CHAPTER I

An Introduction to the Problem

I

All philosophical works have their genesis in a problem. To this extent at least this volume is philosophical. The problem is deceptively simple in appearance and perhaps seems hardly worth another book. For when an author insists that he is a religious author from first to last and when he proclaims that the movement in his own literature is away from the aesthetic and through the philosophical and reflective and into finally the religious,[1] then it would seem that enough has been said already, that anything else about the author's philosophy will be gratuitous. Appearance also has its structure and there are many readers of Kierkegaard's words who find their anti-intellectual proclivities and judgments strengthened by such remarks. All kinds of existentialists are quick to use Kierkegaard as authority for the view that inferential reasoning is of no avail. With the torrent of praise that Kierkegaard receives from those who are belatedly discovering that biblical religion is serious business, there come also the rejoinders from minorities in philosophy and theology who fear that everything anti-rational and barbaric is being brought back under the aegis of a perverse genius.[2]

1. This is asserted in "On My Work as an Author," 145–47.

2. As an excellent example of a clear and forthright statement against contemporary anti-intellectualism, note Blanshard's "Current Strictures on Reason," 345–68.

In one way or another Kierkegaard's disparagement of philosophy is construed to mean something quite different from what was stated within his own authorship. In the contexts of language and reflection in which his strong words are placed and understood by contemporaries, it becomes difficult to make sense of many of his most important remarks. The fact that he eschewed writing a treatise on metaphysics, ethics, logic, or epistemology seems to credit the conviction that he was not a philosopher at all. But, as one reads his voluminous literature, both his published writings and papers, it becomes clear that he is eminently systematic, that every part of his literature expresses an intention. Furthermore, it all belongs together in ways that are very heartening for a philosophically oriented reader. Although there is no treatise on logic, there is a kind of embedded logic, a logical order informing every inquiry and sentence. Although there is no explicit ethical theory there are ample indications of a theory about ethical proposals again informing the entire literature. True, there is no metaphysical system spelled out in detail; but there are numerous statements about metaphysics. Furthermore there are consistent and well-articulated attitudes and convictions that are in the spirit of a "meta-metaphysics," that is, they represent a kind of outlook and language system within which the possibility and limits of metaphysics are seen. Likewise Kierkegaard wrote no extended treatise on epistemology, but when one pieces together all that he said one finds again that only a sustained argument could have produced those somewhat casual appearing remarks.

Those students of Kierkegaard's literature who stress his religious writings all too frequently stress them to the exclusion of his pronounced philosophical abilities. This is easily enough done, especially when Kierkegaard said that he was moving out of philosophy and into the religious. But this was a kind of philosophy, the kind which proposed a set of life-values. The nineteenth century is remarkable for the plentitude of that kind of philosophical system. Kierkegaard did not reject philosophy as a formal enterprise. He was not anti-logic, anti-theory, or anti-consistency, nor did he disparage theories about any of these. His point is rather that the regnant philosophies of his day were full of the self-assertiveness and self-assurance of men and hence acquire their value content, not in virtue of logically necessary

reasoning but in virtue of all kinds of social and subjective factors.[3] A more limited scope for philosophy seems called for—this seems to be his plea.

But a warning is in order. Kierkegaard thought that the world of scholarship is quite a humorous spectacle. And it is devoutly hoped that the arrival of the promised philosophical hero will not be accompanied by the tense and varied expectancy Kierkegaard described:

> . . . reception committee on its feet . . . some with note-books open, pens dripping with ink, minds yearning in systematic instruction; all and sundry awaiting . . .[4]

