

Adolph Peter Adler: A Stumbling-Block and an Inspiration for Kierkegaard

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Adolph Peter Adler is a well-known name in recent literature on Søren Kierkegaard's authorship. He is the only person to be treated in a severe, dialectical manner by Kierkegaard in an entire book, *The Book on Adler* or *The Present Religious Confusion*, which was, for the most part, written in the fall of 1846 and repeatedly taken up again and reworked, but yet never published by the author himself. Only a reworked section of the book, namely, "On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle," in which Adler is not mentioned by name, was published in 1849 in *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* under the pseudonym HH. In the book itself Kierkegaard refuted Adler's claim to have received a revelation. He argued that Adler, in connection with his revelatory experience and the flood of books which followed in its wake could be characterized as a confused genius at best, and not as a person to whom divinity had revealed itself or with whom divinity had directly spoken—in other words, not an apostle. Since then, few people have made a scholarly investigation of Adler and this affair.¹ Not until 1872, three years after the issue had disappeared along with Adler's death, did Kierkegaard's book on Adler appear in its entirety in the third volume of Hans Peter Barfod's edition of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers. In Peter Andreas Heiberg and Victor Kuhr's extensive edition of Kierkegaard's papers, the Adler book was printed in 1926 in volume VII–2 (*Pap* VII–2 B 235) with additions and emendations from 1847 in volume VIII–2 (*Pap* VIII–2 B 6).

¹ The first contributions to the scholarly investigation of Adler came from Italy. Alessandro Cortese published in 1968 the article, "Il Pastore Adler della libertà religiosa in Kierkegaard," *Archivio di Filosofia*, 1968, pp. 629–46. In 1976 Cornelio Fabro published his translation of Kierkegaard's *Book on Adler* with an extensive Introduction (Kierkegaard, *Dell' autorità e della rivelazione* ("Libro su Adler"), Padova: Gregoriana 1976), and in 1978 there appeared Fabro's article, "La critica di Kierkegaard alla dialettica hegeliana nel 'Libro su Adler,'" *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, series 4, no. 9, pp. 1–32. The only monograph on Adler is Carl Henrik Koch's *En flue på Hegels udødelige næse eller Om Adolph Peter Adler og om Søren Kierkegaards forhold til ham*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1990. Recently, Jon Stewart has treated Adler in his *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003. A brief account of Adler's philosophical views can be found in Carl Henrik Koch, *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004.

The first person to have discussed Adler and Kierkegaard's intense occupation with him, was Christian Jensen, who, in his book *Søren Kierkegaards religiøse Udvikling* from 1898, very briefly examines *The Book on Adler*. In the 1920s both Eduard Geismar and Christoph Schrempf included Adler in their influential monographs on Kierkegaard.² My *Habilitation* from 1990 on Adler is a first attempt to understand Kierkegaard's attack on Hegelianism and speculative theology as an assault directed at Danish Hegelianism, especially at Adler, who was the most prominent representative of the young Danish Hegelians around 1840.³

I.

Adolph Peter Adler was born on August 29, 1812, a year before Søren Kierkegaard. His father was the well-to-do merchant and later wholesaler Niels Adler (1785–1871). His son, at eight years of age, was accepted at Copenhagen's most prestigious private school, The School of Civic Virtue (*Borgerdydskolen*), whose headmaster was the legendary Michael Nielsen (1776–1846).⁴ Kierkegaard began his school days here the following year. At one point they were in the same class together. The littérateur Frederik Ludvig Liebenberg (1810–94), who began at the school some years before Adler, recounts in his memoirs that he, Adler, and Kierkegaard were in the same class together from 1823 to 1827 and that the latter was “a quiet, peaceful, industrious boy who hardly made himself noticed.”⁵ This explains why Adler and Kierkegaard were on informal footing, addressing each other with the informal “*du*” form, which was rare in the nineteenth century, even among young students of the same age.

In 1831, Adler began his studies at the University of Copenhagen, but only the following year did he begin work on his major, theology. After the normal four years of study, he became a theological candidate in 1836. In 1837, he travelled abroad and returned a year and a half later. In the interim Hegelianism had captivated the young students of theology at the University of Copenhagen. The reason for this was the young theologian, Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–84), who, in 1837, had begun his lectures on speculative dogmatics which evoked an enormous, albeit brief, enthusiasm for his version of right-Hegelian speculative theology. Some of Martensen's auditors recalled later in their autobiographies their youthful enthusiasm for Hegel. One wrote the following of the word “speculative”:

² Eduard Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard. Hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, nos. 1–6, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad 1926–28. Christoph Schrempf, *Søren Kierkegaard. Eine Biographie*, vols. 1–2, Jena: Diederichs 1927–28.

³ Koch, *En flue på Hegels udødelige næse eller Om Adolph Peter Adler og om Søren Kierkegaards forhold til ham*.

⁴ Holger Lund, *Borgerdydsskolen i Kjøbenhavn 1787–1887*, Copenhagen: Wroblewsky 1887, pp. 124–251.

⁵ F.L. Liebenberg, *Nogle Optegnelser om mit Levned*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1894, p. 11.

This mystical word, which appeared with the sound of the “Absolute” resounded through all of our master’s powerful statements....Where it came from we did not know; it flew by like a magic trick. But once it was better understood, it proved to be the art of bringing the mysteries of Christianity into the daylight of the Concept, aided by an eclectic aggregate of German systems, as certainly as if one had an angel placed in the spirit of analysis.⁶

Another one described the situation as follows with memory’s ironic distance to the intellectual mistakes of youth: “We had, so to speak, received a piece of furniture with three drawers, in which we easily divided everything that was discussed among us, and at bottom we believed that everything was cleared up when we had thus found the proper place in the system for the theme in question.”⁷

The year after Søren Kierkegaard’s death in 1855, one of his followers wrote that Martensen had been the center of a “philosophical dizziness” which had gripped the young students of theology such that they, instead of appropriating the highest truths with humility and inwardness, learned rather how to play ball with them. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship, he wrote, had been directed first and foremost against this religious monstrosity.⁸

Due to his journey abroad, Adler had not been present at Martensen’s lectures and later, having completed his degree in theology, was hardly involved in the excitement which the lectures had provoked among the young theology students. To be sure, prior to his trip he had been interested in the fashionable philosophy of the day, Hegelianism, but it was only after his return home that he began a more systematic study of Hegel’s system. The result was a dissertation in philosophy with the title *The Isolated Subjectivity in its Most Important Forms. Part One*, which was submitted and defended in 1840. A second part never appeared. The dissertation was prefaced by eleven theses in Latin.

