

Abstract

The Withdrawal of Excessive ‘Reflection’: Kierkegaard’s Critique of Johan Ludvig Heiberg and the Problem of ‘Culture’

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In Heiberg(1791–1860)’s aesthetics, Kierkegaard sees excessive ‘reflection’ as a consequence of ‘culture(*Dannelse*)’ in the Danish Golden Age. This excessive ‘reflection’ lacks ethics as a distinction between the good and bad. In addition, ‘culture’ as excessive ‘reflection’ brings self-alienation of the individual spirit, as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel points out in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In order to rehabilitate this lost ethics, Kierkegaard recommends the upbringing of conscience(*Samvittighed*), which resides in ‘immediacy’ and can put the brakes on excessive ‘reflection’. He claims that the vector from the subject to the object in the modern epistemology should be bended back. By this bending-back, the individual will be able to reach his or her self.

According to Kierkegaard, this bendind-back is the corrective to the contemporary Danish ‘culture’. And he calls this corrective the controlled irony, into which Heiberg’s irony as reservation(*Tilbageholdenhed*) and disguise(*Forstillelse*) is remodelled.

As Poul Martin Møller(1794–1838) points out, irony as a consequence of excessive ‘reflection’ is in danger of nihilism. In order to avoid this danger, Kierkegaard estimates conscience as ‘immediacy after reflection’.