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# Kierkegaard's Recurring Criticism of Hegel's 'The Good and Conscience'

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Kierkegaard was, at least during his early years, an avid reader of Hegel's philosophy. For example, his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, constitutes a careful study of, among other things, Hegel's account of Socrates in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and of Hegel's discussion of Romantic irony in both the *Lectures on Aesthetics* and the book review of Solger's *Posthumous Writings*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in connection with the analysis of *Antigone* in *Either/Or* and the discussion of universals and particulars in the unfinished *Johannes Climacus* or *De Omnibus dubitandum est*, Part Two, there is clear evidence that Kierkegaard consulted the relevant parts of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Based on these examples, Kierkegaard's use of Hegel can almost always be characterised as *ad hoc*. He goes directly to specific passages or discussions in Hegel's texts, which are of special interest in connection with works that he himself is writing. Thus, when working on *The Concept of Irony*, the first part of which is concerned with Socratic irony, Kierkegaard goes specifically to the section in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that treats Socrates, without feeling any obligation to read the book from cover to cover.

One special case of Kierkegaard's use of Hegel's primary texts concerns his references to 'The Good and Conscience' section from the 'Morality' chapter of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Kierkegaard refers specifically to this section several times throughout his authorship. He quotes from it with apparent approbation in *The Concept of Irony* (CI: 227-8; SKS 1: 270). It is mentioned in a rather enigmatic manner at the beginning of the first 'Problem' in *Fear and Trembling* (FT: 54; SKS 4: 148-9).<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard also alludes to it, albeit not by name, in the *Journal* NB2 (JP 2: 1613; SKS 20: 207, NB2: 166). Finally, it is referred to in a polemical fashion in *Practice in Christianity* (PC: 87; SV1 12: 83). The question that I wish to address is what it was about this section that was so important for him. Why did he continue to refer to it throughout his authorship? What *ad hoc* purpose do these references serve in the different contexts? I wish to show that these references, since they span so much of the Kierkegaardian authorship, are instructive in understanding Kierkegaard's changing relation to Hegel. Moreover, they highlight the differences in their respective positions. In order to treat this issue, we must first have a look at what Hegel is doing in the section in question. Then we can attempt to compare it with Kierkegaard's analyses and agenda.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Hegel's View of Individualism and Subjectivism in History

'The Good and Conscience' is probably best known for Hegel's critique of different forms of individualism, subjectivism and relativism, which he often tends to associate with contemporary forms of Romanticism. Hegel has a sweeping story to tell about the development of human history. It will be worthwhile to dwell a moment on this story before turning to the *Philosophy of Right* in order to gain some appreciation for his understanding of the role of the rise of individualism or subjectivism in the grand scheme of things.

The locus of truth can be regarded as something outward or something inward. In other words, according to one view, truth is some fact of the matter out there in the world; it is true in itself and wholly indifferent to one's perception, understanding or opinion of it. According to the opposite view, the truths of the external world are only illusory, and the real truth is to be found in the human heart or mind of the individual. Truth is not some universal out there in the world but a particular bound up with a specific human being. Taken on their own, these are simply two logical possibilities about the origin of truth, which more or less correspond to our intuitions about truth in different areas. Most of us probably incline towards the former view in matters of science, and towards the latter view in matters of art, ethics or perhaps religion. In any case, it is probably fair to say that for most of us our intuitions are in some way divided here.

For Hegel, these two logical possibilities correspond to two main periods in the development of world history. According to his account, traditional societies and cultures are characterised by the view that truth dwells in the outward sphere, i.e., in their customs, laws, religion, etc. His model for this is the ancient Greek world. The Greeks, for Hegel, lived in harmony with their public customs and religion. Truth was an objective, seemingly verifiable fact that could be found in their practices, ceremonies and traditions every day of their lives. These practices had divine sanction and were, in the minds of the people, completely continuous with the natural world. Given that they were regarded as objective facts, the possibility was never seriously entertained that these things might be contingent or arbitrary. One went to war or got married because such things were sanctioned by the gods. In this context, Hegel quotes from Sophocles' tragedy, *Antigone*, where the tragic heroine 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' (*PhS*: 261; *Jub*. 2: 333). Thus, while we nowadays tend to think of laws or customs as merely arbitrary conventions, for the Greeks these were, so to speak, fixed natural laws. They were simply facts about the universe, and the personal opinion of individuals played no role in this whatsoever.

According to Hegel, Socrates was one of the first people to call into question this order of things. He demanded that the customs and traditions of ancient Athens be justified by means of discursive reason, and refused to grant his assent before this

justification was given. He went around Athens asking people to defend their beliefs and ground their views, leading them to despair when they could not do so consistently. Most troubling for the Athenians was that Socrates seemed to posit a new criterion for truth by appealing to his well-known '*daimon*,' the voice in his head that warned him against doing certain things. In the Greek world, this was particularly offensive due to the fact that there was a very ancient practice of consulting public oracles when important decisions had to be made. In this way, politicians and generals could assure themselves that their decisions were in harmony with the will of the gods and the natural order. With Socrates this was entirely inverted: he claimed to be in contact with a god directly and privately. The locus of the divine was not a public sanctuary or temple but the inner recesses of the mind of a single man. Thus, the content of the divine message could not be publicly accessed or scrutinised. When Socrates appealed to his *daimon* to justify his actions, which were perceived as contrary to accepted custom and practice, he was effectively saying that his personal views were higher than the time-honoured customs and traditions of the state; his personal deity had more authority than the gods of Athens. One of the charges leveled against him was precisely that he worshiped gods different from those accepted by the state.

For Hegel, Socrates set into motion a long historical process whereby the locus of truth gradually shifted from the objective sphere to the subjective one.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the characteristic of the modern world is the principle of subjective freedom. We moderns no longer believe truth to lie in external customs, traditions, laws, etc. Rather, we tend to regard these merely as the arbitrary constructs of limited minds, created for specific purposes at specific points in time. On the contrary, the true modern locus for truth is the individual human spirit. This is what is considered infinite and divine. The modern goal is thus often conceived of as liberating oneself from the shackles of custom and tradition in order to discover the truth which lies within oneself.