Adler’s dissertation is, by and large, a standard piece of the right-Hegelian school and does not really present anything original. After a brief account of the dialectic between thought and being, which serves to define the concept of “consciousness,” the concept of isolated consciousness or isolated subjectivity—which in the theses is referred to as “*subjectiva abstracta*,” a direct translation of Hegel’s “*die abstracte Subjektivität*”—is defined with respect to both being and thought. From the perspective of Hegel’s philosophy of history and philosophy of religion, Adler describes the historical appearance of isolated subjectivity as a moment in the development of the individual from nature to spirit. The latter appearance is especially important since holding consciousness in isolated subjectivity makes possible the introduction into speculative theology of the concept of sin and evil.

According to the Hegelian dialectic, what Hegel called *the Concept*, that is, the universal, is realized in the particular, which implies that the objectivity of

⁶ Johannes Fibiger, *Mit Liv og Levned som jeg selv har forstaaet det*, ed. by K. Gjellerup, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1898, p. 74.

⁷ C. Hostrup, *Erindringer fra min Barndom og Ungdom*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1891, p. 83.

⁸ H.P. Kofoed-Hansen, *Dr. S. Kierkegaard mod Dr. H. Martensen*, Copenhagen: C.G. Iversens Forlag 1856, p. 9.

the universal is negated. The particular or the individual is therefore a moment in the dialectical development of the Concept, that is, a moment in the collective historical or cultural process of development. The person's conception of himself in his individuality and of his environment at any given point in time is therefore one moment in this development, and, as negation of the universal and objective, this negation is an expression of subjectivity. Every form of subjectivity is, as a moment in the development of the Concept, valid and necessary since it is merely a phase in the self-development of the Concept or the objective. Every historical moment in this development is therefore a justified, albeit not independent, part of this development.

Subjectivity, that is, the individual's understanding of himself and his environment, is thus, like a moment in the world-historical development, a negation of the objective and as such implies that the human being feels alienated in the world. In this context Hegel speaks of the unhappy consciousness. As Adler writes in the dissertation: "from the moment that the creature stepped forth out of the unity with the Creator, subjectivity also stepped forth out of unity with objectivity."⁹ Both humanity and the individual human being must in their development re-establish the lost unity but at a higher level.

If the individual now remains in a moment in his development and thereby isolates himself from it, the individual does not take up actuality into his consciousness, which implies that subjectivity loses all content. In the fact that consciousness is held firmly at a determinate stage in its historical development, for example, by understanding world history from a supernatural conception at a point in time when supernaturalism is a surpassed moment in the cultural development, it is isolated since the views that it holds do not correspond to actuality. Adler calls subjectivity in this condition "isolated subjectivity." Every moment in the world-historical development is necessary and valid in a relative sense, but held firmly, it loses all validity, or as Adler puts it: "when world spirit's past moments and stages are born in individuals, they no longer have historical truth and justification."¹⁰

The previous religious conceptions are a link in the development toward the Christianity of the nineteenth century and, as such, possess relative validity; but if they are held firmly even after they have been surpassed historically, the individual places himself in opposition world spirit, which is the force which drives historical development forward and which Hegel himself understood as an immanent force—though the theological right Hegelians understood it as divinity. When this is the case, the individual occupies at "the standpoint of evil: for evil consists precisely of holding on to the standpoint, which, seen in opposition to a higher one, ought to be sublated."¹¹

⁹ Adolph Peter Adler, *Den isolerede Subjectivitet i dens vigtigste Skikkelser*, Copenhagen: Berlingske 1840, p. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51. The Danish word "*ophæve*" (to sublimate) is a translation of the Hegelian term "*aufheben*" which literally means to "lift up" but in Hegel's usage means "to cancel" and "to preserve." Often Hegel uses "*aufheben*" to suggest all three of these connotations at the same time.

By placing oneself at the standpoint of evil, the person commits a sin, a “sin which cannot be forgiven, the sin against spirit. For one sins against spirit when one holds on to antiquated standpoints and does not pay tribute to what the new spirit has brought to the world.”¹² Or as we read in thesis eleven: “*Homo in malis est quum retinet momentum historicum, quod evanuit,*” the human being is in evil, who remains at the historical moment which is surpassed. If, for example, a person of the nineteenth century holds on to the eighteenth century’s conception of the divinity, he sins by not wanting to be what he is, namely an individual of the nineteenth century. It follows from this that a human being is saved from sin by taking up the objective, the real, into his consciousness. It is objectivity and not subjectivity which saves.

To these considerations we can also add some considerations concerning revelation. Regarded from what Adler calls “the standpoint of the moment,” revelation is accidental and arbitrary; it seems to be in conflict with the generally accepted conception of nature and human life. Therefore, “the human being of the moment” does not understand revelation: but seen from its true perspective, in Adler’s words, “reproduced in time and by humanity” or mediated and taken up in human consciousness and in human culture, what appeared at the moment of revelation as something accidental is now understood as something necessary:

This is true of every divine revelation since creation. Every revelation would be a riddle if it did not, by eternally being reborn and reproduced in humanity’s great consciousness, show itself as the expression of necessity. Every divine revelation must be viewed from this perspective; in this way, the necessity of mediation is also apparent.¹³

The historical moment takes on eternal significance when it is taken up in the human consciousness and human culture, that is, when it is mediated. As Adler puts it in his tenth Latin thesis: “*Inspiratio et prophetia est mediatio necessaria,*” divine inspiration, that is, revelation, and prophetic speech are necessary mediations. Revelation, and hereby also the appearance of the divine in time—the life and works of Christ—only receive their full significance when they become a part of human culture. The result is that only when the individuals of the nineteenth century educate themselves in agreement with Christian culture, which they are a product of, do they become true Christians.

As noted above, Adler’s dissertation contains nothing original. His conception of evil corresponds exactly to Hegel’s; but, for Adler, the entire doctrine of isolated subjectivity takes on a far more theological twist than for Hegel.

It cannot be determined with certainty whether Kierkegaard read Adler’s dissertation. The title is merely mentioned in *The Book on Adler* without any account of its contents,¹⁴ and it does not appear in *The Auction Catalogue* of Kierkegaard’s library. There is only one single place in his posthumous papers that can be interpreted as a possible reference to it.

