



OXFORD THEOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHS

Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism

Stephen Backhouse

OXFORD THEOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHS

Editorial Committee

M. McC. ADAMS

P. M. JOYCE

O. M. T. O'DONOVAN

M. J. EDWARDS

D. N. J. MACCULLOCH

C. C. ROWLAND

OXFORD THEOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHS

SEXUAL & MARITAL METAPHORS IN HOSEA, JEREMIAH, ISAIAH,
AND EZEKIEL

Sharon Moughtin-Mumby (2008)

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF LEO THE GREAT

Bernard Green (2008)

ANTI-ARMINIANS

The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I

Stephen Hampton (2008)

THE THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF AUGUSTINE'S

DE TRINITATE

Luigi Gioia (2008)

THE SONG OF SONGS AND THE EROS OF GOD

A Study in Biblical Intertextuality

Edmée Kingsmill (2009)

ROBERT SPAEMANN'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Nature, Freedom, and the Critique of Modernity

Holger Zaborowski (2010)

OUT-OF-BODY AND NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Brain-State Phenomena or Glimpses of Immortality?

Michael N. Marsh (2010)

WHAT IS A LOLLARD?

Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England

J. Patrick Hornbeck II (2010)

EVANGELICAL FREE WILL

Phillip Melancthon's Doctrinal Journey on the Origins of Free Will

Gregory Graybill (2010)

ISAIAH AFTER EXILE

The Author of Third Isaiah as Reader and Redactor of the Book

Jacob Stromberg (2011)

CONTRASTING IMAGES OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ART

A Case Study in Visual Exegesis

Natasha F. H. O'Hear (2011)

GENDER ISSUES IN ANCIENT AND REFORMATION

TRANSLATIONS OF GENESIS 1-4

Helen Kraus (2011)

Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism

STEPHEN BACKHOUSE

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi

Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi

New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece

Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore

South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States

by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Stephen Backhouse 2011

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed in Great Britain
on acid-free paper by
MPG Books Group, Bodmin and King's Lynn

ISBN 978-0-19-960472-2

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Now, if someone thinks that this is not quite right, that he is not a Christian, he is considered an eccentric. His wife says to him: 'How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish aren't you? Doesn't the geography book say that the predominant religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? . . . Don't you tend to your work in the office as a good civil servant; aren't you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran Christian state? So of course you are a Christian.

Johannes Climacus (1846)

I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love.

Cecil Spring-Rice (1918)

God bless America!

Irving Berlin (1918)

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me along the way to the completion of this book. It is with gratitude and respect that I especially acknowledge the following persons.

I am very happy to thank my teacher and advisor George Pattison for the time, effort and care he has taken in guiding my studies. I am also grateful to George Pattison and to Bruce Kirmmse for giving me permission to reference their (as yet) unpublished material. Thanks are due to all who taught, edited or gave academic comment on my work as it has developed: Jonathan Chaplin, director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics; Torrance Kirby and Douglas Farrow of McGill University; Nick Spencer of the public theology think-tank Theos; in Oxford, Joel Rasmussen, Bernd Wannenwetsch and Johannes Zachhuber provided invaluable help during the initial stages of my research. Any meagre Danish I have acquired is thanks to the patience of Elsbeth Wulf. Being invited to speak, teach or write on my subject has helped me to work out my own thoughts on nationalism and Kierkegaard (sometimes even in fear and trembling) and I extend my thanks to those who provided the opportunity: Michael Kenny and Rick Muir of the Institute for Public Policy Research; Steven Shakespeare and Hugh Pyper of the Søren Kierkegaard Society UK; Graham Tomlin and Mike Lloyd of St Melitus College and the Fetter Lane Research Group; in Cambridge, KLICE and the Tyndale Research Fellowship; Jon Stewart, editor of C. A. Reitzel's *Danish Golden Age* series, and Paul Woolley, director of Theos. Monetary aid has come by way of the Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regents Park College, the Hensley Henson Scholarship, the Crewdson Trust, the Latimer Trust, the Bible Society UK, the Squire and Mariott Bursary and the Sir Richard Stapely Scholarship.

Acknowledgement is also due to the Backhouse and Finch families for their moral and financial support, their encouragement and their patience. Finally and most importantly, for aid, inspiration and countless acts of self-sacrifice always given with humour and grace, I want to thank my wife, Clare.

Table of Contents

<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. Nationalism, Christianity and Kierkegaard	1
Introduction	1
Nations and nationalism	2
Patriots and patriotism	11
Current Christian nationalism	16
Kierkegaard and the modern conversation	20
Towards a Kierkegaardian ideology critique	27
2. H. L. Martensen	34
Introduction	34
J. P. Mynster	36
Martensen and Christendom	39
The critique of Kierkegaard in <i>Social Ethics</i>	43
Three ‘pillars’ of the state	47
<i>Social Ethics</i> , the state and Christendom	55
Concluding remarks	63
3. N. F. S. Grundtvig	66
Introduction	66
<i>Mageløse opdagelse</i> —the matchless discovery	69
<i>Menneske først</i> —human first	75
<i>Verdens-Historien</i> —world history	82
Concluding remarks	89
4. Philosophical Tools	92
Introduction	92
<i>Øieblikket</i> —the moment of vision	93
<i>Samtidigheden</i> —contemporaneity	110
5. History	125
Introduction	125
The world-historical in <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>	128
Development and the age	143
The ages in <i>Two Ages</i>	151
Concluding remarks	159

6. Identity	161
Introduction	161
Kierkegaard and society	163
Kierkegaard and the common man	173
Challenging the socio-political	177
7. Undefined New Things: Church and State	198
Introduction	198
Civic life	201
Church life	215
Conclusion	222
<i>Bibliography</i>	228
<i>Index</i>	243

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for the works of Kierkegaard, Grundtvig and Martensen. Full references are provided in the bibliography.

Kierkegaard

CA	<i>The Concept of Anxiety</i>
CI	<i>The Concept of Irony</i>
COR	<i>The Corsair Affair</i>
CUP	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>
EUD	<i>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses</i>
FT	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>
JP	<i>Journals and Papers</i>
Moment	<i>The Moment and Other Late Writings</i>
Pap.	<i>Søren Kierkegaards Papirer</i> [papers]
PC	<i>Practice in Christianity</i>
PF	<i>Philosophical Fragments</i>
POV	<i>Point of View</i>
SKS	<i>Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter</i> [writings]
SLW	<i>Stages on Life's Way</i>
SUD	<i>Sickness unto Death</i>
SV	<i>Samelede Værker</i> [collected works]
TA	<i>Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review</i>
UDVS	<i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i>
WL	<i>Works of Love</i>

Grundtvig

US	<i>Udvalgte Skrifter</i> [Selected Writings]
VU	<i>Værker i Udvalg</i> [Selected Works]
DV	<i>Danne-Virke</i> [Cultural Activities]

Martensen

<i>CD</i>	<i>Den christelige Dogmatik</i> [Christian Dogmatics]
<i>CE</i>	<i>Den christelige Ethik</i> [Christian Ethics]
<i>IE</i>	<i>Den christelige Ethik. Den specielle Deel. Første Afdeling; Den individuelle Ethik</i> [Christian Ethics: Special Part, First Division; Individual Ethics]
<i>SE</i>	<i>Den christelige Ethik. Anden Afdeling; Den sociale Ethik</i> [Christian Ethics: Special Part. Second Division; Social Ethics]
<i>Outline</i>	<i>Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy</i>

Introduction

Every effort that tends toward the establishment of a Christian State, a Christian people, is *eo ipso* un-Christian, anti-Christian.¹

It is no secret that Kierkegaard thought Church and state were strange bedfellows, to say the least. A brief scan of his journals, or five minutes reading the polemics of *The Moment*, Kierkegaard's final attack upon Christendom, are enough to demonstrate that he did not think authentic Christianity had a happy relationship with patriotism: 'How strange! Once, the objection to Christianity was . . . that it was unpatriotic, subversive, revolutionary. And now Christianity has become patriotism and the State Church' (*Pap.* X4 A 126).

For Kierkegaard, to speak positively of a national religion was to misunderstand the nature both of 'nations' and of 'religion'. 'Christianity is related to the individual,' he wrote in 1853, but Christendom is related to 'lower notions of religion', specifically to 'national religion and national God' (*Pap.* X5 A 97). In 1854 he fumed: 'State Churches and People's Churches and Christian countries are nonsense' (*Pap.* XI1 A 189).

The State [of course] cannot be absolved from having had a bit of the notion that it is always a good idea to have Eternity up its sleeve in order to govern people more effectively—so that what is civic comes to be identical with what is Christian. Thus what the State would call a good citizen becomes synonymous with being a good Christian . . . (*Pap.* XI2 A 410)²

Merely proof texting from the journal entries and later polemical articles is sufficient to demonstrate the strength of feeling that Kierkegaard had against the state of cultural Christianity in the nineteenth century. Yet it is precisely these exasperated expostulations (combined with the relative lack of explicit discussion of the issue in Kierkegaard's published pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous writings) that could tempt some to conclude that his opposition to 'Christian nationalism' is froth: a later development that owes more to the dying Kierkegaard's personal disillusionment with his contemporary Danish culture than to a consistent application of his theological and philosophical principles. Contrary to these views, the aim of this book is to draw out the critique of Christian nationalism implicit throughout Kierkegaard's thought, a critique inseparable

¹ *Pap.* XI2 A 373.

² For the above journal quotations I am grateful to Bruce Kirmmse for the use of his translations, which he has prepared for inclusion in a forthcoming paper on Kierkegaard's Church-state relations: 'Kierkegaard on the Divorce between Nationality and Christianity' (Unpublished, 2007).

from the core values of Kierkegaard's project. Furthermore, I wish to suggest ways in which this Kierkegaardian critique can be helpfully brought into conversation with nationalistic movements and theologies outside of the immediate context of Kierkegaard's Golden Age Denmark.

By Christian nationalism, I mean the family or set of ideas and assumptions by which one's belief in the development and uniqueness of one's national group (usually accompanied by claims of superiority) is combined with, or underwritten by, Christian theology and practice. Two examples of Christian nationalism can be found in the works of Martensen and Grundtvig, Danish contemporaries of Kierkegaard and leading theologians of their day. Although Kierkegaard did not challenge 'Christian nationalism' systematically, it is primarily from his response to these two figures and to their ideas that we can construct a Kierkegaardian critique. Looking at Kierkegaard's writings in this way serves a dual purpose. At one level, to consider Kierkegaard in this light is to consider central ideas that lie at the heart of his project. Key motifs, such as the 'moment of vision', 'the leap', and the notion of 'contemporaneity' are all employed by Kierkegaard in service of his attack on what he sees as Grundtvig's and Martensen's (and their followers') faulty approaches to world history and matters of authentic identity. Thus the writings of Grundtvig and Martensen, placed in comparison with Kierkegaard's project, can help us to see the critique implicit in the main features of his thought, which stands starkly opposed to their theologically conceived nationalisms. This comparison leads to the other purpose of my book, which serves to bring Kierkegaard's thought to bear on current political and theological work with regard to religion and national identity. In many ways, Kierkegaard's challenge to the Christian nationalists of nineteenth-century Denmark provides a basis on which to challenge those who attempt to align patriotism too closely with faith, or to ascribe to national narratives the authority and attributes normally reserved for the divine.

The book, divided into seven chapters, progresses as follows. In the first chapter I introduce the thorny issue of nations and their attendant nationalisms. I consider the symbolic and narrative nature of nationalist discourse and look at the pseudo-theological currents that often lie at the heart of national constructions, especially as they appear in the christianized west. This leads to a discussion of Christian nationalism, and I suggest instances where the issue is a present concern. The chapter then considers specific examples of where Kierkegaard has either been used in support of nationalist ideologies, or could potentially be used in opposition to them. I think that this latter approach is a more legitimate reading of Kierkegaard; however, a full Kierkegaardian critique of religious nationalism has thus far been suggested, but not developed, by the commentators I mention. It is my intention to develop and clarify these suggestions by demonstrating how it is that with his theological project to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom, Kierkegaard is well placed to provide a critique of deified society

and champion the individual in the face of the absolutized crowd. In the second and third chapters of the book I set out the intellectual and cultural climate in which Kierkegaard wrote by paying close attention to H. L. Martensen and N. F. S. Grundtvig, two leading churchmen of Golden Age Denmark. Although bitterly opposed to each other in many ways, both Martensen and Grundtvig espoused theologies of Christian nationalism. Since Kierkegaard's work was largely defined in opposition to the schools of thought represented by Martensen and Grundtvig, it is instructive to examine the role that nations, states and cultural allegiance play in their respective theologies in order to elucidate Kierkegaard's contrary approaches to these matters.

The fourth chapter examines the theoretical 'tools' that can be put to use in a Kierkegaardian critique of Christian nationalism, looking in particular at *Philosophical Fragments*, *Concept of Anxiety* and *Practice in Christianity*. The key notions of *Øieblikket* [the 'moment of vision'] and 'the leap' that leads to *Samtidigheden* ['contemporaneity'] together represent what Kierkegaard means by 'authentic' existence, and they mark the contours of Kierkegaardian 'true Christianity' as distinct from the religion of Christendom. Together, these three notions cover the ground of history and identity which will be the focus of subsequent chapters. As a 'moment' or a 'moment of vision' *Øieblikket* refers to both a temporal/historical relation and also to an orientation or way of being. Likewise, *Samtidigheden* has clear temporal connotations, but in Kierkegaard's schema, 'contemporaneity' is also the means by which humans must relate to God in Christ. By so doing, an individual can exist authentically as a person regardless of the historico-cultural context in which he or she lives.

Chapter 5 looks at one application of these theoretical tools: Kierkegaard's complaint with the 'world-historical' influence on Christian thought. Building on Kierkegaardian contemporaneity, and considering the implications of an orientation informed by *Øieblikket*, the question arises as to what the relationship of Christianity to historical events and facts might be. Kierkegaard's existential approach is often caricatured as radically separating the individual from all meaningful relations to history and historical events. Yet, for Kierkegaard, a genuine interrogation of history is what underpins his project of reintroducing Christianity back into Christendom. The Christian nationalisms of both Martensen and Grundtvig (and indeed anyone else) presuppose a belief in the hierarchical historical development of national cultures, and to the idea that the spiritual task of a group changes from age to age as humanity progresses. It is precisely these ideas that Kierkegaard challenges with his attack on the 'world-historical' point of view. I will follow Kierkegaard's argument in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Two Ages* in order to consider how it might be seen that while the trappings of culture change from age to age, what is essential about the human condition does not.