Hegel places the Romantic movement and its different versions of subjectivism in this context. He takes it to be a typical example of modern thinking with its emphasis on the individual and its rejection of traditional customs and values. The story of modern philosophy begins not with the world, but with the subject. He analyses Descartes' famous *cogito* argument in terms of this shift. Similarly, this principle was developed in more detail by Kant with his famous 'Copernican turn' in philosophy, according to which our representations are no longer thought to conform to preexisting objects in the outside world but instead those objects must necessarily conform to the representations produced by the categories of the human mind. This principle was made even more extreme by Fichte with his theory of the self-positing ego, which, like Descartes' *cogito*, begins with the human subject and deduces the world from that point of departure. According to Hegel, the Romantics follow in this tradition. Specifically, they take Fichte's epistemological principle of the self-positing ego and turn it into a principle of ethics and action. They take Fichte's theory as giving them license to reject all customs, traditions and laws that do not suit them. They believe that they can construct or create their own

world out of their subjectivity, and that the world as they find it has no validity whatsoever. Thus, an abstract epistemological point becomes a principle of praxis and life in the hands of the Romantics.<sup>5</sup>

Hegel's own view is that what is needed is a reconciliation of these two historical positions. It is neither desirable nor possible to return to the ancient world and live in immediate harmony with custom and tradition. The price of such a harmony is the repression of the individual and of human freedom. We need critical reflection about our customs and traditions. However, there is something praiseworthy and desirable in this view in the fact that there is a substantive truth in the public sphere which is recognised by everyone. This is what we should attempt to preserve. The problem with the modern world is the potential for a dangerous relativism, where everyone has their own private truth and there is no consensus about right and wrong. This leads to a sense of alienation from the other and from the social sphere as a whole. However, the positive aspect of this modern view is that it emancipates the human mind by affording it the right to judge for itself what it takes to be right and wrong. It is wholly correct that one should be critical and reflective about the world we inherit from the past. As Hegel writes, 'the *right of the subjective will* is that whatever it is to recognise as valid should be perceived by it as good' (PR, § 132; *Jub.* 7: 189). This was not a right in the ancient world. What one personally thought about the pronouncements of the god through the oracles was a matter of complete indifference. One's private opinions played no role when the truth was considered to dwell in the external sphere. The right of the subjective will, Hegel continues, is 'that it should be held responsible for an action ... as right or wrong, good or evil, legal or illegal, according to its cognizance of the value which that action has in this objectivity' (PR, § 132; *Jub.* 7: 189). Similarly, this was not recognised as a right in the ancient world. Oedipus was regarded as guilty and subsequently punished by the gods for murdering his father and marrying his mother, even though he was wholly unaware of what he was doing when he committed these acts. Likewise, the Greeks would put horses and donkeys on trial, which presumably were unaware of their criminal actions. In the Greek world, no subjective moment is recognised as valid. A thing is true or valid in itself, or an action is right or wrong in itself, and one's knowledge of it is irrelevant.

Thus, for Hegel, the goal is to unify these two views: to create a public order that is generally recognised as true and rational, but at the same time to allow individuals the opportunity to grant their assent by means of their own critical evaluation of the concrete customs and traditions. In short, truth is both in the outside world and in the inwardness of the individual simultaneously; it exists in the customs and traditions in the public sphere, but these must be recognised as rational by each individual. This is Hegel's formula for overcoming the repression of the ancient world and the alienation of the modern one. He formulates this concisely by saying that the 'right of the subjective will' to recognise the good must coexist harmoniously with 'the right of objectivity,' i.e., the right of the validity and truth of the external world. Hegel explains that, 'since action is an alteration which must exist in an actual world and thus seeks recognition in it, it must in

general conform to what is recognised as valid in that world' (PR, § 132; *Jub.* 7: 190). This will prove to be a key point for the dialogue with Kierkegaard that we wish to reconstruct.

## II. The Criticism of Romantic Individualism in 'The Good and Conscience'

The three main sections of the *Philosophy of Right* — 'Abstract Right', 'Morality' and 'Ethical Life' — systematically treat increasingly complex social forms, beginning with an account of the isolated individual, then progressing to an account of individuals in interaction with others in the social sphere and the state, and finally culminating in an account of the interaction of nations with one another in history. The section at issue, 'The Good and Conscience,' is the third and final subsection of the middle chapter, 'Morality.'

Hegel famously distinguishes 'morality' [*Moralität*] from 'ethical life' [*Sittlichkeit*].<sup>6</sup> The latter represents the broad sphere of custom, tradition, habit, religious belief, legal practice and handed-down ethical notions, all of which constitute the fabric of every society.<sup>7</sup> It is, of course, this sphere which is ultimately of most interest to Hegel since it contains its own inherent rationality, which the philosophical eye can discern. Only when this rationality is unpacked can one begin to see the logos in existence. By contrast, morality is characterised by Hegel as an abstract approach that focuses on the individual. Morality goes to work to formulate abstract laws of conduct as if they had to be created *ex nihilo*. It thus ignores the fact that we live in families and societies and always already have a deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong from these sources.<sup>8</sup>

Morality tends to regard the individual in isolation from his or her social environment and context, in abstraction from the surrounding culture and society. It unknowingly abstracts from the lived ethics that is already given in the real world. It is natural for Hegel to analyse morality before ethical life given the structure of the work, which treats its subject matter in increasing levels of complexity and sophistication. Thus, he begins in the introduction with a theory of action, which concerns only a single abstract individual; then in 'Abstract Right' he treats the interactions of single individuals in abstraction from any wider social framework. All of these accounts presuppose the full human being in relation to the family, the state and the social order, which are all treated in the section 'Ethical Life.'

This is the context of Hegel's analysis of different forms of subjectivism in 'The Good and Conscience.' These forms have their justification in their role in the development of the concept of right, which includes a recognition of the rights of the individual. However, these forms are, on their own, finite and erroneous when taken as something absolute. The danger that Hegel is keen to point out is the tendency to absolutise the individual will and place it in opposition to the universal, i.e., to the sphere of *Sittlichkeit*.

In this section, Hegel defines thus the notion of conscience: 'Subjectivity, in its universality reflected into itself, is the absolute inward certainty of itself; it is that which posits particularity, and it is the determining and decisive factor —*the conscience*' (PR, § 136; *Jub.* 7: 195). The conscience is regarded as something absolute or, as Hegel puts it, 'absolute inward certainty.' Given its absolute nature, conscience risks coming into conflict with accepted custom, civil law, religion, etc., which also make absolute claims. Another key feature of conscience is that it is regarded as belonging to a specific individual. It is private and accessible only to the individual just like the contents of one's own mind. Hegel writes that conscience is 'infinite formal certainty of itself, which for this very reason is at the same time the certainty of *this* subject' (PR, § 137; *Jub.* 7: 196).