In 1850, Kierkegaard sketched, in the briefest possible form, speculative theology’s conception of sin. He writes in his journal that all the “more profound

¹² Ibid., p. 51.

¹³ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁴ *Pap.* VIII–2 B 6, p. 12.

thinkers” are “unanimous in locating evil in isolated subjectivity—objectivity is the saving factor.”¹⁵ He agrees that “isolated subjectivity” is evil, but he does not think that “restoration to health by means of ‘objectivity’ is a hair better; subjectivity is the way of deliverance—that is, God, as infinitely compelling subjectivity.”¹⁶ This passage can be interpreted as a reference to Adler even if there is no more evidence than the fact that Kierkegaard uses the designation “isolated subjectivity,” which Adler introduced in his dissertation.

II.

Even before Adler had published and defended his dissertation, he submitted a shorter article to the *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*. Here he criticized the person who, more than anyone else, presented himself as the central Danish Hegelian: the poet and critic Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860), who had dared to correct Hegel. According to Heiberg, the first triad of logic is not what Hegel claimed, the triad of *being, nothing, and becoming*, but, by contrast, the unity of being and nothing, becoming and determinate being (*Dasein*).¹⁷ A modification of this kind, thought Adler, did violence to the structure of Hegel’s logic.¹⁸ And when the leading theologian at the University of Copenhagen, Henrik Nicolai Clausen (1793–1877), criticized the young Danish Hegelians in 1840 for betraying Lutheran scripturalism in their attempt to make Christianity appear to be a result of *a priori* constructions,¹⁹ he was dismissed by Adler with the remark that he was not in agreement with the most recent scholarly advances.²⁰ A few years later, Adler also criticized philosophy professor Rasmus Nielsen (1809–84), who had allowed himself to depart from Hegelian terminology.²¹ In the same year, Adler’s short article on baptism was accepted in Heiberg’s journal, *Intelligensblade*.²² The article is a typical contribution to the attempt to make Christianity a part of the bourgeois culture of the age which Martensen, for example, stood for. Martensen’s theology was later characterized as a theology of mediation. It is characteristic for this period in Danish cultural life—the period from around 1810 to around 1860 called the Danish Golden Age—that leading personalities in the world of culture understood their contemporary culture as a melting pot of art, science, religion, and social life. Together, these aspects of

¹⁵ SKS 23, 49–50, NB15:71 / JP 4, 4555.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, “Det logiske System,” *Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*, no. 2, 1838, pp. 1–45.

¹⁸ Adolph Peter Adler, “J.L. Heiberg, det logiske System,” *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, pp. 474–82.

¹⁹ Henrik Nicolai Clausen, *Det Nye Testaments Hermeneutik*, Copenhagen: Schultz 1840, p. IV.

²⁰ P. Vogel [A.P. Adler], *Professor Clausens Dom over den hegelske Filosofi*, Copenhagen: Høst og Klein 1840.

²¹ Adolph Peter Adler, *En Anmeldelse*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1842.

²² Adolph Peter Adler, “Et Par Bemærkninger med Hensyn til Barnedaabens absolute Gyldighed,” *Intelligensblade*, no. 8, Copenhagen 1842, pp. 181–90.

nineteenth-century Danish cultural life were supposed to contribute to the realization of the kingdom of God. Both Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship and his later attack on what he called "Christendom"—which smoothes over the ultimate demands placed on the believer—were strongly opposed to this constitutive feature of the self-understanding of the Danish Golden Age.

Adler introduced his thoughts on baptism by claiming that in the early days of Christianity, baptism presupposed a personal appropriation of the doctrine. The church was not supported by the state; Christianity did not spread and was not supported by a Christian family life. In these first days of Christianity, where strife about religious matters raged even among close relatives, it was necessary that those who were to be baptized be instructed in the Christian faith. At that time, Christ was not yet "the spirit of the age"; "the spirit had no objective form in the world,"²³ that is, Christianity had not yet been taken up into historical actuality and into the consciousness of the individual. This implies that adult baptism was a necessity in the early days of Christianity. But as time passed, spirit's immediate appearance was mediated in the historical dialectic; it became an objectively established phenomenon, and "Christianity received a kingdom on earth."²⁴ What had been subjective faith stepped forth objectively as the state religion. Thus, education into Christianity was assured by a Christian family, a Christian community and a Christian state, and the reason for adult baptism, which existed previously for paganism, now falls away. In the Christian state, baptism is a sign that the final goal of the historical development also includes the baptized person, who is born into a Christian culture and is determined ahead of time to grow up as a Christian. Therefore, child baptism, thought Adler, is a necessity within the victorious church, and in baptism, the historical fate of the human being is made clear.

Adler's arguments for the necessity of child baptism in the Christian state are his only real contribution to speculative theology. This wholly confirms Clausen's conception of the right Hegelians.

After having defended his dissertation, Adler had begun to prepare a series of lectures on Hegel's objective logic, that is, the doctrine of being and essence. The lecture series was to have taken place at the University of Copenhagen in winter semester 1840–41, but it is uncertain whether it was ever carried through to the end since on February 10, 1841, Adler received the position of pastor for the congregations in Hasle and Rutsker on the Danish island of Bornholm. In 1842, he published the lectures, which represent a major work in the Danish Hegel reception of the nineteenth century.²⁵

In this book, Adler gave a generally correct presentation of the main lines of Hegel's objective logic. For the most part, he paraphrases Hegel's text and on occasion there are straightforward translations from the *Science of Logic*. However, Adler's presentation is far more theologically colored than Hegel's. For example, in his criticism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), he claims that the full content of

²³ Ibid., p. 184 and p. 183.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁵ Adolph Peter Adler, *Populaire Foredrag over Hegels objective Logik*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1842.

Christianity is only given when it is conceived as an immediate unity of thought and being or as “the word in the flesh”;²⁶ thus he says that the correct Christology—what he here calls Christianity’s “specific, substantial essence”—can only be formulated within the framework of speculative philosophy. Reflection alone, which introduces the distinction between essence and form rather than their necessary unity, cannot alone achieve a unity of thought and being. Speculative knowing and the content of Christianity, however, are in harmony with one another within the framework of the Hegelian system. Only from the perspective of speculation’s understanding of the Word (*logos*) as synonymous with thinking, which unites itself with being, can the creation and “the miracles of Christ by means of the Word” be grasped.