In the sixth chapter I trace out the second main critical application of Kierkegaard's philosophical tools, which is in relation to individual personhood and identity formation. Kierkegaard is often dismissed as individualistic bordering on misanthropic. Instead I argue that his category of the 'single individual' [*den Enkelte*] offers a viable account of the relationship between persons and groups. The chapter addresses the 'anti-social' critiques as well as the overly enthusiastic counter-critiques which I will suggest have painted Kierkegaard as primarily a communitarian thinker and class-warrior. Against both these schools of thought, I argue that it remains appropriate to refer to Kierkegaard's *individualism*, but that he is not for that reason atomistic or anti-social. Kierkegaard's 'single individual' is inextricably intertwined with his religious project and Christological commitments. As such, this cannot be squared with a merely socio-economic materialist view of human identity and resists attempts to ground identity primarily in a group, class or nation. Drawing from *Point of View* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* amongst other texts, I argue that Kierkegaardian individualism provides an account of authentic identity that rivals commonly accepted socio-historical models. In this way, my argument takes seriously Kierkegaard's priority of God as the ground and source of all being, and the effect of the incarnation upon human existence. As such Kierkegaard's individualism offers a route to healthy inter-personal relationships and an alternative to the idolatrous deification of the nation or of the group that any Christian theology of human society needs to address. The social contribution becomes especially apparent when we consider the moral implications of an individual-focussed social ethic as worked out in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, a text which challenges the passionate but ultimately selfish form of love commonly adopted by national groups and proposes a self-giving love for neighbour in its place.

Having established Kierkegaard's negative critique of Christianized nationalist commitments to history and identity formation, the seventh and final chapter of the book suggests the positive contributions that a Kierkegaardian approach to nationalism can make in the discourse and practice of both Church and state. I agree with those commentators who think that Kierkegaard's radical attack on the established order is, in effect, an attempt to introduce an 'undefined new thing' in its place. Yet, with reference to *Øieblikket* (which describes a way of being in the face of that which is objectively unknowable), I argue that Kierkegaard's 'neighbour' in *Works of Love* goes some way to providing a picture of this 'new thing', by describing the experience of an authentic individual who lives in the complex, ever-shifting real world of multiple national narratives. As an individual, by Kierkegaard's definition, the neighbour's reality includes the fact that one's personhood cannot be defined primarily by one's membership of a certain cultural group. For this reason I argue that seeing persons as neighbours is a more ethically viable alternative than seeing them primarily defined as co-nationals. I demonstrate that Kierkegaard's theoretical analysis of the defects

of nation-love at the expense of neighbour-love is borne out in practice, and the chapter considers the evidence of modern democracies such as the United States which suggests that patriots do not necessarily make the best citizens. As well as speaking to the sphere of civic participation, the Kierkegaardian project can also contribute a useful framework for theory and practice in Christian ecclesiology. Kierkegaard's subversion of nation-talk and elevation of neighbour-talk has radical implications for traditional Christian views of 'church' and 'congregation'. I agree with those commentators who conclude that Kierkegaard undermines many traditional political and ecclesial views of community, but I do not think that this closes the door to all senses of sociality for Kierkegaardian Christians. Just as the love of neighbour presupposes a neighbourhood of individuals, and thus can be a model for social relations without requiring the concept of the group, so too the Church can be understood as a neighbourhood without its being a congregation defined by a monopolized narrative or overarching agreement about a set of doctrines. Like all neighbourhoods, the Church must be allowed to remain as 'something undefined' if it is to avoid becoming absolutized, following the idolatrous route of the Christian nation. It is here that Kierkegaard's political and ecclesial contributions meet. His attack on Christendom, and his championing of the self and the neighbour as individuals who find their identity primarily in their relation to the God-man means that his theological project is by extension also a political project, applicable as it is to any Christian culture which is tempted to confuse its Christianity with its nationality.

This page intentionally left blank

Nationalism, Christianity and Kierkegaard

It is bad because it is a lie, and a lie can never be uttered without doing harm.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Notoriously difficult to define, ‘nationalism’ is a powerful ideology which harnesses ideals of personal identity, history, race and language, often in order to promote good citizenship or human flourishing, whose values are affiliated to the privileging of a particular cultural-ethnic identity. Nationalism is broader than the explicitly racist and/or militaristic movements as popularly understood. These more obviously malevolent forms are of course phenomena of nationalism, but the ideology is more extensive and pervasive than the virulent types would suggest. Following Michael Billig’s identification of ‘banal nationalism’, we can see that nationalism also includes those elements that undergird the (usually subconscious) everyday expressions of identity and affiliation connected to a specific people group.² Nationalism encompasses that which establishes a ‘sense of the common’ in a society, including religious and generational wisdom that is privileged for racial and ethnic reasons. Nationalism contributes to many of the narratives by which people live their lives and base their prejudices. One need not talk only of its extreme forms to talk of nationalism—for the banal versions also hold sway in everyday life. So although nationalism can (and often does) erupt as a justification for genocide or apartheid, before it reaches that stage, it can remain an unconscious set of ideological assumptions that govern who one considers worthy of friendship,

¹ Leo Tolstoy, ‘Christianity and Patriotism’ in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 487.

² ‘Banal nationalism’ refers to ‘ideological habits’ that underlie national identities. ‘Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition.’ Following Hannah Arendt, Billig stresses that ‘banal’ should not be confused with ‘benign’. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6, 7.

what type of person appears appropriate to marry, to educate, to heal or on whom to spend public money.

I propose that nationalism is ultimately malignant, even when not overtly antagonistic to other national groups: this theme will be explored in detail below and expanded upon throughout the book. I argue that even apparently benign nationalisms rely on quasi-historical myths, selective cultural memories and suspect racial theories, and as such, they undermine human flourishing by prioritizing the unstable, abstract notion of the 'compatriot' over the concrete reality of the 'neighbour' (the Kierkegaardian understanding of which I discuss in detail in the following chapters). Furthermore, I maintain that 'patriotism' is not, ultimately, distinct from nationalism, and thus cannot provide the solution to nationalism's deficiencies that its proponents desire. When nationalism and patriotism are combined with Christian thought and practice, or when Christians fail to see the ways in which these ideologies make rival overarching claims establishing identity and destiny, it becomes not only a political and cultural problem, but also a theological problem.

I do not attempt here to provide an exhaustive account of the political-philosophical literature on nationalism. Instead, I aim to sketch some of the main lines of inquiry, flagging key issues and thinkers in the field whose discourse particularly invites or benefits from Kierkegaard as an interlocutor. After considering the political-philosophical issue of nationalism and patriotism, the chapter will focus on specifically christianized forms of the phenomenon and its relation to the specifically theological aspects of Kierkegaard's project.

2. NATIONS AND NATIONALISM

One of the reasons it is difficult to define nations and their attendant nationalisms is the history of their development.³ However, one common consensus is that nations as we know them today are relatively modern social phenomena, with their ideology and discourse only becoming prevalent in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Key dates in the growth of the idea of nationalism include 1775 (First Partition of Poland), 1776 (American Declaration of Independence), 1784 (Herder's cultural-linguistic historical theories in *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*), 1789 and 1792 (the two

³ A brief scan of confident, and occasionally contradictory, statements on nationalism's source is revealing: 'There was no such thing as nationalism as such before the eighteenth century.' (Conzemius, 1995); 'Nationalism is a product of European thought from the last 150 years.' (Kedourie, 1960); 'The age of nationalism began in 1815.' (Featherstone, 1939); 'We can say quite precisely when [nationalism] came into the world, in 1789.' (Schneider, 1995).

phases of the French Revolution) and 1807 (Fichte's *Address to the German Nation*).⁴ The English word 'nationalism' has been traced back to occasional use in literature in 1798 and again in 1830, and it did not appear in lexicographies until the late nineteenth century.⁵ 'The nation' is relatively new, therefore, and in constant flux, its contours continuing to develop while new forms of nationalism spring up.⁶

In the absence of total agreement about terms, sociologist Anthony D. Smith has proposed some good working definitions which are helpful here. *Nationalism*, he writes, is 'an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a human population, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential "nation".' Furthermore, *nation* is defined as 'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members.'⁷ These definitions take into account the two main forces at play in any incarnation of nationalism, namely the *primordial* and *political*.⁸ The primordial force is one that affirms the values of heritage, blood and culture. Nations do not arise from borders and states, but from pre-rational (or a-rational) 'givens' of kin, religion, language and custom.⁹ The political force describes nationalism's drive towards civic autonomy, which in turn creates various movements towards defined borders, national independence, and the relations of national groups sitting together at the world's table.¹⁰

A synthesis of the primordial and the political is evident in all forms of nationalism. All nationalisms maintain that 'the people' must be free to

⁴ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

⁵ Walker Conner, 'A Nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group, is a . . .' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1978): 377–400 at 384.

⁶ Habermas refers to nationalism as 'a specifically modern phenomena of cultural integration' that emerges 'at a time when people are at once both mobilised and isolated as individuals'. 'Citizenship and National Identity' in *Praxis International* 12/1 (April 1992): 1–19 at 3.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, 'The Nation: Real or Imagined?' in Edward Mortimer (ed), *People, Nation, State* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 37.

⁸ See Clifford Geertz, 'The Integrative Revolution' in *Old Societies and New States* (London: Macmillan, 1963), and Conner, 'Nation'.

⁹ Geertz, 'Revolution', 109.

¹⁰ Note however that 'nations' are often erroneously conflated with 'states'. A state is a territorial, juridical unit, whereas a nation is 'a psychological bond' (Conner, 'Nation', 379). While nationalism may display affinities towards the political, territorial unit, it does not ultimately demand loyalty upon the *state*, but the *nation*. Nations are far more numerous than states, and every state has more than one nation living within its borders. 'With very few exceptions, the greatest barrier to state unity has been the fact that the states each contain more than one nation, and sometimes hundreds.' (Conner, 'Nation', 383–4). See also Anthony D. Smith, 'Imagined?', 38; Charles Tilly, *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Cf. ch. 2 below where Martensen occasionally recognizes the distinction.

pursue their own destiny. This involves fraternity, unity, the dissolving of all internal divisions, and being gathered together in a single historic territory and sharing a single public culture.¹¹ In nationalism, culture and territory are determined by historic rights, heritage and generational inheritance which are taken to constitute 'authentic identity'.¹² The belief in blood ties and heritage leads to, and is in turn protected by, the political drive towards boundary identification and civil autonomy. Nationalism's movement is historically conditioned: rooted in the past, celebrated in the present and providing hope for triumph and success in the future. Each period—past, present and future—is continually constructed and re-imagined according to current need. Thus it is very difficult to identify the roots of 'the nation'. Nationalism requires an ambiguous relationship to history in order to thrive, for it is a constantly developing construction, not simply a brute fact of geography and laws.

It is not the things which are simply 'there' that matter in human life. *What really and finally matters is the thing which is apprehended as an idea, and, as an idea, is vested with emotion until it becomes a cause and a spring of action . . . a nation must be an idea as well as a fact before it can become a dynamic force.*¹³

2.1 Imagined communities

The 'nation' is therefore an invented idea and consequently 'nationalism' is an act of collective imagination, a claim which for some arouses righteous indignation.¹⁴ Yet nations did not fall fully formed from the sky, and they are not natural features of any landscape.¹⁵ All nations are the psychological/cultural productions of human beings which, following Eric Hobsbawm, are merely sets of invented traditions comprising national symbols, mythology

¹¹ There are forms of mainstream civic nationalism, such as the Scottish and Welsh Nationalist parties, that do not seem to synthesize the political with the primordial, or take a strong line on primordiality. As such these parties are much closer to espousing constitutional or civic patriotism and, as such, they share in the weaknesses attached to these models of citizenship participation and identity (see below).

¹² *Nationalism*, 4.

¹³ Ernest Barker, *National Character and the Factors in its Formation* (Methuen: London, 1927), 173 (emphasis added).

¹⁴ For example, conservative commentator Melanie Phillips quotes with derision a think tank report which suggests that the 'nation' is an artificial construct, and that there is not a fixed conception of national identity and culture. She claims this as yet another example of 'British society trying to denude itself of its identity'. Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (London: Gibson Square, 2006), 111–12. Cf. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Parekh Report* (London: Profile Books, 2001).

¹⁵ Cf. Mark Dooley, 'The Politics of Statehood vs. A Politics of Exodus' in Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter (Issue 40, August 2000), 6.

and suitably tailored history.¹⁶ The question is therefore not whether nations are *real*, but rather *in what way* they exist. Even though they may exist only as invented constructions—kept alive by symbols, ethnic memory, myth and common consent—Smith emphasizes that they are still actual enough in the way they operate: ‘Nations and nationalism are real and powerful sociological phenomena, even if their reality is quite different from the tale told about them by nationalists themselves.’¹⁷ While it would be foolish to say that national identities do not exist, one is equally mistaken if one does not recognize the human ingenuity, imagination and narrative construction that is *essential* to those identities.¹⁸

2.2 Salvation drama

Recognition of the symbolic and narratives elements of nationalism brings us to the heart of its constructed nature. The secular rhetoric that accompanies much modern nationalism is in fact a later addition masking a foundational premise. The original engine of nations and nationalisms is in fact theology. Whether writers such as Martensen or Grundtvig (discussed in the following chapters) recognized it or not, the pseudo-theological language of nationalism arises from an explicit attempt on behalf of European nationalism’s founding fathers to provide an alternative home for the passions and energy that people used to pour into the Christian Church.

Nation talk often betrays a Messianic enthusiasm that draws heavily from Judeo-Christian roots. As Max Weber notes, there is in nationalism ‘a fervour of emotional influence’ that does not have, in the main, a political-economic origin.¹⁹ Instead, nationalism is based upon what he calls ‘sentiments of prestige’ rooted deep in notions of common descent and essential cultural/ethnic homogeneity.²⁰ The prestige of a nation is directly linked to the foundational idea (albeit not always explicitly addressed) of that nation’s ‘mission’ in the world, which in turn invites the notion that a particular nation’s culture and spirit is set apart from other nations. A ‘culture mission’ to the rest of the world creates and affirms sentiments of national significance

¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ch.1; Smith, ‘Imagined?’, 39. Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an ‘imagined political community’. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), ch. 3.

¹⁷ Smith, ‘Imagined?’, 36–7.

¹⁸ Cf. Matušítk, who says of Kierkegaard that he ‘cuts beneath traditional conceptions of human nature as something already formed and given once and for all. There is no given essence. Human nature itself is shaped through our choices.’ Matušítk, ‘Interview’, 6. This of course is the antecedent for Sartre’s guiding maxim, ‘existence precedes essence’.