Because Kierkegaard saw clearly that no conviction warranted by detached and rational argument could simultaneously move the thinker from detachment to attachment, from disinterestedness to interestedness, he also believed that it was ridiculously inappropriate to create too wide a concern about epistemological and logical problems. He was engaged as most men are in the pursuit of self-justification and what the theologians call salvation. In this matter he had maximal interest. Furthermore, he believed that the passions ought to be expressed upon such passional matters. But on matters appropriately abstract and detached he was inclined not to be the least bit evocative or persuasive. He was content to think clearly and exactingly for the sake of the clearness and exactness but he refused to give any alien inducements to his readers at this point. The effect of clear expression upon logic and epistemological matters he understood to be regulative and disciplinary, not provident. It was his merit to have seen that the philosophical discourse that tried to get to reality, as he said, "in the last paragraph" or to ascertain the good was a misunderstanding of what reflection and discourse could properly do. Therefore Kierkegaard was most willing to let his readers do without the system—it was only deception that gave systems such importance anyway and such a deception certainly he would not practice.

3. Some of Kierkegaard's reflections about philosophers are to the effect that the subjectively derived factors enter reflection and thereafter get a status not quite due them. Note, for example, *Papirer* I A, 72–76 (*JP* 5, 5092, 5093, 22, 5100, 5101), and also V A, 18, 20 (*JP* 1, 622, 47). Professor David Swenson's remarks in his notes to the translation of *Philosophical Fragments,* 99–100, are appropriate too. An earlier reflection, dating from 1840, contrasts Hegel and Kant on this point. See *Papirer*, III A, 3 (*JP* 1, 37).

4. From the preface, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 3.

In a different context, one of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, Johannes Climacus, tries to explain the importance, or rather the unimportance of his huge philosophical work (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*), and then says:

> If a naked dialectical analysis reveals that no approximation to faith is possible, that an attempt to construct a quantitative approach to faith is a misunderstanding, and that any appearance of success in this endeavor is an illusion; if it seems to be a temptation for the believer. . . . in transforming faith into something else, into a certainty of an entirely different order . . . then everyone who so understands the problem. . . . must feel the difficulty of his position . . .[5]

The difficulty is precisely in loving learning and yet knowing its limits, in admiring scholarship and scholars and yet not crediting them with the fountain of life. The point is that Kierkegaard believed in "a naked dialectical analysis," by which he meant a formal analysis of concepts. The *Postscript* is a study of both passions and concepts. This is why it is called "pathetic-dialectical." The projected title for this largest of his pseudonymous works was originally *Logical Problems* by Johannes Climacus.[6] And the kind of reflection which helped constitute that book is amply illustrated in one hundred pages of his papers. Typical problems adumbrated therein and illustrative of what he meant by dialectical philosophy are questions about the meaning of a category, the difference between a dialectical and pathos-informed analysis, and the status of historical concepts like progress, etc.[7]

Kierkegaard believed that the truth or falsity of claims could be ascertained. To do this was to be dialectical. But there was also a science of ideas, an overview upon ideas and the language stating them. Dialecticians worried their way through such matters. Kierkegaard does not decide with Kant that dialectic is the logic of appearance or with Hegel that it is the logic of reality itself. The dialectical analysis of which Kierkegaard spoke in the passage quoted is "naked" ("*nogne*" in

5. *Postscript*, 15.

6. *Papirer* VI B, 89 (*JP* 5, 5850).

7. *Papirer* VI B, 13–99, 89–193; (*JP* 1, 56, 199, 456, 632–35, 925, 926, 1039; *JP* 2, 1344, 1607–610, 1638, 1668, 1746, 2115, 2116, 2235, 2286, 2287; *JP* 3, 2355, 2371, 2372, 2749, 3083–3086, 3307, 3562, 3607, 3654, 3702, 3739; *JP* 4, 4537, *JP* 5, 5778, 5783–797, 5807, 5850, 5851). There are included here many illuminating abstract considerations.

