

POUL MARTIN MØLLER AND THE DANISH DEBATE ABOUT  
IMMORTALITY  
IN THE WAKE OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

Jon Stewart  
Søren Kierkegaard Research Center

*Abstract*

Møller's main philosophical treatise, "Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality", published in 1837 in the leading journal of Golden Age Denmark, the famous *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, was part of the ongoing debate surrounding Hegel's position on the issue of human immortality. The article, which in a sense joined the left Hegelians in rejecting the presumed theory of immortality in Hegel's system, would be an important source of inspiration for Søren Kierkegaard and his onslaught on Hegelianism.

*Keywords*

Møller, Kierkegaard, Immortality, Existence, Hegelianism.

*Resumen*

El principal tratado filosófico de Møller, "Pensamientos sobre la posibilidad de una demostración de la inmortalidad humana", publicado en 1837 en el importante diario de la Edad de Oro de Dinamarca, el famoso *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, fue parte del debate en torno a la postura de Hegel acerca del tema de la inmortalidad humana. El artículo, que, en cierto sentido, se unió a los hegelianos de izquierda en su rechazo de una presunta teoría de la inmortalidad en el sistema de Hegel, sería una importante fuente de inspiración para Søren Kierkegaard y su ataque en contra del hegelianismo.

*Palabras clave*

Møller, Kierkegaard, inmortalidad, existencia, hegelianismo.

Even during his lifetime there was a degree of controversy surrounding Hegel's philosophy of religion, but this intensified after his death in 1831. His lectures on the subject were published for the first time in 1832 by Philipp Marheineke (1780-1846) as a part of the first collected edition of his writings<sup>1</sup>. The publication of this material served to intensify the debates about Hegel's position on a handful of key issues relevant for religion. These debates raged during the 1830s and '40s and determined in a constitutive manner the character of the Hegel schools<sup>2</sup>.

One of the key issues that was disputed was whether or not Hegel espoused a theory of immortality, which would seem to be required if his philosophy is to count as genuinely Christian as he claims it is. Some were quick to point out that while Hegel discussed a vast number of issues pertaining to religion and indeed many traditional Christian dogmas, he, for whatever reason, omitted any extended treatment of immortality. This was proof enough for the critics that Hegel in fact never believed in immortality and his philosophy could not be rightly considered Christian. Some of Hegel's followers of the right Hegelian persuasion tried to argue that there was a theory of immortality implicit in Hegel's works or at least the basis for one. These attempts to defend Hegel's orthodoxy were met with great suspicion and only served to evoke further criticism. The left Hegelians were fairly unconcerned about this since they did not regard it as a negative point if Hegel did not believe in a highly dubious doctrine in the first place. These discussions characterized much of the philosophical debate during the first decade or so after Hegel's death and involved most of the major philosophical figures of the age.

These debates also reached Golden Age Denmark which enjoyed a rather extensive Hegel reception beginning in the mid-1830s. The key work in the Danish context was an article that appeared in 1837 from the pen of the poet and philosopher Poul Martin Møller (1794-1838), who was an important figure in the Danish Hegel reception<sup>3</sup>. The long article,

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<sup>1</sup> *George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols. 1-18, ed. by Ludwig Boumann, Friedrich Förster, Eduard Gans, Karl Hegel, Leopold von Henning, Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Philipp Marheineke, Karl Ludwig Michelet, Johannes Schulze, Berlin 1832-45.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilhelm Stähler, *Zur Unsterblichkeitsproblematik in Hegels Nachfolge*, Münster: Universitas-Verlag 1928.

<sup>3</sup> For Møller's relation to Hegel, see Arne Löchen, "Poul Møller og Hegels Filosofi," *Nyt Tidsskrift, Ny Række*, 3. Årgang, 1894-95, pp. 447-456. Uffe Andreasen, *Poul Møller og Romanticismen*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1973, pp. 17-43. Vilhelm Andersen, *Poul Møller, Estudios Kierkegaardianos*. Revista de filosofía (2015)

entitled “Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality, with Reference to the Most Recent Literature Belonging Thereto”<sup>4</sup> appeared in the leading scholarly journal of the day. Møller had been inspired and influenced by Hegel’s philosophy in his earlier years, and so his interest in this topic was natural. In this article he reviews some of the leading works in debate about the question of immortality that were taking place in Germany and Prussia. He argues that there is no overlooking the fact that Hegel neglected to develop a theory of immortality, and the well-intentioned efforts of his followers to develop one on his behalf ended in utter failure.

Møller died only a year after his article was published, but it proved to be his most important philosophical work. It was widely read and commented upon at the time by figures such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) and

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*hans Liv og Skrifter*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1894, third edition 1944, pp. 302-316, pp. 359-372. Harald Høffding, “Poul Møller,” in his *Danske Filosofer*, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1909, pp. 119-121. Peter Thielst, “Poul Martin Møller: Scattered Thoughts, Analysis of Affectation, Struggle with Nihilism,” in *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries*, pp. 45-61. Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 33-38.

<sup>4</sup> Poul Martin Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed, med Hensyn til den nyeste derhen hørende Literatur,” *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, pp. 1-72, pp. 422-453. (Reprinted in Møller’s *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 2, pp. 158-272. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6. Copenhagen 1848-50, vol. 5, pp. 38-140. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6. Copenhagen 1855-56, vol. 5, pp. 38-140.) (In French as *Réflexions sur la possibilité de prouver l’immortalité de l’homme en rapport avec la littérature récent sur le sujet*, in *Lectures philosophiques de Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard chez ses contemporains danois*, ed. and trans. by Henri-Bernard Vergote. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1993, pp. 149-213.) See Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 105-106. Carl Henrik Koch, *Den danske idealisme 1800-1880*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 258-264. See Jørgen K. Bukdahl, “Poul Martin Møllers opgør med ‘nihilismen,’ ” *Dansk Udsyn*, vol. 45, 1965, pp. 266-290. Martin Paludan-Müller, *Udlængsel og hjemve: Personlighedsopfattelse hos Poul Martin Møller og hans forgængere*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag 1987, pp. 90ff. Vilhelm Andersen, *Poul Møller, hans Liv og Skrifter*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1894, third edition 1944, pp. 358ff. George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*. 2nd edition, London: SCM Press 1999 [1992], pp. 29-30. Jesper Garsdal, “En fremstilling af Poul Martin Møller og Masao Abes opfattelse af ‘Menneskets evighedsdimension,’ ” in *Punktnedslag i dansk livsfilosofi*, ed. by Morgens Pahuus. Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag 2001, pp. 45-83. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard, *Sjælen efter døden. Guldalderens moderne gennembrud*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2007, pp. 83ff. See also *Poul Møller og hans Familie i Breve*, vols. 1-3, ed. by Morten Borup. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel 1976, vol. 2, letter 150, p. 85f.

Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785-1872), and proved to be an important inspiration for Søren Kierkegaard.

