
The Eyes of Argus

The Point of View and Points of View With Respect to Kierkegaard's "Activity as an Author"

by Joakim Garff

“The religious is definitely present right from the very beginning. It decidedly has superior power, but it waits patiently for a short time, while the poet is permitted to finish speaking his piece, watching all the while with the eyes of Argus to see that the poet does not cheat and make himself the whole of things.

“I believe that the significance of my activity as an author for these times can be best understood from the above-mentioned point of view.” [SV 18, 125]¹

A Scene on the Text-Stage

One must be careful with metaphors. Take the eyes of Argus, for instance: Argus was a giant whom jealous Hera had ordered to keep watch over Io, with whom Zeus was in love and with whom he wished to have a liaison in the form of a bull. Argus had 100 eyes, which took turns keeping watch. As soon as one closed, another opened. But Argus' eyes only saw Io, and this was good fortune for Hermes, who lay in wait, drew his sword, and suddenly plunged it into Argus.

This, then, is the myth which is embedded in Kierkegaard's metaphor: No fewer than 100 eyes have been marshalled in order to guarantee that “the poet” will not cheat “the religious.” Despite the fact that Kierkegaard himself watches “sleeplessly,” and thus keeps himself “alert, attentive, and obedient” [18, 121n], so that one could not “require more of a spy” [18, 139], he is nonetheless subject to “supervision . . . [,] is himself under the strictest supervision” [SV 18, 134], by nothing less than “Governance,” in whose service Kierkegaard's espionage takes place.

But there is another person looking: *mutatis mutandis*, the reader, who inspects *The Point of View's* hundred eyes, and who thus finds himself in Hermes' position. The reader is a hermeneut. But what point of view should we adopt in viewing *The Point of View*? How can we most effectively spy on the spy? The answer must be: let Kierkegaard himself

carry out the counterespionage. But it is imperative that Kierkegaard be disguised as Climacus, who wrote the following cheerful and cautionary note near the “unscientific” finale of the *Postscript*:

“All ironic observation consists in continually watching out for the ‘How,’ while the honored person, with whom the ironist has the honor to be engaged, is only keeping an eye on the ‘What.’ A man gives voluble and iron-clad assurance that ‘such and such is my belief.’ He does not limit himself to repeating this short formula, however, but explains himself in more detail and dares to vary his language. Well, it is not as easy as one thinks to introduce variations. More than one student might have gotten High Honors if he had not introduced variations, and a great many people have the talent of variation which Socrates admired in Polos: they never say the same thing – about the same thing. The ironist notices this very well. He does not, of course, pay so much attention to what is written in capital letters or to language whose formulaic character can be deduced from the speaker’s diction (the honored person’s ‘What’). But he is careful to notice a little parenthetical clause, a beckoning little predicate, which has escaped the excellent attention of his honored interlocutor. And now, delighting in the variations of expression (*in variatione voluptas*), the ironist is astonished to see that his honored interlocutor does *not*, in fact, believe in his position, not because he is a hypocrite – goodness, no! that would be too serious a matter for an ironist – but because the good fellow has concentrated on yelling his opinion out, and not very much on appropriating it inwardly. The honored person may be right to the extent that he has this belief, a belief which he imagines he will defend with all his strength . . . He can risk his life for it; . . . and yet there could be an ironist, contemporary with him, who could not keep from laughing, even at the very moment that the unfortunate honored man was executed, because the ironist could tell, from the circumstantial evidence he had gathered, that the man had never been honest with himself” [10, 276].

The ironist has examined the different variations with a careful attention to the significance of detail, and he is therefore able to make the mischievous judgment: “the honored person” does *not* hold the belief, in which he, ironically enough, thought he believed. For, although it is true that changes give pleasure by breaking with the banal and the commonplace, it is also a banal truth that changes transform the situation. When our figure intensifies his semantic production of significance, he involuntarily produces more signs, and thereby increases the ambiguity, because the “belief” which was originally put forth does not remain unchanged during the intensification process, but begins to shift in the direction of “the expressions.” In other words, to intensify the production of a “belief” is – quite literally – to produce another “belief.”

It is worth noting that the above judgment is not of an ethical character; indeed, it is quite clearly emphasized that “the honored person” is

nothing so dishonorable as a “hypocrite.” In a certain sense this verdict could have been expected, because he of course does not say anything other than what he believes. But the problem is not that “the honored person” says something which he does not believe, but that he believes something he is *not* able to say, which is why he continually says something *other* than what he believes. And this contradiction seems to occur so spontaneously that it could be a condition for all communication, thus summoning up the heretical idea that no one ever succeeds in being completely “honest with himself,” even if he promised to do so and risked his life for it.

If this “no one” is a text, then this little scene reveals that a text does not always manage to *do* what it is consciously trying to *signify*, and – to say what amounts to the same thing – that there is a difference between what a text *says* it does and what it *actually* does, or at any rate what it does at the same time. One could also say that Climacus has set forth a strategy of reading which pays special attention to the (dys)functions in a text’s attempt to express its significance and to speak its mind.²

And because *The Point of View* is one of the texts which has a “belief,” it is natural to employ the strategy presented by Climacus, in which he makes it possible to read Kierkegaard with Kierkegaard against Kierkegaard. One could hardly ask for a more Kierkegaardian reading of Kierkegaard.

Points of View Before *The Point of View*

If we want to adopt this point of view with respect to *The Point of View* we will have to begin by looking at the point of view of *The Point of View*. That is, we will have to look at what Climacus called the “formula” and the “belief.” And this can be very easily done:

”The content of this little work is thus: what I really am as an author, that I am and have been a religious author, that all of my activity as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem of becoming a Christian . . . What I write here is for orientation and attestation, and it is not a defense or an apology” [18, 81f.]. This is the point of view of *The Point of View*. The situation is complicated, however, by the fact that the authorship already contains a whole series of other points of view “for orientation and attestation,” namely:

1) In an “Appendix” entitled “A View of a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature,” Climacus comments on the writings of a Kierkegaard (M.A.), beginning with *Either/Or* through *Stages on Life’s Way* [cf. 9, 210-252]. In a slightly eccentric way, the “Appendix” derives its energy from indignation in connection with the unmasking of a literary fraud. For years, a Kierkegaard (M.A.), with whom Climacus is not acquainted, has published precisely those works which Climacus himself had thought of writing. With a mixture of disappointment and enthusi-

asm about being more or less synchronized with this magical M.A., Climacus summarizes and comments upon the published writings up to the *Fragments*, which Climacus miraculously managed to finish just before the M.A. could get to it.

2) This same *Postscript*, however, contains a final declaration [cf. 10, 285-289], signed by S. Kierkegaard, which claims that this proclamation is to be “A First and Final Explanation,” but it is in fact neither the one nor the other, because the first explanation is of course already put forth in the “Appendix” mentioned above, and the final explanation still lies ahead. Kierkegaard here tells us that, despite the fact that it can scarcely be of interest to anyone, he acknowledges the pseudonymous production, although he quickly points out that his use of “pseudonymity or polynymity has not been based on anything *accidental* in my *personality* . . . , but is *essential* to the production itself What has been written is certainly mine, but only to the extent that I have given audible words to the life-view of the poetic-actual individual whom I have produced. For my situation is more extreme than that of a poet who *poetically produces* characters but who *himself*, in the preface, is nonetheless *the author*. Impersonally, or personally (but in the third person), I am a prompter, who has poetically produced *authors*, whose *prefaces*, indeed, whose very *names*, are also of their own making. Thus, my pseudonymous books do not contain a single word which is my own. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of what they mean except as a reader . . . ” [10, 285]. Thus there is not the most distant connection – or perhaps only the most distant connection – between the various pseudonymous authors and Kierkegaard himself, “while on the other hand I quite matter-of-factly and straightforwardly am the author of the edifying discourses, for example, and of every word in them” [10, 287].

