

France:

Kierkegaard as a Forerunner of Existentialism and Poststructuralism

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When one thinks of Kierkegaard's influence in the Francophone world of letters, it is natural that one immediately thinks of the appropriation of his thought by French existentialism and poststructuralism. However, French Kierkegaard reception was far richer than this and indeed began far earlier than these movements. Today French Kierkegaard studies has developed into a specialized field with scholars who define their professional profile in terms of the Danish thinker. It can be said without hesitation that Kierkegaard research in France at present is flourishing more than at any time in the past.

I. Denmark and France: The Cultural Ties

During Kierkegaard's lifetime, many Danish scholars, writers, and artists regularly visited Paris, which ranked probably just after Berlin and Rome as a favorite destination of Golden Age intellectuals. This was no accident, for Denmark had close cultural and political ties to France. During the Napoleonic War, Denmark was allied with France, and at this time many French embassies came to Copenhagen, where they were treated virtually as celebrities. The atmosphere of these times is wonderfully portrayed in the novel *Two Ages* (1846),¹ from the pen of Thomasine Gyllembourg (1773–1856), a work reviewed positively by Kierkegaard.² In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries there were also a handful of francophone

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¹ Thomasine Christine Gyllembourg-Ehrensvärd, *To Tidsaldré. Novelle af Forfatteren til "En Hverdags-Historie,"* published by Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1845.

² Kierkegaard, *En literair Anmeldelse. To Tidsaldré, Novelle af Forfatteren til en 'Hverdags-historie' udgiven af J.L. Heiberg.* Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1846. SKS 8, 7–106. (English translations: *Two Ages. The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review by Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978; *A Literary Review*, trans. by Alastair Hannay. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 2001.)

journals based in Copenhagen: *Novelles de divers Endroits* (1719–20), *Extrait des Nouvelles* (1720–22), *Gazette historique, politique et littéraire de Copenhague* (1749–76), the *Messager Français du Nord* (1825–26); also worthy of note is the journal *Jacobineren* (1796).³ The alliance with France resulted in the British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807. Despite the unfortunate outcome of this alliance, Denmark continued to cultivate close ties with France as it, in the course of the nineteenth century, became ever more estranged from its southern neighbors, Germany and Prussia.

Among the best-known Danes in Paris were the satirical writer and dramatist, Peter Andreas Heiberg (1758–1841), who had been exiled from the Kingdom of Denmark in 1800 due to his impudent remarks about the established powers.⁴ P.A. Heiberg lived for forty years in exile in France, where he continued to write and work as a translator, eventually becoming the secretary of the French diplomat Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand (1754–1838). His son, the poet and dramatist Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860) also lived in Paris briefly from 1819 to 1822. He was highly interested in French drama, especially the vaudevilles of the French dramatist Augustin Eugène Scribe (1791–1891). Heiberg translated and adapted Scribe's works for the Danish stage, thus introducing the Danish theater public to the latest trends in Parisian theater life. The natural scientist Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851) also had close ties with France. He visited Paris on several occasions, and his discovery of electromagnetism was received with great excitement among French physicists. Another significant Dane to make his way to Paris was the literary critic Peter Ludvig Møller (1814–65), who is best known for his role in the so-called *Corsair* controversy.⁵ Prior to this conflict, Møller had studied different aspects of French culture. As a student, he wrote a Gold Medal treatise on French poetry. He founded a number of newspapers and reviews, which used then contemporary French journals as their model. Kierkegaard denounced Møller as being responsible for the attacks in the *Corsair*.⁶ The latter left Denmark a couple of years later with a government scholarship to pursue his studies abroad. Møller journeyed throughout Germany and Prussia, ending up in Paris in 1851, where he lived for the rest of his life. Like the elder Heiberg, he earned his living by writing and translating for French newspapers and journals. During these final years, he wrote a comparative work on comedy in France and Denmark.⁷

³ See Jette D. Søllinge and Niels Thomsen, *De danske aviser 1634–1989*, vols. 1–3, Odense: Dagpressens Fond i Kommission hos Odense Universitetsforlag 1988–91, vol. 1.

⁴ See P.A. Heiberg's autobiography, *Erindinger af min politiske, selskabelige og litterære Vandel i Frankrig*, Christiania: P.J. Hoppe 1830. See also Henning Fenger, *The Heibergs*, trans. by Frederick J. Marker, New York: Twayne Publishers 1971, pp. 23–37; Povl Ingerslev-Jensen, *P.A. Heiberg. Den danske Beaumarchais*, Herning: Poul Kristensen 1964.

⁵ See Hans Hertel, "P.L. Møller and Romanticism in Danish Literature," in *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries. The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003 (*Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 10), pp. 356–72.

⁶ *SVI XIII*, 431 / COR, 46.

⁷ Peter Ludvig Møller, *Det nyere Lystspil i Frankrig og Danmark*, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad 1858.

There was thus a long tradition of an active exchange of culture and information between France and Denmark dating from the eighteenth century and continuing into the Danish Golden Age. It is therefore natural that French thinkers would take some interest in the cultural affairs of Denmark and the work of Søren Kierkegaard.

II. From the Earliest References to the First World War

The earliest known French reference to Kierkegaard appears in 1856 in *La Revue de Deux Mondes*.⁸ The *Revue* published a series of overview articles about the political and cultural state of affairs in different countries. There in an article on Denmark, a special section is dedicated to "Religious Questions," in which the anonymous author describes the confusion surrounding the question of freedom of religion and freedom of speech in Denmark after the introduction of the Constitution in 1849. The occasion for this discussion is Kierkegaard's attack on the Danish State Church. The author is generally quite positive about Kierkegaard's actions:

The virulent attacks of S. Kierkegaard and his followers have, it is true, bewildered many minds and troubled many weak or fearful consciences, but they have also awakened many sheep and many indolent or drowsy pastors; they have shaken or brought down many things and persons of but little importance; they have caused profound and serious souls to reflect. In brief, the Danish church, both pastors and parishioners, will doubtless emerge from this spiritual struggle more sure of themselves, more clear-sighted, in the things of faith and worship.⁹

After this general assessment of the ultimate significance and impact of Kierkegaard's attack, the author turns to a more general introduction and assessment of Kierkegaard as a writer. The text continues:

Without ever occupying any public position, S. Kierkegaard has come to rank, during the last fifteen years or so, as one of the most productive and remarkable, and also one of the most singular, of writers in Denmark. With a lively imagination, a shrewd, caustic, and mocking mind, a far from ordinary debating talent, but bizarre in his way of writing, he has proved to be at once a speculative philosopher, an unrelenting moralist, and a merciless religious reformer. At first secretly, finally openly, he has undermined and unsettled everything; taking as his battle cries the words "freedom" and "independence," he tended to bring down everything, society and church, but without worrying about reconstruction.¹⁰

⁸ "Le Danemark," *Annuaire des Deux Mondes. Historie générale des divers États*, vols. 1–14, 1851–68, Paris: Revue de deux mondes, vol. 4, October 20, 1856, pp. 459–91. The relevant excerpts from this article have been translated into English in F.J. Billeskov Jansen, "The Study in France," in *Kierkegaard Research*, ed. by Marie Mikulová Thustrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1987 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 15), pp. 134–59; pp. 134–6.

⁹ Quoted from Billeskov Jansen, "The Study in France," p. 134.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 135. The counterintuitive characterization of Kierkegaard as "a speculative philosopher" may be taken as an indication that P.L. Møller is the author of this piece. In the *Corsair* controversy, Møller had reproached Kierkegaard for his "barren dialectic that swirls around an infinite center" (COR, Supplement, p. 101) and refers to "the dialectical-critical-

Finally, the article recounts briefly Kierkegaard's death and the scandal surrounding his funeral caused by the outbreak of his nephew Henrik Lund (1825–89), who, during the ceremony, protested against the Church and the clergy. There can be little doubt that this account was written by a Dane with knowledge of French.

The first French translation of Kierkegaard was also the work of a Dane, Johannes Götzsche (1866–1938). In 1886 his translation *En quoi l'homme de génie diffère-t-il de l'apôtre? Traité éthique-religieux*¹¹ appeared in Copenhagen and Paris. It is a translation of the second of Kierkegaard's *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* (1849). The work includes a preface by the theologian Hans-Peter Kofoed-Hansen (1813–93), which offers a brief overview of Kierkegaard's works and recommends him to the French reader. This early translation seems, however, not to have made any real impression in France.

In 1893 an article appeared entitled "Søren Kierkegaard. Le moraliste danois" in *La Nouvelle Revue*.¹² This work is from the hand of one Bernard Jeannine. The author is apparently inspired by the critical works of Georg Brandes (1842–1927), who mentions Kierkegaard in connection with Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906). In his article Jeannine portrays Kierkegaard as a central Scandinavian author, who inspired many other Danish and Norwegian writers who were to follow. His criticism of the hypocritical Christianity of his day and of petty bourgeois philistinism are mentioned, and it is in this context that he is regarded as a moralist.

By the end of the century Kierkegaard's name began appearing in French reference works. A one-paragraph article on him by Théophile Cart (1855–1931), a professor of German Studies in Paris, appears in *La Grande Encyclopédie*, which was published from 1886 to 1903.¹³ Here the author summarizes Kierkegaard's thought in terms of the well-known stages:

He [sc. Kierkegaard] declared that an unbridgeable gulf exists between science and faith and, in language that was vivid and paradoxical but of outstanding dialectical vigor, he preached renunciation of the world; a purely aesthetic conception of life, in his view, leads fatally to an egoistical search for pleasure; a purely *moral* (ethical) conception has neither foundation nor sanction; only the *religious* conception is Christian, i.e., the isolated *individual* face to face with God can stand his ground....¹⁴

Kierkegaard is characterized as "a rather unorthodox theologian," and no mention is made here of his philosophical or literary side.

In 1897 a theological thesis on Kierkegaard for the degree of bachelor was presented to the Faculté de théologie protestante at the University of Paris. The work was by a French-Danish theologian Victor Deleuran entitled *Esquisse d'une étude sur Søren Kierkegaard*.¹⁵ This can be regarded as a kind of introduction to selected aspects of Kierkegaard's religious thinking. It begins with a brief biographical overview and then moves to Kierkegaard's thought. In his account of the latter, Deleuran gives a central place to the theory of the three stages. The work ends with a brief account of Kierkegaard's attack on the Church and a short concluding section. While Deleuran concedes that Kierkegaard is a passionate and controversial thinker, he insists that there is much that the attentive reader can learn from him.

In 1900 an article appeared entitled "Søren Kierkegaard. Le christianisme absolu à travers le paradoxe et le désespoir" in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.¹⁶ The author of the article was a psychologist by the name of Henri Delacroix (1873–1937). A highly gifted scholar, Delacroix studied at the universities of Berlin, Heidelberg, and Munich, eventually becoming a professor at the Sorbonne. The image of Kierkegaard that he presents is of a religious fanatic and cultural reactionary, who denies the importance of science and the autonomy of the individual, insisting on one's dependence on the divine. There is a certain irony in this interpretation when one considers that later Sartre would transform Kierkegaard into a champion of radical freedom.

Another article appeared in 1901 from the pen of Maurice Murat (1870–1954) entitled "Un précurseur de Henrik Ibsen. Søren Kierkegaard."¹⁷ This work, which was published in *La Revue de Paris*, is a typical reflection of the association of Kierkegaard with Ibsen during this period. There was a wave of interest in Ibsen in France at this time since his works were being performed in Paris throughout the 1890s.¹⁸ This article focuses primarily on Ibsen's *Brand*, which is read as an example of the Kierkegaardian demand for choice and freedom. Murat was by no means a Kierkegaard expert, and this article can be seen as a part of his attempt to make foreign literature better known to the French reader.

In 1903 an article appeared by a professor at the Sorbonne, Victor Basch (1863–1944), entitled "Un individualiste religieux: Søren Kierkegaard."¹⁹ This work appeared in *La Grande Revue* and presents the philosophical side of Kierkegaard. Basch praises Kierkegaard for emphasizing the individual and is sensitive to the radical nature of his religious thinking. He was among the first to recognize Kierkegaard as a forerunner of Nietzsche (1844–1900). Basch approached Kierkegaard's texts from a secular perspective and found in them tools that could be of use for his humanist

¹⁵ Victor Deleuran, *Esquisse d'une étude sur Søren Kierkegaard*, Paris: Charles Noblet 1897.

¹⁶ Henri Delacroix, "Søren Kierkegaard. Le christianisme absolu à travers le paradoxe et le désespoir," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1900, pp. 459–84.

¹⁷ Maurice Murat, "Un précurseur de Henrik Ibsen. Søren Kierkegaard," *La Revue de Paris*, vol. 8, no. 13, 1901, pp. 98–122.

¹⁸ See Peter Kemp, "Le précurseur de Henrik Ibsen. Quelques aspects de la découverte de Kierkegaard en France," *Les Études philosophiques*, no. 2 (April–June), 1979, pp. 139–50.

¹⁹ Victor Basch, "Un individualiste religieux: Søren Kierkegaard," *La Grande Revue*, vol. 23, 1903, pp. 281–320.

¹¹ *En quoi l'homme de génie diffère-t-il de l'apôtre? Traité éthique-religieux*, trans. by Johannes Götzsche, Copenhagen: Hagerup and Paris: Nilsson 1886.

