

Introduction

The writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) have undergone a fate that he himself foresaw: appropriation and interpretation by scholarship and the canons of the academy – whether theological, philosophical, historical, or literary. Hence arise the uses of Kierkegaard and the primary myths they engender: Kierkegaard as “the father of existentialism” or inspirer of Christian “neo-orthodoxy” (the early Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann) or, more recently, Kierkegaard as proto-deconstructionist (Mark C. Taylor, Christopher Norris). Appropriated into the “history of philosophy” or “the history of theology,” with the historian’s need for typologizing (hence, comparing and contrasting him with other thinkers) and the professor’s need to cover a wide range of “material,” Kierkegaard’s writings ironically have often become what he himself feared – a “subsection” within the history of thought, to say nothing of grist for the mill of academic publication and the furtherance of academic careers.¹

The irony is compounded by two facts: first, Kierkegaard’s stated intention in his literature was for what he called a “primitive” reading that engendered reflection and self-reflection in the reader, rather than merely abstract reflection unrelated to an existing person’s concerns. “Scholarship more and more turns away from a primitive impression of existence . . . One does not love, does not have faith, does not act; but one knows what erotic love is, what faith is.”² So too, as a writer he distinguishes between an “essential author” who is inwardly directed, with a distinctive life-view (*Livsanskuelse*), from a “premise author” who lacks inward direction.³ Hence, Kierkegaard muses again and again on the difficulties of writing and reading, the uncertainties of communication between author and reader. Second, such primitive reading was

¹ CUP 250 (SV VII 211).

² CUP 344 (SV VII 298).

³ OAR 3–11 (*Pap.* VII² B 235, 6–16).

meant to outmaneuver the scholarly apparatus of high academic culture that systematically places obstacles before such primitive reading, obstacles that he thought revealed deep resistances that people place before such reading and understanding. Judging by the profusion of scholarly literature on Kierkegaard, even he has been swallowed up into the “subsection-uniform.”

All of this makes yet another book “about Kierkegaard” immediately suspect, as a basic misunderstanding and betrayal of his intent as a writer and thinker. For more readers than care to admit it, there is something deeply opaque and troubling in strategy and spirit about Kierkegaard’s thought, for he is a writer who calls attention to the resistances against primitive reading, and he can make one ashamed of one’s own thoughts and passions. In this he resembles such reflective interrogators as Socrates and Ludwig Wittgenstein; American philosopher O. K. Bouwsma, who knew Wittgenstein, said that he was “the nearest to a prophet I have ever known,” and that “he robbed me of a lazy comfort in my own mediocrity.”⁴

But Bouwsma’s reactions to Wittgenstein also offer a clue as to how one might write and read “about Kierkegaard” without betraying Kierkegaard’s intent. In his own writing on Wittgenstein, Bouwsma said that he was “a helper” who might orient a reader to Wittgenstein’s thought.⁵ “Helper” is perhaps unfortunate, for it is not that Kierkegaard (or Wittgenstein) is somehow beyond summation, scrutiny, or disagreement. But “helper” is apt if it means that the solution to scholarly misunderstanding of Kierkegaard is not hagiography – indeed, Kierkegaard would himself see hagiography as yet another misreading. The solution to both scholarly misunderstanding and hero-worship is, rather, engagement with his writing. What Kierkegaard desired – and deserves – above all is readers (and writers) who attempt to “think with” (and “against”) him, to enter into the concerns and issues he raises with philosophical *eros* and passion.⁶

The present study is intended as an attempt to “think with” Kierkegaard, specifically to help one approach Kierkegaard as a

⁴ O. K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949–1951*, ed. with an introduction by J. L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), xv–xvi.

⁵ O.K. Bouwsma, “The Blue Book,” in *Philosophical Essays* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 177. Cited also in Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 4.

⁶ “Thinking with Kierkegaard” is the felicitous subtitle of a book of essays, Richard H. Bell, ed., *The Grammar of the Heart: Thinking with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein: New Essays in Moral Philosophy and Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

religious thinker. By “religious thinker” I mean that his thought is *about* religion and at the same time is itself religious. Kierkegaard both analyzes religion and seeks to evoke religious dispositions in his readers. Indeed, one reason that Kierkegaard is a thinker to be reckoned with is that he has so many arrows in his quiver: as a religious thinker he at once presents profound and interesting philosophical and theological reflections *about* religion, but also presents his thoughts within a literary form that offers to an interested reader a “training” in religious ways of thinking and living. It is in this important sense that Kierkegaard wishes not only to describe what religion (and especially the Christian religion) are, but also to show it; his philosophy and theology are an introduction to, an exercise of, the practice of religious reflection. In this study, I will place him in dialogue with other religious thinkers, and I will disagree with him on certain theological matters, but throughout I attempt not simply to place him within either the history of thought or a typology of theologians, but to engage sympathetically with the questions and issues he raises as a religious thinker. In my view, this is what any work of commentary and criticism should do with any thinker of caliber.