In connection with the famous Hegelian theme that quantity is transformed in quality, evident when a building gradually falls apart and suddenly appears as a ruin, for example, Adler writes: “When a pious Christian is declared to be different from a pagan, it is not the abstract quality common to all which defines them but a new quality brought forth through quantity, time.”²⁷ To be a Christian was, for Adler, not a daring leap out into 70,000 fathoms, but a matter of assimilating time into oneself: that is, of reproducing in one’s consciousness the historical course of events, including the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ as well as the later history of Christianity. To become a Christian was for Adler—before 1842, at any rate—a human process of education. The pious pagan, for example, Socrates, diverges from Christianity because the Christian receives a new quality by running through the historical course of events in his consciousness. The condition for being a Christian is thus to hold firmly to a historical fact, regardless of the fact that the temporal distance to the object of faith is eliminated in faith. Adler seems to anticipate a view which was criticized by Kierkegaard two years later in *Philosophical Fragments*.

Kierkegaard owned a copy of Adler’s account of Hegel’s objective logic and quoted from it in a draft to the introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* as well as in a note to this draft.²⁸ Although the reference to Adler was omitted in the final version, there is one place in the book which can perhaps be understood as an implicit reference to Adler’s work.

In the “Introduction” to *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard refers to the final section of the logic having “actuality” (*Virkeligheden*) as its heading.²⁹ This is not the case in Hegel, if by “the logic” one understands all of Hegel’s logic and not only the objective logic. Kierkegaard’s remark may rest on the fact that he had consulted the copy he had made of the table of contents to the first part of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. This consists of the subdivision of the second section of the logic, “The Doctrine of Essence,” the last section of which has the heading “Actuality” (*Die Wirklichkeit*). This concludes the presentation of the objective logic in the *Science of Logic* and the abbreviated presentation of the objective logic which

²⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁸ *Pap.* V B 49.5, p. 108 and *Pap.* V C 4.

²⁹ SKS 4, 317 / CA, 9.

Hegel gives in the *Encyclopaedia*.³⁰ It is, however, also possible that Kierkegaard, who had referred to Adler's objective logic in connection with his work on *The Concept of Anxiety*, recalled that the two final paragraphs in Adler's presentation treated formal and real actuality.

The question of the degree of Kierkegaard's direct knowledge of Hegel's writings has been repeatedly treated in the secondary literature.³¹ I myself have shown that Kierkegaard's general knowledge of Hegelian logic could be based on a reading of secondary sources, in the first instance, Adler's book and Karl Werder, whose lectures on logic and metaphysics in winter semester 1841–42 Kierkegaard attended,³² and whose little commentary from 1841 on Hegel's logic he owned.³³ Based on a study of the published works, it does not seem possible to make good on the claim that Kierkegaard studied Hegel's *Science of Logic* or the abbreviated presentation of the logic in the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Recently, Jon Stewart has shown in detail that the criticism directed against Hegel in *The Concept of Anxiety* is based on Adler's description of Hegel's logic.³⁴ Instead of concluding from this evidence that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hegel's logic was not based on a study of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, but rather that his knowledge of Hegel was mediated by Adler and that he thus identified Adler's right-Hegelian presentation of the objective logic with Hegel's own, Stewart, convinced that Kierkegaard must have undertaken a study of Hegel, claims that Kierkegaard's critique was aimed at Adler. With regard to this assertion, perhaps all one can say is that such a study cannot be proven and that one cannot establish—based on a veneration for an author who does not purport to be a scholar but, if anything, to be a religious propagandist—that Kierkegaard always went to the sources. Stewart also has a problem answering two questions: first, Why would Kierkegaard criticize Adler's presentation of the objective logic? And second, Why is the criticism directed against Hegel and not against Adler? Only the second question is answered: "The answer is that Kierkegaard uses Hegel as a kind of decoy or disguise in order to veil the true objects of his criticism."³⁵ But why would Kierkegaard have used this rather odd procedure, which at best can be conceived as subtle irony by identifying a little disciple with the master himself? Kierkegaard was an ironist and used irony as a literary and rhetorical tool, but he directly declared his intentions in his two accounts of his authorship (*On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*), but neither here nor in the posthumous papers is there any evidence that in *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard intended to criticize Adler. I agree with Stewart that Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegelianism is in

³⁰ Pap. IV C 101, p. 409.

³¹ Cf. the overview in Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, pp. 1–32.

³² See Kierkegaard's notes to Werder's lectures: SKS 19, 245, Not8:50. SKS 19, 246, Not8:52. SKS 19, 278–82, Not9:2–9.

³³ Karl Werder, *Logik. Als Kommentar und Ergänzung zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*, Berlin: Veit u. Comp. 1841 (ASKB 867). See Koch, *En Flue på Hegels udødelige næse eller Om Adolph Peter Adler og om Søren Kierkegaards forhold til ham*, pp. 189–97.

³⁴ Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 378–418.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

reality aimed at the Danish-right Hegelians; but in opposition to Stewart, I think that the natural conclusion is that Kierkegaard identified their version of Hegelianism with Hegelian philosophy generally.

III.

After having presented the objective logic, Adler's goal was to sketch the subjective logic or the logic of the concept. But one evening when he was sitting and developing his view of the origin of evil—which at first glance strikes one as a theme which lies outside the subjective logic—something happened which caused him to scrap this project and which changed his entire life. He wrote later in his "Preface" to a collection of sermons published in 1843, that he realized "as if in a flash that everything depended not upon thought but upon spirit, and that an evil spirit existed." And he continued:

That same night a hideous sound descended into our room. Then the *Savior* commanded me to get up and go in and write down these words:

The first human beings could have had an eternal life, because when thought joins God's spirit with the body, then life is eternal; when the human being joins God's spirit with the body, then the human being is God's child; Adam would thus have been God's son. But they sinned. Thought immersed itself in itself without the world, without the body. It separated the spirit from the body, the spirit from the world. And when the human being himself, when thought itself separates the spirit from the body and the spirit from the world, the human being must die and the world and the body must become evil. And what becomes of the spirit? The spirit leaves the body. But God does not take it back. And it becomes his enemy. And where does it go? Back into the world. Why? It is angry with the world, which abandoned it. It is the evil spirit. And the world itself created the evil spirit.

Then Jesus commanded me to burn my own works and in the future to keep to the Bible.³⁶

As he understood it, Adler had received a revelation!