### *I. Poul Martin Møller's Life and Works*

Although he was an important figure in Golden Age Denmark, Poul Martin Møller is no longer well known today<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, if he is known as all it is usually in connection with his famous student Søren Kierkegaard<sup>6</sup>. There are several reasons for Møller's obscurity today. First, he died relatively young and did not have the opportunity to create a large body of students

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<sup>5</sup> See Frederik Christian Olsen, "Poul Martin Møllers Levnet," in Møller's *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3. Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 3, pp. 1-115 (reprinted as a separate monograph: *Poul Martin Møllers Levnet*. Copenhagen 1856). Vilhelm Andersen, *Poul Møller, hans Liv og Skrifter*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1894, third edition 1944. Johannes Brøndum-Nielsen, *Poul Møller Studier*. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1940. Søren Holm, "Poul Martin Møller," in his *Filosofien i Norden for 1900*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1967, pp. 77-80. Peter Thielst, "Poul Martin Møller: Scattered Thoughts, Analysis of Affectation, Struggle with Nihilism," in *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart. Berlin and New York: Verlag Walter de Gruyter 2003 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 10), pp. 45-61. F. Rønning, *Poul Martin Møller. En Levnedsskildring med et Udvalg af hans Arbejder*. Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad 1893, pp. 7-72. Carl Henrik Koch, "Poul Martin Møller," in his *Den Danske Idealisme 1800-1880*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 249-269. Peter Thielst, "Poul Martin Møller," in his *Fem danske filosoffer fra det 19. århundrede*. Frederiksberg: Det lille Forlag 1998, pp. 23-30. Svend Erik Stybe, "Poul Møller" in his article "Filosofi," in *Københavns Universitetet 1479-1979*, vols. 1-14, ed. by Svend Ellehøj, et al. Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads 1979-1980, vol. 10, pp. 55-58.

<sup>6</sup> [This seems to be based on passages such as *JP*, vol. 5, 5961; *SKS*, vol. 20, p. 83, NB:107. *JP*, vol. 6, 6888; *Pap.* XI-1 A 275. *JP*, vol. 6, 6889; *Pap.* XI-1 A 276. For Kierkegaard's relation to Møller in general, see Frithiof Brandt, "Poul Martin Møller og Søren Kierkegaard," in his *Den unge Søren Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaards Forlag 1929, pp. 336-446. Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, London: Oxford University Press 1938, pp. 143-149. Bernd Henningsen, *Poul Martin Møller oder Die dänische Erziehung des Søren Kierkegaards*, Frankfurt am Main: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft 1973. Poul Lübcke, "Det ontologiske program hos Poul Møller og Søren Kierkegaard," *Filosofiske Studier*, vol. 6, 1983, pp. 127-147. Gregor Malantschuk, "Søren Kierkegaard og Poul M. Møller," *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 3, pp. 7-20. H.P. Rohde, "Poul Møller" in *Kierkegaard's Teachers*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag 1982 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 10), pp. 91-108. Henri-Bernard Vergote, "Poul Martin Moeller et Soeren Kierkegaard," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 75, 1970, pp. 452-476. Knud Jensenius, "Poul Møller og Kierkegaard," in his *Nogle Kierkegaardstudier*. Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck 1932, pp. 125-153. W. Glyn Jones, "Søren Kierkegaard and Poul Martin Møller," *Modern Language Review*, vol. 60, 1965, pp. 73-82.

or followers, despite his popularity among them. Second, he was not a prolific writer and much of his *corpus* was never published during his lifetime. Third, Møller had a very mixed profile as a scholar; he was a poet, a classicist, a playwright and a philosopher. But in none of these fields did he ever manage to create a definitive *magnum opus*. Thus, it is not unusual that his main philosophical work was in fact a journal article.

Møller was born in 1794 near Vejle. He studied theology at the University of Copenhagen and seemed destined for the priesthood. After receiving his degree in 1816, he spent a few years as a private tutor as he contemplated his future. In 1819 he decided to take a post as a chaplain on board a merchant ship belonging to the East Asian Company. This position took him on a two-year trip to the Far East with stops in Indonesia and China<sup>7</sup>. With a great deal of leisure time on board, he pursued his interest in ancient culture, reading extensively ancient texts from the Greco-Roman world.

Møller returned to Copenhagen in the summer of 1821 and took a position as instructor in Greek at the Borgerdyd School. In 1822 he took a similar position at the Metropolitan School. It was during this period from 1822-26 that Møller established his credentials as a classicist by translating into Danish the first six books of Homer's *Odyssey*<sup>8</sup>. It was around this time that Møller probably first became interested in Hegel. Møller's friend, the philologist Niels Bygom Krarup (1792-1842) went to Berlin in 1821 and attended Hegel's lectures<sup>9</sup>. Presumably at Møller's request, Krarup dutifully reports to him what he learns about Hegel. Krarup states, "With what concerns Hegel, I have written to P. Møller more or less everything I know about him"<sup>10</sup>. In 1825 Møller published an article entitled "Some Observations on the Development of Popular Ideas," which contains some signs of an interest in Hegel's philosophy<sup>11</sup>. This is presumably the work

<sup>7</sup> See Vilhelm Andersen, *Poul Møller, hans Liv og Skrifter*, pp. 101-129. Lone Klem, "Rejoicing over Denmark. Poul Martin Møller's Voyage to China on the Frigate 'Christianshavn' 1819-1821," in *The Golden Age Revisited. Art and Culture in Denmark 1800-1850*, ed. by Bente Scavenius. Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1996, pp. 84-91.

<sup>8</sup> Poul Martin Møller, *Homers Odysees sex første Sange metrisk overstædt*, Copenhagen 1825.

<sup>9</sup> See Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome I, *The Heiberg Period: 1824-1836*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 3), pp. 94-98.

<sup>10</sup> Morten Borup (ed.), *Mellem klassiske filologer: Af Niels Bygom Krarups Brevvekslinger*, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger 1957, Letter 20, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Poul Martin Møller, "Nogle Betragtninger over populære Ideers Udvikling," *Nyt Aftenblad*, no. 18, April 30, 1825, pp. 153-160. (Reprinted in Møller's *Efterladte Skrifter*,

that Hans Friedrich Helweg (1816-1901) has in mind when he claims that Møller “had made an approach toward Hegel before J.L. Heiberg”<sup>12</sup>, who is usually considered the founder of the Hegelian movement in Denmark.

In 1826 Møller at last received a university appointment. He took a position in Norway as lecturer in philosophy at the new University in Christiania<sup>13</sup>. During his five-year stint in Norway, Møller continued his study of Hegel’s philosophy. Møller’s friend and biographer Frederik Christian Olsen (1802-74) describes his interest as follows:

As soon as the demands of his position... allowed him time, he began to study Hegel zealously and acquired a complete and intimate knowledge of the writings of this philosopher. But once he thus had raised himself upon this base, which is the foundation for the philosophy of the more recent time, he found no rest. He took Hegel’s system and method as an indispensable aid in his own philosophical praxis, but his natural disposition to see things immediately and first-hand resulted in him wanting to have knowledge freely on his own and not to bind himself to what had been handed down....<sup>14</sup>.

Møller cautiously spoke about his interest in Hegel with one of his colleagues at the University of Christiania, Claus Winther Hjelm (1797-1871), who explains, “Although he would never show me his manuscripts and only with reluctance went into detail about what he was lecturing on, I must assume that in 1828 he began to make as the basis of his work the Hegelian system,

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vols. 1-3. Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 2, pp. 3-19. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6. Copenhagen 1848-50, vol. 5, pp. 27-37. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6. Copenhagen 1855-56, vol. 5, pp. 23-37.) See Carl Henrik Koch, “Om populære ideers udvikling,” in his *Den Danske Idealisme 1800-1880*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 257-258. Frederik Christian Olsen, “Poul Martin Møllers Levnet,” p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Friedrich Helweg, “Hegelianismen i Danmark,” *Dansk Kirketidende*, vol. 10, no. 51, December 16, 1855, p. 826f.

<sup>13</sup> See Vilhelm Andersen, *Poul Møller, hans Liv og Skrifter*, pp. 302-316. Ludvig Daae, “Fra Poul Møllers Liv som Professor i Christiania,” *Historiske Samlinger*, ed. by Den Norske Historiske Kildeskriftkommission, vol. 3, no. 1, 1908, pp. 1-20. Ole Koppang, *Hege-lianismen i Norge. En Idéhistorisk Undersøkelse*, Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard) 1943, pp. 38-40. See also *Breve til og fra F.C. Sibbern*, vols. 1-2, ed. by C.L.N. Mynster. Copenhagen: den Gyldendalske Boghandel 1866, vol. 1, pp. 156-159. *Nogle Blade af J.P. Mynster's Liv og Tid*, ed. by C.L.N. Mynster. Copenhagen: den Gyldendalske Boghandel 1875, pp. 223-226.

