

## ***The Conflict between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars and Kierkegaard's Relation with Speculative Thought***

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In this article I offer a historical analysis of Kierkegaard's early, unpublished theatrical work, *The Conflict between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*. In this comedy, it is possible to trace a number of expressions that ridicule the philosophical view of Martensen, which in turn is associated with Hegelianism and speculative thought. However, I wish to argue that, if one pays close attention to some passages in Kierkegaard's early journals in the 1830s, specifically the so-called journal of Gilleleje, one notes that he actually seems to agree with Martensen on several points. In my view, this would show that, despite Kierkegaard's hostility towards Martensen in the *Soap-Cellars*, he was actually sympathetic to some of the latter's ideas. This analysis would help us to better understand the philosophical position of young Kierkegaard, who, as it turns out, had a more favorable opinion of speculative thinking than is often thought.

**Keywords:** Kierkegaard – Martensen – Hegel – Golden Age Denmark – speculative thought – Heiberg – satire

The comedy entitled *The Conflict between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars* was written by Kierkegaard presumably in the first half of 1838. This text, unpublished in Kierkegaard's lifetime, has not received much attention from the scholars, since it is assumed that, as with other early writings by Kierkegaard, the *Soap-Cellars* lacks a philosophical proposal and its objective is specifically polemical (Watkin 1990). The drama describes in three acts the path of the protagonist, Willibald, through this world and a type of philosophical paradise known as the Prytaneum. The action depicts conversations between

Willibald and a series of characters who clearly allude satirically to real figures of the Danish Golden Age.<sup>1</sup> In fact, what has been written about the *Soap-Cellars*<sup>2</sup> usually attempts to decipher who are the real people behind the *dramatis personae*. In theory, the point of this exercise is to identify who were Kierkegaard's rivals, which would help determine his philosophical position at the time. For example, if the characters Phrase and Mr. Merrythought in the drama are parodic representations of Heiberg and Martensen, both writers labeled as Hegelian in the 1830s, this would show, it could be argued, that Kierkegaard was anti-Hegelian back then. This is a traditional interpretation adopted by commentators such as Niels Thulstrup (1980). Once this question is settled, scholars typically leave this text behind.

This anti-Hegelian reading has been questioned recently. Jon Stewart (2024) argues that, while Kierkegaard seems to attack Heiberg and Martensen in the *Soap-Cellars*, this does not mean that he was necessarily against Hegel's philosophy. Rather, Stewart suggests, the satire is directed at the Hegelian jargon that was spreading among students at the University of Copenhagen, a trend caused in part by Martensen's lectures in the spring of 1838. Thus, Kierkegaard is mocking a way of speaking, not a philosophical position.

In this article I wish to take Stewart's idea and take it a step further. In the *Soap-Cellars* it is possible to trace a number of expressions, usually uttered by the aforementioned Phrase and Mr. Merrythought in the Prytaneum, that reflect Martensen's discourse, which in turn is associated with Hegelianism and speculative thought. Kierkegaard clearly mocks this way of speaking. However, I would like to argue that, if one pays close attention to some passages in Kierkegaard's early journals in the 1830s, specifically the so-called journal of Gilleleje, one notes that he actually seems to agree with several of these ideas. In my view, this would not only show that the satire is a personal attack against Martensen, but that, surprisingly and despite this hostility, Kierkegaard was sympathetic to some of his ideas. This analysis would help us to better understand the philosophical position of young Kierkegaard, who, as it turns out, had a more favorable opinion of speculative thinking than is usually thought.

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<sup>1</sup> It was a common practice during the Danish Golden Age to ridicule public figures through literature and drama. A famous example of this practice was Heiberg's celebrated comedy *A Soul after Death* of 1841.

<sup>2</sup> See Thulstrup (1980), Thulstrup (1965), Brandt (1929), Watkin (1990), Stewart (2003), Fenger (1980), Stewart (2007), Stewart (2024), Bravo (2009).