3) This account concurs with the work *On My Activity as an Author*, which was composed in 1849, but was not published until the summer of 1851. In this work Kierkegaard once again concentrates on the total intention of the authorship: “The movement described in the authorship is *from* ‘the poet’ – from the aesthetic, from ‘philosophy,’ from speculation – *to* the indication of the most profound categories of Christianity . . . This movement has been traversed or described *uno tenore*, in one breath, if I dare say, so that the authorship, viewed as a *whole*, is religious from beginning to end. This is something which anyone who has eyes to see, must see, when he wants to see” [18, 63f.]. In addition to playing upon this theme (and a confused mass of variations on this theme), the work plays a number of little cadenzas on the dialectic of communication, and in a so-called “Supplement” Kierkegaard sets forth his position as a religious author in “Christendom” as well as the tactics he has felt it necessary to employ in order to make Christianity’s radical requirements visible again [cf. 18, 73-77].

4) Then, finally, there is *The Point of View for My Activity as an Author*, which was composed in the course of the summer of 1848 – i.e.,

before *On My Activity as an Author*, and at approximately the same time as *The Sickness Unto Death* and the first draft of *Practice in Christianity*. For reasons to which I will later return, *The Point of View* was put aside, to await posthumous publication by P. C. Kierkegaard in 1859, when it was accompanied by the “Two Notes,” whose connection with *The Point of View* had been pointed out by the younger brother. All told, the number of pages corresponds to the number of Argus’ eyes, and – almost symbolically – the original manuscript has been lost.

What is characteristic of these four pieces is that they each in their own way make normative pronouncements about the authorship and more or less explicitly give instructions for its proper reading. The problem, of course, is that each of the pieces does this in its own way, from different points of view, which not only undermines the normative status of each individual piece, but also compromises the fourth standpoint, which doggedly insists that it is simply *the Point of View*.

For example, if we try to determine the significance of the pseudonyms we get rather contradictory information. Although, as we have seen, in “A First and Final Explanation” Kierkegaard renounces every connection with his pseudonyms, in *The Point of View* he claims that the pseudonymity has been the tactical dissembling of a religious author, whose intention was to catch and keep the reader’s attention [cf. 18, 104]. If we compare these statements with those referred to above, in Climacus’ “Appendix,” we are first of all confronted with an odd situation in which a pseudonym here comments upon the meaning of pseudonymity. Furthermore, Climacus seems neither to be interested in pseudonymity as a maieutic strategy nor to have any notion that pseudonymity is supposed to be a religious author’s dissimulating form of presentation. On the contrary, Climacus packs his “Appendix” with a thematic presentation of the authorship’s contraposition of systematic objectivity and subjectivity as untruth/truth.

Because the point of view taken in “A First and Final Explanation” with respect to the authorship differs from the point of view in *The Point of View*, this latter work must adopt a special point of view with respect to the viewpoint adopted in the former work. And without batting an eye, Kierkegaard passes judgment upon the quality of Climacus’ “Explanation”: “. . . this is a pseudonym who is considering other pseudonyms; that is, this is a third party who cannot know anything about the intentions of a production which is foreign to him. The *Concluding Postscript* is not an aesthetic product, but neither is it a religious one in the strictest sense. It is thus written by one of the pseudonyms, although I have, however, put my name on it as ‘publisher,’ which I did not do with any of my merely aesthetic publications – a hint, to be sure, to the sort of person concerns himself with and has a sense for this sort of thing” [18, 87].

If we in fact have “a sense for this sort of thing,” we will discover that this account does not hold up either, because as late as March 30, 1846 Kierkegaard published *A Literary Review*, with his name as “publisher,”

and this despite the fact that he assigned the *Review* to his aesthetic work. Kierkegaard discovered this discrepancy, however, and in a note which he added later he attempts to anticipate (all) possible objections [cf. 18, 87, note 2].

The four pieces constitute a balance sheet to which are appended a series of invoices which upon close inspection betray shameless inexactitude by the accountant. It is a matter of accounting for the extent of the authorship. *The Point of View*, cites the titles listed below, in the following rank and order: “*First group* (aesthetic productions): *Either/Or, Fear and Trembling, Repetition, The Concept of Anxiety, Prefaces, Philosophical Fragments, Stages on Life’s Way* – plus 18 edifying discourses, which were published along the way. *Second group: Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Third group* (only religious productions): *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, Works of Love, Christian Discourses*, plus a little aesthetic article, *The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress*” [18, 85, note 1].

If this is supposed to be a definition of “the totality of the authorship,” then this “totality” is not identical with “the total production.” For example, the youthfully libelous book on Hans Christian Andersen, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, and the ironic dissertation *On the Concept of Irony* have been passed over in silence, just as one seeks in vain to find the journal articles which Kierkegaard acknowledged in “A First and Final Explanation” [cf. 9, 285]. The most striking thing, however, is that the overview omits mention of *A Literary Review*, and the fact that this cannot be a case of simple forgetfulness,³ is made clear in the above-mentioned apologetic note in which Kierkegaard carefully accounted for the placement of the *Review* in his production. The fact that “the totality of the authorship” and “the total production” are not identical is thus due to the overview’s concern for equilibrium and evenhandedness: the “*Third group* (only religious productions)” is already burdened with one aesthetic work and must thus not be burdened any further – and certainly not by anything so cumbersome as flagrantly aesthetic juvenilia.

We get the impression that it is only by means of this truncated definition of “the authorship” that Kierkegaard can establish the whole, within which the collected mass of writings can be distributed with symmetrical balance and arranged with a maieutic synchronicity that balances between the aesthetic and the religious. This impression is strengthened when we investigate *On My Activity as an Author*, which contains the following proclamation: “The beginning was made, *maieutically*, with aesthetic publication, and the entire pseudonymous production is thus *maieutic* in this way. For this reason this production was also pseudonymous, while the directly religious production – which was present in hints and intimations from the very beginning – was in my own name. The religious production was present from the very beginning, in that the *Two Edifying Discourses* are of course simultaneous with *Either/Or* The *Concluding Postscript* was of course the

midpoint, and – although this is a fact which is only interesting as a curiosity – this is the case so exactly that even the very quantity of work before and after it is quite close to being exactly the same size, if one, quite properly, counts the 18 edifying discourses as a part of the purely religious production. And even the temporal duration of the authorship before and after the *Concluding Postscript* is close to being evenly divided” [18, 65f.].

A curiosity, of course. And particularly when one considers that in *The Point of View* Kierkegaard placed these same eighteen discourses in the “First group,” that is, in his “aesthetic production”! It thus seems paradoxical that the establishment of this *aesthetic* symmetry requires that a work, which is classified as *aesthetic* at one point, must be classified as *religious* at another, and it is no less paradoxical that this symmetry is established precisely in order to defend against an *aesthetic* impression.⁴

So much for the audit of the balance sheet’s various invoices, which borrow heavily against the reader’s goodwill, and which furthermore reveal a troubling discrepancy between the religious credit balance and the aesthetic debit. With respect both to himself and his reader, Kierkegaard must therefore, call the following to mind: “Above all, there is one thing he [the reader] must not forget, the point which must be kept in mind, namely, that the religious must be brought forth in a decisive way” [18, 100, cf. 18, 98].

It is scarcely unreasonable belligerence to ask how and why such an admonition can arise with respect to an authorship which is religious from beginning to end. And why doesn’t Kierkegaard – as a student of Climacus – simply stay with his “formula”? Why does he put forward arguments when this is not an “apology,” but something as matter-of-fact as an “orientation”? What, and where, is the “belief” in all this, and what is the meaning of it?

Let us have a look at *The Point of View*.

The Point of View in *The Point of View*

The Point of View describes the canon – that is, all those writings which have left their traces in the earlier texts, the various scattered writings seen as a collective entity – as “the totality.” For the same reason, *The Point of View* demands that it not be read in the same way that we read the other texts, but as the “text” of the other texts, the text of the texts, as a “meta-text.” As such, *The Point of View* would like to overwrite the other texts, to attribute to them *its* understanding of their significance. Therefore, if, as is stated in the work’s own textual metaphor, there is a “difference between writing on a blank sheet of paper and using caustic fluid to bring forth words which are hidden under other writing” [18, 105], then *The Point of View* itself helps obliterate this difference. The text which is produced as the true text of the texts, is in fact not an original, hidden text, because it is only with *The Point of View* that the true text *is generated*, so that that which becomes visible in *The Point of View*

is not hidden writing, but is rather the hidden intention of the visible writings. Therefore, *The Point of View* is far from having been written on “a blank sheet of paper,” and any possible mention of “caustic fluids” ought to include deceptions, manoeuvres, and tricks among the more active ingredients which *The Point of View* uses in its attempt to make its viewpoint into *the reader's*.