<sup>14</sup> Frederik Christian Olsen, “Poul Martin Møllers Levnet,” in Møller’s *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3. Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 3, p. 88.

which he was zealously studying and which was the primary topic of our daily philosophical discussions”<sup>15</sup>. On May 5, 1829, Møller writes with great zeal to Sibbern, “Hegel has no greater admirer than I”<sup>16</sup>.

In 1831 Møller returned to Denmark when he received a professorship in philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. Upon his return his interest in Hegel seems to have been as strong as ever. He was associated with Heiberg’s well-known Hegelian campaign. The philosopher and theologian, Frederik Ludvig Bang Zeuthen (1805-74) refers to Møller and Heiberg as “the most prominent representatives [of Hegelianism] in Copenhagen at that time”<sup>17</sup>. In 1834-35 Møller gave a lecture course on the history of ancient philosophy<sup>18</sup>, which relied on Hegel’s treatment of the same material in the then recently published initial volumes of the edition of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*<sup>19</sup>. Møller also penned two book reviews which referred to Hegel, one from 1835<sup>20</sup> and another from the beginning of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Poul Møller og hans Familie i Breve*, vols. 1-3, ed. by Morten Borup, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel 1976, vol. 2, letter 201, p. 171f. See also Ludvig Daae, “Fra Poul Møllers Liv som Professor i Christiania,” p. 16f.

<sup>16</sup> *Poul Møller og hans Familie i Breve*, vol. 1, letter 102, p. 221. Also in Frederik Christian Olsen, “Poul Martin Møllers Levnet,” p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> Frederik Ludvig Bang Zeuthen, *Et Par Aar af mit Liv*, Copenhagen 1869, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> Poul Martin Møller, “Forelæsninger over den ældre Philosophies Historie,” in Møller’s *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 2, pp. 275-537. (Reprinted in *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1848-50, vol. 4, pp. 1-272. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1855-56, vol. 4, pp. 1-272.)

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, I-III, ed. by Karl Ludwig Michelet, Berlin 1833-36, vols. 13-15 in *Hegel’s Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols. 1-18. Berlin 1832-45. Michelet’s foreword is dated April 28, 1833. It should be noted that Møller also uses other sources such as the multi-volume history of philosophy by Heinrich Ritter, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols. 1-12, Hamburg 1829-53. (In 1833 Møller had at his disposal volumes 1-3, which treat the relevant material; volume 3 appeared already in 1831.) Ritter and Hegel are mentioned by Olsen directly as Møller’s main sources: Frederik Christian Olsen, “Fortale,” in Møller’s *Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. iv.

<sup>20</sup> Poul Martin Møller, “Om Poesie og Kunst i Almindelighed, med Hensyn til alle Arter deraf, dog især Digte-, Maler-, Billedhugger- og Skuespillerkunst; eller: Foredrag over almindelig Æsthetik og Poetik. Af Dr. Frederik Christian Sibbern, Professor i Philosophien. Første Deel. Kiøbenhavn. Paa Forfatterens Forlag, trykt hos Fabritius de Tengnagel. 1834,” *Dansk Literatur-Tidende* for 1835, no. 12, pp. 181-194; no. 13, pp. 205-209. (Reprinted in Møller’s *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 2, pp. 105-126. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1848-50, vol. 5, pp. 202-221. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1855-56, vol. 5, pp. 201-220.)

following year<sup>21</sup>. It was presumably around this time that Møller began to have some misgivings about Hegel's philosophy. Olsen explains, "he began more and more to distance himself from Hegel and followed with animated interest the opposition to this philosopher and his followers"<sup>22</sup>. Olsen illustrates this with an interesting recollection:

A friend once asked him to try to see if he could give, in a brief sentence, the key point in the Hegelian philosophy. Poul Møller was silent for a moment, rubbing his chin as he lay on his sofa, and said, "Indeed, Hegel is really mad. He suffers from a monomania and thinks that the Concept can spread like this..." and then, in a deep silence, he made an expansive motion with his hands<sup>23</sup>.

It is often thought that the culmination of Møller's development away from Hegel was his article on the immortality of the soul in 1837<sup>24</sup>. Møller died on March 13, 1838 at a time when his article was still being widely discussed.

## II. Møller's Article on Immortality

Møller's article, "Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality, with Reference to the Most Recent Literature Belonging Thereto," was published in two installments at the beginning of 1837 in the *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*. The article is divided into eleven sections of varying length, marked by Roman numerals. This work takes aim primarily

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<sup>21</sup> Poul Martin Møller, "Nye Fortællinger af Forfatteren til en Hverdagshistorie. Udgivne af Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Andet Bind: Extremerne. Kjøbenhavn. Paa Universitets-Boghandler Reitzels Forlag, trykt hos J.D. Qvist, Bog- og Nodetrykker. 1835," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 15, 1836, pp. 135-163. (Reprinted in Møller's *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-3, Copenhagen 1839-43, vol. 2, pp. 126-158. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1848-50, vol. 6, pp. 44-73. *Efterladte Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1855-56, vol. 6, pp. 46-75.)

<sup>22</sup> Frederik Christian Olsen, "Poul Martin Møllers Levnet," p. 108f.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109n.

<sup>24</sup> Sibbern takes the article to be a public declaration of Møller's shift of allegiance away from Hegel. See Frederik Christian Sibbern, "*Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*. Udgiven af Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Nr. 1, Juni 1837. Kjøbenhavn. Reitzels Forlag. XIV og 264 S. 8. Priis 1 Rbd. 84 Skill. —(Med stadigt Hensyn til Dr. Rothes: *Læren om Treenighed og Forsoning. Et speculativt Forsøg i Anledning af Reformationsfesten.*)," in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 20, 1838, Article IV, p. 30.



at the right Hegelians who were trying to construct a theory of immortality on Hegel's behalf.

Møller introduces to his Danish readers the controversial work from 1833 by Friedrich Richter (1807-56), *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen*<sup>25</sup>. Richter presented a serious challenge to the right Hegelians by claiming that Hegel's philosophy had demonstrated that the belief in immortality was obsolete. This claim seemed to contradict Hegel's explicitly stated intention of trying to defend Christianity against its critics. Thus the right Hegelians rushed to refute Richter's claim. Karl Friedrich Göschel (1784-1861) responded on Hegel's behalf in 1835 with his *Von den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele im Lichte der spekulativen Philosophie*<sup>26</sup>. Göschel tried to argue that in fact Hegel's system did contain a doctrine of immortality and was far from denying it. These conflicting positions set the frame for Møller article, and he sets to work to evaluate them in depth. He formulates his intention with the article thus:

In what follows I hope to demonstrate that due to its peculiar nature, the doctrine of immortality, more than any other thetic proposition, when once shaken in its foundation, can never again dominate the human consciousness as it ought, unless the negation has developed itself freely in all its consequences. Only then will it become evident whether humanity can live with the world-view consistent with the negation<sup>27</sup>.