## I. History and Structure of the *Soap-Cellars*

This piece is found in Kierkegaard's DD journal. Something that is important to consider in order to establish the date of the text is that Kierkegaard wrote in the front and back of the journal. The *Soap-Cellars* is found in the back.

The chronology of the comedy is a topic that has been much discussed in the secondary literature. Barfod (1869, 166 – 168), the editor of the *Posthumous Papers*, places the *Soap-Cellars* in 1838, although he offers no justification for this. Heiberg and Kuhr (1910, 285), editors of the *Papirer*, follow Barfod. In contrast, Brandt (1929, 435) suggests that Kierkegaard wrote the drama in the second half of 1839. Brandt argues that one of the targets of the satire is Henrik Hertz's novel, *Stemninger og Tilstander*, published in 1839, so the composition of the *Soap-Cellars* must be after that date. Thulstrup (1980, 193) accepts this interpretation. Fenger (1980, 141 – 142) proposes that the text was written between the spring and summer of 1838.

More recently, Leon Jaurnow and Kim Ravn (2007, 483) claim that Kierkegaard wrote the *Soap-Cellars* between January 27 and May 29, 1837. They argue that the comedy was a reaction to the review Martensen (2007) wrote of Heiberg's *Introductory Lecture to the Logic Course*. In the *Soap-Cellars*, Kierkegaard alludes to several passages in this review, which would seem to confirm this point. Although the review was included in the December 1836 issue of the periodical *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, it was not published until January 1837. Thus, according to this interpretation, the drama could not have been written before that date.

Jaurnow and Ravn assume that Kierkegaard must have read the review immediately after its publication. The evidence for this, they say, is an entry in the BB journal in which Kierkegaard (2019, 115) mentions Martensen's review. This entry was written between January 27 and February 4, 1837, at which time, according to Jaurnow and Ravn, Kierkegaard began to work on the *Soap-Cellars*. When he finished, he turned the DD journal over and began writing entries on the other side. Since the first entry in this new series is dated May 29, 1837, Jaurnow and Ravn suggest that Kierkegaard would have finished the *Soap-Cellars* before that date.

Jon Stewart offers a different chronology (2007; 2024). He suggests that the real target of Kierkegaard's satire is not the review, but the Hegelian jargon that became popular among students after Martensen's famous lectures at the University of Copenhagen, especially his lectures on the history of modern philosophy, which he gave in the spring of 1838. Therefore, Stewart (2024, 152) argues that the comedy could not have been written before that cycle of lectures.

Stewart also notes that one of the characters in the drama, Mr. Merrythought, mentions Fichte looking Medusa in the eye (Kierkegaard 2007, 283). This seems to be an allusion to the first issue of the journal *Perseus*, in which Heiberg, the editor of this periodical, compares his attempt to spread Hegel's philosophy to the struggle of the titular Greek hero Perseus with Medusa, who in this context represents empiricism and the lack of speculative thought (1837, xiii – xiv). Since this issue of *Perseus* was published in June 1837, this would mean that Jaurnow and Ravn's chronology is impossible.

Another piece of relevant information is that in that issue of *Perseus*, Martensen (1837) published an essay on Faust. Between 1835 and 1837, Kierkegaard had shown interest in the figure of Faust and planned to write a piece on the subject. However, upon learning of Martensen's work, Kierkegaard began to lose interest in the German necromancer and abandoned the project. In the *Soap-Cellars*, the Faust theme is mentioned mockingly. Mr. Merrythought/Martensen talks about the "Faustian thing" (Kierkegaard 2007, 281). If one follows Stewart's chronology – namely, if the drama was written during the first half of 1838 – it is possible that Kierkegaard associated Faust with Martensen's essay, and, thus, it would make sense that he would represent the mythical figure in a less favorable light.

Although scholars debate the dating of the *Soap-Cellars*, they agree that its main value lies in its satirical character. It is not controversial to assert that the main purpose of the piece is to ridicule the abuse of Hegelian language. More specifically, as has been said, one could argue that the main target is Martensen. The language used by Martensen in his review of Heiberg and in his lectures is consistently parodied.

