

Solger:

An Apostle of Irony Sacrificed to Hegel's System

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Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger is known to most Kierkegaard researchers today as one of the prominent German Romantic scholars interested in the phenomenon of irony. He is mentioned along with figures such as Friedrich von Schlegel in the second part of *The Concept of Irony*, which explores the different forms of modern irony. Solger is thus often regarded as a background figure to the development of Kierkegaard's own theory of this phenomenon. What is less well known is the fact that his relation to Solger is closely connected to his relation to Hegel; indeed, Kierkegaard's view of Solger is largely mediated by Hegel's assessment. In this article, an attempt will be made to sketch Kierkegaard's view of Solger with an eye towards its dependence on Hegel's treatment. The goal is to determine if Kierkegaard ever managed to arrive at an independent view of Solger that was significantly different from Hegel's.

I. Solger's Life and Works

Solger was born on November 28, 1780 in Schwedt in Prussia.¹ After beginning his early education in his hometown, he was sent to Berlin to study at a renowned secondary school. In 1799 he began his university studies at Halle, where he enrolled as a law student. Here he met his lifelong friend, the historian Friedrich von Raumer (1781–1873). His father had planned for him to become a civil servant or businessman, but Solger found his law studies tedious, preferring much more the study of languages. During this time, he avidly read literary and aesthetic works from both the ancients and the moderns.

¹ For a more detailed account of Solger's life and works, see Reinhold Schmidt, *Solger's Philosophie*, Berlin: Dümmler 1841; Max Lenz's *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, vols. 1–4, Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses 1910–18, vol. 1, pp. 394–6; vol. 2.1, pp. 98–9. An account of Solger's first years and initial university studies appears in the "Vorrede," to *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich von Raumer, Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus 1826, pp. VII–XV (*ASKB* 1832–1833). This is followed by Solger's own diaries from 1800 onward, which are elucidated with interspersed comments by the editors. This is clearly the main source of primary material information on Solger's life. Hegel also recounts a fair bit of this biographical information in his review of this work (see below).

In 1801 Solger went to the University of Jena for six months in order to attend the lectures of F.W.J. Schelling (1775–1854), the young star of German philosophy at the time, who had just published his *System of Transcendental Idealism*.² The university was in those days the focal point of the famous Jena Romantic movement, with figures such as Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), Novalis (1772–1801), Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829) and August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845). Under Schelling's influence, Solger further developed his interest in philosophy. He also presumably met Hegel (1770–1831) for the first time here, where the latter had moved in January 1801.

In 1802 Solger embarked on a long journey that took him through southern Germany, Switzerland and finally to Paris. Upon his return, he took a position, at the beginning of 1803, in the House of War and Domains in Berlin, in accordance with the wishes of his father. In 1804 he attended Fichte's lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* at the University of Berlin. These lectures struck him as a kind of revelation and moved him to return to academic life. In 1806 he quit his government post and devoted himself wholly to scholarship. One fruit of this was a two-volume translation of Sophocles' works in 1808.³

Having received his doctoral degree in philosophy in 1808, Solger, in 1809, went to the University in Frankfurt an der Oder, where he was soon made professor extraordinarius in philosophy. In 1810 he was elected mayor by the town commissioners. Although the position came with a high salary, he declined the honor in order to stick with the non-salaried position as professor at the university there. (His humility and good will were recognized, and shortly thereafter he was awarded a small salary by the government.)

This was followed in 1811 with a prestigious appointment at the then newly founded University of Berlin. Not yet 32 years old, he was among the young generation at the university. Initially he was a popular instructor, and already in the Winter Semester 1811–12 his lecture courses attracted more students than Fichte's.⁴ However, his initial popularity wore off in time, and he ultimately became more and more isolated as fewer and fewer students came to his courses.⁵ He felt increasingly alienated from the students whom he regarded as light-minded for following both frivolous modern trends and a superficial, overly nostalgic and emotional version of Christianity. Moreover, the reception of his books was disappointing.

Solger published his main work in 1815 under the title, *Erwin: Four Conversations about the Beautiful and Art*.⁶ Here he attempts a defense of some of the basic principles of Romantic aesthetics in a series of dialogues. This work has the reputation of being extremely difficult to comprehend. In 1817 he published another series of dialogues along the same lines entitled, *Philosophical Conversations*.⁷ Readers found him

² Schelling, *System des transscendental Idealismus*, Tübingen: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung 1800.

³ *Des Sophokles Tragödien*, vols. 1–2, trans. by K.W.F. Solger, Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung 1808. A second edition appeared in 1824.

⁴ Lenz, *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 469.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2.1, pp. 98f.

⁶ K.W.F. Solger, *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung 1815.

⁷ Solger, *Philosophische Gespräche*, Berlin: Mauer 1817.

tedious, and his decision to write in dialogues proved an unsuccessful strategy. This met with the disapproval of, among others, Hegel, who seems to have found the dialogue form inappropriate for current philosophical expression.⁸

Nonetheless Solger supported Hegel's appointment to a professorship in Berlin in 1818.⁹ In his letters after the appointment but before Hegel's arrival, Solger's tone is one of great interest and anticipation.¹⁰ When asked to submit his course proposals for the Winter Semester, Hegel solicited Solger for suggestions so that they could coordinate their instruction. The tone of Solger's response is respectful and even friendly.¹¹ They became good friends after Hegel's arrival in the Prussian capital in the fall of that year.

In the last year of his life Solger was active in university politics. The university Senate entrusted him with the formulation of a letter of protest defending the rights of the professors to express their opinions freely.¹² This must be seen in the context of the rise of the student movement in Prussia and the German states, which was regarded with great alarm by the authorities. Some professors had been fired, and all works had to be submitted to the censors before they could be published. Solger died of a sudden illness on October 20, 1819 before the results of his efforts in this regard were clear. His period at the University of Berlin has been described as an "interregnum" between Fichte and Hegel, the two major philosophers who played such a formative role there.¹³

A two-volume edition of Solger's posthumous works was published in 1826 with the title, *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*.¹⁴ This work was edited by Solger's friends, Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich von Raumer, who published some of their own correspondence with Solger in this edition. The first part of this work consists of excerpts from Solger's diary along with his correspondence. These are arranged in such a way as to present a kind of autobiography. The second part of the work consists of individual essays, reviews, prefaces and short pieces by Solger. In their Preface Tieck and Raumer mention that Hegel had helped them with the organization of the philosophical material in their edition.¹⁵ In addition to this work, an edition of Solger's lectures on aesthetics was published in 1829 by one of Solger's students, Karl Wilhelm Ludwig von Heyse (1797–1855).¹⁶ Kierkegaard owned a copy of both of these posthumous works.

⁸ See Günther Nicolin, *Hegel in Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1970, p. 229.

⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 171f; pp. 172f.

¹¹ See *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vols. 1–3, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister, 3rd ed., Hamburg: Meiner 1969 [1951–54], vol. 2, letter 340, pp. 189f.

¹² Lenz, *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, op. cit., vol. 2.1, p. 99f.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 396.

¹⁴ *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit.

¹⁵ "Vorrede," in *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, ibid., vol. 1, p. XVI.

¹⁶ *K.W.F. Solger's Vorlesungen über Aesthetik*, ed. by K.W.L. Heyse, Leipzig: Brockhaus 1829 (ASKB 1387).

Tieck and Raumer's edition was reviewed sympathetically by Hegel in 1828 in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*.¹⁷ This book review was then reprinted in 1834–35 in the volume of *Vermischte Schriften*, edited by Friedrich Förster (1791–1868) and Ludwig Boumann (1801–71), in the posthumous edition of Hegel's collected works.¹⁸ Kierkegaard also owned a copy of this work. It can fairly be said that Tieck's and Raumer's edition along with Hegel's review were the primary forces involved in the reception of Solger's thought not just for Kierkegaard but for all later generations.

In 1837–38 Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801–93) published his famous two-volume, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*.¹⁹ In this work Michelet has an extended chapter dedicated to "Die Solger'sche Philosophie."²⁰ This account is based largely on texts featured in *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, with the sole exception being the final section which is based primarily on Heyse's edition of Solger's lectures on aesthetics. While Solger wrote works on metaphysics and political philosophy, he is, however, best known as a critic and theorist for aesthetics, which is the focus of Hegel's book review. Michelet, by contrast, attempts to give a more rounded view of him, beginning with an account of Solger's epistemology and metaphysics, and then moving from there to his political philosophy and finally to his aesthetics. Towards the end of the chapter, Michelet treats Solger's understanding of irony as the key to art.²¹ His analysis is on this point clearly influenced by Hegel's assessment.

Prior to Kierkegaard, Solger was certainly not an unknown figure in Denmark. The Danish critic and aesthetician, Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860), was quite familiar with his works. For example, in a letter from 1825, he laments the ponderous style of some writers who "lose themselves in what the Germans call 'ein breites Hin- und Herreden.'" ²² He then implies that Solger's *Erwin* suffers from this flaw

¹⁷ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel. Herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich von Raumer. Erster Band 780 S. mit Vorr. XVI S. Zweiter Band 784 S. Leipzig, 1826," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, Erster Artikel (March 1828), nos. 51–52, pp. 403–16; nos. 53–54, pp. 417–28; Zweiter Artikel (June 1828), nos. 105–106, pp. 838–48; nos. 107–108, pp. 849–64; nos. 109–110, pp. 865–70.

¹⁸ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel. Herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich von Raumer. Erster Band 780 S. mit Vorr. XVI S. Zweiter Band 784 S. Leipzig, 1826," in *Vermischte Schriften*, I–II, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1834–35, vols. 16–17 in *Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols. 1–18, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1832–45, vol. 16, 1834, pp. 436–506 (ASKB 555–556). (*Jub.* vol. 20, pp. 132–202 (*Jub.*= *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden*, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928–41); in English as *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2002, pp. 354–400.)

¹⁹ Karl Ludwig Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1837–38 (ASKB 678–679).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 560–98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 592–4.