The question seems to be whether or not it is possible in general for people to live with the idea that there is no immortality. From this statement it is clear that Møller's goal goes beyond the immediate Hegelian context. This question seems to imply that the real target of his criticism is not so much

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<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Richter, *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen*, vol. 1, *Eine wissenschaftliche Kritik aus dem Standpunct der Religion unternommen*, Breslau 1833; vol. 2, *Die Lehre von jüngsten Tage. Dogma und Kritik*, Berlin 1844.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Friedrich Göschel, *Von den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele im Lichte der spekulativen Philosophie*, Berlin 1835. See Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 2f. (Reprinted in Møller's *Efterladte Skrifter* (1839-43), vol. 2, p. 160.)

<sup>27</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 4. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 162.) In contrast to the other translations given here which are my own (unless otherwise noted), I am making use of Reidar Thomte's unpublished translation as the basis for my English quotations of this text.

the right Hegelians, who attempt to ascribe to Hegel a theory of immortality, but rather the left Hegelians who deny this doctrine as such.

Before addressing himself to the Hegelian debates, Møller examines two traditional theories of immortality, those of Leibniz and Spinoza. He rejects the quite different conceptions of God that these two systems present and then turns to the notion of immortality that results from them. With respect to Leibniz's view, Møller writes,

According to this mechanistic theory of existence, nothing comes truly into being, and nothing is annihilated, but all things consist of indestructible singular essences that combine and separate into a multiplicity of appearances. Thus some kind of immortality is assured these singular essences, some of which naturally are human souls<sup>28</sup>.

It is important to emphasize the immortality of the individual since this is precisely what is denied in the pantheistic view or the view that Heiberg sketched earlier, where immortality concerns only spirit generally and not the individual. Møller sees these views as being a part of a long development in the theory of immortality and each serves a function along the way. Seen from this perspective, even the pantheistic view is not regarded as something entirely negative or absurd: "Pantheism is a theological preparatory school that every individual must attend before arriving at true religious insight"<sup>29</sup>. According to Møller, the goal should be to develop the view of immortality further in order to restore it to the place that it has lost. The implication is clearly that this doctrine has come to be regarded as dubious in recent times, and for this reason pantheism has emerged. But now it is time to put an end to the confusion and to reestablish immortality in its proper place as an important and central dogma.

The old system [sc. theism] in which the concept of immortality had a harmonious place has perished, and the new system [sc. pantheism] is not yet so fully developed that the concept of immortality can find a justifiable place in it. Even those who nourish a complete conviction that all is one and whose faith in immortality is unshaken hesitate to use

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<sup>28</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 8. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 166.)

<sup>29</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 12. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 170.)

the old formulas and have misgivings about using the term “immortality of the soul”<sup>30</sup>.

Møller thus sees the task as synthesizing these two previous views in order to create a theory of immortality that is appropriate for the present age.

In Section III of the article Møller discusses the tension between the fact that the doctrine of immortality is very important to everyone, but yet the treatments that it receives in philosophy are only accessible to a few highly trained individuals. This leads the untrained to be dissatisfied and to demand of philosophy a clear demonstration of the issue. But philosophy cannot demonstrate immortality with the necessity of a logical or mathematical proof. Thus the popular mind unknowingly makes an unreasonable demand on philosophy. Logical proofs belong to the realm of abstract ideas or “ideality”<sup>31</sup>, whereas the question of one’s personal immortality is one of existence. There can never be any necessary proof of the latter. In order to make clear this tension between the uneducated demand desire for immortality and the philosophy, Møller breaks away from his analytic style and turns to narrative, telling an amusing story of an accountant who demands of his friend, a student of theology, a firm proof for his immortality<sup>32</sup>. The exchange begins when the accountant request that his friend Ferdinand allow him to borrow a scholarly book that discusses the immortality of the soul. Then the accountant says he must begin to get ready for an appointment, and so instead of borrowing the book, he asks his friend to orally give him the strongest demonstrations of immortality while he prepares to depart: “But please hurry; I fear the coach will be here in a moment”<sup>33</sup>. The student Ferdinand rightly finds this disposition utterly absurd since one can hardly begin a serious discussion of such issues under such circumstances. But the accountant, who is not accustomed to scholarly work or argumentation, sees no problem with it, claiming that Ferdinand is simply engaging in scholarly subterfuge in order to avoid telling him what he wants to know:

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<sup>30</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 14. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 173.)

<sup>31</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 22. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 181.)

<sup>32</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, pp. 18-21. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, pp. 177-180.)

<sup>33</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 20. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 180.)

That, Ferdinand, is the same old nonsense. If you use understandable language, why shouldn't I comprehend the proof as well as you? But we all know the guild-spirit that possesses both you and your honorable colleagues with the Latin and Greek culture. You use your own gibberish to keep something to yourselves. When liberal conceptions become prevalent, this caste system will no longer endure<sup>34</sup>.

Møller thus brilliantly portrays the conflict between the popular mind, demanding answers, and the scholarly mind unable to provide them in the form requested.

Kierkegaard's writing style is well known for its ability to shift perspectives and use different forms of genre to achieve the desired end. It is thus no accident that this somewhat uncharacteristic passage in a scholarly article attracted his attention. In his *Journal BB*, the young Kierkegaard writes, "The episode Poul Møller has included in his treatise on the immortality of the soul in the latest issue of the *Maanedsskrift* is very interesting. Perhaps relieving the strict scholarly tone in this way with lighter passages, in which life nevertheless emerges much more fully, will become the usual thing, and will in the scholarly domain compare somewhat to the chorus, to the comic parts of romantic dramas"<sup>35</sup>.

In his general assessment of this anecdote, Møller again returns to the question of the incommensurability of a necessary logical proof with the subject matter at hand. Anticipating Kierkegaard's later views on the matter<sup>36</sup>, he writes,

A closer examination of logical and mathematical statements will indicate that they are all of a hypothetical nature. It is certain that the angles of a triangle = two right angles, but this does not at all imply that triangles exist. We only know something about their actual existence when we experience their presence in existence. But this is something we cannot learn from mathematics. Mathematics belongs in the realm of ideality where strict proofs are demonstrated from hypothetical truths. When we make statements about doctrines of the supersensuous, we are not merely speaking about conceptual relations that apply to a particular kind of object on the assumption

<sup>34</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 20. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 179.)

<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard, *SKS*, vol. 17, p. 134, BB: 41 / KJN 2,?

<sup>36</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP1*, pp. 109-125; *SKS*, vol. 7, pp. 106-120.

that such objects are given, but we propose to say something about the supersensuous reality itself<sup>37</sup>.

Here Møller argues that the mistake lies in the fact that one hopes to attain a guarantee for a continued existence after death, but one searches for this guarantee in a logical proof, which can only demonstrate relations of things assumed to exist ahead of time but which is impotent with regard to proving their actual existence. But it is existence that is absolutely decisive in the question of immortality. There is thus a conceptual confusion involved in asking for a logical proof for immortality since logic is in no way equipped to provide such a proof.

After thus refuting the view that mathematical or logical proofs can be used to demonstrate the truth of immortality, Møller raises the question of whether Hegel's "speculative dialectics"<sup>38</sup> might succeed where mathematics and traditional logic failed. This then leads him to the all-important question of immortality in Hegel's system. At the beginning of his account, he states rather categorically,

I shall maintain first of all, with the most complete certainty, that Hegel nowhere in his writings endorses a concept of immortality such as is taught by Christianity and correctly maintained by the most competent contemporary philosophers. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Hegel expressly denies the doctrine of immortality as is falsely maintained in several German writings which frequently quote tirades from Hegel's *Logic* to substantiate their allegations. Remarks have been brought to light where the abstract concept of the beyond is mentioned as an immature metaphysical thought; but only by a vulgar misunderstanding can this thought be understood as referring to the Christian idea of a higher future existence. Such passages do not speak of the Christian idea any more than Hegel's *Logic*, which according to its whole plan, is unable to deal with such concrete concepts as heaven and immortality<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 22. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 181f.)

