

## Author's Preface

IT IS A LITTLE embarrassing to offer the reading public another book about Søren Kierkegaard, especially when that most singular Dane designed his literature as a tool to personal enrichment and subjective stature. For whatever else might be said about Kierkegaard's literature, it is not ambiguous on this point. With characteristic irony, though, he anticipated our age, the learned corps who would use his writings to get clearer definitions of faith, love, right, and wrong, while remaining the same paltry human subjects.

Perhaps this book will seem to be a betrayal of Kierkegaard's intent and authorship. I hope not. For what I pretend at least is the discovery of all kinds of unsuspected levels of reflection and discourse within Kierkegaard's literature. While I have documented his remarks as best I can and given credit where it is due, still it seems to me that much of what is offered here is the exploitation of neglected aspects of Kierkegaard's reflection. Some suggestions, especially about logic and the limits of logical values, others about the characteristics of propositional truth, and others about ethical choice, seem to have brought me into the middle of both the philosophical tradition and the contemporary discussion. So it is with other matters too. It is with more appreciation, therefore, that I can repeat a remark made about twenty-five years ago by David F. Swenson (reported to me by Professor T. V. Smith) to the effect that the future of American philosophy belonged to Søren Kierkegaard.

A hundred years ago, Kierkegaard suggested that the religious people were so acclimatized to faith and to faith-talk that now was the time to emphasize the minor premise, "works." Today it might be said that the age is full of good works (though the number of saints still seems few) and surely sated with talk again about faith. Perhaps it is time to emphasize reason, reflection, objectivity, and sundry other values. Not because faith abounds—far from it!—but rather because with all the talk and easy accord, almost anything passes for religious-

ness. The definitions are again blurred and the requisites of systematic consistency, of careful consideration and accuracy, of a weighing of the facts, almost seem to add up to ungodliness. Instead of abandonment to a genuinely ethical enthusiasm and a heartfelt dedication to Christian recklessness, instead of a wanton giving of oneself, the categories become wantonly handled and speech becomes abominably loose. The irony of this is that Kierkegaard is cited as the fountainhead and apogee of the new irrationalism.

At once then there are several difficulties. Kierkegaard is maligned, religion is associated with misology, and the cleft in the person who reads Kierkegaard with concern for both religious stature and intellectual clarity becomes wider. It is true that Kierkegaard opposed philosophical systems but he did not oppose systematic thought; he disparaged talk about the logic of events but not the logicity of argumentative discourse; he minimized the religious importance of discursive reasoning but not by saying that reason was irreligious; he praised subjectivity but not temperamentally; he abjured objectivity as a substitute for enthusiasm but not as a condition for knowledge.

If all this is true it might be well to watch Kierkegaard speak collectedly about paradoxicality, objectively about subjectivity, and detachedly about human interests, without being either intellectually inconsistent or morally reprobate. At the same time he was both reflective and passionately religious. He sought each with diligence, admitting difficulties en route, but never giving up the endeavor to become a living synthesis of aristocratic reflection and religious compassion. His authorship is a calculated attack upon misunderstandings of his day, and, unfortunately, of ours too. The evangelical hope of bringing the reader face to face with the God of Jesus Christ never forsakes him for a moment. But it is for others to say this at length about Kierkegaard. I choose here a more modest task, that of etching out the features of the authorship that give rectitude to his argument, that seem to promise the kind of universality and necessity that any reflection must have if it is to be called valid. This is a kind of scholiast's annotation upon the text, not however undertaken without sympathy and delight. It was Professor David Swenson, who, taking me through Nietzsche's many volumes as an introduction to Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, also taught me to respect

Kierkegaard's logical and reflective acumen. If this book is Swensonian I am neither surprised nor disappointed. My debt to others, including Conger, Hendel, Sheldon, Cassirer, H. R. Niebuhr, Geismar, Lowrie, Thulstrup, Böhlin, and Hirsch, is rather longstanding. I have tried to read the extant literature about Kierkegaard in addition to the vast primary sources. I no longer remember every impetus but I have tried to indicate causes and sources wherever I could. Because of rather strong interests in some of the issues herein involved I have more interest in the validity of the argument than in the source. But this again is no excuse for neglecting the latter.

My thanks are due to Miss Alma Scott, Archivist of the University of Minnesota, for the use of materials in her care, and also to Dr. and Mrs. Lachlan Reed for another kind of solicitude, and to librarians at Yale, the University of Minnesota, and the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

A note concerning the footnote references may also be in order. References to Kierkegaard's collected works are usually to the 1906 edition of the *Samlede Vaerker* (*Saml. Vaerker*); *E. P.* refers to the *Efterladte Papirer* in nine volumes; *Papirer* betokens *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, now the standard edition in twenty volumes. Except for special reasons usually noted, references to both the latter and to Alexander Dru's translation of selections from them are to the entry number, not usually to the page. A reference like the following, e.g., *Papirer* X 2 A, 11–13, means volume 10, part two, section A, entries 11–13.