²² Letter 126, "J.L. Heiberg til H.C. Ørsted," in *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Johan Ludvig Heiberg*, vols. 1–5, ed. by Morten Borup, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1947–50, vol. 1, p. 166. (In English as *Heiberg's On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2005, p. 77.)

and, further, constitutes a "false imitation of the Platonic form."²³ Heiberg continues his attack on Solger's style in a short article, entitled "On Solger," published in his famous journal of aesthetics and criticism, *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, on February 16, 1827.²⁴ This was actually a part of a larger discussion of Solger in the Danish journals.²⁵ In his article Heiberg echoes the sentiment of his earlier letter comparing Solger's *Erwin* with Plato's less stylistically successful dialogues. He further carps at Solger's infelicitous translations of Sophocles. Heiberg refers specifically to Solger's views on irony and mentions Hegel's treatment of this in the *Philosophy of Right*:

With all respect for Tieck (whom Solger's lovable personality has impressed), in philosophy his authority is quite limited. I would rather refer to what the most profound thinker of our age, Hegel, has said about Solger's confused ideas about irony, [which Solger] set forth in the review of A.W. Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst*. Hegel discusses Solger with respect and friendship (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 150, in the footnote), but also demonstrates how far Solger was from speculative clarity. Without doubt Hegel, who is no lenient judge, would have judged him even more sharply if he had not had in mind the dear memory of Solger's personality.²⁶

Although he is more focused on the issue of style, Heiberg seems generally to share Hegel's criticism. However, his tone is considerably shaper that the latter's. In his article Heiberg, with characteristic condescension, writes, "A man who struggles with honest efforts on the field of reflection, without having the genius to work through it and reach the speculative result, is to be pitied, but his efforts deserve to be appreciated, although Tieck goes too far when he proclaims that a book of this kind [sc. *Erwin*] contains the truth."²⁷ Heiberg thus portrays Solger as a well-meaning but incompetent philosopher, who never managed to grasp the depths of speculative thought.

While Kierkegaard was almost certainly familiar with Heiberg's article and perhaps even with Michelet's chapter, there can be little doubt that the real key to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Heiberg, "Om Solger," *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, 1827, February 16, no. 14, [pp. 67–8]. Since the journal *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post* did not have page numbers, page references have been given in square brackets to the page numbers in the photomechanically reprinted edition: *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, vols. 1–4, by Uffe Andreasen (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1980–84).

²⁵ The polemical context is somewhat complex. An article in *Kjøbenhavnsposten* ("Kjøbenhavnspostens Nyheder," "Solgers Dom om Baggesens Parthenais," *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, no. 4, 1827, p. 15) had reported Solger as complaining that Baggesen's work, *Parthenais, oder die Alpenreise* (1802), was written in an infelicitous German style. A subsequent article in *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, pseudonymously attributed to "S....." (S....., "Solger og Baggesen," *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, 1827, January 22, no. 7, [pp. 38–9]) attempted to defend Baggesen by arguing that Solger should be the last one to make criticisms regarding style since his German translation of Sophocles is a stylistic disaster. The author of the original piece then riposted in another issue of *Kjøbenhavnsposten* ([anonymous], "Til S..... i den flyvende Post No. 7," *Kjøbenhavnsposten*, no. 12, February 10, 1827, pp. 50–51). This is the point where Heiberg enters the discussion with his short piece.

²⁶ Heiberg, "Om Solger," *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, 1827, no. 14 [p. 68].

²⁷ Heiberg, "Om Solger," *ibid.*, [p. 68].

understanding his assessment of Solger is Hegel's critique. Thus, this is the natural place to begin any treatment of Kierkegaard's relation to Solger.

II. Hegel's Assessment of Solger's Irony

Hegel had long been in a polemical relation with the theoretical leaders of German Romanticism, especially Friedrich von Schlegel.²⁸ As early as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) he had criticized different forms of subjectivism associated with the Romantic movement with sarcastic labels such as "the unhappy consciousness," "the beautiful soul," "virtue and the way of the world," and "the spiritual animal kingdom."²⁹ Hegel's criticism of the Romantics continues and is further developed in different forms throughout his authorship and not least of all in his posthumously published lectures. One of the forms of subjectivism that Hegel identifies for criticism is irony.³⁰ Solger appears in the context of these critical analyses and specifically in connection with Hegel's discussions of Romantic irony.

A. The Philosophy of Right

Hegel's first direct mention of Solger comes in the *Philosophy of Right* (1821). In a long analysis in the "Morality" chapter, Hegel systematically surveys the different forms of subjectivism.³¹ Here in a long footnote he refers to Solger as follows:

²⁸ See Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik*, Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität 1956 (for Solger, see pp. 263–98).

²⁹ See the chapters "The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through its own Activity" and "Individuality which Takes Itself to be Real In and For Itself" from the "Reason" Chapter (*Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 271–334; in English as *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977, pp. 211–262) and "Spirit that is Certain of Itself. Morality" from the "Spirit" Chapter (*Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 459–516; *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., pp. 364–409). See also Ferruccio Andolfi, "Die Gestalten des Individualismus in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*," *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 1991, pp. 211–25; Gary Shapiro, "Notes on the Animal Kingdom of the Spirit," *Clio*, vol. 8, 1979, pp. 323–38; Donald Phillip Verene, "Two Forms of Defective Selfhood: The Spiritual Animal Kingdom and the Beautiful Soul," in his *Hegel's Recollection. A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1985, pp. 92–103; Donald Phillip Verene, "Hegel's Spiritual Zoo and the Modern Condition," *Owl of Minerva*, vol. 25, 1994, pp. 235–40; J.Y. Calvez, "L'âge d'or. Essai sur le destin de la 'belle âme' chez Novalis et Hegel," *Études Germaniques*, vol. 9, 1954, pp. 112–27; D.O. Dahlstrom, "Die schöne Seele bei Schiller und Hegel," *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 1991, pp. 147–56; Moltke S. Gram, "Moral and Literary Ideals in Hegel's Critique of 'The Moral View of the World,'" *Clio*, vol. 7, 1978, pp. 375–402; Emanuel Hirsch, "Die Beisetzung der Romantiker in Hegels *Phänomenologie*. Ein Kommentar zu dem Abschnitte über die Moralität," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 2, 1924, pp. 510–32.

³⁰ See Ernst Behler, "Hegels Polemik gegen die Ironie," in his *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, Paderborn, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh 1997, pp. 115–49.

³¹ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*, Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung 1821, § 140, pp. 137–53. (Reprint: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im*

My late colleague Professor Solger did admittedly take over the expression "irony" which Friedrich von Schlegel introduced during an earlier period of his literary career and whose meaning he extended to include that subjectivity which knows itself as supreme. But Solger's better judgment rejected this definition, and his philosophical insight seized upon and retained only one aspect of it, namely the dialectical element proper, the activating pulse of speculative reflection. But I do not find his conclusions entirely clear, nor can I agree with the concepts which he develops in his last, substantial work, his detailed critique of August Wilhelm von Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (*Wiener Jahrbuch*, vol. VII, pp. 90ff.)³²

Here Hegel is quick to distinguish Solger's form of irony from what he regards as the more offensive form found in Friedrich von Schlegel, who is Hegel's most frequent target of criticism in this context. Solger is praised for grasping "the dialectical element" in the phenomenon of irony. By this Hegel means that one essential element of irony recognized by Solger is its negative or critical dimension. It destroys accepted beliefs and customs; it sets itself apart from the status quo and the accepted order of things by calling everything into question. While Hegel's statement appears to be straightforwardly laudatory, there is an implicit criticism hidden in it. By saying that Solger focuses on the negative dimension of irony, Hegel seems to want to imply that he thus overlooked the *positive* or constructive dimension, which appears after irony has done its destructive work.

Hegel focuses his analysis here on Solger's then recently published review³³ of August von Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.³⁴ He quotes from the review as follows:

"True irony," says Solger on that occasion (p. 92) "starts from the point of view that, as long as human beings live in this present world, it is only in the world that they can fulfill their destiny, even in the highest sense of that word. Any means whereby we believe we can *transcend finite ends* is a vain and empty fancy....Even the highest of things is present to our action only in a *limited and finite shape*." This, if understood correctly, is a Platonic view, very truly expressed in opposition to that empty striving for the (*abstract*) infinite which Solger had previously referred to. But to say that the highest of things is present in a limited and *finite shape*, like the realm of the ethics—and the ethical realm is essentially actuality and action—is very different from saying that it is a *finite end*; the

Grundrisse, ed. by Eduard Gans, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1833, in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 8, § 140, pp. 188–207; *Jub.*, vol. 7, § 140, pp. 204–23; in English as *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. by H.B. Nisbet, ed. by Allen Wood, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1991, § 140, pp. 170–84.)

³² Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), § 140, p. 150n. (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1833), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 8, § 140, p. 201n; *Jub.*, vol. 7, § 140, p. 217n; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., § 140, pp. 170–84 and § 140, p. 180n–81n.)

³³ Solger's review of August Wilhelm von Schlegel's *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*. *Vorlesungen* originally appeared in *Jahrbuch der Literatur*, vol. 7, 1819 (Vienna), pp. 80–155. It was then reprinted as "Beurtheilung der Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur" in *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 493–628.

³⁴ August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur. Vorlesungen*, vols. 1–2.2, Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer 1809–11.

shape and form of finitude do not deprive the content, i.e., the ethical realm, of any of its substantiality or of the infinity which is inherent within it.³⁵

From the passage Hegel quotes, he again underscores the negative dimension in Solger's position, which denies any truth or validity to the world of actuality. As Hegel indicates, this kind of despairing view of the actual world is commonly accompanied by a conception of a true, meaningful world in some transcendent sphere; this posited utopia constitutes the contrastive term to the miserable and impoverished world of actuality. In contrast to this, Hegel affirms his view that the Idea or the truth is not some abstract, unattainable entity dwelling in the beyond but rather exists all around us in the sphere of appearance. The challenge is merely to recognize and understand it in the appearances. Hegel seems to want to point out that Solger is apparently guilty of the common error of thinking that anything that is revealed in the realm of finite appearances is merely finite and ultimately trivial and meaningless. For Hegel, the essential point is that the Idea can appear in phenomenal form and is thus something real and not merely an abstract ideal. The Idea is not denigrated, tainted or compromised by the fact that it also appears in actuality.

Returning to the actual context of Solger's discussion in art, Hegel then goes on to discuss in some detail how this relates to an understanding of dramatic characters. He quotes again from Solger's review as follows:

Solger continues: "And for this very reason, it [the highest of things] is as insignificant in us as the lowest of things, and *necessarily perishes with us and our insignificant intellects*. For it is truly present in God alone, and when it perishes in us, it is transfigured as something divine, in which we would have no share if there were not an immediate presence of this divinity which becomes manifest even as our actuality disappears; but the state of mind to which this presence becomes immediately evident in human events themselves is tragic irony."³⁶

It is only though God that humans are saved from a complete nihilism. Without the divine, we simply would wallow in a meaningless, finite world. God is thus the guarantor of truth and beauty, in short, all the "highest of things."

Solger makes this claim in the context of a discussion of tragic characters, whose fate is, according to his analysis, caused by the fact that they cease to believe in a higher sphere and become apostate. They then betray their own highest values and character traits. Hegel analyzes this as follows:

The arbitrary name "irony" would not in itself require comment, but there is an unclarity in the statement that it is *the highest of things* which *perishes* with our insignificance, and that the divine is revealed only when our actuality disappears, as when we are told on page 91: "We see heroes lose faith in the noblest and finest aspects of their dispositions

³⁵ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), § 140, pp. 150n–51n. (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1833), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 8, § 140, pp. 201n–202n; *Jub.*, vol. 7, § 140, pp. 217n–18n; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., § 140, p. 181n.)