<sup>38</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 23. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 183.)

<sup>39</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 24f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 184f.)

After thus acknowledging the controversial nature of the matter, Møller continues by stating his own views based on Hegel's primary texts:

Nonetheless, whoever is able to read between the lines in Hegel's writings will reach the conclusion that this philosopher holds the concept of personal immortality to be a representation without reality. Consequently, according to the discoverer of the method himself, speculative dialectic can never bring forth any proof of immortality<sup>40</sup>.

Since Hegel himself did not attempt to deduce a doctrine of immortality from his speculative method, it would be misguided to attempt to do so on his behalf.

After thus having established that Hegel himself sought no proof for immortality, Møller pursues the question of whether such a proof may be adduced using Hegel's dialectical methodology and notes that Hegel's students were attempting just such a proof<sup>41</sup>. Møller begins by discussing Hegel's deduction of the logical categories:

Philosophy deals with something real that is purely *a priori*, namely ontology. Here the dialectical development of concepts that Hegel so vigorously accomplished has its full significance although the method was in use prior to his time. The universal determinations of thought can actually be developed in such a dialectical cohesion that one category leads to another, and through such a procedure an *a priori* system of determinations is brought forth that is valid for all existence<sup>42</sup>.

Hegel's method has its proper application and can indeed prove the existence of abstract categories. However, Møller continues, the question of immortality can only be decided based on experience:

This science [sc. speculative logic or ontology] articulates the quintessence of all universal and necessary determinants of whatever exists, but not the necessity of the actual world's existence with all its

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<sup>40</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 25. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 185.)

<sup>41</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 25. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 185.)

<sup>42</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 26. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 186.)

infinite determinateness. The actually existing world can be known only through experience, and no philosophy can prove *a priori* the necessity of the inexhaustible richness of the determinants in which it appears. Like mathematics, ontology has an aggregate of hypothetical assumptions. It offers an *a priori* unfolding of all predicates that can be affirmed of all that can exist, but that anything actually does exist must be known in a different way. Science can develop *a priori* the unalterable conditions of existence but not its multifarious factual content<sup>43</sup>.

Given this, Møller concludes that Hegel's speculative ontology is in principle unable to prove the immortality of the soul since "it is impossible to prove the necessity of existence from purely abstract concepts"<sup>44</sup>. Møller thus ends this section with a straightforward denial of all *a priori* proofs for human immortality.

In Section IV Møller, having dispensed with the mathematical and ontological proofs, takes up a new kind of proof, based on what he calls a "world-view" (*Verdensanskuelse*). A world-view is the basis of all one's ideas and conceptions and is thus more fundamental than any given proof or idea. A philosophical system can be said to express a world-view, but remains merely an inadequate reflection of it. Since a world-view is fundamental, no proof for it can really be given beyond a judgment of the strengths and weakness of it in its completed form. This leads Møller to an account of tradition, specifically the religious tradition, which constitutes an example of a world-view. One is born into such traditions and can never completely escape them even with a conscious effort. Møller ascribes three aspects to the world-view:

We have now also indicated two essential aspects that appear in every more or less complete world-view: first, the empirical understanding of the phenomena of the world of sense, second, the Christian tradition of the supersensuous which always is enriched and corrected in the course of time. Added to these two extremes is the third aspect, which in the present order of things has for us the most perfect actuality and gives to human life its proper fullness, namely the presence of

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<sup>43</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 26f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 186f.)

<sup>44</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 27. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 187.)

the supersensuous in the sensuous as the object of an experience of a higher nature<sup>45</sup>.

A philosophical system cannot adequately capture these aspects: “the philosopher’s systematic presentation expresses with formal perfection only the knowledge that was already present with him in an immediate way and in a rudimentary form”<sup>46</sup>.

Møller then returns to Richter’s criticism of the doctrine of immortality, which, he argues, proceeds from the presentation of a world-view which renders this doctrine superfluous. Møller writes, “Thus Friederich Richter, contrary to his own intentions, has contributed much to the refutation of the Hegelian system by giving intelligible explanations of several points that clearly show that the doctrine of immortality is incongruous with the spirit of the system”<sup>47</sup>. The truth of immortality must be judged on the basis of its place in a true world-view: “the proof derives all its power of persuasion from the world-view that is presented in the whole system and can have significance only for one who is assumed to share essentially the same world-view that is presented in the system”<sup>48</sup>. The left Hegelians are correct in their understanding that Hegel’s system cannot be harmonized with personal immortality:

The belief in immortality cannot be harmonized with logical pantheism to which some of Hegel’s followers subscribe. This we affirm with the strongest certainty although some of the supporters of this philosophy delude themselves into believing that they eventually can bring this spurious conceptual structure into conformity with the main principle of Christianity. My own conviction is that the impossibility of such an attempt ought to be obvious even to a superficial observer<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 32. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 193.)

<sup>46</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 33. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 193f.)

<sup>47</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 33f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 194.)

<sup>48</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 34. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 195.)

<sup>49</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 34f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 195f.)



Here there can no longer be any doubt about Møller's opinion: there is no such doctrine in Hegel's philosophy, and the right Hegelians are utterly deluded in trying to find one there since the world-view of Hegel's philosophy is straightforwardly hostile to this doctrine. He regards the left Hegelians as at least honest since they deny the doctrine more or less straightforwardly<sup>50</sup>.

Møller's argument is that since Hegel's philosophy has no doctrine of immortality, the world-view that informs it is incomplete and cannot stand the test of time: "The system is incongruous with the essential points in the age-old tradition, the content of which constitutes the true knowledge of the supersensuous: for every system that excludes the essential parts of this knowledge will ultimately fail in its claim to universal validity in science"<sup>51</sup>.

Møller argues that the right Hegelians' attempt to cobble together a doctrine of immortality on Hegel's behalf is in vain:

The view that has been expressed here Hegel has already stated in other words, but his philosophy does not have the pretended but only the apparent congruity with the contents of the Christian tradition. The complete absence of a true doctrine of immortality is the decisive proof of this. Some of his school's independent disciples have become aware of this and have attempted to find a remedy for this deficiency, for they fully realize that without a doctrine of immortality the system will not have the extensive influence they had hoped for. But if such a new component is admitted to the system of Hegel, a thorough alteration must take place in all its principal parts<sup>52</sup>.

The defect lies so deep in Hegel's system that it cannot be corrected by the best of efforts. Given this, Hegel's system must fail the test of being an adequate world-view since reason will always demand of a complete world-view that it contain a doctrine of immortality.

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<sup>50</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 35. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 196.): "a great number of honest followers of the system unhesitatingly admit...that the innumerable rational beings do not as 'these persons' constitute any essential part of existence but are merely temporary forms of the logically necessary determinable process of spirit. According to the hypothesis that is basic in this view, every finite rational being is merely a vanishing wave in the ocean of thought, the undulation of which is determined by an unalterable necessity."

<sup>51</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 35. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 196f.)

<sup>52</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 36. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 197.)

Møller thus argues that the truth must be judged on the basis of its conformity with a traditional and enduring world-view. Given that the only such world-view he recognizes is that of traditional Christianity, any deviations from Christian dogma must be rejected. In a way that today sounds question-begging and Eurocentric, Møller argues that the only enduring truth is that of the Christian tradition: “Whatever is to have essential endurance must follow the current of the Christian tradition. Whoever wants to form something apart from this common medium merely builds castles in the air without foundations, and these eventually dissolve into a multitude of subjective whims”<sup>53</sup>. Since Hegel’s system lacks a Christian doctrine of immortality, it cannot be said to contain any final truth and will thus fade with time<sup>54</sup>.