¹⁹ Max Weber, ‘The Nation’ in *Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1948), 171.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 173, 176.

and superiority, or at least irreplaceability. For Weber, prestige is directly linked to a nation's belief in its own 'legend of providential "mission"'.²¹ Smith refers often to nationalism as a 'salvation drama', which 'specifies what shall count towards collective purification and regeneration. Briefly, everything that is popular, authentic and emancipatory contributes to the renaissance of the nation'.²²

The Messianic ardour of nationalism identifies and preserves one people as distinct from any other people: 'One of the goals of nationalism is the attainment and maintenance of cultural identity, that is, a sense of a distinctive cultural heritage and "personality" for a given named population.'²³ In order to attain the highest ideal of authentic existence, the nationalist must 'discover and discern that which is truly "oneself" and to purge the collective self of any trace of the "other"'.²⁴ Nationalism must therefore have an 'authentic' history, which marks out and excludes the influence of any other cultures and must not admit any opportunistic invention on behalf of the nationalist dogma.²⁵ As nationalist history rediscovers, reconstructs and appropriates the communal past in order to build the basis for a vision of collective destiny, its collective salvation drama often derives from religious models.²⁶

That the nation poses as a rival for individuals' ultimate allegiance is not lost on sociologists or theologians. What humans once projected onto their gods, they can also entrust to the nation:

Nationalism... substituted the nation for the deity, the citizen body for the church and the political kingdom for the kingdom of God, but in every other respect replicated the forms and qualities of traditional religions.²⁷

²¹ Ibid., 176. The 'culture mission' motif runs throughout Martensen's thought: 'It is only by means of Christianity that nationalities can attain the development to which they are really appointed.' *SE*, 93–4. Also *SE*, 333, 345; *CD*, 173, 275. It is even stronger in Grundtvig. As the 'divine experiment' the Norse nation has a pre-eminent role in the world (*US X*, 45) and it has assumed the mantle of history (N. F. S. Grundtvig, 'Christian Signs of Life' in *A Grundtvig Anthology* trans. Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lykne Jensen (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1984), 154). See especially 'The Pleiades of Christendom' *VU VI*, 274–390; also 'Introduction to Norse Mythology' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 35, 'New Years Morn' *VU VII*, 373.

²² Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 4. Cf. Dooley, 'Talk of the "historical mission" of a state, or of the *Geist* of world history, was bound to send shivers up [Kierkegaard's] stooped spine. For in either its secular or religious variations, a divinized state implies terror' in 'Statehood', 5.

²³ Smith, *Modernism*, 90.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Cf. Grundtvig's *mageløse opdagelse* which bases Danish Christianity on common speech as opposed to written words translated from foreign languages. (See, for example, *Christelige Prædiker I*.) Popular/National (*folkelig*) religion is clearly impossible if it is to be 'derived from and based on books'. 'Elementary Christian Teachings' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 136–7.

²⁶ Smith, *Modernism*, 90.

²⁷ Ibid., 98.

Tomka points out that as a rival to Christianity, the nation offers itself as the dominant institution for formulating individual and cultural identity and as such it is 'a likely starting point for ideologies with a claim to absoluteness'. In the face of the collapse of religion, 'nationalism creates its own sacred microcosm from within, in a way which cannot be refuted from outside'.²⁸

One of the theological threads of nationalism can be definitively traced back to 1789, when Abbé Emmanuel Sieyès published his pamphlet entitled 'What is the Third Estate?' and declared the nation to be the ground of all politics.²⁹ Indeed, it seems that for Sieyès, the nation is more than just the ground of politics, for it is also 'the origin of all things' and it 'exists before all else', independent of 'all forms and conditions'.³⁰ Its law is the supreme law, prompting one commentator to conclude that 'Sieyès the theologian gives the nation the traditional predicates of God'.³¹ Sieyès did not produce the supposed divine attributes of the nation *ex nihilo*, for behind them lies Rousseau's doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. 'Rousseau is similarly a theologian in disguise—or a pseudo-theologian: he attributes superhuman sovereignty to the "*volonté générale*"'.³² Often understood by social historians as a political construct referring to the general will of the people, Rousseau's '*volonté générale*' was, in fact, a theological term current at the time, meaning simply the will of God.³³ Is it any surprise that nationalisms encroach upon allegiances and functions normally attributed to Christianity? From the start, nationalism appropriated Christian theological concepts. In short, nationalism is simply a re-worked religious construct.

2.3 A great aggregate of men

From the pseudo-theological underpinnings of nationalism naturally flow religious-like claims of providing authenticity and identity to individuals.

²⁸ Miklós Tomka, 'Secularisation and Nationalism' in John Coleman and Miklós Tomka (eds), *Concilium: Religion and Nationalism* (SCM, 1995), 29. Cf. Westphal, 'The society that becomes its own point of reference absolutizes itself... Eichmann and Mengele were good Germans in this sense, and apartheid is what the age demands for Afrikaners. This is why Johannes Climacus says that the system has no ethics... We would do well to remember that Socrates and the early Christians were accused of atheism because they did not worship at the shrines of the self-absolutizing cultures in which they lived.' *Critique*, 125.

²⁹ Emmanuel Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* trans. M. Blondel (London: Pall Mall Press, 1963. *Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat?* (1789)).

³⁰ See Sieyès, *Estate*, ch.1. Cf. Heinrich Schneider, 'Patriotism and Nationalism' in *Concilium*, 38.

³¹ Schneider, 'Patriotism', 38.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Cf. Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). An example of a more 'political' reading of *volonté générale* is Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

A prime component of nationalism is that it must tell *the* story of the essential character of the people who belong to the nation.³⁴ It is this 'authentic identity' that preserves and defines the group. Defining 'the people' involves notions of unity, dissolving all internal divisions and subsuming the needs of the individual into the group. Such unity requires a single public culture, which in turn is determined by historic right, heritage and generational inheritance.³⁵

As a necessary condition for authentic identity, nationalist narratives advertise themselves as historically inviolable, rooted in self-evident or common sense truths. Only certain useful aspects of history and culture are selected for the narrative, and even then they are often radically transformed. Dead languages are revived, traditions invented and fictitious pristine purities restored.³⁶ Contrary to its self-image as an 'inevitable' expression or movement of 'the people', nationalism is in fact a product of intellectual endeavour and (re)education, prompting Gellner to comment, "The basic deception and self-deception practised by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society".³⁷ Nationalism is a cultural invention, indoctrinated into a people with the aim of producing *the People*.

The creation of *the People* and their story also constructs an identity for the individual within the group. The story of a nation is, for nationalism, effectively the story of a 'group person' created by individuals, a factor clearly seen in Renan's 1882 influential nationalist essay where he claims:

A great aggregate of men, with a healthy spirit and warmth of heart, creates a moral conscience which is called a nation. When this moral conscience proves its strength by sacrifices that demand abdication of the individual for the benefit of the community, it is legitimate, and it has a right to exist.³⁸

The story of national identity co-opts, and claims definitive rights over, the identity of its individuals, and the collective identity of the group is *the*

³⁴ Cf. Grundtvig, 'Nyårs-Morgen' US IV, 239ff; 'Living Memory', 91, 94; *Daneskere*; 'Norse Mythology', 48–50; ch. 6 below.

³⁵ A nationally understood 'people' is the basis for Martensen's 'principle of personality'. See especially: *Outline*, 259, 271, 302–4; *CE*, 230ff; *SE*, 88, 196. Martensen says that the national people is the 'condition of all human, all moral and mental development'. *SE*, 96.

³⁶ This is not only apparent in Grundtvig's poetical and mythological project for the Norse people, but can also be seen, for example, in the successful re-invention of 'the Celts' in the service of Scottish nationalism. 'I believe that the whole history of Scotland has been coloured by myth; and that myth, in Scotland, is never driven out by reality, or by reason.' Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (London: Yale University Press, 2008). Less polemical, but arguing a similar case, is Murray G. H. Pittock's study of 'sham Celtification' in *The Invention of Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1991), 100ff.

³⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 55, 56. See also Smith, *Modernism*, 42.

³⁸ Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* trans. Ida Mae Snyder (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1882), 29; *Nationalism*, 18.

essential component of individual identity: the collective defines the individual, and not the other way around.³⁹

Primordial appeals to ancestral culture and heritage (such as Bismarck's purported exhortation to the German people to 'think with their blood') are key elements within the construct of a nation, giving it the psychological dimension of an extended family or blood lineage. This adds credence to the demand that the destiny of 'the people' takes priority over that of any one individual in that group. Indeed, for nationalism, the sublimation of an individual into the group marks the highest point of authentic existence for that individual, insofar as each personal sacrifice contributes to the authentic identity of the whole.⁴⁰

2.4 Illusion of destiny

Following closely on the heels of the story of essential identity comes nationalism's appeal to *destiny*: Messianic fervour and a sense of cultural mission lead naturally towards the concept of a grand, possibly inevitable, future for the chosen nation. It is precisely the problems connected to the dogma of a nation's unique purpose that prompted Amartya Sen's concern with what he calls 'civilizational partitioning', that is, a tendency to essentialize cultures into easily manageable, and supposedly predictable, units. His target is 'the odd presumption that the people of the world can be uniquely categorized according to some *singular and overarching* system of partitioning'.⁴¹ The process of identifying the supposed 'essence' of a unique culture inevitably leads to speculation about that culture's role and purpose on the world's stage, as well as the assumption that certain nations are destined to clash.⁴² For Sen, this is less an accurate scientific prediction than it is a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'The illusion of destiny, particularly about some

³⁹ For example, for the Axis nations, 'Japan to the Japanese [and] Germany to the Germans was something far more personal and profound than a territorial-political structure termed a state; it was an embodiment of the nation-idea and therefore an *extension of the self*.' Conner, 'Nation', 385 (emphasis added). Cf. Martensen, 'I am not formed to stand alone . . . [I am] fitted to be a *member of one great whole*.' *CE*, 230; *Outline*, 298. For his part Grundtvig maintained that 'man' apart from his national context, was an abstraction. See 'Living Memory', *Danskeren* and the discussion on '*Menneske først*' in ch. 3 below.

⁴⁰ 'National self-determination is, in the final analysis, a determination of the will; and nationalism is, in the first place, a method of teaching the right determination of the will.' Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Hutchinson, 1960), 81.

⁴¹ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Allen and Lane, 2006), xii.

⁴² It is this thought which underpins the political philosophy of Samuel Huntington, whose work has been an influential source text for neo-conservative foreign policy and military interventions. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

singular identity or other (and their alleged implications), nurtures violence in the world through omissions as well as commissions.⁴³ Many of the conflicts of the world are sustained through the illusion of a 'unique and choiceless identity'.⁴⁴

2.5 Group sustaining fictions

The claim to a national destiny, or culture mission, based as it is on a constructed essential identity, can be observed as a tendency towards *abstraction*, although this seems counterintuitive to those who envision their national culture as a tangible reality, rooted in the shared cultural artefacts of land, history and kin.⁴⁵ And yet, any attempt to direct attention towards certain favoured features worthy of allegiance is in effect to misdirect attention away from the real existence of the complex of narratives, history and people that have been deselected in order to arrive at *the* nation. Abstraction detracts from engagement with the practical realities and problems of everyday community life—Sen's 'ordinary and mundane' facts of existence—that every actual society exhibits, and fixates instead upon ideals.

Nationalism abstracts an individual when it subsumes his particular, complicated identity into the general, simple identity of the group, even while it claims to be the foundation for that individual's identity. It is here that we return to the topic of 'imagined communities'. Personal identity is trivialized and truncated when a national idea is taken to constitute not *part* of, but the *whole* of who a person is. American political philosopher George Kateb refers to 'group-sustaining fictions' which 'offer to help persons carry the burden of selfhood, of individual identity'. The greatest part of the burden is 'the quest for meaningfulness, which is tantamount to receiving definition of the self'.⁴⁶ Nationalisms act as group-sustaining fictions in that they provide the what, why and wherefore for their individual adherents, demanding only allegiance in return. And yet, of course, as judiciously selected historical facts and information, nationalisms are a *fiction*, an abstraction from actual personal experience, and therefore ultimately unsuited for establishing authentic personal identity in its complex entirety.

⁴³ Sen, *Identity*, xiv.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁴⁵ We shall see in ch. 3 below how this is precisely the case for Grundtvig. It is also true for Martensen, who describes the idea of a person abstracted from his society as a fiction: 'No one is a human being in pure generality, but only in a definite peculiarity ... in a certain circle of society.' SE, 196. See ch. 2 below.

⁴⁶ George Kateb, *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4, 5.

3. PATRIOTS AND PATRIOTISM

Thus far I have argued that nationalism is problematic not only as a mode of communal relations but also as a conceptual foundation for individual identity. But what of *patriotism*? Patriotism is usually considered a virtue by those who would otherwise repudiate the excesses of nationalism. Patriotism is often seen as a middle way between bland apathy and excessive devotion to one's civic identity, 'a particular loyalty compatible with universal reasonable values'.⁴⁷ The idea of belonging to a *state* or *country* is seen as an alternative to the *nation*, with allegiance not to blood-ties, ethnicity and myth but instead to the apparatus of state—constitutions, laws and historical symbols. Whereas nationalism is love of nation, it is hoped that patriotism, truly, is love of country.

Many sociologists and political writers assume that distinguishing patriotism from nationalism is a fairly straightforward task. Elie Kedourie, for example, defines patriotism as 'affection for one's country, or one's group, loyalty to its institutions, and zeal for its defence'. Kedourie claims that unlike nationalism, the sentiment of patriotism does not depend 'on a particular anthropology, [or] assert a particular doctrine of the state or of the individual's relation to it'.⁴⁸ Habermas compares the political loyalty of citizens to the free polity they share in patriotism, to the focus on ethnicity and culture in nationalism.⁴⁹ Here 'civic' or 'constitutional' patriotism is proposed as a corrective antidote to the problems of nationalism,⁵⁰ so that loyalty to the 'primordial' elements of race, generational inheritance and language are replaced by political institutions and the constitution of the state.⁵¹ Hence the claim that 'patriotism saves populations from nationalism'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Andrew Vincent, *Nationalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111. See also Stephen Nathanson, 'In Defence of "Moderate Patriotism"' in *Ethics* 99, no.3 (1988/89), 535–52; Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 73–4.

⁴⁹ See Habermas, 'Citizenship'. Habermas has on occasion defended constitutional patriotism with reference to Kierkegaard. He acknowledges that 'in the identifications that the nation state expected of its citizens more was pre-decided than Kierkegaard, with the interests of the individual in mind, could allow'. However, Habermas continues, 'the situation is different with a constitutional patriotism'. Habermas, 'Historical', 261. Martin Matušík's treatment of Habermas and Kierkegaard is discussed at length in ch. 7 below.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Charles Blatburg, *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, 'Citizenship and National Identity' in *Praxis International* 12 no.1, 1–19; Attracta Ingram, 'Constitutional Patriotism' in *Philosophical and Social Criticism* 22 no.6 (1996), 1–18.

⁵¹ Smith, *Nationalism*, 211, 213.

⁵² Vincent, *Particularity*, 114, 115.

3.1 A viable alternative?

I suggest that patriotism is not sufficiently distinct from nationalism to offer a viable alternative to its malignant effects. At this point, some readers may question whether I do not here run the risk of accidentally targeting those good citizens who practice the (Christian) virtue of loving their country. This is not inadvertent; they are, indeed, my targets. The assumption that love of country provides the ideal foundation for the Christian love of neighbour has a respectable pedigree.⁵³ Likewise, the assumption that sentiments of national superiority and manifest destiny need not trouble the Christian patriot, and that one should allow others to love their country just as one should love one's own is commonplace in Christian literature, thought and practice.⁵⁴ Such widespread assumptions, however, simply beg the questions at hand. Is any 'country' worthy of our love? What if it turns out that rather than enabling, patriotism *precludes* true neighbourliness?⁵⁵

In practice, the distinction between nationalism and patriotism fails. In practice patriotism does not in fact escape the problems of nationalism for which it is supposed to be an alternative. This is because patriotic language and ideas draw from the same well as those of nationalism.⁵⁶ Commentators who wish to preserve patriotism while avoiding nationalism often unwittingly use nation-language when they mean to be talking about the state, too easily assuming a difference between a supposedly rational, constitutional patriotism, and emotive, fluid nationalism. For Kedourie and other civic patriots, patriotism does not rely on a 'particular anthropology' or 'doctrine' of individual relations as nationalism does; yet upon inspection, it is these very things that patriotic rhetoric manifestly *does* rely on. Although understood as a rational, constitutional allegiance to the strictly political, 'state' structures of a society, patriotism still enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the nationalist ideas of particularity, sentiment and selective memory. Furthermore, these confusions of patriotism and nationalism are for the most part inevitable, due

⁵³ Perhaps the best theological defence of patriotism as distinct from nationalism comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* Eberhard Bethge (ed), trans. Neville Horton Smith (SCM, 1955); Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1939–45*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (Collins, 1973). See also Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Bristol Baptist College, 1984).

