

Jon Stewart

## Andreas Frederik Beck's Review of *Philosophical Fragments*

**Abstract:** The present article presents the Danish theologian Andreas Frederik Beck and provides an English translation of his book review of *Philosophical Fragments*. In Kierkegaard's time, Beck was a proponent of left Hegelianism and a follower of Bruno Bauer and David Friedrich Strauss. As a student of the University of Copenhagen, Beck was acquainted with Kierkegaard personally and had a special interest in *The Concept of Irony*, which he reviewed in 1842. In 1845 Beck published an anonymous book review in German of *Philosophical Fragments* in a theological journal in Berlin. This review, which appears here in English translation for the first time, provides some insight into the contemporary reception of this important work.

The Danish theologian Andreas Frederik Beck (1816–61) was an engaged and largely sympathetic reader of Kierkegaard. In 1845 he published an anonymous book review in German of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work *Philosophical Fragments* in the Berlin-based *Neues Repertorium für die theologische Literatur und kirchliche Statistik*.<sup>1</sup> Here he tried to present to the German readers the intricacies of some of the key doctrines contained in the work such as the absolute paradox, offense, Socratic learning as recollection, the moment, and contemporaneity. At the end of the present introduction to Beck, this review appears in full in English translation.

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I would like to thank Heiko Schulz for his invaluable corrections and suggestions to my translation of Beck's review.

1 Andreas Frederik Beck [anonymous], "*Philosophiske Smuler eller en Smule Philosophie (Philos. Brocken oder ein Bischen Philosophie)*. Af S. Kierkegaard. Kiöbenhavn (Copenhagen), Reitzel. 1844. 8<sup>o</sup>," *Neues Repertorium für die theologische Literatur und kirchliche Statistik*, Berlin, Band 2, Heft 1, April 30, 1845, pp. 44–48. This original text has been reprinted in *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 8, 1971, pp. 212–216, and in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1979 (*suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft*, vol. 241), pp. 127–131.

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Beck is not a well-known figure today, and if he is mentioned at all, it is usually as a member of the left Hegelian movement in Golden Age Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The son of a pastor, Beck attended the Børgerdydskole in Copenhagen from 1829, the same school that Kierkegaard attended from 1821 until 1830. Beck was admitted to the University of Copenhagen in 1834. Having completed his degree in theology in 1838, he went to the University of Kiel, where he received a doctoral degree in philosophy the following year.<sup>3</sup> In 1840 he returned to the University of Copenhagen and completed the *licentiat* degree in theology with a dissertation on Chapter 53 of Isaiah.<sup>4</sup>

As a young student, Beck was swept away by the work of the left Hegelians, Bruno Bauer and David Friedrich Strauss. He was especially taken with Strauss' *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*,<sup>5</sup> in which the Tübingen theologian tries to demonstrate that the gospel stories are in large part myths. Beck wanted to build on Strauss' controversial work and introduce it to his Danish readers, and so in 1842 he published *The Concept of Myth or the Form of Religious Spirit*, which can be regarded as his *magnum opus*.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard owned a copy of this work and was presumably familiar with it at least in a general way.<sup>7</sup> The allusion in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to "the modern mythical allegorizing trend"<sup>8</sup> is presumably a reference to, among other things, Beck's book. In addition to the review of *Philosophical Fragments*, Beck also reviewed a number of other theological works of the day.<sup>9</sup>

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2 See Carl Henrik Koch, *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 487–496. Jens Holger Schjørring, *Teologi og filosofi. Nogle analyser og dokumenter vedrørende Hegelianismen i dansk teologi*, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 1974, pp. 36–49. S.V. Rasmussen, *Den unge Brøchner*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1966, p. 186. P.P. Jørgensen, *H.P. Kofoed-Hansen (Jean-Pierre). Med særligt Henblik til Søren Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen and Kristiania: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1920, pp. 179–182.

3 His dissertation in Kiel was *De Parallelismi membrorum in poesi Hebraeorum usu hermeneutico et critico Dissertationis Pars prior*, Copenhagen: Salomon 1840.

4 His dissertation in Copenhagen was *De capite quinquagesimo tertio libri Jesajani Commentatio*, Copenhagen: Fabritius de Tengnagel 1840.

5 David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, vols. 1–2, Tübingen: C.F. Osiander 1835–36 (in English as *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. by George Eliot, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, Ramsey, New Jersey: Sigler Press 1994).