Before elaborating on my approach more fully, it may help the reader to point out how this book differs from other approaches. Modern scholarship has devised a variety of ways to “read” Kierkegaard’s authorship. This is due not only to the prolixity and inventiveness of scholars, but also to the fact that, as we have seen, Kierkegaard himself is many-sided as a thinker, at once a religious thinker, a philosopher, and a literary artist. Add to this his self-proclaimed irony and the pseudonymity of much of his authorship, to say nothing of its dialectical complexity, and Kierkegaard’s writings appear to be a vast field awaiting the tools of competing schools of thought.

First, some scholars, like Josiah Thompson and Walter Lowrie, read Kierkegaard’s literature biographically, as an account – veiled and cryptic though it be – of Kierkegaard’s own struggles and turmoils, in particular the broken engagement with Regine Olsen and his troubled, ambivalent relationship with his father.⁷ The assumption here is that the primary “meaning” of Kierkegaard’s literature is a

⁷ See Josiah Thompson, *The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Works* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), and *Kierkegaard* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938) and *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton University Press, 1942; 1965); Naomi Lebowitz, *Kierkegaard: A Life of Allegory* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

veiled communication of his personal experiences. On this reading, the literary devices he employed were designed primarily to disguise, yet indirectly reveal, the hidden secret meaning of his life. In more interesting vein is the approach that explores the literature with biographical methods aimed at showing the interplay between the author's various textual and empirical "I's," and the ambiguities of those various authorial masks.⁸ Kierkegaard's use of pseudonymity – the device of publishing some of his books under pseudonyms – and the "secrets" that literature can simultaneously reveal and conceal have all understandably led many scholars to read the literature biographically. There is ample room for this kind of reading, for Kierkegaard himself acknowledged these deeply personal relationships as the fountainhead of his own productivity, and he speaks in his journals of the "secret note" that interprets his literature.⁹ If the literature was, as he said, the product of his own struggles, are there not clues to these struggles to be unearthed in the texts, just as they are clearly spelled out in the journals? To take only one example: surely, this approach concludes, the meaning of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling* is Søren's sacrifice of his engagement to Regine Olsen. At its extreme, this view holds the Kierkegaardian literature to be simply material for psychological diagnosis.

The biographical approaches nonetheless have limitations. As Mark C. Taylor has noted, Kierkegaard is not interested in his own existence, but in the existence of the reader; Kierkegaard deliberately withdraws behind the pseudonymous authors he creates.¹⁰ He was adept at employing masks for the purposes of self-concealment and self-revelation, but he also maintained that the poet deals not with personal experience as such, but with the "possibilities" and "idealities" that experience generates. One's own "personal actuality" is not legitimate literary property.¹¹ In short, many things engaged Kierkegaard's concern as a writer, and not just his own struggles. His concern is with the "idealities," the "possibilities," of existence.

A second strategy of reading is to approach Kierkegaard primarily as a philosopher, a thinker who presents philosophical arguments and

⁸ Joakim Garff, "The Eyes of Argus: The Point of View and Points of View with Respect to Kierkegaard's 'Activity as an Author,'" *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991): 29–54.

⁹ *JP* v 5645 (*Pap.* IVA 85, n.d., 1843).

¹⁰ Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 29–30.