³⁶ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), § 140, p. 151n. (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1833), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 8, § 140, p. 202n; *Jub.*, vol. 7, § 140, p. 218n; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., § 140, p. 181n.)

and feelings, not only in relation to what these lead to, but also in relation to *their source* and *their value*; indeed, we are elevated by the *downfall of the best* itself.” The tragic downfall of figures of the highest ethical worth can interest us, elevate us, and reconcile us to its occurrence only in so far as such figures appear in mutual opposition, with equally justified but distinct ethical powers which have unfortunately come into collision....As a result of this opposition to an ethical principle, they incur guilt, from which the right and wrong of both parties emerges, and with it the true ethical idea which, purified and triumphing over this *one-sidedness*, is thereby reconciled in us. Accordingly, it is not the *highest* thing in us which perishes, and we are *elevated* not *by the downfall of the best* but, on the contrary, by the triumph of the true.³⁷

Here Hegel invokes his own theory of tragedy. The portrayal of straightforward rogues getting their just deserts has no higher value. This may well be conceived as the meaningless play of finite forces, which is rightly criticized by irony. However, true tragedy involves the necessary conflict of two rightful principles, as in, for example, Hegel's famous analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*.³⁸ The conflict between Antigone and Creon represents higher principles of spirit working itself forward. The truth thus appears in the conflict of this opposition. This development is not merely destructive, as the Romantic ironist would have it.

The upshot of this is again, according to Hegel, that Solger grasps only the negative dimension of this tragic relation. He sees only the negative downfall of the characters and not the higher, positive view revealed in the dialectical collision of the abstract principles that they represent. The truth lies in the speculative overcoming of these one-sided principles and not their simple destruction. It is thus a mistake to conceive of irony in this straightforward, negative fashion.

B. Hegel's Review of Solger's Posthumous Writings

Hegel's most extensive account of Solger is clearly his book review of Tieck's and Raumer's edition of Solger's posthumous writings. This review consists of two long articles, which, going far beyond a simple account of the new book, provide an overview of Hegel's assessment of the German Romantic movement in general. While Hegel paints a positive portrait of Solger, he is highly critical of other Romantics, such as Friedrich von Schlegel and Solger's editor, Tieck. In his review, Hegel treats the issue of irony at some length in a couple of different places.

After giving a brief account of Solger's biography based on the materials contained in the first volume of the edition, Hegel describes the crises in German literature and literary criticism during the periods in question. One of these is the

³⁷ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), § 140, p. 151n. (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1833), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 8, § 140, p. 202n; *Jub.*, vol. 7, § 140, p. 218n; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., § 140, p. 181n.)

³⁸ The classic statement of this is of course the beginning of the "Spirit" chapter from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 340–67; *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., pp. 266–89. Hegel also analyzes the *Antigone* in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, see *Jub.*, vol. 14, pp. 556–7. (*Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, vols. 1–2, trans. by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1998 [1975], vol. 2, pp. 1217–18.) See also the *Philosophy of Right*, *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 227; pp. 246–7. (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., § 144, Remark; § 166.)

crisis of irony. It began innocently enough with some comic writers making use of irony to comic effect, and thereby criticizing specific institutions or practices. It was then subsequently adopted as a more general theory of poetry which denied the truth and reality of everything. Hegel describes this as follows:

... we saw the theory of the poetry of poetry, and, on the other hand, the circle of poets developing who made it their object to mystify both themselves and the public with the dawning products of the new poetic poetry with a cometary world made of fragrance and tone without a core. The lyrical form is natural for this ironic sublimation towards meaninglessness and longing, and it creates itself almost out of itself because the playing in unreal tones of the hollow mind is not, for verse and rhyme, embarrassed by content. In the dramatic branch, reality, character, and plot cannot be dispensed with. The inner void, which is demanded by the theory of irony, leads here to what mediocrity hits upon by itself—lack of character, inconsistency and accidentality, boastful dryness. The theory adds only the claim that mediocrity, even with the maxim of unprincipledness and superficiality, is productive. With this point of view, criticism gave itself a new, bold, indeed, often insolent, impetus and impressed a group who wanted to be at the aesthetic apex because a public, as Solger frequently expresses the experience, forms itself around every bold and glossy crookedness.³⁹

Although he mentions no names here, Hegel seems to have in mind here the period in German literary criticism immediately preceding Schlegel. His criticism is that, apart from its numerous theoretical shortcomings, this view of irony simply leads to bad art. When applied to lyric poetry, irony provides the poet with an excuse to avoid the treatment of any concrete content or issue, and the poem becomes flighty and self-indulgent. With respect to dramatic poetry, the ironic practice eliminates the key ingredients of drama and leaves the audience with no reason to be interested in the characters or the piece. The ironic poet or dramatist thus ends in an arrogant and self-congratulatory posture that disdains the readers or audience who cannot understand his self-indulgent amusement.

Hegel then moves ahead in his historical account and discusses the period of irony which is dominated by Friedrich von Schlegel. Still following the correspondence and biographical material in the edition, Hegel compares Solger's view of irony favorably with that of Schlegel:

A great many literary phenomena and opinions that belong to the spirit of this time pass before our eyes in this correspondence. Yet the most audacious and flourishing period of irony, *Lucinde*, *Athenäum*, etc., falls already beyond this....Solger's more profound judgment always stopped far short of the standpoint of the *Athenäum*, not to mention *Lucinde*. Even less could he in more mature years participate in the utmost grotesqueness to which the humor in the Hoffmannesque productions climbed.⁴⁰

As evidence of Solger's more tempered view of irony and his disapprobation of the Romantics, Hegel cites the following:

³⁹ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 410. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 445f; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 141f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 360.)

⁴⁰ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 411. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 446; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 142; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 360f.)

Just to give a few examples of that tendency, Solger, in his youth, finds in the novel begun by Novalis, *Heinrich of Ofterdingen* (p. 95), a new and extremely daring attempt to depict poetry through life, the idea of a mystical story, a tearing apart of the veil that the finite on this earth holds around the infinite, an appearance of the godhead on earth, of a true myth, which here, however, forms itself in the mind of an individual man. "It distresses me exceedingly that this novel is not continued further and stops right at the beginning of what is most important." The sparkling onset corrupted the young man, but he still did not realize that a conception of this kind is deficient precisely because it cannot be continued and brought to a conclusion. The shallow characters and situations shudder back from the reality towards which they should move if they are to progress. On p. 124 the *Song of the Nibelungs* is declared, according to its outline, to be greater than the *Iliad*. In A.W. Schlegel's lecture on Dante, Solger finds neither the proper solemn awe before this lofty mysticism, nor sufficient receptivity for the sublime artlessness.⁴¹

Hegel's quotations of Solger here are clearly intended to demonstrate that Solger is critical of the excesses of his contemporaries. Hegel lauds Solger for having the good sense, even as a young man, to reject the self-indulgent dimension of irony as presented by Novalis, Schlegel and their followers. However, according to Hegel's portrayal, while Solger has the correct intuitive disposition towards these errors, he does not properly understand the philosophical reasons for rejecting them.

Hegel then dedicates some pages to exploring Solger's assessment of the works of his editor Tieck; Hegel uses this as an occasion to take the latter to task on a number of different points. Hegel then returns to the issue of irony and runs through the interpretations of this concept in the different Romantic authors beginning with Schlegel, whom he reproaches for misunderstanding what philosophy is. It will be useful to explore his criticisms of these other figures briefly in order to set Solger's position into relief. Hegel writes the following about Schlegel:

The self-conscious frustration of the objective has called itself *irony*. Since the most excellent ironical individuality is to be found on our path, let us briefly mention this....Throughout his entire public career, the father of irony [sc. Friedrich von Schlegel] has given himself the same relation to philosophy noted here. He has, namely, always behaved judgmentally towards it without ever articulating content, philosophical propositions, or even a developed sequence of them, not to speak of having proven or even refuted them. Refuting requires the assertion of a basis, and with this an engagement in the issue. This would mean, however, condescending from the genteel position or (to use one of his earlier inventions of categories) from the divine insolence and from the heights of irony (one can just as easily say: from the satanical or diabolical insolence of evaluating and disputing from the position above the issue to condescending to the ground of philosophizing itself and to the issue).⁴²

Hegel attacks what he takes to be Schlegel's overbearing arrogance with regard to his judgments of others since Schlegel seems to believe that his clever use of

⁴¹ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 411. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 446f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 142f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 361.)

⁴² Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., pp. 426f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 465f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 161f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 372f.)

irony elevates him above the common people, who are still trapped by a simple and outdated conception of truth and value. Like Kierkegaard, Hegel describes this position as “demonic.” Hegel continues:

Mr. Friedrich von Schlegel has constantly pointed out that he stood on the highest peak of philosophy without ever proving that he has penetrated this science and understood it in a merely ordinary fashion. His discernment and reading have certainly acquainted him with problems that philosophy has in common with religion and that even get in the way of philological criticism and literary history. But the kind of solution he intimates everywhere and only ostentatiously gives one to understand instead of simply stating it or indeed justifying it philosophically, is partly a subjective solution, which may be convenient for him as an individual this way or that, but partly demonstrates the entire demeanor of his remarks, that the requisite of thinking reason, and with it, the basic problem of that thinking reason and a science of philosophy which is conscious and honest towards itself have remained foreign to him.⁴³

Here Hegel descends into a whole-hearted attack on Schlegel for pretending to have a defensible philosophical position, while in reality not having any idea about what philosophy is or how philosophical argumentation works. Schlegel has no interest in providing reasoned arguments to support his position. He does not enter into any form of discursive reasoning to explicate or defend his views. Thus, for Hegel, his opinions remain bald assertions with no philosophical basis whatsoever.

In his criticism Hegel then moves from Schlegel to Tieck. As in his previous analysis of Schlegel, here he likewise uses Tieck as a contrastive form of irony to that of Solger:

Tieck’s irony remains free of charlatany in its relationship to philosophy and generally limits itself to dismissing the objective formation of content through thinking, that is, to dismissing the characteristic of philosophy to deduce the abstract universal, what is called mystical; in relation to Solger’s philosophy, it limits itself to having a sincere interest and occasionally acknowledging its content, usually to formulate the response to the explicated Solgerian depictions and explanations with a general agreement enclosing them with the often repeated good-natured assurance of understanding Solger, of understanding him completely, of having finally understood him.⁴⁴

Here Tieck clearly comes off better than Schlegel with respect to his understanding of philosophy. His irony, with respect to philosophy, seems to be confined to a denial of the ability to deduce the universal truth in any final way. Influenced by the German mystics, Tieck regards the truth as a mystical experience that cannot be reduced to rational explanation or discursive reasoning.

