. By contrast, Hegel has attained clarity on this issue by understanding the phenomenon of the daimon as representative of Socrates' fundamental moral disposition. In the following passage, Kierkegaard approvingly cites Hegel as an authority on the issue: "One of Hegel's statements expresses in a general sense and yet very pregnantly how to understand the daimónion: 'Socrates, in assigning to insight, to conviction, the determination of men's actions, posited the individual as capable of a final moral decision, in contraposition to country and customary morality, and thus made himself

---

[21] *CI,* pp. 161-167 / *BI,* pp. 211-215.

[22] Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, pp. 421-445 / *VGP* II, pp. 94-122. (*Hist. of Phil.* I-III = *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 volumes, tr. by E.S. Haldane, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner 1892-96; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1955. Cited by volume and page number. *VGP* I-III = *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Jub.* vols. 17-19. Cited by volume and page number.)

[23] *CI,* p. 161 / *BI,* p. 211.

[24] *CI,* p. 162 / *BI,* p. 211. Hegel *PR* § 279 Remark / *PR,* pp. 385-386. (*PR* = *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr. by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952. Cited by paragraph number (§) with the exception of the Preface which is so noted and cited by page number. *RP* = *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse. Jub.* vol. 7. Cited by page number.)

an oracle in the Greek sense.'"[25] Kierkegaard cites a similar passage from the *Philosophy of Right*,[26] apparently to make the same point, while noting that Hegel's most extended discussion of the issue comes in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Thus, at the beginning of his discussion, Kierkegaard makes it clear that Hegel's account of the issue is important for him and that he will examine it closely.

Hegel's analysis of the Greek world is now the object of Kierkegaard's attention. Classical Greek culture was governed by traditional morality or what Hegel calls "*Sittlichkeit*." This was reflected in the religion, the customs and the laws of the state, all of which were believed to have their sanction in the gods. Such customs and laws represented an absolute moral command which the individual, being immediately immersed in them, never thought to question. By incessantly calling into doubt established religion and morality and demanding that they justify themselves rationally, Socrates represented the destructive force of individuality and subjective freedom. "Socrates' position," Kierkegaard writes, "is that of subjectivity, of inwardness, which reflects upon itself and in its relation to itself detaches and volatilizes what is established in the flood of thought that surges over it and carries it away while it itself recedes again into thought."[27] With Socrates the individual was for the first time invested with the burden of moral reflection and judgment, and this new principle of individuality comes into conflict with traditional morality.

Hegel portrays the conflict by juxtaposing the Delphic oracle, one of the main organs of traditional morality, with Socrates' daimon, which was a kind of inner, subjective oracle, representing the principle of individuality. Since the oracle was essentially a medium for the propagation of traditional morality, its utterances were perceived as having absolute validity. By appealing to the oracle, the people effectively denied themselves the freedom of decision and action, for they allowed the oracle to choose and to determine their course of action for them. Kierkegaard cites Hegel once again: "This element, the fact that the people had not the power of decision, but were determined

---

[25] *CI*, p. 161 / *BI*, p. 211. Hegel *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 269-270 / *VPG*, p. 350. (*Phil. of Hist* = *The Philosophy of History*, tr. by J. Sibree, New York: Willey Book Co. 1944. Cited by page number. *VPG* = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Jub.* vol. 11. Cited by page number.)

[26] *CI*, p. 162 / *BI*, p. 211.

[27] *CI*, p. 163 / *BI*, p. 212. Translation slightly modified.

from without, was a real factor in Greek consciousness; and oracles were everywhere essential where man did not yet know himself inwardly as being sufficiently free and independent to take upon himself to decide as we do. This subjective freedom...was not yet present with the Greeks."[28] The unreflective citizen thus had no subjective freedom or autonomy since life was lived in accordance with established patterns and customs which were thought to have their legitimation in their antiquity. The oracle, understood as the mouthpiece for traditional morality and universality, is then contrasted with the daimon of Socrates, which is individual. The daimon is not something external or adventitious like the oracle; moreover, it is not accessible to the public sphere but rather dwells within the person of Socrates himself and is thus subjective. It represents the principle of subjective freedom that stands in contradiction to traditional morality and indeed poses a threat to it. But the daimon does not represent the extreme limit of individuality but only a sort of halfway house between it and the universality of traditional morality. Kierkegaard quotes Hegel once again: "the daimónion of Socrates stands midway between the externality of the oracle and the pure inwardness of the mind."[29] The daimon is not synonymous with Socrates' own private will; indeed, it often warns him against doing things that his private will would otherwise like to do. Thus, although it is in Socrates, *qua* individual, the daimon is not wholly subjective; rather, it has an objective validity since it transcends Socrates' individual will, but yet it still stands in contrast to the universal public morality of the oracle.

Kierkegaard indicates that his account of Hegel's interpretation of the daimon is here at an end and that he will now use it as a point of departure or foundation upon which he intends to build.[30] His addition to Hegel's account involves merely the observation that the phenomenon of the daimon is consistent with his own interpretation of

---

[28] *CI,* p. 163 / *BI,* pp. 212-213. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 423 / *VGP* II, p. 97. N.b. In quoting Kierkegaard's quotations of Hegel, I use the standard English translation of Hegel (referenced above) and not Hong's translations of Kierkegaard's quotations. Cf. *PhS,* §§ 711-712 / *PhG,* pp. 542-544. (*PhS* = *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977. Cited by paragraph number (§). *PhG* = *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *Jub.* vol. 2. Cited by page number.)

[29] *CI,* p. 164 / *BI,* p. 213. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 425 / *VGP* II, p. 99.

[30] *CI,* p. 165 / *BI,* p. 214: "This concludes my exposition of Hegel's presentation, and, here as always when one has Hegel along...I have thereby acquired a footing from which I can safely start out on my own excursion to see whether there might be some particular worthy of note to which I can safely return whether or not I have found anything."

the irony of Socrates. With its negative commands and warnings, the daimon provided Socrates with a truth which was for him valid and objective. Thus, the daimon furnished Socrates with a stable truth, (albeit a purely negative one), which remained sacrosanct even with respect to his own skeptical questioning, and in this one finds, according to Kierkegaard, its ironic element: "If we now add to this the polemical consciousness into which Socrates absorbed his whole relation to his contemporaries...the security provided for him by the daimónion against being perplexed by all the happenings in life, then Socrates' position once again manifests itself as irony."[31] The essential point here is that the daimon's commands had no positive content but rather were always negative in character. Thus, this interpretation of the daimon is consistent with Kierkegaard's claim that Socrates had no positive doctrine and remained in a position of pure ironic negativity with respect to traditional morality.

