Kierkegaard's Romantic Legacy

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Quite some time has elapsed between my writing this manuscript and the bringing of it to print. I began research on it in 1996, while a master’s committee was contemplating my thesis. I continued to revise it after my doctorate, ten years after its initial inception. I am pleased it was allowed to take this amount of time, as my ideas germinated, morphed, and crystallized as time passed. I wanted to deliver my most recent, and clearest, statement on selfhood.

Although generally a committed follower of naturalism and realism, I renounce reductionism (which some types of realism are thought to entail) if it eliminates, for instance, the self. In attempting to avoid reductionism, I follow the pragmatism of Hilary Putnam.

If one disputes the extreme naturalist contention that there is no self, one must in doing so present a suggestion as to what we are. I consider several authors, whom I locate, roughly, in the romantic reaction against the Enlightenment, and which have something to say about the nature of the self. Furthermore, I emphasize, as a pragmatist must, that there is a relevance to practice for holding a certain conception of the self.

The problem of reductionism is a natural consequence of the intellectual revolutions that began in the seventeenth century. The Enlightenment, for instance, was an intellectual revolution which held that reason—by which the enlightened meant something like the critical spirit of scientific inquiry—could solve humanity’s problems, be they medical, economic, social, and so on.

The romantic tradition reacted against the Enlightenment. It was not, however, totally at odds with the Enlightenment, but can in retrospect be seen to occupy a place beside it. For instance, the enlightened and the romantic, like their cognitive heirs the reductionist and anti-reductionist, respectively, need each other to develop and nuance their views.

I have as indicated in the title of this work, wished to emphasize the importance of the romantic tradition in the development of intellectual thought of the West, and how, more specifically, it has contributed to a discourse about the self. I hope that cognitive scientists, interested in more than the physiological side of the story, will profit from this discussion on the self.

Scholars of Kierkegaard may find that some of his concepts—for example, choice, faith, subjectivity, and so on—are not scrutinized in this my exegesis of
his writings as much as they may require in order to have their complexities fully explored. Nevertheless, these deficiencies are tolerable, I believe, as my stated focus is his theory of the self (and some of its legacy).

Furthermore, I have avoided as much as possible Kierkegaard’s polemic against Hegel. Kierkegaard was no authority on Hegel (it is unlikely he read his writings). Kierkegaard was not as far from Hegel’s thought as he may have wished, either in terms of his dialectical style or content. German idealism was, after all, an expression of Romanticism in that country, where the self was conceived, literally, in relation to everything. As Plato put it, in the *Phaedrus*, “And do you think that you can know the nature of the soul intelligently without knowing the nature of the whole?”

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**Documentation**

In “Kierkegaard’s Theological Self” I refer to “supplements”; when I do so I am referring to the additional sections added by the editors of Kierkegaard’s texts, called “supplements” in those texts. A “supplement” will contain, for instance, excerpts from Kierkegaard’s journal entries, unpublished manuscripts, and so on, which I draw upon to build my case. Where Kierkegaard expounds a point that resonated from the Bible, I have attempted to refer to the corresponding quotation within the text, citing the book.