¹² B. Jeannine, "Søren Kierkegaard. Le moraliste danois," *La Nouvelle Revue*, no. 2 (November–December), 1893, pp. 578–96.

¹³ Th. C. "Kierkegaard (Søren Aabye)," in *La Grande Encyclopédie*, vols. 1–31, Paris: H. Lamirault et Cie 1885–1902, vol. 21, p. 530. This article has also been translated into English in Billeskov Jansen, "The Study in France," pp. 136–7.

¹⁴ Quoted from Billeskov Jansen, "The Study in France," p. 136.

program. This approach would be followed by many secular French thinkers in the twentieth century. Further, there seems to be a general consensus that, among these pioneers of French Kierkegaard studies, Basch had the best knowledge of Kierkegaard's actual texts and, unlike many of the others, did not base his opinions on second-hand accounts.

Another French-language dissertation was written at the University of Geneva, appearing in 1907 under the title *Kierkegaard et la certitude religieuse. Esquisse biographique et critique*.²⁰ The author of this work, Raoul Hoffmann (1881–1972), was perhaps bilingual; he was familiar with the German Kierkegaard literature and published the work in a German translation in 1910.²¹ This work focuses, among other things, on the concept of the paradox. Hoffmann did not pursue his Kierkegaard studies but instead went on to be a surgeon.

In 1914 André Bellesort (1866–1942) published an article on Kierkegaard in the *Revue de deux mondes* entitled “Le Crépuscule d’Elseneur.”²² This article portrays Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christianity as typical of the dark and depressive Nordic spirit. Kierkegaard is associated with Hamlet, as a figure obsessed with anxiety. Some years later this piece was printed as an independent monograph.²³ Since Pascal (together with Descartes) has traditionally been one of the main points of cultural orientation for French thinkers, it was natural to present Kierkegaard as a kind of Scandinavian Pascal. In 1913 the Danish philosopher Harald Hoffding (1843–1981) gave a lecture on this theme that was subsequently translated into French and published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.²⁴ In 1930 an article with the same title by another Danish scholar appeared in French in the *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses*.²⁵

III. The Influence of the German Sources and the Russian Émigrés

Much of French Kierkegaard reception has been mediated by that of foreign sources. One of the most important of these was the body of German translations and secondary literature on Kierkegaard, which began to appear at a remarkably early period. While many French scholars could read and speak German well, Danish remained an esoteric foreign language. It was thus natural that the German-language materials played a role in pioneering French reception. Christoph Schrempf’s (1860–1944) 12-volume translation of Kierkegaard’s *Gesammelte Schriften* appeared in 1909–

22,²⁶ with an expanded second edition following in 1922–25. This was the text that most French scholars were working with until they received translations in their own language, which began to appear in the 1930s. The early picture of Kierkegaard in France was largely shaped by German intellectuals influenced by him. Figures such as Martin Buber (1878–1965), Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), Karl Barth (1886–1968), and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), were carefully studied and in part co-opted as the French struggled to develop their own form of existential thinking.

One key event triggered the influx of a new group of scholars into France, namely, the October Revolution in Russia. As a result of this event in 1917, a number of Russian scholars in the fields of philosophy and theology fled the country, with many of them seeking refuge in Paris.²⁷ Among them were thinkers such as Lev Zander (1893–1964), Ivan Tikhonrhevsky (1878–1951), and Georgy Florovsky (1893–1979), who had keen interests in Kierkegaard. The most important of these Russia exiles in Paris was Lev Isaakovich Schwazmann (1866–1938) who became known in the West as Léon Chestov or Shestov.

Shestov only began his study of Kierkegaard in the late 1920s after his arrival in Paris. It would mark the beginning of a long and highly personal struggle with his thought. At the beginning of the 1930s he was offering a course at the Department of Russian Studies at the Sorbonne with the title, “Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard.” Shestov’s reputation grew as, in addition to his professional obligations, he also gave a number of public lectures, one of which was published in the well-known and widely-read journal *Les Cahiers du Sud*.²⁸ In connection with his lectures, Shestov was also working on his book *Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle*. Although this work was finished as early as 1934, due to resistance from the French communist community including André Malraux (1901–76), Shestov had difficulties publishing it. Friends of a different political persuasion, such as Nikolay Berdyayev (1874–1948) and Albert Camus (1913–60), helped him to get the book printed with a subscription plan. The work finally appeared in July 1936.²⁹

In this work Kierkegaard is presented as the champion of a lived philosophy engaged in life and conscious of the demands of freedom. He is seen as a strict opponent of the corrupting influence of the rationalism or “theoretical philosophy” of much of the Western tradition. Shestov regards rationalistic thinking as a form of sin and a source of evil and corruption. Rejecting this sterile philosophy, he was interested in Kierkegaard’s analysis of individual figures in real-life situations such as Job, Abraham, and Socrates. While Shestov’s own relation to Christianity was a complex and changing one, he fully accepted Kierkegaard’s analysis of the radical demands that faith places on the individual, and thus he was careful not to modify

²⁰ Raoul Hoffmann, *Kierkegaard et la certitude religieuse. Esquisse biographique et critique*, Geneva: Romet 1907.

²¹ Raoul Hoffmann, *Kierkegaard und die religiöse Gewißheit. Biographisch-kritische Skizze*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1910.

²² André Bellesort, “Le Crépuscule d’Elseneur,” *Revue de deux mondes*, no. 1, 1914, pp. 49–83.

²³ André Bellesort, *Le Crépuscule d’Elseneur*, Paris: Perrin 1926.

²⁴ Harald Hoffding, “Pascal et Kierkegaard,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1923, pp. 221–46.

²⁵ H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, “Pascal et Kierkegaard,” *Revue d’historic et de philosophie religieuses*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1930, pp. 242–63.

²⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Gesammelte Werke*, trans. and ed. by Hermann Gotsched and Christoph Schrempf, vols. 1–12, Jena: Diederichs 1909–22.

²⁷ For an account of this see Darya Lougina’s outstanding article “Russia: Kierkegaard’s Reception through Tsarism, Communism, and Liberation” in Tome II of the present volume.

²⁸ Léon Shestov, “Kierkegaard et Dostoyevski,” in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, no. 18, 1936, pp. 170–200.

²⁹ Léon Chestov, *Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle (Vox clamantis in deserto)*, Paris: J. Vrin 1936. (English translation: *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, trans. by Elinor Hewitt, Athens: Ohio University Press 1969.)

or play down Kierkegaard's striking claims about things such as martyrdom and despair.

Shestov was reproached for writing about his own thoughts more than explicating those of Kierkegaard. This charge is, however, in a sense understandable given Shestov's existential mission to appropriate Kierkegaard's message in his own life and thinking. In any case, this book and Shestov's accompanying lectures were to be a source a great inspiration for the French existentialists. Shestov was to French Kierkegaard studies what his fellow émigré Alexandre Kojève (1902–68) was to French Hegel studies.

It has been often noted that the general mood in Europe in the wake of the First World War and the Russian Revolution was highly receptive to Kierkegaard's message. The Second World War would see this interest repeated and further intensified.

IV. Forerunners of the Existentialists

While Kierkegaard's influence on French existentialism has become a signal episode in the French reception of his thought, this influence did not appear overnight or spontaneously. The ground was made fertile for it by a handful of lesser known thinkers, who are only indirectly associated with the existentialist movement itself. One important figure in this regard was Jean Wahl (1888–1974), a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne. Although not a tremendously productive or original author, his didactical work was important for introducing Kierkegaard to the generation of French scholars that would make existentialism famous.³⁰ In addition to his influential teaching, he wrote introductions to some of the early French translations of Kierkegaard's works.³¹ His essay on anxiety in Kierkegaard from 1932 may well have served as an inspiration for Sartre's later interest in this concept.³² His many short studies of individual concepts were put together in 1938 under a single cover with the title *Études Kierkegaardien*nes.³³ His understanding of Kierkegaard was profoundly influenced by the incipient German Kierkegaard studies. In the following years this book was carefully studied by the existentialists.

Another important figure in this regard was the Romanian Benjamin Fondane (1898–1944), whose interest in Kierkegaard was inspired by Shestov. In 1936 he

published his *La Conscience malheureuse*, a title taken from the famous motif in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³⁴ In this work Fondane analyzes Kierkegaard together with Heidegger and Dostoevsky. Fondane's work was cut short as he ultimately fell victim to the Nazis, dying in the gas chamber in Birkenau in 1944.

A pioneering translator and interpreter of Kierkegaard, Paul Petit (1893–1944), tried to understand Kierkegaard's critique of the Danish State Church and contemporary complacency in religion as an attempt to revert to a pre-Lutheran Catholic position. Despite his attack on the public and the masses, Kierkegaard was, according to Petit, consistent with a Catholic position. In addition to a handful of articles, Petit published a translation of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in 1941.³⁵ A posthumous translation of the *Philosophical Fragments* appeared in 1947.³⁶ Petit, who was active in the French resistance movement, was executed by the Germans in August 1944.

Another important French interpreter of Kierkegaard in the 1940s was the Catholic thinker Régis Jolivet (1891–1966), a professor in Lyon. In 1946 he published his much read *Introduction à Kierkegaard*.³⁷ Two years later he gave one of the earliest attempts at an overview of the existentialist movement, with his *Les doctrines existentialistes de Kierkegaard à J.P. Sartre*.³⁸ His final major work on Kierkegaard appeared in 1958 under the title *Aux sources de l'existentialisme chrétien. Kierkegaard*.³⁹ Jolivet gives Kierkegaard a sympathetic interpretation and, like Petit, enlists him as a defender of Catholicism.

In 1944 Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) published his *Le drame de l'humanisme athée*, which attempts to provide an overview of atheist thinking since the nineteenth century, treating primarily Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Comte, and Dostoevsky.⁴⁰ De Lubac, who was a highly influential and prolific French Catholic cardinal, examines Kierkegaard's thought and juxtaposes him to Nietzsche.⁴¹ Despite the apparent contradiction of Nietzsche's atheism and Kierkegaard's faith, there are, according

³⁴ Benjamin Fondane, *La conscience malheureuse*, Paris: Éditions Denoël 1936 ("Martin Heidegger sur les routes de Kierkegaard et de Dostoievski," pp. 169–98; "Soeren Kierkegaard et la catégorie du secret," pp. 199–227; "Chestov et Kierkegaard et le serpent," pp. 229–57 (with the same title originally published, *Les Cahiers du Sud*, vol. 21, August 1934, pp. 534–54)).

³⁵ *Post-scriptum aux Miettes philosophiques*, trans. by Paul Petit, Paris: Mesnil 1941.

³⁶ *Les miettes philosophiques*, trans. by Paul Petit, Paris: Éditions du Livre français 1947.

³⁷ Régis Jolivet, *Introduction à Kierkegaard*, Paris, Abbaye Saint-Wandrille: Éditions de Fontenelle 1946.

³⁸ Régis Jolivet, *Les doctrines existentialistes de Kierkegaard à J.P. Sartre*, Paris, Abbaye Saint-Wandrille: Éditions de Fontenelle 1948.

³⁹ Régis Jolivet, *Aux sources de l'existentialisme chrétien Kierkegaard*, Paris: Éditions Fayard 1958.

⁴⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée*, Paris: Éditions Spes 1944. (English translation: *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. by Edith M. Riley, London: Sheed & Ward 1949.)

⁴¹ Lubac, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée*, pp. 71–113; *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, pp. 36–60.

to de Lubac, a number of surprising points of coincidence, including their struggle against Hegelian historicism.

The professor of philosophy Pierre Mesnard (1900–69) played a significant early role in French Kierkegaard studies. He was particularly captivated by *The Concept of Irony and Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel and the German Romantics*. His main work is the much discussed *Le vrai visage de Kierkegaard* from 1948.⁴² This book treats Kierkegaard's main pseudonymous works, which Mesnard interprets as stages in Kierkegaard's own development. Mesnard also authored an introduction to Kierkegaard's writings in 1954 under the title *Kierkegaard. Sa vie, son œuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie*.⁴³ This work also presents Kierkegaard's thought and authorship primarily in terms of the three stages. After Mesnard's own introduction, the second half of the text consists of selected extracts from Kierkegaard's writings, which are likewise organized into categories following the different stages. Sections are also dedicated to Kierkegaard's concepts of humor and irony.

Another early translator was Jean-Jacques Gateau (1887–1967) who translated some of Kierkegaard's journals and "The Diary of a Seducer," which he published as individual articles.⁴⁴ The latter text was then republished in 1929 as a monograph in the series *Le cabinet cosmopolite*, which included texts from foreign literature.⁴⁵ In the 1930s a series of translations of Kierkegaard's main pseudonymous works that Gateau made together with the Dane Knud Ferlov were published at Gallimard.⁴⁶

Finally, Gateau and Ferlov produced a five-volume selection of Kierkegaard's *Nachlaß*, which appeared from the beginning of the 1940s into the 1960s.⁴⁷ This edition, which is based on the Danish edition of the *Papirer*, remains to this day the most extensive collection of Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks in French.

The study of Kierkegaard in France was facilitated by the first systematic translation of Kierkegaard's works by Paul-Henri Tisseau (1894–1964).⁴⁸ Prior to

Tisseau, many of the French Kierkegaard translations, like those of Gateau, were chapters or parts of larger works, such as "The Diary of a Seducer" or "In Vino Veritas," misleadingly published as Kierkegaard's signed works and as independent monographs. Tisseau wished to give the French reader a more accurate picture of Kierkegaard's writings by translating complete texts.