⁴³ Hegel, “Über Solger’s nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel,” *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 427. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 466; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 162; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 373.)

⁴⁴ Hegel, “Über Solger’s nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel,” *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 427f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 466f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 162f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 373.)

Hegel saves his most detailed account of Solger's conception of irony for the second article of his review.⁴⁵ He there takes a historical approach and inquires into the origins of the concept of modern irony. As in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,⁴⁶ Hegel identifies Fichte's conception of the self-positing ego as the beginning of this trend:

For this purpose we distinguish the speculative moment which lies on one side of irony and is certainly found in the speculative determinations observed. This is, namely, that negativity in general, which in the elevation to its abstract apex constitutes the basic determination of Fichte's philosophy. In the ego = ego not only all finiteness, but also all content in general has disappeared. The highest starting point for the problem of philosophy has indeed been brought to consciousness with this elevation, to develop the particular from the unconditional, the universal—a principle containing the possibility for it because it is itself simply the impulse of development. But this principle is, first of all, itself a presupposition and exists only in its abstract, and therefore not in its true, one-sided purity. A principle must also prove something; it must not be required that it be accepted on intuition, immediate certainty, inner revelation, or as one may call it in a word, in good faith....In the aforementioned form, negativity has remained only in the one-sided, finite affirmation that it has as ego.⁴⁷

Fichte makes use of the abstract principle of the subject for epistemological purposes. It is a universal, abstract conception of a subject and not a real flesh and blood one. Its purpose is to play a role in the further epistemological argumentation, but it was never intended as a kind of philosophical anthropology.

Fichte's account was then seized upon by Schlegel, who took it out of its original context and applied it to the particular, empirical subject. Hegel continues:

In this exclusively subjective affirmation, it has been taken up from Fichtean philosophy by Friedrich Schlegel with a lack of understanding of the speculative and a dismissal of it, and so torn out of the field of thought, that turned directly toward reality, it has flourished

⁴⁵ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 854. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 486f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 182f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 386): "But with this depiction of Solger's highest determination of the Idea and of the highest rung of his philosophical development, one perhaps misses an account of the irony touched upon preliminarily in the previous article, which because it otherwise is labeled the highest, one can especially expect to meet it here, to find its sense and determination exponentiated and safeguarded against misunderstandings. As it usually occurs, it is to be regarded as more than simply a famous, supposedly refined apparition. In relation to Solger, however, it can never be treated as a principle, and in this sense we want to consider it more closely here."

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, I–III, ed. by Karl Ludwig Michelet, vols. 13–15 [1833–36], in *Hegel's Werke*, op. cit., vol. 15, pp. 611–46. (*Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 611–46; In English as *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vols. 1–3, trans. by E.S. Haldane, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner 1892–96; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1995, vol. 3, pp. 479–512.)

⁴⁷ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., pp. 854f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 487; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 183; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 386f.)

into irony, to the negation of the animation of reason and truth and to the degradation of it to the appearance in the subject and to the appearing for others.⁴⁸

Schlegel thus took the abstract Fichtean ego as a kind of theoretical justification for his own view of the flippant, ironic artist. Like the Fichtean ego, the ironist has no fixed content and is free to criticize, or in Fichte's language, negate everything around it. The ironist is unlimited and thus unconstrained by any conventions, customs or laws. For Hegel, this was never the point of Fichte's theory, and when Schlegel applies it for his own purposes in this way, the theory is distorted almost beyond recognition.

Then anticipating Kierkegaard's analysis, Hegel contrasts this form of irony with Socratic irony.⁴⁹ Hegel then returns to the issue of Solger's irony, referring explicitly to his previous analysis.⁵⁰ He writes:

⁴⁸ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 855. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 487f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 183f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 386f.)

⁴⁹ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 855f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 488f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 184f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 387f.): "For that perversion, innocent Socratic irony had to allow its name to be perverted. It deserved all the less to be drawn into this, since if we leave out the side entirely according to which it was only the charming sophistry of cheerful, well-meaning conversation of Attic urbanity in which Plato and Aristophanes are these great masters, if we take them according to the sense in which they are attributed to Socrates in relation to his scholarly manner of teaching, it can appear to have been attributed to Socrates unjustly, be it as accused or as praised. If it is mainly assumed thereby that Socrates began his conversations with the assurance of not knowing anything and caused the others, the sophists, the learned, and whoever else there was, rather to display their wisdom and scholarship that then was brought to confusion and shame by him through his dialectic, then this success is certainly well known, but it is at the same time usually of such a kind that it remains something negative and without a scholarly result, so that the peculiarity and the great effect of Socrates should be placed in the stimulation of reflection and in the leading back of the human being to his innermost, to his moral and intellectual freedom. The truths that Socrates did not really teach and his students gained from him, that which is considered true and right for the human being, what he must draw and confirm from his own interior through reflection, refer entirely alone to that free self-assurance of the mind in general. Accordingly, that preamble in Socrates considered as untrue, that lie claiming to know nothing, to possess no knowledge, should, on the contrary, be considered by us as stated completely in earnest, as completely correct and by no means ironic. We do not find it contradicted by his actual teaching and activity."

⁵⁰ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 856 (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 488; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 185; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 388): "If, for Solger, irony is, according to his own explanations, by no means the "scornful disregard for everything which essentially and seriously interests the human being, for the entire discord in his nature" (II, p. 514 in the review of A.W. Schlegel's *Dramatic Lectures*), but he instead expressly rejects this meaning of it, just as it is in other respects contrary to all his principles, his definition nevertheless remains not without the admixture of something crooked, as I have already noted elsewhere (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 150), and which emerges in connection with the speculative ideas explained above in an even more definitive light."

What is to be distinguished from the purely abstract attitude of the speculative category of negativity which is discussed is the reflection of this upon the specific, upon the field where duties, truth, principles begin. It is in this transition that irony appears. "When it looks towards reality," it states in vol. I, p. 689, "mysticism is the mother of irony, when it looks towards the eternal world, the child of enthusiasm or inspiration." We have seen before what is expressed right there (*ibid.*, pp. 115ff.), that it is an immediate presence of the divine that reveals itself precisely in the disappearance of our reality. The mood that makes this directly manifest to human events is tragic irony.⁵¹

Here Hegel quotes from a letter to Tieck, from November 1818, found in *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften*.⁵² Where the divine appears, it makes the actual world look impoverished and meaningless. Hegel analyzes this in a manner similar to that in the *Philosophy of Right*:

It had been said immediately before that "the highest for our behavior was present only in limited, finite formation, that for that reason it was as insignificant with us as the lowest and necessarily is destroyed with us and our insignificant meaning because, in truth, it is only there in God, in whose destruction it then is transfigured as divine." If we first take this elevation and its sentiment which is called "tragic irony" here, then what is necessary has already been mentioned with regard to the relationship of both definitions that relate here to each other, for which philosophical knowledge was the one definition, the point of departure. This elevation in itself, whatever its point of departure may be, is nothing other than devotion, and if it is only a matter of popular depiction, then it does not require a large circumlocution in order to make one acknowledge it.⁵³

Here Hegel associates this use of irony with traditional conceptions of religious devotion. The goal in the religious context is to elevate oneself to the level of the divine in order to overcome the finitude and triviality of this world. There is thus a clear religious dimension to Romantic irony. Hegel continues:

In relation to ancient tragedy too, we may use the term "devotion" because that depiction of art was part and parcel of the cult, and as pure and enhanced devotion may be, it is nevertheless in general an elevation to God out of the occupation of the mind with temporal interests and cares and out of the impurity of the soul. But this is only the Sunday of life; the workdays follow. Out of the cabinet of the interior, the human being steps out of the specific present and work, and the question is: how does the reflection of the divine, which is present in devotion, look in this world?⁵⁴

⁵¹ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 856. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 488f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 185f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 388.)

⁵² *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 689.

⁵³ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 856f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 490; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 186; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 388.)

⁵⁴ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 857. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 490; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 186; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 388f.)

The contrast between "the Sunday of life" and everyday life is significant. The point is to recognize the divine (and thus the truth) in day-to-day life and not only on special occasions.

Hegel is quick to defend Solger against the nihilistic view that denies this world any truth and validity, which is reserved solely for the divine. He continues:

Solger is far removed from the view that the workday and activity in this world are and could only be a godless life; his theology is also morality...and his philosophy is for this reason at the same time worldly wisdom. But in the passage cited, the reflection of the divine in the world, "the unfolding of the same into the world of dismemberment, of nothingness," etc., through which the divine becomes familiar to us and transplanted completely into our sphere, appears only as comic irony, "the highest and holiest" as the object of comedy. Without wanting to go further into the dissection of "the highest and holiest," so much is clear that between the worldly presence of this kind and that elevation above the finite, the middle is missing in which the "highest and holiest" has worldly presence as morality, law, love, and every virtue, as Solger himself views everywhere the state, the entire moral life, as the revelation of God. Here affirmation must receive an entirely different determination than merely that of a subjective affirmation persisting negatively against the concrete.⁵⁵

The shortcoming with Solger's view is that although the divine is revealed in the world, it is not revealed in anything objective, that is, laws, institutions and so on. It is revealed only to the private conscience of the individual. It thus becomes something purely subjective with no objective validity. The individual does not see itself recognized or affirmed in the world. On the contrary, the world is a place of alienation, which stands in utter contrast to the divine and the dictates of the individual's conscience.