As for the real figures behind the characters in the drama, there are two who can be easily identified. Mr. Rushjob [Holla Hastværksen] is Orla Lehmann, a student leader and liberal politician with whom Kierkegaard had polemicized earlier. Mr. Thomas Stuffing [Ole Wadt] is Jens Finsteen Giødwad, a liberal journalist. The protagonist Willibald and his alter ego, Echo, are commonly associated with Kierkegaard himself. This is what Thulstrup (1980, 191) and Brandt (1929, 336) claim. Julia Watkin (1990, 260 – 261), who translated the *Soap-Cellars* into English, admits that Willibald might be Kierkegaard, although she also suggests that Echo might be based on the writer Henrik Hertz. It is not impossible, however, that Echo is a fictional character. The motif of an alter ego was common in the literature of the time, as Watkin (1990, 260 – 261) notes, and even Kierkegaard would later use it in *From the Papers of One*

*Still Living* (1990, 55). Finally, Stewart (2024, 162 – 164) thinks that Willibald represents the students who attended Martensen's lessons.

The characters that have caused most disagreement are the two intellectuals, Mr. Merrythought and Phrase. Thulstrup (1980, 188) and Garff (2005, 83) think that Mr. Merrythought is Heiberg and that Phrase is Martensen. Fenger (1980, 141 – 142) and Stewart (2024, 154) suggest that it is the other way around. Julia Watkin takes a more conciliatory position: "Mr. von Jumping-Jack [Mr. Merrythought], as the caricature of the philosophizing esthete, may be based on Johan Ludvig Heiberg, although he talks like Hans Lassen Martensen" (Watkin 1990, 261). Regardless of the actual identity of these two characters, it seems to me that the aspect Kierkegaard satirizes is a type of discourse clearly attributable to Martensen, whether this manner of speaking appears in Phrase or Mr. Merrythought. A hypothetical reader of the time – if the play had been performed – would have easily recognized Martensen in either character.

It would seem reasonable to suppose that, if Kierkegaard ridicules that kind of discourse, it would mean that he is also against its content. Moreover, when one takes into account the hostility that Kierkegaard shows in several of his mature works against Heiberg, Martensen, and generally against Hegelianism and speculative thought, it would be natural to conclude that this was also his view at this early stage of his career. However, if one pays attention to some of his early journals, it is possible to observe that Kierkegaard sympathized with the speculative point of view more than one might think.

## **II. The Speculative Approach in the Journal of Gilleleje**

In Kierkegaard's early journals, the reader finds recurring topics such as irony, humor, doubt, despair, or the development of the self. In the present article, the latter theme is of special interest. For this reason, in this section I would like to examine a part of the early journals where this issue is discussed, the journal of Gilleleje of 1835, a collection of entries Kierkegaard presumably wrote during his trip to northern Zealand in the summer of that year.

Although at first glance it seems that this text is a simple travel diary, Kierkegaard elaborates here a kind of worldview according to which the universe is not a chaotic and meaningless place, but an organic totality in which everything is interconnected. In this context, he suggests that the self is not an isolated entity, but an element within the totality of the world. Thus, the proper development of the self has to do with finding one's place within this totality. In a way, it could be argued that the journal of Gilleleje narrates the search for

a special place or position, which Kierkegaard often refers to as *that Archimedean point*.

I wish to argue that the discourse Kierkegaard ridicules in the *Soap-Cellars* represents in part ideas that he approved of earlier. This would seem to imply that Kierkegaard agreed with his rival Martensen, a notion that might sound strange. However, this makes more sense when one considers that both rejected the relativistic view in which finite things are disconnected and lack a higher meaning. Both also shared an admiration for Johan Ludvig Heiberg, perhaps the leading critic of this cultural nihilism and an enthusiastic promoter of Hegel's philosophy. Unlike Heiberg, however, both Kierkegaard and Martensen were somewhat suspicious of what they perceived as the all-encompassing pretension of the systematic view of Hegelianism.