Tisseau had the opportunity to learn Danish since he was married to a Dane and in 1926 received an appointment as a lecturer at the University of Lund in Sweden, just across the sound from Denmark. He soon became interested in Kierkegaard and began translating individual works, without any vision of a collected edition. The first translations appeared in 1933.⁴⁹ Tisseau experienced many setbacks in his attempts. He lost his Kierkegaard books and materials when his house in Nantes was destroyed by a bomb in the Second World War. He also had difficulty finding the financial resources to support his translations. After his death in 1964, Tisseau's daughter Else-Marie Jacquet-Tisseau (1925–2003) took it upon herself to organize and supplement her father's translations in the form of a collected works edition. This was published in 20 volumes from 1966 to 1986 at the publishing house Éditions de l'Orante under the editorial supervision of Jacques Lafarge.⁵⁰ This translation used the second edition of the *Samlede Værker* as its textual basis.⁵¹

V. The Existentialists

There can be no doubt the many of the leading figures associated with the French existentialist movement were in some ways influenced by Kierkegaard, and some of them indeed explicitly attempted to appropriate him to their cause.⁵² This appropriation has rightly or wrongly earned him the title of "the father of existentialism" and has assured the dutiful inclusion of a few excerpts from his texts in virtually every anthology of existentialist authors ever assembled. The existentialists readily identified with Kierkegaard's protest against sterile, abstract philosophy that has nothing to do with actuality as individuals experience it in their daily lives. In an age of totalitarian regimes, his emphasis on the individual and human freedom found a natural resonance. Similarly, his criticism of the masses and the public in works such as *A Literary Review of Two Ages* struck a chord in the quickly developing anonymous and spiritless modern society of the twentieth

⁴² Pierre Mesnard, *Le vrai visage de Kierkegaard*, Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils 1948.

⁴³ Pierre Mesnard, *Kierkegaard. Sa vie, son œuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1954.

⁴⁴ "Fragments d'un journal," trans. by Jean J. Gateau, *Commerce*, no. 12, 1927, pp. 153–64; pp. 165–202; "Le journal du séducteur," trans. by Jean J. Gateau, *Bibliothèque universelle et Revue de Genève*, vol. 2 (December) 1929, pp. 714–43.

⁴⁵ *Le journal du séducteur*, trans. and introduced by Jean J. Gateau, Paris: Libr. Stock, Delamain & Boutelleau 1929 (*Le cabinet cosmopolite*, série scandinave, vol. 43).

⁴⁶ *Traité du désespoir. (La maladie mortelle)*, trans. by Knud Ferlov and Jean J. Gateau, Paris: Gallimard 1932; *Le concept de l'angoisse*, trans. by Jean J. Gateau and Knud Ferlov, Paris: Gallimard 1935; *Les Riens philosophiques*, trans. by Jean J. Gateau and Knud Ferlov, Paris: Gallimard 1937.

⁴⁷ *Journal. Extraits*, vols. 1–5, trans. by Jean J. Gateau and Knud Ferlov, Paris: Gallimard 1942–61.

⁴⁸ See Jacques Lafarge, "Kierkegaard dans la tradition française: Les conditions de sa réception dans les meilleurs philosophiques," in *Kierkegaard Revisited. Proceedings from the Conference "Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning II"* Copenhagen, May 5–9, 1996, ed. by Niels Jorgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997 (*Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 10), pp. 274–90; especially pp. 283–4.

⁴⁹ Jacques Lafarge, "L'Édition des Œuvres complètes de Kierkegaard en français: contexte — historique—objectifs—conception—réalisation," *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook*, 2000, pp. 300–16.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vols. 1–20, ed. and trans. by Paul-Henri Tisseau and Else-Marie Jacquet-Tisseau, Paris: Éditions de l'Orante 1966–86.

⁵¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Samlede Værker*, vols. 1–15, ed. by A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1920–36.

⁵² See Ronald Grimsley, "French Existentialism," in *The Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1981 (*Biblioteca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 8), pp. 121–34.

century. Finally, in the context of the Second World War and the German occupation of France, his profound analyses of anxiety, despair, and authenticity seemed to take on an immediate relevance and significance for many French intellectuals. They shared with him an interdisciplinary profile, often using novels and dramas instead of philosophical tracts to illustrate their ideas.

The philosopher and dramatist Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) makes use of Kierkegaard sporadically in his long authorship.⁵³ Marcel refers to Kierkegaard in his book *L'Homme problématique* from 1955.⁵⁴ In this work he explores the different conditions for the self-alienation of modern human beings. In his account of the different historical diagnoses of this alienation, he dedicates a short chapter to Kierkegaard.⁵⁵ Much of this chapter is concerned with Kierkegaard's understanding of the concept of anxiety. Here Marcel treats some of the same material that inspired Sartre's theory of human freedom, but in contrast to Sartre, Marcel actually gives a reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*. Marcel agrees with Sartre that, in his rejection of abstract thinking and in his focus on the individual's relation to concrete existence, "Kierkegaard appears as the true initiator of the philosophy of existence, and it is of the greatest importance to observe at the same time that this philosophy finds itself placed from the outset under the sign of anguish."⁵⁶

Marcel, later as an old man, gave a paper on his own relation to Kierkegaard at the conference *Kierkegaard vivant* held in Paris in 1963.⁵⁷ This task was doubtless inspired by the claim, popular at the time, that Kierkegaard was the father of existentialism. Since Marcel was one of the existentialists, he felt the need to clarify this relation. At the beginning of this piece he plays down his knowledge of Kierkegaard, claiming that he did not know Kierkegaard's texts very well during the formative years of his writing. Marcel does, however, explore some connections between his own dramatic works and Kierkegaard's interest in the theater and different forms of communication. In the end he admits a more substantial influence and agrees that he and Kierkegaard belong to the same family of thinkers.

Another important thinker in this context is the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). Kierkegaard is referred to several times in Maritain's book on the "existentialism" of Thomas Aquinas: *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant* from 1947.⁵⁸ In this work Kierkegaard is taken primarily as an early representative

of existentialism.⁵⁹ Maritain also offers a criticism of Kierkegaard's separation of subjective and objective thinking:

Kierkegaard's great error, amid all his great intuitions was to separate and oppose as two heterogeneous worlds the world of *generality*, or universal law, and that of the unique witness (unjustifiable at the bar of reason) borne by the "knight of faith." Consequently, he had to sacrifice, or at least "suspend" ethics. In reality these two worlds are in continuity; both form part of the universe of ethics, which itself is divided into typically diversified zones according to the degree of depth of moral life.⁶⁰

Maritain insists that there is a continuity in the spheres or stages, which are conceived by Kierkegaard as being radically distinct. He also notes Kierkegaard's polemic with Hegel as follows:

Subjectivity marks the frontier which separates the world of philosophy from the world of religion. This is what Kierkegaard felt so deeply in his polemic against Hegel. Philosophy runs against an insurmountable barrier in attempting to deal with subjectivity, because while philosophy of course knows subjects, it knows them only as objects. Philosophy is registered whole and entire in the relation of intelligence to object; whereas religion enters into the relation of subject to subject. For this reason, every philosophical religion, or every philosophy, which, like Hegel's, claims to assume and integrate religion into itself, is in the last analysis a mystification.⁶¹

Here Maritain seems positively disposed towards Kierkegaard's efforts to keep philosophy and religion separate. At the end of the work Maritain makes the connection between Aquinas and existentialism by means of Kierkegaard:

We believe that the central intuition on which the existentialism of a Kierkegaard lived was in the last analysis the same as that which lies at the heart of Thomism. We refer to the intuition of the absolutely singular value and the primacy of the act of existing, the *existencia ut exercita*. But in Kierkegaard it sprang from the depths of a faith filled with anguish, robbed of its intelligible or superintelligible structure, desperately expecting the miraculous and rejecting the mystical possession for which it thirsts; it sprang from a radically irrationalist thought which rejects and sacrifices essences and falls back upon the night of subjectivity.⁶²

⁵³ For a useful thematic account of this relation, see J.B.L. Knox, *Gabriel Marcel. Håbets filosof, fornvindeiens dramatiker*, Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2003, pp. 26–7; pp. 34–6; p. 72; pp. 140–2. See also Jeanne Parain-Vial, "Gabriel Marcel et Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard*, ed. by Jean Brun, Nyons: Borderie 1981 (special number of *Obligues*), pp. 185–91.

⁵⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *L'Homme problématique*, Paris: Aubier 1955. (English translation: *Problematic Man*, trans. by Brian Thompson, New York: Herder and Herder 1967.)

⁵⁵ Marcel, *L'Homme problématique*, pp. 126–34. (*Problematic Man*, pp. 101–6.)

⁵⁶ Marcel, *L'Homme problématique*, p. 131. (*Problematic Man*, p. 104.)

⁵⁷ Gabriel Marcel, "Kierkegaard en ma pensée," in *Kierkegaard vivant. Colloque organisé par l'Unesco à Paris du 21 au 23 avril 1964*, Paris: Gallimard 1966, pp. 64–80.

⁵⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, p. 119. (*Existence and the Existents*, p. 72.)

⁵⁹ Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, p. 11; pp. 197–201. (*Existence and the Existents*, p. 2; pp. 123–5.)

⁶⁰ Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, pp. 93–4. (*Existence and the Existents*, p. 56.)

⁶¹ Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, p. 119. (*Existence and the Existents*, p. 72.)

⁶² Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, pp. 208–9. (*Existence and the Existents*, pp. 130–1.) Here Maritain is actually quoting himself from a previous article.

Maritain thus finds that Kierkegaard and what he refers to as the "first existential generation"⁶³ kept true to this principle, while the later atheist existentialists, such as Heidegger and Sartre, betrayed it by turning it into something academic.

In 1957 Maritain authored a short essay specifically on Kierkegaard, who is again reproached for being an irrationalist who rejects any form of binding ethics. Here it seems that Kierkegaard is made to pay for the sins of Sartre, who, as we will see below, highlights Kierkegaard's thought on freedom at the expense of his thoughts on morality. Kierkegaard also plays a role in Maritain's grand work on ethics, *La Philosophie morale* from 1960.⁶⁴ In his treatment of Socrates, Maritain refers to Kierkegaard's account of Socratic irony in *The Concept of Irony*.⁶⁵ Kierkegaard is also mentioned in connection with Kant's philosophy. Maritain claims that the abstract nature of Kant's ethics was one of the factors that made Kierkegaard revolt against abstraction and the universal.⁶⁶ Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel's understanding of religion is treated in a couple of different passages.⁶⁸ Kierkegaard is also mentioned as an important source of Sartre's existentialism.⁶⁹ Finally, Maritain compares Kierkegaard's account of the divine with that of Bergson (1859–1941).⁷⁰

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), probably the most important ideologue of the existentialist movement, apparently first read Kierkegaard during his time as a soldier in 1939–40. Sartre had already made a careful study of Husserl and Heidegger in part during a stay in Berlin in 1933–34. Sartre in fact records his reading of Kierkegaard in the so-called *War Diaries*, which he kept at this time. In his *Notebook 5*, on December 17, 1938, Sartre writes:

If Kierkegaard is right to call "the possibility of freedom" anxiety, it's not without a touch of anxiety that I discovered once again yesterday morning that I was entirely free to break the piece of bread which the waitress had placed beside me, and free also to convey the fragments to my mouth. Nothing in the world could stop me from doing so, not even myself.⁷¹

In a letter dated December 1, 1939 he requests to Simone de Beauvoir that she send him a copy of *The Concept of Anxiety*.⁷² In the same notebook on December 19, 1939, he lists this work among the books which he has read recently.⁷³ This reading is reflected in some of the entries in the same journal. On December 18, he quotes the following passage from *The Concept of Anxiety*: "...the relation of anxiety to its object, to something that is nothing (linguistic usage also says pregnantly: to be anxious about nothing)..."⁷⁴ This Kierkegaard quotation and the passage quoted above can be taken as evidence that Kierkegaard is the original source of Sartre's doctrine of the anxiety in the face of the nothingness of absolute freedom.

Like many of the thinkers of his generation, Sartre was aware of Heidegger's interest in Kierkegaard. He notes this explicitly in a letter dated December 16, 1839: "I'm reading *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which there are countless things within theological terms that are obviously a bit forbidding. His influence on Heidegger is undeniable."⁷⁵ In the same notebook mentioned above, Sartre then goes on to note a similarity between the two thinkers:

The influence upon Heidegger is clear: use of the stock phrase "to be in anxiety of nothing" is found word for word in *Sein und Zeit*. But it's true that for Heidegger anxiety is anxiety-at-Nothingness, which is not Nothing but, as Wahl says, "a cosmic fact against which existence stands out." Whereas, for Kierkegaard, it's a question of "a psychological anguish and a nothing that is in the mind." This nothing, in short, is possibility. Possibility that is nothing as yet, since man in the state of innocence does not yet know of what it's a possibility. But it's there, nevertheless, as a sign of freedom: "What passed by innocence as the nothing of anxiety has now entered into Adam, and here again it is a nothing—the anxious possibility of being able...as a higher form of ignorance, as a higher expression of anxiety."⁷⁶

The last part of this passage is a quotation from *The Concept of Anxiety*.⁷⁷ The point here, with respect to Kierkegaard, is the same as in the previously quoted passages. According to Sartre, Kierkegaard's view is that there are no facts but only possibilities. We realize these possibilities by means of our freedom. But since there

⁶³ Maritain, *Court Traité de l'Existence et de l'existant*, p. 213. (*Existence and the Existent*, p. 133.)