As has been noted, the truth of ethics is to be found in the social sphere of rational institutions, laws, duties, mores, etc. of a people. These are by their very nature universal, making a claim on every individual. To act ethically means to act in accordance with the universal. Hegel points out that the locus of moral action in the will is the rational element which recognises this universal. He explains: 'What constitutes right and duty, as the rationality in and for itself of the will's determinations, is essentially neither the *particular* property of an individual, nor is its *form* that of feeling or any other individual ... kind of knowledge, but essentially that of universal determination of thought, i.e. the form of *laws* and *principles*' (PR, § 137; *Jub.* 7: 197). Hegel is thus quick to deny that any feeling, humor or whim could serve as a lasting basis for ethical action. It is the rational element alone that can guarantee that the individual acts in accordance with the universal.

Given that ethical action is by its very nature universal, a potential conflict arises with the moral conscience, which is, as noted, by its very nature particular. Hegel explains this as follows:

The conscience is therefore subject to judgment as to its *truth* and falsity, and its appeal solely *to itself* is directly opposed to what it seeks to be — that is, the rule for a rational and universal mode of action which is valid in and for itself ... The ambiguity associated with conscience therefore consists in the fact that conscience is assumed in advance to signify the identity of subjective knowledge and volition with the true good, and is thus declared and acknowledged to be sacrosanct, while it also claims, as the purely subjective reflection of self-consciousness into itself, the authority which belongs only to that identity itself by virtue of its rational content which is valid in and for itself. (PR, § 137; *Jub.* 7: 197f)

Hegel rebukes what he takes to be an uncritical and prejudiced valorisation of the moral conscience as sacred and thus infallible. On the contrary, it is, he claims, able to be either true or false, and when it is false, it can and should be criticised. In short, the conscience is true when it conforms to the universal, and false when it deviates from it. The

conscience is irrational and potentially dangerous when it wills something contrary to the universal, or when it defies some specific aspect of the ethical life of a people.

Hegel then arrives at his definition of evil. This involves setting up the individual will in defiance of the universal sphere of ethics. Hegel explains that, 'where all previously valid determinations have vanished and the will is in a state of pure inwardness, the self-consciousness is capable of making into its principle either *the universal in and for itself*, or the *arbitrariness of its own particularity*, giving the latter precedence over the universal and realising it through its action — i.e. it is capable of being *evil*' (PR, § 139; *Jub.* 7: 200). Evil is then the absolutising of the individual will in contradiction to the universal. It involves acting in accordance with subjective impulses and drives rather than with universally accepted principles and laws.

Hegel notes the state's necessary rejection of such subjective acts of conscience which are not in harmony with the universal: 'The state cannot recognise the conscience in its distinctive form, i.e. as *subjective knowledge*, any more than science can grant any validity to subjective *opinion*, *assertion*, and the *appeal* to a subjective opinion' (PR, § 137; *Jub.* 7: 197). It would be folly to accord the subjective will as such any truth value based solely on its own authority and independent of its actual content. It cannot be allowed free reign since this would lead to complete anarchy and the destruction of the state. In his analysis of the conflict between Socrates and the Athenian state, Hegel remarks that the state was perfectly right to condemn Socrates for just this reason.<sup>9</sup>

It should, however, be noted that Hegel is willing to allow for the subjective will's contradiction of the universal within certain limits. Later in the text, he gives the example of exempting from mandatory military service people who have moral or religious objections to it.<sup>10</sup> His argument here seems to be that such deviations from the universal can be allowed to the extent that the state is well developed and not threatened by them.

### III. Socrates and Subjective Freedom: The Concept of Irony

Kierkegaard's first reference to 'The Good and Conscience' comes in the appendix to the first part of *The Concept of Irony*, entitled 'Hegel's View of Socrates.' In much of his analysis of Socratic irony, which constitutes the main object of investigation in this first part, Kierkegaard relies heavily on Hegel's accounts in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. He also brings in the *Philosophy of Right* in order to understand the significance of the figure of Socrates. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, one reads:

[I]t was in *Socrates*, that at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the principle of subjectivity — of the absolute inherent independence of thought — attained free expression. He taught that man has to discover and recognise in himself what is the right and good, and that this right and good is in its nature universal. Socrates is celebrated as a teacher of



morality, but we should rather call him the *inventor of morality*. (*Phil. of Hist.* 269; *Jub.* 11: 350 [Hegel 1840: 328])

As was discussed above, Socrates introduced the notion that the individual had the right to determine what was right and wrong, in contrast to the traditional view that this was something already established in the public sphere where the individual's view of the matter was irrelevant. Socrates invents 'morality' in the sense of subjective freedom, i.e., the recognition of the individual as the locus of moral truth.

In order to explain what Hegel means by this claim, Kierkegaard presents to his reader the aforementioned Hegelian distinction between '*Moralität*' and '*Sittlichkeit*,' and quotes from 'The Good and Conscience':

[Hegel] distinguishes between morality [*Moralitet*] and ethical life [*Sædelighed*]. But ethics is in part unreflected ethics such as ancient Greek ethics, and in part a higher determination of it such as manifests itself again after having recollected itself in morality. For this reason, in his *Philosophie des Rechts* he discusses morality before proceeding to ethics. And under morality he discusses in the section, 'The Good and Conscience,' the moral forms of evil: hypocrisy, probabilism, Jesuitism, the appeal to the conscience and 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. Hegel himself says this in *Philosophie des Rechts* (p. 184): 'Conscience, as formal subjectivity, consists simply in the possibility of turning at any moment to *evil*.' (*CI*: 227-8; *SKS* 1: 270)

Here with the reference to 'the moral forms of evil, hypocrisy, probabilism, Jesuitism,' etc., Kierkegaard refers to the typology of forms of subjectivism that Hegel sets up in § 140 of the *Philosophy of Right*. His explanation of Hegel's criticism of the forms of subjectivism is quite accurate and apparently uncritical. Here the young Kierkegaard seems wholly to agree with Hegel. This is confirmed in the second part of *The Concept of Irony*, where Kierkegaard, in his account of the forms of modern irony, comes to second many of Hegel's criticisms of the Romantics.