Although the words which Adler claimed Christ dictated to him can hardly be said to be immediately comprehensible, nevertheless this was an account which was relatively clear, given the background of speculative theology's doctrine of sin and evil. When thought, that is, subjectivity, deepens itself in itself and fails to incorporate the actual into itself—in Adler's words, is "without world, without the body"—it is in evil and thereby sinful. It becomes unclear, however, when Adler's conception of the sex drive, which is a central theme in his book, is set in relation to the content of the revelation.

³⁶ Adolph Peter Adler, *Nogle Prædikener*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1843, Preface. *BA*, Supplement, pp. 339–40.

In the 27th sermon, Adler writes, “The sex drive is the evil spirit, and it came into the world with the evil spirit, for man abandoned the spirit of God.”³⁷ In several of the longer and shorter works which he published after 1846—20 of them in all—the sex drive is treated in an almost identical fashion.

According to the revelation, the first Adam is supposed to have united spirit with the flesh, but lost himself in his own thoughts, and for this reason the evil spirit arose. The reason for this kind of thought was that he was seduced by Eve, or rather, as Adler wrote in 1833, that man became lost in thought “in order to speculate about Eve’s words, instead of promptly keeping to the spirit’s command.”³⁸

In *Attempt at a Brief Systematic Account of Christianity in its Logic* from 1846, Adler writes that man is thought, woman the body, the serpent in the account of the Fall is a image of desire which tempted Eve, and from sinful, carnal love arose the evil spirit: “Man is the head, the reasonable, thought. The woman is the body, the flowering, smiling body. The man’s force and seriousness should unite God’s spirit with the body, the weaker, light-minded woman.”³⁹ When Eve seduced Adam, he began “to think, to become absorbed in himself—instead of keeping to the Spirit’s immediate voice. It was apostasy.”⁴⁰ Tempted by lust, man sinned: “In sinful love, they created the evil spirit, the devil, and he returned to the world with the words: the devil is...the birth of man, it is my birth, my right.”⁴¹ This is rather confused.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, which was published one year after *Some Sermons*, Kierkegaard also offered several reflections on the sex drive. That he read the 27th sermon is evident from his underlinings and markings. In his copy of the book, which has 119 pages and contains 28 sermons and speeches, pages 93 to 106 and 117 to 119 remain uncut; in the 27th sermon, which covers pages 109 to 114, there are two underlinings in pencil. The first one comes on page 114 where Adler, with an implicit reference to Galatians 4:21ff., writes: “Drive out the servant woman but not the free woman. Everything in the name of Jesus! Keep yourself for the free woman!” Kierkegaard here underlined the words “not the free” and “Keep yourself for the free” and has marked the passage with a line. The numerous underlinings and markings in *Attempt at a Brief Systematic Account of Christianity in its Logic* from 1846 show that Kierkegaard also studied this work extensively. For example, in the aforementioned quotation, “to think, to become absorbed in himself...,” he has underlined the sentence after the dash, and has underlined the word “immediate” twice. Underlinings and markings in two other books which Adler published in 1846 show that Kierkegaard studied them as well.⁴²

³⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁸ Adolph Peter Adler, *Momenter med Hensyn til Forløsningsværket i Jesu, logisk fremstillet*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1853, p. 71, note.

³⁹ Adolph Peter Adler, *Forsøg til en kort systematisk Fremstilling af Christendommen i dens Logik*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1846, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8, note **.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴² Prior to *Forsøg til en kort systematisk Fremstilling af Christendommen i dens Logik* Adler published in June 1846 *Studier og Exempler*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, *Theologiske Studier*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1846 and *Nogle Digte*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.

Adler's "Preface" to the collection of sermons and, more importantly, his performance at the pulpit in his churches in Hasle and Rutsker—where, according to his superior, the rural dean on the island of Bornholm, he announced his revelation with a wild look and violent expression—led the church authorities to intervene in the matter, though he appeared entirely normal in his daily life as soon as he left the pulpit. He was suspended from his office in January 1844 and dismissed in August 1845. In the same year, he published the official documents surrounding the case. In June 1846, he published four books, which, naturally enough, evoked Kierkegaard's interest. In the same month, Kierkegaard bought Adler's four books, and, in August, he purchased Adler's account of his dismissal. During the months that followed, he seems to have been exercised by the "Adler phenomenon." The result was *The Book on Adler*.

But as early as 1843, Kierkegaard had noticed that something had happened to Adler. His former schoolmate had been in Copenhagen in connection with the publication of *Some Sermons*, and it is possible that he visited Kierkegaard, who on June 29 wrote to his brother Peter Christian Kierkegaard (1805–88):

You know there is a Magister Adler in town, who became a pastor on Bornholm, a zealous Hegelian. He has come here to publish some sermons in which he will probably advocate a movement in the direction of orthodoxy. He has a good head on him and has considerable experience in many *casibus* of life, but at the moment he is a little overwrought. Nevertheless it is always possible that this is a phenomenon worth paying attention to.⁴³

Kierkegaard's distant relative, philosopher Hans Brøchner (1820–75), writes in his "Recollections of Søren Kierkegaard," which was published in 1876, that Kierkegaard, "at the time when Adler's mental disturbances began," had told him of a visit by Adler:

One day Adler came to Kierkegaard with a work he had published and talked to him for a long time about both of their activities as religious writers. Adler made it clear to Kierkegaard that he viewed him [Kierkegaard] as a sort of John the Baptist in relation to himself, who, since he had received the direct revelation, was the genuine Messiah. I still remember the smile with which Kierkegaard told me that he replied to Adler that he was completely satisfied with the position that Adler assigned to him: he found it a very respectable function to be a John the Baptist and had no aspirations to be a Messiah. During the same visit, Adler read aloud a large portion of his work to Kierkegaard; some of it he read in his ordinary voice, the rest in a strange whisper. Kierkegaard permitted himself to remark that he could not find any new revelation in Adler's work, to which Adler replied: "Then I will come to you again this evening and read all of it to you in *this* voice (the whisper), and then you shall see, it will become clear to you." Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's underlinings and markings in the first three of these are published in *Pap. VII–2 B 237–9*, pp. 234–59.