Danish) precisely because it is formal; it has to do with form, not content; it focuses on logical relations, on the limits of valid discourse, not finally on the empirical truth or falsity of what is said except indirectly as this is affected by logical considerations.[8] The dialectician comes to know the rules of discourse. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* we see a young dialectician, who, because of philosophical competence, is able to discern the mistakes made by scholars who accumulate evidence for hypotheses that are logically irrelevant to that kind of verification. Philosophers of the non-dialectical and speculative variety are also instances of such mistaken thinkers. To borrow a contemporary expression, it is as if Kierkegaard is saying that there are category mistakes, and not least among the philosophers.

Therefore, the problem with which we are concerned is that of discussing and stating the dialectical and neutral structure within which Kierkegaard believed that he reflected and wrote. It must, of course, first be made clear that he acknowledged such a structure. But beyond this it is essential to state its relation to everything else that he wrote. The fact that this systematic structure of reflection is described as neutral ought to warn the critic who would insist that "now the professors are at him, doing exactly what he said they would, and misunderstanding him completely." The neutrality of the ruled reflection is Kierkegaard's philosophical secret. But to grasp for oneself these rules and forms of reflection, to be clear on the categories, is still to possess no content! So even if this effort is completely successful, nothing ethically or religiously important (as Kierkegaard undertsood such matters) will have been accomplished. Kierkegaard's system will prove to be no palace of reflection with rooms for human occupation! The reality issue—if there is one—is not solved by systematic reflection; neither is the question of right or wrong conduct resolved by systematic thought about ethics. The issue for religious inquiry is certainly not to be resolved by a correct dialectic either. But it is only as we note Kierkegaard's audacious and radical philosophical reflection that we can understand properly why he made the above denials. This is what will be subsequently attempted.

8. Readers of the eloquent passages in the author's introduction to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* will remember the trials faced by the young man who wants to be a thinker!

II

One of the exasperating difficulties in philosophy is to define the word "philosophy" itself. To a surprising extent, the definition of philosophy itself is a problem for philosophy. To the degree that philosophies have included within their limits persuasive and "*lebens*-philosophic" components, i.e., ethical and existential claims, so too have the definitions of philosophy reflected these same components. To determine, therefore, whether a given author was a philosopher or his works philosophical has been a matter most frequently of loud assertion on the part of innovators, on the one side, and a recitation of the precedents on the other. If one were to wait for loud assertions on behalf of Kierkegaard today, one would hear principally the theologians and the men-of-letters. However great their authority, the philosophers perhaps are not persuaded. If one were to wait for the precedents, one waits in vain. Who are the philosophers in the East or West who one would dare to say are the classic instances of what Kierkegaard also did? There are a few, of course, who did some of what he did: Rousseau and Augustine wrote confessional pieces but these are not their principal philosophical writings; Plato and Santayana combine aesthetic appeal and argumentative vigor; many wrote about the religious life, but was it not then theology that they wrote?

Kierkegaard was, in almost every perspective from which he can be read and understood, a most singular person and author. To describe him as a philosopher, whatever else he was, supposes that he had something in common with others called philosophers. As shall be indicated later, many pieces of his writings can be oriented to the elucidation of this issue, but at the outset suffice it to say that Kierkegaard never sought to provide for anyone else a summary of fundamental beliefs. He was not a pontiff philosopher seeking to be anyone else's provident communication of wisdom. He denied his own right to communicate directly any fundamental ethical or religious belief. There was no dialectic establishing an ethical or religious belief anyway. Philosophical dialectic was more important in establishing beliefs about believing, a second-order belief so to speak, than in establishing a primary belief about matters of existence. For reasons which are, therefore, somewhat similar (but if anything much more circumspectly conceived and stated) to those given by logical

empiricists and analytical philosophers, Kierkegaard too refrained from providing metaphysical and ethical beliefs in the grand manner.