It seems safe to assume that Kierkegaard wrote the journal of Gilleleje during the summer of 1835, although it is not impossible that some parts were inserted later (Brunn and Knudsen 2000, 298 – 299). From a historical point of view, Kierkegaard was in Gilleleje between June 17 and August 24, 1835, so it is reasonable to suggest that the text is indeed a travel diary, although it could also be argued that several parts are fiction and that Kierkegaard was actually trying to write a short novel, a popular genre at the time. Such is the thesis proposed by Fenger (1980, 89 – 96) and Garff (2003, 364 – 365). This is relevant because the Danish short novel, a literary genre influenced by the German *Bildungsroman*, shows young heroes trying to find their place in the world, a main motif in the journal of Gilleleje, as mentioned above.<sup>3</sup>

There are several passages in the journal that show the protagonist – presumably Kierkegaard himself – attempting to understand his role in the totality of the universe. On July 29, for example, he visits Gilbjerget (now Gilberghoved), where he contemplates ecstatically at the vastness of the ocean and nature. Then he writes:

When the whole, seen this in perspective, presented only the larger, bolder outlines and I didn't lose myself in detail as one so often does, but saw the whole in its totality, I gained the strength to grasp things differently, to admit how often I myself had made mistakes and to forgive the mistakes of others (Kierkegaard 2007, 9 – 10).

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<sup>3</sup> On the relations between Kierkegaard and the short novel genre, see Henriksen (1954), Bravo – Rojas (2022).

Then he says:

As I stood there, without depression or despondency making me see myself as an enclitic of those by whom I am usually surrounded, or without pride making me the constitutive principle in a small circle (Kierkegaard 2007, 10).

These two passages illustrate the importance of adopting a perspective not only of particular things, but of the totality, and of trying to understand what is the relation of the self to this totality. From this new perspective, things take on a different meaning. The self does not have a relative and unimportant character, it is not a finite entity among many others like an enclitic, but neither is it the constitutive center of the world, a self that creates and gives meaning to everything else. The author of the journal strives to find here the position that the self must occupy within an organic totality where everything is interconnected. He suggests that this is like “that Archimedean point from which he could lift the whole world, that point which precisely for that reason must be outside the world, that point outside the constraints of time and space” (Kierkegaard 2007, 1, 10). This new allusion to the Archimedean point suggests that in order to acquire this global view it is indispensable to go outside the world. It could be argued that this has to be thus in order not to contemplate things in a finite and isolated way.

Later, Kierkegaard inserts in the journal a letter addressed to a paleontologist living in Brazil. In the first part of the letter, the sender talks about “the young who as yet only dream of their destiny” (Kierkegaard 2007, 14), namely, those who are still trying to find their role in the world. Here begins an interesting description of the development of selfhood that is relevant to this discussion. In the first stage, the individual assumes a passive disposition and is simply a reflection of her environment. But then consciousness awakens and the individual must take charge of herself. It is a matter of placing oneself “on the soil to which one really belongs, but that is not always so easy to find” (Kierkegaard 2007, 14). Again, one finds here an image that shows to the organic and holistic character of the world.

A fortunate few intuitively find their place in the world. However, the vast majority of human beings struggle with this task. At this point, the individual enters a process of fermentation in which she faces doubt. There are some who cannot overcome this stage and return to their initial condition in which they are determined by their surroundings. But there are others who plunge deeper into doubt. Here the author of the journal mentions the figure of Faust, who is the personification of doubt. Although Mephistopheles allows Faust to “look

through his spectacles into the hidden secrets of man and of the world" (Kierkegaard 2007, 15), the latter is unable to reach an understanding of the deepest things, as this would imply betraying his essence as a doubter. What these deeper things are is not specified, but, given the course of the narrative, it could be inferred that it is that which the protagonist of the diary seeks, i.e., the Archimedean point, the view in which everything, including the self, is situated in its right place. In this sense, Faust's wisdom could be considered a mere accumulation of empirical and unconnected data.