In the long Section VI Møller refutes the denial of the doctrine of immortality. First, Møller argues that immortality is necessary for the production of art. Here Møller in a sense follows Heiberg’s line that sees art as a highly developed embodiment of the Absolute; but Heiberg’s view on immortality is not entirely clear on this issue, whereas Møller thinks that that view implies a belief in immortality. In this context Møller states his famous thesis that “True art is the anticipation of the blessed life”<sup>55</sup>, which is repeated by Kierkegaard<sup>56</sup>. Second, also in a Kierkegaardian spirit, Møller

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<sup>53</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 40. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 202.)

<sup>54</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 46. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 208.): “Since nowadays every philosophy of religion that has the least significance pretends that its content is the Christian tradition, its outward authority receives a severe blow when it becomes clear that it is incongruous with one or another essential principles of Christianity. There is no truth the absence of which is more difficult to palliate or supplement with sentences that remotely resemble it, than the doctrine of immortality, since its absence penetrates all the principle parts of the system. Therefore, the absence of this doctrine will always be the secret flaw that early and late prepares the downfall of the otherwise sagacious system.”

<sup>55</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa-nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 53f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 217.) For an outstanding discussion of this, see Lasse Horne Kjældgaard, *Sjælen efter døden. Guldal-derens moderne gennembrud*, pp. 94ff. Møller’s source for this claim might well have been C.H. Weiß’s *Die philosophische Geheimlehre von der Unsterblichkeit des menschlichen Individuums* (Dresden 1834, pp. 46ff.), which was one of the works he treats in his article.

<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard, *BA*, p. 153; *SKS*, vol. 4, p. 452: “This conception has found definite expression in the statement: Art is an anticipation of eternal life, because poetry and art are the reconciliation only of the imagination, and they may well have the *Sinnigkeit* of intuition but by no means the *Innigkeit* of earnestness.” See also Johan Ludvig Heiberg,

argues, implicitly criticizing Hegel, that there can be no final or complete knowledge in the finite mundane sphere<sup>57</sup>. Yet a third argument is that abstract knowledge can never capture the existential truth of the individual:

If we assume that knowledge of existence is not abstract, then the particular inasmuch as it is particular, must be regarded as a large number of accidental forms in the appearance of the absolute. If the particular to which single human individuals, who are born and die on this earth at definite hours belong, is to have true reality, none of the scientific forms known to us can give us perfect knowledge<sup>58</sup>.

All three arguments were redeployed by Kierkegaard in his polemic against Hegelianism. The third argument recalls that of Martensen in his review of the *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course*.

Møller again characterizes the Hegelian system as pantheism, which, he argues, ultimately leads to nihilism, and is thus the source of the contemporary confusion about matters of religion. Møller cites Schopenhauer as the culmination of this nihilistic pantheism<sup>59</sup>. Schopenhauer, who himself spared no invective against Hegel, would presumably have been startled by Møller's belief that their respective philosophies served a common end. Møller ultimately indicates his confidence that the general repugnance at nihilism will serve in time to reject it. Hegel is mentioned directly in this section only briefly in order once again to confirm that Hegel's philosophy is a pantheism<sup>60</sup>.

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“Om Malerkunsten i dens Forhold til de andre skjøne Kunster,” *Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*, no. 2, 1838, p. 121. (Reprinted in *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vols. 1-11. Copenhagen 1861-62, vol. 2, p. 274.)

<sup>57</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 58f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 221f.)

<sup>58</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 60. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 224.)

<sup>59</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 62, p. 66. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 226, p. 230.)

<sup>60</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 62. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 226.): “Thus K.L. Michelet, who by no means is one of those disciples of Hegel who think freely under their own auspices, has in a review of a short treatise that presents the nineteenth century world-myth in a very simple form stated that the essential conclusions of this publication are in complete agreement with Hegelian philosophy.” Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p.

In Section VII Møller criticizes the various concrete depictions of life after death, which he regards as wholly unfounded products of the imagination. In our present condition, it is impossible for us to know the nature of our immortal life: “What can be known about the order of things in the hereafter is hardly more than its existence, and the representation of the undetermined hereafter cannot give human life its real richness of content. But the certainty of the hereafter places the present world from which human life derives its fullness in its correct light”<sup>61</sup>. Møller argues that with a consciousness of immortality human beings have the proper understanding of their finite existence on earth, and this informs all aspects of their personal and social life. Thus, while science cannot accept the fantasies of the imagination about this matter, these do play a role in the popular mind and help many people to gain the correct perspective about mundane existence. While this short section contains no polemic with Hegel, it is important for clarifying Møller’s own view.

Møller concludes by surveying some recent attempts to prove the existence of immortality. Section VIII discusses Christian Hermann Weiße’s (1801-66) attempt to demonstrate that human immortality is consistent with Hegel’s system in opposition to Richter<sup>62</sup>. Much of the section is merely a long quotation from Weiße’s treatise. Similarly, Section IX is dedicated to the work on the issue by Immanuel Hermann, the younger, Fichte (1797-1879)<sup>63</sup>, who attempted to establish a proof for the existence of immortality independently of Hegel’s thought. Møller also cites his treatise at length. Section X is dedicated to Karl Friedrich Göschel’s *Von den Beweisen für*

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67. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 231.): “Marheineke has namely prepared a dogmatics in Hegelian form that accurately abides with the words of the Apostolic Symbol and which nevertheless omits the Christian doctrine of immortality. It is extremely difficult for a believer who expresses his faith in popular formulas to disagree with an adherent of the modern system when such an adherent endeavors to maintain faith in the old symbol. Only in the realm of science can scientific errors find their refutation.”

<sup>61</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 71. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 236.)

<sup>62</sup> See Christian Hermann Weiße, “*Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen. Eine wissenschaftliche Kritik, aus dem Standpunct der Religion unternommen, von Dr. Friedrich Richter von Magdeburg*. Erster Band. Breslau, 1833. XV. 245 S. gr. 8,” *Jahrbucher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, September 1833, nos. 41-42, pp. 321-327, pp. 329-334. Møller also mentions Weiße’s *Die philosophische Gebeimlehre von der Unsterblichkeit des menschlichen Individuums*, Dresden 1834.

<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Hermann Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer*, Elberfeld 1834.

*die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele*<sup>64</sup>, which argues for a doctrine of immortality based on Hegel's philosophy. Møller quotes and paraphrases from this work extensively. After setting forth Göschel's position, Møller reiterates his doubts that Hegelianism can be reconciled with Christianity:

Therefore, there can be no doubt that the author believes that he can bring the conclusions of his speculative philosophy into complete harmony with the Christian tradition. No informed Hegelian could possibly believe that such a church spire could fittingly be placed upon the Hegelian edifice without subjecting it to a thorough transformation. From several quarters objections have been made to Göschel's position by the disciples of Hegel, and the question has been raised as to where this cycle of concepts may find a place in the system (or in its framework)<sup>65</sup>.

Møller believes that Göschel's efforts are wholly misguided and goes on to criticize his grasp and presentation of Hegel's thought. The short Section XI represents Møller's conclusion to the work. But here he does little more than make some general comments about the literature he has just reviewed.

This work marked an important episode in the history of Danish Hegelianism. It provoked Heiberg, who perceived it as an open attack on Hegel, and inspired the young Kierkegaard with respect to what might be called its existential arguments against Hegelianism<sup>66</sup>. Yet Møller ultimately rejects Hegel's philosophy not because he believes it lacks merit on its own terms but because he fears its pernicious effects. His attitude toward Hegel remains ambivalent. While he is critical of the absence of this doctrine in Hegel's system, he makes clear that he remains sympathetic to other aspects of Hegel's thought. Part of this ambivalence can be seen in the fact that

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<sup>64</sup> Carl Friedrich Göschel, *Von den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele im Lichte der speculativen Philosophie*, Berlin 1835.