It is the desire of *The Point of View* that the reader share its point of view. And this is unfortunate, because in order to be able to present his religious concern Kierkegaard is in fact forced to resort to an extremely aesthetic discourse. This, in turn, means that the work is haunted by the fundamental, performative contradiction in the form of the incongruity (pointed out by the ironist Climacus) between the statement's “What” and its “How.” Concerning the “What”: *The Point of View* wants to undertake the intricate task of making explicit an inwardness – the very inwardness whose incommensurability is alluded to everywhere in the authorship as the real reason why it was necessary to communicate indirectly. And concerning the “How”: *The Point of View* wants to use the aesthetic to abolish an aesthetic usage, and to “make visible what it is to become a Christian” [18, 135], as it says, by bringing its reader to “reflect himself out of the illusion of being a Christian” [18, 140].

The problem for the reader is that Kierkegaard seems to be to some extent aware of the problem, because he knows that it is precisely the person who most energetically condemns “the bewitchment of the aesthetic” [18, 97] who “ends up mired in the aesthetic himself” [18, 96]. Kierkegaard's problem is that the reader might become aware of this as the fundamental problem of *The Point of View*, and there is a sort of quiet echo of this in the somewhat resigned instruction on the next-to-last page of the book's “Conclusion”: “... do it, or don't do it, remain silent or speak, it's wrong either way” [18, 136].

Thus, correctly considered, *The Point of View* can neither keep silent nor speak out, and if it can't decide to do the former, neither can it bring itself to do the latter. It continually breaks the silence, and not even its “Epilogue” is the last word, but is closer to a prologue for the subsequent “Conclusion” [18, 142], which, in turn, is not a conclusion, because it is followed by the “Two Notes,” which are introduced by a new “Preface” [18, 149], which is in turn followed by more text and then by a new “Postscript” [18, 167], of which the true postscript is yet another “Postscript” [18, 168], which so earnestly begs to be permitted: “Just one word more” [18, 169]. From this perspective it is both symptomatic and ludicrous when, about halfway through *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard permits himself to proclaim: “The whole thing can be said with one word” [18, 103]. If only it could.

But it can't, of course, and if *The Point of View* talks on and on, it is not merely because the book has good reasons for being unable to remain silent, but, more important, it is also because the book wants to say *everything* – especially including the things which a critical reader could

be imagined to want to say. This is clearly evident when Kierkegaard makes the following, rather coy, invitation; "Try it, then. Try to explain this entire authorship under the assumption that it is by an aesthetic author" [18, 89]. This may perhaps sound tempting, but we soon understand that this is one of those temptations which we ought to resist, because the invitation invites us not to make one movement among many possible ones, but to make the most impossible one of all. If, on the other hand, one makes "the attempt to assume that this is a religious author, one will see that it matches up, step by step, at every point" [18, 89]. Either/Or. *Tertium non datur*. Nonetheless, perhaps it is still best to arm oneself with a certain neutrality, because despite the fact that there appears to be a quite considerable distance between the first, disingenuous proposal and the second, preferred one, they in fact tacitly share the same hermeneutical premise. Both proposals simply accept as given that there is a direct and uninterrupted line between, on the one hand, an "author's" declared intentions and his "activity," and, on the other hand, the complete carrying out of these intentions by this "activity." If one assumes that Kierkegaard is a "religious author," this does not automatically establish that his "activity-as-an-author" was religious, because that depends less upon "the author" than upon "the activity," that is, upon the text.

As a student of Climacus, Kierkegaard ought to have been satisfied with the "short formula" that the authorship was religious from beginning to end. But he isn't, because he "explains himself in more detail," and in the "First Section" he carries out a *demonstratio ad oculos*, by means of which he wants to prove the presence of the "duplicity" which is the earmark of the authorship as a simultaneously aesthetic-religious whole. No sooner has Kierkegaard proclaimed this duplicity than he identifies himself with the critical reader and makes the following statement: "But is this how it is?," he asks, filled with aversion. "Has this sort of duplicity been carried out? Can't we explain the phenomenon in another way, so that an author, who started out as an aesthetic author, then *changed* over the years and became a religious writer?" [18, 85]. This of course could sound quite plausible, but we are led to understand that the question is terribly naive and it is only asked in order to be dismissed, that is, in order to provide Kierkegaard an occasion to "demonstrate that it is impossible to explain the phenomenon in any other way" [18, 86].⁵

This is the sentence with which Kierkegaard opens the "Apology," which is precisely what *The Point of View* was *not* supposed to be. He wants not merely to point out the presence of "the duplicity," but to prove it, and therefore "the explanation: that the author is and was a religious author" [18, 87] soon builds up a need for further explanation. Yet, Kierkegaard is aware of the dangers which lie concealed in the logic of perseverance – which, by intensifying the explanation, comes close to attacking the very trustworthiness which it desires to protect. Therefore

Kierkegaard takes the following measure: “It might seem as though a simple affirmation by the author is more than sufficient. After all, he must know what is what. I do not believe in assurances with respect to literary productions, however, and I am accustomed to relating myself completely objectively to my own productions. If, in my capacity as a third party, as a reader, I cannot establish on the basis of the writings themselves that things are as I claim them to be and that they cannot be otherwise – then it would never occur to me to attempt to win a battle which I would have to regard as lost. If, as an author, I have to give these assurances, it could easily transform my entire production, which was dialectical from beginning to end” [18, 87f.].

Now, is this an explanation or an assurance? This manifesto reminds one most of all of a performative contradiction, of which the formula is: “I assure you that I do not give assurances.” If the reader’s goodwill is so flexible that it can accept the claim that Kierkegaard relates to himself as an author objectively, as “a third party,” then this very reader’s memory must be as short as his goodwill is flexible, because the position of “a third party” is, as we have seen, precisely the position which disqualified Climacus in relation to “a productivity the intentions of which were unknown to him.” Thus, ironically enough, in order to avoid the intentional fallacy Kierkegaard must embrace a pseudonym’s fallacious intentionality.

The passage cited continues with the following assurance: “Thus, I cannot give assurances to anyone, at least not before I have made the explanation so clear by another means that the assurance thereby becomes superfluous. That having been done, such an assurance, insofar as I feel a need to give it, could then *be permitted*, as a lyrical satisfaction, and it could *be required* as a religious duty. As a human being, I am certainly within my rights in giving assurances, and it could be my religious duty to do so. But this must not be confused with the authorship: when I give assurances as a human being that I have wanted to do such and such, it helps me but little as an author” [18, 88].

If the energy invested in the argumentation reveals that Kierkegaard was painfully aware of the conflict between “explanation” and “assurance(s),” the argument also testifies to the painfulness of the attempt to escape from that conflict. And scarcely two pages after his sober remark that he does not care much for literary “assurances,” Kierkegaard is compelled to behold his own prose as he writes: “This is how things are. In the strict sense, *Either/Or* was written in a monastery, and I can assure you . . . , I can assure you that the author of *Either/Or* devoted a definite time every day, regularly and with monastic exactitude, to the reading of edifying literature, for his own sake and in much fear and trembling, aware of his responsibility. And he bore in mind, in particular, ‘The Diary of the Seducer’ (oh, how odd!)” [18, 90].