¹¹ *TA* 98–99 (*SV* VIII 91–92).

takes positions on certain classic issues in Western thought.¹² C. Stephen Evans, for example, rightly defends seeing at least the major Climacean writings (*Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) not only as philosophy, but much of it as good philosophy, and Kierkegaard as a philosopher who entertains ideas and presents philosophical arguments.¹³ None the less, Kierkegaard is a philosopher with a difference. His concerns are often outside the mainstream of the philosophical tradition. As Richard H. Bell has noted, whereas philosophers of religion are often concerned with the justification of religious belief, or the range of epistemic credentials, that is, with presenting philosophical arguments, Kierkegaard, while concerned with these matters too, is equally interested in curing diseases of thought and life.¹⁴ This contributes to the peculiar elusiveness of his thinking. Stanley Cavell's reflections on Wittgenstein and Freud characterize Kierkegaard's religious thought as well: it aims at preventing understanding unaccompanied by inner change.¹⁵ And James Conant warns against seeing Kierkegaard as concerned primarily with "evidences" for religious or Christian belief.¹⁶ *Pace* Conant Kierkegaard is concerned with such epistemological questions, yet Conant rightly sees that Kierkegaard's epistemological interests are in the service of another concern: allowing the religious context of the use of such concepts to stand forth. Hence, the therapy involved in Kierkegaard's philosophy too is not conducted only by marshaling arguments, but by unlearning old patterns and habits of thought, asking ourselves what we understand and do not understand, and by turning our attention as much to ourselves as "thinkers" and "questioners" as to the "issues." This therapy confronts illusions, disentangles meanings, weighs what we say and how we live.¹⁷

A third approach, sometimes in response to the philosophic approach

¹² For Kierkegaard as "paraphilosopher," see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard. The Arguments of the Philosophers*, ed. Ted Honderich (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 8–18.

¹³ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1983), 4.

¹⁴ Bell, *The Grammar of the Heart*, xii.

¹⁵ Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in George Pitcher, ed., *Wittgenstein: The "Philosophical Investigations."* *Modern Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Amelie Rorty. Anchor Books. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966), 184.

¹⁶ James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," in Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam eds., *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 209.

¹⁷ See again O. K. Bouwsma, "The Blue Book," in *Philosophical Essays*, 183–87, on the therapy in Wittgenstein's philosophy of dispelling illusions.

priations of Kierkegaard, insists that Kierkegaard cannot be understood apart from his literary artistry. Louis Mackey's *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* has been the primary advocate of this position. He claims not only that Kierkegaard's writings are literary – this has been long recognized and studied in works such as Aage Henriksen's *Kierkegaards Romaner (Kierkegaard's Novels)* – but that an understanding of his literature is possible *only* through the use of literary critical approaches to the literature. For Mackey, only attending to the literary aspects of this literature can reveal its true shape and character.¹⁸ The strength of this approach is that it is sensitive to the qualities of Kierkegaard's literature as literature. Helpful as Mackey's study is, however, one must wonder whether such an extensive claim for literary study is warranted. A primary difficulty with this approach is that it too tends to misconstrue the intent of the writings. As Robert C. Roberts has put it, Mackey's concern, as he himself admits, is to understand Kierkegaard as Kierkegaard; Roberts judiciously counters that Kierkegaard's concern is rather with the reader's coming to understand other matters.¹⁹

Related to this are varieties of deconstructionist readings of Kierkegaard's writing that undermine the illusion of an authoritative reading of a text. They find in Kierkegaard's practice of indirect communication, duplicity, irony, and his uses of multiple pseudonymous masks ample warrant for an approach that rejects a single authoritative reading of the literature, allowing for multiple, indeed contradictory, readings.²⁰ The undoubted strength of this approach is that it takes seriously the possibility of multiple readings of his literature, that one may, for example, read the aesthetic writings of *Either/Or I* and opt for a life of pleasure, what Kierkegaard describes as an aesthetic existence, and that there is not an internal necessity to the progression of the "stages on life's way." This approach also serves notice that one should not (and need not) make claims concerning Kierkegaard's authorial intentions as the key to "understanding the meaning" of his

¹⁸ Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); Aage Henriksen, *Kierkegaards Romaner* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1954).

¹⁹ Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, 6.

²⁰ Examples are found in the series *Kierkegaard and Postmodernism*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, including Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986); John Vignaux Smyth, *A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard, and Barthes* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986); Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988). See also John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

writing.²¹ However, one restrained practitioner of deconstructive readings, Christopher Norris, has cautioned that, even without resorting to authorial intention, there are limits to this deconstructive reading of Kierkegaard. Instead of dissolving the texts into an ironic play of tropes, Kierkegaard's decentering texts employ irony to another end, made clear already in his dissertation *The Concept of Irony*: they drive the reader to a self-irony that may lead to a decisiveness that affirms "an undeconstructible bedrock of authenticated truth" in the choice of a way of life, be it aesthetic or ethical or religious existence.²²