6 Andreas Frederik Beck, *Begrebet Mythus eller den religiøse Aands Form*, Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen 1842.

7 Cf. ASKB 424.

8 SKS 7, 199 / CUP1, 218.

9 See, for example, Andreas Frederik Beck, "Dr. Philipp Marheinekes *Udkast af den praktiske Theologi*. Oversat af J. Fr. Hagen," *Fædrelandet*, vol. 2, no. 448, February 28, 1841, columns 3597–3601; no. 455, March 7, 1841, columns 3656–3658. Andreas Frederik Beck, "Den

After completing his degrees, Beck worked as a *Privatdozent* at the University of Copenhagen in the hope of making an academic career. He was, however, too outspoken in his critical opinion of the conservative elements of the Danish church (including the views of both Martensen and Mynster),<sup>10</sup> and when he applied to the church authorities to become a pastor, his application was rejected. Unable to gain an appointment either in the church or at the university due to his controversial views, Beck was consigned to eke out a living as a journalist. But even in his capacity as a journalist, his critical statements about the Danish national character offended many readers in a period of rising nationalism. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s Beck published articles in leading German and Danish journals of philosophy and theology.

Beck was interested in Kierkegaard's work perhaps initially since he saw a resemblance to Strauss' methodology.<sup>11</sup> While Strauss compared the gospel writers for consistency in order to determine the truth about the life of Jesus, Kierkegaard, in his master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony* from 1841, explored the different relevant sources in order to determine which one presented the true Socrates. Beck was one of the questioners at Kierkegaard's oral defense of the work.<sup>12</sup> Presumably based in part on his exchange with Kierkegaard in that context, he published a book review of *The Concept of Irony* in the same year.<sup>13</sup> Although this review was, on the whole, quite laudatory, it nonetheless angered Kierkegaard, especially with its association of him with the left Hegelians. Kierkegaard responded publicly to this in his short article, "Public Confession."<sup>14</sup>

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*speculative Methodes Anvendelse paa den hellige Historie.* Af R. Nielsen, Lic. i Theologien og Professor i Philosophien. Paa Dansk udgivet af Cand. B.C. Bøggild. Kleins Forlag. X S. 162. Kjøbenhavn 1842. (Priis 1 Rbd.), *Theologisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 7, 1842, pp. 127–154.

**10** Andreas Frederik Beck, *Theologiske Tilstande i Danmark i Aarene 1842–46*, Copenhagen: n.p. 1847, p. 2.

**11** For the relationship between Beck and Kierkegaard see K. Brian Söderquist, "Andreas Frederik Beck: A Good Dialectician and a Bad Reader," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy, Politics and Social Theory*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Aldershot: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7), pp. 1–12.

**12** See Søren Bruun and Johnny Kondrup, "Tekstredegørelse" to *Om Begrebet Ironi*, in *SKS K1*, 144f.

**13** Andreas Frederik Beck, "Om Begrebet Ironi, med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates af Søren Kierkegaard," *Fædrelandet*, nos. 890 and 897, May 29, and June 5, 1842, columns 7133–7140, 7189–7191.

**14** Søren Kierkegaard, "Aabenbart Skriftemaal," *Fædrelandet*, no. 904, June 12, 1842, columns 7245–7252; cf. *SKS* 14, 41–46 / *COR*, 3–12.

Beck's review of *Philosophical Fragments* thus marks his continuing interest in Kierkegaard's thought on key issues such as the nature of faith. His review is not easy reading due to the fact that he adopts Kierkegaard's language and conceptual apparatus, while offering very little by means of explanation. Perhaps cowed by Kierkegaard's satirical response to his earlier review in "Public Confession," Beck explicitly refrains from issuing any criticism of the work and states instead that his goal is simply to explain Kierkegaard's special methodology.

Kierkegaard responded to Beck's review in a long footnote in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>15</sup> Beck should probably have been able to guess that even without an explicit criticism of Kierkegaard's work, he would nonetheless still be made the object of the latter's spiteful pen. Under the guise of the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard claims that the review is misleading and that it would be impossible to glean a clear picture of the *Fragments* from it. He goes on to list a large number of key elements in the work of which there is no mention in Beck's review. He also carps on the last line of the review where Beck leaves it to the readers to decide for themselves whether the *Fragments* is intended as a serious work or an ironic one. Climacus objects that this is a misleading disjunction since it presupposes that there can be no serious point in irony. The implication is clearly that while the *Fragments*, to be sure, employs irony, it has an important and serious message to convey. A clear motif in both of Kierkegaard's responses to Beck's reviews is that Beck is too much of a simpleton to appreciate the subtlety and sophistication of Kierkegaard's writing. Beck, it is claimed, mistakenly reads the *Fragments* as a straightforward dialectical argument, and all of Kierkegaard's well-known literary devices, such as pseudonymity, irony, indirect communication, and so forth, are lost on him.