Even the most generous reader will certainly have to summon up extra generosity to understand how this sort of assurance – which refers to cir-

cumstances which are, from a textual point of view, arbitrary – can guarantee the presence of a dialectical “duplicity” in the authorship. It is, however, not merely “oh, how odd!” that Kierkegaard placed monastic restrictions on himself while he worked on “The Diary of the Seducer” – it is also very *interesting*. Here, as in 19th-century confessions, a veil is lifted, revealing the fact that there was a hitherto-unknown connection between the “edifying writings” and “The Diary of the Seducer,” and the effect of this is to endow Kierkegaard, seductively, with a higher degree of interestingness. And in order to maintain the religious character of the confession, Kierkegaard quickly adds the following penitent note: “The book enjoyed a terrific success, especially (oh, how odd!) ‘The Diary of the Seducer.’ The world gave an enormous welcome to its admired author, who, however, was not ‘seduced’” or transformed by all this – he was an eternity too old for that” [18, 90].⁶

It is possible that Kierkegaard did not allow himself to be seduced, but it is certain that he did not allow himself to be transformed, because he is still a seducer. And the unreflective innocence which the Seducer presupposed in Cordelia is alarmingly similar to the uncritical seriousness which Kierkegaard presupposes in his reader.⁷ Step by step, he renounces his epistemological pretensions and is therefore only able to proclaim imploringly that “the true explanation can be found by the person who honestly seeks for it” [18, 88f]. With this, the hermeneutic conditions have been exchanged for moral ones, and the reader has been made accountable for his (ethical) qualifications. Thus, as happens again and again, the presupposed “seriousness” of the presupposed reader is expected to provide Kierkegaard’s presentation with its documentary validity, and this means that the reader’s “seriousness” is identical with his tacit approval of this fiction. It is therefore an obvious consequence that Kierkegaard places a significant and at times quite demanding confidence in the reader’s perfectibility, as for example, when he puts himself in the reader’s position and is able to understand, without difficulty, the ambiguous situation which he himself had shortly before declared to be inconceivable: “Here the reader will easily see the explanation the duplicity of the entire authorship, with the additional fact that the author was also conscious of this” [18, 132].

If the reader does not possess “seriousness,” then what is sought will not be found in the text, and the text must therefore bring about genuine “seriousness” in its reader. This often happens in a series of rhetorical fits, as in the following example, in which the aesthetic is bound to the religious as intimately as possible: “As soon as the necessary seriousness takes hold, it can also manage it [i.e., ‘the dialectical reduplication’], always, however, in such a way that the seriousness itself guarantees its truth. For, just as a woman’s coyness put her in a relation to a true lover, and then [when the true lover appears], but only then, does she surrender, so, in the same way, does dialectical reduplication relate to the seriousness which is true. Therefore the explanation cannot be com-

municated to a less serious person, because the elasticity of the dialectical doubleness is too great for him to master. It takes the explanation away from him again and causes him to have doubts about whether it really was the explanation” [18, 89]. When a text has a coy woman copulate with her true lover in an attempt to summon up the necessary “seriousness” in its reader, the text not only presupposes what it wants to summon up, it also risks losing the “seriousness” which the reader *might* have.

What the woman lost, despite her coyness, the reader loses by virtue of the text. And a reader’s innocence is re-established no more easily than a woman’s.

Documenta(fic)tion

Kierkegaard not only produces the theatre of his works, he also theatricalizes himself in relation to the stage of his work, a production in which *The Point of View* serves as fictive documentation, a documenta(fic)tion. Kierkegaard presents his interpretation of the connection between himself and his writings in the book’s second chapter, which is entitled “The Mutability in My Personal Existence, as Corresponding to the Essential Mutability in My Production” [18, 107]. The chapter is divided into two separate sections, which each set forth the techniques he used in order to provide existential support, first for the aesthetic production [18, 108-113], and then for the religious [18, 113-119]. Obviously, this division renders problematic Kierkegaard’s earlier claim about the simultaneous “duplicity” of the authorship, but it also reveals some of the subtle (self-)deceptions which are at work in his presentation of his own activity (as an author). Thus, when he accounts for his “existence” in relation to his aesthetic production, Kierkegaard emphasizes the fact that his maieutic activities have been determined by the use of reverse deception as a “tactic”: “... I am convinced that rarely has any author used as much cunning, intrigue, and ingenuity in order to win honor and respect in the world, to deceive the world, as I have done in the reverse direction – in order to deceive it into the truth” [18, 110]. Kierkegaard proclaims that there is indeed a difference – which he calls a Socratic difference – between deceiving someone *out of* the truth and deceiving someone *into* the truth, and therefore one must not let oneself “be deceived by the word ‘deception’” [18, 104]. The motto for this is the complex performative slogan: “I am a deceiver. Believe me!”

Kierkegaard cites a single example of this deception as a *fait accompli*, which his friend Gjørdwad can confirm: during the proof-reading of the text of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard was so busy that there was no time for his daily posing as an “idler”. He therefore had to rush to the theatre after finishing his work, and he “literally stayed only five or ten minutes.” This, however, was enough time to maintain “the opinion that he doesn’t do anything at all – he is a real loafer” [18, 111]. By providing the reader with this sort of glimpse into the tortuous machinery of decep-

tion, Kierkegaard involuntarily makes himself vulnerable to the suspicion that this virtuoso of deception is still the master of his art and that he is practicing it right now. Kierkegaard of course defends himself against the obvious accusation that he lacks "seriousness." This is absolutely not the case, he says: "Melancholic, irremediably melancholic as I was, with enormous inner suffering, after I despairingly broke with the world and with all things worldly – I was brought up strictly and with the understanding that the truth must suffer, must be mocked and insulted, and I spent a certain portion of every day in prayer and edifying meditations, personally penitent. Because I was the person I was, I do not deny that in a sense I took a certain satisfaction in that life, in that reverse deception. . ." [18, 112].

Here, as often, the reader is tempted to ask whether Kierkegaard is writing in good faith, or whether he is the somewhat impious stage producer of a pious fraud. How can the reader know whether or not Kierkegaard, in his revelation that he has spent "a certain portion of every day" in prayer and meditation, is not merely repeating the routine of self-staging which he carried out – only a page and a half earlier! – by showing up for "five or ten minutes" in the theatre? The two revelations stand side by side, the latter one supporting the former, but what guarantee do we have that this causality is not also a "reverse deception," or that the reverse deception which has brought Kierkegaard so much satisfaction is not finding its own satisfaction here, in deceiving Kierkegaard?

It is impossible to determine definitively how much conscious intent there was in the poet's head, but we can ascertain that there was at least a certain amount of *post facto* construction by looking at the chapter's second portion, in which Kierkegaard describes the correspondence between his own existential acting and the religious works which, as we have seen, are introduced on the second page of the *Postscript*. Kierkegaard repeats that information and states that he delivered the manuscript to the printer Luno in December 1845, but in the same breath he adds: "... mistrustful people do not have to take my word for it, because it can be proven from Luno's journal" [18, 113].⁸ Why this sudden gesture? Because by referring to Luno's journal as a hard fact Kierkegaard can deflect the reader's attention from the fictiveness in the construction of the correspondence between the authorship and his personal, existential acting. The purpose of the reference to Luno, just like the earlier reference to Giødwad, is to endow the presentation with documentary validity, and this is especially necessary with respect to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, inasmuch as its very title more than implies that Kierkegaard had intended to conclude his authorship with that book. As Kierkegaard notes in a rather solemn journal entry from February 7, 1846, having finished the *Postscript*, he intended to seek a position as a pastor [cf. Pap. VII 1 4 and 18, 133]. Nonetheless, he has *also* done the following in connection with the publication of the *Postscript*: "I saw

right away that my personal existence in relation to this [the finishing of the *Postscript*] had to be re-formed, or that I had to try to give my contemporaries a different impression of my personal existence. I was thus aware of what had to be done, when a very convenient little circumstance, in which I saw a hint from [divine] Governance, came to my assistance and helped me to act decisively in that direction” [18, 113].

The circumstance which has so conveniently presented itself is the appearance of *The Corsair*, with its corrupting influence on the population of Copenhagen, which like “a monstrous public, arm in arm, *in bona caritate* [had] become ironic, damn it” [18, 114]. The ironic craze of his time places Kierkegaard in a painful situation in which he himself is unable to make use of irony, because his ironizing would only have been made use of by a “new and extremely piquant form of irony,” and therefore, Kierkegaard found it necessary, on the contrary, to make himself into “the object of everyone’s irony” [18, 115]. Kierkegaard here examines the organization of the train of events so carefully that the fiction becomes evident despite his intention, and this impression is strengthened when he presents himself as the all-powerful director of the drama: “Now, I had calculated that the situation would be dialectically appropriate for the reintroduction of indirect communication. While I busied myself exclusively with religious works, I ventured to rely upon the negative support of a daily shower from the rabble, in the hope that this would keep things sufficiently cooled off, thus preventing a religious communication which was too direct and protecting me from gaining followers in too direct a fashion. And even the people who could not be scared off were very upset by the fact that I had voluntarily exposed myself to all this, that I had leaped into it, a sort of madness . . . ah, yes, and again, ah, yes, because this was precisely the dialectical form of Christian self-denial . . . ” [18, 116].