⁴³ *B&A*, 1, p. 122 / *LD*, 155–7, Letter 83.

was much amused by this conviction of Adler's that the variation in his voice could give the writings greater significance.⁴⁴

Kierkegaard himself used the episode about the variation in Adler's voice in *The Book on Adler*, where he wrote that Adler must have desired that his reader would be moved to ecstasy, not to quiet reflection, and continued:

In a way it would be quite consistent if Adler, by analogy with magicians and conjurers, recommended and prescribed certain rituals, that at the stroke of twelve at night one should get up, then walk around the room three times, then take the book and open it... then read the single passage, first in a soft voice, and then let the voice rise to its peak, and then again downward.⁴⁵

The book which Adler read aloud to Kierkegaard could hardly have been *Some Sermons*, which appeared on July 4, 1843. Kierkegaard's letter to his brother had been written a month earlier, and only in the course of the fall can one, for Kierkegaard's part, speak of a real religious authorship. Admittedly, *Two Edifying Discourses* appeared on May 16, 1843, but *Fear and Trembling, Repetition*, and *Three Edifying Discourses* were published on October 16, and *Four Edifying Discourses* appeared on December 6. Since Adler published a small volume, *Studies*, on December 12, in which he treats the main content of his revelation, everything speaks for the fact that this was the work which he read aloud to Kierkegaard. In this book, both God and Christ are ascribed many statements; take the following passage, for example: "Before the foundation of the world was laid, God said to Jesus: should man abandon my spirit, then remember: God can give the body back to the earth. And Jesus said: he will. And God said: You are my son, I gave birth to you today."⁴⁶ It is not difficult to imagine one reading a passage like this aloud with various tones of voice, perhaps like a kind of miniature play.

In *The Book on Adler* Kierkegaard concealed that he had any great familiarity with Adler. He writes, for example, that he "completely renounces any private view of Magister Adler, for which I have no data at all."⁴⁷ By contrast, in his journal he expresses concern for Adler. Thus, shortly after August 16, 1847, he wrote: "I do not at all like this whole business with Adler. I am in truth all too inclined to keep Adler afloat. We need dynamic personalities, unselfish persons who are not immersed and exhausted in endless consideration for job, wife, and children."⁴⁸ Kierkegaard also considered writing to Adler to ask him to renounce what he said in the "Preface" to *Some Sermons*. This suggests that Kierkegaard believed that he would have been able to convince Adler to take such a step, despite the fact that church authorities were unsuccessful in this endeavor. He also feared that if *The Book on Adler* were published, it would have too strong an effect upon Adler and considered dividing it

⁴⁴ *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, ed. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996, pp. 234–5.

⁴⁵ *Pap.* VII–2, B 235, p. 171 / *BA*, 296.

⁴⁶ Adolph Peter Adler, *Studier*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1843, p. 143.

⁴⁷ *Pap.* VII–2 B 235, p. 178 / *BA*, 92.

⁴⁸ *SKS* 20, 196, NB2:138 / *BA*, Supplement, p. 224.

up such that only the principle ideas would be published and all references to Adler would be erased, which was indeed the final result. He would thereby be freed from the cruelty of “slaying a person that way.”⁴⁹

On December 1, 1847, *The Book on Adler* seems to have been finished—although Kierkegaard continued to work on it—but he foresaw that if it were published, the unfortunate thing would be “that one gets involved with this confused person who has nothing to do and presumably therefore will write and write....No, rather let Adler go his way. Then the book will be recast as a series of essays.”⁵⁰ And that is what it became.

Formally, it was the content of *Some Sermons* and *Studies* which spelled the downfall of Adler. Prior to his dismissal, he had received a letter in which the Bishop of Zealand, Jakob Peter Mynster (1775–1854), posed four questions. First, the bishop asked if he would admit that he was in an exalted and confused mental state when he wrote and published *Some Sermons* and *Studies*, which Adler had to deny since he believed that what he had written made perfect sense. In the second question, the implicit request was that he renounce his claim to have received a revelation. Adler’s response can perhaps be conceived as evasive, since he now seems to conceive his revelation experience as an event which made him a believer and thus saved him in a miraculous fashion; at the same time he wrote that from his description of the course of the events of that memorable night, it must be clear to everyone “to which Gospel and to which revelations I subscribe and have taught others to subscribe.”⁵¹

The third question posed to Adler aimed at getting him to acknowledge that in the two works there were propositions which were in conflict with Christian dogmatics: first, the claim that the earth was originally good and second, the claim that the sex drive is the evil spirit that is spoken of in the words dictated by Christ. Finally, he was asked whether he would admit that there were various propositions which were offensive and inappropriate. In answer to these two questions, Adler referred to a statement of support which 115 members of his congregation had submitted to the church authorities in 1844. They testified here that there had always been “a sincere Christian spirit which pervaded all his discourses and sermons.”⁵² The result was that Mynster was obliged to maintain the view that Adler was still in a confused mental state and could therefore not be entrusted with the responsibility for a congregation. Adler was hereafter dismissed.

IV.

In an entry from 1847 under the heading, “For the Preface,” a reference to a possible preface to *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard wrote:

In this way I am separated from this book. It is, which will seem strange to many, it is actually an upbuilding book—for the one who understands it; and, which will seem

⁴⁹ SKS 20, 201, NB2:150 / BA, Supplement, p. 225. (Translation slightly modified.)

⁵⁰ SKS 20, 264, NB3:38 / BA, Supplement, p. 225. (Translation slightly modified.)

⁵¹ Adolph Peter Adler, *Skrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1845, p. 18. BA, Supplement, p. 344.

⁵² Adler, *Skrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende*, p. 6. BA, Supplement, p. 342. (Translation slightly modified.)

even stranger to many, on behalf of my little bit of renown I ask no more than to have written the book, since in connection with it there is an element of good fortune that is seldom offered, since seldom, perhaps, has a person by going the wrong way come as opportunely as Mag. Adler has for me.⁵³

One cannot immediately say whether Kierkegaard is here speaking in his own name. In connection with the book, he had toyed with several possible pseudonyms. The pseudonym Johannes Climacus was rejected, “since he is already marked as the one who has said he is not a Christian.” Instead, he mentions Petrus Minor, Thomas Minor, Vincentius Minor, and Ataraxius Minor.⁵⁴ In a variant of the “Preface,” dated November 1847, he concludes: “since perhaps rarely has a person by going wrong come so opportunely as Mag. Adler has for Vincentius Minor.”⁵⁵

With the 1846 publication of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in which, as Kierkegaard himself later wrote, “The issue: becoming a Christian” is posed,⁵⁶ the pseudonymous authorship is concluded for Kierkegaard—at least retrospectively. The occupation with Adler and his claim to have received a revelation raised for Kierkegaard the problem of who can speak with authority in religious matters. The entire *Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard wrote, is an investigation of the concept of “authority.”⁵⁷ Kierkegaard described—again retrospectively—his occupation with Adler as a turning point in the authorship since its result, “On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle,” received a central place in *On My Work as an Author* from 1851. Kierkegaard did not regard the *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* to be related to the individual works of the pseudonymous authorship. He viewed them rather as related to the authorship as a whole, including the edifying discourses, by showing that he was speaking without authority:

The significance of this little book (which does not stand *in* the authorship as much as it relates totally *to* the authorship and for that reason also was anonymous, in order to be kept outside entirely) is not very easy to explain without going into the whole matter. It is like a navigation mark *by* which one steers but, note well, in such a way that the pilot understands precisely that *he is to keep a certain distance from it*. It defines the boundary of the authorship. “The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle” (essay no. 2) is: “The genius is without authority.”⁵⁸

“The category of the entire authorship” is thereby defined.⁵⁹ Based on this statement, there is no reason to doubt that Kierkegaard also speaks in his own name in his notes on the “Preface” to *The Book on Adler*.

In both *The Book on Adler* and “On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle,” the genius and the apostle are defined as belonging “each in its qualitative

⁵³ Pap. VIII–2 B 20, p. 73 / BA, Supplement, p. 228.

⁵⁴ Pap. VIII–2 B 24, p. 74 / BA, Supplement, p. 224.

⁵⁵ Pap. VIII–2 B 27, p. 79 / BA, 6.

⁵⁶ SVI XIII, 549 / PV, 63.

⁵⁷ Pap. VIII–2 B 27, p. 76 / BA, 4.

⁵⁸ SVI XIII, 494, note / PV, 6, note.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

sphere of immanence and of transcendence.”⁶⁰ Both the genius and the apostle bring something new; but whereas what is new for the genius is taken up and assimilated in general cultural development, that is, “vanishes in the human race’s general assimilation,”⁶¹ what is new for the apostle stands outside time and is neither taken up nor assimilated in this development. The appearance of the eternal in time, “the moment” in the terminology of *Philosophical Fragments*, is an example of something new of this kind. The genius anticipates something that will come later, and his novelty is assimilated and captured by time; by contrast, the message of the apostle remains a novelty, does not anticipate anything that comes later and therefore is not assimilated. The genius is a genius because he is gifted, for example, with unique artistic or scholarly abilities; the apostle is an apostle by the fact that he communicates a message which has been revealed to him. Thus, the apostle speaks with divine authority, while the genius does not; the genius speaks with the authority which his special abilities give him a right to speak with. His insight or production is the proof of the fact that he is a genius. Genius can be determined with sense certainty. By contrast, there is no sense certainty for determining whether a person is an apostle and speaks with divine authority. If there could be empirical evidence for a person being an apostle, he would be no apostle. The only proof he has is his own words. Only for the person who believes in him is he an apostle.

Everyone who at some point brings something new into the world must therefore be either a genius or an apostle. To bring something new is to express a knowledge which is not given immediately for the educated individual at the given level of the cultural development. This novelty must then either be captured by development, that is, it must be understood as dialectical—to use an expression from *Philosophical Fragments*—in the direction of time and therefore subjected to the category of time, or this is not the case, and the category of novelty must then be eternity.

It was this “either/or” that Kierkegaard confronted Adler with: either a genius or an apostle. According to his own view, Adler communicated a revelation, that is, he should be understood as speaking with divine authority. But at the same time, he writes the following in a letter to Mynster from July 1845, written in order to make “as great an overture as possible”: “in the future, by working out and calmly developing the ideas over a longer time, I will see my way to have the Christian content unfold in a form more appropriate and more in accord with the specific words of the Holy Scripture.”⁶² Adler had now, in Kierkegaard’s words, forgotten “the doctrine communicated by him (by a revelation)”⁶³ and had begun to believe that with some work, the novelty he introduced could be mediated into cultural development and thereby lose the character of novelty.

Kierkegaard argued that in *Some Sermons*, where Adler recorded his revelatory experiences, he had appeared as an apostle; in his later works, however, Adler

⁶⁰ SKS 11, 98 / WA, 94.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Adler, *Skrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende*, pp. 23–4 / BA, Supplement, pp. 347–8.

⁶³ Pap. VII–2 B 235, p. 133 / BA, Supplement, p. 274.

seems to have understood himself as a genius.⁶⁴ But, Kierkegaard writes, Adler must understand these two categories—which are qualitatively different for Kierkegaard—to be one and the same.⁶⁵ In this case, there arises “the total confusion that is implicit in the misrelation between Adler’s first and last statements, or, to express it more precisely, in his total ignoring of this misrelation.”⁶⁶ Adler wants to be both a genius and an apostle, wants to be a religious genius; but this is impossible since these are contrary determinations and no mediation is possible. Adler is thus neither an apostle or in the real sense a genius—or rather, one thing indicates that he is the one, while something else indicates that he is the other. He is therefore at best a “confused genius.” “It is,” Kierkegaard wrote some years later in his journal, “frightful to see the recklessness with which the philosophers and the like introduce differentiating categories like genius, talent, etc. into religion. They have no intimation that religion is thereby abolished.”⁶⁷ This was also one of the themes in “On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle.”

As a “neither/nor,” Adler is simply confused; for he believes that he is “both/and.” Kierkegaard expresses his argument against Adler, as follows, on June 18, 1843: “we have before us a man, who has been called with a revelation and who has received a teaching from the savior himself, which he wrote down following the savior’s dictation.”⁶⁸ On May 10, 1845, Adler explained to the church authorities that he was saved in a wonderful way, and although both *Some Sermons* and *Studies* must be regarded as “a child’s first babbling, lisping, imperfect voice, I nevertheless believe that the words testify that an event through which I was deeply moved by faith did occur.”⁶⁹ Finally, Adler wrote to Bishop Mynster on July 5, 1845: “I do not insist on regarding my *Sermons* (or *Studies*) as revelations alongside or opposite to Christianity, but I regard the words written down in the preface to *Sermons* and my frequently recurring dogmatic categories as reference points that have been necessary for me in order in the beginning of the enthusiasm to be able to set the Christian substance securely in a form.”⁷⁰ Kierkegaard’s conclusion had to stand: Adler was confused.

There is hardly reason to criticize Kierkegaard’s conclusion itself; but one could say something against his argumentation. In contrast to Kierkegaard, Adler did not understand the categories of “genius” and “apostle” to be contrary opposites, that is, as qualitatively different.