The passage that Kierkegaard quotes is from § 139 of the *Philosophy of Right* and immediately follows Hegel's definition of evil cited above. The complete passage reads as follows: 'Conscience, as formal subjectivity, consists simply in the possibility of turning at any moment to *evil*; for both morality and evil have their common root in that self-certainty which has being for itself and knows and resolves for itself' (*PR*, § 139; *Jub.* 7:

200). Given that there are two logical possibilities regarding the will — it can will either the universal or the particular — there is always necessarily the possibility of the latter. Evil is thus not an arbitrary force that by some unfortunate event was allowed to sneak into the world; on the contrary, it is a necessary part of the very structure of the free will. The dialectical nature of this concept is captured in an addition to this paragraph:

Good and evil are inseparable, and their inseparability derives from the fact that the concept becomes its own object and, as object, immediately embodies the determination of difference. The evil will wills something opposed to the universality of the will, whereas the good will acts in accordance with its true concept ... Thus, evil as well as good has its origin in the will, and the will in its concept is both good and evil. (PR, § 139, Addition: 168f; *Jub.* 7: 202)

In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard seems both to understand and accept this conception of the will and the nature of evil. He goes on to give a profoundly Hegelian account of how Greek culture prior to Socrates was lacking this principle of subjective freedom. Thus, at this early stage in his literary career, Kierkegaard seems quite positively disposed towards Hegel's analysis and criticism in 'The Good and Conscience,' which he makes use of both in his account of Socrates and in his reflection on the forms of Romantic irony later in the book.

#### IV. Kierkegaard's Abraham and the Moral Conscience: Fear and Trembling

In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard has his pseudonymous writer, Johannes de silentio, present a series of three 'Problemata' which treat different dimensions of the Abraham/Isaac story. At the beginning of each of these three sections, he sets up the issue to be explored and contrasts it explicitly with some aspect of Hegel's philosophy. These three parallel passages seem to serve both a didactical and a polemical purpose. They help to clarify Johannes de silentio's own position by way of contrast, and are intended to demonstrate the shortcomings of specific aspects of Hegel's thought.

The reason for the reference to 'The Good and Conscience' in the first Problema should already be more or less clear. Kierkegaard's Abraham is a model for the absolute right of the moral conscience. By heeding the divine command to sacrifice his son, Abraham must 'suspend' the universal ethics of his society. Acting in accordance with the particular, Abraham defies the universal laws which state that parents should take care of their children or that one should not kill others. Kierkegaard thus wants to juxtapose his Abraham to Hegel's account of the role and rights of the individual vis-à-vis the *Sittlichkeit* of a people.<sup>11</sup>

The first Problema addresses the question 'Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?' By 'the ethical' here, Johannes de silentio seems straightforwardly to mean

the same thing that Hegel's '*Sittlichkeit*' signifies, i.e., the universal realm of ethics, law and custom. This association is enforced by the direct comparison with Hegel at the outset of the analysis. The section begins with the Hegelian sounding claim that 'the ethical as such is the universal' (FT: 54; SKS 4: 148). Johannes de silentio continues that 'the single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his *telos* in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this, to annul the singularity in order to become the universal' (FT: 54; SKS 4: 148). This clearly echoes Hegel's account of the moral conscience which lives in harmony with the universal ethical standards and norms of society. Any attempt to assert the individual will above the universal is an expression of evil, according to Hegel. Johannes de silentio also affirms that, 'as soon as the single individual asserts himself in his singularity before the universal, he sins, and only by acknowledging this can he be reconciled again with the universal' (FT: 54; SKS 4: 148).

Up until this point, it sounds as if Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author is an advocate of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The text continues: 'If this is the case,' that is, if there is nothing higher than the universal, 'then Hegel is right in "The Good and Conscience," where he defines man only as a "moral form of evil" (see especially *The Philosophy of Right*), which must be annulled [*ophævet*] in the teleology of the moral in such a way that the single individual who remains in that stage either sins or is immersed in spiritual trial' (FT: 54; SKS 4: 148f). Here Johannes de silentio uses language slightly different from Hegel's, but the point is clear enough. Subjectivism or individualism has, for Hegel, its justified place in the grand scheme of things, but is ultimately only one step along the way to the developed concept of right. Similarly, while the individual has the right to the moral conscience, this must be in agreement with the universal ethic if it is to be true.

The critical point that Kierkegaard's author wishes to raise is that there is another, higher sphere beyond that of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. This sphere renders the universal of the realm of *Sittlichkeit* secondary or irrelevant. It is the sphere in which Abraham operates when he acts to fulfill the divine command by sacrificing his son. The objection is that Hegel's ethics does not have the apparatus to deal with this type of case. Here is Johannes de silentio's criticism: 'But Hegel is wrong in speaking about faith; he is wrong in not protesting loudly and clearly against Abraham's enjoying honor and glory as a father of faith when he ought to be sent back to a lower court and shown up as a murderer' (FT: 54-5; SKS 4: 149). In order to be consistent, Hegel's ethics can do nothing other than condemn Abraham, and this indicates a shortcoming in his theory in general.

The shortcoming ultimately comes down to the fact that the realm of *Sittlichkeit* is absolute for Hegel. It is the highest instance, but cannot take into account the sphere of religious faith, which Johannes de silentio takes to be higher than the universality of *Sittlichkeit*. Here is where the real tension lies since Hegel believes that religious faith is indeed to be found in the realm of *Sittlichkeit*.

Kierkegaard then introduces the famous notion of the paradox, anticipating the account in *Philosophical Fragments*. The paradox is clearly supposed to point to a transcendent sphere which is higher than the immanent sphere of civil life and ethics. As Johannes de silentio writes, 'faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal —yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he, as the single individual, isolates himself as higher than the universal' (FT: 55; SKS 4: 149).<sup>12</sup> This is a difficult claim which has been the object of many interpretations. By referring to this relation as a paradox, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writer seems to imply that it cannot be made sense of by means of normal human understanding or discursive rationality. This explains why there is no direct argument for it and why it is claimed, in the third Problema, that Abraham cannot attempt to use it in order to justify his actions but rather must simply remain silent. Here as elsewhere, Kierkegaard seems quite anxious to distinguish this position from a simple relativism which dismisses the validity of the universal. One enters this paradoxical position from the universal sphere of ethics, but the movement should not be conceived of as a reverting to a sphere of random individualism. Thus, one can talk here of a higher form of individualism, by which Kierkegaard distinguishes his position from the different forms of subjectivism and relativism that he criticised in *The Concept of Irony*. Johannes de silentio's form of individualism is based on faith and a relation to God. But since this cannot be explained, no argument for it can be given.