Much of the history of philosophy is a rather sorry spectacle in which views of the good and the real contend. Even when one finds the occasional author like Plato who can write skillfully while giving contrasting views simultaneous expression in his own work, there is a kind of deception practiced that makes the philosophers suspicious. In Plato's *Gorgias* "the ethical conquers because it is fortunate to have incomparably the abler protagonist; it conquers, and the reader can see the victory achieved and the opponents humbled."[9] Thus it is with most philosophers. A superior dialectical skill wins the plaudits for a point of view for a season and the other philosophical systems are then vanquished, but only until another dialectician arrives who conquers the field again. Metaphysicians who have ruminated about these matters profess to find a kind of depersonalized dialectic shaping the minds of men and predisposing their assent. On the other hand, critics of metaphysics who find such an amplitude of nonsense in philosophy, fittingly enough, use more chaste language and say confidentially, philosophy is analysis. They omit the distressing rubric, "I think," or "I opine that . . ." and without being metaphysical, they still legislate, worse perhaps than the metaphysicians ever did.

It was such a state of affairs that Kierkegaard discovered over one hundred years ago. Instead of thinking for all of humanity and picking up Hegel's burden where he had laid it down, Kierkegaard breaks with the precedence altogether. He refuses to write out still another system of existence—a "*weltanschauung*" for others. "How foolish, then, is the modern seeking after system upon system, as though help was to be found there . . ."[10] But he refuses because he was not able to continue one. His disparagement of systems, not systematic or logical reflection, is repeatedly expressed but seldom with the succinctness one finds in the following journal entry:

> The majority of men in every generation, even those who, as it is described, devote themselves to thinking, (dons and the

9. The remark is Professor Swenson's and is used to point up the contrast between Plato and Kierkegaard. See *Philosophical Fragments*, "Introduction," xvi. Note the illuminating remarks on "Comparing Søren Kierkegaard and Plato," in Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 50–61, 117–29.

10. Dru, *Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, entry 590 (*Papirer* VII A, 102).

> like), live and die under the impression that life is simply a matter of understanding more and more, and that if it were granted to them to live longer, that life would continue to be one long continuous growth in understanding. How many of them ever experience the maturity of discovering that there comes a critical moment when everything is reversed, after which the point becomes to understand more and more that there is something which cannot be understood. That is Socratic ignorance, and that is what the philosophy of our times requires as a corrective.[11]

Kierkegaard's Socratic ignorance was philosophically articulated. He discovered by intellectual analysis that a system of logic was possible, but that a system of existence was not possible. This meant not simply a repudiation of the ontological logic of idealism and particularly Hegel but also the repudiation of the attitude that assumes that philosophers are particularly commissioned to know the objects or referents for the great words like "good," "true," "beautiful," "God," "reality," etc. Discovering as he did that these words had passional significance and only to a limited degree cognitive significance, Kierkegaard was able to restate his own relation to philosophical inquiry in categories that for his time were indigenous and novel. The corrective he brought to philosophy was the reasoned case for the admission of ignorance. In more formal language, it was an analysis and argument concerning the limits of cognition and propositional truth. Perhaps it was not ignorance of the object that made the difficulty. Kierkegaard is bold enough to suggest both that there may be no objects for the cognitive intelligence and that, therefore, there is no wisdom to be had in such matters at all. What passes for philosophical wisdom might be something much less. But again the limits of cognition and philosophy on these matters are his interest. He does not exploit our ignorance by strongly asserting this suspicion.

In the common man's view of the matter, a philosopher is a man who has a set of beliefs on fundamental questions. Kierkegaard had beliefs and they were coherently related to one another. But this set of commitments he did not communicate to others as his "philosophy." He believed that an argument in a rational form concerning these or

11. Dru, *Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, entry 962 (*Papirer* X1 A, 679). Suffice it to say that there are numerous entries in the papers for especially 1849 emphasizing this point.

any other beliefs of ethical and existential import would bring persuasion only in virtue of the dialectician, the fashionableness of the view, the accidental fact of someone's cleverness—these and more, all of them essentially irrelevant to the argument at hand.