Adler took his concept of “genius” from the Romantic conception of genius, which has its immediate roots in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s (1775–1854) transcendental idealism, where the product of the genius, art, is defined as a synthesis

⁶⁴ See, for example, Adolph Peter Adler, *Studier og Exempler*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1846, pp. 207–8.

⁶⁵ *Pap.* VII–2 B 235, p. 154 / *BA*, Supplement, p. 281.

⁶⁶ *Pap.* VII–2 B 235, p. 156 / *BA*, Supplement, pp. 282–3.

⁶⁷ *SKS* 23, 19, NB15:19 / *JP* 1, 1017.

⁶⁸ *Pap.* VII–2 B 235, p. 123.

⁶⁹ Adler, *Skrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende*, p. 18 / *BA*, Supplement, p. 345.

⁷⁰ Adler, *Skrivelser min Suspension og Entledigelse vedkommende*, p. 23 / *BA*, Supplement, p. 347–8.

of nature and freedom, as an instinctual, not intellectual presentation of the infinite.⁷¹ In the Danish context, the Romantic conception of genius is expressed by Henrik Steffens (1773–1845), who defined poetry as an expression of an intuition (*anelse*) of the infinite, and intuition, even in the finite, finds traces of the eternal.⁷² Similarly, Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872) considered the expression of the genius to be grounded in “a higher instinct, whereby a higher nature’s inner power drives and steers the individual.” In the artistic act of producing, “the individual must feel himself seized and moved, and feel himself as the organ for an idea, which by its own inner force creates and forms in the person’s inward being.”⁷³ Adler’s conception of genius was similar. For him the genius was a person who has seen God’s secret; the genius is “a mouthpiece, a proclaimer, a seer, a visionary.”⁷⁴ The difference between a genius and an apostle was, for Adler, not a qualitative difference; Jesus spoke with God’s spirit to the genius and the genius’ communication of the message is difficult to understand; Jesus is like the sun in darkness, a sun which again has disappeared, and the genius speaks in and through this darkness. Apostles are merely better than the genius at communicating what has been revealed, for “They have seen Jesus’ deeds and heard his words—they had a silhouette, and the Holy Spirit reminded them of everything.”⁷⁵ In his later, somewhat clearer reflections on genius, Adler characterizes it straightforwardly as a tool, and he speaks of the moment of inspiration or the moment of enthusiasm as designations for the meetings of the genius with the divine.⁷⁶ Kierkegaard judges Adler to be confused, based on Kierkegaard’s own definitions of the concepts and his own conviction of the existence of an unbreachable gap between the immanent and the transcendent sphere.

In his treatment of Adler, Kierkegaard arrived at a positive result, which he published in “On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle,” and a negative result, namely, that Adler was simply confused. Cleverly he avoided publishing his reflections on Adler, which would have amounted to shooting flies with a canon. For Kierkegaard, who conceived himself as “a secret agent in the highest service,”⁷⁷ Adler was easy prey.

V.

On May 2, 1846, a mentally hurt Kierkegaard traveled to Berlin, fleeing the many attacks which had appeared in the satirical weekly, *The Corsair*, since January. On

⁷¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), ed. by R.-E. Schulz, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1957, pp. 288ff.

⁷² Henrik Steffens, *Indledning til filosofiske Forelæsninger*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1803, p. 31 and p. 165.

⁷³ Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Om Poesie og Konst*, Copenhagen: Tegnagel 1834, pp. 367–8.

⁷⁴ Adolph Peter Adler, *Studier og Exempler*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1846, p. 207.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

⁷⁶ Adolph Peter Adler, *Christelige Afhandlinger*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 1852, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁷ SKS 20, 424, NB5:138 / JP 6, 6192.

May 16, he returned. In June, Adler's four books appeared, which Kierkegaard bought on the 12th of the same month. On August 25, he acquired Adler's small publication of the proceedings surrounding his dismissal. From the time of his return home from Berlin until September 7, there are no journal entries. Beginning June 12, Kierkegaard seems to have been occupied with Adler, who, judging from the Adler book, had apparently set his dialectical machine into full flight. As is clear from the discussion above, something positive came from this intense occupation with Adler, namely, the definition of the difference between the genius and the apostle, and thus, the concept of "authority." There can be no doubt that Kierkegaard regarded this result as essential for understanding his own authorship. But why did Kierkegaard find it necessary to write an entire book on Adler? Adler's case seems to have exercised very few people; it did not catch the eye of the press, and his books do not seem to have sold particularly well. In a letter dated December 16, 1843, addressed to the Danish Cancellery, the government agency concerned with domestic matters, Mynster mentions that of the 1,000 copies of *Some Sermons* which were printed, only 50 had been sold.⁷⁸ The case attracted absolutely no attention.

As noted above, Kierkegaard's interest in Adler in June 1846 and the months that followed did not arise because he had just become aware of his case. As late as the spring of 1848 during his stay in Berlin, he describes Adler *en passant* as an example of the "unhinged individuals, who have grown dizzy by throwing themselves out in the infinite" and in this context refers to the fact that Adler thought that "one could not distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the devil."⁷⁹ Kierkegaard's interest in "the unhinged individual" was likely merely occasioned by the fact that in June 1846, Adler published no less than four books, just as Kierkegaard himself had done in the same month two years previously. Adler himself, incidentally, never said that he, for his part, could not distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the devil. Perhaps Kierkegaard meant that Adler seemed to be suggesting that the evil spirit had perverted human reason to such a degree that human beings can no longer distinguish the devil's voice, that is, perverted reason, from God's voice, that is, revelation.

Though Adler is not mentioned in Kierkegaard's published works, perhaps one of the reasons Kierkegaard was occupied so intensely with Adler in 1846–47 was that many of the central right-Hegelian views which, in *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, for example, are presented and attacked in a simple form, are found in Adler. Adler's dissertation, which presents the doctrine of the moment and the claim that human beings are saved by objectivity, Adler's attempt to put faith in the form of the concept in his lectures on Hegel's objective logic, and his conception of Christianity as a part of human culture, might all be stumbling-blocks which evoked Kierkegaard's criticism of his contemporaries' understanding of Christianity.

Translated by K. Brian Soderquist

⁷⁸ Rigsarkivet, Cultusministeriet, 1. kontor, 06/1–401, p. 1642.

⁷⁹ *Pap.* VII–1 A 143, p. 83, note / *JP* 2, 1348, p. 98, note. (Translation slightly modified.)