Hegel returns to the criticism of Schlegel's failure to offer any philosophical justification of his position on irony. Solger is lauded for recognizing this. Hegel continues with a critical analysis of Solger's conception of the divine. He writes:

If we now see that with Solger the kind of subjectivity which irony leaves unharmed the highest speculative principles as well as the axioms of concrete truth, nevertheless it has to happen, due to the imperfection of form in the highest determinations, that a subjective side emerges in another way—a side which should already reveal itself from the overview of the whole of the moments cited above. The first determination is...that the Godhead creates itself directly in a present reality, a moment which is for us only among the determinations and relationships of existence in which we are constrained. This relative fact should, however, raise itself in us into the experience and reality of God. With that, the omnipresence of God is expressed in everything finite, but with this obligation to experience, we are first of all no farther than what Spinoza said, i.e., that everything must be observed *sub specie aeternitatis*, or it is furthermore the same as the pious soul does to be devout in all natural things and changes, as in the occurrences of the circle of human things, to acknowledge and to experience it in what is higher, i.e., God's finger and presence. What is indefinite in this attitude becomes a definite content

⁵⁵ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 857f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 490f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 186f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 389.)

only through cognition. For this to be true, the merely relative manner of cognition is not enough for Solger, i.e., the so-called explaining from natural causes that proceeds along the finite and stops within the circle of the limited, but also the manner of cognition that makes the eternal merely a presupposition and with it an abstract universal.⁵⁶

Solger claims that the divine is revealed in the actual finite world. But to recognize the divine in the world requires that one distinguish the things or events which are invested with the divine or show signs of a divine hand from the other finite things and events. This always requires a cognitive act of interpretation to distinguish the two. Hegel continues:

Furthermore, Solger very nicely distinguishes these modes of cognition from philosophical knowledge as that which, within itself, by recognizing the progress of self-limiting determinations, at the same time sees itself in thought going beyond its finiteness and sees its original unity necessarily emerging out of it. Since Solger, however, separates from this objective being in truth, from the knowledge of opposites, what he calls the experiencing of divine reality, there remains for this only to make "subjective sensation and devotion" a demand, and to bring about the elevation to the consciousness of divine presence in the same way it is produced through the religious excitement of the soul: regardless of whether this consciousness is essential only in relation to itself or whether it is produced in the relation to philosophizing. It is only in such a superficial manner, therefore, that Solger can now seek to bring about this experience of the divine, since he has not recognized that for philosophical cognition it is immanent as an affirmative result as well as a foundation and in the activity of progress.⁵⁷

Hegel reproaches Solger for not recognizing the necessity of speculative thought in this process. It is the very nature of the abstract and the infinite to make itself concrete and finite. Thus, it is necessary that the divine be revealed in some way. Similarly, it is necessary that the human mind overcome its natural limitations and strive for the eternal. Solger sees this as something desirable but fails to recognize the speculative truth of its necessity. Thus, he ends up with an arbitrary conception of human devotion to the divine, which amounts to a simple moral wish or "pious demand" that humans recognize the divine in the world and elevate themselves to God.

In his review of Solger, Hegel anticipates a number of things that Kierkegaard says not only about Solger but also about Romantic irony in general in *The Concept of Irony*. It is natural that Kierkegaard, while working on his dissertation, would go to this text for inspiration since this is clearly one of Hegel's fullest treatments of the forms of Romantic subjectivity in his authorship.

⁵⁶ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 859. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 493; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 189; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 390f.)

⁵⁷ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., pp. 859f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 493f.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 189f.; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 391.)

C. Hegel's Lecture's on Aesthetics

In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, published posthumously from 1835–38 by Heinrich Gustav Hotho (1802–73), Hegel again takes up the question of Solger's irony. In this context he understands irony to be a historical phenomenon in the development of art. He thus takes a historical approach, tracing irony back to its source in Fichte's philosophy. Here he repeats what he said previously in his review of Solger. The main analysis is, as one might expect, about the irony of Friedrich von Schlegel.

After his account of Schlegel, however, as a kind of historical note, Hegel mentions the irony of Solger and Tieck as members of the Romantic movement of irony. There one reads:

Of Solger this is not the place to speak at the length he deserves, and I will confine myself to a few observations. Solger was not content, like the others, with superficial philosophical culture; on the contrary, his genuinely speculative inmost need impelled him to plumb the depths of the philosophical Idea. In this process he came to the dialectical moment of the Idea, to the point which I call "infinite absolute negativity," to the activity of the Idea in so negating itself as infinite and universal as to become finitude and particularity, and in nevertheless canceling this negation in turn and so re-establishing the universal and infinite in the finite and particular. To this negativity Solger firmly clung, and of course it is *one element* in the speculative Idea, yet interpreted as this purely dialectical unrest and dissolution of both infinite and finite, only *one element*, and not, as Solger will have it, the *whole* Idea.⁵⁸

Here Hegel reiterates what he said in his previous analyses. As was claimed in the *Philosophy of Right*, Solger's irony consists in grasping the negative dimension of the dialectic. However, he stopped there and failed to go on to see the positive, speculative side. He thus grasped only one dimension of the Idea and not the whole. Here one sees the famous formula, "infinite absolute negativity," which will come to play such an important role for Kierkegaard. Similarly, as Hegel argued in his book review, Solger's irony is set in the context of a serious philosophical discussion in contrast to Schlegel's "superficial philosophical culture."

Hegel then continues his analysis of Solger with a more personal tone. Here he extols Solger's moral character and once again is anxious to distinguish him from Schlegel:

Unfortunately Solger's life was broken off too soon for him to have been able to reach the concrete development of the philosophical Idea. So he got no further than this aspect of negativity which has an affinity with the ironic dissolution of the determinate and the inherently substantial alike, and in which he also saw the principle of artistic activity. Yet in his actual life, having regard to the firmness, seriousness, and stoutness of his character, he was neither himself an ironic artist of the kind depicted above, nor was his profound sense for genuine works of art, nurtured by his persistent study of art, in this respect of an ironical nature. So much in justification of Solger, who in his life, philosophy, and art deserves to be distinguished from the previously mentioned apostles of irony.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, I–III, ed. by Heinrich Gustav Hotho, vols. 10.1–3 [1835–38], in *Hegel's Werke*, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 89f. (*Jub.* vol. 12, p. 106; *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 68f.)

⁵⁹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, op. cit., vol. 10.1, p. 90. (*Jub.* vol. 12, p. 106; *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 68f.)

Here Hegel seems to make an attempt to play down the importance of irony for Solger. It is not difficult to see the continuities of this with Hegel's previous analyses. While Solger is seen as being in the same constellation of positions in the universe of Romantic irony, he clearly occupies a galaxy far different from that of Schlegel.

III. Solger in The Concept of Irony

The second part of Kierkegaard's famous master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1841) can fairly be described as a critical discussion of different forms of Romantic irony. The references to Solger begin in the second half of the book. In this context, he quotes or refers to the three texts by Hegel treated in the previous section—namely, *The Philosophy of Right*, the review of Solger's posthumous writings, and the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, all of which he owned in the relevant volumes of the complete edition of Hegel's works. Moreover, there are also direct quotations from Tieck's and von Raumer's edition of *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*,⁶⁰ and a reference to von Heyse's edition of Solger's lectures on aesthetics.⁶¹

Solger's importance in the work is signaled at the very beginning since Kierkegaard dedicates one of the 15 obligatory theses to him. The fourteenth thesis reads as follows: "Solger not moved by piety of the soul but seduced by envy of mind because he could not think the negative or subdue it by thought, adopted acosmism."⁶² The idea that Solger was a victim of sheer negativity, who never managed to reach a positive principle is familiar from Hegel's analyses. What is significant about this in the first instance is that apart from Hegel, Solger is the only modern author mentioned in the 15 theses. This can be taken as a hint that he will assume a position of some significance for the work in general.

A. Solger in the Introduction to Part Two

In the Introduction to Part Two of the work, Kierkegaard explains that he will now move from his account of Socratic irony, which was treated in the first part, to explore the other forms of irony which have appeared since then, specifically, the forms of irony found in German Romanticism. Like Hegel, Kierkegaard refers to Romantic irony as a radical form of subjectivity: "For a new mode of irony to be able to appear now, it must result from the assertion of subjectivity in a still higher form. It must be subjectivity raised to the second power, a subjectivity's subjectivity, which corresponds to reflection's reflection."⁶³ He then goes on to name the main theorists of this form of irony, which he will come to treat in this part of the work.

⁶⁰ *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit. See SKS 1, 283n / CI, 243n. SKS 1, 340ff. / CI, 308ff.

⁶¹ *K.W.F. Solger's Vorlesungen über Aesthetik*, op. cit. See SKS 1, 340n / CI, 308n. SKS 1, 352 / CI, 324.

⁶² SKS 1, 65 / CI, 6.

⁶³ SKS 1, 282 / CI, 242.

Like Hegel, he traces this movement back to Fichte's theory of the self-positing ego, which is then transformed into a theory of irony by Schlegel. He explains:

With this we are once again world-historically oriented—that is, we are referred to the development that modern philosophy attained in Kant and that is completed in Fichte, and more specifically again to the positions that after Fichte sought to affirm subjectivity in its second potency. Actuality bears out that this hangs together properly, for here again we meet irony. But since this position is an intensified subjective consciousness, it quite naturally is clearly and definitely conscious of irony and declares irony as its position. This was indeed the case with Friedrich Schlegel, who sought to bring it to bear in relation to actuality; with Tieck, who sought to bring it to bear in poetry; and with Solger, who became aesthetically and philosophically conscious of it.⁶⁴

Here Kierkegaard anticipates his later discussion by giving a brief description of the trademark forms of irony that one finds in the representative Romantic authors. What he means by saying that Solger “became aesthetically and philosophically conscious of it” is best understood in contrast to the descriptions given of Schlegel and Tieck. While Schlegel attempted to apply the theory of irony to a way of existing or being, and Tieck attempted to apply it to poetry and literature, Solger was the more philosophical mind, who attempted to work out a philosophically defensible account of the concept. Here Kierkegaard clearly follows Hegel.

Kierkegaard begins by noting that it is not easy to find a straightforward definition of irony among the Romantic writers, despite the fact that they have constructed an entire theory around it. In this context he notes that Solger has drawn attention to this fact:

In the period after Fichte, when it [sc. irony] was especially current, we find it mentioned again and again, suggested again and again, presupposed again and again. However, if we are looking for a clear exposition, we look in vain. Solger laments that A.W. v. Schlegel in his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*, where, if anywhere, we would expect to find adequate information, cursorily mentions it but once. Hegel laments that with Solger it was the same and no better with Tieck.⁶⁵

It is natural that Solger would lament that the concept is used so loosely without any adequate definition given the fact that, in contrast to Schlegel and Tieck, he is interested in developing a philosophical theory of irony.

In a footnote to this passage Kierkegaard then goes on to quote the passage in question from *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*. In his review Solger writes:

As reviewer I was stunned by finding irony (which I regard as the true focus of all dramatic art and also as indispensable to philosophical dialogue if it is to be properly dramatic) mentioned only once in the entire work (pt. II, sec. 2, p. 72) and then for the sake of prohibiting irony from any and all intermingling in the genuinely tragic. And yet the reviewer can recall previous statements of this author that at least appear to

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ SKS 1, 282f. / *CI*, 243.

approximate this idea. But irony is the very opposite of that view of life in which, as the author supposes, seriousness and jest are rooted.⁶⁶

Kierkegaard was perhaps made attentive to this passage by Hegel, who, as noted in the passage itself, makes a point of it in his review of Solger. In fact, in a footnote, Kierkegaard quotes just this passage, where Hegel writes:

Solger has met up with the same: he does not mention irony at all in the speculative expositions of the highest Idea, which he presents in the aforementioned treatise with the innermost mental seriousness, irony which joins itself most intimately with enthusiasm and in which depths art, religion, and philosophy are to be identical. There especially, one would have believed, must be the place where one would find cleared up what the philosophical case might be with the noble secret, the great unknown—irony.⁶⁷

Kierkegaard seems to share Hegel's wish for a detailed philosophical account of the concept in question. In the Romantic tradition it seems to be taken for granted that everyone knows what is at issue, but no attempt is ever made to provide a conceptual analysis.