Instead of all this, one might invoke another and more limited conception of philosophy and the philosopher. Recent Anglo-American philosophy has perhaps prepared most readers in part at least for the kind of thing that Kierkegaard chooses to do in this respect. There is a technical-scientific conception of philosophy which has always existed and has been amply illustrated—especially in the history of Western philosophy. Because it has so frequently been written out within the compass of a more vernacular and vulgar conception of existence by the tough-minded, it has lost many readers. In the works of Spinoza, for example, it takes great patience and perspicuity to discover that he was a logician and epistemologist who, while he was summarizing beliefs on very important issues, was also concerning himself with the rules for articulating, for defining, and for conceptualizing many issues. The latter interests have only recently been separated sharply enough from the former to bring general awareness of this kind of inquiry. But the propriety of the complete separation as one sees it today among those who analyze without synthesizing, who make language the subject matter for philosophical scrutiny, is another and involved matter. The point is, however, that philosophers can and do provide a kind of knowledge, claiming to be true and therefore possibly false, about matters which are not directly of ethical or metaphysical significance. Much of modern philosophy, from Descartes to Hume and Kant and on to the contemporaries, is the criticism and analysis of knowledge and ethical claims and is for this reason called "critical" rather than "speculative." But even if there have been confusions created, perhaps by grammatical similarities which in turn have concealed logical and cognitive dissimilarities, this does not mean that the philosophers who discover these confusions do not speak the truth. It is in this sense that we shall discover Kierkegaard in fact to be a philosopher. In highly original and artistically pleasing ways, he did write about points of view that men might hold about nature, man, and God.

Kierkegaard is not an empiricist rather than a metaphysician, a critical philosopher rather than a speculative one. But like Socrates he found delight in sticking to a few elementary category questions. He found Pascal, Hume, Hamann, Kant, and Trendelenburg to his liking, especially to the extent that all of them were the critics of extravagant philosophy, the kind which offered God, immortality, and freedom within the system.[12]

Kierkegaard continues to write about the big issue of philosophy. But the mode in which he does it still puts enormous distance between himself and his readers. Kierkegaard secures his critical and detached vantage point by contriving pseudonymous authors to do the asserting for him. This very device both credits the passions as the source of the affirmations and philosophy as the formal study of such affirmations and their reasons and causes.

Earlier philosophers like Spinoza, Locke, Plato, and numerous others gave precedence to metaphysics as the body of doctrine about the ultimate nature of things. The principal interest was here because other disciplines, logic and dialectic for example, were instruments leading to metaphysical knowledge and ethics was the body of practical conclusions that could be drawn from it. In classical philosophy, except for the very few who were almost idiosyncratic in their detachment, there was no need to isolate the tools of intellectual construction, and therefore the critical analysis, although it takes place, seldom is given the status that it plays in modern philosophy, where under the rubrics of knowledge or the theory of knowledge, it is a separate discipline. Kierkegaard also conceals the latter kind of inquiry and therefore he is also so easily assumed to be another muddle-headed and somewhat eccentric philosopher. When there is no other way in which to describe a thinker's peculiarities, the history of philosophy always seems to offer antecedents. But that does not happen in this case. For Kierkegaard's concealment on these matters—or rather, his refusal to propound and elaborate his critical standpoint—was not

12. Søren Holm's *Historiefilosofi* is an able statement of Kierkegaard's relations (on a few points) to Kant and other philosophers. Note especially 7–20. Even though tangential to the issue talked about above, this book shows how much of traditional philosophy Kierkegaard got rid of. See also *Papirer*, especially vols. II–IV, and Dru's translations for the same year. The *Kierkegaard Commentary* by Croxall gives some clue to Kierkegaard's interest in Hamann. So too does James O'Flaherty's book on Hamann, *Unity and Langauge*.

the consequence of obtuseness. It was not the result either of the conviction that there were other domains of greater cognitive importance in comparison to which these latter were either derivative or trivial.