⁶⁴ Jacques Maritain, "Le champion du singulier," *Recherches et Débats*, 1957, no. 19, pp. 14–19.

⁶⁵ Jacques Maritain, *La Philosophie morale*, vol. 1, *Examen historique et critique des grands systèmes*, Paris: Gallimard 1960. The aforementioned essay, "Le champion du singulier," has been incorporated in his "La protestation kierkegardienne (Méditation sur le singulier)" in his *La Philosophie morale*, vol. 1, pp. 439–59.

⁶⁶ Maritain, *La Philosophie morale*, pp. 20–1; p. 26; p. 32.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 148–9.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 232; p. 269.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 464; p. 475n; p. 488.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 545–6.

⁷¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, November 1939–March 1940, Paris: Gallimard 1983, p. 158. (English translation: *The War Diaries*, trans. by Quinton Hoare, New York: Pantheon 1984, pp. 124–5.)

⁷² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Simone de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard 1983, vol. 1, p. 451. (English translation: *Witness to My Life. The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir 1926–1939*, trans. by Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, Hammondswoth: Penguin 1994, p. 378.)

⁷³ Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, p. 176; *The War Diaries*, p. 139. SKS 4, 348 / CA, 43.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*, vol. 1, p. 491. (*Witness to My Life*, p. 413.) See also *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*, vol. 1, p. 494. (*Witness to My Life*, p. 416): "I'll write to my parents and then read a bit in *The Concept of Anxiety*, which I'll send or bring back to you, and which you'll read with the greatest of interest, if only to understand Kierkegaard's influence on Heidegger and Kafka (you know that Kafka feathers his nest through that book)."

⁷⁵ Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, p. 166. (*The War Diaries*, pp. 131–2.) Translation slightly modified.

⁷⁶ SKS 4, 350 / CA, 44–5.

are no rational criteria for choosing which ones to realize, one is left with an anxiety in the face of the manifold of equally meaningless possibilities.

Again in his journals Sartre takes up the question of moral responsibility and accountability. He writes, "the more I see that men deserve war—and deserve it more, the more they wage it. It's like the sin of Adam that each individual, according to Kierkegaard, freely adopts as his own. The declaration of war, which was the fault of certain men, we adopt as our own, with our freedom."⁷⁸ Sartre has his own account of appropriation according to which one makes the world one's own by means of one's freedom. In Sartre's extreme view, by accepting certain morally repugnant situations, one not only condones them but even makes oneself responsible for them. Sartre's study of Kierkegaard corresponds to the period when he was writing his philosophical masterpiece *Being and Nothingness*, which was published in 1943 in occupied France.⁷⁹ This work argues for the irreducibility of human freedom and authenticity and clearly bears the stamp of some of Kierkegaard's thoughts on these subjects. Here Sartre again draws primarily on *The Concept of Anxiety* and the account of freedom given there. At the beginning of the work he writes:

Kierkegaard describing anxiety in the face of what one lacks characterizes it as anxiety in the face of freedom. But Heidegger, whom we know to have been greatly influenced by Kierkegaard, considers anxiety instead as the apprehension of nothingness. These two descriptions of anxiety do not appear to us contradictory; on the contrary the one implies the other.⁸⁰

This observation is an echo from his *War Diaries*, where he writes, "Anxiety as Nothingness, with Heidegger? Anxiety of freedom, with Kierkegaard? In my view it's one and the same thing, for freedom is the apparition of Nothingness in the world."⁸¹ Sartre continues in *Being and Nothingness*: "First we must acknowledge that Kierkegaard is right; anxiety is distinguished from fear in that fear is of beings in the world whereas anxiety is anxiety before myself."⁸² According to Sartre, for Kierkegaard there is a personal or subjective dimension of anxiety that involves a self-relation and not a relation to a genuine, objective danger in the external world. This may well be what Sartre refers to in a letter dated December 21, 1939, when he writes, in reference to *The Concept of Anxiety*: "I also found a theory of nothingness while reading Kierkegaard."⁸³

In a footnote in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre refers to "the 'ambiguous' realities of Kierkegaard."⁸⁴ This is also a theme that he touched upon in his notebooks; for example, on 17 December 1839 Sartre writes, "So that ambiguity which would have been shocking to a systematic mind (and yet, I have a systematic mind)—that ambiguity which Kierkegaard calls to his aid against Hegel—first appeared to me through an experiment in physics; or, at least, this experiment in physics established *against physics* that idea of ambiguous states."⁸⁵ Here it is not entirely clear what in Kierkegaard Sartre has in mind; however, with the reference to the criticism of Hegel, one might infer that he is thinking of the beginning of *The Sickness unto Death*, where Kierkegaard talks about the human being as a synthesis of contradictory elements. Humans are thus ambiguous and cannot be defined straightforwardly. As we will see below, this is a motif that Simone de Beauvoir takes up. This passage might also be a reference to Kierkegaard's remarks in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* about ambiguity in relation to the sciences.

In his account of the existence of others, Sartre explains Hegel's account of lordship and bondage and the dialectic of recognition from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this context, he mentions Kierkegaard as a counterweight:

Here as everywhere we ought to oppose Hegel to Kierkegaard, who represents the claims of the individual as such. The individual claims his achievement as an individual, the recognition of his concrete being, and of the objective specification of a universal structure. Of course the *rights* which I demand from the Other posit the universality of *self*; respect of persons demands the recognition of my person as universal. But it is my concrete and individual being which flows into this universal and fills it; it is for that *being-there* that I demand rights. The particular is here the support and foundation of the universal; the universal in this case could have no meaning if it did not exist for the purpose of the individual.⁸⁶

Sartre thus avails himself of the old cliché of Kierkegaard as the champion of the individual in the face of Hegel's unwavering claim for the lifeless universal. Finally, there is an allusion to Kierkegaard's understanding of irony,⁸⁷ but Sartre does not say enough for one to adjudicate whether or not he actually made a study of *The Concept of Irony*.

In his famous lecture from 1946, *Existentialism is a Humanism*,⁸⁸ Sartre mentions Kierkegaard explicitly as a forerunner of existentialism. Here reference is made to Kierkegaard's analysis of the story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, which Sartre uses as a model for his theory of radical freedom, without reasons or excuses. He writes:

⁷⁸ Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, p. 204. (*The War Diaries*, p. 164.)

⁷⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris: Gallimard 1943. (English translation: *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Citadel Press 1969.)

⁸⁰ Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 66. (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 29.) Here Sartre references Wahl's *Études Kierkegaardgiennes* for the connection between Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

⁸¹ Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, p. 166. (*The War Diaries*, p. 132.) Translation slightly modified.

⁸² Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 66. (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 29.)

⁸³ Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*, vol. 1, p. 500. (*Witness to My Life*, p. 421.)

⁸⁴ Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 138n. (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 94n.)

⁸⁵ Sartre, *Les carnets de la drôle de guerre*, p. 153. (*The War Diaries*, p. 120.)

⁸⁶ Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 295–6. (*Being and Nothingness*, pp. 239–40.)

⁸⁷ Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 669. (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 580.)

⁸⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris: Les Éditions Nagel 1946. (English translation: *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet, Brooklyn: Haskell House 1948.)

This is the anxiety that Kierkegaard called "the anxiety of Abraham." You know the story: An angel commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son; and obedience was obligatory, if it really was an angel who had appeared and said, "Thou, Abraham, shalt sacrifice thy son." But anyone in such a case would wonder, first, whether it was indeed an angel and secondly, whether I am really Abraham. Where are the proofs?...I shall never find any proof whatsoever; there will be no sign to convince me of it. If a voice speaks to me, it is still I myself who must decide whether the voice is or is not of an angel.⁸⁹

For Sartre, the upshot of this story is that Abraham illustrates the anxiety that we feel when we realize that we are constantly in positions where we are obliged to choose, but yet we ultimately have no rational criteria by which to determine our choices. We must nonetheless accept and embrace our freedom with our choices and actions.

Kierkegaard continues to be an interest for Sartre in his later works. In *Search for a Method*, which was originally printed as an article in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1957,⁹⁰ then later as an introductory part of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*,⁹¹ and finally as an independent monograph,⁹² Sartre juxtaposes Kierkegaard to Hegel in his attempt to sketch the relation between Marxism and existentialism. Hegel is presented as the champion of knowledge and universality, while Kierkegaard is portrayed as the exponent of the individual and subjectivity. Sartre claims that in the historical development of thought, Kierkegaard represents a development:

Kierkegaard is right: grief, need, passion, the pain of men, are brute realities which can be neither surpassed nor changed by knowledge. To be sure, Kierkegaard's religious subjectivism can with good reason be taken as the very peak of idealism; but in relation to Hegel, he marks a progress toward realism, since he insists above all on the *primacy* of the specifically real over thought, that the real cannot be reduced to thought.⁹³

Sartre can thus see Kierkegaard as an intermediary figure between Hegel and Marx, who also criticized Hegel's idealism and insisted on a focus on the concrete material relations. Kierkegaard is seen as anticipating Marx's emphasis on action in contrast to thinking.

There was a major conference held in Paris in 1963 organized by UNESCO on occasion of the 150-year anniversary of Kierkegaard's birth. This conference, entitled *Kierkegaard vivant*, brought together many of the major intellectuals of the period. On this occasion, Sartre presented a paper entitled "Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal."⁹⁴ This is clearly his most straightforward statement of his

⁸⁹ Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, pp. 29–30; (*Existentialism and Humanism*, pp. 31–2.)

⁹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Questions de méthode," *Les temps modernes*, no. 139 (September 1957), pp. 338–417; no. 140 (October) 1957, pp. 658–98. (English translation: *Search for a Method*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Vintage 1968 [Alfred A. Knopf 1963].)

⁹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, vol. 1, *Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, Paris: Gallimard 1960, pp. 13–111.

⁹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Questions de méthode*, Paris: Gallimard 1960.

⁹³ Sartre, *Questions de méthode*, p. 19. (*Search for a Method*, p. 12.)

⁹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," in *Kierkegaard vivant. Colloque organisé par l'Unesco à Paris du 21 au 23 avril 1964*, Paris: Gallimard 1966, pp. 20–63 (reprinted 1970).

understanding of Kierkegaard's thought and its significance for French philosophy at the time. Here Kierkegaard is portrayed as the proponent of the individual, who fights against all attempts to reduce people to objects and patterns of history. For Sartre, Kierkegaard should not just be "an object of knowledge" for us, but rather we must also try to understand and appropriate for ourselves "the determination of his *praxis*.⁹⁵" Sartre points out the interpretive paradox of trying to understand Kierkegaard today—a man who claimed that the interiority and subjectivity of another person is "always inaccessible to cognition in its strict sense."⁹⁶ Given this, does it even make sense to try to understand Kierkegaard, and if we do, what is it that we are really understanding?⁹⁷

Philosophical Fragments is the Kierkegaard text that Sartre makes the point of departure for this study. Sartre refers to the doctrines of the paradox, reduplication and contemporaneity and quotes the text directly. He outlines the problem of Hegel's all-encompassing system, which seems to swallow everything in its path. In this sense Kierkegaard was, according to Sartre, aware that he would be taken up as a moment in this universalizing system. As some authors have suggested, he represents the stage of the unhappy religious consciousness, sketched in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. But, for Kierkegaard, this universal knowledge is not ultimately what is important. Rather, the key for the individual is the lived truth. With a quotation from the *Fragments*,⁹⁸ Sartre interprets this as a statement about freedom and autonomy:

And so he could write, in the *Fragments*: "My own Untruth is something I can discover only by myself, since it is only when I have discovered it that it is discovered, even if the whole world knew of it before." But when it is discovered, my Untruth becomes, at least in the immediate, my Truth. So subjective truth exists. It is not knowledge but self-determination; it can be defined neither as an extrinsic relation of knowledge to being, nor as the internal imprint of a correspondence, nor as the indissoluble unity of a system. "Truth," he said, "is the act of freedom."⁹⁹

This fits in well with Sartre's understanding of Kierkegaard as a forerunner of his own theory of radical freedom. It must, however, be said that Sartre presents this pseudonymous statement straightforwardly as Kierkegaard's own and indeed mentions nothing about the fact that this part of the text is conceived as a "thought project" in which secular Socratic knowing is sketched, only later to be contrasted to Christian knowing.

As long as Kierkegaard lived, Sartre claims, he maintained his singularity and with humor and irony resisted putting forth objective knowledge and being incorporated

in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations IX*, Paris: Gallimard 1971, pp. 152–90. (English translation: "Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal," in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. by John Mathews, New York: Pantheon Books 1974, pp. 141–69.)

⁹⁵ Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," in *Kierkegaard vivant*, p. 21. ("Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal," p. 141.)

⁹⁶ Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," in *Kierkegaard vivant*, p. 22. ("Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal," p. 142.)

⁹⁷ SKS 4, 223 / Pf: 15.

⁹⁸ Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," in *Kierkegaard vivant*, pp. 26–7. ("Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal," p. 145.)

into the system. As a single individual, "he desperately wanted to designate himself as a transhistorical absolute."¹⁰⁰ However, this ended with his death and the destruction of his subjectivity. Then all that remained was objective knowledge for later thinkers to appropriate. His subjectivity will continue to elude us forever. Thus, Kierkegaard represents for Sartre the paradox of "the singular universal." He poses this paradox as a problem at the end of the essay.