<sup>65</sup> Møller, "Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maa- nedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 449f. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 268.)

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Kierkegaard's discussion of this issue in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where he writes, "Moreover, I know that the late Professor Poul Møller, who certainly was familiar with the newest philosophy, did not until late in life become really aware of the infinite difficulty of the question of immortality when it is made simple, when the question is not about a new demonstration and about the opinions, strung on a thread, of Tom, Dick, and Harry or about the best way of stringing opinions on a thread. I also know that in a treatise he tried to give an account and that this monograph clearly reflects his aversion to modern speculative thought." (*CUP1*, p. 172; *SKS*, vol. 7, p. 159.)

Møller is far more critical of the right Hegelians for their attempt to ascribe to Hegel a theory of immortality than he is of Hegel himself for failing to include such a theory in the first place. It is they rather than Hegel himself who have mistakenly used his logical tools to address questions of individual existence.

But the work was understood as signaling Møller's break with Hegelianism<sup>67</sup>. With respect to this Zeuthen writes in his memoirs: "I have said how Poul Møller, before he died, turned away from the *absolutum dominium* [absolute power] of thought, as it was made dominant by Hegel"<sup>68</sup>. The theologian Nikolai Fogtmann (1788-1851) wrote the following in a letter to Sibbern, dated, May 25, 1838, i.e., shortly after Møller's death: "Poul Møller's death was a great loss. It is strange that his treatise on the immortality of the soul was his last and to date (I do not yet know his *opere posthuma*) most important philosophical work. I was glad to see from it that he had torn himself free from Hegel's chains"<sup>69</sup>. Thus, Møller's rejection of right Hegelianism seems to have met with wide approbation at the time.

### III. Heiberg's Discussions of Hegel and Immortality

Heiberg had been studying Hegel's philosophy since the mid-1820s. He was interested in many different aspects of the Hegelian system and, prior to Møller's article in 1837, had occasion to broach the issue of immortality. In his work on Hegel's logic from 1832, the *Outline of the Philosophy of Philosophy or Speculative Logic*, Heiberg refers to the notion of immortality in his analysis of the concept of "life"<sup>70</sup>. In this context Heiberg notes the unreasonable demands made on philosophy when people expect it to demonstrate things like the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. He laments that usually people who make such demands have little understanding of philosophy. He claims that it is misleading to talk about

<sup>67</sup> See Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 105-106.

<sup>68</sup> Frederik Ludvig Bang Zeuthen, *Et Par Aar af mit Liv*, Copenhagen 1869, p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> *Breve til og fra F.C. Sibbern*, vols. 1-2, ed. by C.L.N. Mynster. Copenhagen: den Gyldendalske Boghandel 1866, vol. 1, p. 186.

<sup>70</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik. Som Ledetraad ved Forelæsninger paa den kongelige militaire Høiskole*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1832, § 177, Remark, pp. 113f. (In English in *Heiberg's Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2006 (*Texts from Golden Age Denmark*, vol. 2), pp. 196ff.)

the soul in this context since it is usually associated with eternal life. But he contends that this is not the case. The soul, he argues, is necessarily connected with the body and is thus negated with the death of the body; “the soul cannot outlast the body. The soul is nothing but the concept of the body, and the body is the objectivity of this concept or the visible soul. Man has the soul in common with every object of nature”<sup>71</sup>. But this is not a pure negation but rather a Hegelian sublation: “but the human soul possesses the advantage of sublating itself and becoming spirit. However, logic, which forms the foundation of spirit, is precisely *the Idea*; this is eternal, intransitory, reason and truth, and all actual life exists only in it”<sup>72</sup>. The immediacy of the soul is overcome in the higher concept of spirit. Heiberg genuinely seems to believe that people will take comfort in the notion that after the death of their bodies they will participate in the speculative Idea. Based on this analysis, one could infer that Heiberg is a right Hegelian since he believes that the notion of a collective consciousness called “spirit” is a proof of a doctrine of immortality<sup>73</sup>.

When he read Møller’s article, Heiberg presumably had some misgivings. He had been close to Møller and believed that Møller was one of the few people among his fellow Danes who had an understanding and sympathy for Hegel’s philosophy. But with this article, Møller seemed to be critical of both the Hegelian right and the Hegelian left. Thus he felt obliged to respond in some way to the article. He did so almost immediately in his book review of Valdemar Henrik Rothe’s (1777-1857) *Doctrine of the Trinity and Reconciliation*<sup>74</sup>. Heiberg alludes to Møller’s betrayal in the third

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<sup>71</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik. Som Ledetraad ved Forelæsninger paa den kongelige militaire Høiskole*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1832, § 177, Remark, pp. 113f. (In English in *Heiberg’s Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, pp. 196ff.)

<sup>72</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *Grundtræk til Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik. Som Ledetraad ved Forelæsninger paa den kongelige militaire Høiskole*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1832, § 177, Remark, pp. 113f. (In English in *Heiberg’s Speculative Logic and Other Texts*, pp. 196ff.)

<sup>73</sup> When Martensen met Heiberg for the first time in person in 1836 he was surprised to see that he had right Hegelian tendencies: “When we discussed his work, *On the Significance of Philosophy*, I had expected that he would situate himself near the Hegelian left. This was, however, not the case, for all of his statements went in the direction of the Hegelian right, and he placed Marheineke quite high among the theologians.” Martensen, *Af mit Levnet*, vol. 1, pp. 218-219.

<sup>74</sup> Heiberg, “Recension over Hr. Dr. Rothes *Treenigheds- og Forsoningslære*,” *Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*, no. 1, 1837, pp. 1-89. (Reprinted in *Heiberg’s Prosaiske*

section of the review, without naming him explicitly. After concluding one discussion, Heiberg notes,

I might add I know well that this utterly simple solution to the task will not satisfy everyone, in particular those who are interested in *the most recent* fermentation in philosophy. But it has still not been shown whether the laudable attempt by the most recent participants in this movements to progress beyond the present circle of philosophy, is not unwittingly a regress; whether the system, which they just left, does not contain what they now are looking for outside it, in which case they would have gone over the stream after water. Yet it does not seem that these deserters would ever come to make up their own corps; for their goal is too indeterminate, for if they also could name something or another for which they are searching, for example, a future world-view, then they cannot say anything about the way which leads there, but it is just that which is at issue in philosophy, which cannot be served by having its property on the moon<sup>75</sup>.

Here Møller is given the harsh label of “deserter” of the Hegelian cause due clearly to his then recent article<sup>76</sup>. Heiberg presumably felt offended by the fact that in the article, Møller dared to satirize Heiberg’s on-going program to make philosophy popular. Specifically, in the aforementioned exchange between the theology student and the accountant, the latter echoes Heiberg’s famous call: “The spirit of the age demands that science be popularized”<sup>77</sup>.

The fifth section of that article is entitled “Spirit and Immortality.” In this work Heiberg repeatedly attempts to make Hegelian corrections to what

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*Skrifter*, vol. 2, pp. 1-112.) (In English as “Review of Dr. Rothe’s Doctrine of the Trinity and Reconciliation,” *Heiberg’s Perseus and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press 2010 (*Texts from Golden Age Denmark*, vol. 6), pp. 81-149.)

<sup>75</sup> Heiberg, “Recension over Hr. Dr. Rothes *Treenigheds- og Forsoningslære*,” *Perseus*, no. 1, 1837, p. 33. (*Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 2, pp. 41-42.)