Hegel is mentioned again in a critical manner when Johannes de silentio compares his thought to that of the Greeks:

For if the ethical — that is, social morality — is the highest and if there is in a person no residual incommensurability in some way such that this incommensurability is not evil (i.e. the single individual, who is to be expressed in the universal), then no categories are needed other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be deduced from them by consistent thought. Hegel should not have concealed this, for after all, he had studied Greek philosophy. (FT: 55; SKS 4: 149)

The point here seems in part to be that there must be some legitimate distance or separation of the individual from the universal ethical sphere. Not every deviation from the universal need be understood as an arbitrary act of the moral will and a form of moral evil.

The idea of a legitimate 'incommensurability' is taken up in the second Problema, where Johannes de silentio polemicalises against the purported Hegelian commensurability of the inner and the outer.<sup>13</sup> There he writes that, 'if there is nothing incommensurable in a human life, and if the incommensurable that is present is there only by an accident from which nothing results insofar as existence is viewed from the idea, then Hegel was right' (FT: 68; SKS 4: 160-1). This seems to refer to Hegel's general view that truth can be

known by speculative human reason. As is well known, Hegel consistently rejects any form of unknown transcendent beyond in whatever form that may take, e.g., unseen forces of physics, the Kantian thing in itself, or Jacobi's God. His claim is of course that human reason can know truth since anything transcendent is necessarily related to and conditioned by the immanent. Thus to claim that something cannot be known because it lies in a sphere beyond is simply a kind of conceptual game that philosophers like to play; what they forget is that they themselves have posited the transcendent realm based on their experience with the immanent. But they fail to see the necessary conceptual unity of the two. The truth is revealed to the human mind, which is, for Hegel, represented symbolically by the Christian revelation. It would be an absurdity, according to Hegel, for the divine to reveal Himself but yet still remain hidden and unknown.

The connection with 'Greek philosophy' in the passage quoted above seems to refer to the public ethical sphere of the Greeks, which is universal and accessible to all. The purported harmony of the Greeks meant that individuals immediately identified with that sphere, and there was no separation or sense of alienation between what the individual wanted and what the public sphere demanded. For the Greeks, nothing of their universal, public ethics remained hidden. There was no incommensurability. This was why they persecuted Socrates, who, with his *daimon*, claimed to have a private source of ethics, which was incommensurable and inaccessible to the public sphere. This is precisely why Kierkegaard in other works lauds Socrates as someone who placed the individual above the universal. Kierkegaard sees in Socrates a pagan analogue to the incommensurability that he wishes to argue for in the Christian context with the notion of the God-man and the doctrine of the paradox in *Philosophical Fragments*, or here to the incommensurability of the figure of Abraham.

The key feature of Johannes de silentio's doctrine of the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' seems to be that one has an absolute duty towards God which infinitely outweighs even the most important finite duties one has in the finite sphere of universal ethics or the Hegelian realm of *Sittlichkeit* (FT: 66; SKS 4: 159). Johannes de silentio explains that Abraham stands 'in an absolute relation to the absolute.'<sup>14</sup> Thus God's command to Abraham represents something infinitely higher than Abraham's duty as a father or citizen. But given that this relation to God is characterised as a paradox, it is hidden and inaccessible to the public sphere. Like Socrates' *daimon*, one's relation to the divine is something private and inward that cannot be immediately perceived in the outward sphere. It represents a form of incommensurability that cannot be found in Hegel's system.

The potential for conflict arises here from the fact that the individual must place himself or herself at odds with the realm of accepted ethics and laws in order to obey the divine command. Since this divine command is not publicly accessible, it cannot be evaluated or understood by others as the justification for the individual's action. On the contrary, the individual must remain silent and accept that no justification in this sense is possible. The individual cannot appeal to the divine command or revelation in order to

defend his or her actions since this would be contrary to the notion of the paradox, which is precisely something that cannot be understood or explained.

The natural question in this context is, given the subjective, personal and individual nature of the relation to the divine and the divine commands, how can one be certain that this relation and these commands are genuine? In the natural course of things, one is wrong and mistaken about any number of points; how then can one be certain in this all-important sphere where so much is at stake, including the lives of those one loves? Johannes de silentio raises the question as follows: 'How does the single individual reassure himself that he is legitimate? It is a simple matter to level all existence to the idea of the state or the idea of society. If this is done, it is also simple to mediate, for one never comes to the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal' (*FT*: 62; *SKS* 4: 155). Here Johannes de silentio openly acknowledges this problem and effectively leaves it unanswered. With respect to discursive knowledge, it is easy; one need only follow the reasoning through to the end to accept the conclusion. This is, however, not possible in the sphere of the paradox and the *incommensurable*. No logic or mediation can help one reach a conclusion, but instead an act of faith is required. The very nature of this faith is that it cannot rest in the quiet complacency of having done the right thing. Instead, faith involves by its very nature uncertainty and the possibility of being mistaken. This simply underscores the profound challenge of faith, which is not a matter of certainty but of fear and trembling. There is a natural anxiety involved in every genuine act of faith. This anxiety is a central part of the analysis of Abraham in the work. In an odd sense, both Hegel and Johannes de silentio can agree that this account does not solve the problem.

## V. Hegel's 'Abolition of Conscience' in the Journal NB2

In the *Journal NB2*, which Kierkegaard kept in 1847, he discusses the notion of the moral conscience once again. This journal contains a number of entries on different themes including some autobiographical reflections on Kierkegaard's profile as an author as well as a number of discussions of various theological topics. The entry in question begins as follows:

The world regards the God-relationship of the single individual as really being selfishness, self-love. Since the world does not really believe in God, in the long run the God-fearing person must really love himself. The God-fearing person does not love what the world loves, but then what is left — God and himself. The world takes God away, and therefore the God-fearing person loves himself. The world regards the fear of God as self-love. (*JP* 2: 1613; *SKS* 20: 207, NB2: 166)

The criticism here clearly seems to be directed against a secular view which refuses to acknowledge any transcendent sphere which has a demand on the individual. It thus interprets devotion and pious feeling in a secular manner with no divine referent. This is in effect what Hegel was criticised for in *Fear and Trembling* since he did not recognise any higher sphere than that of *Sittlichkeit*.