Finally, Kierkegaard also appears briefly in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* from 1960.¹⁰¹ At the beginning of this work Sartre dwells on some methodological considerations concerning the nature of dialectical thinking and analysis. In a footnote, he refers as follows to Kierkegaard's concepts of the paradox and ambiguity:

Theoretical psychoanalysis simultaneously employs determinism, the dialectic, and "paradox" in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term. Ambivalence, for example, cannot now be regarded as a contradiction or exactly as Kierkegaardian *ambiguity*. Given the way the concept is used, one is tempted to think of a real contradiction with interpenetrating terms or, in other words, of a contradiction without opposition. In my opinion, what psychoanalysis lacks is opposition, at least in certain respects (for there is dialectical conflict between the id, the superego and the ego). They have nonetheless constructed a rationality and what might be called a logic of ambiguity—which would scandalize poor Kierkegaard.¹⁰²

Here Sartre appeals to Kierkegaardian concepts in a criticism of psychoanalysis. By Kierkegaard's concept of ambiguity, Sartre refers to the analyses of the individual as a synthesis of contradictory elements such as infinity and finitude. This reference is quite casual, and the point that Sartre wishes to make concerns psychoanalysis and not Kierkegaard.

It is interesting that such a profoundly secular thinker as Sartre could be so keenly interested in the thought of such a profoundly religious thinker as Kierkegaard. Indeed, it is telling that Sartre effectively ignores the context of Kierkegaard's account of freedom, namely, an analysis of the concept of sin. By contrast, he is keen to exploit Kierkegaard's sense of the anxiety in the world of freedom and choice. Similarly, in his analysis of the story of Abraham and Isaac, Sartre abstracts from the very obvious religious dimension of the narrative. He is not in the least interested in the question of the obedience to a divine command or the nature of faith as Kierkegaard is; rather, for Sartre, the only real point that the story is intended to demonstrate is that Abraham has radical freedom. It is not a question about faith but rather action. Another oddity about this appropriation is that Sartre seems to ignore the fact that Kierkegaard is an essentialist. Sartre is known for his sloganistic claim that

¹⁰⁰ Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," in *Kierkegaard vivant*, p. 30. ("Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal," p. 147.)

¹⁰¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, vol. 1, *Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, Paris: Gallimard 1960. (English translation: *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, *Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith, London: NBL, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press 1976.)

¹⁰² Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, p. 117n. (*Critique of Dialectical Reason*, pp. 17n, 18n.)

"existence precedes essence" in the sense that there is no ultimate human essence, but rather our essence is fluid and mutable since we choose it freely. In *Existentialism is a Humanism* Sartre presents this as an attempt to provide a single unified doctrine that all those associated with the existentialist movement could sign on to. By contrast, while Kierkegaard does not speak of a fixed human essence as such, he does emphasize that humans are created beings subject to certain limiting factors, e.g., a dependence on God. It is thus strange that Sartre picks out Kierkegaard as a forerunner of the existentialist school given that he clearly could not agree to that school's first premise, according to Sartre's own definition of it. Finally, from these passages it is also clear that Sartre's main philosophical point of orientation is Heidegger, and his discovery of Kierkegaard came only later. Kierkegaard is thus understood by Sartre, at least in part, not on his own but rather in terms of Heidegger's universe of concepts.¹⁰³

Albert Camus (1913–60) makes active use of Kierkegaard in his famous work *The Myth of Sisyphus* from 1942. There he avails himself of Kierkegaard's analysis of the absurd and expands it from Kierkegaard's original context as faith by virtue of the absurd to a major existential statement about the absurdity of a meaningless world. Like Sartre, Camus seems to ascribe to Kierkegaard a special role as a forerunner of the existentialist movement: "since Kierkegaard's fatal sickness 'that malady that leads to death with nothing else following it,' the significant and tormenting themes of absurd thought have followed one another."¹⁰⁴ Also like Sartre, Camus runs through a series of existential thinkers, giving a brief account of the contribution of each. His blurb on Kierkegaard is as follows:

Of all perhaps the most engaging, Kierkegaard, for a part of his existence at least, does more than discover the absurd, he lives it. The man who writes: "the surest of stubborn silences is not to hold one's tongue but to talk" makes sure in the beginning that no truth is absolute or can render satisfactory an existence that is impossible in itself. Don Juan of the understanding, he multiplies pseudonyms and contradictions, writes his *Edifying Discourses* at the same time as that manual of cynical spiritualism, "The Diary of the Seducer." He refuses consolations, ethics, reliable principles. As for that thorn he feels in his heart, he is careful not to quiet its pain. On the contrary, he awakens it and, in desperate joy of a man crucified and happy to be so, he builds up piece by piece—lucidity, refusal, make-believe—a category of the man possessed. That face both tender and sneering, those pirouettes followed by a cry from the heart are the absurd spirit itself grappling with a reality beyond its comprehension. And the spiritual adventure that leads Kierkegaard to his beloved scandals begins likewise in the chaos of an experience divested of its setting and relegated to its original incoherence.¹⁰⁴

Camus seems to take Kierkegaard to be a forerunner of the doctrine of the meaninglessness of the world, which is reflected both in his writings and in his

¹⁰³ This has been noted before by Grimsley, "French Existentialism," pp. 121–34.

¹⁰⁴ Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris: Gallimard 1970 [1942]. (English translation: *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien, New York: Vintage 1991, p. 23.)

¹⁰⁵ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, pp. 42, 3. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 25, 6.)

biography. In other words, he ascribes to Kierkegaard a doctrine quite close to that of Romantic irony that Kierkegaard was so keen to criticize in *The Concept of Irony*.

In his most substantial discussion of Kierkegaard, Camus praises him for recognizing the paradoxical nature of faith and for focusing on despair and the absurd. On this point Camus seems somewhat more sensitive to the religious dimension in Kierkegaard's thought than Sartre. However, according to Camus, Kierkegaard should have held fast with this view and not attempted to resolve it. The point is "not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments."¹⁰⁵ He continues, "Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish, and it runs throughout his whole journal. The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition."¹⁰⁶ By embracing Christianity, Kierkegaard, according to Camus, sought an authentic solution to the problem of existence that he had so astutely described. Kierkegaard cannot bear the meaninglessness of existence and thus flees to an illusory comfort. Even though Kierkegaard talks about the difficulty of faith, it is still clearly a goal or ideal and what gives life meaning. By contrast, for Camus, the true existential hero is one who, like Sisyphus, can accept the absurd and the lack of meaning, and leave it at that without seeking any reconciliation. To defend his interpretation, Camus quotes extensively from Kierkegaard's journals. In a comparison of Kierkegaard with Husserl, Camus continues his critique: "The leap does not represent an extreme danger as Kierkegaard would like it to do. The danger, on the contrary, lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on the dizzying crest—that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge."¹⁰⁷ Camus clearly recognizes and appreciates Kierkegaard's doctrine of offense, but he also points out passages where Kierkegaard talks of achieving reconciliation. He takes this to be a betrayal of the original principle: "Reconciliation through offense is still reconciliation."¹⁰⁸ One might wish to defend Kierkegaard against this charge by pointing out that, for him, faith never does reach a static point of rest but is always in a dialectic with offense, fear, and trembling. However, even if Camus has got this part wrong, what he wants to point out is that the general wish for religious reconciliation is an illusion and a self-deception for the disabused existential hero. Camus rightly notes that "antimony and paradox become criteria of the religious."¹⁰⁹ Then he goes on to expand this from what Kierkegaard calls "the sphere of subjectivity" to the world in general: Kierkegaard "makes the absurd the criterion of the other world, whereas it is simply a residue of the experience of this world."¹¹⁰ In other words, it is not just faith that is absurd but the entire universe. Here, however, one might object that Camus is using the word "absurd" in a way different from Kierkegaard's sense. While in Kierkegaard "absurd" refers to the doctrine of the paradox and implies the contradiction of the finite and the infinite, the eternal and the temporal, Camus takes it to imply meaninglessness or nihilism.

¹⁰⁵ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 58. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 38.)

¹⁰⁶ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 58. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 38–9.)

¹⁰⁷ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 72. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 50.)

¹⁰⁸ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 59. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 39.)

¹⁰⁹ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 57. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 37.)

¹¹⁰ Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 57. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 38.)

¹⁰⁵ Camus' analysis of sin in *The Concept of Anxiety* and despair in *The Sickness unto Death*.¹¹¹ Connections are also waiting to be explored between Kierkegaard's works and Camus' novel, *The Plague*, which portrays an existential struggle against a sickness, which can be understood metaphorically, in the sense of a confrontation with despair, in the way Kierkegaard suggests.

While Kierkegaard's influence on Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) seems to be less significant than that on Sartre or Camus, references to Kierkegaard's works and ideas do appear here and there in Merleau-Ponty's writings. Kierkegaard appears in the Preface to Merleau-Ponty's *magnum opus*, the *Phenomenology of Perception* from 1945. There he is counted among the first phenomenologists. Merleau-Ponty claims that "phenomenology can be...identified as a manner or style of thinking" and that "it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as philosophy."¹¹² In this sense he can identify Kierkegaard as one of its many early practitioners: "It has been long on the way, and its adherents have discovered it in every quarter, certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud."¹¹³ In the body of the work he mentions Kierkegaard only a single time, where he refers in passing to Kierkegaard's notion of objective thinking. In describing the way in which the world emerges from our perception and experiences, Merleau-Ponty writes, "I now refer to my body only as an idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus 'objective' thought (in Kierkegaard's sense) is formed—being that of common sense and of science—which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel."¹¹⁴ Here Merleau-Ponty simply refers to Kierkegaard's distinction, from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, between subjective and objective thinking, intended to distinguish the sphere of science and logic from that of religious faith. Unlike Kierkegaard, who consistently insists on the absolute separation, irreducibility, and incommensurability of these two spheres, Merleau-Ponty regards them as being necessarily related and in a dialectical relation. The analogue to the religious sphere of subjective knowing in Kierkegaard would be the immediate phenomenological experience in Merleau-Ponty.

In an article entitled "The Battle over Existentialism," which appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1945, Merleau-Ponty refers to Kierkegaard's conception of faith in passing. In reference to the Catholic critics of existentialism, he writes:

Perhaps they are right in the end, when all is said and done. Perhaps the only way to sustain Christianity as theology is on the basis of Thomism, perhaps the Pascalian

¹¹¹ Judy Gammelgaard, "The Qualitative Leap and the Call of Conscience," *Kierkegaard Studies*. Yearbook, 2001, pp. 183–98.

¹¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard 1945, p. ii. (English translation: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and New York: The Humanities Press 1962, p. viii.)

¹¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. ii. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. viii.)

¹¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 86. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 71.)

concept of being as a blind thing and of spirit as voluntariness leaves room only for mystical action with no dogmatic content and for a faith which, like Kierkegaard's, is not faith in any being.¹¹⁵

As has been seen above, the comparison of Kierkegaard to Pascal is a natural one for the French researcher. In the same piece Merleau-Ponty refers to Kierkegaard and Marx as "the two halves of Hegelian posterity."¹¹⁶ In both of these references, Kierkegaard is simply taken as a representative of a general movement or trend of thought, either religious or philosophical.

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty refers to Kierkegaard again in an essay called "Faith and Good Faith" from 1946.¹¹⁷ There he writes: "Kierkegaard thought it impossible to say 'I am a Christian' in the way one says 'I am tall' or 'I am short,' because being a Christian means living the contradiction of good and evil, and so it also means not being a Christian."¹¹⁸ To be a Christian is a subjective matter and can never be meaningfully uttered as an objective statement. Here Merleau-Ponty is also clearly attentive to Kierkegaard's account of the ineffable and the doctrine of the paradox of Christianity, which is alluded to explicitly.¹¹⁹

In his extended analysis of Marxism from 1955, entitled *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty makes a brief comparison of Kierkegaard and Marx: "When Marx said: 'I am not a Marxist,' and Kierkegaard more or less said, 'I am not a Christian,' they meant that action is too present to the person acting to admit the ostentation of a declared choice. The declared choice is nearly the proof that there has been no choice."¹²⁰ This is ultimately used as a criticism of Sartre's self-declared Marxism, which Merleau-Ponty takes to be at least in part inauthentic and even hypocritical. The reference to Kierkegaard seems to be to his statements, for example, in the attack on the Church or in *The Point of View*, where he underscores that he has never claimed to be Christian because he wishes to keep that free as an ideal. It can also be seen in connection with the aforementioned passage from Merleau-Ponty's "Faith and Good Faith," where reference is made to the subjective nature of Christian faith generally.

In his lecture "The Philosophy of Existence" from 1959, Merleau-Ponty gives a retrospective view of the development of existentialism in the twentieth century.