Kierkegaard finishes his discussion by contrasting his general methodology with that of Hegel and by offering a criticism of him on this point. He writes, clearly referring to Hegel, "As a rule, irony is understood ideally, is assigned its place as a vanishing element in the system, and is therefore treated very briefly."[32] Kierkegaard is critical of Hegel's speculative method of abstracting irony out of its actual concrete context and analyzing it as an abstract concept in relation to a general system of concepts. For Kierkegaard, by contrast, irony is not just an abstract concept but rather a concrete utterance or action in a specific situation:

> 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.[33]

Kierkegaard's method, in contrast to Hegel's, will be to analyze irony in its concrete context in the life of a specific individual. According to Kierkegaard, Hegel has with his method overlooked important aspects of irony, for in order to understand the irony of Socrates one must examine his use of it within the context of his life and cultural

---

[31] *CI*, p. 166 / *BI*, p. 214.
[32] *CI*, p. 166 / *BI*, p. 214.
[33] *CI*, pp. 166-167 / *BI*, p. 215.

setting. Hegel allegedly fails to see this since he is purportedly only interested either in the historical concept (*Begriff*) that is represented by the Greek world or in irony as a concept in a general theory of aesthetics. The details of history are, it is claimed, of no interest to him.

Kierkegaard develops this criticism further at the beginning of the appendix, "Hegel's View of Socrates." The relation between the original criticism and its development here is clear since he refers to his previous discussion in a footnote.[34] Kierkegaard criticizes Hegel for overlooking important aspects of the figure of Socrates, arguing that Hegel is not concerned with the various empirical particulars in his analysis of history:

> The difficulty implicit in the establishment of certainty about the phenomenal aspect of Socrates' life does not bother Hegel. He generally does not acknowledge such trivial concerns....Although he himself observes that with respect to Socrates it is a matter not so much of philosophy as of individual life, there is nothing at all in his presentation of Socrates in *Geschichte der Philosophie* to illuminate the relations of the three different contemporary views of Socrates.[35]

Kierkegaard goes so far as to criticize Hegel for not being historically exacting.[36] He attributes Hegel's lack of interest in matters of philology or textual criticism to his insistence upon taking in a wider historical perspective: "Anything like this is effort wasted on Hegel, and when the phenomena are paraded, he is in too much of a hurry and is too aware of the great importance of his role as commander-in-chief of world history to take time for more than the royal glimpse he allows to glide over them."[37] According to Kierkegaard, by viewing history only from the macrolevel, Hegel has not been able to grasp fully the nature of Socrates and his use of irony. This claim seems to prefigure Kierkegaard's later criticism which charges philosophy and the system with being idealized and abstracted from the actual.

---

[34] *CI*, p. 219fn. / *BI*, p. 263fn.: "With Socrates (to bring up again a previously quoted remark by Hegel, which strangely enough is by Hegel) it is a question not so much of philosophy as of individual life."

[35] *CI*, p. 221 / *BI*, p. 265.

[36] *CI*, pp. 221-222 / *BI*, pp. 265-266: "He uses one single dialogue from Plato as an example of the Socratic method without explaining why he chose this particular one. He uses Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Apology*, and also Plato's *Apology*, quite uncritically."

[37] *CI*, p. 222 / *BI*, p. 266.

Strangely enough, in his Introduction Kierkegaard says just the opposite of this and indeed praises Hegel's methodology on precisely this point. There he discusses the difference between an empirical account of history and a philosophical one. His discussion is derived wholly from Hegel. He begins by claiming with Hegel that philosophy necessarily involves a historical element, given that concepts, which are the objects of philosophy, are historically contingent entities:

> Concepts, just like individuals, have their history and are no more able than they to resist the dominion of time, but in and through it all they nevertheless harbor a kind of homesickness for the place of their birth. Indeed, philosophy can now on one side no more disregard the recent history of this concept than it can stop with its earliest history.[38]

Kierkegaard is quick to point out that, although concepts have their histories, there is a difference between a purely historical account, which merely recounts various actions, and a philosophical-historical account, which interprets the general historical pattern or idea behind the manifold phenomena: "Just as the individual making a confession is certainly able not only to reel off the incidents of his life chronologically but also to relate them entertainingly but still does not comprehend them himself, so history certainly is also able to declare the eventful life of the human race with pathos in a loud voice but must leave it to the senior (philosophy) to explain it."[39] This is, of course, an essentially Hegelian view and corresponds generally to the distinction, outlined in the Introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, between "original history," which is concerned with facts and empirical data, and "philosophical history," which is concerned with an interpretation of history in terms of abstract thought.

Kierkegaard surprisingly goes on to insist on this Hegelian distinction, claiming that philosophy should concentrate on the universal, while history concentrates on the particulars. Each has its own domain, and they should avoid merging into one another. Both philosophy and history "ought to have their rights so that, on the one hand, the phenomenon has its rights and is not to be intimidated and discouraged by philosophy's superiority, and philosophy, on the other hand, is not to let itself be infatuated by the charms of the particular,

---

[38] *CI*, p. 9 / *BI*, pp. 71-72. Cf. Hegel *PR* Preface, p. 11 / *RP*, p. 35: "Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time / so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts."

[39] *CI*, p. 10 / *BI*, p. 72.

is not to be distracted by the superabundance of the particular."[40] Here he says directly that philosophy should avoid slipping into the realm of pure particularity for which it is unsuited. The surprising thing about this passage is that it contradicts precisely what Kierkegaard argues for in the passage just discussed. As has been noted, there he seems to criticize Hegel for concentrating on the universal and ignoring the particular, claiming that by so doing Hegel has missed the point of the notion of irony. But here in the Introduction, he says, "The same holds for the concept of irony: philosophy is not to look too long at one particular side of its phenomenological existence and above all at its appearance but is to see the truth of the concept in and with the phenomenological."[41] Here he insists that the goal of philosophy is to examine irony abstractly as a concept and not to be concerned primarily or exclusively with the use made of it by specific individuals.

Moreover, Kierkegaard states, empirical or original history fails to see the true importance of the figure of Socrates. In his Introduction, Kierkegaard announces that in this work he intends to examine the philosophical concept of irony, but in order to do so he must first come to terms with the history of the concept. He claims that the concept of irony was introduced into the world by Socrates, and for this reason he must first give a philosophical-historical account of Socrates in order to understand the concept.[42] But to give a purely empirical account of the particulars would not be sufficient. "Moreover," he writes, "if through an intimate familiarity with Socrates' life and way of living someone gained a notion of his singularity, he would still not therefore have a total concept of what irony is."[43] But it is precisely the understanding of Socrates as an individual that Kierkegaard aims at in the body of the text. Later Hegel is cited as

---

[40] *CI*, pp. 10-11 / *BI*, pp. 72-73.

[41] *CI*, p. 11 / *BI*, p. 73. Kierkegaard goes so far as to make a plea for a systematic understanding of history: "Just as it has been correctly pointed out that nature is unable to adhere to the concept...so also something similar can legitimately be said about history, inasmuch as every single fact does indeed evolve, but only as an element, and the whole sum of historical existence is still not the completely adequate medium of the idea, since it is the idea's temporality and fragmentariness...that long for the backward-looking repulse emanating, face against face, from consciousness." ibid.