What follows here is a complete English translation of Beck's review. The original page numbers have been inserted in square brackets in order to facilitate comparison with the original German text. The page references that Beck gives in parentheses are, of course, to the first edition of the work that he is reviewing.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> SKS 7, 249–253n / CUP1, 274–277n.

<sup>16</sup> These references can be readily located using the concordance provided by the online version of SKS.

*Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy.* By S. Kierkegaard. Copenhagen, Reitzel. 1844. 8<sup>o</sup>.

This work by one of Denmark's most productive writers is not undeserving of a brief review on account of the peculiarity of its method. It attempts to give an analysis of the positive-Christian presuppositions in the form of general problems, i.e., without reference to their historical appearance, which, however, is always present before the eye of the author. In a possible sequel the author will call the matter by its proper name and clothe | [45] the issue in its historical costume (p. 162). These presuppositions are presented with such clarity, and analyzed with such acuity and fineness, that our age, which levels, neutralizes and mediates everything, will hardly recognize them. The method of the author consists in assuming the basic Christian presupposition as a general hypothesis and then finding the determination in human life which corresponds to it, and this is itself, at bottom, contained in that presupposition. The result is that the relation between the *objective* and the subjective must be thought as *absolute*, or, put differently, that the former becomes a *paradox*, which is appropriated only by means of *faith*. If according to the Socratic presupposition of the receiver, the learner already ahead of time possesses what is communicated, even if only in an unconscious manner, so that the so-called teaching only becomes the occasion for the learner to recollect the truth, then the moment, in which he discovers that he has known the truth from eternity, is taken up in the same "now" into the eternal, and the temporal point of departure for the recollection of truth has no importance. If the situation is different, if the moment wins absolute significance, then it must be more than the mere occasion, and this is only possible by the person being determined as outside the truth, i.e., as untruth. He must lack the condition of truth, for otherwise he would only need to *recollect*. But how can a condition be taken from him, which he must have as a human being? Not by the god, and not by accident (for otherwise something inferior would have vanquished something superior), but rather only by his own free will. (Certainly, the reviewer must raise the question here whether there has ever been a free will of this kind, which has preceded unfreedom and sin in time.) Then the teacher must communicate to him the condition and must therefore be to him more than one human being is to another, that is, he must be the god himself. With this there arises a new consciousness in the human being, for he is born anew, and the moment wins a decisive significance.

But what should move the god to appear as teacher of human beings? Of course, no need can move him as is the case with the human teacher, who is at the same time receptive in the communication and takes the occasion to

understand himself. The god, who understands himself anyway, can only be driven by love (here, to be sure, the historically given religious conception seems to appear to stand out in all too sharp contrast). The learner must thus receive everything from the teacher. But since this relation makes understanding difficult, the god must become equal to the lowest and appear in the form of a servant in order for the unity to be brought about (p. 44). Thus we arrive at the miracle, the absolute paradox (in fact, we were already there when there was talk of the communication not only of the teaching but rather even of the *condition*). | [46]

But the paradox is precisely the passion of the understanding; the latter wills the stumbling block [Anstoß] and precisely thereby its own destruction; it always encounters something unknown, which is its limit, and, seen from the standpoint of rest, is the absolutely different. But the understanding cannot think this unknown because, insofar as it thinks it through itself, it precisely thereby thinks it as its own determination. This difference cannot then be maintained; deep in the fear of god there lurks, madly enough, arbitrariness, which then knows that it has created the god. The understanding thus confuses the difference with the unity. The god must himself bring it to the consciousness of man, that He is absolutely different from him, and this difference must consist in the guilt of man, i.e., in sin. The paradox thus wins a greater strength since the god both gives man consciousness of sin, thus distinguishing him absolutely from Himself, and also wants to sublimate this difference into the absolute unity.