There is a self-assertion present in Kierkegaard’s Christian self-denial, which is practically indistinguishable from an aesthetic stage production. We get this impression from a number of sources, including the many metaphors of disguise: “costume,” “finery,” “suit of clothing” [18, 117f.]. Kierkegaard’s arrangement of things is in fact a textual stage production, which the reader is expected to accept at face value. This is obvious, for example, in the following erotic appeal: “Some day, when my lover comes, he will easily see that when I was seen as an ironist, the irony was by no means where the highly honored, cultivated public thought it was He will see that the irony lay in the fact that beneath this aesthetic author, and beneath the appearance of worldliness, was concealed a religious author My lover will see how everything sufficed in every detail, how my existential situation was transformed, corresponding perfectly to the transformation in my works” [18, 119].

Who is Kierkegaard’s lover? He is the reader who reads the fiction as non-fiction and who cannot see that Kierkegaard is not reproducing his own actions but is in fact producing a text-action, which presents itself as

a fact. What Victor Eremita states in “The Diary of a Seducer” concerning textuality can thus be applied to *The Point of View* as a text: “His diary is ... not historically accurate or a simple narrative; it is not indicative, but subjunctive” [2, 282].

Only in that way, then, can things work out in every detail.⁹

The Point of View as Bio-Graphy

In its construction of events the text produces a tale about its teller, a bio-graphy, in which the empirical self – rather ambivalently – is written off by the textual self. The desire to construct the self narratively or “subjunctively” implies a destruction of the empirical or “indicative” self, which, in a double sense, gives the bio-graphy the character of the deconstruction of the self. These are the terms of this bio-graphy, which renders impossible any final answer to the question of where (and when) Kierkegaard is a deceiver in his text and where (and when) the text deceives Kierkegaard.

The relationship between the indicative and the subjunctive self becomes visible as a relationship between the revelation and the concealment of the self. Here we can refer to the role assigned to Regine in the confessional narrative which is developed in the final section of *The Point of View*. Kierkegaard refers to the events regarding Regine as “a fact,” whose complex character made him into a poet, but at the same time he stresses that “that fact” was not of a religious nature. He says this in order to keep the story of his engagement within a purely aesthetic parenthesis, in order thus to be able to insulate the broken engagement from any ethical evaluation of the situation, which would implicate events beyond the textual control of *The Point of View* and thereby threaten his religious teleology. In other words, the relation to Regine (always and unfeelingly referred to as “that fact”) is concealed in order that Kierkegaard can regain the moral self-justification which was lost in the revelation.¹⁰

However, the concealment which Kierkegaard undertakes in his revelation of “that fact” is at the same time staged as a strategic representation which has the purpose of titillating the reader’s curiosity in a sort of literary foreplay. What is at work here is the law for raising the interesting to a higher power. And it is precisely that higher power – or, rather, the loss of same – which is the subject of *The Point of View*’s “Epilogue,” in which a troublesome (aesthete?) asks: “‘But now what have you done here,’ I can hear someone say. ‘Don’t you see what this information and this public announcement have lost you in the eyes of the world?’ Yes, of course, I can see it very well. By doing this I lose that which, from a Christian point of view, would have to be regarded as a loss if I retained it ... I lose interestingness, I lose being a mystery ... I lose this interestingness, and instead I receive as a substitute that which is no less than interestingness – the *direct communication* of the fact that the problem was and remains: how to become a Christian” [18, 138].

This is in fact not a particularly interesting communication – so much the less so for its having *already* been said in the book’s “Introduction” [cf. 18, 81f.]. It is closer to being a deactivation of the maieutic function which is supposed to be the *raison d’être* of the aesthetic writings. And – as Kierkegaard later had to acknowledge – “when something is supposed to be captivating, it is of course a mistake to explain everything about it. Obviously a fisherman would not say to the fish, with reference to the bait: ‘This is bait’” [Pap. X 1 A 117, p. 90]. Two pages later, however, Kierkegaard regains the interestingness which he has lost because of his revelation, when he conceals what he has revealed. First, the reader reads: “Now if a generous reader reads this work carefully, he will know what I am as an author” [18, 141]. But no sooner is that line read to its conclusion than a footnote sends the generous and careful reader down to another text which is set in small type, and here we read: “It is, however, quite proper, that I myself should, of course, retain a purely personal, intimate interpretation of my personal situation” [18, 141n]. So. The most personal of personal things remains concealed, and perhaps he undertakes this concealment right here because the revelation of the religious point of the authorship was a loss of interestingness, and the person behind the book must compensate for this loss by concealing himself and thus re-establishing this interestingness.

In his “Conclusion,” Kierkegaard gives the pen to “another person, my poet” [18, 142], who concludes the bio-graphy and thus allows fiction to have the last word, and this is perfectly symptomatic for a revelation *qua* concealment. Only in the fiction, in the textual staging of the self, can the Kierkegaard who, as he candidly admits, is “not present” both before and after the book [18, 142], be present. But, please notice, he is only present as the writer. As soon as he reads his bio-graphy, Kierkegaard is again “not present.”

The two previous sentences contain the essence of the sections which follow below.

Governance as the Pro-gram of the Text

The Point of View is a programmatic piece of writing. As its author’s hermeneutic manifesto, it wants to present the reader with the *correct* reading. Thus, here “pro-gram” means “pre-scription.” But *The Point of View* is also programmatic because it depicts the production of the writings as the copying out of an earlier writing. And here, “pro-gram” means “fore-word.” Kierkegaard therefore claims that “there has not been the least bit of delay in this productivity. What has been needed was always ready at hand at just the moment when it was needed. In one sense, the entire productivity has had an uninterrupted steadiness, as if I had done nothing every day other than copy out a specified part of a printed book” [18, 124]. We are to understand that Kierkegaard’s work has not been driven forward by inclination, because, as he writes, his

work has been a “simple task of duty” [18, 123], in relation to which he has “lived as a scrivener in his office” [18, 122].

Kierkegaard’s “office” is a metaphor for non-pleasure, for duty and for exactitude, and is meant to guarantee that the production of the writings is not viewed as an expression of aesthetic delight, but of ethical subjection. We are not told what book it is that Kierkegaard has copied out so diligently, but it is pretty obvious that this is no case of ordinary copying or other common plagiarism. When Kierkegaard copies something out, he does something different and more than mere copying. But what is it, then? And of whose writing is Kierkegaard’s writing a copy?

Kierkegaard the copyist answers these questions with great originality in the book’s third chapter, entitled “The Part Played by Governance in My Authorship.” It is true that he confesses at the outset that he finds it “rather painful” to have to speak of himself, but the fact that the painfulness has been conquered is clear from what follows, which is Kierkegaard’s confessional writing and should therefore be cited *in extenso*:

“What hasn’t this pen managed to accomplish, when it was a matter of daring, enthusiasm, passion almost verging on madness! And now that I have to talk about my relationship to God, about what is repeated daily in my prayers, which give thanks for the indescribable things [!] which He has done for me, so infinitely much more than I could ever have expected; . . . because now that I have to talk about it, a poetic impatience awakens in my soul. More decisively than the king who cried, ‘My kingdom for a horse,’ but with a blessed decisiveness that he lacked, I would give everything, including my life, in order to find that which is more blissful to thought than when the lover finds the beloved: ‘the expression.’ And then to die with that expression on my lips. And, look, they come forward: ideas as enchanting as the fruits in a fairy-tale garden, so rich, so warm, so passionate, the expressions, so soothing to the urge for thankfulness within me, balm for my fervent longing. It seems to me as if I had a winged pen. Indeed, even if I had ten pens I would not be quick enough to keep up with the wealth which presents itself to me. But the moment I take my pen in hand it is, as they say, as if I couldn’t move an inch. In that condition not a line about my situation gets put on paper. It is as if I heard a voice which said to me: ‘Stupid man! What does he imagine? Doesn’t he know that obedience is dearer to God than the fat of rams? Do the whole thing as a work of duty.’ Then I become quite calm, and there is time to write every letter with my slower pen, almost painstakingly. And if the poetic passion awakens in me again for an instant, then it seems to me as though I heard a voice speak to me, as a teacher to a schoolboy, when he says: ‘Now, hold onto the pen properly and write each letter with equal care.’ Then I can do it, . . . practically ignorant of what the next word or the next line will be. And when I read it through afterwards, it satisfies me quite remarkably. For even if I let one or another incandescent expression escape from my lips,

the production is something else – it stems from a passion which is not poetic or intellectual, but is the passion of God-fearingness. And for me it is the worship of God” [18, 120f.].