Although he deviates from Sartre's assessment in some regards, he agrees with him in ascribing to Kierkegaard the role of a forerunner of the movement. He writes:

The term "existentialism" has come to designate almost exclusively the philosophical movement which arose in France after 1945, chiefly as a result of Sartre's investigation. In reality, this philosophical movement has its antecedents: it is tied to an entire philosophical tradition, a long and complicated tradition, since it actually begins with Kierkegaard's philosophy, and following this, is derived from philosophies such as Husserl's and Heidegger's in Germany, and in France, even before Sartre, from philosophies such as that of Gabriel Marcel.¹²¹

Here Merleau-Ponty seems to take it as more or less unproblematic that Kierkegaard is to be understood in line with these later thinkers. Indeed, it is so unproblematic that he offers no evidence to support this claim. In a somewhat cryptic note from Merleau-Ponty's *Nachlaß*, dated February 1959, he associates Kierkegaard with Nietzsche and Sartre as follows:

Start from the present: contradictions etc, ruin of philosophy—Show that that calls into question not only the classical philosophy, but also the philosophies of the dead god (Kierkegaard—Nietzsche—Sartre) in as much as they are its contrary. (and also, of course, the dialectic as a "maneuver").¹²²

The reference to Kierkegaard's philosophy as a form of a "dead god" philosophy is difficult to make sense of. However, the use of "contradictions" to undermine traditional philosophy might well be understood in the context of Kierkegaard's attack on the abstract conceptual thinking of German idealism and modern rationalism generally. In any case, this passage may well be understood in the context of the previous one from "The Philosophy of Existence" since it seems to imply a family resemblance among Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre, which could be taken to indicate their inclusion as members of a more or less continuous school of thought known as "existentialism."

Unlike Sartre and Camus, Merleau-Ponty does not enter into any analyses of particular Kierkegaard texts. Moreover, he seems not to be particularly interested in the standard set of themes in Kierkegaard, such as despair, anxiety, absurdity, and freedom, that Sartre and Camus virtually made into slogans of the existentialist movement. Kierkegaard remains a figure in the background of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical horizon.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) was also keenly interested in Kierkegaard's thought. Her reading of Kierkegaard seems to date from the same period as Sartre, and indeed this is no accident given the fact that she was the one who was sending him

¹¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "La querelle de l'existentialisme," *Les Temps modernes*, no. 2, November 1945, pp. 344–56; p. 349. (English translation: "The Battle over Existentialism," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964, pp. 71–82; p. 76.)

¹¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, "La querelle de l'existentialisme," p. 353; "The Battle over Existentialism," p. 77.

¹¹⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Foi et bonne foi," *Les Temps modernes*, no. 5, February 1946, pp. 769–82. (English translation: "Faith and Good Faith," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, pp. 172–81.)

¹¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, "Foi et bonne foi," pp. 774–5; "Faith and Good Faith," p. 176.

¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, "Foi et bonne foi," p. 775; "Faith and Good Faith," p. 176.

¹²⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, Paris: Gallimard 1955, p. 266. (English translation: *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. by Joseph Bien, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973, p. 198.)

¹²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "La Philosophie de l'existence," *Dialogue. Revue canadienne de philosophie*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1966, pp. 307–22; p. 307. (English translation: "The Philosophy of Existence," in *Texts and Dialogues*, ed. by Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry, Jr., New Jersey and London: Humanities Press 1992, pp. 129–39; p. 129.)

¹²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, p. 236. (English translation: *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1968, p. 183.)

books during his time as a soldier and subsequently as a prisoner of war. In a letter dated December 21, 1840, she reports that she has "heaps of books by Kierkegaard" that she intends to read over the Christmas holidays.¹²³ Two days later she writes, again to Sartre, "I'm busy reading Kierkegaard and Wahl's essays on him—it really interests me."¹²⁴ On December 26, she informs Sartre that she "read *The Concept of Anxiety* at the Café de Flore."¹²⁵ Her interest in this work was doubtless awakened at least in part by Sartre's eager recommendation of it.

De Beauvoir uses Kierkegaard as a source of inspiration for her central work on ethics, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* from 1947.¹²⁶ In this work she claims that there lie a number of fundamental ambiguities in human existence, such as mind and body or rational and animal, that traditional philosophical systems have attempted to eliminate in order to arrive at a single consistent principle. In this context she hails Kierkegaard as a forerunner of existentialism for his identification of this ambiguity and his insistence on it; he resists capitulating to the urge to reduce the ambiguous terms to a single principle. She writes, "It was by affirming the irreducible character of ambiguity that Kierkegaard opposed himself to Hegel, and it is by ambiguity that, in our own generation, Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, fundamentally defined man...."¹²⁷ Here she clearly refers to Kierkegaard's thesis of human beings as a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, finite and infinite, etc. She has no hesitation in identifying Kierkegaard with Sartre's *magnum opus*, which was of course the defining work of the French existential movement.

Towards the end of the book she refers to Kierkegaard again by way of illustration. Like Sartre, she refers to Kierkegaard's analysis of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*:

Kierkegaard has said that what distinguishes the Pharisee from the genuinely moral man is that the former considers his anguish as a sure sign of his virtue; from the fact that he asks himself, "Am I Abraham?" he concludes, "I am Abraham"; but morality resides in the painfulness of an indefinite questioning. The problem we are posing is not the same as that of Kierkegaard, the important thing to us is to know whether, in given conditions, Isaac must be killed or not. But we also think that what distinguishes the tyrant from the man of good will is that the first rests in the certainty of his aims, whereas

here she refers to Kierkegaard's discussion from *Fear and Trembling* in order to illustrate the correct relation to a cause or a given end. Critical of those who wholeheartedly and without hesitation embrace nationalism or Stalinism, de Beauvoir argues that Kierkegaard has here provided us with a correct model of the proper relation to such ends; one must always seek to preserve the ambiguity, negativity, and tension involved in them and keep them present before one's eyes, always questioning and always doubting. Thus, de Beauvoir takes Kierkegaard's criticism of complacent Christianity as a model for any kind of authentic affiliation with a given end and subsequent action.

She refers to Kierkegaard several times in her classic statement of feminist theory, *The Second Sex* from 1949.¹²⁹ In her account of the "facts and myths" of women, she quotes Kierkegaard directly as follows: "To be a woman," says Kierkegaard in *Stages on Life's Way*, "is something so strange, so confused, so complicated, that no one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman could put up with it."¹³⁰ She refers to the beginning of Victor Eremita's speech from "In Vino Veritas."¹³¹ Her comment on this is simply, "This comes from not regarding woman positively, such as she seems to herself to be, but negatively, such as she appears to man."¹³² She uses this to begin an explanation of the concept of the woman as the Other. Kierkegaard (or his pseudonymous work) is thus used as an example of a form of sexism. She quotes from the same work in more detail later in the analysis:

"Through woman," writes Kierkegaard in *In Vino Veritas*, "ideality enters into life, and what would man be without her? Many a man has become a genius thanks to some young girl...but none has ever become a genius thanks to the young girl who gave him her hand in marriage...." "Woman makes a man productive in ideality through a negative relation....Negative relations with woman can make us infinite...positive relations with woman make a man finite for the most part." Which is to say that woman is necessary in so far as she remains an idea into which man projects his own transcendence; but that she is inauspicious as an objective reality, existing in and for herself. Kierkegaard holds that by refusing to marry his fiancée he established the only valid relation to woman.

¹²³ Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard 1990, vol. 2, Letter 219, p. 213. (English translation: *Letters to Sartre*, trans. by Quintin Hoare, London: Vintage 1991, p. 355.)

¹²⁴ de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre*, vol. 2, Letter 220, pp. 213–14. (*Letters to Sartre*, p. 357.)

¹²⁵ de Beauvoir *Lettres à Sartre*, vol. 2, Letter 222, p. 215. (*Letters to Sartre*, p. 358.) Her reading of Kierkegaard continued on into the new year; see *Lettres à Sartre*, vol. 2, Letter 229, p. 222; *Letters to Sartre*, p. 363.

¹²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguité*, Paris: Gallimard 1947. (English translation: *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. by Bernard Frechman, New York: Philosophical Library 1949, 1976.)

¹²⁷ de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguité*, p. 15. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 9–10.)

¹²⁸ de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguité*, pp. 186–7. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 133–4.)

¹²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 1, *Les Faits et Les Mythes*, vol. 2, *L'Expérience vécue*, Paris: Gallimard 1949. (English translation: *The Second Sex*, trans. by H.M. Parshley, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1952.)

¹³⁰ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 1, *Les Faits et Les Mythes*, p. 236. (*The Second Sex*, p. 162.)

¹³¹ SKS 6, 57–8. / *SLW*, 56. The Hongs render this passage somewhat more favorably to Kierkegaard: "To be a woman is something so special, so mixed, so compounded that there are no predicates to describe it, and the many predicates, if they were used, contradict one another in a manner only a woman can tolerate."

¹³² de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 1, *Les Faits et Les Mythes*, p. 236. (*The Second Sex*, p. 162.)

And he is right in a sense; namely that the myth of woman set up as the infinite Other entails also its opposite.¹³³

She here again refers to a passage from Victor Eremita's speech from "In Vino Veritas."¹³⁴ She connects Kierkegaard's biography more or less straightforwardly with what is said in his pseudonymous work.

De Beauvoir refers to Kierkegaard again in her insightful analysis of the "mystery" of the feminine. She writes:

Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine "mystery." It has numerous advantages. And first of all it permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable: the man who "does not understand" a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a "mystery" outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once. A heart smitten with love thus avoids many disappointments: if the loved one's behavior is capricious, her remarks stupid, then the mystery serves to excuse it all. And finally, thanks again to the mystery, that negative relation is perpetuated which seemed to Kierkegaard infinitely preferable to positive possession; in the company of a living enigma man remains alone—alone with his dreams, his hopes, his fears, his love, his vanity.¹³⁵

In the absence of any textual reference, this appears to be an allusion to Kierkegaard's biography. De Beauvoir seems to ascribe to him the view that Kierkegaard found himself unable to marry Regine Olsen due to the fact that he was unable to penetrate the mystery of her person, and that he thus preferred to accept this mystery as an outward phenomenon than to ascribe to himself some role in it.

In the second volume of *The Second Sex*, she returns to *Stages on Life's Way*. In the context of a discussion of the relation of love and marriage, de Beauvoir raises the question of the possibility, raised by Kierkegaard, of ever reconciling the two. She writes:

To reconcile marriage and love is such a *tour de force* that nothing less than divine intervention is required for success; this is the solution reached through devous ways by Kierkegaard. Love, he says, is spontaneous; marriage is a decision; the amorous inclination, however, is to be aroused by marriage or by the decision to wish to marry. Something so mysterious as to be explained only by the divine action paradoxically occurs in virtue of reflection and decision, and the whole process must be simultaneous. This is to say that to love is not to marry and that it is hard to see how love can become duty. But the paradox does not dismay Kierkegaard. He agrees that "reflection is the destroying angel of spontaneity," but says that the decision is a new spontaneity based on ethical principles; it is a "religious conception" which "should open the way to amorous inclination" and protect it from all danger. A real husband, he says, "is a miracle." As for the wife, reason is not for her, she is without "reflection"; "she passes from the

immediacy of love to the immediacy of the religious."¹³⁶ In plain language this means that a man in love decides on marriage by an act of faith in God, which should guarantee the harmony of feeling and obligations....Kierkegaard fully admits that there should be a preceding "inclination" but that this should last through life is no less miraculous.¹³⁶

A footnote to this passage indicates that this is a loose reading of what Kierkegaard says in "In Vino Veritas" and "Some Reflections on Marriage," both from *Stages on Life's Way*.

A final reference to *Stages on Life's Way* appears in the conclusion of the work.

There de Beauvoir writes, "That she is being tricked, many men have realized. 'What a misfortune to be a woman! And yet the misfortune, when one is a woman, is at bottom not to comprehend that it is one,' says Kierkegaard."¹³⁷ She continues the quotation in a footnote:

Politeness is pleasing—essentially—to woman, and the fact that she accepts it without hesitation is explained by nature's care for the weaker, for the unfavored being and for one to whom an illusion means more than a material compensation. But this illusion, precisely, is fatal to her...To feel oneself freed from distress thanks to something imaginary, to be the dupe of something imaginary, is that not a still deeper mockery?... Woman is very far from being *verwahlost* (neglected), but in another sense she is, since she can never free herself from the illusion that nature has used to console her.¹³⁸

Like the other passages, this also comes from Victor Eremita's speech in "In Vino Veritas."¹³⁹ De Beauvoir seems to take this passage as evidence for her claim that women are tricked or suffer from an illusion that, despite the many disadvantages that they must endure, they are nonetheless privileged in many ways.

It is striking to compare de Beauvoir's use of Kierkegaard in this text with that of the other existentialists including her life-long companion and collaborator Sartre. While, for example, Camus and Sartre find in Kierkegaard a forerunner of existentialism and a theorist of radical freedom, anxiety, despair, and absurdity, de Beauvoir is here focused more or less exclusively on Kierkegaard's pseudonym's statements about women, love, marriage, etc. The Kierkegaard that appears in her analyses is far from being an existentialist or for that matter a thinker from whom one can gain positive insights or inspiration. In a sense he is used as just another banal example of old forms of sexism.

In 1963 Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) published two articles on Kierkegaard in the *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*. In the first, entitled "Kierkegaard et le mal,"¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 2, *L'Expérience vécue*, pp. 213–14. (*The Second Sex*, pp. 489–90.)

¹³⁷ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 2, *L'Expérience vécue*, p. 564. (*The Second Sex*, p. 800.)

¹³⁸ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 2, *L'Expérience vécue*, p. 564n. (*The Second Sex*, pp. 800n–801n.)

¹³⁹ SKS 6, 58–9 / SW, 57.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "Kierkegaard et le mal," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, no. 4, 1963, pp. 292–302. (Reprinted in *Les Cahiers de philosophie*, nos. 8–9, Lille 1989, special issue, *Kierkegaard, vingt cinq études*, pp. 271–83.)