[42] *CI*, p. 9 / *BI*, p. 71: "Before I proceed to an exposition of the concept of irony, it is necessary to make sure that I have a reliable and authentic view of Socrates' historical-actual, phenomenological existence."

[43] *CI*, p. 11 / *BI*, p. 73. Translation slightly modified.

one who sees Socrates in his historical context. At first Kierkegaard writes, "The point of this, of course, is not to tear Socrates out of his historical context – on the contrary, it is to see him properly in that context."[44] He then goes on to quote Hegel to the same effect: "But Socrates did not grow like a mushroom out of the earth, for he stands in continuity with his time."[45]

It is difficult to know what to make of Kierkegaard's inconsistency here. It may reveal that he was developing his ideas as he was writing, or it may be indicative of an uncertain or ambivalent relation to Hegel. In any case, it is fair to say that in "The Daimon of Socrates," Hegel dominates the discussion. It is his interpretation of the daimon that Kierkegaard discusses at length and largely adopts. He does not expand Hegel's analysis in any detail and is in no way critical of it as a point of departure; indeed, he cites Hegel at length without much analysis at all. At the end of his discussion, Kierkegaard points out that his interpretation of Socratic irony is wholly consistent with Hegel's account of the daimon. It thus seems indisputable that Hegel is crucial for shaping Kierkegaard's views on this matter. The daimon represents, for Hegel and Kierkegaard, Socrates' general negative relation to the established order. This is the key for Hegel's understanding of Socrates as a world-historical figure and for Kierkegaard's understanding of the concept of irony as essentially negative. Moreover, Hegel is an important interlocutor for Kierkegaard, which can be seen above all in the criticism that Kierkegaard offers. There he carves out his own position and methodology in contrast to Hegel.

III. Hegel's Account of Socrates vis-à-vis the other Greek Schools

In the third and final chapter of Part One, "The View Made Necessary,"[46] Kierkegaard turns to an analysis of the figure of Socrates as a world-historical individual in the Hegelian sense, i.e. as someone who set off profound changes in the development of history by helping to bring about the destruction of historical notions which are no longer viable. Socrates is analyzed as "a turning point"[47] in history since he was in part responsible for the destruction of the Greek *polis* as a

---

[44] *CI*, p. 199 / *BI*, pp. 244-245.
[45] *CI*, p. 199 / *BI*, p. 245. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 384 / *VGP* II, p. 42.
[46] *CI*, pp. 198-218 / *BI*, pp. 244-262.
[47] *CI*, p. 200 / *BI*, p. 245.

form of life. Kierkegaard's language and methodology in this discussion are, as before, profoundly Hegelian.[48] Once again following exactly Hegel's analysis in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,[49] he divides his discussion here into two parts: first he examines Socrates in relation to what came before, i.e. the Sophistic movement in Greek thought, and then in relation to what came after him, i.e. the post-Socratic schools. In a typically Hegelian passage, Kierkegaard emphasizes Socrates' importance in the development of world spirit and says that the goal is "to become conscious of the idea that is the meaning of his existence in the world, of the phase in the development of world spirit that is symbolically indicated by the singularity of his existence in history."[50] Kierkegaard reminds the reader once again that the task is now not to view Socrates in his concrete historical context as before but rather to grasp his meaning for world history in thought or, as Hegel would say, according to the Notion: "He [sc. Socrates] is not, because he is not the object of immediate apprehension....He is, because of thought he is, which corresponds to the emergence of the Idea in the world of mind – but, please note, the Idea in its abstract form, its infinite negativity. Thus, the form of his existence in history is not a perfectly adequate pictorial indication of his significance for spirit."[51] As has been seen above in connection with Kierkegaard's ambiguous criticism of Hegel, the various empirical facts about Socrates' life are not sufficient for a philosophical-historical analysis of his importance; instead, one must investigate his conceptual meaning for history.

Kierkegaard begins by trying to understand Socrates in relation to the Sophists. Again Hegel is referred to at the start as the authority on the issue.[52] The Sophists are characterized as wanting to teach to the young a "universal culture"[53] that would prepare them to participate fully in civic life. They introduced a kind of reflection which called tra-

---

[48] E.g. *CI*, p. 200 / *BI*, p. 246: "Precisely because it is a turning point in history, Hegel talks about it again and again; sometimes his task is to describe it, and sometimes he uses it as an example. Therefore, everyone who has read anything at all of Hegel must be familiar with his views on this, and I shall not vex people by repeating what no one can say so well as Hegel himself."

[49] Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, "The Sophists," pp. 352-384 / *VGP* II, pp. 5-42. "The Philosophy of the Socratics," pp. 448-487 / *VGP* II, pp. 122-169.

[50] *CI*, pp. 198 / *BI*, p. 244.

[51] *CI*, p. 198 / *BI*, p. 244. Translation slightly modified.

[52] *CI*, p. 201fn. / *BI*, p. 247fn.: "Here again Hegel has provided excellent expositions."

[53] *CI*, p. 203 / *BI*, p. 248.

dition and law into doubt only to return again and put them back into place: "In its first form, this education shakes the foundations of everything, but in its second form it enables every pupil of integrity to make everything firm and fast again....In Sophistry, reflection is awakened; it shakes the foundations of everything, and it is then that Sophistry lulls it to sleep again with reasons."[54] The student of the Sophist learns to give arguments and reasons for every cause, and thus a stability is re-established in the face of the original skepticism.

Kierkegaard is critical of Hegel's understanding of the Sophists as wholly negative. He quotes at length the beginning of the account of the Sophists in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* in order to analyze and criticize it: "This firm ground – whether it be a security of natural being or the security of definite conceptions, principles, customs and laws – becomes vacillation and loses its stability....We see this movement arising in the so-called Sophists."[55] Kierkegaard's point in quoting this passage seems to be that the Sophistic movement is portrayed by Hegel as something wholly negative, i.e. wholly skeptical, without any positive aspect. Kierkegaard writes by way of commentary,

> It seems, however, that Hegel makes the Sophistic movement too grandiose, and therefore the distrust one may have about the correctness of his view is strengthened even more by the presence, in his subsequent discussion of Sophistry, of various points that cannot be harmonized with it; likewise, if this were the correct interpretation of Sophistry, there is much in his conception of Socrates that would make it necessary to identify Socrates with them.[56]

Kierkegaard, using Hegelian language, has already claimed that Socrates introduced into the world the principle of "finite subjectivity."[57] Given that Socrates is characterized as subjectivity, it is important for Kierkegaard to find a way to contrast him to the Sophists who also are often represented as champions of subjectivism. According to Kierkegaard, the Sophists and Socrates cannot be distinguished on Hegel's account.[58] Contrary to Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that the Sophists were not wholly negative, but rather that they tried to offer solutions to the skepticism they had initiated: "the Sophists' pompous, confident parading, their matchless self-sufficiency...is proof

---

[54] *CI,* p. 205 / *BI,* p. 250.