This seems to be confirmed shortly thereafter, when the author of the journal discusses the difference between what might be called empirical science and true science. The former knows "a great number of details and have discovered many new ones, but nothing more. They have merely provided a substratum for others to apply their thought to and work up" (Kierkegaard 2007, 15). True science, on the other hand, "decides what meaning each particular finding is to have within the whole" (Kierkegaard 2007, 15 – 16). True scientists are those

who through their speculation have found, or tried to find, that Archimedean point which is nowhere in the world and from which they have surveyed the whole and seen the details in their proper light (Kierkegaard 2007, 16).

For Kierkegaard true science resembles more the speculative and systematic view of Heiberg or Martensen than the empirical approach of the natural sciences.

Towards the end of the journal, one finds the famous passage in which Kierkegaard discusses subjective truth:

What I really need is to be clear about *what I am to do*, not what I must know, except in the way knowledge must precede all action. It is a question of understanding my own destiny, of seeing what the Deity really wants *me* to do; the thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*. And what use would it be in this respect if I were to discover a so-called objective truth, or if I worked my way through the philosophers' systems and were able to call them all to account on request, point out inconsistencies in every single circle? (Kierkegaard 2007, 19)

The first thing one notices is that this truth is practical, not theoretical; it is not a matter of knowing, but of doing. Second, it is underscored that what really matters about such truth is its connection to individual existence. In retrospect, if one considers Kierkegaard's mature work, one might think that this is the moment when he abandons the systematic view – of what use are the

philosophers' systems – in favor of the focus on the singular individual for which he is famous. In the context of the journal, however, it is clear that Kierkegaard has not stopped searching for the Archimedean point. The objective truth he rejects is the empirical – that is, non-systematic – knowledge mentioned earlier:

It is this inward action of the human, this God-side of man, that matters, not a mass of information. That will no doubt follow, but then not in the guise of accidental accumulation or a succession of details side by side without any system, without a focal point upon which all radii converge (Kierkegaard 2007, 21).

The view of totality remains necessary. However, the goal is not pure contemplation, but to understand one's place in this totality, not in order to know, but to live.

### **III. The Satire against Speculative Thought in the *Soap-Cellars***

The plot of the drama is simple. In the beginning of the first act, Willibald attends a meeting where he encounters his alter ego, Echo, who entertains the guests with witty remarks he has taken from Willibald. The latter escapes and hurries back to his room (Kierkegaard 2007, 274). There Willibald tries to commit suicide, but fails. Echo leaves to fetch a doctor, but when he returns the hero has disappeared, and the act concludes with the remark that he must have vanished from the face of the earth (Kierkegaard 2007, 278).

The second act begins with a brief description of Prytaneum, a fantastic region in which "everything is arranged in a triangular way-3 packs of cards, etc." (Kierkegaard 2007, 278). The allusion to the triangular theme is probably a mocking reference to the triads in Hegel's dialectic. However, if one reads this taking the journal of Gilleleje into account, the passage takes on a different meaning: Willibald flees the earth, the sphere of relativity, to seek asylum in a kind of realm of speculation. It is the opposition between the world of the necessary versus the world of the contingent, the absolute versus the relative. Although the sarcasm is evident, it is also easy to see the resemblance with the search of the author of the journal of Gilleleje.

The first scene shows Mr. Thomas Stuffing and Mr. Rushjob. They represent Jens Finsteen Giødwad and Orla Lehmann, both liberal journalists. While the former is moderate, the latter takes a radical stance and constantly insists on putting theory aside in favor of practice, a point on which he would seem to

agree with Kierkegaard, even though in real life he and Orla Lehmann had clashed in a journalistic controversy in 1836.

In the second scene Mr. Merrythought and Phrase appear, the representatives of speculative thought. The latter announces that his aim is to make the results of science available to the people: "The age's development should gain in extensity what it loses in intensity" (Kierkegaard 2007, 279). This is an allusion to Heiberg. Johan Ludvig Heiberg thought that the age was in a state of crisis caused by cultural relativism and nihilism. People, he argued, are stuck in finitude and are unable to see anything beyond this mundane existence. The cure for such a disease is Hegel's speculative philosophy, which reveals that in reality the infinite is present in the finite, and that everything is interconnected with each other. The problem was that Hegel's system was too confusing and obscure; the point was to find a way to bring this true science to ordinary people. With this goal in mind, Heiberg attempted to convey his speculative message through treatises, essays, and vaudevilles. Although Kierkegaard seems to mock Heiberg's campaign, he too, as discussed earlier, tried to leave behind the relative in order to acquire an organic view of the whole.