And on the other hand, if one attempts to turn Kierkegaard into a crypto-analyst, a philosopher of language, one also does him an injustice. He was much too complex to be described so easily. He was too many-sided to be the forerunner of any school or emphasis. Because he attacked the idea that the ends of thought (clarity, definiteness, precision) were, as such, the highest ends for human existence, he is at pains at once to oppose both the speculative and the metaphysical kind of reflection and on the other side what for him would have been among moderns an undue concern with the instruments rather than the substance. His own literature is a criticism of all objectivity, whatever its kind, that becomes of culminating importance, and with this he writes out a description in great detail of the subjectivity, the concerns, passions, interests, and enthusiasms which he believes are the essential expressions for personality. But at the same time he is not a romantic fulminating against reflection. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* his author Johannes Climacus writes:

> Only a very limited intelligence, or someone who cunningly wishes to guard himself against feeling impressed, could here assume that I am in this objection playing the role of a vandal, seeking to violate the sacred security of the precincts of science, and to have the cattle let loose; or that I am a lazarene, placing myself at the head of newspaper readers and balloting idlers, in order to rob the modest scholar of his lawful possessions, earned by the employment of his happy gifts in resigned toil. Verily, there are many, many, who possess more than I do in the realm of the mind; but there is no one who more proudly and gratefully believes that in this realm there prevails an eternal security of property rights, that the idlers remain outside. But when a generation *en masse* proposes to dabble in universal history; when demoralized by this, as one is by playing the lottery, it rejects the highest of human tasks; when speculative philosophy is no longer disinterested but creates a double confusion, first by overleaping the ethical, and then by proposing a world-historical something as the ethical task for the individuals—then it is due to science itself that something be said about it. No, all honor to the pursuits of science, and all honor to everyone who assists in driving

> the cattle away from the sacred precincts of scholarship. But the ethical is and remains the highest task for every human being. One may ask even of the devotee of science that he should acquire an ethical understanding of himself before he devotes himself to scholarship, and that he should continue to understand himself ethically while immersed in his labors. . . . But when, on the other hand, a tumultuous scientist seeks to invade the sphere of the existential, and then proceeds to confuse the ethical, . . . then he is as scientist no faithful lover, and science itself stands ready to deliver him up to a cosmic apprehension.[13]

While agreeing with most of the critics of metaphysical philosophy that the *a priori* cognitive certainties about matters of fact, and especially history, were quite impossible, Kierkegaard did not therewith leap to the other extreme of making philosophy scientific by limiting its subject matter to an analysis of cognitive form. As we shall indicate in later chapters, there is a high degree of competence displayed in incidental remarks, footnotes, and addenda to his other writings on these very issues but, nonetheless, his literature combines analytic powers with a synoptic grasp of fundamental beliefs. Philosophy is not therefore for Kierkegaard only the totaling of beliefs. Nor is it either the "truth," i.e., the true beliefs in contrast to the false ones. The conceptual and systematic language of reflection is used in his instance to state and analyze and complete the persuasive, the convictional, and the belief-ful languages describing the subjective and passional existing of persons. Thus, on the one side, he moves away from the attempted concreteness of traditional philosophy, a concreteness essayed through extending the powers of objectifying cognitive awareness to problems where cognition was not possible, to a formalistic and detached analysis.[14] But rather than staying there and gaining certainty by limiting the area and omitting all concreteness, Kierkegaard returns to the concrete again, this time to the life

13. *Postscript*, 135–36.