[55] *CI,* pp. 206-207 / *BI,* p. 251. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 352 / *VGP* II, p. 5.

[56] *CI,* p. 207 / *BI,* p. 251.

[57] *CI,* p. 201 / *BI,* p. 246.

[58] Cf. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, pp. 385-387 / *VGP* II, pp. 43-45, where Hegel does in fact distinguish them.

enough that they thought themselves able to satisfy the demands of the times, not by shaking the foundations of everything but, after having shaken the foundations, by making it all secure again."[59] The Sophists tried to find a remedy to the disease of critical thinking which had afflicted Greek culture, and thus they "considered themselves to be *physicians* to the age."[60] For Kierkegaard, the evidence for the positivity of the Sophists is also provided by the very nature of their rhetorical abilities. In public speaking, the orator always makes a particular case, i.e. something in particular is always argued for, and this is *ipso facto* something positive. Thus, for Kierkegaard the Sophists were in the final analysis always positive.

Given this interpretation of the Sophists, Kierkegaard is able to distinguish them from Socrates whom he sees as wholly negative. He contrasts the view of Socrates with that of Protagoras as portrayed in Plato's dialogue of the same name: "Protagoras' thesis that virtue can be taught is certainly positive; it contains a high degree of confidence in existence and in the Sophistic art. One the other hand, the Socratic thesis that virtue cannot be taught is negative."[61] Contrary to the Sophists, Socrates' role in world history is purely negative, and his goal is to overcome this principle of positivity: "But irony is the very incitement of subjectivity, and in Socrates irony is truly a world-historical passion. In Socrates, one process ends and with him a new one begins."[62] Thus, Socrates' use of irony plays an important role in the development of Greek history. It is in this sense "that irony has a world-historical validity."[63] It was this irony which initiated the transformation of the Greek world and shook it out of its traditional way of life forever. This use of irony was, for Kierkegaard, wholly absent among the Sophists.

Now that he has analyzed the figure of Socrates in relation to what preceded him, i.e. the Sophists, Kierkegaard begins the second part of the analysis and turns to an account of what came after him, namely, the Megaric, Cyrenaic and Cynic schools inspired by him.[64] This once again follows exactly Hegel's ordering of the subject matter in the

---

[59] *CI*, p. 207 / *BI*, p. 251.
[60] *CI*, p. 208 / *BI*, p. 252.
[61] *CI*, p. 208 / *BI*, p. 253.
[62] *CI*, p. 211 / *BI*, p. 256.
[63] *CI*, p. 211 / *BI*, p. 255.
[64] *CI*, p. 214 / *BI*, p. 259: "We now proceed to show in Socrates the other side of the bifrontic character implicit in every historical beginning: we must look at his relation to the development that traces its beginning back to him."

Lectures on the History of Philosophy. As before, Kierkegaard here begins his analysis by addressing Hegel's view of the matter: "Hegel notes that Socrates had been reproached for the derivation of so many diverse philosophies from his teaching; he replies that this was an account of the indefiniteness and abstraction of his principle."[65] However, for Kierkegaard, the fact that so many later philosophies trace their origins back to Socrates is not a result of the abstractness of his philosophy and thus a ground for criticism, but rather it is evidence that Socrates' position was purely negative:

> if the Socratic position had included the limitation that every intermediate positivity must necessarily have, then it most certainly to all eternity would have been impossible that so many descendents could try to claim their right of primogeniture. If, however, his position was infinite negativity, then it is easily explained, since this contains within itself the possibility of everything, the possibility of the whole infinity of subjectivity.[66]

According to Kierkegaard, it would make sense that Socrates' philosophy was interpreted in so many different ways if it were, as he claims, without positive content since then later schools could read whatever they wanted into his position and claim him as their heir. This would presumably not have been possible, had Socrates in fact espoused a clear, fixed positive position which would, by virtue of its positivity, have stood in obvious contradiction to other positive views and thus have made it impossible for those views to claim it as a forerunner.

Kierkegaard acknowledges that for Hegel as well the diversity of the Socratic schools is the result of the essential negativity of Socrates' teaching: "In discussing the three Socratic schools (Megaric, Cyrenaic, and Cynic), Hegel notes that all three schools are very different from one another and adds that this alone clearly shows that Socrates had no positive system."[67] Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel on this point but insists that his comments here must be supplemented: "Not only did he have no positive system, but he was devoid of positivity....It does not suffice to say that from the heterogeneity of the Socratic schools the conclusion may be drawn that Socrates

---

[65] *CI*, p. 215 / *BI*, p. 260. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 449 / *VGP* II, p. 125: "The most varied schools and principles proceeded from this doctrine of Socrates, and this was made a reproach against him, but it was really due to the indefiniteness and abstraction of his principle."

[66] *CI*, p. 215 / *BI*, p. 260.

[67] *CI*, p. 216 / *BI*, p. 260.

had no positive system; but it must be added that by its pressure the infinite negativity made all positivity possible, has been an infinite incitement and stimulation for positivity."[68] For Kierkegaard, Socrates had no positive element at all. Socrates' negativity was important for stimulating subsequent schools to move into a position of positivity, and thus his position contained "within itself a multiplicity of beginnings."[69] This then concludes Kierkegaard's account.

Hegel is omnipresent in this chapter. Kierkegaard cites him at length and closely follows his analyses from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*; the accounts Hegel gives of Sophism, of Socrates and of the later Socratic schools are repeated and generally approved of. Hegel's accounts of world history and of Socrates as world-historical figure are also adopted. Only with respect to the questions of the positivity of the Sophists and the infinite negativity of Socrates does Kierkegaard venture what he perceives as slight modifications of Hegel's position, arguing that there is no positive aspect in Socrates at all. In the final analysis, it is by no means clear that he has departed from Hegel's position since it is not clear that Hegel attributes positivity to Socrates. In any case, Hegel's influence here in this section seems to be unquestionable.

IV. Hegel's Account of Socrates as the Founder of Morality

The next section to be explored is "Hegel's View of Socrates,"[70] an appendix at the end of Part One in which Kierkegaard once again discusses Hegel explicitly. At this point Kierkegaard has completed his account of Socrates, and now his goal is to situate his understanding of Socrates in the context of other interpretations. This appendix thus represents, so to speak, Kierkegaard's treatment of the literature on the topic of his thesis. But he tells his readers at the start that he has no intention of giving a survey of the various historical interpretations of Socrates. For him, there is only one theory worthy of mention, namely, Hegel's: "Hegel clearly provides a turning point in the view of Socrates. Therefore, I shall begin with Hegel and

---

[68] *CI*, p. 216 / *BI*, pp. 260-261: "I shall try to show this later in connection with the way in which Hegel reclaims for him the idea of the good; here it suffices to say that even the good he had only as infinite negativity."