The writing is itself a display of the point it is trying to make. It searches for “the expression,” which in its profundity and uniqueness must be protected with quotation marks. But it finds instead “the expressions,” which in a wild eruption of metaphor transform Kierkegaard’s confessional writing into an aesthetic writing about the religious. The text swarms with hovering clouds of allegory, as if it were actually written by a “winged pen,” indeed, perhaps by ten pens, which in their flight had followed a “poetic passion.” And yet this is not the case at all. No fewer than two times the text gives voice to a “voice,” which corrects Kierkegaard and orders him, like other good pupils, to hold “properly” onto that willful pen and write each word “carefully,” which Kierkegaard then does with a so-called “slower pen.”

In this sudden shift in the discourse from monologue to dialogue, “the voice” functions as a linguistic or grammatological authority, a *transcendental signifié*: “the voice” determines Kierkegaard’s writing, just as “Governance” governs it. And it is by (re)reading and (re)writing his texts from this perspective that Kierkegaard is first able to characterize “the aesthetic productivity” as “a necessary discharge” [18, 125]. In a subsequent fragment of dialogue he reports how “... the religious was willing to put up with this discharge, but continually hurried things along, as if to say, ‘Won’t you be finished with that soon?’” [18, 132]. The text is silent on the question how and when Kierkegaard answered that complaint, but the complaint was apparently repeated [cf. 18, 133], and Kierkegaard at last decided “to satisfy the religious by becoming a religious author” [18, 133].

Consequently, in the middle of this erotic metaphor, which connects aesthetic discharge to religious satisfaction, appears “God” – partly in a text-theory sense, as the super-metaphor of the writing, who is to provide consistency and evenness to what is written; partly in an instinct-psychology sense, as the super-ego of the desires, which focuses desire under the concept of control. Kierkegaard’s confessional writing is thus a dish cooked to order for every Freudian gourmet, and Kierkegaard practically puts the words in the Freudian’s mouth, when he describes his “relationship to God” as the only happy “love story” [18, 119] of his unhappy life. The fact that he aestheticizes his relationship to God in his attempt to draw the boundary between the religious and the aesthetic is no less paradoxical than the fact that, in order to erase all the tell-tale signs of an artistic experience, he transforms God into the “Muse” upon whom he has had to call “every day, in order to protect myself from an overabundance of thought . . . I could sit down and write uninterrupted for a day and night and for still another day and night, because there is wealth enough for it. But if I did it, I would burst. Oh, the least little dietary indiscretion, and I am in mortal danger” [18, 122]. Fabulous per-

severance with writing for 1001 nights. Anyone can see how the erotic desire for Regine is sublimated here and has displaced God, who as (another) Father keeps watch over the son's uncontrollable need for "discharge," and therefore must direct the spermatically spluttering pen to behave "properly."¹¹

But let us leave Freud in peace. What is of decisive importance here, after all, is not to explain "the activity" on the basis of "the author," but the reverse, to explain "the author" on the basis of "the activity," in other words, to notice how the text has governed the writer.

Auto-graphy

If it was fear of inconsistency which endowed Kierkegaard's presentation with fictionality and thereby revealed that the real situation was in fact inconsistent, then the retrospective activity of (self-)interpretation seems to compel Kierkegaard to make repeated revisions of *The Point of View*, so that the book thereby threatens to dissolve itself into a multiplicity of points of view. That which is to be explained will not enter into the explanation neatly and without leaving a remainder. Exactitude, "the expression," refuses to make an appearance, not because the attempt to summon it up has not been made, but because it is made so frequently. We remember, from Climacus' "ironic observations," that among other things it was "the honored person's" desire to explain things in more detail, to define his "belief" more precisely, and to "vary the expressions," which called forth the laughter of the ironist. And now Kierkegaard writes: "Yet in a more exact sense I must enter into the accounting the part played by Governance in the authorship. If I were to go out and say that from the very first moment I had an overview of the entire dialectical construction of the whole authorship, ... this would be dishonesty to God. [And, it could perhaps be added, it would be dishonesty to the reader as well.] No, I must truthfully say that I cannot understand the whole thing, precisely because I can understand the whole thing down to the most insignificant detail. But what I cannot understand is that I am now able to understand it. And yet there is no way that I can dare to say that I understood it so exactly at the very beginning. And yet I am the person who has done it, and who has taken every step with reflection" [18, 124f.].

If the idea of "The Part of Governance in the Authorship" seems at first blush to resemble rampant megalomania, the passage cited above seems to be quite a bit like a declaration of the fact that his autonomy has been limited. We understand that there are good reasons why Kierkegaard views himself as the "reader" of the authorship rather than as its author. It is not Kierkegaard who has governed the writing, but the reverse: the writing has governed Kierkegaard, a governance which Kierkegaard interprets religiously as "Governance." He explains that "as categorically definitely as is possible [it is] ... Governance, which has educated me, and the education is reflected in the process of the pro-

ductivity. Therefore, to this extent, what was developed in the foregoing is not quite true, namely the statement that the whole of the aesthetic productivity is a deception, because that way of expressing it grants a bit too much to consciousness. Yet, neither is it quite untrue, because I have been conscious from the very beginning that I was being educated” [18, 125].

The dialectic between conscious and non-conscious text production has been forcibly prompted by a compositional/confessional crisis in the book. On the one hand, an enraptured Kierkegaard has told how, “in what was almost a state of ecstatic possession” [18, 112], he managed to realize the complex tactics of the deception, and permitted the aesthetic to function as an alluring mirror which was designed to catch and hold the attention of his contemporaries. On the other hand – and later in the composition – “Governance” is installed as the highest authority of the text-production. Thus arises a crisis, which comes to light both in the intentional dialectic between the conscious and the non-conscious, and in the moral dialectic between the “not quite true” and the “yet, neither quite untrue.”

This double dialectic reveals the presence of two points of view in *The Point of View*. And if we cast a sidelong glance at the entries in the *Papers*, where Kierkegaard comments on *The Point of View*, we can see that the conflicting status claims made by these points of view, plus their mutual incompatibility, were of decisive importance to him when he set the work aside for posthumous publication. Despite his otherwise so eminent powers of reflection, Kierkegaard has not grasped that a writer always writes *in* a language and *in* a logic, whose entire system of signs and references is not completely mastered by his own discourse. And he therefore understands the determining logic in this system of signs as “an inexplicable something, which suggests that I have been helped by another, [so that] I have come to carry out things and say things whose full significance I sometimes only understand afterwards” [Pap. X 5 B 168, p. 362]. But on the other hand, Kierkegaard is unable to understand the precise source of this surplus, not even “afterwards.” It remains “an inexplicable something,” and for this reason must be understood as “Governance.”