⁵⁴ A notable example is C. S. Lewis, *Four Loves* (London: Collins, 1977), who also attempts to differentiate between 'demonic' nationalism and rightful patriotism.

⁵⁵ See especially ch. 7 below.

⁵⁶ Indeed, the relationship between the concepts is more complicated still, with classical patriotism providing the conceptual furniture for modern nationalism, which in turn has fuelled modern patriotic imaginations. See below.

to the foundations that patriotism and nationalism share but which many commentators do not acknowledge.⁵⁷

Part of the problem lies in the fact that patriotic notions of citizenship are based on ideas of civic duty and allegiance to a specific legal and cultural entity, which themselves have their roots in the Greco-Roman ideas of *patria* and *res publica*. *Patria* refers both to the father as head of a family, and to the land and property associated with that paternal authority.⁵⁸ The political scientist Andrew Vincent puts it thus: "The qualities of "local familial emotive identification" and "abstract legal loyalty and entitlement" have remained part of the curious conceptual baggage of patriotism to the present day."⁵⁹ Love of the particular homeland and family unit is an intrinsic part of the concept of *patria*, a sentiment that arises partly to compensate for the remoteness of the impersonal, generalized entity of the *res publica*. The emotive/familial as a target of allegiance is not trumped by the rational/legal, but instead they exist—sometimes uneasily—side by side.

Despite the language of rational/objective allegiance to laws and states, in reality the patriot is being asked to identify him or herself morally and emotionally with one particular way of life.⁶⁰ Yet the laws and social structures that are the supposed objects of patriotic affection are themselves deeply rooted in the collective (un)consciousness of an historical community. In other words, pledging allegiance to a flag is *not* simply a way to unite disparate groups around a neutral, objective symbol. The flag itself represents a complex mix of cultural, religious and ethnic assumptions. Like nationalism, patriotism assumes a 'theoretical cultural homogenization', a 'moral chauvinism' implicit in the patriotic story that is told to enforce or shore-up sentiments of loyalty and identity.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Two defenders of patriotism who do recognize (and welcome) its inseparability from forms of nationalism are Roger Scruton, 'In Defence of the Nation' in J. C. D. Clark (ed), *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1990) and Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' in Igor Primoratz (ed), *Patriotism* (New York: Humanity Books, 2002). MacIntyre suggests that the state could not survive if the 'bonds of patriotism' were dissolved by liberal morality, which questions national partiality. He argues that for this reason soldiers cannot (and should not) be given a liberal education. MacIntyre, 'Virtue', 56. Cf. Nathanson, 'There is an air of realism about MacIntyre's psychological claim that morality is a weak motivator that must be supplemented by blind patriotism.' in 'Moderate', 549.

⁵⁸ Vincent, *Particularity*, 111.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁰ Cf. Canovan's critique of constitutional patriotism which argues that Habermas and Ingram constantly betray possessive, localized language in their discussion of the supposedly supranational identity and allegiance. She concludes that 'the notion that constitutional patriotism can provide a substitute for ties of birth and blood is incoherent'. Margaret Canovan, 'Patriotism is not Enough' in *British Journal of Political Science* 30 (2000), 413–32.

⁶¹ Vincent, *Particularity*, 123–4; Paul Gomberg, 'Patriotism is like Racism' in *Patriotism*, 106–7.

It is often assumed, and occasionally made explicit, that patriotism names a virtue that applies to real people and concrete situations. So it is that Hegel can praise patriotism as:

The political *disposition* [which is] certainly based on *truth* (whereas merely subjective certainty does not originate in *truth*, but is only opinion) and a volition which has become *habitual*.⁶²

Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre defends patriotism based on a country's 'true history' over and against the 'irrational attitude' of pledging allegiance towards those nations which have built themselves on 'largely fictitious' narratives.⁶³ Yet the assumption about the 'truth' of patriotism's love, or the assumption that there can be *any* country whose story is not largely fictitious, begs precisely the question at hand. Because it requires an element of cultural homogenization and identity formation, patriotism does not escape the charge of *abstraction*. It is for this reason that I agree with Kateb's claim that patriotism (love for country) 'is a mistake'. This is in large part because the identity of the individual is lost just as surely in patriotism as it is in nationalism, as Kateb continues:

[Countries] are best understood as an abstraction . . . a compound of a few actual and many imaginary ingredients . . . A country is not a discernible collection of discernible individuals like a team or a faculty or a local chapter of a voluntary organisation.⁶⁴

Of course, a country has a 'rational', geographical place: a setting, a landscape, cities, a climate and so on. 'But it is also constructed out of transmitted memories true and false; a history usually mostly falsely sanitized or falsely heroized; a sense of kinship of a largely invented purity.'⁶⁵ Like nationalism, patriotic abstraction occurs in the construction of the target of its affection. Even if the feelings of affiliation are not overtly focussed on race or ethnicity, they are still focussed on objects or ideas that are the result of (often extremely) selective historical memory. Furthermore, any act of selection by definition involves multiple *de-selections* of elements that do not fit the preferred patriotic picture. By telling you *who* you are and *what* you should love, patriotic narratives also make foundational claims on identity. Even when patriotism is opposed to nationalism, it finds itself appealing to 'a kind of communal identity formation' that depends, in part, on a story of people and place 'to provide both identity and direction to the citizen-ideal'.⁶⁶ In order to avoid

⁶² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §268. Original emphasis.

⁶³ MacIntyre, 'Virtue', 55.

⁶⁴ Kateb, *Mistakes*, 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁶ John Coleman, 'A Nation of Citizens' in *Concilium*, 54.

content-less generalizations, 'people and place' inevitably becomes 'The people and A place'.⁶⁷

3.1.1 Case study USA

One need only look at today's flagship of constitutional patriotism to see this phenomenon in effect. The United States of America (USA) endorses a form of civic patriotism that is, theoretically, an alternative to 'primitive' nationalism. Politicians and commentators routinely look to the USA as their prime positive example of a patriotic society that eschews the demand of affiliation to a particular cultural or ethnic group in order to belong.⁶⁸ And yet, as Charles Taylor has noted, mere appeals to democracy, justice, equality and constitution are too 'thin', even for a country that places such a high value on the above named political goods.⁶⁹ Almost as soon as it was introduced, the model patriotism provided by the USA relied on the trappings of nationalism and nation-states, including appeals to founding fathers, origin myths, religiously endowed symbols and ideals, and references to historical, or quasi-historical, narratives with ancestral/ethnic overtones.⁷⁰ For Taylor, such a drift was inevitable: 'Nationalism has become the most readily available motor of patriotism.' Although the American Revolution was not nationalist in intent, later, 'so much did nationalism become the rule, as a basis for patriotism that the original pre-nationalist societies themselves began to understand their own patriotism in something like nationalist terms'.⁷¹

The trend is born out in topical sociological surveys. One example is Deborah Schildkraut's study of conceptions of American identity. She reports that, contrary to the 'official' version of a civic patriotism (separate from race or creed), 'lingering ethnocultural conceptions of American identity' are in full

⁶⁷ Prompting Coleman to comment: 'Nationalism and modern concepts of citizenship exist in a condition of both tensile conflict and mutual inter-dependence and influence.' in 'Citizens', 48.

⁶⁸ Prime Minister Gordon Brown has often referred to the USA as a model in this regard. See his 'Britishness' in *Moving Britain Forward: Selected Speeches 1997–2006* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). Also Janet Daley, 'Everyone Needs to be Given a Strong Sense of National Identity' *Telegraph* 2 April 2007, and Canovan, 'Patriotism'. I agree with Canovan in doubting that the USA is really the constitutional patriotic success story that it is portrayed as. See discussion below.

⁶⁹ See Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ So, for example, Benjamin Franklin expressed his resentment of German immigrants in his new America. 'They will never adopt our language or customs,' he wrote, 'any more than they can acquire our complexion.' Benjamin Franklin's Letters, quoted in Morris P. Fiorina et al., *America's New Democracy*, 3rd edn (New York: Longman, 2006), 69.

⁷¹ Charles Taylor, 'Nationalism and Modernity' in R. McKim and J. McMahan (eds), *The Morality of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40–1.

force.⁷² Despite the theory that the American civic identity is 'decoupled from ethnicity, separated from religion and detached even from race',⁷³ the reality seems to be that this decoupling exists more in theory than in practice. 'The place of race, ethnicity and religion in determining what people think it means to be an American is still very much an active debate.'⁷⁴ Even the best model of patriotism as embodied in the American experience reveals its reliance on the same essential elements as the nationalism for which it is supposed to be an alternative. Contemporary evidence and analysis suggest that, as a socio-political force, patriotism is not substantially different from nationalism.

4. CURRENT CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

A study of patriotism in the USA leads easily to a discussion of religious expressions of nationalism and patriotism. Although there are clear historical precedents, it is not anachronistic to talk of Christian (or perhaps *christianized*) nationalism today. Arguably, shades of Christian nationalism lie behind the most powerful populist forces at play presently in US politics. A brief survey of some more popular treatments on the topic reveals not only the problem itself, but also the many attempts that have been made in recent years to understand and critically assess it. Such attempts betray a sense of urgency as well as a common difficulty in coming to grips with the theoretical and theological roots of Christian nationalism.⁷⁵

⁷² Deborah Schildkraut, 'The More Things Change . . . American Identity and Mass and Elite Responses to 9/11' in *Political Psychology* Vol. 23 no. 3, 2002, 511–35 at 512.

⁷³ Stanley Renshon, *One America?* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 258.

⁷⁴ Schildkraut, 'Identity', 514. Cf. the 1996 General Social Survey in which 55% of the respondents said that being Christian was important in making someone a 'true American', and 70% said the same thing about being born in America. The study also showed that white Americans revealed a tendency to assume that people who did not fit the stereotypical WASP identity were foreigners, despite the fact that these 'foreigners' enjoyed full legal citizenship as Americans. R. Takaki, 'Race at the End of History' in D. Batstone and E. Medieta (eds), *The Good Citizen* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷⁵ The literature on this topic is immense, and the polemical and ideologically motivated nature of much American discourse in this area does not seem to have provided much clarity on the issue, as evinced from the examples I deal with here. Solid historical surveys of the roots of the christianized 'Chosen People' understanding of US identity and narrative include: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States 1607–1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Martin E. Marty, *Religious Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970). See also many of the essays in Mark A. Noll (ed), *Religion and American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The controversy surrounding US civil religion and the purported religious intent of the founding fathers is briefly discussed below.

In his 2005 book, *God's Politics*, the American theologian and social activist Jim Wallis lambastes US politicians (of the left and of the right) for their vacuous use of Christian symbolism and ideas. His book contains a chapter on the 'dangerous theology' of empire, in which he highlights the rhetoric of President George W. Bush, and subjects it to special criticism:

It is one thing for a nation to assert its raw dominance in the world; it is quite another to suggest, as this president does, that the success of American military and foreign policy is connected to a religiously inspired 'mission' and even that his presidency may be a divine appointment for a time such as this.⁷⁶

Tony Carnes, notes in *Christianity Today*, 'Some worry that Bush is confusing genuine faith with national ideology'.⁷⁷ The *Christian Century* agrees: 'What is alarming is that Bush seems to have no reservations about the notion that God and the good are squarely on the American side.'⁷⁸

Not content with merely focussing on a particular president, journalist Michelle Goldberg has investigated the Christian worldview of her conservative, 'Red State' compatriots, seeking to uncover the culture that lies behind the alarming announcements of her country's elected leader. A self-styled 'secular Jew and ardent urbanite',⁷⁹ Goldberg seems shocked to find a subculture espousing militant Christian patriotism in the rural heartlands and suburbs.⁸⁰ She traces the roots of the movement to the reactionary preaching of 'depression era demagogues' and in the highly partisan politics of the 1970s.⁸¹

Clifford Longley, trying to locate the 'big idea' that shapes both English and American identity, goes further back, finding a Chosen People motif in the American national myth. The early Puritan Americans, he writes, 'firmly believed that the Bible was primarily about them, and not primarily about the ancient tribes of Palestine. It was not history, it was contemporary narrative and prophecy.'⁸² Longley admits the previous existence of some 'extreme fundamentalist sects in America' and suggests in passing that these ideas 'may well' have contributed to US policy.⁸³ However, Longley assumes that in the present USA these ideas are now old and obsolete, referring to 'modern Protestants' who would find the concept of a chosen nation alien. Only the 'fringe' element continues to maintain a Chosen People status, and

⁷⁶ Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the American Right gets it wrong and the Left doesn't get it* (Oxford: Lion, 2005), 139.

⁷⁷ Tony Carnes, 'The Bush Doctrine' in *Christianity Today*, May 2003.

⁷⁸ John Dart, 'Bush's Religious Rhetoric Riles Critics' in *Christian Century* 8, March 2003.

⁷⁹ Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸¹ See Goldberg, *Kingdom*, 10–13.

⁸² Clifford Longley, *Chosen People: The Big Idea that shapes England and America* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 101.

⁸³ Such as America's long-term support for the state of Israel, see Longley, *Chosen*, 109.

the closest example Longley can find of a religious group that still holds to this are the Mormons.⁸⁴

He cannot have been looking very hard. Goldberg, too, claims that the attitude does not represent the majority of Americans, or even a majority of all evangelicals, but instead represents 'a significant and highly mobilised minority'.⁸⁵ That the mindset has coalesced into movements that are significant and mobilized is undeniable. That it represents only a minority view is far less certain. When commentators such as Longley, Wallis and Goldberg express surprise at particular pronouncements from certain presidents, or ascribe these sentiments to fringe, fundamentalist subcultures, they fail to appreciate the depth and breadth of these ideas in present-day, mainstream America.

The sense of America's 'chosen' status, its favoured place in history and its famous claim to 'exceptionalism' runs deep in the culture, crosses political allegiance and is espoused by both Christian and non-Christian alike. What is the source of these ideas? Goldberg, building on her 'mobilised minority' theory, suggests that it represents 'a conscious refutation of Enlightenment rationalism'.⁸⁶ This, however, fails to recognize that the worldview is itself an example of a rationalist, modernistic mindset, albeit with adjustments. It is a religious Chosen People ideology, bolted on to a classically liberal interpretation of the progression of history, cemented by a thoroughly Enlightenment vision of modern nations and national identity.