Kierkegaard then continues that 'it is also self-love to be unwilling to deify the world and contemporary opinion, to want to maintain (as every human being ought to) that one's ultimate judgment and ultimate responsibility are to God. This impiety (the abolition of the relationship of conscience) is the fundamental damage done by Hegelian philosophy' (JP 2: 1613; SKS 20: 207, NB2:166). When one considers the many different criticisms of Hegel's philosophy issued by Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, the identification of 'the fundamental damage done by Hegelian philosophy' amounts to a very strong statement. Consistent with his account in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard here seems to think that Hegel has eliminated the moral conscience by not recognising its validity as something independent of and indeed higher than the sphere of *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel's understanding of *Sittlichkeit* as the highest instance is conceived by Kierkegaard as a deification of 'the world and contemporary opinion.' By contrast, Kierkegaard, like Abraham, recognises 'that one's ultimate judgment and ultimate responsibility are to God,' and not to anything in the finite sphere.

## VI. Hegel's 'Deification of the Established Order' in *Practice in Christianity*

Another critical assessment of 'The Good and Conscience' appears in *Practice in Christianity* from 1850. This text can be regarded as further developing the demanding view of faith set forth in *Fear and Trembling* by adding the concept of offence. Indeed, in the 'Exordium' to the second part of the work, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writer Anti-Climacus reminds the reader to 'fear and tremble, for faith is carried in a fragile earthen vessel, in the possibility of offence' (PC: 76; SV1 12: 74).

The reference to Hegel comes in 'The Exposition,' also in the second part of the work. There the contradiction is between Christ and the universal, established order. Anti-Climacus discusses the way in which the Pharisees were offended by Christ. He argues that this is no accident but rather a necessary feature of the God-man, and that the possibility of offense is a necessary precondition for true faith:

Every time a witness to the truth transforms truth into inwardness (and this is the essential activity of the witness to the truth), every time a genius internalises the true in an original way — then the established order will be offended at him. We need but little acquaintance with the human race to know that this is so and but very little with the most recent philosophy to know that this will happen in our day also. (PC: 87; SV1 12: 83)

Here 'the most recent philosophy' clearly refers to Hegel, who is mentioned explicitly in what follows:

Why has Hegel made conscience and the state of conscience in the single individual 'a form of evil' (see *Rechts-Philosophie*)? Why? Because he deified the established order. But the more one deifies the established order, the more natural is the conclusion: ergo, the one who disapproves of or rebels against this divinity, the established order — ergo, he must be rather close to imagining that he is God. (PC: 87; SV1 12: 83)

Here Kierkegaard repeats his criticism that Hegel deifies 'the established order' by regarding the realm of *Sittlichkeit* as the highest. In short, Hegel does not recognise the realm of the religious which is higher and which has an absolute demand on the individual. Anti-Climacus continues his criticism: 'The deification of the established order, however, is the smug invention of the lazy, secular human mentality that wants to settle down and fancy that now there is total peace and security, now we have achieved the highest' (PC: 88; SV1 12: 84). The objection is that this is a complacent view which gives people the mistaken impression that everything has been comprehended. It thus undermines the uncertainty of faith in fear and trembling.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is also related to *The Concept of Irony*, as is seen from an allusion to Socrates: 'And then — then along comes a singular one, a Mr. Impudence, who fancies himself as being higher than the established order. But, no, this is not to say that he is self-deluded; it could very well be that he is the "gadfly" the established order needed to keep it from falling asleep or from falling into what is even worse, self-deification' (PC: 88; SV1 12: 84). Here Socrates is lauded for his role of preventing the established order from slipping into complacency. As in *The Concept of Irony*, he represents the principle of the individual moral conscience over against the realm of *Sittlichkeit*.

Now, although the point is the same, the tone is even sharper than in *Fear and Trembling*. In the first references to this section in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard clearly understood and acknowledged the point about the nature of the will representing a *potential* for evil. Now, however, he claims that, for Hegel, conscience *is* a form of evil, an obvious distortion of the position.

How then are we to evaluate these criticisms? What role do they play in Kierkegaard's works? Are these criticisms and the positive positions defended by his pseudonymous authors philosophically plausible? Finally, what do these criticisms tell us about Hegel's and Kierkegaard's respective intuitions on the key issues of faith, conscience, etc.

Generally speaking, the case against Hegel made by Kierkegaard and others in this context has been overstated. It has long been a caricature of Hegel's political philosophy that he destroys the individual in order to deify the state.<sup>16</sup> This is overstated since Hegel



is, of course, interested in preserving key elements of the modern world that respect the rights of the individual. Indeed, his criticism of the unreflective *Sittlichkeit* of the Greek world would not make any sense if he were not interested in protecting the rights of individuals. It is the purpose of his overall project to reconcile the harmony of the ancient world with the individualism of the modern.

From Kierkegaard's perspective, to the extent that Hegel does not recognise an unknowable transcendent sphere, he defies existing actuality. Similarly, given that Hegel cannot accept the absolute right of the moral conscience independent of its actual content, he cannot accept that one has an absolute duty towards God. Kierkegaard thus seems to use Hegel, or a somewhat caricatured picture of his political philosophy, as a polemical foil in order to construct and clarify his own position with respect to the doctrines of the God-man, the paradox, offense and, most importantly, faith. The misrepresentation of Hegel's position is found in the overstated claims that Hegel's political philosophy deifies the state and crushes the individual and moral conscience. This is a distortion of Hegel's account of the relation of the moral conscience to the realm of *Sittlichkeit*. The position set forth under Hegel's name is intended to be the whipping boy for the general views that Kierkegaard wishes to criticise. He also uses this purportedly Hegelian view as a negative example in order to work out his own positive view by contrast.

Although Kierkegaard's presentations of Hegel's view are polemical distortions, and Hegel's actual position is not nearly so wicked, pernicious or Kafkaesque as it is portrayed, this is of course not to suggest that Kierkegaard and Hegel are in agreement here. Hegel would certainly never accept, for example, either the doctrine of the divine as the absolute other in a transcendent realm, or the unknowability of the Incarnation contained in the Kierkegaardian doctrine of the paradox. The two thinkers have fundamentally differing intuitions about these basic issues.

The arguments Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous writers raise against Hegel in this regard are, alas, like so many arguments of the great philosophers in the tradition, question begging. In short, he effectively reproaches Hegel for not having a doctrine of the paradox and for not respecting the sphere of the incommensurable or ineffable that it circumscribes. But these reproaches come without any attempt to address the underlying philosophical issues that inform Hegel's position, e.g., the polemic against the transcendent sphere of the Kantian thing-in-itself. This seems in a sense to be confirmed by the fact that before he developed these famous doctrines, Kierkegaard, in his early work *The Concept of Irony* is in complete agreement with Hegel's analysis. This positive evaluation only changes as he develops his own views in more detail.