<sup>76</sup> Frederik Christian Sibbern “*Perseus, Journal for den speculative Idee*. Udgiven af Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Nr. 1, Juni 1837. Kjøbenhavn. Reitzels Forlag. XIV og 264 S. 8. Priis 1 Rbd. 84 Skill. —(Med stadigt Hensyn til Dr. Rothes: *Læren om Treenighed og Forsoning. Et speculativt Forsøg i Anledning af Reformationsfesten.*)” in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 19, 1838, Article I, p. 336. (Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Bemærkninger og Undersøgelser fornemmelig betræffende Hegels Philosophie, betragtet i Forhold til vor Tid*. Copenhagen 1838, p. 54.)

<sup>77</sup> Møller, “Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed,” *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, p. 20. (*Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 179.)



he regards as conceptual confusions on the part of Rothe. Thus, it seems fair to assume that he takes his statements on the topic of immortality to be in line with standard Hegelian doctrine. He argues against the common view that immortality means simply that one continues to live in heaven more or less as one lived on earth, but only for eternity:

Neither in religion nor in philosophy can the human being's condition after death be regarded as a continued existence in time and space. While the possibility of such an existence cannot be ruled out, it is inappropriate to claim that it is so without the experience necessary to establish the claim on a scientific basis. That such a thing can very well be possible cannot be denied; but for one to know something about it, one would have to be in possession of *experiences* on which then the doctrine about this matter could be built, and thereby become a kind of higher, albeit empirical natural science<sup>78</sup>.

This claim sounds more Kantian than Hegelian. Knowledge can only come from experience, and since we have not experience of life after death, this transcends our ability to know. All of our experience is in space and time, and this would seem to imply that any conscious state in death would not be in space or time but rather would be eternal. He goes on to explain the nature of a speculative treatment of this issue:

But the speculative idea of immortality is not concerned with these particularities; and people are therefore mistaken if they believe that religion or philosophy can give them information about this. In both fields immortality is taken in the purely speculative sense, independent of the limitations of time and space...religion teaches that the faithful will be saved and philosophy that spirit and its works will continue to exist<sup>79</sup>.

This squares with his earlier account, according to which immortality meant not a personal immortality but the immortality of the collective human mind.

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<sup>78</sup> —45— [Johan Ludvig Heiberg], "Bretschneiders Forsvar for Rationalismen," *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, 1830, VII, no. 108, September 8, [p. 438].

<sup>79</sup> —45— [Johan Ludvig Heiberg], "Bretschneiders Forsvar for Rationalismen," *Kjøbenhavns flyvende Post*, 1830, VII, no. 108, September 8, [p. 438].

#### IV. Sibbern's Criticism of Heiberg's Views on Immortality

Sibbern responded to Heiberg's new philosophical journal with a long book review that was published in several installments in the *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*. This review meticulously goes through Heiberg's text and critically examines virtually every argument, often with reference to Hegel's philosophy. In the sixth article of this review, Sibbern takes up Heiberg's account of immortality in a section entitled "Remarks Concerning Prof. Heiberg's Contribution to the Doctrine of Human Immortality"<sup>80</sup>. This is the section in the review that explores Heiberg's section "Spirit and Immortality" from Heiberg's review of Rothe. This issue was one that had interested Sibbern for some time. Sibbern had treated the issue in his *De præexistentia, genesi et immortalitate animæ disputatio* from 1823.

Here Sibbern says that he will set forth three comments regarding Heiberg's treatment of this doctrine. First, he criticizes Heiberg for never really giving a proof for immortality but instead merely pointing out that such a proof would fall within the sphere of logic<sup>81</sup>. This leads to a second criticism that such a proof would actually fall under the pure view of the philosophy of spirit rather than that of logic<sup>82</sup>. Third, Heiberg distinguishes between individuals [*Individer*] and particular specimens [*Exemplarer*]<sup>83</sup>. The latter are merely individual plants and animals which are perishable, while the former are ontologically primary as individuals and thus immortal. Sibbern argues that this distinction cannot hold in Hegel's philosophy which reduces all particulars to specimens, thus ruling out the possibility of immortality. Finally, Sibbern discusses Poul Martin Møller's essay on immortality and Heiberg's polemic with it.<sup>84</sup> Not surprisingly, he defends Møller against Heiberg's critique.

The young Kierkegaard followed these discussions attentively. He refers to Møller's article in an early journal entry dated February 4, 1837,<sup>85</sup> immediately after the publication of the first installment of Møller's article.

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<sup>80</sup> Sibbern, "Bemærkninger ved Prof. Heibergs Bidrag til Læren om Menneskets Udødelighed," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1838, pp. 222-244.

<sup>81</sup> Sibbern, "Perseus," *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1838, Article VI, p. 227.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228f.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231f.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237ff.

<sup>85</sup> See *JP*, vol. 5, 5201; *SKS*, vol. 17, p. 134, BB:41. This work is also referred to by Emil Boesen on February 18, 1837. See Carl Weltzer, "Stemninger og Tilstande i Emil

Kierkegaard mourned his death, and in 1844 dedicated *The Concept of Anxiety* to him<sup>86</sup>. Two years later he refers more explicitly to Møller's article on immortality in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "Poul Møller, when everything here at home was Hegelian, judged quite differently... for some time he first spoke of Hegel almost with indignation, until his wholesome, humorous nature made him smile, especially at Hegelianism"<sup>87</sup>. In another passage he writes,

...I know that the late Professor Poul Møller, who certainly was familiar with the newest philosophy, did not until late in life become really aware of the infinite difficulty of the question of immortality when it is made simple, and when the question is not about a new demonstration and about the opinions, strung on a thread, of Tom, Dick, and Harry or about the best way of stringing opinions on a thread. I also know that in a treatise he tried to give an account and that this monograph clearly reflects his aversion to modern speculative thought<sup>88</sup>.

Thus, Kierkegaard praises Møller's rejection of right Hegelianism on this issue. Although Kierkegaard is not known for having a developed theory of immortality, he does take up the issue explicitly in scattered passages in *The Concept of Anxiety*<sup>89</sup>, the *Postscript*<sup>90</sup>, and "There will be the Resurrection of the Dead, of the Righteous—and of the Unrighteous" from *Christian Discourses*<sup>91</sup>. These passages present an open door for Kierkegaard scholars who wish to use source-work research to pursue the importance of Møller's work for the development of Kierkegaard's thought.

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Boesens Ungdomsaaar," in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger*, seventh series, vol. 1, Copenhagen 1951-53, p. 402.

<sup>86</sup> Kierkegaard, *CA*, p. 5; *SKS*, vol. 4, p. 311: "To the late Professor Poul Martin Møller, the happy lover of Greek culture, the admirer of Homer, the confidant of Socrates, the interpreter of Aristotle—Denmark's joy in 'Joy over Denmark,' though 'widely traveled,' always 'remembered in the Danish summer'—the object of my admiration, my profound loss, this work is dedicated." See also *CA*, Supplement, p. 178; *Pap.* V B 46. See H.P. Rohde, "Poul Møller," in *Kierkegaard's Teachers*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag 1982 (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 10), pp. 91-108. See also Frithiof Brandt, *Den unge Søren Kierkegaard*, pp. 336-446.

<sup>87</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP1*, p. 34n.; *SKS*, vol. 7, p. 41n.

<sup>88</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP1*, p. 172; *SKS*, vol. 7, p. 159.

<sup>89</sup> Kierkegaard, *CA*, pp. 139-141, pp. 151-154; *SKS*, vol. 4, pp. 439-442, pp. 451-453.

<sup>90</sup> Kierkegaard, *CUP1*, pp. 165-188 / *SKS* 7, pp. 153-173.

<sup>91</sup> Kierkegaard, *CD*, pp. 202-213; *SKS* 10, pp. 211-221.

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