The result is a theology best described as 'Christian nationalism'. The theology is not systematic, but it is pervasive. It does not have a single source or author, but it does appear regularly from multiple voices and at multiple times. It has not been explicated dogmatically, but its core themes recur with remarkable consistency. Significantly, in his critique of George W. Bush, Wallis complains that the President's Christian theology 'seems not to have an impact on foreign policy, but simply serves to bolster an ideology of US moral supremacy'.⁸⁷

I suggest that what is happening here is not the *absence* or failure of theology, but is in fact the *presence* and success of the particular theology of Christian nationalism. Bush's confusion of faith with national ideology, and the equation of God with the American Way, are evidence not of a deviation from theology, so much as the fruit of a theology which has long been at the heart of US self-identity.

In a speech made after the first anniversary of the September 2001 attacks, President Bush said of his country that it is 'the hope of all mankind. . . . That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.'⁸⁸ What is most profound here is not the use

⁸⁴ Longley, *Chosen*, 105.

⁸⁵ Goldberg, *Kingdom*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. ⁸⁷ Wallis, *Politics*, 141.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 142. A transcript of this speech can be found at (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2252515.stm>).

of a scriptural phrase but the fact that the Bible-believing, born-again demographic (to which this language would have the most resonance) heard their Christian president substitute America for the incarnate Christ and no one batted an eye. The fact that such explicit idolatry could go unnoticed and even applauded, demonstrates that the culture to whom Bush spoke was quite comfortable with equating nation with divine revelation.⁸⁹ Puritan preacher John Winthrop, on the boat to the New World in 1630, told his fellow travellers that their community will be 'as a city on a hill', a substitution of America with the Kingdom of Heaven that was famously taken up by President Reagan in a speech more than 300 years later.⁹⁰ In 1850, Herman Melville wrote:

And we Americans are the peculiar chosen people—the Israel of our time . . . Long enough have we been sceptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether indeed the political Messiah had come. *But he has come in us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings.⁹¹

Influential broadcaster and right-wing political enthusiast Pat Robertson maintains that America is a Christian nation and thus that 'studying the constitution is like studying the Bible'.⁹² Popular early twentieth-century evangelist Billy Sunday said 'Christianity and patriotism are synonymous terms'. He would often end his sermons by jumping onto the pulpit and waving the American flag.⁹³ In 1995, during the push to protect the US flag by drafting laws that intentionally used religious terms such as 'sacralisation' and 'desecration', Republican Congressman Bill Young said 'alone of all flags, it has the sanctity of revelation'.⁹⁴

These are pronouncements and attitudes that worry many theologians, political scientists and sociologists, not to mention US politicians working to

⁸⁹ For an example of this tradition and a robust defence of President Bush on this point, see the unapologetic celebration of the theology of American exceptionalism in Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence* (New York: Continuum International, 2004) esp. the introduction and ch.1. The phenomenon is far more prevalent amongst the American-right than the American-left; however, it occasionally comes from this quarter too. Presumably Hebrews 10:23 was not talking about 'the American promise' as Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama was when he exhorted his audience to 'hold firmly without wavering to the hope that we confess' during his nomination speech on 28 August 2008.

⁹⁰ Robert Jewett and John S. Laurence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The dilemma of zealous nationalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 276–7. Cf. Conrad Cherry (ed), *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), 43; Longley, *Chosen*, 109.

⁹¹ Jewett, *Captain*, 1. Cf. Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970. Original 1850), 151 (emphasis added).

⁹² Jewett, *Captain*, 143. Cf. Pat Robertson, *In America's Dates with Destiny* (Nashville: Nelson, 1986), 90.

⁹³ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 51.

⁹⁴ Jewett, *Captain*, 297–300. Cf. Congressional Record, June 28 1995, H6435, 299.

navigate their way around religion and patriotism.⁹⁵ Yet, Americans did not invent Christian nationalism, and most likely they will not be the last culture to exhibit it.⁹⁶ The American experience is not unique—it is simply that the USA is currently where the theological problem is most acute. This not a book-length assessment of the situation in the USA, and I am not proposing to pit Kierkegaard against the musings of George W. Bush or Pat Robertson. Nor do I intend to become embroiled in the specifically American conversation about the source and legitimacy of its civil religion.⁹⁷ Instead, having demonstrated the contemporary potency of ongoing Christian nationalist narratives, I suggest that all Christian nationalisms share similar traits, and rest on common theological assumptions. For this reason, Kierkegaard's critique of the nationalistic ideas of his contemporaries can be fruitfully considered today. Kierkegaard's authorial project contains a wealth of argument that engages the elements of any Christian nationalism, whatever flag it waves.

5. KIERKEGAARD AND THE MODERN CONVERSATION

In the following chapters, I hope to demonstrate that Kierkegaard's thought proposes and supports a radically egalitarian orientation in which the problematic specifics of nationalism and patriotism do not take on ultimate or

⁹⁵ As Obama no doubt discovered in his association with Rev. Jeremiah Wright and that preacher's infamous prophetic injunction that 'God Damn America'. This case is discussed in ch. 7 below.

⁹⁶ Some other examples worthy of future study include the resurgence of the Orthodox Church and its relationship to Putin's Russia, and the fact that the officially recognized (and very popular) Christian Church in China is called the Three-Self Patriotic Church. Africa is also of interest. Zambia has written Christianity into its constitution and was declared a 'Christian nation' by President Frederick Chiluba in 1992. Simon Kimbangu began a Christian movement in the 1920s in what was then the Belgian Congo. It is still flourishing today with associations of Congolese nationalism.

⁹⁷ This conversation, begun in earnest by Robert N. Bellah's 'Civil Religion in America' in *Daedalus* 96 (winter 1967) and subsequent writings, often centres on the religious intent of the American founding fathers and the question of whether America was (or is, or could be once again) a 'Christian nation'. The issue has become a focal point in the so-called 'culture wars' between American conservatives and liberals, and there is no shortage of literature on the topic. See, for example, George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1991); Mark Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and the collection of point-counterpoint essays in Jerry Herbert (ed), *America, Christian or Secular?* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1984). While obviously of importance to certain sections of US society, the historical-political debate tends to bypass more fundamental theological reflection and analysis. Even if we were to grant the highly contentious and revisionist conservative claim that the architects of the US constitution worked from principles that broadly coincide with present-day American evangelical Christianity, we would still be left with the deeper question of whether the idea of any nation being Christian is Christianly desirable, or indeed makes sense at all.

eternal significance (though they may help to set the context of identity formation).⁹⁸ I argue that the foundation of this thought is Kierkegaard's incarnational Christology, a person and event accessed by a faith and composed of the existential elements of the moment of vision, the leap, and contemporaneity.⁹⁹ Kierkegaard's prising of the single individual away from identity in a group, and his propounding of true Christianity and real sociality¹⁰⁰ preclude the very elements which nationalisms need to exist: that is, his thought denies the narrative of authenticity rooted in group affiliation and it denies the doctrine of inviolable historical development and destiny. Furthermore, Kierkegaard not only denies that the mass-man speaks for the like-minded units which make up the whole, he also denies that the mass-man acts and relates to other mass-men in ways analogous to individual persons.¹⁰¹

Despite all this, it is true that some have tried to recruit Kierkegaard for their nationalist cause and the perception still lingers in some quarters that Kierkegaardian existential individualism amounts to little more than incipient fascism. These commentators think Kierkegaard props up the brand of *bourgeois* self-interest that lent itself easily to some of the more virulent ideologies of the twentieth century, especially National Socialism.¹⁰² In this book I hope to demonstrate that, although Kierkegaard is often tainted by the vestiges of this association, this is a spurious reading of Kierkegaard. For this reason, it is worth briefly considering the use that some National Socialist thinkers made of Kierkegaard, before going on to reviewing other, I think more legitimate, ways that Kierkegaard can be brought into the modern conversation about nationalism, religious identity and patriotic allegiance. I shall first look briefly at the use that Carl Schmitt made of Kierkegaard in the service of nationalist ideals, and then consider the readings by Mark Dooley and Merold Westphal whom I think more validly use Kierkegaard to suggest an ideology critique of these same forces.

5.1 Schmitt

While Heidegger is often brought up in the context of a potentially fascistic reading of Kierkegaard, an arguably more politically significant National

⁹⁸ Cf. chs. 5 and 6 below.

⁹⁹ Cf. ch. 4 below.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. ch. 7 below.

¹⁰¹ This runs against the spirit guiding Grundtvig (ch. 3 below), but also especially Martensen, as we shall see in ch. 2 below. Behind the latter lies Hegel: 'The state has individuality which is [present] essentially as an individual and, in the sovereign, as an actual and immediate individual.' *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §321.

¹⁰² The criticisms of Adorno, Lukács, Marcuse and others will be addressed in the following chapters. See especially chs. 5 and 6 below.

Socialist thinker also wrote under Kierkegaard's influence.¹⁰³ Yet unlike Heidegger, Carl Schmitt's appropriation of certain Kierkegaardian categories has gone largely unremarked in the secondary literature. Schmitt joined Hitler's National Socialist party in May 1933¹⁰⁴ and was promptly trumpeted as 'one of the most visible academic sympathisers and intellectual ornaments of the new order'.¹⁰⁵ Schmitt supported granting the Reich president the authority to suspend basic constitutional rights and take extraordinary measures in order to eliminate threats to the public order.¹⁰⁶ Schmitt's theoretical justification for emergency state sovereign exceptionalism has remained influential to this day.¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard is rarely mentioned by name in Schmitt's work, and as a result commentators tend to miss both Schmitt's debt to—and distortion of—the Danish philosopher's ideas.¹⁰⁸ Yet Kierkegaard's influence is evident in Schmitt's critique of romanticism and his construction of sovereign exceptionalism, a philosophy that he was happy to put to use for nationalist ends.

¹⁰³ The debate over Heidegger's relationship to both Kierkegaard and Nazism is wide ranging and cannot be the focus of the present discussion. Heidegger himself minimally acknowledged Kierkegaard, however see, for example, Patricia Huntington, who argues that Heidegger abstracted from Kierkegaard's notion of inwardness, a move which depleted Kierkegaard's thought of its ethical import and which accounted 'in significant measure' for Heidegger's decisionistic turn towards fascism. 'Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited' in Martin Matušík and Merold Westphal (eds), *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44. Richard Wolin banishes Kierkegaard and indeed all existentialist philosophy to a decisionist and quietist corner in light of Heidegger's politics in *The Terms of Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Cf. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), where he identifies metaphysics as 'the pivotal point and core of all philosophy' (at 17) and then goes on to identify the German nation as 'the most metaphysical of all nations' (at 38). Dooley (following Levinas) finds in Heidegger an existentialist touting of the 'Teutonic spirit' that feeds directly into National Socialist ideology. Levinas' rejection of Kierkegaard was derived in part from Kierkegaard's association with the philosophy of Heidegger, and in turn that philosopher's association with the Nazis. 'Statehood', 1.

¹⁰⁴ The same month as Heidegger also joined the Party.

¹⁰⁵ Translator's introduction, Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism* trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), xi.

¹⁰⁶ Oakes in *Romanticism*, ix; Joseph Bendersky *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), part III.

¹⁰⁷ Despite his Nazi affiliations, Schmitt's thought has retained its importance in political science, and he is seen as a perceptive critic of liberalism and the liberal state. See, for example, Renato Crisiti, *Carl Schmitt and Authoritarian Liberalism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998); Duncan Kelly, *The State of the Political* (Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003); John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁸ Schmitt's commentators often do not mention Kierkegaard even when discussing those texts where Schmitt himself quotes or alludes to him. This is the case for Bendersky and Kelly, and Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). A notable exception to the general rule appears in Guy Oakes' introduction to his translation of *Political Romanticism*, discussed below.

Schmitt's *Political Romanticism* champions 'decision politics' via an attack on the romanticism that Schmitt thought had permeated the European *bourgeois*, which appears to draw its force from such elements as *Concept of Irony* and Kierkegaard's portrayal of the hedonistic Seducer in *Either/Or*.¹⁰⁹ For Schmitt, romanticism had transformed political debate into an endless conversation that rendered genuine political decisions impossible. Here we find more than a shade of Kierkegaard's critical assessment of the Present Age's obsession with 'chatter' in *TA*.¹¹⁰ However, whereas Kierkegaard intends his criticism to spark inwardness and spiritual seriousness in the individuals of the chattering classes, Schmitt takes from his own version of the critique an endorsement of decisive political action. This becomes especially apparent in *Political Theology*, a work on sovereignty and the politics of exceptionalism.¹¹¹ Here Schmitt is interested in the degree that modern national politics derives its power from the theological tropes of authority, uniqueness and sovereignty. The book looks at the politics of emergencies and extraordinary circumstances, privileging the personal political decision over and against liberalism's abstract norms: 'Sovereign is he who decides the exception.'¹¹²

Here Schmitt adopts a tone evoking not only Kierkegaard's exploration of Abraham in *FT* but also his analysis of levelling in *TA*. The Schmittian sovereign is the one who can stand outside of normal legal systems and make decisions on behalf of the people. It is here that Schmitt approvingly quotes from *Repetition*:

A Protestant theologian [i.e. Kierkegaard] stated: 'The exception explains the general and itself... Endless talk about the general becomes boring... The exception on the other hand, thinks the general with intense passion.'¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ The strong presence of Kierkegaardian categories in *Political Romanticism* coupled with an almost complete lack of accreditation (there is a minor footnote near the end of the work) prompts Oakes to say of Schmitt's treatment of Kierkegaard that it is 'either disingenuous or remarkably obtuse'. Oakes in *Romanticism* n.19, xxxiv. In light of the perceived Kierkegaardian connection, it is worth noting that Lukács includes this book under the rubric of the 'destruction of reason', calling it 'pre-fascist'. Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980. Original 1962), 652. Cf. Müller, *Dangerous*, 21 and n. 6. 253.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *TA*, 97ff and ch. 5 below.

¹¹¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985 originally published 1922).

¹¹² Schmitt, *Political*, 5. In his introduction, Schwab sees Schmitt's prioritizing of social stability as paving the way for totalitarian governments. If the ruler can ensure your safety, then he can demand your obedience. This would lead directly to Schmitt's support for the National Socialists 10 years later.

¹¹³ Ibid. This quote ends the chapter, thus giving Kierkegaard the last word on Sovereign Exception. Cf. *Repetition*, 227.

With his appeal to the individual exception above the normative herd *on behalf of the herd*, Schmitt has transformed Kierkegaard's project of egalitarian inwardness before God into a political philosophy of the totalitarian state.¹¹⁴ This leads Müller to conclude:

[Schmitt] affirmed 'decisionism', namely, the notion that it mattered not so much how and which decisions are made but that they are made at all. The state did not have to be right to create right.¹¹⁵

Of course, Kierkegaard too is commonly labelled as a decisionist, with an ethic that in the end cannot amount to much more than a subjectivist version of 'might is right'.¹¹⁶ However, while this may well be a deserved judgement for Schmitt (the apologist for National Socialism), it is less appropriate for Kierkegaard, whose application to the politics of national identity tends toward the opposite direction. I now turn to two authors who, I think, suggest a more legitimate reading of Kierkegaard as a critic of the ideological structures of nationalism.