Falling broadly within the literary category, and informed by postmodern and theological concerns, is George Pattison's provocative study, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image*. Pattison explores an escalating tension in Kierkegaard's literature between the distancing of aesthetic and narrative imaging and the requirements of communication and Christian discipleship. The limits of the aesthetic image and the dogmatic theological heritages are revealed finally as violence; the poet who tries to depict the crucified is a torturer. In contrast to poetic idealization, the image of the crucified One, as a crucifixion of the image, gives a much truer portrayal of Christian discipleship.²³

Pattison's work engages a number of the same issues and concerns of this study, especially in chapters 4–7, exploring Christ as Pattern. Where my approach differs is in reflecting upon positive *uses* of the imagination, not solely in providing ideals of perfection giving comfort to pilgrims, but as learned imaginative capabilities that, in the words of another recent study, provide a "transforming vision" within concrete human existence.²⁴ Kierkegaard's "inverted dialectic," or what I have

²¹ Henning Fenger's historical analysis of Kierkegaard is allied in result if not in method to deconstructionist readings. He calls into question Kierkegaard's stated religious intent in *The Point of View*, yet still locates the meaning of the texts in authorial intention. Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard: The Myths and Their Origins: Studies in the Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

²² Christopher Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), 87; see also his "The Ethics of Reading and the Limits of Irony: Kierkegaard Among the Postmodernists," *Southern Humanities Review* 23:1 (Winter 1989):1–35; and "De Man Unfair to Kierkegaard?: An Allegory of (Non)-Reading," in Birgit Bertung, ed., *Kierkegaard – Poet of Existence. Kierkegaard Conferences 1* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1989), 89–107.

²³ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious: From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), xi. Pattison generously reviews, and disagrees with, my own work.

²⁴ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

called elsewhere the “reversal” involved in “repetition,” is the key to seeing this positive role for the imagination.²⁵ In ethical upbuilding, in religious repentance, and in faith, hope, and love as imitation of Christ as Pattern, the imagination breaks through the limitations of aesthetics into the harshest concrete realities of life, including, as we will see in the last chapter, the political realm.

Pattison’s work partakes of another method, with a lengthy history behind it, of reading Kierkegaard as a *religious author*. The present study too naturally falls into this category, but we might pause to consider what is involved in making this claim. The approach is in one sense self-evident; even if questions arise about whether, and if so in what sense, Kierkegaard is a philosopher, he is certainly a religious thinker of the first rank. He described himself in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* as a “religious author,” one who did not begin as an aesthetic author and then became a religious writer, but whose production had a religious teleology from the outset.²⁶ Even if, with Henning Fenger, one does not accept Kierkegaard’s later account of his authorship, one can still read the literature on its own as religious. The difference, then, from biographical religious readings of Kierkegaard’s literature noted earlier, is that one can simply turn to the writings as *writings* and investigate their content. In short, there is much to be said for reading Kierkegaard as a religious and Christian author.²⁷

If Kierkegaard can be read as a religious author, is he therefore a *theologian*? After all, he was a student of Christian theology, especially familiar with Lutheran dogmatic theology and Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*.²⁸ Further, he by and large accepted the established dogmas of the Christian faith, and, apart from some notable exceptions that we will consider along the way, he did not believe that the

²⁵ On “inverted dialectic,” see Sylvia Walsh, “Kierkegaard: Poet of the Religious,” in George Pattison, ed., *Kierkegaard on Art and Communication* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 6–8. Walsh develops this positive understanding of the imagination in her fine recent study *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). On “repetition in reversal,” see my *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of the Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

²⁶ *PV* 5–6 (*SV* XIII 517–18).

²⁷ C. Stephen Evans, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Christian Psychology: Insight for Counseling and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 9.

²⁸ On Kierkegaard’s early studies in theology, see, for example, Niels Thulstrup, “Theological and Philosophical Studies,” in *Kierkegaard’s View of Christianity*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1978), 1, 38–60, and Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton University Press, 1980), 41–45. Kierkegaard studied under the rationalist theologian H. N. Clausen and read Schleiermacher with H. L. Martensen. He was also familiar with the range of theological manuals.

established dogmas called for revision: “The doctrine in the established Church and its organization are very good. But the lives, our lives – believe me, they are mediocre.”²⁹ Because Kierkegaard’s writings reveal not only profound literary creativity and philosophical acuity, but also a detailed knowledge of the history of theology and of dogmatics, it is possible and even instructive to trace out Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christian doctrinal issues and the positions that he occupied theologically. I will treat these issues in due course.