[69] *CI*, p. 217 / *BI*, p. 261.

[70] *CI*, pp. 219-237 / *BI*, pp. 263-278.

end with Hegel, without giving attention to his predecessors, since they, insofar as they have any significance, have been corroborated by his view, or to his successors, since they have only relative value in comparison with Hegel."[71] Kierkegaard is so taken by Hegel's analysis that he does not bother to examine other interpretations. He praises Hegel overtly, in particular lauding his grasp of history.[72] In this appendix, Kierkegaard approvingly cites long passages from Hegel's analysis of Socrates in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and speaks of Hegel in a generally deferential tone. At the beginning he takes up his criticism of Hegel's methodology where he left off in the discussion examined previously[73]; since I have treated this issue above,[74] I will not repeat it again here.

After levelling this criticism, Kierkegaard goes on to analyze Hegel's account of Socrates in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and this forms the main subject matter of the appendix. Here Kierkegaard announces that he will concentrate his energies on a single aspect of Hegel's interpretation of Socrates which, to his way of thinking, captures the very heart of Hegel's position. This is the question that Kierkegaard uses as the title of a subsection here, namely, "In What Sense is Socrates the Founder of Morality?"[75] According to Hegel, the revolution in thought effected by Socrates is that the universal good is something which must be recognized by the individual.[76] With this revolution, the terms of morality are shifted from the outer sphere to the inner. Formerly, moral laws had been considered to be a part of the fabric of the universe independent of all individuals. As Antigone says of the laws of the gods, "They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting, / Though where they came from, none of us can tell."[77] Contrary to this conception of natural right, Socrates claims that the conscience of the individual has jurisdiction in moral

---

[71] *CI*, pp. 220-221 / *BI*, p. 264.

[72] *CI*, p. 221 / *BI*, p. 264: "Just as his presentation of the historical usually cannot be charged with wasting time on wrangling about minutiae, so it focuses with prodigious intellectual intensity upon specific, crucial, central battles. Hegel apprehends and comprehends history in its large formations."

[73] *CI*, pp. 166-167 / *BI*, p. 215.

[74] In Section II above.

[75] *CI*, p. 225 / *BI*, p. 269.

[76] *CI*, p. 226 / *BI*, p. 269. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 386 / *VGP* II, p. 44: "Socrates' principle is that man has to find from himself both the end of his actions and the end of the world, and must attain to truth through himself."

[77] Hegel *PhS*, § 437 / *PhG*, p. 333. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 386 / *VGP* II, p. 45.

matters. In this sense Socrates is the founder of a new conception of morality that is still alive today.

Kierkegaard underscores Hegel's claim that Socrates' teaching had no positive content but instead was essentially negative. Thus, the Socratic dialectic or the ελεγχος finds the contradictions in any given argument but is not able to construct an edifice itself, and for this reason many Platonic dialogues end in αποριαι. This negative aspect essentially frees one from the commands of traditional morality and leaves it to the individual to decide what is right.[78] It was Socrates who destroyed the validity of the traditional Greek morality and transferred it to the sphere of the individual. Kierkegaard explains, "In the old Greek culture, the individual was by no means free in this sense but was confined in the substantial ethic; he had not as yet taken himself out of, separated himself from, this immediate relationship, still did not know himself. Socrates brought this about...he brought the individual to this by universalizing subjectivity, and to that extent he is the founder of morality."[79] The conscience was universalized and then came to take the place of the universal, natural law or traditional morality. With Socrates the individual became for the first time the vessel in which moral judgment occurred.

The abstracting of conscience to moral judgments ultimately ignores the actual empirical individual who is filled with inclinations and irrational impulses. For this charge, Kierkegaard cites Hegel's approving reference to Aristotle's famous criticism: "He [Socrates] places all the virtues in judgment (cognition). Hence it comes to pass that he does away with the irrational-feeling part of the soul, that is, inclination and habit."[80] Virtue and morality according to Socrates' conception thus become so abstract as to depart from the sphere of actuality. For moral action to take place at all, there must be not

---

[78] In this context, Kierkegaard appropriately alludes to the "Morality" section of the *Philosophy of Right*. *CI*, pp. 227-228 / *BI*, p. 270: "In his *Philosophie des Rechts* he [sc. Hegel] discusses morality before proceeding to ethics. And under morality he discusses in the section 'Good and Conscience' the moral forms of evil, hypocrisy, probabilism, Jesuitism, the appeal to conscience, irony. Here the moral individual is the negatively free individual. He is free because he is not bound by another, but he is negatively free precisely because he is not limited in another. When the individual by being in his other is in his own, then for the first time he is in truth (i.e. positively) free, affirmatively free. Therefore, moral freedom is arbitrariness; it is the possibility of good and evil." Cf. Hegel *PR*, §§ 129-140, esp. § 140 Remark / *RP*, pp. 204-223.

[79] *CI*, p. 228 / *BI*, pp. 270-271.

[80] *CI*, p. 229 / *BI*, p. 271. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 412 / *VGP* II, p. 77.

merely an abstract moral law but also a determinate empirical moral agent to act on it. There must be two aspects of morality: "the universal and the actualizing individuality, the real spirit."[81] Socrates has in a sense destroyed morality by insisting on the former at the expense of the latter. This view forgets that in order for a moral action actually to take place, it must be performed by an agent in the sensible world with passions and irrational inclinations. According to Hegel's criticism, by its insistence on the purity of abstract moral judgment, Socrates' position effectively eliminates the possibility of actual moral acts in the empirical world.

From this analysis, says Kierkegaard, one can see that there was for Hegel a positive content, albeit an abstract one, in Socrates' teaching. The individual conscience must provide a positive content within itself. It must manifest the universal moral law. As has just been seen, this is, according to Hegel, precisely the defect in Socrates' moral view. Since by nature the universal moral law is abstract, it cannot be determined concretely in the realm of action. Kierkegaard quotes Hegel again: "but the main point with Socrates is his knowledge for the first time reached this abstraction. The good is...the universal....It is a principle, concrete within itself, which, however, is not yet manifested in its concrete development, and in this abstract attitude we find what is wanting in the Socratic standpoint, from which nothing that is affirmative can, beyond this, be adduced."[82] Ultimately, the universal good that Socrates preaches is indeterminate since it remains in the abstract realm of thought and is foreign to the sphere of actuality, the empirical realm of determinate content.[83] It appears that the universal has no positive content, and thus "Socrates had advanced the universal only as the negative."[84] Since the universal has no fixed content, the action of the moral individual reduces to arbitrariness. The individual is left to act according to whim: "Here the subject shows itself to be the deciding factor, as that which arbitrarily determines itself within itself. But the limiting of the universal that takes place thereby is one that the subject himself arbitrarily posits at

---

[81] *CI*, p. 230 / *BI*, p. 272.