The point in both cases is the same, however: to write is also to be written, and when the writer puts his name onto a text, he writes off his empirical “I.” It is in and with this “production” that the textual “I” is produced, and Kierkegaard can therefore confess that “for a long time [he has not] done anything except dialectical exercises with an admixture of fantasy, experimenting with my spirit in the same way that one tunes an instrument, but *I* have not really lived” [18, 129]. Because the subject, the “I,” lives off his writing in this specific sense, we can better understand that for Kierkegaard it becomes “an extremely dangerous business, this solemn desire to set a period” [Pap. X 1 A 510, p. 328].¹²

The fact that the textual “I” is not identical with the “I” who re-reads

what has been written, emerges more or less explicitly from a journal entry where Kierkegaard (after writing “NB” three times!) writes down his impression of the material he has just read by the writer Kierkegaard, who was writing about the author of the same name: “*The Point of View for My Work as an Author* must not be published. No! No! – 1) And this is what is decisive (never mind everything I have thought up about dangers regarding my livelihood and about making a living): I cannot present myself entirely truthfully. Even in the very first manuscript (which, however, I had written without any thought of publishing) I was not, however, able to emphasize what is the main thing for me: that I am a penitent, and that this fact is the deepest explanation of me. But when I then took out the manuscript [Pap. IX B 54, 55,57] in order to consider whether I should publish it, I had to make some small changes, however. This was due to the fact, however, that the emphasis was too strong for it to be published . . . – 2) I cannot quite say that my activity as an author is self-sacrifice. For, true enough, since my childhood, etc., I have been indescribably unhappy, but with respect to this I acknowledge, however, that the escape which God found for me, by permitting me to become an author, has been rich, rich in enjoyment. Thus I have certainly been sacrificed, but my activity as an author is not a sacrifice. However, being an author, of course, is what I most unconditionally would like to continue to be. Thus I cannot be quite truthful here, either. For I cannot, however, talk in print like this about my sufferings and my misery – but if I don’t, then what would stand out would really be the enjoyment” [Pap. X 1 A 78, p. 62f.].

The situation is quite characteristic of the relationship between writing and reading, and it demonstrates how the textual “I” has deconstructed the empirical “I,” which has become so foreign to itself that Kierkegaard is unable to know himself. The seven ‘however’s’ which fill the textual monologue with hesitation bear witness to the astonishment caused by the re-vision: Kierkegaard has taken out his first draft, has re-read it, and has determined that “the main thing,” i.e., penitence, had been sketched insufficiently. He has made minor corrections and interventions, which, however, do not strengthen, but on the contrary weaken “the main thing.” And why this weakening of something which was already too weak to begin with? Because the private, penitential motive for the production of the text does not converge with the actual production of the text, which was not “sacrifice,” but on the contrary was “rich, rich in enjoyment.” When the inner “sufferings and misery” are exposed “in print,” the penitence of the penitent subject thus becomes the interesting, which means that the religious is once again displaced in the direction of the aesthetic.

It is from this double point of view that Kierkegaard himself views *The Point of View*: “The book itself is true, and is, in my view, masterful,” Kierkegaard writes in a self-conscious journal entry in which he clearly has had one eye on the religious and the other on the aesthetic. He

continues without batting an eye: “If a little bit is added in order to emphasize more strongly that I am a penitent, and a little more about my sin and my guilt, and a little about my inner misery – then it is true” [Pap. X 1 A 78]. As a loosely composed sketch, the journal entry demonstrates that the confessional value of the writing rests upon aesthetic premisses. It is noted, almost technically, that, as for existential misery, a “little bit” must be added. But naturally the question is how much can be added in this regard without subtracting from its documentary validity. In other words, if the book is to be “true,” then it must be accompanied in documentary fashion by a series of private existential declarations. But it is exactly by adding these existential declarations that Kierkegaard risks having the book take on the piquancy of a confessional piece, which would make it the object of the intrusive stare of a prying public, who will see the sensational in the confessional. Thus, documentary validity is not only dependent upon rhetorical effectiveness, it is also threatened by it. In brief: “All the material about my activity as an author is absolutely unusable, because it is obvious that in bringing it up I only dig deeper into the interesting instead of coming out of it, and it will seem the same to my contemporaries” [Pap. X 1 A 510, p. 328].

Authenticity and Fictionality

The uncontrollable exchange between the penitent Kierkegaard and the interesting Kierkegaard corresponds to the text’s transformation of the empirical Kierkegaard into the textual Kierkegaard. The latter seems “literally” to marginalize the former, who *as a reader* is disappointed to see “the main thing” disappear in the text. One such marginalization can be sensed – epigrammatically, we could say – from a small marginal note which was appended to one of the two “scraps of paper” on which Kierkegaard wrote comments about “From on High He Will Draw All Unto Himself” [cf. Pap. X 2 A 393]. Along one edge of the scrap, under the title “Concerning Works Which I Have Completed for Publication and Myself,” Kierkegaard has written: “The difficulty with publishing the material about the authorship is and remains that I have, after all, been used, without being able properly to understand it myself or really being aware of it. Only now do I understand and comprehend the whole thing – but of course, I am not, after all, able to say ’I’” [Pap. X 2 A 89].

This time, we do not see “Governance” functioning as a transforming metaphor for the control exercised by the text. Kierkegaard has been used or guided by the text, and he has thus been enlisted in “the process of productivity” to such an extent that when he turns around and looks back at it he is unable to say “I.” Notwithstanding this fact (or precisely *because* of it), Kierkegaard’s marginal note continues: “The most that I can ... say is that this is how I now understand the completed production” [*ibid.*]. But if this really is “the most” that Kierkegaard can say about his relationship to his total production, then he has assigned him-

self the position of “third party,” and he has simultaneously gotten involved in a quite remarkable dilemma. If he in fact installs himself in the position of a “third party,” his statements about the authorship take on a reassuring objectivity. But at the same time he must give up his natural right to define the overall significance of the authorship, and *The Point of View* loses its unique status and becomes one among many – debatable – points of view. If, on the other hand, he insists that he is the most qualified interpreter of the authorship, and bases that claim on the indisputable fact that he is, after all, the author, then he must surrender his (self-)interpretive concept about “The Role of Governance” in the production. In sum: only by turning himself into a fictive “third party” is Kierkegaard able to maintain an interpretive relationship to his authorship, which is a body of work about which Kierkegaard as “the first party” cannot say “I.”

Rather paradoxically – but with an inner logic, in which he more than implies that his lack of authenticity and authority is compensated for by his fictionality – Kierkegaard (the same Kierkegaard who otherwise pathetically asserts that he does not want to risk a “bewildering poetic confusion” [cf. Pap. X 2 A 106]) gives consideration to publishing *The Point of View* under the name of the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio! Soon, however, he realizes that “then it is no longer the same book. Because the point of it was precisely that it was my personal story” [Pap. X 1 A 78, cf. 300]. “The point” is therefore the problem, in that the closer Kierkegaard gets to himself, the less self he can see. Thus, the idea of the pseudonymous publication of the book comes up, not in spite of this crisis about the personal “point,” but because of it. Indeed, Kierkegaard prepared a “Preface” for *The Point of View*, and this “Preface” was supposed to have been written by a certain “A-O.” “A-O’s” “Preface” survives as a fragmentary effort, and concludes with the following: “I have now dared to make this poetic experiment. The author himself speaks in the first person, but bear in mind that this author is not K. (M.A.), but my poetic creation. – I certainly have to apologize to Mr. K. (M.A.) that I have dared, right under his nose, so to speak, to conceive of him poetically, or to make a poetic creation of him. But this apology is . . . all that I need do. For as a poet I have, in fact, completely emancipated myself from him. Indeed, even if he were to declare that my conception was factually untrue in any particular respect, this would not mean that it was poetically untrue. The conclusion could also, of course, be reversed: *ergo*, K. (M.A.) has not measured up to or realized the poetic truth” [Pap. X 2 A 171].

The attempt to organize epistemological material and to mount an effective strategy of argument has here been replaced by a rhetorical game. This game is certainly dialectical, but it is also destructive, because its mischievous double-usage of “factually untrue” and “poetically true” obliterates every distinctive feature which separates “A-O” from “K. (M.A.),” and it therefore breaks up the subject into texts which are

smaller and smaller. Transparency has had to give way to opacity, authenticity has had to give way to fictionality, and the subject has yielded to the text. The inverted logic, which complaisantly submits to the reversed-image conclusion, makes it clear that although the fictive figure has completely emancipated himself from Kierkegaard, it is also the case that a corresponding emancipation has not been carried out by (the) Kierkegaard who, as we have seen, was forced to conclude his *Point of View* by turning its “Conclusion” around and, he explains, “permitting another person, my poet, to speak” [18, 142].