Kierkegaard does not explore further the significance of this for Solger but instead uses this as an introduction to some general reflections about Hegel's criticism of Romantic irony. In this context he explicitly praises Hegel's account in the review of Solger. He continues:

Yet I am far from being able to lament justifiably over Hegel as Hegel laments over his predecessors. There are excellent observations especially in his review of Solger's posthumous writings....And even if the presentation and characterization of negative positions...are not always as exhaustive, as rich in content, as we could wish, Hegel knows all the better how to deal with them, and thus the positivity he asserts contributes indirectly to his characterization.⁶⁸

From this brief introduction, there can be little doubt that Kierkegaard's understanding of Solger is largely shaped by Hegel's account. Indeed, Kierkegaard has not added anything to Hegel's account. Kierkegaard singles out Hegel's review of Solger as one of his most important sources for understanding not just Solger's irony but Romantic irony in general.

B. Solger in "Observations for Orientation"

Kierkegaard prepares his historical analysis of the different forms of Romantic irony with some general reflections about the nature of the concept in a section entitled "Observations for Orientation." While Solger's name is not mentioned here explicitly, he is present indirectly in connection with one of Hegel's remarks about

⁶⁶ Solger's *nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 514. Quoted in SKS 1, 283n / CI, 243n.

⁶⁷ Hegel, "Über Solger's *nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., p. 858. (*Vermischte Schriften*, vol. 16, p. 492; *Jub.* vol. 20, p. 188; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 389f.) Quoted in SKS 1, 283n / CI, 243n–4n.

⁶⁸ SKS 1, 284 / CI, 244.

him. Kierkegaard explains the universal character of irony and in so doing refers to a key phrase from Hegel:

Irony *sensu eminentiori* qualitatively differs from the irony described here in the same way that speculative doubt differs qualitatively from common, empirical doubt. Irony *sensu eminentiori* is directed not against this or that particular existing entity but against the entire given actuality at a certain time and under certain conditions. Thus it has an intrinsic apriority, and it is not by successively destroying one portion of actuality after another that it arrives at its total view, but it is by virtue of this that it destroys in the particular instance. It is not this or that phenomenon but the totality of existence that it contemplates *sub specie ironiae*. To this extent we see the correctness of Hegel's view of irony as infinite absolute negativity.⁶⁹

While Kierkegaard refers to the phrase "infinite absolute negativity" as "Hegel's view of irony" generally, this is in fact his characterization of Solger's irony, which he gave in the Introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, discussed above.⁷⁰ Kierkegaard turns this into a slogan for his account of Romantic irony in general.⁷¹ What is significant here is not so much that this formulation stems from Hegel but rather that it was originally intended as a characterization of Solger's irony specifically. Kierkegaard was presumably just attracted by the phrase and was less concerned about the original context of its use.

At the end of this chapter Kierkegaard describes a final aspect of irony which is remarkably similar to that of Solger, again as described by Hegel. Specifically, what is at issue is irony as a religious phenomenon, which despairs over the finitude, contingency and insignificance of the world and attempts to retreat to the divine. Kierkegaard describes this as follows:

Finally, insofar as irony, when it realizes that existence has no reality, pronounces the same thesis as the pious mentality, irony might seem to be a kind of religious devotion. If I may put it this way, in religious devotion the lower actuality, that is, the relationships with the world, loses its validity, but this occurs only insofar as the relationships with God simultaneously affirm their absolute reality. The devout mind also declares that all is vanity, but this is only insofar as through this negation all disturbing factors are set aside and the eternally existing order comes into view.⁷²

This follows closely Hegel's account of Solger's irony as a form of devotion, as discussed above in connection with Hegel's review.⁷³ While Kierkegaard mentions neither Hegel nor Solger in this context, it seems clear that he is drawing on Hegel's

⁶⁹ SKS 1, 292 / CI, 254.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, I–III, op. cit., in *Hegel's Werke*, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 89f. (*Jub.* vol. 12, p. 106; *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 68f.)

⁷¹ SKS 1, 87 / CI, 26. SKS 1, 292 / CI, 254. SKS 1, 297 / CI, 259. SKS 1, 299 / CI, 261. SKS 1, 307 / CI, 271. SKS 1, 309 / CI, 273. SKS 1, 343 / CI, 312. SKS 1, 352 / CI, 323.

⁷² SKS 1, 296 / CI, 257f.

⁷³ Hegel, "Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, op. cit., pp. 856f. (*Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 490; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 186; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., p. 388.)

analysis in order to identify and illustrate a specific dimension of the phenomenon of irony in its modern form.

C. Solger in "The World-Historical Validity of Irony"

Kierkegaard begins the following chapter, "The World-Historical Validity of Irony, the Irony of Socrates,"⁷⁴ with the aforementioned slogan that Hegel used to characterize Solger's irony:

If we turn back to the foregoing general description of irony as infinite absolute negativity, it is adequately suggested therein that irony is no longer directed against this or that particular phenomenon, against a particular existing thing, but that the whole of existence has become alien to the ironic subject and the ironic subject in turn alien to existence, that as actuality has lost its validity for the ironic subject, he himself has to a certain degree become unactual.⁷⁵

Kierkegaard now attempts to develop this slogan into a general definition of irony. He continues, "It is negativity because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not."⁷⁶ The key here is that this form of irony is intended to negate all actuality in an indiscriminate fashion. Nothing is spared its critical appraisal. This is intended to capture Solger's position, which, as noted, remains in this nihilistic view.

Solger appears again toward the end of the chapter where Kierkegaard mentions him together with Schlegel:

For irony, nothing is an established order; it plays helter-skelter *ad libitum* with everything; but when it wants to declare this, it says something positive, and to that extent its sovereignty is thereby at an end. Therefore, when Schlegel or Solger says: Actuality is only appearance, only semblance, only vanity, a nothing, he obviously is saying this in earnest, and yet Hegel assumes it to be irony. The difficulty here is that, strictly speaking, irony actually is never able to advance a thesis, because irony is a qualification of the being-for-itself subject, who in incessant agility allows nothing to remain established and on account of this agility cannot focus on the total point of view that it allows nothing to remain established. Schlegel's and Solger's consciousness that finitude is a nothing is obviously just as earnestly intended as Socrates' ignorance.⁷⁷

This passage constitutes a part of Kierkegaard's polemical agenda since he wants to insist, ostensibly against Hegel, that irony is a purely negative phenomenon, which contains no positive element. What is somewhat unusual here is the fact that Solger's position is conflated with that of Schlegel. The two are taken to be advocating a universal ironic negation of the world. Usually, both Kierkegaard and Hegel are

⁷⁴ SKS 1, 297–308 / CI, 259–71. In this section Kierkegaard refers primarily to Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 397–406; *Jub.*, vol. 18, pp. 58–70.

⁷⁵ SKS 1, 297 / CI, 259.

⁷⁶ SKS 1, 299 / CI, 261.

⁷⁷ SKS 1, 306 / CI, 269.

anxious to give a nuanced account which distinguishes the two, but here they are taken together to represent a general conception of Romantic irony.

D. Solger in "Irony after Fichte"

The most extensive treatment of Solger in *The Concept of Irony* and, indeed, in Kierkegaard's entire authorship appears in the next chapter of the book, "Irony after Fichte."⁷⁸ There Kierkegaard attempts to trace a brief history of Romantic irony, largely following Hegel's model: he begins with Fichte as the forerunner of the movement, before dedicating individual sections to Schlegel, Tieck and Solger. There can be no doubt that this section on Solger must be the central focus of any general account of Kierkegaard's understanding of Solger. Kierkegaard begins the chapter, exactly as Hegel began his account, namely with a presentation of Fichte's self-positing ego as the theoretical background for Romantic irony, which was seized upon and transformed by Schlegel. In this part of the analysis Schlegel and Tieck are often mentioned together as representing a single phenomenon, but Solger is generally omitted. Here prior to the actual section specifically dedicated to Solger, there are only a couple brief references to him.

In the first of these Kierkegaard makes reference to Hegel's review of Solger without mentioning it by name.⁷⁹ However, this passage concerns Hegel's criticism of Schlegel and not Solger. In the second reference to Solger, which is more substantial, Kierkegaard discusses Hegel's criticism of the Romantics for placing themselves above accepted morality and law. He writes:

Here we have come to the point that has been the particular object of Hegel's attack. Everything established in the given actuality has nothing but poetic validity for the ironist, for he, after all, is living poetically. But when the given actuality loses its validity for the ironist in this way, it is not because it is an antiquated actuality that must be replaced by a truer actuality, but because the ironist is the eternal I for which no actuality is adequate. Here we also perceive the implications of the ironist's placing himself outside and above morality and ethics, something that even Solger declaims against in pointing out that this is not what he means by irony.⁸⁰

Here Kierkegaard refers to a passage in *Solger's Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, which he later quotes in a footnote. There Solger writes, "Is this irony an insolent disregard for whatever essentially and seriously interests man, a total disregard for the split in his nature? By no means. That would be a vulgar mockery, which is not superior to earnestness and jest, but rather combats them on their own

⁷⁸ SKS 1, 308–52 / CI, 272–323.

⁷⁹ SKS 1, 314 / CI, 278: "It was against this judging and denouncing conduct on the part of Friedrich Schlegel that Hegel declaims in particular (*Werke*, XVI, p. 465). In this connection, Hegel's great service to the understanding of the historical past cannot be sufficiently acknowledged. He does not reject the past but comprehends it; he does not repudiate other scholarly positions but surpasses them." Translation slightly modified. The reference is to Hegel, *Vermischte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 16, p. 465. (*Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 161; *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, op. cit., pp. 372f.)

⁸⁰ SKS 1, 318f. / CI, 283.

level with their own weapons."⁸¹ This indicates that Kierkegaard follows Hegel in giving a milder judgment of Solger than of Schlegel and Tieck. Here Kierkegaard explicitly emphasizes that Solger's irony is not a denial of morality.

The next reference to Solger here appears in connection with a criticism of Tieck. What is at issue is the lack of character of the ironist, who does not allow himself to be fixed or defined in any way: "As the ironist poetically composes himself and his environment with the greatest possible poetic license, as he lives in this totally hypothetical and subjunctive way his life loses all continuity. He succumbs completely to mood. His life is nothing but moods."⁸² Kierkegaard then notes that this criticism was central to Hegel's critique of the Romantics: "It is especially for this that Hegel criticizes Tieck, and it is also present in his correspondence with Solger. At times he has a clear grasp of everything, at times he is seeking; at times he is a dogmatician, at times a doubter, at times Jacob Böhme, at times the Greeks, etc.—nothing but moods."⁸³ Presumably in agreement, Kierkegaard merely notes this without really adding anything to Hegel's criticism.