Mr. Merrythought objects that his infinite and scientific doubt has nothing to do with the popular. In his review of Heiberg's *Introductory Lecture*, Martensen (2007, 76) applauds the latter's attempt to popularize Hegel's philosophy, which he regards as the most complete system of rational knowledge. To explain this, Martensen offers an exposition of the history of philosophy in which Descartes appears as the initiator of modern philosophy with his motto *de omnibus dubitandum est*. From that moment on, true science demands absolute and infinite doubt (Martensen 2007, 79). Kierkegaard makes fun of this by showing Mr. Merrythought as a little man with a ridiculous obsession with doubt: "Indeed, I am sometimes troubled by a veritable scientific doubt as to whether I have doubted enough" (Kierkegaard 2007, 279). The implication seems to be that Martensen, unlike Heiberg, is a pedantic academic. However, one sees that the idea that doubt represents an awakening of consciousness also appears in the journal of Gilleleje. The difference is that while Martensen discusses this in the history of philosophy, Kierkegaard does so in the existential sphere.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the scene, Mr. Merrythought formulates this philosophical imperative in another way: "The profound demand of modern philosophy

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<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard would further explore this theme in *De omnibus dubitandum est*.

δοξ μοι του στω applies here too. But where in the vulgar sphere of reasoning am I to find a foothold" (Kierkegaard 2007, 280). The Greek sentence, "give me a place to stand," is a reference to the phrase typically attributed to Archimedes, "give me a place to stand, and I will move heaven and earth." Martensen, like Kierkegaard in Gilleleje, seeks that Archimedean point,<sup>5</sup> but does not think he can find it in "the vulgar sphere of reasoning." Once again, Kierkegaard ridicules Martensen by depicting him as an elitist disconnected from real existence. Although the Archimedean point represents the speculative approach, it should be directed to life, not to a purely contemplative position. Kierkegaard seems to refer to this in one of Mr. Rushjob's comments in the dialogue: "Philosophy this, philosophy that. It is not philosophy that matters. It is the practical questions, questions of life-in short, life" (Kierkegaard 2007, 280).

Willibald appears in the third scene kissing the ground, glad because he has cast off the chains of relativity. Mr. Merrythought immediately offers a diagnosis: "It is the Faustian thing" (Kierkegaard 2007, 281). In the journal of Gilleleje, Kierkegaard mentions the issue of Faust. In that context, the mythical figure represents the awakening of consciousness through doubt. The Faustian individual has overcome relativity, but can go no further because she is trapped by doubt. In this sense, it seems that the diagnosis of Mr. Merrythought and Kierkegaard in Gilleleje is the same.<sup>6</sup>

However, since it is Mr. Merrythought who makes the reference to Faust, it seems reasonable to suppose that Kierkegaard is alluding once again to the review by Martensen (2007, 85 – 86), who mentions the scene in Goethe's *Faust* where the protagonist reflects on the meaning of the term *logos*, whether it is the uncreated word, i.e., God, or it is rather the speculative thought invented by human beings. The implication here seems to be that Mr. Merrythought/Martensen has opted for the speculative alternative, renouncing his Christian faith, even though that does not coincide with the position of Martensen (2007, 85), who in his review seems to lament that Hegel has chosen "eternal thought" rather than the "eternal word."

Moreover, in 1837 Martensen published an essay on Faust in which he presented the German necromancer in a similar way to Kierkegaard, although

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<sup>5</sup> In his review, Martensen (2007, 80) also alludes to this expression to refer to the starting point without presuppositions of Hegelian philosophy and that here appears identified with absolute doubt.