To view the matter anachronistically, what would Hegel's view of Kierkegaard's position be? In § 140 of the *Philosophy of Right*, in his typology of forms of subjectivity and individualism, Hegel treats a view which somehow resembles that put forth by Kierkegaard. Hegel runs through the following views, which represent increasing forms of individualism: (A) acting with a guilty conscience, (B) hypocrisy or presenting oneself

actions as good, (C) probabilism, (D) willing the good, (E) the so-called law of the heart, and (F) irony. Of these different positions, it is the law of the heart that best corresponds to Kierkegaard's standpoint (this form of subjectivity takes its name from the famous section in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where it is also analysed).<sup>17</sup> According to the law of the heart, the ethical nature of the action is determined by the conviction which holds it. If one is truly convinced of the truth and righteousness of one's action, then it is true and righteous. If one is truly convinced that one is carrying out God's command, then the act is justified. It will be noted that the actual content of what one wills remains abstract and wholly indeterminate. The sole criterion is that one is convinced that one is doing the right thing. Here, in contrast to the previous stage of hypocrisy, for example, there is no recognition of anything objective in the ethical sphere. A guilty conscience is impossible at this stage since it does not recognise the legitimacy of the universal as opposed to one's action and conviction. There is no factual truth of the matter outside the individual, and thus the only thing that one has to go on is subjective conviction. But one can be subjectively convinced of anything at all. Hegel explains this view as follows:

But if a good heart, good intentions, and subjective conviction are said to be the factors which give actions their value, there is no longer any hypocrisy or evil at all; for a person is able to transform whatever he does into something good by reflection of good intentions and motives, and the element of his *conviction* renders it good. Thus, there is no longer such a thing as crime or vice in and for itself, and instead of those free and open, hardened and undiluted sinners referred to above, we have a consciousness of complete justification by intention and conviction. (PR, § 140, Remark, (e); *Jub.* 7: 213-14)

In short, anyone who sincerely believes that he or she has received a divine command to do something that is in conflict with ethics, law, etc., is thereby *ipso facto* justified and indeed duty-bound teleologically to suspend the ethical and act on the absolute divine command. Needless to say, this is potentially a very dangerous position since with it one can justify anything at all, based on the good motivation of fulfilling a divine command. The problem here is that the merit of an action cannot be judged solely by its good intention or the belief that one is acting on a divine command. Instead, the actual content of the action is essential. Without a determinate content by which an action can be meaningfully examined, Hegel believes that one effectively gives *carte blanche* to any kind of evil or self-serving act.

But one should hasten to note that Kierkegaard would not accept this as a form of justification. Unlike modern terrorists who use such arguments, Kierkegaard's Abraham must remain silent. He can make no attempt to appeal to the fact (imagined or real) of his revelation in order to justify his act. But this silence does not seem to get rid of the problem entirely.

While this act cannot be justified to others, there still remains the question of its status for Abraham himself. He must in some way be able to 'justify' the action to himself, or else he would not act. At some level or in some way he must believe that he is doing the right thing, or else in such a serious matter he would act differently. One can call this 'faith' or 'knowledge' or something else, but there must be something that moves him to action if his moral psychology is to make any sense. The question then becomes one of his moral motivation. In short, he believes that he is doing right since he is acting in accordance with a divine command. Hegel's response to this is as follows:

In so far as we speak of judging and pronouncing a verdict on an action, this principle requires that the agent should be judged only in terms of his intention and conviction, or of his *faith* — not in the sense in which Christ requires faith in *objective* truth (so that the judgment passed on a person of bad faith, i.e. on one whose conviction is bad in its *content*, must also be negative, in keeping with this evil content), but in the sense of loyalty to one's conviction (in so far as a person, in his action, remains *true to his conviction*), i.e. in the sense of formal, subjective loyalty, which is alone in keeping with duty. (PR, § 140, Remark, (e); *Jub.* 7: 214)

Hegel's view is that this conviction on its own is meaningless if it is not accompanied by an evaluation of a particular content. Kierkegaard's doctrine of an absolute duty to the absolute is one that is free of all determinate content. God can command one to do anything at all, and one is obliged to follow this command regardless of the content. Conviction alone does not provide any meaningful criteria for evaluation.

Hegel argues that this position is incoherent on its own terms. One must admit that there is a possibility of error in one's perception of a purported divine command. Again, this is the whole point of the difficult challenge of faith in fear and trembling: there is no firm knowing but only faith, and a part of this always involves the possibility of error. Hegel argues as follows:

For in the first instance, conviction is supposed to be the basis of ethics and of man's supreme worth, and is thereby declared to be a supreme and sacred value; and in the second case, all that we are concerned with is error, and my conviction is insignificant and contingent, in fact a purely external circumstance which I may *encounter in one way or another*. And my conviction is an extremely insignificant thing if I cannot recognise the truth; for it is a matter of indifference *how* I think, and all that remains for me to think about is that empty good as an abstraction of the understanding. (PR, § 140, Remark, (e); *Jub.* 7: 216)

On the one hand, conviction is supposed to be the highest, absolute principle (with the presupposition that it is correct); however, on the other hand, when it is mistaken, it is dismissed as trivial or meaningless. Thus, the view that everything hangs on the personal conviction of having received a divine command cannot be consistently maintained in both cases. In cases of mistaken perceptions of revelations, one must admit that there is more to the matter than just personal conviction.

If it is the case that we cannot know the truth about the divine or about the divine command, then our personal conviction about these things is a matter of complete indifference. If one does not know, then one has no ethical motivation. In short, Kierkegaard's Abraham seems, on the one hand, not to *know* that he has received a divine command based on the doctrine of the paradox. But then, on the other hand, he seems to know very well since he *knows* what he must do and that he must suspend the ethical.

Hegel would doubtless find particularly problematic Kierkegaard's claim that no discursive explanation or defense of Abraham's actions is possible. If this is not possible, then how can one make sense of Abraham's action? Kierkegaard's response is simple: one cannot. Hegel refuses to accept that there can be such cases which defy philosophical understanding especially when they involve actions in the world which implicitly claim the recognition of others by their very nature. The doctrine of a transcendent sphere of the religious, which involves concepts like the paradox, the incommensurable and the ineffable, would seem to Hegel to be a self-admission on the part of Kierkegaard that he is exempting himself from philosophical discourse altogether, at least with what concerns these issues.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations:

SVT: Søren Kierkegaard (1901-6), *Samlede Værker*, ed. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange, 14 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal). References to this work will be followed by volume and page number.