5.2 Dooley

In a number of works, Mark Dooley has undertaken a 'prophetic' and political reading of Kierkegaard.¹¹⁷ In the company of Derrida and Caputo, Dooley finds Kierkegaard to be useful for carving out a political space for the marginalized person disenfranchised by the totalizing narrative claims of the established order. Dooley does not write as a theologian, but instead 'translates' Kierkegaard's Christian categories politically. Although he does not deny or ignore the Christian Kierkegaard, Dooley privileges the political over the religious messages that can be drawn from books such as *Practice in Christianity* and *Works of Love*. Indeed Dooley intimates that Kierkegaard's religious concerns 'have no practical utility today'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ On 'totalitarianism' and Schmitt's coining of the term 'totalitarian state', see Schwab's introduction.

¹¹⁵ Müller, *Dangerous*, 23.

¹¹⁶ The proponents of this type of reading of Kierkegaard are discussed in chs 5 and 6 below. Alongside Schmitt, George Pattison has identified other German writers who made similar 'decisionistic' appeals to Kierkegaard. Nazi ideologue Alfred Baeumer championed Kierkegaard (along with Nietzsche) as a rare example of one who *acted* on the basis of his will against the stultifying social order. Kierkegaard's German translator, Theodore Haecker, was not a Nazi; nevertheless his 'Kierkegaardian' attack on liberalism, his defence of authoritarian government, and his flirtation with 'sophisticated' forms of anti-Semitism gave intellectual solace to supporters of nationalistic totalitarianism. 'Kierkegaard and Nineteenth Century Democracy' (unpublished paper, 2008).

¹¹⁷ The prophet as the model for the critical philosopher has also been championed by Westphal, discussed below.

¹¹⁸ Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus: Søren Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xvi.

Aiming to find points of congruence between Derrida and Kierkegaard, Dooley develops what he calls a politics of the émigré.¹¹⁹ The individual in exodus is one who is in a state of liminal existence apart from—or in spite of—a common culture.¹²⁰ Dooley recognizes that Kierkegaard can be usefully employed in the search for meaningful individual identity in the face of overarching narratives that, by their absolutizing nature, exclude more than they embrace. To this end, Dooley draws from Kierkegaard's assertion in *TA* that the genuine community is one that unites around a common idea. Yet the common idea can only be appropriated by individuals as inward subjects who are thinking apart from the crowd:

The particular, ideal community [Kierkegaard] seeks to generate is composed of ethically responsible and committed individuals or selves, each of whom has critically challenged the basic assumptions underlying the philosophical, political and ethical paradigms that have heretofore determined the manner in which both the individual and society have been defined.¹²¹

Dooley acknowledges that for Kierkegaard, the idea that the genuine community must unite around is the God of the God-man. However, Dooley morphs this explicitly theological trope into what he believes the God-man stood *for*, namely, 'one who challenged the established order in the name of the nuisances and nobodies, in the name of justice and radical egalitarianism'.¹²² Dooley aligns himself (and Kierkegaard) with John Dominic Crossan and other 'historical Jesus' approaches, arguing that Kierkegaard's Christian commitment must translate politically into a preference for the poor and marginalized.¹²³ In tandem with his emphasis on Jesus of Nazareth as a political agitator, Dooley opposes the idea of Kierkegaard as primarily 'a Christian philosopher for a Christian people', and instead insists on a broader scope for his social and ethical theories.¹²⁴ Thus Dooley attempts to demonstrate how Kierkegaard's ethics of responsibility can act as a foundation for a radical conception of social relations that does not locate the worth of an individual primarily in his relationship to culture, creed or country.

In the essay 'The Politics of Statehood', Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, or social morality, stands as a cipher for all systems that monopolize narratives of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., xiii, also ch. 6 of *Exodus*.

¹²⁰ Dooley refers to such a person as the 'deconstructed subject'. See, for example, 'Risking Responsibility: a Politics of the Émigré' in George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (eds), *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 139.

¹²¹ Dooley, *Exodus*, 8; Cf. *TA*, 106.

¹²² Dooley, *Exodus*, 23.

¹²³ The nuisances and nobodies line comes from a chapter in Crossan's *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 54–74.

¹²⁴ Dooley, *Exodus*, 146, also 144. Against Dooley, I argue below that an overemphasis away from Kierkegaard's specifically Christian concerns undermines his effectiveness as a political philosopher.

identity.¹²⁵ Dooley reads *Sittlichkeit* as effectively conferring divine legitimacy on the powers that be. If, as Hegel says, the laws of the state are the material manifestation of God's divine design on earth, then God is woven so fundamentally into the fabric of the state and the historical development of human cultures 'that it may be legitimately assumed that he must prefer one set of people to another, he must, that is, be given to nationalistic fervor'.¹²⁶ It is this conclusion, found in Hegel and in Hegel's followers, that Dooley argues 'deeply disturbed' Kierkegaard. 'The idea that God is on the side of the powers that be was what most offended Kierkegaard about Hegelian philosophy.'¹²⁷ It is on this reading that Dooley bases his Kierkegaardian 'politics of exodus' over and against rival 'politics of statehood':

[The politics of exodus] challenges the dominant political, ethical, religious, and metaphysical paradigms governing reality, in the name of those whose welfare they do not serve, those poor existing individuals who have not made it as far as Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, or into the grand narrative of Being.¹²⁸

5.3 Westphal

Behind Dooley lies the work of Merold Westphal, as Dooley himself acknowledges.¹²⁹ Westphal emphasizes the possibility of reading Kierkegaardian inwardness as an ideology critique with concrete social ramifications, rather than as merely a prop for individualistic religion.¹³⁰ For Westphal, Kierkegaard's critique of reason is intricately tied up with his critique of society. This is because it is not any and all 'reason' that Kierkegaard holds to account, it is specifically the reason of the established order, of quantitative valuation and of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*. Modern expressions of Christianity have uncritically incorporated this 'reason' to the extent that it is difficult to tell the difference between socio-historical triumphalism and Christian truth: 'Kierkegaard, in fact, is not at all sure it's possible to keep the arguments for Christianity's reasonableness from being heard as affirmations of Christendom's righteousness.'¹³¹

For Westphal, underlying Kierkegaard's critique of reason and society is the prophetic aspect of speaking truth to power—reminding the present age that its status quo is, in fact, not inviolable or eternal:

¹²⁵ Mark Dooley, 'The Politics of Statehood vs. A Politics of Exodus: A Critique of Levinas's Reading of Kierkegaard' in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* (Issue 40, August 2000), 5.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 5 n. 13.

¹³⁰ On the philosopher as prophetic critic see Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), 22, 105ff.

¹³¹ Ibid., 24.

Underlying Kierkegaard's verdict on apologetics is . . . a recognition that human reason is a social enterprise and, as such, historically conditioned. This is where the genuinely prophetic element becomes apparent.¹³²

Westphal ascribes to Kierkegaard a 'sociology of knowledge' which recognizes that social groups legitimize themselves through their belief systems in which the established order is justified.¹³³ This is clearly seen, for example, in the tone that Kierkegaard has his Hegelian clergyman take in *PC*. Here, the clergyman is portrayed (and satirized) for maintaining that 'reason is man's capacity to recognise the authority of the established order, thereby participating in its self-deification'.¹³⁴

By constantly attacking the speculative apotheosis of Hegel and his followers, Kierkegaard critiques the divinization of society apparent in any belief system that incorporates soteriology with group membership:

Kierkegaard seeks to discomfort those who confuse socialisation with salvation; they find their existential task completed when the initiation rites prescribed for adulthood by their society have been completed.¹³⁵

Westphal places Kierkegaard in sharp contrast to Hegel, who claims that the 'wisest of antiquity have therefore declared that wisdom and virtue consist in living in accordance with the customs of one's nation'.¹³⁶ Socrates—Kierkegaard's simple wise man—represents the opposite conclusion. Virtue is found in the space where the individual refuses to abrogate all responsibility to the group merely because it is the group. To be sure, such a position is not *anti*-social. Pointing out that human society is not god is not the same as seeking to annihilate that society. Nevertheless the self-deified established orders¹³⁷ tend not to condone such citizens in their midst:

We would do well to remember that Socrates and the early Christians were accused of atheism because they did not worship at the shrines of the self-absolutising cultures in which they lived.¹³⁸

6. TOWARDS A KIERKEGAARDIAN IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

In the light of the directions suggested by Dooley and Westphal, it is clear that I am not alone in recognizing the relevance that Kierkegaard might have in the

¹³² Ibid., 22.

¹³³ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Cf. *PC*, 47.

¹³⁵ Westphal, 34.

¹³⁶ Westphal is here quoting from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 214.

¹³⁷ Westphal refers to the 'apotheosis of the present age'. *Critique*, 38.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 125.

area of identity politics, or the critical edge that he brings when examining society's various self-divinizing creeds. With them I affirm Kierkegaard's prophetic voice that speaks against the idolatrous status quo of institutionalized 'common sense'. With Dooley I recognize that Kierkegaard provides for meaningful individual identity in the face of absolutizing narratives. I wish to further Westphal's suggested project of marrying Kierkegaardian inwardness with a robust ideology critique. These authors, their projects and others who share them will be discussed later in this book, and with some caveats I would place myself within this general school of thought.

6.1 Centrality of nation

One qualification I offer is that the constellation of ideas that make up 'nationalism' hold a deeper and more central place in constructing a Kierkegaardian prophetic ideology critique than has been previously realized. Typically, commentators touch on, but do not develop, the relevance that Kierkegaard has to nation and state talk.¹³⁹ So for example, Dooley's emphasis on the émigré is much more concerned with economic and social class structures than it is with issues of national affiliation. By pitting Kierkegaardian 'politics of exodus' against the various 'politics of state', Dooley recognizes that his reading has a bearing on these issues, but he does not pursue them, preferring instead to consider those victims of 'the state', rather than the role that 'the state' plays in forming the identity and commanding the allegiance of its citizens—victims and perpetrators alike.¹⁴⁰ For his part, Westphal is interested in the ways in which social groups legitimate their established order through the propagation of belief systems.¹⁴¹ He occasionally refers to nationalism and tends to see national allegiance as one of many ways that this happens, alongside other rites of socialization such as marriage, economic activity, education and the 'distinctly modern kind of social formation' fuelled by the mass media.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ This seems to be the general rule for those who recognize Kierkegaard's political application, including Dooley and Westphal as well as James. L. Marsh, 'Kierkegaard and Critical Theory' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. In various works Cornel West alludes to the Kierkegaardian project as one with political ramifications for racial and national relations, but he does not elucidate further. See *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982) and *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993). In chs. 6 and 7 below, I find the same trend for commentators working on *Works of Love* such as C. Stephen Evans, Robert Perkins and M. Jamie Ferreira. A notable exception is Martin Matušík, whose political (and explicitly non-theological) treatment of Kierkegaard's contribution to 'postnational identity' is discussed at length in ch. 7 below.

¹⁴⁰ For example, after considering the links between Kierkegaard's and Derrida's 'deconstructed subject', Dooley mentions in passing that such a discussion is related to a Derridian critique of 'national identity' constructs without developing the idea. 'Émigré', 145–6.

¹⁴¹ Westphal, *Critique*, 23.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 34, 47.

And yet the self-deification of the established order that Westphal and Dooley rightly wish to critique is, at base, nationalism by a different name. The absolutization claimed *via* technological, economic, familial or religious means takes place not in some generic ‘society’, but in a time, place and population, expressed in the language and idioms of an identifiable people group and in the service of demanding allegiance to a specific culture over and against other specific cultures. Thus it is that when Westphal writes about Kierkegaard’s attack on those who confuse salvation with proper socialization¹⁴³ he is in effect talking about a Kierkegaardian attack on nationalistic ideology. This is because the very act of defining what is ‘proper’ and what counts as ‘socialization’ is to privilege one form of society over another, and to attempt to determine who counts as a member of that society—again a preserve of nationalist ideology. Later in this book, I shall explore how Kierkegaardian inwardness does indeed offer an ideology critique of society, always remembering that ideologies of societal absolutism can exist only in relation to actual societies, thus placing us within the sphere of nationalism. What is more, when Westphal writes of Kierkegaard wanting to preserve the possibility of the incarnation against the apotheosis of the present age,¹⁴⁴ he is inadvertently signalling a point of contact with those nationalisms that crop up in Christendom. The apotheosis of national cultures has happened and is happening still within the christianized societies of the West. These are specifically Christian forms of divinization, using Christian motifs and concepts, often appropriating incarnational language to describe the divine mission of the nation itself. Nationalism is not simply one of many ways that society divinizes itself—the apotheosis or absolutization that Westphal, Dooley and others discuss is precisely the Christian nationalism that I have in view. In setting out a Kierkegaardian critique of Christian nationalism, I am not in disagreement with those commentators who find the target of Kierkegaard’s ideology critique to be the divinization of the established order. It is simply that I find ‘nationalism’ to be the best way to describe the ideological tie that binds the disparate elements that contribute to the self-deification of society—claiming for their nation the arbitration of destiny and identity that for the Christian should properly be the domain only of God.

6.2 Centrality of Christianity

This final point constitutes the second caveat to my approach in this chapter, which is that I primarily read Kierkegaard as a Christian writer, even a theologian, and not as a secular philosopher or socio-political critic. Furthermore, while

¹⁴³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 38.

it is obviously true that non-Christians can and do make effective use of Kierkegaard, it remains the case that his primary intended audience were Christians (or putative Christians) living within Christendom. For this reason, it seems perverse to apologize either for Kierkegaard's Christianity, or for the contribution that his writings might make to Christian life and thought. Nevertheless, many commentators are suspicious of imposing a Christian structure onto the broad spectrum of Kierkegaard's thought. For example, Louis Mackey proposes that Kierkegaard was primarily a poet-artist who did not have an overarching plan for his pseudonyms.¹⁴⁵ For Mackey, arguing that in Kierkegaard there is a doctrine that needs to be accepted or rejected 'makes about as much sense as agreeing or disagreeing with *Hamlet*'.¹⁴⁶ Benjamin Daise, expressly following Mackey, also attempts to separate 'Kierkegaard' from any one philosophical or theological point of view.¹⁴⁷ The implication of this assumption for Kierkegaard's overtly Christian works is that they are approached with suspicion, if they are approached at all. Daise only looks at the Climacus books, and Mackey intentionally avoids Kierkegaard's last works, claiming that this is in line with Kierkegaard's original preference; he thereby implies that the later Kierkegaard is not representative of the best Kierkegaard.¹⁴⁸

Here we come to the crux of the issue that much contemporary critical literature takes with the later (usually non-pseudonymous but always overtly Christian) Kierkegaard. It is often assumed, and occasionally made explicit, that Kierkegaard's Christianity and his final Christian polemics are an academic embarrassment, possibly a product of an increasingly deluded and fading mind. This view can be traced back to Kierkegaard's contemporaries, most notably Bishop Martensen, who wrote in his memoirs:

[Kierkegaard] was a noble instrument who had a crack in his sounding board. This crack, alas, became greater and greater. To this I attribute his broken health, which increasingly exercised a disturbing influence on his psychological life . . . No one can say to what degree he is accountable.¹⁴⁹

Michael Plekon (who does not himself hold this opinion) reports that in conversation 'not a few scholars have muttered, off the record, that the rantings and ravings . . . the raw material for the public attack literature, are

¹⁴⁵ Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, x; 'Taken as instruments of his intent,' writes Mackey, 'his works add up to a magnificent nonsense', 290.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), viii.