<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard will revisit the figure of Faust in the essay *Silhouettes in Either/Or*.

in a much more elaborate way. In fact, the latter had devoted about two years to a project on this topic,<sup>7</sup> which he set aside upon learning of Martensen's own essay. Kierkegaard probably concluded that the two had basically the same idea. This would seem to indicate that, despite the parody in the *Soap-Cellars*, Kierkegaard and Martensen were in agreement as to the meaning of the Faustian issue.

Mr. Merrythought then begins an exposition on the history of modern philosophy, which is clearly based on Martensen's review, but also on his lectures at the University of Copenhagen, in which he discussed this subject at length. To ridicule Martensen, Kierkegaard makes the president of the Prytaneum have Mr. Merrythought arrested because of his excessively long monologue. As he is taken away, the philosopher pompously concludes, "I am now finished, and with Hegel the whole of world history is over, just carry me off; for now there is nothing left but mythology and I myself will become a mythological person" (Kierkegaard 2007, 283).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Despite his initial enthusiasm, Willibald is not convinced by Mr. Merrythought's speech, so the members of the Prytaneum decide to send him to the "world-historical high school," a half-built institution where the teachers babble incessantly and no one really knows what they are talking about. Gradually, the protagonist is converted to the doctrine of the Prytaneum (Kierkegaard 2007, 284).

Jon Stewart (2024, 162 – 164) suggests that Willibald represents the naïve students who were indoctrinated by Martensen's sophistry through his influential lessons. Thus, Willibald would not be Kierkegaard himself, but the students who have become victims of the professor's manipulation. Admittedly, this explanation makes sense. As mentioned, Mr. Merrythought is portrayed as a conceited, pedantic and stubborn professor. His whole merit resides in parroting slogans and platitudes of modern philosophy. Willibald timidly resists at first, but otherwise offers no objections to Mr. Merrythought's speech and ends up becoming a zealous disciple.

However, in this article I wished to show that, while this criticism may be valid, this does not mean that Kierkegaard himself did not agree with some of the points presented by the philosophers of the Prytaneum. The young man suffering from the Faustian disease, who rejects the meaningless relativity of

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<sup>7</sup> On the Faust project, see Bravo (2020).

the finite and longs to find that Archimedean point in which the organic character of totality is revealed might have been a cliché of the university students of the time, but, as has been discussed, it also seems to represent the young Kierkegaard.

He, like the naïve students Stewart mentions, attended Martensen's lectures at the University of Copenhagen. He, too, accepted Heiberg's diagnosis of the crisis of the age – relativistic triviality and nihilism – and seemed to admit its speculative remedy: to acquire a higher perspective in which it is possible to observe how everything is connected to everything and possesses a higher meaning. That said, in the journal of Gilleleje Kierkegaard claims that this speculative position must be oriented toward practical life, not theoretical contemplation. In the *Soap-Cellars*, Kierkegaard suggests that Mr. Merrythought/Martensen is inclined to the latter. This accusation, however, might be unfair. In his review, Martensen expresses his admiration for Hegel's system, though he also points out its limitations. As for his lectures, he writes in his autobiography:

I had to lead my listeners through Hegel; we could not remain in him, but it was necessary to go beyond him, as they used to say. I had to inspire in them excitement for Hegel, if possible, and, at the same time, I had to fight with him and make them oppose him. I do not know whether I always succeeded in this, but I can say with certainty that I maintained my theonomous position as opposed to Hegel's autonomous position. I have always said that the views of faith and revelation were essential for me, in contrast to Hegel's autonomous view (Martensen 1882 – 1883, 4 – 5).

Although Martensen's reservations have more to do with the theological than with the existential, he rejects, like Kierkegaard, what could be interpreted as the speculative excess of Hegelianism, that which Martensen calls *autonomy*.

Thus, the *Soap-Cellars* undoubtedly contributes to illustrate the context around the Hegelian discussions in Denmark in the 1830s. But, if this text is analyzed taking into account a part of Kierkegaard's early *Nachlass* such as the journal of Gilleleje, it can also help us to better understand his relation to the speculative thought of Heiberg and Martensen.

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