JP: Søren Kierkegaard (1967-78), *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 6 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). References to this work will be followed by volume and page number.

FT: Søren Kierkegaard (1983), *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

R: Søren Kierkegaard (1983), *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

EO1: Søren Kierkegaard (1987), *Either/Or 1*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

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

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

PC: Søren Kierkegaard (1991), *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

CUP1: Søren Kierkegaard (1992), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2 vols.

SKS: Søren Kierkegaard (1997-2009), *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup and Alastair McKinnon, 28 vols, K1-K28 (Copenhagen: Gad Publishers). References to this work will be followed by volume and page number.

Jub.: G. W. F. Hegel (1928-41), *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner, 20 vols (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag). References to this work will be followed by volume and page number.

Phil. of Hist.: G. W. F. Hegel (1944), *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Wiley).

PhS: G. W. F. Hegel (1977), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

PR: G. W. F. Hegel (1991), *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Hist. of Phil.: G. W. F. Hegel (1995), *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, 3 vols (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). References to this work will be followed by volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> See also FT: 68 (SKS 4: 160-1), and 82 (SKS 4: 172).

<sup>3</sup> I have treated this issue previously in connection with *Fear and Trembling* in Stewart 2003: 310-23. See also Stewart 1998 and Stewart 1999.

<sup>4</sup> See PR, § 138 (Jub. 7: 198-200), and Hist. of Phil. 1: 384-448 (Jub. 18: 42-122).

<sup>5</sup> In 'The Good and Conscience,' Hegel characterises this contrast between the ancient and the modern world in his discussion of the moral conscience: 'As conscience, the human being is no longer bound by the ends of particularity, so that conscience represents an exalted point of view, a point of view of the modern world . . . Earlier and more sensuous ages have before them something external and given, whether this be religion or right . . .' (PR, § 136, Addition; Jub. 7: 196).

<sup>6</sup> See PR, § 33, Remark (Jub. 7: 85), § 135 (Jub. 7: 193-5), and § 137 (Jub. 7: 196-8). This distinction was clearly noted by Kierkegaard in CI: 227 (SKS 1: 270).

<sup>7</sup> See PR, § 151 (Jub. 7: 233): 'But if it is simply identical with the actuality of individuals, the ethical [*das Sittliche*], as their general mode of behavior, appears as custom [*Sitte*]; and the habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence.'

<sup>8</sup> It will be noted that Hegel associates Kant with morality and much of his polemic against the latter is also a polemic against the former. His claim is that Kant's ethics based on the abstract moral law ignores fundamental features of the lived ethical experience. It fails to appreciate the everyday ethical relations that we and others engage in as a matter of course, and prefers to transfer ethics to the realm of pure thought, abstract rules and principles; see PR, § 148, Remark (Jub. 7: 229-30). Hegel writes: "Morality" [*Moralität*] and "ethics" [*Sittlichkeit*], which are usually regarded as roughly synonymous, are taken here in essentially distinct senses. Yet even representational thought seems to distinguish them; Kantian usage prefers the expression "morality," as indeed the practical principles of Kant's philosophy are confined throughout to this concept, even rendering the point of view of ethics impossible and in fact expressly infringing and destroying it; see PR, § 33, Remark (Jub. 7: 85, translation slightly modified). While Kant

thinks that an abstract ethical principle must be urgently established since it is the presupposition for us to be able to act morally, Hegel turns this relation around. Formulating any abstract principle of ethics presupposes that one already has certain ethical intuitions that one has received long ago. We must first know what an ethical relation or act is before we can abstract from it in order to formulate an abstract moral law.

<sup>9</sup> See *Hist. of Phil.* 1: 439-40 (*Jub.* 18: 112-13), and 444 (*Jub.* 18: 117): because the Socratic principle of subjective freedom 'by effecting an entrance into the Greek world, has come into collision with the substantial spirit and the existing sentiments of the Athenian people, a reaction had to take place, for the principle of the Greek world could not yet bear the principle of subjective reflection. The Athenian people were thus, not only justified, but also bound to react against it according to their law, for they regarded this principle as a crime.'

<sup>10</sup> See PR, § 270 (*Jub.* 7: 353-4): 'A state which is strong because its organisation is fully developed can adopt a more liberal attitude in this respect, and may completely overlook individual matters which may affect it, or even tolerate communities whose religion does not recognise even their direct duties towards the state (although this naturally depends on the numbers concerned). It is able to do this by entrusting the members of such communities to civil society and its laws, and is content if they fulfil their direct duties towards it passively, for example by commutation or substitution of an alternative service.' In a footnote to this passage, Hegel mentions precisely the example of exempting from military service citizens who have moral or religious objections.

<sup>11</sup> This juxtaposition is hinted at even prior to the *Problemata*; see FT: 32-3 (*SKS* 4: 128): 'Love indeed has its priests in the poets, and occasionally we hear a voice that knows how to honor it, but not a word is heard about faith. Who speaks to the honor of this passion? Philosophy goes further. Theology sits all rouged and powdered in the window and courts its favor, offers its charms to philosophy. It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a small matter. To go beyond Hegel is a miraculous achievement, but to go beyond Abraham is the easiest one of all.'

<sup>12</sup> Kierkegaard also broaches the question of an exception to the universal in R: 226 (*SKS* 4: 92).

<sup>13</sup> See also *EOI*: 4-5 (*SKS* 2: 12-13); *SLW*: 375 (*SKS* 6: 349); *SLW*: 428 (*SKS* 6: 396); *SLW*: 441 (*SKS* 6: 408); *CUP*1: 54 (*SKS* 7: 58); *CUP*1: 138 (*SKS* 7: 129); *CUP*1: 296fn. (*SKS* 7: 270fn.); *CUP*1: 542 (*SKS* 7: 492); and *JP* 2: 2111 (*SKS* 18: 170, JJ: 96).

<sup>14</sup> See FT: 56 (*SKS* 4: 150) and 62 (*SKS* 4: 155).

<sup>15</sup> See PC: 88 (*SV*1 12: 84): 'Every human being is to live in fear and trembling, and likewise no established order is to be exempted from fear and trembling. Fear and trembling signify that we are in the process of becoming; and every single individual, likewise the generation, is and should be aware of being in that process of becoming. And fear and trembling signify that there is a God — something every human being and every established order ought not to forget for a moment.'

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Grégoire 1996: 289-300.

<sup>17</sup> See 'The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit' from the 'Reason' Chapter in *Jub.* 2: 283-92 (*PhS*: 221-8).