¹⁴⁸ Mackey, *Poet*, xi.

¹⁴⁹ Hans Lassen Martensen, *Af mit Levnet* III, (12ff), trans. T.H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard Commentary* (London: James Nisbet, 1956), 244–5. Bishop Martensen was not alone amongst Kierkegaard's peers to hold this opinion, see Michael Plekon, 'Introducing Christianity to Christendom' in *Anglican Theological Review* LXIV (1982), 328–9 and 331. A modern example of this view lies behind Josiah Thompson's *Kierkegaard* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).

decidedly inferior to the earlier writings and ought to be ignored'.¹⁵⁰ Some scholars do not ignore it, but effectively make an anomaly of the final phase of Kierkegaard's life. Danish critics K. E. Løgstrup¹⁵¹ and Johannes Sløk¹⁵² are amongst those who argue that Kierkegaard's Christian polemics exemplify a distortion of his earlier dialectics and intellectual position. Their influence is discernible in the English scholarship. David Aiken, for example, proposes that with the overtly Christian writing Kierkegaard was breaking with the precedent that his earlier works had set. Aiken suggests that Kierkegaard's accounts of authentic Christianity act as a sort of literary confession of failure, and mark a regression from the highpoint that had come before in the pseudonyms.¹⁵³

It is, perhaps, Kierkegaard's claim on behalf of Christianity itself, more than the coarseness of the polemics, which most irk some critics. One of the commentators most openly hostile to the Christian Kierkegaard is Henning Fenger.¹⁵⁴ Fenger is forthright about his aversion to Christianity, and is especially critical of any proposal that there is a legitimate 'theological' direction to Kierkegaard's works.¹⁵⁵ He does not find Kierkegaard's role as 'persecuted martyr in the market town of Copenhagen' very appealing; he implies instead that by and large the events surrounding the affair of the *Corsair* were in fact a product of Kierkegaard's own delusional tendency for self-destruction.¹⁵⁶ Fenger is sceptical of Kierkegaard's late claims, in his journals and in the posthumously published *Point of View for My Work as an Author* (written 1848, first published 1859), in which Kierkegaard retroactively stated the Christian direction of all of his work.¹⁵⁷ This Kierkegaard, Fenger says, was a 'falsifier of history',¹⁵⁸ and he views with a 'deep and fundamental distrust' the late journals and other Christian writings.¹⁵⁹ It is the interpretations of so-called 'theologians' who attract most of Fenger's invective, and he criticizes them for letting ideology cloud their judgement when reading Kierkegaard.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁰ Plekon, 'Introducing', 332. Plekon reports that this view is made 'on the record' by Valter Lindström, *Efterføljelsens teology* [The Theology of Imitation] (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1956), 128–9.

¹⁵¹ K. E. Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968).

¹⁵² J. Sløk, *Da Kierkegaard tav. Fra Foratterskab til Kirkestorm* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel, 1980).

¹⁵³ David Aiken, 'Kierkegaard's Three Stages: A Pilgrim's Regress?' in *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996), 352–67.

¹⁵⁴ Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard: The Myths and Their Origins*, trans. George Schoolfield (London: Yale University Press, 1980).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xi. Cf. COR.

¹⁵⁷ See POV, especially part 1, 27–37. POV is discussed at length in ch. 6 below.

¹⁵⁸ Fenger, *Myths*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20. Cf. ch. 6 below.

¹⁶⁰ Fenger, *Myths*, 214. Fenger tends to label anyone who recognizes that Kierkegaard was primarily a religious author as a 'theologian'.

By contrast, I think it is eminently possible, indeed necessary, to read the religious Kierkegaard sympathetically and to avoid the blunt, naive reading that Fenger and others seem to ascribe to all 'theological' commentators.¹⁶¹ By treating both Kierkegaard's Christianity and his pseudonyms with respect, it is possible to find a balanced interpretation of the project in its entirety. Indeed, I hope to demonstrate that Kierkegaard as a political philosopher can only be understood properly once theological underpinnings of his project are acknowledged, and his intended Christian audience is appreciated. A key feature of Kierkegaard's project is that he is preaching not the raw data of 'Christianity' (he is living within Christendom after all), but rather 'honesty' for those who already claim to be Christians.¹⁶²

I am not saying that it is for Christianity I venture—suppose, just suppose that I become quite literally a sacrifice. I would still not become a sacrifice for Christianity but because I wanted honesty. (*Moment* 49)

So let there be light on this matter, let it become clear to people what the New Testament understands by being a Christian, so that everyone can choose whether he wants to be a Christian or whether he honestly, plainly, forthrightly does not want to be that. (*Moment* 97)

It is for this reason that it is appropriate to speak of Kierkegaard as a theologian: he is working with the 'givens' of Christian faith. His aim is to be consistent with Christian claims, actions and events—most notably those surrounding the incarnation or the God-man. Kierkegaard is profoundly uninterested in apologetics or proving the central claims of Christianity—but he is concerned with tracing out the consequences of them for everyday life.¹⁶³

Neither does [God] want anything to do with this human impudence about why and wherefore Christianity came into the world—it is and shall remain the absolute. (*PC* 62)

If you cannot bear contemporaneity, if you cannot bear to see this sight in actuality, if you could not go out into the street—and see that it is the god [*Guden*] in this dreadful procession and this your condition if you fell down and worshiped him—then you are not *essentially* Christian. (*PC* 65)

In other words: *if* Jesus is God in some way that Christianity traditionally says he is, *then* there are certain implications of this event for the self-professed Christian's orientation towards God and society. For Kierkegaard, these implications are not contingent upon the truth of the incarnation event

¹⁶¹ Commentators with theological sensitivities including Eriksen, Ferreira, Mooney, Pattison, Perkins, Plekon and Westphal (to name but a few from a rich list) consistently fail to live up to Fenger's stereotype of the blunt reader.

¹⁶² This is a key feature throughout the later works, but especially the final stage of Kierkegaard's writing career: 'Very simply—I want honesty [*Redelighed*].' *Moment*, 46.

¹⁶³ See especially 'The Halt' part IV, *PC*, 62ff.

(because it cannot be proved) as much as they are on the honest following through of this professed faith in Christ in the everyday life of the individual.¹⁶⁴ This 'inward' orientation to the God-man thus has tangible and 'outward' ramifications for the Christian's life in the nation, state and neighbourhood, as we shall see.

To argue for Kierkegaard's political relevance is eminently possible and desirable. However, to do so by first downplaying or radically re-interpreting his Christianity does not do justice to Kierkegaard's project. I am writing with a sense of those to whom the force of Kierkegaard's political relevance will be most keenly felt, namely those people who can most closely identify with Kierkegaard's religious concerns and religious language. Here I diverge from Dooley when he writes that he does not want to see Kierkegaard as primarily 'a Christian philosopher for a Christian people'.¹⁶⁵ The fact that Kierkegaard has time and again been taken up by non-Christians is testament to the reasonableness of Dooley's wish. Yet these readings of Kierkegaard, in their attempt to work with Kierkegaardian categories, almost invariably turn Kierkegaard's God into 'Society' or 'The Other', his God-man into a social class or proletariat, and his ethics of choice and responsibility into a subjective and decisive leap into the dark, to name just a few ways that Kierkegaard's Christian categories have been co-opted, in an attempt to appeal to a more general philosophical-socio-political audience.¹⁶⁶

Yet, as I have stated, after all these attempts have been made, it remains the case that Kierkegaard wrote as a Christian, employing Christian themes to catalyse authentic Christianity amongst a population of Christendom who already thought they were Christians. In an age where God saves the Queen and Blesses America, any suggestion that Kierkegaard's religious concerns have no practical utility today seems at best an oversight and at worst myopic. To recommend Kierkegaard's insights to a Christian audience is not to direct it at a dwindling, increasingly irrelevant population. The opposite is true. As a religion, Christianity is on the ascendancy, often in forms that actually or potentially feed into the ideology that I have here called Christian nationalism. This is not only true for the growing Christian cultures of the majority world such as South America, Africa and China. As recent world events have demonstrated, it is often at, or near, the seats of power in the first-world West. To offer a Christian critique of Christian nationalism is not to participate in anachronism. Therefore, it is to a discussion of the political theologies of Kierkegaard's contemporaries, Kierkegaard's response to them, and his contribution in turn to the wider conversations of nationalism, that we must now turn.

¹⁶⁴ 'Honesty before God is the first and the last.' PC, 66.

¹⁶⁵ Dooley, *Exodus*, 146.

¹⁶⁶ The examples of this interpretative trend will be discussed as they arise in the following chapters. Authors include Heidegger, Sartre, Matušík (who is in turn following Habermas), Best and Kellner to name but a few.

H. L. Martensen

The relation of Christianity to nationality is not only a purifying, but a cultivating or perfect one... It is only by means of Christianity that nationalities can attain the development to which they are really appointed.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The content and importance of nations and states and their place in Christian thought forms the backbone of Martensen's speculative system. For Martensen, a person does not 'become' authentic unless he or she is a Christian, and such a person will not meet the right form of Christianity unless it is embedded in the peculiar particulars of nationality. Supporting his system and his view of the state are three 'pillars': underlying philosophical assumptions about the nature of *history*, *ethics* and *personality*. These commitments are put to work to create a theology of nations and states that comes to its fulfilment in the defence of Christian states. For Martensen, national states need Christianity in order to attain their highest level of civilization. More importantly Christianity needs the national state in order to attain *its* highest expression. Martensen's theology of national identity thus amounts to a defence of the very Christendom against which Kierkegaard was so opposed, and the commitments that Martensen makes in these areas bring into sharp relief the deep differences that exist between himself and his former student.

To look at the relationship between Kierkegaard and Martensen in these terms is in contrast with the general thrust of some scholars. Some tend to emphasize the animosity that existed between the two men, suggesting that Kierkegaard's argument against Martensen was *primarily* driven by personal

¹ H. L. Martensen, *Christian Ethics: Special Part. Second Division; Social Ethics*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), 93–4.

dislike.² While it is true that Kierkegaard was antipathetic towards Martensen, emphasizing this aspect of their relationship comes at the expense of recognizing the fundamental philosophical and theological differences between them. Kierkegaard's attack on Martensen was not merely sparked by personal enmity or petty jealousy. Martensen represented a strong line of thought that Kierkegaard opposed at a fundamental level.³ For convenience's sake it is useful to term this thought 'Hegelian'. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that Martensen was an uncritical follower of Hegel.⁴ Recent treatments have rightly argued for a more nuanced view which respects Martensen as a thinker in his own right, and recognize that he consciously differed from Hegel on key points, most notably the place of revelation and religion in the grand movement of historical development.⁵ For all this however, Martensen is clearly 'Hegelian' in his speculative approach and outlook, as is evident from his literature. He himself was aware of the Hegelian tag, sometimes admitting and sometimes distancing himself from the connection, but never abandoning 'Hegelian' dialectic altogether.⁶

Martensen consistently appears as a target throughout Kierkegaard's authorship. However, it was Bishop Martensen's relationship to his predecessor J. P. Mynster that cemented his position as the main object of Kierkegaard's ire. The place of Mynster and his thought cannot be the focus of this chapter, but he is a crucial feature of Kierkegaard's Golden Age landscape. For this reason it will help to set the context of Kierkegaard's quarrel with Martensen by considering the man whose protégé and successor he was.

² Two examples are Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), see esp. 64–7.

³ Cf. the study of Martensen's theological method provided by Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialect* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2007). Horn's treatise focuses on Martensen's early theological development rather than Kierkegaard's opposition, however, Horn suggests a number of points of divergence between the two, at 223ff.

⁴ Some commentators seem to lend themselves to this conclusion. For example, Niels Thulstrup effectively sees 'Hegel' as the target whenever Kierkegaard criticizes 'Martensen'. See, for example, the chapter entitled 'Kierkegaard's Direct and Indirect Clash with Hegel in the Authorship from *Either/Or* to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*' in *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 320–80. Contra Stewart, who convincingly argues for a reconsideration of Thulstrup's thesis, and proposes that in these cases Kierkegaard's main target was, in fact, Martensen himself. *Passim*, but see for example *Relations*, 241, 249; also Horn, *Positivity*, 2ff, 223ff.

⁵ See, for example, Stewart and also Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas, *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

⁶ Cf. Thompson, *Between*, 8, 58; Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 170, 172; J. H. Schjørring, 'Martensen' in Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (eds), *Kierkegaardiana 10: Kierkegaard's Teachers*. (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1982), 182, 186–8, 190.

2. J. P. MYNSTER

Whereas Kierkegaard's personal dislike of Martensen coincided with his intellectual opposition, this was not so simply the case for Mynster. As the friend of Kierkegaard's father, and as the family's pastor, Søren's relationship to the old Bishop could never be anything other than ambivalent.⁷ While he was alive, Mynster never received the kind of open attack that Kierkegaard meted out to Martensen (and to Grundtvig, as we shall see), and Kierkegaard at times went to extraordinary lengths to (tacitly) disagree with Mynster in print while retaining a degree of his personal and professional approval.⁸

The primary example of this was the events surrounding the publication of *Practice in Christianity*, a book that Mynster rightly perceived at the time as being mostly aimed at him.⁹ The numerous dismissive comments about 'observations' in *PC* was a clue: 'Observations' [*Betragtninger*] being the title of one of Mynster's best known books.¹⁰ Kierkegaard's critique runs deeper than a swipe at Mynster's rhetorical style however. *PC* attempts to upset the comfortable religion of Christendom, an attack on the kind of sophisticated and commonsensical Christianity that bears little resemblance to the offensive and counter-cultural faith in the New Testament.¹¹ In short, the equation of modern European civilization with Christianity has had a disastrous effect on Christianity. 'The deification of the established order is the secularisation of everything' (*PC*, 91). Kierkegaard makes it clear in his journals that he thinks Mynster 'idolises' the establishment, thus committing precisely this heresy,¹² but Mynster did not need to read Kierkegaard's diary to see that *PC* was an indictment on his brand of Christianity.

⁷ Kierkegaard was confirmed by Mynster on 20 April 1828. On Mynster's 'fatherly' connection to Kierkegaard see for example *JP* 1:663; 5:6073.

⁸ See Christian Fink Tolstrup, 'Playing a Profane Game with Holy Things: Understanding Kierkegaard's Critical Encounter with Bishop Mynster' in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 274; Kierkegaard's private journals mention Mynster by name more than any other opponent. At the same time Mynster is named rarely in the public works, and then usually in a context of respect. Niels Thulstrup, 'Mynster' in Niels Thulstrup and Marie Thulstrup (eds), *Kierkegaardiana 10: Kierkegaard's Teachers* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1982). The glaring exception is Kierkegaard's attack on Mynster a year after that Bishop's death. See below.