These references to Solger are rather minor in comparison to Kierkegaard's main treatment in the section dedicated specifically to him.⁸⁴ At the beginning of this section, Kierkegaard gives a direct statement of his sources: Heyse's edition of Solger's lectures and Tieck's and von Raumer's edition of *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*.⁸⁵ Immediately thereafter he mentions and even quotes briefly from Hegel's treatments of Solger in his book review of the *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel* and the Introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. It is noteworthy that there is no reference either to Solger's *Erwin* or his *Philosophical Conversations*. Thus, his analysis is based solely on the posthumously published works. With respect to Hegel, he notably fails to mention Hegel's brief treatment in the *Philosophy of Right*. It is clear, however, that he has made use of this treatment since earlier in the text he quotes directly from the section in the *Philosophy of Right*, where it appears.⁸⁶ A further source mentioned briefly is Hotho's *Vorstudien für Leben und Kunst*, where Solger is briefly mentioned in a general overview of German literature and criticism.⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 515. Quoted in SKS 1, 341n / CI, 309n.

⁸² SKS 1, 319 / CI, 284.

⁸³ SKS 1, 320 / CI, 285. See also SKS 1, 318f. / CI, 283: "Here we have come to the point that has been the particular object of Hegel's attack. Everything established in the given actuality has nothing but poetic validity for the ironist, for he, after all, is living poetically. But when the given actuality loses its validity for the ironist in this way, it is not because it is an antiquated actuality that must be replaced by a truer actuality, but because the ironist is the eternal I for which no actuality is adequate."

⁸⁴ SKS 1, 340–52 / CI, 308–23.

⁸⁵ SKS 1, 340 / CI, 308.

⁸⁶ SKS 1, 270f. / CI, 228.

⁸⁷ Heinrich Gustav Hotho, *Vorstudien für Leben und Kunst*, Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta 1835, p. 399 (ASKB 580). Quoted in SKS 1, 341 / CI, 308f.

Following his introductory comments here, Kierkegaard seems to divide his analysis of Solger into three main sections, which correspond to the different spheres where irony plays a role: metaphysics,⁸⁸ dogmatics,⁸⁹ and aesthetics.⁹⁰

(1) Kierkegaard begins his account by analyzing Solger's conception of irony as a metaphysical principle. This is presumably intended to distinguish Solger from, for example, Schlegel, for whom irony was not something primarily abstract or theoretical but rather practical. For this reason, Solger's conception is dubbed "contemplative irony,"⁹¹ in contrast to something like practical irony or applied irony. Further, it is claimed that "Solger's efforts are totally within the sphere of scholarship,"⁹² with the implication being that they never advance out into life and action. In this respect Solger's conception of irony remains closer than Schlegel to Fichte's theory of the self-positing ego, which, according to Hegel, was the origin of the notion of Romantic irony. At the outset Kierkegaard writes, "Solger has gone completely astray in the negative."⁹³ However, he has failed to break out of this and to see the positive dimension of irony. Kierkegaard writes:

Since the negative always becomes visible only through the positive, but the negative here is the absolute monarch and is present here in all its unproductiveness, everything becomes confused, and the moment one hopes for the possibility of having a determination by which to orient oneself, everything vanishes again, because the positive that appeared in the distance is found upon closer inspection to be a new negation. Presumably Solger may have had his significance in the development, but no doubt he can best be regarded as a sacrifice Hegel's system demanded. This also explains Hegel's partiality for him; he is the metaphysical knight of the negative.⁹⁴

Here Kierkegaard seems to agree wholly with Hegel's assessment in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, treated above. While negation is an important and necessary step in Hegel's dialectical methodology and thus in his metaphysics, ultimately, it gives rise to a positive moment. Out of the negation and the contradiction arises the positive speculative truth. Solger thus grasps the negation but he fails to see the next step, called by Hegel, "the negation of the negation" or the positive. In the conclusion to the section Kierkegaard writes, "Throughout this whole investigation, Solger seems to have a dim notion of the negation of the negation, which in itself contains the true affirmation. But since the whole train of thought is not developed, the one negation erroneously slips into the other, and the true affirmation does not result."⁹⁵ Similarly, he claims, Solger "does have the negation of the negation, but still there is a veil

⁸⁸ SKS 1, 341–8 / CI, 308–14.

⁸⁹ SKS 1, 345–8 / CI, 314–18.

⁹⁰ SKS 1, 348–52 / CI, 318–22.

⁹¹ SKS 1, 341 / CI, 309.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ SKS 1, 341 / CI, 309.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ SKS 1, 348 / CI, 317.

in front of his eyes so that he does not see the affirmation."⁹⁶ It seems obvious that Kierkegaard has simply co-opted Hegel's criticism on this point.⁹⁷

After complaining, like Hegel, about a certain lack of clarity in Solger's use of irony, Kierkegaard goes on to explain its metaphysical implications. Here he refers to a long debate about the proper beginning of philosophy without presuppositions: "Solger wants to bring about the absolute identity of the finite and the infinite, wants to destroy the partition that in so many ways wants to separate them. Thus he is working together toward the absolute presuppositionless beginning; consequently his striving is speculative."⁹⁸ This unity is begun with a recognition of the emptiness of the actual and the subsequent negation or destruction of it: Solger's "contemplative irony now sees the finite as the *Nichtige*, as that which must be annulled."⁹⁹

Next, one must appeal to the abstract sphere of thought and ideas in order to restore truth and meaning to the world. But this sphere must first be negated so that it loses its abstraction and becomes real: "the infinite must also be negated; it must not continue in an otherworldly *an sich*. In this way, the true actuality is produced."¹⁰⁰ Here Solger shares Hegel's criticism of empty, abstract ideals, which never become real. For both Solger and Hegel, if they are to have any meaning at all, then they must at some point enter into actuality, but this means giving up their abstract, ideal status. This is what must be negated for them to become real.

Kierkegaard's criticism is then that this negated ideal does not, for Solger, manage to save the world of actuality of emptiness and meaninglessness. He writes:

Solger is at the beginning, but this beginning is utterly abstract, and now the point is that the dualism that is in existence is to manifest itself in its truth. But this does not happen. On the contrary, it becomes clear that Solger is unable to achieve the concession of any validity to the finite. He cannot achieve any concreteness for the infinite. He sees the finite as the *Nichtige*, as the vanishing, as the *nichtige All*.¹⁰¹

The world of actuality still remains without meaning and truth since by entering into reality the ideals lose their sublime form and become finite and compromised. Solger thus seems to end in a kind of nihilism where there is no truth in the moral sphere: "Therefore moral qualifications have no validity; all finitude together with its moral and immoral striving vanishes in the metaphysical contemplation that sees

⁹⁶ SKS 1, 352 / CI, 323.

⁹⁷ SKS 1, 348 / CI, 317: "Hegel perceived this very clearly and therefore articulates it explicitly on page 470."

⁹⁸ SKS 1, 343 / CI, 311.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ SKS 1, 343 / CI, 311. Cf. SKS 1, 343f. / CI, 312: "Here, then, we have the idea at the point of the absolute beginning; therefore we have it as the infinite absolute negativity. Now, if this is to become something, the negative must assert itself again in a finitizing of the idea—that is, in making it concrete. The negative is the restlessness of thought, but this restlessness must manifest itself, must become visible; its desire must manifest itself as the desire that actuates the work, its pain as the pain it engenders. If this does not happen, then we have only the unreal actuality of contemplation, devotion and pantheism."

¹⁰¹ SKS 1, 344 / CI, 312.

it as nothing.”¹⁰² Kierkegaard argues in a Hegelian manner that Solger overlooks the fact that although “the finite is indeed the *Nichtige*...there is nevertheless something in it with substance.”¹⁰³

(2) Kierkegaard then turns from this analysis of metaphysics to dogmatics. Here he is concerned primarily with the dogmas of atonement, the creation and the incarnation. In this part of the analysis, he refers explicitly to Hegel’s treatment of this dimension of Solger’s thought.¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard complains that Solger uses a language that is rather unclear and indeed intentionally paradoxical, and this then leads to confusions in his understanding of the different dogmas. He writes, quoting Solger:

When it says: “inasmuch as God exists or reveals himself in our finitude,” we first of all have to know something about how God exists in finitude—we lack here the concept of creation. When it expressly says next that by existing this way in finitude he sacrifices himself, it might seem that here creation is expressed. But if this is the meaning, it is not strictly expressed, for then it would have to read: In sacrificing himself, God creates. This could seem to be confirmed by the corresponding predicate, that God destroys himself. In other words, if we say that God destroys himself, we do, of course, have a negation, but, please note, a negation by means of which the infinite is made finite and concrete.¹⁰⁵

The idea that Solger seems to have in mind here is concerned more with the doctrine of Incarnation than that of creation. God must first negate himself in the sense that the abstract conception of the divine in the beyond must be negated in order for God to appear in incarnate form. In other words, in order to enter the world of actuality, God must give up his abstract, ideal side and become something particular and concrete.

But then a second negation takes place with the Crucifixion. God, in incarnate form, allows himself to be sacrificed. Kierkegaard continues his account:

On the other hand, however, the statement that God sacrifices himself, just as the one that God destroys himself, leads thought more to the Atonement. This is confirmed by the very next words: “We are nothing, for that, of course, posits the finite, posits it in its finitude, its nothingness, and it is this nothingness that must be negated, whereby the negation then infinitizes the finite.” But here we lack the middle term to inform us in what sense man is nothing—middle terms of such scope that the meaning of sin might be construed therein. As a result, we have a speculative unclarity that does justice neither to creation nor to the Atonement, neither to finitude nor to sinfulness.¹⁰⁶

What Kierkegaard finds insufficiently illuminated here is the doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ as atonement for human sins. He complains that Solger talks too much about negation but does not explain adequately how this can be understood in relation to this doctrine. The finitude of the world can be interpreted as a result of human sin, and the doctrine of atonement can be understood as the negation of human sin and

¹⁰² SKS 1, 344 / CI, 312f.

¹⁰³ SKS 1, 345 / CI, 313.

¹⁰⁴ SKS 1, 345 / CI, 314: “Hegel has carefully considered this part, and therefore I can draw upon him.” SKS 1, 346 / CI, 315: “Hegel’s development of this is found on pages 469 top ff.”

¹⁰⁵ SKS 1, 346 / CI, 315.