14. Already in 1835, as a young student, Kierkegaard had concluded that knowledge was not incremental and productive as other people said. Even if one possessed knowledge, one might not possess the idea for which one could live and die. Note here the letter addressed to P. W. Lund, June 1, 1835. This is included in *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, I:32–36. Part of this letter is translated by Dru in *Journals*, entry 16.

of subjectivity. What contemporaries have only suggested by drawing distinctions, albeit insidiously between cognitive and emotive meaning, Kierkegaard long since has explored. One of his ablest philosophical critics has summarized his acuity on these matters thus:

> If I were to compress into a single word the intellectual significance of Kierkegaardian literature, I would say that it consisted in mapping out the sphere of the inner life, the subjective life of emotion, with constant reference to the ideal. And great as has been the energy devoted to reflection in the centuries past, wonderful as the productions of human thought have been, with reference to all the impersonal and objective problems—nature, logic, mathematics, metaphysics, history—it must be confessed that the inner life of the emotion has been comparatively unchartered sea. Herein lies Kierkegaard's originality, herein his permanent contribution to thought.[15]

III

Kierkegaard's chosen path in philosophical writing appears to be a kind of *via media*. He combines poetic and reflective talents. He refuses to exclude the passional components in order to achieve certainty. He was attracted by the scientists, the logicians, and mathematicians but still refused to submerge his poetic talents to the kind of extirpating discipline that their style of writing demanded. On the other hand, he decries making philosophy a declamation or a reading of tea leaves or the derivation of certainty from doubt.[16] He admits with his imagined critic that his literature is a combination of "a little irony, a little pathos, and a little dialectic." One need not, in his estimate, exclude one for the other if one has enough virtuosity. And furthermore he asks, "What else should anyone have who proposes to set forth the ethical?"[17]

Though Kierkegaard was a religious author from first to last as he repeatedly says, he refused to use his talents for a forthright apologetic for religious faith. To do so would have involved him in the same

15. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, 69.
16. *Postscript*, 137.
17. Ibid.

tissue of difficulties he had noted in the classical metaphysicians and theologians. His sympathies were stirred by David Hume whom he knew only cursorily and by Hamann whom he knew quite well. Both of these writers had encountered insuperable difficulties in the claims of theologians and the natural philosophers. God was not an object to be scrutinized nor did either theology or a natural philosophy provide proofs of his existence and/or a description of His nature. With a deftness that seems incommensurate with the conceptual tools at hand, Kierkegaard finds it necessary to completely rephrase the traditional problems too. Once this is done, and even though he writes a kind of religiously oriented literature, still what he says cannot be said to constitute a conceptual enrichment of anything metaphysical or transcendent. In fact he discovers both religious and logical reasons for delimiting cognitive claims and this is why he insists that his dialectic plays over "pathetic" (passional) matters. Kierkegaard again never flinches as he approaches the sharply defined limits he has set himself. Almost completely alone as he was in his day, he refused to adopt the conventional language and phrases, the adoptive formulae and circumlocutions, that would have given him an audience, but at the price of misunderstanding.[18]

The world is full of books about Kierkegaard and most of them report faithfully what he did and what he said. There is almost no end to the number of studies that tell you who said similar things and why and when. With the scholarly industry being what it is, one can expect more books in the same genre during the coming decade. Kierkegaard is still fair game in the world of scholarship. He wrote a great deal and he bears a lot of repeating. But, there is still the strange neutrality and dispassionateness about the man's writings that goes

18. Early in his life, Kierkegaard saw that the greater number of people were given what he calls their "categorical imperative" by their social context. Their propensities are directed, they are led by their surroundings, and they work in allotted paths. About these people Kierkegaard says that they "experience in life the real meaning of the Hegelian dialectic." The philosophers who document this story are metaphysicians—the historically oriented metaphysicians who see the dialectic moving in transempirical totalities, in time, and in history. Kierkegaard was like Johannes Climacus, for whom the dialectic (and logical rules) related one idea to another. He stood alone, trying not to be intimidated by the rhetoric and the grandeur of scope that others have commanded. Note Dru, *Journals*, entry 16 (*Papirer* I A, 72); see also *Breve*, I:32–36. See also the introduction to *Postscript*.

a-begging. Even with his profoundly religious and Christian writings, there is still a stylistic feature of them, and, in addition, a context of language and reflection that keeps the persuasiveness and propagandizing at a minimum. Kierkegaard supposes a nexus between his books, between himself as author and his books, and between his books and the reader, that he nowhere chooses to describe at great length. That he was aware of it, there can be no doubt. There is a dialectic governing his literature and the description of this dialectic is his formal philosophy.