[82] *CI*, p. 232 / *BI*, p. 274. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, pp. 406-407 / *VGP* II, pp. 70-71. Translation slightly modified.

[83] *CI*, p. 234 / *BI*, p. 275. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, pp. 417-418 / *VGP* II, p. 83: "The positive, which Socrates sets in the place of what was fixed and has now become vacillating, in order to give a context to the universal, is...obedience to law....it remains in its content undetermined."

[84] *CI*, p. 233 / *BI*, p. 275.

every moment."[85] In the absence of any determinate principle upon which to act, the moral agent has recourse only to his own arbitrary will.

Kierkegaard, by way of conclusion, returns to the theme of irony in order to make clear that the results of Hegel's discussion are in harmony with his thesis about irony. He claims that from Hegel's analysis of Socrates as the founder of morality, one can rightly attribute to Socrates irony in moral matters. "If we wish," Kierkegaard writes, "to include the qualification of irony, which Hegel so frequently stresses, that for irony nothing is a matter of earnestness, then this can also be claimed for the negatively free subject, because even the virtues he practices are not done with earnestness."[86] Since the moral individual has only an abstract moral law as his principle, a law which is indeterminate in the realm of actuality, he cannot be serious about his actual actions being moral. This leads to what Hegel calls "dissemblance" and "duplicity."[87] In other words, the individual cannot really be serious about acting in accordance with a moral law since, according to this view, his actions are always necessarily tainted by irrational desires. Thus, the individual in principle cannot act morally in the mundane sphere where he is forever a slave to irrational passions. This analysis is consistent with Kierkegaard's thesis about irony since the ironic individual is likewise not serious about his or her actions. Kierkegaard is thus happy to find in Hegel an authority which supports his view.

At the end of his analysis, Kierkegaard criticizes the static or finished view of Socrates as presented by Hegel's speculative philosophy. For Kierkegaard, one must essentially understand Socrates and his life not as a static entity but as a process. "The real difficulty with Hegel's view of Socrates," he claims, "is centered in the continual attempt to show how Socrates interpreted the good....The movement in Socrates is toward arriving at the good. His significance in the world development is to arrive there (not to have arrived there at some time)."[88] Socrates plays the role in the world-historical process as the founder of morality, as someone who reached a new conception of the good, and this is the picture of him that the system presents. But this is distorting since Socrates in his own life was always

---

[85] *CI*, p. 234 / *BI*, p. 275.
[86] *CI*, p. 235 / *BI*, p. 276.
[87] Cf. Hegel *PhS*, §§ 616-631 / *PhG*, pp. 471-484.
[88] *CI*, p. 235 / *BI*, p. 276.

in the process of arriving at the good with each new discussion and new interlocutor: "Now, this does not mean that he arrived there almost toward the end of his life, but that his life was a continual arriving at the good and having others arrive at it."[89] Kierkegaard emphasizes Socrates' role as a teacher who helped individuals move from the realm of actuality to that of abstract morality. He thus did not stop once he reached abstract morality himself; instead, he returned again and again to help others to reach it. "But in order to be able to hold him fast at this point, in order never to forget that the content of his life was to make this movement at every moment," Kierkegaard writes, "we must recollect his significance as a divine missionary. Although Socrates himself places much weight on his divine mission, Hegel has ignored this."[90] This completes Kierkegaard's account of Hegel's interpretation.

Aside from the final point of criticism, Kierkegaard's account in this section relies entirely on Hegel. Indeed, at the beginning of his discussion he indicates that his view amounts to a mere modification of Hegel's.[91] In his criticism, Kierkegaard emphasizes one aspect of Hegel's which he does not agree with, and precisely there they part company, but up until that point they have actually traversed a lot of ground together. Moreover, Kierkegaard seems to acknowledge that these attempts to distance his view from Hegel's position, are ultimately unsuccessful since they are in many ways question-begging: he indicates that his procedure is different from Hegel's but that Hegel's might well still be the true and correct one for scholarship and science.[92] Given that the goal of science is to formulate systems and universal laws, it cannot after all be concerned with individuals. Thus, at this point in the authorship, Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel's philosophical methodology is still in its initial phases and will not be worked out in detail until somewhat later.

---

[89] *CI*, p. 235 / *BI*, p. 276. Translation slightly modified.

[90] *CI*, p. 236 / *BI*, p. 277. A variant of this criticism appears later in the *Postscript*, where Socrates is used as the exemplar of the subjective thinker who is always in the process of becoming in contrast to the speculative philosopher who is pure being. See *CUP1*, pp. 92-93 / *AE*, p. 73.

[91] *CI*, p. 225 / *BI*, p. 268: "However, when I consider the Hegelian account in its totality and consider it in relation to *the modification I have advanced*, I believe that it all can best be dealt with under one rubric: In what sense is Socrates the founder of morality?" (My italics.)

[92] *CI*, pp. 166-167 / *BI*, p. 215. (Cited above.)

V. Hegel's Account of Irony and the Ironic Subject

Kierkegaard announces at the beginning of Part Two that he will now leave his historical account of Socrates and take up an analysis of the concept of irony itself.[93] Of particular interest here is the Chapter, "The World-Historical Validity of Irony, the Irony of Socrates," in which he once again draws heavily on Hegel.[94] In his Introduction to Part Two here he briefly touches on the contributions to the understanding of the concept made by Friedrich von Schlegel, Tieck, Solger and Jean Paul, and once again declares that it is Hegel's work on the issue which he finds the most impressive,[95] saying, "Finally, here irony also met its master in Hegel."[96] Kierkegaard's assessment seems to be that Hegel's understanding of the concept of irony is insightful, if somewhat incomplete.[97] He explains,

> At the point in all his systems where we could expect to find a development of irony, we find it referred to. Although, if it all were copied, we would have to concede that what is said about irony is in one sense not so inconsiderable, in another sense it is not much, since he says just about the same thing on every point....Yet I am far from being able to lament justifiably over Hegel as Hegel laments over his predecessors. There are excellent observations especially in his review of Solger's posthumous writings...even if the presentation and characterization of negative positions...are not always as exhaustive, as rich in content, as we could wish.[98]

Moreover, Kierkegaard claims that Hegel's polemic against the Schlegels, the German champions of irony, clouded his view of the

---

[93] For an excellent treatment of this section see Ernst Behler "Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* with Constant Reference to Romanticism" in *Kierkegaard Revisited, Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 1., ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997, pp. 13-33.

[94] *CI*, pp. 259-271 / *BI*, pp. 297-308.