¹³³ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 1, *Les Faits et Les Mythes*, pp. 295–6. (*The Second Sex*, pp. 210–11.)

¹³⁴ SKS 6, 60 / SW, 59.

¹³⁵ de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 1, *Les Faits et Les Mythes*, pp. 386–7. (*The Second Sex*, p. 289.)

He gives an interpretation of Kierkegaard's account of evil in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*. This is a somewhat technical, text-oriented piece. Unlike Sartre, Ricoeur is sensitive to the theological dimension of Kierkegaard's thought, in particular his account of sin. At the end of this article Ricoeur raises the question of what it means to philosophize after Kierkegaard, and this is made the topic for the second article.

In this essay, "Philosopher après Kierkegaard,"¹⁴¹ he explores for the first time in a more nuanced manner the complex relations between Kierkegaard's thought and the later French and German existentialists. Ricoeur was among the first to call into question Kierkegaard's association with the existentialists and the notion of a homogenous and unified school of thought called "existentialism." According to him, Kierkegaard represents an original alternative kind of philosophy, which Ricoeur refers to as a criticism of existential possibilities. With this separation of Kierkegaard from these later appropriations, Ricoeur opened the door for more independent studies of Kierkegaard on his own terms.

VI. Poststructuralism and Late Phenomenology

Kierkegaard's writings have also been claimed by the poststructuralists. Many of the features of his thought seem in different ways to anticipate some of the central themes of that movement. For example, his use of pseudonyms as a way to undermine his own authority as an author and to create a polyphony of authorial voices has been seen as an anticipation of the so-called death of the author, the deferment of meaning, and the relativity of interpretation. Moreover, Kierkegaard's interest in the concept of irony also finds resonance in a number of poststructuralist theorists. These interpreters tend to focus on the disruption of straightforward communication implied in Kierkegaard's discussion of irony. In this context, his writings become a springboard for investigations into the destabilization of meaning and the difficulty of univocal communication.

One of the leading poststructuralist theorists, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) has long maintained an interest in Kierkegaard's writings. His most intensive encounter with Kierkegaard appears in his late work, *Donner la Mort* from 1992.¹⁴² The third chapter of this book contains a rich analysis of the notion of sacrifice as illustrated by the analysis of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*. Here Derrida agrees with Kierkegaard about the ultimate incomprehensibility of the absolute and the divine, which transcends the normal sphere of ethics. This mystery of the divine other nonetheless enjoins one to act, and this is action with "fear and trembling" since one has no way to understand or justify one's actions.

The influential psychologist Jacques Lacan (1901–81) also makes use of some important Kierkegaardian themes.¹⁴³ In a handful of texts he examines Kierkegaard's concept of repetition, comparing it to the same concept in Freud.¹⁴⁴ In one of his seminars, after an account of "The Unconscious and Repetition," Lacan warmly recommends Kierkegaard's book to his auditors as follows: "I would ask you to re-read Kierkegaard's essay on *Repetition*, so dazzling in its lightness and ironic play, so truly Mozartian in the way, so reminiscent of Don Giovanni, it abolishes the mirages of love."¹⁴⁵ For Lacan, this concept in the context of psychology concerns how one is condemned to repeat certain behavioral patterns that one has learned from early on. In this context he talks about Kierkegaard's account of hereditary sin from *The Concept of Anxiety*. Each of us repeats or appropriates the sin of Adam in his or her own way. There is no exact repetition but rather always an element of difference since each person sins in his or her own unique manner. So also for Lacan the father, for example, establishes forms of behavior which the children repeat in different ways in their own lives. In another seminar Lacan appeals to Kierkegaard's distinction between recollection and repetition, again in comparison with Freud. He writes:

Freud distinguishes two completely different structurations of human experience—one which, along with Kierkegaard, I called *ancient*, based on reminiscence, presupposing agreement, harmony between man and the world of his objects, which means that he recognizes them, because in some way, he has always known them—and, on the contrary, the conquest, the structuration of the world through the effort of labor, along the path of repetition.¹⁴⁶

While Lacan is not interested in a detailed exegesis of Kierkegaard's texts, he clearly makes active use of a handful of Kierkegaardian concepts which he puts into his own psychoanalytic context.

Another Francophone philosopher to be captivated by Kierkegaard's account in *Fear and Trembling* is the Lithuanian-born Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–95).

¹⁴¹ For this relation, see Yves Depelsenaire, *Une Analyse avec Dieu. Le Rendez-vous de Lacan et de Kierkegaard*, Brussels: La Lettre volée 2004. Rudolphe Adam, *Lacan et Kierkegaard*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2005.

¹⁴² See especially Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XI: Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Le Seuil 1974. (English translation: *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, New York and London: W.W. Norton 1981.) Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre II: Le Moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique psychanalytique*, Paris: Le Seuil 1978. (English translation: *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. by Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988.)

¹⁴³ Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XI: Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p. 59. (*Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 61.)

¹⁴⁴ Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre II: Le Moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique psychanalytique*, pp. 124–5. (*Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, p. 100.)

¹⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophe après Kierkegaard," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, vol. 4, 1963, pp. 303–16. (Reprinted in *Les Cahiers de philosophie*, nos. 8–9, Lille 1989, special issue, *Kierkegaard, Vingt-cinq études*, pp. 285–300.)

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Donner la Mort*, Paris: Gallée 1992. (English translation: *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1995.)

He explores this in his essays “À propos Kierkegaard Vivant,”¹⁴⁷ “‘Existence et éthique,’”¹⁴⁸ and in his book *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l’extériorité*.¹⁴⁹ While Lévinas lauds Kierkegaard’s thesis that the individual is absolute and irreducible, he is nonetheless highly critical of Kierkegaard’s ethical views, in particular the doctrine of the theological suspension of the ethical. Lévinas argues that the idea of transcending ethics in order to reach the religious sphere cannot be used as an excuse for murder. The unique and irreducible ethical quality of the individual as individual is, according to Lévinas, missing in Kierkegaard’s religious stage. He claims that Kierkegaard’s religious individualism precludes him from having any meaningful account of ethical relations to others.¹⁵⁰ He portrays Kierkegaard, with his account of the irreducibility and lack of transparency of the individual, as promoting a self-indulgent fixation on one’s one inwardness and subjectivity, while at the same time eliminating all forms of intersubjectivity that can lead to a fruitful ethics and social life.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) refers to Kierkegaard frequently in a number of different works, without, however, ever really entering into a detailed discussion. In his book on Nietzsche from 1962, Deleuze offers a comparison of the German thinker with Pascal, Shestov, and Kierkegaard.¹⁵¹ The comparison is, however, rather brief and question-begging. Kierkegaard and his fellow ‘tragic philosophers’ are portrayed as still being “ensnared in *ressentiment*. ”¹⁵² Kierkegaard was not a thinker who affirmed life and the will to power, but rather relied on “inferiority, anguish, wailing, guilt, all the forms of dissatisfaction.”¹⁵³ In *Difference et répétition* from 1968, Deleuze makes use of Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition and compares him with Nietzsche.¹⁵⁴

Deleuze also alludes to Kierkegaard couple of times the first volume of his work on film, *Cinéma* from 1983.¹⁵⁵ There he writes:

¹⁴⁷ Emmanuel Lévinas, “À propos de Kierkegaard Vivant,” in his *Noms propres*, Paris: Librairie générale française 1987 [1976], pp. 111–13. (English translation: “A Propos of ‘Kierkegaard vivant,’” in his *Proper Names*, trans. by Michael B. Smith, London: Athlone Press 1996, pp. 75–9.)

¹⁴⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, “Existence et éthique” in his *Noms propres*, pp. 77–87. (English translation: “Existence and Ethics,” in his *Proper Names*, pp. 66–74.)

¹⁴⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infiniti. Essai sur l’extériorité*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1961. (English translation: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1969.)

¹⁵⁰ For an account of this criticism, see Pia Søltoft, *Svimmelheden Elik—om forholdet mellom den enkelte og den anden hos Buber, Lévinas og især Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 2000, pp. 83–112, especially pp. 105–10.

¹⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1962, pp. 41–3. (English translation: *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson, New York: Columbia University Press 1983, pp. 36–8.)

¹⁵² Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, p. 42; *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 36.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference et répétition*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1968.

¹⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma I. The Movement-Image*, vol. 1, *L’Image-Mouvement*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit 1983. (English translation: *Cinema I. The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson, New York: Athlone Press 1986.)

A fascinating idea was developed from Pascal to Kierkegaard: the alternative is not between terms but between modes of existence of the one who chooses. There are choices that can only be made on condition that one persuades oneself that one has no choice, sometimes by virtue of a moral necessity (good, right), sometimes by virtue of a physical necessity (the state of things, the situation), sometimes by virtue of a psychological necessity (the desire one has for something). The spiritual choice is made between the mode of existence of him who chooses on the condition of not knowing it, and the mode of existence of him who knows that if it is a matter of choosing, it is as if there was a choice of choice or non-choice.¹⁵⁶

This is the way Deleuze understands Pascal’s wager and Kierkegaard’s either/or. His Kierkegaard reading is here clearly influenced by Sartre, which Deleuze himself acknowledges later in the passage when he associates Kierkegaard’s “alternative” with Sartre’s “choice.”¹⁵⁷ Deleuze develops this further with reference to *Fear and Trembling*:

Kierkegaard said that true choice means that by abandoning the bride, she is restored to us by that very act; and that by sacrificing his son, Abraham rediscovers him through that very act. Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, but out of duty, duty alone, and in choosing not to have the choice. Abraham, on the contrary, sacrifices his son, whom he loves more than himself, through choice alone, and through consciousness of the choice which unites him with God, beyond good and evil: thus his son is restored to him. This is the history of lyrical abstraction.¹⁵⁸

Finally, Deleuze refers to Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition, which he compares with some of Nietzsche’s concepts, such as the eternal return:

The good man, the saintly man, are imprisoned in the cycle, no less than the thief and the evildoer. But is not repetition capable of breaking out in its own cycle and of “leaping” beyond good and evil? It is repetition which ruins and degrades us, but it is repetition which can save us and allow us to escape from the other repetition. Kierkegaard has already opposed a fettering, degrading repetition of the past to a repetition of faith, directed towards the future, which restored everything to us in a power which was not that of the Good but of the absurd.¹⁵⁹

Generally speaking, Deleuze refers to Kierkegaard in this work to illustrate some of the points about film criticism that he wants to make, and thus he is not interested in exploring Kierkegaard’s thoughts for their own sake.

The literary critic Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003) dedicates a chapter to Kierkegaard in his work *Faux Pas* from 1943.¹⁶⁰ This chapter in a sense represents a pioneering work since Blanchot was among the first to recognize the importance

¹⁵⁶ Barbara Haberjäm, London: Athlone Press 1986.)
¹⁵⁷ Deleuze, *Cinéma I. The Movement-Image*, p. 114.
¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Deleuze, *Cinéma I. The Movement-Image*, p. 116.
¹⁶⁰ Maurice Blanchot, “[Le] ‘Journal de Kierkegaard’” in his *Faux Pas*, Paris: Gallimard

of the *Nachlaß* for understanding Kierkegaard's thought. This chapter is thus one of the earliest to treat the journals as an independent subject of investigation. Here Blanchot touches on a number of themes regarding both the authorship, such as the pseudonyms, the theory of communication, the Kierkegaardian dialectic, and Kierkegaard's biography. With regard to the latter, Blanchot does not really get beyond the well-known clichés about Regine and Kierkegaard's relation to his father.

Blanchot returns to some of these biographical elements in *L'Espace littéraire* from 1955.¹⁶¹ He takes up Kafka's interest in the story Kierkegaard's engagement, due to the former's own failed love story: "Kafka's story and the story of Kierkegaard's engagement have been compared, by Kafka himself among others. But the conflict is different. Kierkegaard can renounce Regine; he can renounce the ethical. Access to the religious level is not thereby compromised; rather it is made possible."¹⁶² The decision to discontinue the engagement is interpreted as an act of sacrifice and compared to the Abraham and Isaac story as a test of faith. In a chapter on suicide and death, Blanchot refers in passing to Kierkegaard's title, *The Sickness unto Death*.¹⁶³ In 1977 Sylviane Agacinski (b. 1945) published her influential work *Aparté. Conceptions et morts de Søren Kierkegaard*.¹⁶⁴ One of the main figures in feminist readings of Kierkegaard, Agacinski argues that Kierkegaard's mother, about whom he says nothing in his journals or published writings, represents an other, something apart. She is the secret to the authorship that Kierkegaard wishes never to be revealed. This interesting and creative reading does not pursue the matter by means of source-work research, which could potentially strengthen the argument substantially if indeed source-work evidence for it could be unearthed. This work was supplemented with a new one in 1996 under the title *Critique de l'égocentrisme: l'événement de l'autre*.¹⁶⁵

The phenomenologist Michel Henry (1922–2002) was also profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard. In particular, Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual and subjectivity was defining for Henry's work. His book *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme* from 1996¹⁶⁶ shows signs of a Kierkegaardian conception of Christianity. Here he outlines the subjective nature of Christian belief in contrast to forms of objective knowing. He further explores a number of

paradoxes of Christianity. Henry also makes use of Kierkegaard's account of the Fall and anxiety in his *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair* from 2000.¹⁶⁷

VII. French Kierkegaard Scholarship Today

Kierkegaard studies in France have developed into a specialist field over the last few decades. In contrast to the French existentialists or postmodernists, who used Kierkegaard as a springboard in the service of a different intellectual program, the main profiles in actual French Kierkegaard scholarship have much of their intellectual identity bound up in Kierkegaard himself. While these scholars are not so well known internationally as the existentialists and postmodernists, they are, generally speaking, more thorough and careful readers of Kierkegaard's texts. They are in general more interested in understanding what Kierkegaard wrote than in appropriating his thought for another cause.