Kierkegaard has no need of a public advocate. His own talent and abilities assure him his place. However, it must be said that many who praise him most misunderstand him.[19] He did not want readers who would become Christian in virtue of his authorship. In fact, the burden of the explanatory work, *The Point of View*, is just this, namely, that he cannot in virtue of his own understanding of himself, of the Christian faith, and of his authorship, constitute himself as a direct agent for the production of religiosity in another. The kind of publicity he gets nowadays, however, suggests that he failed. The public advocates are mistaken. Many of them, at worst, are fawning before a genius or, at best, are overly anxious to give honor where their debt is great. There is, though, another misunderstanding and this is rooted in the failure to read and to understand the man's authorship as the kind of work he wished it to be.

Kierkegaard believed in the validity of his writings and the correctness of his delineation. Furthermore, these can be discovered and understood apart from the acceptance or rejection of the Christian faith or, for that matter, anything else about which this author was mightily persuaded. There was and is an objective validity about the works that their author presupposed. That this was capable of refined description and minute structuralization also cannot be denied. Even the study and care that went into the various pseudonymous and aesthetic works (which often seem so logical, so rhapsodic as to be almost inspired and surely not argumentative or didactic) seems to indicate that the relations between each of them and their author were carefully considered. The papers again (especially section B of

19. Kierkegaard's repudiation of a disciple, Rasmus Nielsen, seems to me to be in consequence of the kind of misunderstanding evident in those who do not take seriously Kierkegaard's dialectical powers.

each volume) indicate the refinement of grasp and detailed dialectical considerations that went into the making of many books. We shall find that a structure is implicit in all of his writings and serves as a kind of wide context, albeit neutral and without passional importance, without which everything fits. Furthermore, such a context is directly described by the many remarks he makes about logical and epistemological matters, both in his public writings and his semi-private papers. And above all, if the literature is to have any consistency at all, such a referent for its various pieces is also necessary. More of this will be indicated in later chapters.

It is this set of philosophical components about which Kierkegaard said relatively little (for reasons that are explicit and will be noted again) that are most important to the interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorship. Few men have been motivated by such evangelical zeal as Kierkegaard. But being a reflective man and his medium being ideas, it would have been ridiculous for him to pen a literature, and a reflective literature, if all communication were "*Cor ad cor loquitur*."[20] His literature was in one sense a direct communication from one person to another. The theory that describes the direct communication is a philosophical theory. This very theory enables the author to say that the direct communication is, however, not all there is to the matter at hand, for there is another kind of communication that Kierkegaard calls "indirect." Repeatedly in his authorship Kierkegaard draws attention to the fact that what his own literature communicates directly is not as significant as what it communicates indirectly. The Danish philosopher, for surely we ought to be prepared by now to call him that, knew that direct communication did in fact take place with the help of words, sentences, and obedience to reflective rules. He was interested in theories that told one how this came about.

But the irony of the Kierkegaardian literature is that it concerns all kinds of human interests, the passions and modes of subjectivity, none of which as subjective states are communicated by the language about them, even if that language is true. At this point Kierkegaard suggests a theory of indirect communication, which describes his own authorship and which is posited upon knowing the limits of

20. This expression gained its currency from John Henry Newman's wide use of it.

communication, the necessary logical structures upon speech, and in a broad sense, the rules of intellectual play.

This is the way then to indicate something of Kierkegaard's intellectual mastery. Without noting the care taken, both to describe his writings and to orient them, one might assume that they are nothing but extended rhapsodies or ingenious homilies. By noting this care and precision of reflection within which they are measured, one can see what is valid and hence really philosophical in Kierkegaard's authorship.