¹⁰⁶ SKS 1, 346f. / CI, 315f.

thus as a restoration of truth and meaning, but none of this is made clear in Solger. Kierkegaard continues his criticism of Solger's confusion of dogmas:

When it goes on to say: "And is this not the greatest love, that he himself has entered into nothing so that we might be," then here again creation and the Atonement are confused and confounded with each other. In other words, God has not entered into nothing in order that we might be, because we are indeed nothing; but God has entered into nothing in order that we might cease to be nothing.¹⁰⁷

While God has created the world in order for humans to exist (Creation), he reveals himself and becomes incarnate in order to redeem us from our sins (Atonement) and thus to save us from death or nothingness. This is not clearly distinguished in Solger. Kierkegaard continues to complain about Solger's confused linguistic usage, which leads to serious problems and questions in dogmatics.¹⁰⁸

Up until now the discussion has been focused on the concept of negation, but finally, Kierkegaard connects Solger's conception of irony with these dogmatic issues. He writes:

If I were to give the reader an idea of Solger's view, I would perhaps come closest to it by attaching it to his favorite concept, irony, and would say that Solger actually turns the existence of God into irony: God continually translates himself into nothing, takes himself back again, translates himself again, etc.—a divine diversion that sets up the most horrible contrasts, as does all irony. In the enormous swinging of this double movement... finitude also participates, and in it at the instant of separation man is the projected shadow of the divine, and sketches his moral virtues and vices into this shadow-existence, which is seen as a nothing only by someone with eyes wide open for irony.¹⁰⁹

Given that negation is the key feature of irony for Solger, it is a short step for him to understand the workings of the God of Christianity as ironic since, according to Solger's language, God negates his abstract self to enter the world, and then the incarnate God negates himself in order to return. For Kierkegaard, there is a real danger that these most serious of dogmas can be conflated with the Romantic ironist's flippant negation of the world. Needless to say, turning "the existence of God into irony" is a highly unfortunate consequence of Solger's theory.

(3) Kierkegaard then turns to the issue of irony in Solger's aesthetics. His argument here is that Solger's theory ultimately fails to overcome the nihilistic position of the other Romantics as he clearly wants to do. Kierkegaard explains:

¹⁰⁷ SKS 1, 347. / CI, 316.

¹⁰⁸ SKS 1, 347f. / CI, 317: "Furthermore, it seems difficult to understand what is meant by the statement that God sacrifices himself if it is to be explained by the following words: 'He annihilates his nothingness.' But the confusion becomes even greater when we learn that the *Nichtige* in us is the divine. We are supposed to be the *Nichtige*, and how then can the *Nichtige* in us (thereby suggesting that there is something else in us that is not the *Nichtige*) be the divine? Finally, it is taught that we ourselves can recognize this *Nichtige* in us. If this means that we ourselves can negate this *Nichtige* by means of this knowledge, then we obviously here have a Pelagian conception of the Atonement."

¹⁰⁹ SKS 1, 348 / CI, 317f.

Here he came to the aid of the romanticists and became the philosophic spokesman for romanticism and romantic irony. Here again we meet the very same basic view that finitude is a nothing and must perish as the false actuality so that the true actuality may emerge....one does not see which actuality is supposed to be destroyed, whether it is the false actuality... whether it is the selfishness of the separate elements that must be negated in order for the true actuality to emerge, the actuality of spirit not as something otherworldly but as something present, or whether that divine diversion cannot allow any actuality to remain.¹¹⁰

According to Solger, actuality is supposed to be negated and destroyed by the sublime work of art, which is a reflection of the divine. This proves problematic. Kierkegaard continues:

Solger seems to want to find in art and poetry the highest actuality that emerges through the negation of finite actuality. But here a new difficulty appears. Since the poetry, the romantic, which Solger in his letters to Tieck so frequently acknowledges as supreme, is quite incapable of pacifying the negation in that higher actuality, inasmuch as in its essential striving it itself seeks to create an awareness that the given actuality is the imperfect one but the higher actuality can be perceived only in the infinite approximation of intimation, then it seems to become necessary to relate ironically once again to every poetic work, because every single work is only an approximation. If so, it is clear that the higher actuality that is supposed to emerge in poetry nevertheless is not in the poetry but is continually becoming.¹¹¹

While Solger hopes that the work of art will be the solution to the problem of nihilism, it falls short of the task. After the world of actuality has been negated, one looks to the work of art as the truth. But, according to Solger, this is not a final truth but only an approximation. Thus, with art one approaches an ideal but never attains it. The truth is posited in another world, while we end up in nihilism in this one.

Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel's objections to Solger's understanding of dramatic poetry. He complains that it does not give us a way out of the negation and nihilism. He writes:

Here it is apparent to what extent the negation that destroys actuality is brought to rest in a higher actuality. We are lifted up by the downfall of the best, but this uplifting is of a very negative kind. It is irony's uplifting, resembling here the envy of the gods, yet it is envious not only of what is great and outstanding, but is just as envious of what is lowly and insignificant, on the whole, envious of finitude. When the great perishes in the world, this is tragic, but poetry reconciles us to this tragedy by showing us that it is the true that is victorious. Herein lies the uplifting and the upbuilding. Thus we are not uplifted by the destruction of the great but are reconciled to its destruction by the victory of what is true, and we are uplifted by its victory. But if in the tragedy I see only the destruction of the hero and am uplifted by that, if in the tragedy I become aware only of the nothingness of human affairs, if the tragedy pleases me in the same way that comedy does by showing me the nothingness of what is great, just as comedy shows me the nothingness of what is lowly—then the higher actuality has not emerged.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ SKS 1, 348f. / *CI*, 318f.

¹¹¹ SKS 1, 349 / *CI*, 319.

¹¹² SKS 1, 351f. / *CI*, 322.

Kierkegaard's objection here seems to be that of Hegel's. Nothing positive is really established by witnessing the downfall of simple rogues. Solger is unable to provide the principle that will restore truth to the world in the face of the negation of actuality. He has not yet discovered the Hegelian principle of the truth operating behind the scenes in the development of spirit through history by means of violent, tragic conflicts.

IV. A Journal Entry

Apart from these references in *The Concept of Irony*, Solger only appears a single time in the rest of Kierkegaard's vast corpus. In an entry from the journal NB10, from 1849, Kierkegaard quotes a passage in Solger's posthumous works as follows:

This is a remarkable characterization of the Furies: μνημονες Ερινυδες.

See Solger: Über den Ursprung der Lehre von Dæmonen und Schutzgeistern in der Religion der alten Griechen.

Nach[elassene] W[erke], vol. II, no. XI, p. 655.

It makes me think of the common phrase: to remind someone of something. What one would like to say emphatically is: "Don't forget, don't forget justice!" In the passage just quoted Solger calls attention to the common German expression "*ahnden*," in the sense of "to punish." Fate, the Greeks say, pursues: μοῖρα ἐπεταί or, also, it sees all. "*Dieses begleitende Bewußtsein ist auch die Zeit, in einem höheren göttlichen Sinne gedacht, und daher ist auch χρόνος eine Schicksalsgottheit, welche alles Einzelne als eine und dieselbe anschaut.*" ...*Dieses unbekannte dunkle, alles anschauende Wesen erkennt also vorzüglich auch die Vergehungen der Menschen, und straft sie, wenngleich noch so spät; denn dasselbe begleitet in ununterbrochener Einheit wie die Gegenwart so die fernste Zukunft.*"

On the whole, it is indeed a qualification of time to make manifest.

How profound the Greeks were; I am thinking specifically of Plutarch's treatise on the slowness of divine justice, a gripping ethical treatise.¹¹³

Kierkegaard here quotes from a treatise printed in *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, which he references here.¹¹⁴ This is not a text that Kierkegaard had referred to before in *The Concept of Irony*.

It is not at all clear why these remarks from Solger happened to catch Kierkegaard's eye at just this point in time. One possible interpretation is that they are to be seen in the context of Kierkegaard's sense of being unjustly treated in the *Corsair* conflict. There are several entries in this journal, where Kierkegaard analyzes and reanalyzes the events of that conflict and his disposition to them. His interest in the concept of the punishment of the Furies can thus be interpreted as a wish that this divine justice would one day be visited on Meir Goldschmidt (1819–87)—as editor of *The Corsair*, one of the main protagonists in the conflict—for whom Kierkegaard nourished an uncompromising hatred. In Kierkegaard's mind, Goldschmidt never really received any proper punishment for his actions (although he voluntarily left *The Corsair*), and so the idea behind this entry may well be that the Furies will remember, and in time

¹¹³ SKS 21, 349, NB10:180 / JP 4, 4796.

¹¹⁴ *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 650–75; p. 655.

they will take action in order to punish the wrong done to Kierkegaard in that context. This would explain Kierkegaard's interest in this entry in the temporal dimension of the work done by the Furies. Admittedly, this interpretation is simply a suggestion, badly in need of further support before it can be accepted. In any case, this entry does evidence Kierkegaard's interest in a different text from *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel* than the ones he makes use of in *The Concept of Irony*.

From this overview, the following can be concluded about Kierkegaard's relation to Solger. His interest in Solger is primarily as one of the theorists of irony. While his interest in irony continues throughout the authorship, his interest in Solger seems to be confined almost exclusively to the early period of his authorship, with *The Concept of Irony* as the obvious main text. While Kierkegaard does quote from Tieck's and von Raumer's edition of *Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel* and von Heyse's edition of Solger's lectures on aesthetics, there can be no doubt that much, if not most, of his information about Solger comes from Hegel. Moreover, Kierkegaard seems to be wholly in agreement with Hegel's assessment of Solger's conception of irony.

In the section dedicated to Solger in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard reaches the same conclusion as Hegel: Solger has focused too exclusively on the negative and has thus failed to grasp its dialectical opposite, the positive. The idea that Solger is best understood as a sacrifice to Hegel's system is mentioned at the beginning of Kierkegaard's analysis and brought up again at the conclusion.¹¹⁵ What he seems to mean by this is that Solger in fact shares something important with Hegel. Both are interested primarily in a theoretical or contemplative approach and not in action or praxis. Further, both have grasped the importance of negativity in this sphere. However, this is where their paths part, and Hegel must abandon or *sacrifice* his friend in order to go on to the next stage, that is, the positive stage of speculation. Thus, instead being the object of Hegel's zealous criticism, like Schlegel or even Tieck, Solger was the object of a necessary sacrifice that Hegel made reluctantly and grudgingly in order to remain true to his speculative principles. This explains the difference in tone between his mild and sympathetic treatment of Solger and his harsh condemnation of the other Romantics.

¹¹⁵ SKS 1, 341 / CI, 309. SKS 1, 352 / CI, 323.

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Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries

Tome III: Literature and Aesthetics

Edited by
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