Through a series of works dating back to the 1960, Jacques Colette has for decades been one of the leading Kierkegaard experts in France. In 1964 appeared his introductory text *Kierkegaard. La difficulté d'être chrétien. Présentation et choix de textes*.¹⁶⁸ Four years later he published his *Kierkegaard, Chrétien incognito*.¹⁶⁹ While his early work focused primarily on the religious dimension of Kierkegaard's writings, Colette's later work took up Kierkegaard's philosophy. In 1972 appeared his *Histoire et absolue, essai sur Kierkegaard*,¹⁷⁰ which examines the relation between human existence and religious faith. Here Colette treats primarily the *Postscript* as well as the other main pseudonymous works, including *The Concept of Anxiety. The Sickness unto Death*, and the *Fragments*. Finally, in 1994 he published his *Kierkegaard et la non-philosophie*.¹⁷¹

The works of Nelly Viallaneix (d. 2005) have also played an important role in the French Kierkegaard research. Her most notable contributions include *L'Authenticité de la foi* from 1967¹⁷² and *L'Unique devant Dieu* from 1974.¹⁷³ Also worthy of note is her two-volume *Écoute, Kierkegaard* from 1979, which was a dissertation at the Sorbonne.¹⁷⁴

Another important figure in more recent Kierkegaard studies is Henri-Bernard Vergote (1931–96). The main representative of *Quellenforschung* in France, Vergote published his first main work in 1982 under the title *Sens et répétition: essai sur*

¹⁶¹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard 1955. (English translation: *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1982.)

¹⁶² Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, p. 57; *The Space of Literature*, p. 61.

¹⁶³ Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, p. 103; *The Space of Literature*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁴ Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions et morts de Søren Kierkegaard*, Paris: Aubier, Flammarion 1977. (English translation: *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Soren Kierkegaard*, trans. by Kevin Newmark, Gainsville: University Presses of Florida 1988.)

¹⁶⁵ Sylviane Agacinski, *Critique de l'égocentrisme: l'événement de l'autre*, Paris: Galilée 1996.

¹⁶⁶ Michel Henry, *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme*, Paris: Gallimard 1994. (English translation: *I am the Truth toward a Philosophy of Christianity: Towards a Christian Philosophy*, trans. by David L. Clément, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.)

¹⁶⁷ Michel Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 2000, see §§ 36–9.

¹⁶⁸ Jacques Colette, *Kierkegaard. La difficulté d'être chrétien. Présentation et choix de textes*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1964.

¹⁶⁹ Jacques Colette, *Kierkegaard. Chrétien incognito*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1968.

¹⁷⁰ Jacques Colette, *Histoire et absolue, essai sur Kierkegaard*, Paris: Éditions Desclee et Cie 1972.

¹⁷¹ Jacques Colette, *Kierkegaard et la non-philosophie*, Paris: Gallimard 1994.

¹⁷² Nelly Viallaneix, *L'Authenticité de la foi*, Paris: Éditions Labor & Fides 1967.

¹⁷³ Nelly Viallaneix, *L'Unique devant Dieu*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1973.

published his work on Kierkegaard's ethics, *Kierkegaard Existence et éthique*.¹⁸⁴ This book also explores many of Kierkegaard's most difficult concepts such as indirect communication, the paradox, and passion. Clair has recently returned to his interests in Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms in his monograph from 2005, *Kierkegaard et autour*.¹⁸⁵

Another prolific author in the Francophone literature is David Brézis (b. 1947). Since the beginning of the 1990s he has produced a series of important works on Kierkegaard's thought. In 1991 appeared his *Temps et présence: essai sur la conceptualité kierkegaardienne*.¹⁸⁶ Brézis is one of the main Francophone writers interested in the constellation of problems surrounding Kierkegaard and feminism. In 1999 he published *Kierkegaard et les figures de la paternité*,¹⁸⁷ which was followed in 2001 by *Kierkegaard et le féminin*.¹⁸⁸ Most recently Brézis has published a work on Kierkegaard's theory of subjectivity under the title *Kierkegaard ou la subjectivité en miroir*.¹⁸⁹

Also of interest are a series of volumes of proceedings from the various conferences and seminars, which have taken place with some regularity over the past several decades. The forerunner of these more recent conferences was the aforementioned event organized by UNESCO in 1963, *Kierkegaard vivant*, which included figures such as Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, and Marcel.¹⁹⁰ From September 8 to 15, 1966, there took place in Copenhagen a conference, entitled "Kierkegaard et la Philosophie Contemporaine," which featured a number of Danish and foreign participants. The proceedings of this conference, which was hosted by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen, were printed in the *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* in 1971.¹⁹¹ In 1997 the journal *Kairos* published a special issue with the proceedings from a joint Danish–French colloquium on Kierkegaard that took place in Toulouse from November 15 to 16, 1995.¹⁹² Jacques Caron edited a volume of proceedings from a conference entitled *Kierkegaard aujourd'hui*, which took place at the Sorbonne in 1996.¹⁹³ From November 26 to 27, 1999, the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen hosted a Francophone seminar in Copenhagen.

¹⁷⁵ Henri-Bernard Vergote, *Sens et répétition: essai sur l'ironie kierkegaardienne*, vols. 1–2, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1982.

¹⁷⁶ Henri-Bernard Vergote (trans. and ed.), *Lectures philosophiques de Søren Kierkegaard: Kierkegaard chez ses contemporains danois. Textes de J.L. Heiberg, H.L. Martensen, P.M. Møller*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1993.

¹⁷⁷ Hélène Politis, *Le discours philosophique selon Kierkegaard, Ph.D. Thesis*, Paris 1993.

¹⁷⁸ Hélène Politis, *Kierkegaard*, Paris: Ellipses 2002; *Le vocabulaire de Kierkegaard*, Paris: Ellipses 2002.

¹⁷⁹ François Bousquet, *Le paradoxe Jésus-Christ, Devenir chrétien par passion d'exister. Éléments pour une Christologie de Kierkegaard comme question aux contemporains*, Ph.D. Thesis, Paris 1996.

¹⁸⁰ François Bousquet, *Le Christ de Kierkegaard: devenir chrétien par passion d'exister, une question aux contemporains*, Paris: Desclée 1999.

¹⁸¹ François Bousquet, *Temps et récit*, vols. 1–3, Paris: Seuil 1983–85.

¹⁸² André Clair, *Pseudonymie et paradoxe, la pensée dialectique de Kierkegaard*, Paris: Vrin 1976.

¹⁸³ André Clair, *Kierkegaard. Penser le singulier*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1993.

¹⁸⁴ André Clair, *Kierkegaard. Existence et éthique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1997.

¹⁸⁵ André Clair, *Kierkegaard et autour*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 2005.

¹⁸⁶ David Brézis, *Temps et présence: essai sur la conceptualité kierkegaardienne*, Paris: Vrin, 1991.

¹⁸⁷ David Brézis, *Kierkegaard et les figures de la paternité*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1999.

¹⁸⁸ David Brézis, *Kierkegaard et le féminin*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 2001.

¹⁸⁹ David Brézis, *Kierkegaard ou la subjectivité en miroir*, Paris: Éditions Kimé 2004.

¹⁹⁰ Bernard Vergote, Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail 1997 (*Kairos*, no. 10).

¹⁹¹ *Kierkegaard aujourd'hui. Actes du Colloque de la Sorbonne, 26 Octobre 1996*, ed. by Jacques Caron, Odense: Odense University Press and Grenoble 1998.

Three of the lectures from that seminar, given by Jacques Lafarge, Jacques Colette, and François Bousquet were subsequently published in the Centre's *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* in 2000.¹⁹⁴ In 2005 there was an international colloquium, which took place at the Maison du Danemark in Paris. This event was organized by the French Kierkegaard Society and had as its theme "Kierkegaard et la critique du religieux."

Another part of the French philosophical landscape is a number of both scholarly and semi-popular intellectual journals and magazines. As the interest in Kierkegaard has increased, these journals have occasionally dedicated a special issue to him. The journal *Le Table Ronde* dedicated an issue to Kierkegaard in 1955 on the one hundredth anniversary of his death.¹⁹⁵ This issue contained some excerpts from Kierkegaard's journals and several articles of secondary literature. In 1963, the centennial year of Kierkegaard's birth, a special number of the Lausanne-based journal *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* was dedicated to Kierkegaard.¹⁹⁶ This issue included the two aforementioned articles by Ricoeur as well as three other pieces. In 1979 the journal *Les Études Philosophiques* published a special issue dedicated to Kierkegaard.¹⁹⁷ This work contains eight articles dedicated to Kierkegaard, three of which are authored by Danish scholars. The journal *Obligues* published another special issue in 1981.¹⁹⁸ It includes articles from leading French and Danish Kierkegaard scholars such as Henri-Bernard Vergote, André Clair, Henning Fenger, and Gregor Malantschuk. In 1989 there appeared a special issue of *Les Cahiers de Philosophie*, entitled *Kierkegaard: vingt-cinq études*.¹⁹⁹ This collection features both new and reprinted material from Danish and French scholars. In 2006 a special issue of the journal *Nordique* was dedicated to Kierkegaard's religious thinking.²⁰⁰ Most recently in 2007 the popular *Magazine Littéraire* published a special issue on Kierkegaard.²⁰¹ Although this journal contains articles from recognized Kierkegaard

scholars such as Jacques Colette and Jacques Lafarge, it regrettably continues to perpetuate the long-standing myth of Kierkegaard as a dandy.

The most recent major development in French Kierkegaard studies is the publication in 2007 of the first volume of Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks in French, *Journaux et cahiers de notes. Journaux AA-DD*.²⁰² This volume is the first of an ambitious and long-planned French edition of Kierkegaard's *Nachlaß*, based on the new Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, produced by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre. This new French translation is the collaborative work of Else-Marie Jacquot-Tisseau and Anne-Marie Finnemann. This edition will doubtless help to open up the new Danish edition to the Francophone world, where it has until now made very little impact.

Kierkegaard studies in France represents one of the major traditions of reception, rivaling the German and Anglophone reception. In contrast to those other traditions, Kierkegaard has played a significant role in the work of many mainstream French philosophers and thinkers to this day. While there was a time when one could say this about the German reception, that period is for the most part long gone (although Kierkegaard remains important for some contemporary German philosophers such as Michael Theunissen). Kierkegaard has never been a welcome figure in mainstream Anglophone philosophy, where he has long been marginalized. Thus, one can say that Kierkegaard's writings are still very much alive in France, as they continue to inspire new generations of French thinkers.

In addition to this creative use of Kierkegaard's writings by productive French thinkers, as has been seen, there has also developed in recent years a specialized secondary literature dedicated to Kierkegaard in the Francophone world. This literature can be favorably compared with that found in other countries, such as Germany or the U.S.A., where there are strong and established traditions of Kierkegaard studies. However, in contrast to other traditions of Kierkegaard reception, where there has been a degree of international cooperation, the French reception has been more inward-looking, preferring to be in dialogue with other French scholars instead of extending their work to include German, Anglophone, or Danish scholarship. It is to be hoped that in the coming years with the growth of globalization that the French researchers will become better integrated into the larger international community of Kierkegaard scholars. The French world of Kierkegaard studies has much to teach the rest of the world, and it would itself be profoundly enriched in turn by better contacts, particularly to the Danish, German, and Anglophone research.

¹⁹⁴ Jacques Lafarge, "L'Édition des Oeuvres complètes de Kierkegaard en français: contexte—historique—objectifs—conception—réalisation," *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook*, 2000, pp. 300–16. Jacques Colette, "Kierkegaard, L'Écrivain, vu à travers un regard particulier sur la littérature française," *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook*, 2000, pp. 317–29. François Bousquet, "Le Motif de la foi chez Kierkegaard," *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook*, 2000, pp. 330–40.

¹⁹⁵ *Le table ronde*, no. 95, 1955.

¹⁹⁶ *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, no. 4, 1963 (Lausanne) special issue "Søren Kierkegaard 1813–1963."

¹⁹⁷ *Les Études Philosophiques*, ed. by Pierre Aubenque, J. Brun and L. Millet, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, April–June 1979 (special number: *Kierkegaard*).

¹⁹⁸ *Kierkegaard*, ed. by Jean Brun, Nyons: Bordier 1981 (special number of *Obliques*).

¹⁹⁹ *Les Cahiers de Philosophie*, nos. 8–9, 1989 (special issue: *Kierkegaard: vingt-cinq études*).

²⁰⁰ *Søren Kierkegaard et la critique du religieux*, special number of *Nordique*, vol. 10 (Spring) 2006.

²⁰¹ *Søren Kierkegaard philosophie et dandy*, special number of *Magazine Littéraire*, April 2007 (articles by Jean-Louis Chrétiens, Jacques Colette, Jacques Lafarge, and Vincent Delcroix).

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Kierkegaard's International Reception

Tome I: Northern and Western Europe

Edited by
JON STEWART

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