[95] Cf. *CI*, p. 244 / *BI*, p. 284. Kierkegaard here indicates the nature of Hegel's importance on this issue with relation to his predecessors: "While the Schlegels and Tieck had their major importance in the polemic with which they destroyed a previous development, and while precisely for this reason their position became somewhat scattered, because it was not a principal battle they won but a multitude of skirmishes, Hegel, on the other hand, has absolute importance by defeating with his positive total view the polemic prudery."

[96] *CI*, p. 242 / *BI*, p. 282. In this context he alludes to the treatment of irony in Hegel's review of Solger and in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* (*CI*, p. 244 / *BI*, p. 284).

[97] Cf. also *CI*, pp. 261-262 / *BI*, p. 299: "In my opinion, the significance of this formation has not received sufficient attention hitherto – all the more strange, since Hegel has treated the negative with such decided partiality. But the negative in the system corresponds to irony in the historical actuality. In the historical actuality the negative exists, which is never the case in the system."

[98] *CI*, p. 244 / *BI*, pp. 283-284.

concept. Thus, while Kierkegaard applauds Hegel's criticism of the Schlegels, he claims that it nonetheless led him to a one-sided reading.[99]

Kierkegaard begins his analysis here with an account of the historical process in Hegelian terms.[100] According to this view, history moves by virtue of contradictory concepts in the worldviews of historical peoples at any given time: "a contradiction appears, by means of which the world process takes place. The given actuality at a certain time is the actuality valid for the generation and the individuals in that generation, and yet, if there is a reluctance to say that the process is over, this actuality must be displaced by another actuality."[101] When a notion (*Begriff*) is no longer viable and its contradictions become apparent, it must be replaced by another. In this way history passes through different forms during the course of time. But the past, however contradictory it may be, is never wholly discarded: "Here we see how intrinsically consistent the world process is, for as the more true actuality presses onward, it nevertheless itself esteems the past; it is not a revolution but an evolution."[102] The historical process is not one of pure negation or of a replacement change of one period with another; rather, it is an *Aufhebung* which preserves each historical period whose time has expired and raises it up into a new form.

Kierkegaard now goes on to interpret the world-historical individual, a concept borrowed from Hegel, as the ironic subject. According to Kierkegaard, the ironic subject is one who stands in a negative relation to the entire actuality of his time and plays a role in the march of world history:

> Inasmuch as the new [sc. age] must forge ahead, here we meet the prophetic individual who spies the new in the distance, in dim and undefined contours. The prophetic individual does not possess the future – he has only a presentiment of it....He battles

---

[99] Cf. *CI*, p. 265 / *BI*, p. 303: "But the fact that Hegel became irritated with the form of irony closest to him naturally impaired his interpretation of the concept....In no way does this mean that Hegel was not right about the Schlegels and that the Schlegelian irony was not on a very dubious wrong road. All that it says is that Hegel has surely conferred a great benefit through the earnestness with which he takes a stand against any isolation, an earnestness that makes it possible to read much that he has written with much invigoration and considerable edification. But on the other hand, it must be said that by his one-sided attack on the post-Fichtean irony he has overlooked the truth of irony, and by his identifying all irony with this, he has done irony an injustice."

[100] *CI*, p. 259 / *BI*, p. 297.

[101] *CI*, p. 260 / *BI*, pp. 297-298.

[102] *CI*, p. 260 / *BI*, p. 298.

for the new and strives to destroy what for him is a vanishing actuality, but his task is still not so much to destroy as to advance the new and thereby destroy the past indirectly. But the old must be superseded; the old must be perceived in all its imperfection. Here we meet the ironic subject. For the ironic subject, the given actuality has lost its validity entirely.[103]

The ironic subject is thus one who helps instigate changes in history by bringing to the fore the contradictions present in the worldview of his age. This is how Kierkegaard understands the figure of Socrates. He summarizes his previous account of Socratic irony by saying "the whole of existence has become alien to the ironic subject and the ironic subject in turn alien to existence, that as actuality has lost its validity for the ironic subject, he himself has to a certain degree become unactual."[104] The ironic individual is out of sync with his world-historical period. The ironic stance is an expression of this, for it represents a general negation of everything in a given age. This is the meaning of Kierkegaard's characterization or irony "as the infinite absolute negativity."[105]

Given this stance, the ironic subject in a sense stands aloof and does not interfere, allowing the internal contraction within the worldview to work itself out. Like Hegel, Kierkegaard emphasizes the internal negation of the notion that irony effects. He cites Hegel to support his claim that the ironic subject can destroy the principle of the world-historical period in which he lives by finding its contradiction and allowing it to dissolve itself immanently instead of importing a criticism from outside.[106] Kierkegaard once again refers to Socrates and places his irony in the historical context:

For him, the whole given actuality had entirely lost its validity; he had become alien to the actuality of the whole substantial world. This is one side of irony, but on the other hand he used irony as he destroyed Greek culture. His conduct toward it was at all

---

[103] *CI,* pp. 260-261 / *BI,* p. 298.

[104] *CI,* p. 259 / *BI,* p. 297.

[105] *CI,* p. 261 / *BI,* p. 299. Cf. *CI,* p. 261 / *BI,* p. 299: "It is negativity because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not." The ironic subject is infinite since he negates everything and not just some particular thing. Cf. Lee M. Capel "Historical Introduction" in his translation of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony,* London: Collins 1966, p. 32.9.

[106] *CI,* pp. 262-263 / *BI,* p. 300: "Precisely because every particular historical actuality is continually but an element in the actualization of the Idea, it carries within itself the seeds of its own downfall." After citing Hegel, Kierkegaard writes, "and in this the world of irony is very accurately interpreted"(*CI,* p. 262 / *BI,* p. 300).

times ironic; he was ignorant and knew nothing but was continually seeking information from others; yet as he let the existing go on existing, it foundered.[107]

This is, for Hegel, "the universal irony of the world."[108] Socrates' ironic stance allowed the contradictions in traditional Greek morality to become apparent without actively evoking them. Socrates merely asked questions and then observed how the proponents of traditional morality fell into confusion and contradiction in their attempts to answer them. Thus, the seed for the destruction of Greek ethical life was planted, and, once planted, required no further cultivation on the part of Socrates.

Kierkegaard then associates irony with subjectivity. The world-historical individual must be self-consciously aware of his negative assessment of the actual and his own negative stance towards it: "But if irony is a qualification of subjectivity, then it must manifest itself the first time subjectivity makes its appearance in world history. Irony is, namely, the first and most abstract qualification of subjectivity. This points to the historical turning point where subjectivity made its appearance for the first time, and with this we have come to Socrates."[109] This is, of course, precisely Hegel's claim, namely that Socrates represents the principle of subjectivity or subjective freedom in contrast to traditional morality. Thus concludes Kierkegaard's own, highly Hegelian view of the historical Socrates which he now somewhat paradoxically contrasts with that of Hegel.[110]

He cites Hegel who claims that Socratic irony consisted in making the abstract concrete. This, of course, refers to the Socratic method of cross-examination, a part of which seeks individual examples which are meant to illustrate some general point. Hegel says,

If I say I know what reason is, what belief is, these are only but quite abstract ideas; it is necessary, in order to become concrete, that they should be explained, and that it should be understood that what they really are, is unknown. The irony of Socrates has this great quality of showing how to make abstract ideas concrete and effect their development, for on that alone depends the bringing of the notion into consciousness.[111]

---

[107] *CI*, p. 264 / *BI*, p. 302.