The authoritative and definitive codification of “the totality of the authorship” therefore cannot be realized in a unified fashion *in propria persona*, but has to be dispersed into a series of fictive techniques. And this is why the work, which in its subtitle so daringly proclaims itself to be “A Direct Communication” and a “Report to History,” has become anything other than direct. This is why its report seems most of all to inform us about the presence of a multitude of points of view: the eyes of Argus.

And at this point we can permit our “ironist” to burst out in some perhaps well-deserved laughter, because it has now become clear that “the man has never been honest with himself” – and this was precisely the diagnosis that the “ironist” found so infinitely amusing. The “serious reader” may perhaps have a more difficult time coming up with the appropriate grimace, and we therefore ought to (re)read the passage which Climacus, prompted by the author, wrote in his *Postscript*. It is a weighty passage. It takes the part of the reader against the author: “... as if an author were, in a purely legal sense, the best interpreter of his own words; as if it could help a reader to know that an author ‘wanted to do thus and such,’ if that intention were not, in fact, realized; or as if it were certain that it were realized, just because the author himself says so in the Preface” [9, 210].

It hardly makes things any better when an author first explains his intentions in the “Epilogue,” and Climacus’ remark thus makes an appropriate “Preface” to further reading of Kierkegaard’s authorship.

New readers can start here.

Translated by Bruce H. Kirmmse

1. Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* [Collected Works] are cited from the third revised edition, vol. 1-20 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962-64). Kierkegaard's *Papirer* [Papers] are cited from the second augmented edition, vol. I-XIII (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-78). References are made to volume number, group (A, B, or C), entry number, and in some cases to page number. (All translations are by the present translator.)

2. What "the honored person" displays in his attempt to convince his ironic listener and to state his "belief" can be viewed as a cautious anticipation of the deconstructive point which Paul de Man makes in his reading of Nietzsche: "Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative, but when considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance" (in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1979), p. 131).

3. Thulstrup claims this in his commentary on the *Philosophical Fragments* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1955), p. 114.

4. In connection with "The Accounting" Kierkegaard considered highlighting the difference between the aesthetic and the religious writings in a simple typographical manner: "It will therefore be printed in different type and on half pages in order to indicate that this is God's cause" [Pap. X 2 A 377, p. 270]. Unfortunately, he later abandoned this service to the reader.

5. As one example among many of the way in which Kierkegaard parodies the embarrassing situation in which he finds himself, we can take a look at this choice dialectical specialty: "But isn't there a contradiction here?," Kierkegaard exclaims, and then quickly answers that the objection of course "looks quite discerning, and is therefore [sic!] really only sophistry. If in a certain situation someone needed to produce some mystification, of course the sophistical result would be that he has to do it in a manner which produces the comical outcome that he himself is unable to figure it out" [18, 88; cf. 18, 134]. The anacoluthon speaks volumes: *ipse dixit!* But let us simply add: "Perfectly reflective is perfectly undecided . . . He [Kierkegaard] had outsmarted himself. The position he wanted earnestly and securely to occupy has been sabotaged by the methods he used to take it. The dialectic eats everything it throws up, and the mystifier becomes a mystery to himself" (in Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986), pp. 183 and 186).

6. In order to complete this "oh, how odd," we could add the following observation, that the movement from monastic isolation to libidinous expansion has been described earlier, practically as early in the authorship as could be imagined, namely, in *On the Concept of Irony*. In that book this movement is presented as prototypical for a

romantic ironist, for whom (also) the distance between aesthetic praxis and religious confession thus seems to have been manageable: "Now he is on the road to the monastery, and along the way he visits the Venusberg. Now he is on the road to the Venusberg, and along the way he prays in a monastery" [1, 296].

7. In his "Epilogue" Kierkegaard writes the following in a note: "The fact that Mr. P. L. Møller quite rightly viewed 'The Diary of the Seducer' as the central point of the entire authorship. . . is certainly psychologically noteworthy, and perhaps it also deserves to be recorded" [18, 139 note 1]. The poisonous remarks which accompany this note lead us to draw the obvious conclusion, however, that the comment was surely meant to be ironic. Ironically enough.

I have tried in, "My Dear Reader! Kierkegaard Read With Measured Abandon" (*Studia Theologica*, Copenhagen, 1991), to show how the relationship of the authorship to the reader can be read as an allegorization of the relationship between the seducer and the seduced, between Søren and Regine.

8. If one is this "mistrustful person" one can consult Pap. VII 1 A 2, where it is clear that "the entire manuscript was delivered to the printer's, lock, stock, and barrel, around the middle of December, 1845. - 'A First and Final Explanation' was sketched out on paper in the original manuscript, but put aside in order to be worked on, and it was delivered to the printer's as late as possible, so that it wouldn't lie about and float around at the printer's." The reason Kierkegaard gives is undeniably odd. Which is not odd in itself, because the reason has the task of explaining why the whole thing, "lock, stock, and barrel," was *not*, in fact delivered.

9. Kierkegaard delighted in citing Lichtenberg: "Solche Werke sind Spiegel: wenn ein Affe hinein guckt, kan kein Apostel heraus sehen," *Vermischte Schriften* (Göttingen, 1844), vol. IV, p. 40. And when we observe the changing critical judgment meted out to *The Point of View* over the years, the "apostle" seems to have been forced to yield increasingly to the "ape." The apostle Geismar writes that *The Point of View* is "a singularly reliable document . . . an objective, reliable account" (in *Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1928) vol. IV, p. 74). Rubow believes that Kierkegaard has "mythologized" (in *Kierkegaard og hans Samtidige* [Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1950) p. 46). Aage Henriksen maintains: "We cannot quite simply adopt Søren Kierkegaard's view of Søren Kierkegaard's production" (in *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1951) p. 10). Bejerholm describes *The Point of View* as an "ex poste construction" and as a "polemical self-interpretation," but he thinks that we

nonetheless ought to try “to combine these statements of unequal logical type” (in *Meddelelsens Dialektik* [The Dialectic of Communication] (Lund: Ohlssons, 1962) pp. 270, 273, and 277). With Bertel Pedersen the ape begins to become visible: “. . . a more careful reading of this text will reveal its dominant theme as another fiction The text exhibits all the traditional literary entrapments of a confession and the fictions of an autobiography Thus we see in POV [*The Point of View*] a curious combination of truly penetrating insights and a pathetic blindness” (in “Fictionality and Authority: A Point of View for Kierkegaard’s Work as an Author” *MLN* “Comparative Literature,” vol. 89, no. 6 (1974), pp. 950 and 955). Henning Fenger, source criticism’s answer to Sherlock Holmes, embraces this point of view almost word for word: “The book contained various concrete inaccuracies, but is especially capricious in its combination of the desire for honesty and naive auto-suggestion” (in *Kierkegaard-Myter og Kierkegaard-Kilder* [Kierkegaard Myths and Kierkegaard Sources] (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1976) p. 32).

What the “apostles” have been unable to see, the “apes” have seen: as an interpretation, *The Point of View* is itself a text, which can be interpreted.

10. Cf. Christopher Norris, “Fictions of Authority: Narrative and Viewpoint in Kierkegaard’s

Writing,” in *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) pp. 93f.

11. In order not to awaken unnecessary offense, I note here that “spermatic” is a word which Kierkegaard himself uses in one of the two “Notes” he appends to *The Point of View* [cf. 18, 163, note 2]. The fact that there is a connection between instinct and writing also emerges from the essay on Don Giovanni, where the reader is warned at one point against “betraying the impotence of language in linguistic lust” [2, 82]. *A propos* of this, Bertel Pedersen writes of Kierkegaard’s sublime(ated?) confessional writing: “. . . if ‘God’ is considered as ‘self-denial,’ as the limitation of desire which requires an act of submission, we can begin to see how problematic writing must be insofar as it is an imitation, a verbal displacement of desire” (in *op. cit.*, p. 995).

Louis Mackey’s observation is related to this, but more heavy-handed: “. . . Kierkegaard was tortured by the thought that his ‘aesthetic’ works were guilty ejaculations” (in *op. cit.*, p. 180).

12. Elizabeth Sewell formulates the dialectic in the most abbreviated form imaginable: “To make any work of art is to make, or rather to unmake and remake one’s self” (cited from Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, second ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 71, note 7).