A common way of studying Kierkegaard as a “theologian” is the descriptive or comparative approach. This has a long history in Kierkegaard scholarship, including such classic studies as Torsten Bohlin’s *Kierkegaards dogmatiska åskådning* (*Kierkegaard’s Dogmatic Views*).³⁰ Bohlin’s works, as described by one commentator, do indeed establish a series of “points of contact between SK and theological positions of the past.”³¹ Another example of a descriptive account of “Kierkegaard as theologian” is Louis Dupré, who in his study of that title locates Kierkegaard historically and systematically as an intermediary figure between Reformation Protestantism and Roman Catholic theology. Kierkegaard’s dialectic of existence is, for Dupré, the most consistent application of Reformation principles, especially the principle of subjectivity and the importance of the individual conscience. Yet Kierkegaard also relates to the Catholic tradition in his understanding of freedom’s role in faith and grace and reintegrating Christian asceticism with Reformation solafideism.³²

Nonetheless, as Dupré notes, there are limitations in approaching Kierkegaard as a theologian. Kierkegaard’s religious and Christian thought is misrepresented if it is overly systematized, or if the Socratic nature of his “dialectical probings” is neglected in the interest of simply stating his “positions” on theological issues.³³

Finally, mention should be made of the common interpretation of Kierkegaard as an *existentialist*, a label that carries both philosophical and theological weight. The standard portrait, arrived at by placing Kierkegaard as a progenitor of later philosophical existentialists such as

²⁹ *JP* VI 6727 (*Pap.* x⁴ A 33, n.d. 1851).

³⁰ Torsten Bohlin, *Kierkegaards dogmatiska åskådning* (*Kierkegaard’s Dogmatic Views*) (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1925); in German: *Kierkegaards dogmatische Anschauung*, trans. Ilse Meyer-Lüne (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927).

³¹ Per Lønning, “Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker,” in Thulstrup and Thulstrup, eds., *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, 1, 165.

³² Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), x–xi.

³³ Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian*, xii.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, and theological existentialists such as Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich, leads to a number of longstanding, persistent characterizations of Kierkegaard, some accurate, others less so.

According to this picture, as a philosophical existentialist, Kierkegaard is praised or blamed as an “irrationalist,” “subjectivist,” or “relativist.” Epistemologically, his attacks on Hegelian rationalism and foundationalism, his reflections on the “leap,” the “absurd,” and “subjectivity,” are taken as attacks on reason and advocacy of “groundless choice” as the only possible basis for ethical and religious commitment.³⁴ So too, Kierkegaard is charged with being the primary creator of a modern myth of the self as the “solitary individual,” unmoored from history or tradition, a permutation of the Cartesian ego or the self-creating individual of Romanticism, a myth that many see in need of radical deconstruction. To take only one aspect of this picture, Kierkegaard is seen to hold a concept of the person that locates the will as the center of selfhood; for existentialism, in Iris Murdoch’s memorable image, the agent, “thin as a needle, appears in the quick flash of the choosing will.”³⁵ As another commentator has recently put it, under Sartre’s influence, existentialists have focused on notions of an anxious, directionless freedom from which the self creates itself from nothing.³⁶ But, as we will see, Kierkegaard has a very different understanding than Sartre or for that matter Bultmann of human freedom and of the self. To be a “self” ethically and religiously includes the will for Kierkegaard, but the self is hardly self-created by daily exercise of the will.³⁷ The task

³⁴ Peter J. Mehl includes Leo Shestov, Walter Kaufmann, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Robert C. Solomon among those who bring these charges against Kierkegaard; see Peter J. Mehl, “Kierkegaard and the Relativist Challenge to Practical Philosophy,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1987): 247–78, especially 265, 274n. For example, the charge of “subjectivism” and “relativism” is made by Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). Some recent studies that challenge such views include: Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), especially 7–11 (against “relativism”) and 73–78 (on “objectivity”); Edward F. Mooney, “Kierkegaard Our Contemporary: Reason, Subjectivity and the Self,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Fall 1989): 381–97; C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 115, 126–27 (against epistemological relativism), 126–31 (against subjectivism), and ch. 11 (against irrationalism); C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments*. The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion, general ed., Merold Westphal (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

³⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 53.

³⁶ Mehl, “Kierkegaard and the Relativist Challenge to Practical Philosophy,” 248.

³⁷ Two recent critiques of volitionalism, to which we will return in chapter 4, are found in M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, and C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason*. I will return to the theme of the narrative understanding of the self in chapter 2.