[108] *CI*, p. 262 / *BI*, p. 300. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 400 / *VGP* II, p. 62.

[109] *CI*, p. 264 / *BI*, p. 302.

[110] *CI*, pp. 264-265 / *BI*, p. 302: "Since Hegel declares himself against viewing Socrates' position as irony, it becomes necessary to look at the objections found here and there in his books."

[111] *CI*, p. 267 / *BI*, p. 304. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, p. 400 / *VGP* II, p. 62.

By claiming not to know or to understand anything, Socrates obliged his interlocutors to try to explain their views more precisely. This invariably involved trying to illustrate general rules or definitions, which the interlocutors thought were clear, with concrete examples. Socrates then went to work showing the contradictions involved in the individual examples given and how they did not fit the general definition. "But this confuses everything," Kierkegaard complains, "the description of Socratic irony completely loses its historical weight, and the passage quoted is so modern that it hardly reminds us of Socrates. To be specific, Socrates' understanding was by no means one of making the abstract concrete, and the examples cited are certainly very poorly chosen."[112] Kierkegaard objects since this would seem to attribute to Socrates some positivity, namely, the concrete.[113] Here as before the purported criticism seems to be best characterized as a modification based on a larger context of shared views and not as a complete or utter rejection of Hegel's analysis.

Kierkegaard finally comes to answer the question raised by this chapter. He claims that Socrates is "world-historically justified"[114] insofar as he, *qua* world-historical individual, brought traditional Greek morality to an end and thus caused history to move beyond this stage of immediacy. Here Kierkegaard does not add anything new to what he has already discussed above regarding the general role of Socrates as a world-historical individual in the development of Greek culture. Like the other discussions, this one follows Hegel's analysis very closely.[115] For all of his criticisms of Hegel here, Kierkegaard seems to admit that in the final analysis there is not much disagreement. He is careful to point out once again that his conclusions are consistent with Hegel's: "I believe, therefore, that everyone will agree with me that there is nothing in these Hegelian observations to preclude the assumption that Socrates' position was irony."[116] Thus, Kierkegaard seems to find his position compatible with Hegel's when all is said and done.

---

[112] *CI*, p. 267 / *BI*, p. 304.

[113] *CI*, p. 267 / *BI*, p. 304. He claims that (1) this positivity may be a fair characterization of Plato but not Socrates and (2) Socrates' whole life was a movement in the opposite direction, namely, from the concrete to the abstract.

[114] *CI*, p. 271 / *BI*, p. 308.

[115] Cf. Hegel *Hist. of Phil.* I, pp. 384-406 / *VGP* II, pp. 42-70.

[116] *CI*, p. 270 / *BI*, p. 307.

At the beginning of the article I explored the argument that the structure of Part One of the *The Concept of Irony* might have been intended to have a Hegelian look about it in that it follows the categories of possibility, actuality and necessity. Now it is clear that the content of the work is more Hegelian than this structure. One might argue that there is a Hegelian structure here but not that of a categorial movement of possibility, actuality, necessity; instead, one can see *The Concept of Irony* as a sort of commentary on a part of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. When one looks at Hegel's table of contents for the relevant section, one can map Kierkegaard's analyses here in the dissertation onto it in a fairly straightforward manner. This can be represented as follows:

Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*	**Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony***
A. The Sophists	Part One: "The View Made Necessary"
B. Socrates	
1. The Socratic Method	Part Two: "The World-Historical Validity of Socrates"
a. Irony	"
b. Midwifery	"
c. *Aporeia*	"
2. The Principle of the Good	Appendix: "Hegel's View of Socrates"
a. The Principle of Subjective Freedom	"
b. The Two Aspects of the Universal	"
a. The Positive Side	"
b. The Negative Side	"
c. The Daimon	Part One: "The Actualization of the View"
3. Socrates' Fate	"
a. The Charges	"
a. Socrates Introduced New Gods	"
b. Socrates Led the Youth Astray	"
b. The Proposal of an Alternative Penalty	"
c. The Aftermath	"
C. The Philosophy of the Socratics	Part One: "The View Made Necessary"
1. The Megarics	"
2. The Cyrenaic School	"
3. The Cynic School	"

Given the similarities between the two texts, it seems that Kierkegaard largely structured *The Concept of Irony* in accordance with this part of Hegel's lectures. It is striking to see just how much of *The Concept of Irony* is indebted to Hegel. The long quotations of Hegel's texts here also suggest that Kierkegaard is not yet wholly the master of the subject matter. At times lengthy passages are cited with little or no explanation or discussion, and often Kierkegaard allows the quotations from Hegel's texts to carry the analysis for him.

In addition to following the organization of Hegel's discussion here, Kierkegaard, in virtually every discussion after the first chapter,

also draws heavily on the content of Hegel's individual analyses and largely accepts Hegel's views on the key issues. Indeed, Kierkegaard makes it a point at the end of each section to say that his view is consistent with Hegel's. He accepts, for example, Hegel's view of Socrates as a world-historical figure and as a destructive force in Greek ethical life, Hegel's characterization of Socrates' irony as infinitely negative and his criticism of the German romantics. He also has a rather Hegelian conception of the movement and development of history. Finally, the very thesis of the work, that irony is a negative concept, is essentially a Hegelian notion which Kierkegaard appeals to many times for support.

Not only does Kierkegaard draw heavily on the structure and content of Hegel's thought in *The Concept of Irony*, but he also in many passages makes use of clearly Hegelian language. He speaks of "world history," of "the unfolding of the idea," of the "phenomenological," of "being-in-and-for-itself," "the world-historical," "world spirit," etc. Thus, as both this work and *From the Papers of One Still Living* attest, Hegel's philosophical language seems to have been perceived by Kierkegaard as a legitimate tool for expressing his ideas. This is of particular interest since even during this early period he is critical of the use of philosophical jargon as is evinced by *The Battle Between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars.*

Here in *The Concept of Irony*, Hegel is used sometimes as a tool, sometimes as a commentator and sometimes as a participant in a discussion. Although Hegel's thought does not set the agenda for the study as a whole, he is clearly the most important interlocutor who at times comes to dominate the discussion. Sometimes Kierkegaard cites him, seeking support for some view in his authority or makes use of his analyses as a focal point for some discussion. By virtue of the vast number of references to Hegel that run throughout *The Concept of Irony* as well as the very form of the work, there can be no doubt that Hegel plays an important and indeed positive role in this text.