Can this paradox be thought? The understanding can certainly not do this; yet in its paradoxical passion, the understanding willed its own destruction and is thus in agreement with the paradox; but this is the case only in the moment of passion. Since the understanding has come to a stumbling block, which it cannot overcome, it now acts as suffering, and it is now the paradox, which appears opposite to it. This suffering—namely, that the understanding can have no power over the stumbling block, which it itself wills, but rather is destroyed by it—is *offense* [Ärgernis]; this arises only by means of the paradox, is only the consequence of the paradox drawn from the understanding, with relation to it itself and thereby the indirect test of the correctness of the paradox. It is the paradox which resonates in the offense; the understanding can say nothing other than what the paradox itself says. If the understanding says that the paradox of the *moment* (namely, the appearance of the god) is foolishness, then it is only by the claim of the paradox that the understanding is the absurd, which now through a resonance resounds out of the offense; but the paradox takes no offense; indeed, it says itself that that which the understanding finds as the stumbling block, it takes only to be an absurdity, a miracle (p. 75).

In order that the moment might win more than Socratic significance, the teacher must also communicate to the learner the condition of the conception of the paradox, i.e., *faith*, which has as its object the paradox, the making eternal of the historical and the historical appearance of the eternal; he must be the god himself; he, not his teacher, must be the object of faith; for the Socratic element lies precisely in the fact that the learner, since he has the truth in him, can push away the teacher; in order that the teacher might give the condition, he must be the god, and in order to be able to communicate this to the student, he must be a human being. Thereby faith itself becomes a miracle, and everything | [47] that is true of the paradox is also true of faith. But within this miracle appears the Socratic relation between the one contemporary and the other, insofar as they owe everything not to each other but to the god.

But what advantage does the contemporary have over the others? Insofar as the divine is not something immediately appearing, no one can be immediately contemporaneous with such a teacher or such an event, but rather the one who is truly contemporary is so only by means of another as *immediate* coetaneity [Coätaneität]. Hence the contemporary person [Zeitgenosse] can nevertheless be the non-coetaneous [der nicht coätane], and the non-coetaneous person [Nicht-Coätane] (understood immediately) in turn must, by means of this other, through which the contemporary became truly coetaneous [coätane], be able to become so himself (p. 98). If the immediate coetaneity [Coätaneität] becomes the occasion for a human being as the untruth to receive the condition from god and now sees the magnificence with the eyes of faith, then he is such a contemporary person [Zeitgenosse] not as an eyewitness, but precisely as a believer, in the autopsy of faith; but in this autopsy each not immediately coetaneous person [Coätane] is truly coetaneous [coätane]. Only in one relation will the author deem the immediate contemporaneity [unmittelbare Zeitgenossenschaft] more fortunate than those who come later, namely, insofar as faith in the first generation has appeared in its entire originality and hence could be very easily distinguished from other things (p. 103), in so far as those of the first generation stood closer to the shock of the miracle (p. 137) and their attention could thus be more easily aroused. But this attention can lead just as well to offense as to faith and thus has no immediate significance.

In an interlude the author develops the nature of the historical, as it in general presupposes faith as a condition for its conception (it could neither be apprehended immediately through the senses nor known by means of necessity which it is not supposed to have). But the appearance of the god as historical fact has as its presupposition not only faith in the usual sense but rather faith *par excellence* based on the self-contradiction. This latter similarity for those

most distant from one another in the temporal respect, engulfs the difference which existed with respect to the first relation between them.

If one perhaps should think that that miraculous fact, as one naturalized through its consequences in the later generations, does not presuppose faith as a condition for its conception, then one would have to attribute retroactive power to the consequences. If one wants to make faith into a second nature in man, then he in any case must have had a first nature, if one does not want to assume that the individual was born with the second nature, that his birth was at the same time his rebirth, that thus the human race, after the appearance | [48] of that fact, has become entirely different and yet has remained in continuity with itself.

One must thus return to the original fact which is the same for everyone: there is no student from secondhand. The later generation has in the report of the contemporaries [Zeitgenossen] the occasion, which the earlier generation had in the immediate coetaneity [Coätaneität], and believed by means of the occasion, on the strength of the condition which the god communicated. The one cannot communicate the historical to the other so that he believes it; for if he communicates it to him in the form of *faith* (and thus motivates it by the contradiction to the human understanding (p. 154)), then he does his part to prevent the other person from immediately accepting it. The believer always has the analysis of faith and does not see with the eyes of others.

We keep to ourselves any contrary remark, for, as was said, our goal was to bring to view the special method of the author. Moreover, we leave it to the judgment of each person whether he wants to seek seriousness or perhaps irony in this apologetic dialectic.