⁹ Kierkegaard's version of Mynster's reaction is detailed in *JP* 6:6691, 6697; *PC* supplement, 356–8. Mynster does not mention *PC* in his autobiography. *Meddelelser om min Levnet* [Notes on my Life] (København: Gyldendal, 1854). Cf. Tolstrup, 'Playing', 245.

¹⁰ *Betragtninger over de christelige Troeslærdomme* [Observations about the doctrines of the Christian faith] (first published in 1833) was the most popular devotional book in Denmark at the time. Cf. Kirmmse, *Golden*, 107–8.

¹¹ *PC*'s notion of 'contemporaneity' with Christ is discussed in ch. 4 below.

¹² *JP*, 5:5961.

The 'religion' which Mynster preached was interchangeable with 'culture'—to suggest that the two might be in conflict was unthinkable.¹³ As a result, Mynster's Christianity was also unapologetically conservative and moderate:

It is low and unworthy to will too little, but it can also be harmful to will too much . . . we will soon find that we can only come to peace by means of a serious and honest intention of perfect obedience.¹⁴

The commentator Olesen Larsen argues that Mynster's theology was jointly focussed on duty and deistic providence. Larsen suggests that it was not much more than Enlightenment humanism using religious rhetoric. 'In Mynster we do not encounter anything, from beginning to end, other than bourgeois humanism which has been united with a faith in Providence and dressed in orthodox expressions'.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, Mynster's emphasis on duty centred on maintaining the established institutions of monarch, church, class, and nation; underwriting what Kirmmse calls 'the Golden Age cultural synthesis of Christianity and cultural concerns'.¹⁶

It is no wonder that Mynster was deeply disturbed by the democratic upheavals of 1848.¹⁷ Denmark enjoyed a 'quiet' (i.e. bloodless) revolution, but it was a revolution nonetheless, with a constitutional monarch replacing the absolute monarchy, and with elected officials taking over the leadership of the state, and therefore also of the Church. One of the key outcomes was a transition from a 'State' to a 'People's' Church—a change in emphasis from a constitutional, clerical elite organization to (in theory) a more popular one.¹⁸ As Denmark's senior Bishop, Mynster guided this transition as best he could, finding in the new set-up an opportunity to maintain the close ties between Christianity and national culture towards which he was already inclined. His main aim throughout the upheavals of 1848–49 was to ensure that no matter what, the Danish state remained a Christian state, and that all citizens remained *de facto* Lutherans.¹⁹

¹³ See Kirmmse, *Golden*, 116; Tolstrup argues that Mynster's and Kierkegaard's conception of theology were so different that no real communication was going to be possible between them. Because he saw no problem in the collusion of civilization with Christianity, Mynster's conscience was clear, and he felt insulted rather than chastened by PC. Tolstrup, 'Playing', 267.

¹⁴ Mynster *Prædikener* [Sermons] vol. 2 (København, 1815), 289, in Kirmmse, *Golden*, 104. Tolstrup reports that 'rest' and 'temperance' were favoured themes of Mynster, following Christ's invitation in Matthew 11.28. Tolstrup, 'Playing', 265. This adds a further polemical twist to the 'Invitation' in PC and that book's appropriation of the same biblical passage.

¹⁵ K. Olesen Larsen, *Søren Kierkegaard læst af K. Olesen Larsen* vol.1, Kirkehistoriske Studier (København: G. E. C. Gad, 1966), 117, in Kirmmse, *Golden*, 103. After looking at Mynster's *Observations*, Kirmmse agrees, thinking that Larsen's assertions are 'well-grounded', 107.

¹⁶ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 113.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard too was disturbed by the political, religious and cultural ramifications of 1848. See esp. ch. 6 below.

¹⁸ The move from State Church to People's Church affected Grundtvig especially, and is discussed in ch. 3 below.

¹⁹ Jens Rasmussen, *J. P. Mynster Sjælands Biskop 1834–1854* (Odense: Odense Universitets Forlag, 1999), 117. Cf. Tolstrup, 'Playing'. There is some debate as to the extent of Mynster's

As long as our people is to be called a Christian people, there must also be ecclesiastical bonds, and whoever wishes to cast these off entirely thereby cuts himself off from the rest of the people and lives as a foreigner in the land.²⁰

Despite his sharp disagreements with Grundtvig (also a supporter of the People's Church)²¹ Mynster's close association of Christianity with Danish national culture meant that by 1852 he was able to give it his enthusiastic support:

Therefore let us hold fast to the beautiful, living term 'People's Church'; it signifies that this is the Church to which the people cling, the Church whose confession is rooted in the people, the Church which is one of the strong bonds which holds the people together, and which connects the generations that follow with those that have gone before. Praise and thank God that we still have such a People's Church that binds together the vast preponderance of the people, so that those who deviate from it can quickly be added up. There are indeed people living among us who confess another faith . . . but everyone feels that they are in many respects guests and foreigners and that in essential ways they are not a part of our people.²²

For all his praise of 'the People', Mynster supported an open elitism that maintained the status quo of social hierarchy. When he spoke of national culture, it was the good taste of Copenhagen's elites, and not folksy peasant lore, that he had in mind.²³ It is significant that Mynster, no fan of Hegel or his followers, nonetheless groomed Martensen as his ecclesiastical successor. Despite his theological leanings, Martensen was a sophisticate—urbane and intellectual with good social connections.²⁴

ultimate success guiding Church policy. Rasmussen claims that Mynster's impact on the Danish Church was greater than Grundtvig's (or Kierkegaard's for that matter), while Thulstrup is less confident that Mynster had a long-lasting influence on Church structures. 'Mynster', 31–2.

²⁰ Sermon delivered June 1848 in *Prædikener holdte i Aarene 1846 til 1852* [Sermons Delivered in the Years 1846 to 1852] vol. 2 (København: Gyldendal, 1854), 74, trans. Bruce Kirmmse *Mynster on the Identity of Christianity and Nationality* (unpublished paper, August 2007).

²¹ Grundtvig and his party were altogether too bombastic and populist for Mynster's refined taste, and he often referred to Grundtvigian preaching as 'screeching'. See Kirmmse, *Golden*, 119–24 and ch. 3 below.

²² Sermon delivered 1852 in *Prædikener 1846 til 1852*, 17–18, trans Kirmmse, 2007.

²³ In his memoirs, Mynster notes with satisfaction that his church was filled with a majority of people 'who belong to the more cultivated [*dannede*] classes'. *Blandede Skrifter* [Various Writings] vol. 1 (København: Gyldendal, 1852–57), 464; Kirmmse, *Golden*, 132.

²⁴ Prompting Kirmmse to comment: 'A certain political and social style was, finally, more determinative of Mynster's Golden Age religiosity than any particular content.' *Golden*, 124. In any case, as we shall see below, by the middle stage of his career Martensen was keen not to be seen as merely a disciple of Hegel, and sought to position himself as a critic of both Hegelian and Kierkegaardian approaches to theology.

Mynster did not develop a theology of the admixture of Christianity and national identity, nor did he systematically lay out the role that the state plays in the Church, and *vice versa*.²⁵ It is for this reason that he cannot be the focus of this present chapter, and it is for this reason that we must return to Martensen's theology of the state. Although far more influenced by Hegel than Mynster would have liked, in many ways Martensen shouldered the mantle of responsibility for theologically justifying the established state of Danish Christendom.

3. MARTENSEN AND CHRISTENDOM

It had been Kierkegaard's wish that after reading *PC*, Mynster would publicly admit the failure of the Church at preserving authentic Christianity and appeal for God's mercy.²⁶ Instead, as we have seen, Mynster remained silent, and the Church retained its comfortable relationship with the established order. When Mynster died Martensen replaced him, assuming the highest ecclesial post in the land. During the memorial service, Martensen made it clear where he stood regarding Mynster's version of Christianity.

So let us now then imitate [Mynster's] faith . . . that his memory amongst us in truth must be for upbuilding! Let us admonish ourselves as we say: Imitate the faith of the true witness, the faith of the authentic witness to the truth! . . . [Let his precious memory] guide our thoughts back to the whole line of witnesses to the truth, which is like a holy chain stretching itself through the ages from the day of the Apostles until our own day.²⁷

With this sermon, Martensen signalled his intention to maintain the close relationship between Church and cultured society that characterized Mynsterian Christianity.²⁸ By explicitly linking Mynster to the great chain of authentic Christian witnesses that connects the apostolic age to the present age,

²⁵ Thulstrup reports how administrative duties curtailed much of Mynster's planned writing projects, including a history of the Church. 'Mynster', 32.

²⁶ Speaking of the challenge implied by *PC*, Kierkegaard writes that 'in the hands of Governance I became the occasion for Bishop Mynster to pronounce judgement upon himself.' *Moment*, 13. See 'The Moral' in *PC*, 67–8. Kierkegaard later retracted this section when his call for an admission of failure was ignored by 'the old bishop'. *Moment*, 69–70.

²⁷ *Leilighedstaler. (Prædiken holdt i Christiansborg Slotskirke, paa 5te Søndag efter Hellig-Tre Konger, Søndagen før Biskop Dr. Mynster's Jordefærd)* [Special Occasion Talks. (Sermon held in Christiansborg palace chapel . . . the Sunday before Bishop Dr. Mynster's funeral)] (Kjøbenhavn, 1884), 20.

²⁸ Kirmmse argues that both Mynster and Martensen retained the favour of Denmark's artistic 'Golden Age' by keeping the definition of 'Christianity' vague enough in order to include non-orthodox playwrights and poets such as Oehlenschläger and Heiberg as pillars of Christian culture. Kirmmse, *Golden*, 183–5, 196–7.

Martensen was thus staking a claim about his own position. This was not lost on Kierkegaard, and Martensen's sermon became the occasion for him to take his attack to a new level. For this reason, although Mynster is an important foundational character, it is Martensen who becomes the arch-representative of Christendom's present age. Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom is an indictment of all aspects of christianized society in general, but he directs his sharpest polemics against Martensen specifically.²⁹

Although Martensen's major works³⁰ were all translated into English and other European languages in his lifetime,³¹ this auspicious beginning has given way to indifference in the wider academic theological world. Despite apparent popular reception, and the best advertising efforts of Martensen's British publishers³² it is ironic that the only (roughly contemporary) extended treatment of Martensen predicted it would be the first of many articles. It was, in fact, the last for the best part of a century.³³ Due to the fact that Martensen is rarely studied, his view of society and the state has not been commented on in the English secondary literature. This is unfortunate, for a grasp of Martensen's speculative system of historical development, individual existence and the Christian state is crucial if we are to understand Kierkegaard's critique of these things.

The state gains the most prominence in the 'ethical' works, notably the *Outline to a System of Morals* written near the beginning of his career,³⁴ and *Social Ethics*, his last major work before his death. *Social Ethics* is the third of the three-volume *Christian Ethics* that works out in detail the points laid down in the *Outline*. Of the two fullest treatments of Martensen to date, neither chooses to address these later works. Bruce Kirmmse explicitly decides not to

²⁹ See, for example, *Moment*, 3–12, 19–27, 79–85, 98, 100.

³⁰ *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. William Urwick (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1866); *Christian Ethics*, trans. C. Spence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873); *Christian Ethics: Special Part, First Division; Individual Ethics*, trans. William Affleck (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881); SE.

³¹ Walter Lowrie reports that Martensen was 'well known' in England and the USA before Kierkegaard's death in 1855. *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 504. See also Hobhouse's introduction to Martensen's *Jacob Boehme: Studies in his Life and Teaching*, trans. T. Rhys Evans. Revised edition with notes Stephen Hobhouse (London: Rockliff, 1949), xvi. By contrast, the first English translated 'selections' of Kierkegaard did not appear until 1923, the first books not until the late 1930s and early '40s.

³² In promoting further works by Martensen, the publisher's advertising copy in the back of the 1873 English edition of *Christian Ethics* feels confident in describing the author as 'the greatest Scandinavian, greatest Lutheran, divine of our century'.

³³ 'Christendom will not... either readily or willingly let his name sink into oblivion.' R. Munro, (probably) 'Bishop Martensen' in *Methodist Review* 68S (1886), 716. Note that this version of the article is an anonymous, and unreferenced, reprint of an earlier essay. I have traced the probable authorship to a Mr. R. Munro who wrote for the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* in the late nineteenth century.

³⁴ *Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy* printed in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

comment on the *Ethics* series, justifying his decision by the fact that it was written long after Kierkegaard had died, and thus presumably is of little value to scholars studying Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark.³⁵ Robert Leslie Horn makes a similar decision and for similar reasons. He chooses to deal only with the early and mid-period Martensen, looking only at the theological writings up to 1850 because 'these are the last works to exercise any significant influence upon Kierkegaard's thought before his death in 1855'.³⁶

In light of these common-sense arguments, it would seem that justification for my choice of text is in order. First, it is in *Christian Ethics*, written sixteen years after Kierkegaard's death, that Martensen (who infamously remained silent during most of Kierkegaard's attack) finally provides us with his assessment of his old opponent.³⁷ This section is invaluable for Kierkegaard scholars seeking to understand the relationship between the two men, and, as we shall see, it highlights key fundamental philosophical and theological differences that exist between Kierkegaard and the 'Hegelians'. As well as this explicit section devoted to Kierkegaard in the first volume, the third volume of *Social Ethics* is replete with indirect allusions to Kierkegaard and the 'Kierkegaardian' position. Although his enemy had long since departed, *Social Ethics* is in part Martensen's answer to Kierkegaard's critique of the individual living in Christendom, the most detailed response available. Finally, the *Ethics* series is the fruit of the *Outline*, a work that Kierkegaard had access to and whose ideas Kierkegaard would have been familiar with. The progression of the *Ethics* remains remarkably true to its *Outline*, even though a span of three decades separates the two works. Kierkegaard's critique of Martensen's position during his lifetime remains apposite even for works written after his death, as Martensen himself was apparently aware.³⁸

However, before assessing the place that the state has in Martensen's thinking, it is important to consider Martensen's overall project as a whole.³⁹ Over a career spanning a multitude of lectures, sermons and books, Martensen pursued a speculative system that sought to explain the totality of history, ethics and the emergence of the authentic individual before God. The 'becoming' of true existence (Martensen refers to this as 'personality', or the 'principle of personality') is synonymous with free and complete identification

³⁵ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 171.

³⁶ Horn, *Positivity*, 3.

³⁷ Cf. CE, 217–36, discussed below.

³⁸ Habib Malik locates the Kierkegaardian references in *Christian Ethics* amongst a general upsurge of interest in Kierkegaard at the time of its writing. He credits Martensen with admitting 'substantial concessions' to Kierkegaard and presenting a fair account of his position. *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 222–3. Whilst I agree that Martensen was responding to the 'live' issue of Kierkegaard, I do not agree with Malik's assessment of Martensen's 'fairness'. See the discussion below.

³⁹ For this brief overview I have dispensed with source references. Each element of Martensen's project is discussed below with full references.

with God's (moral) will. Furthermore, it is the religious-ethical event that marks the high point of humanity's historical development. Martensen thus put himself on the side of the Christian individual, while strenuously opposing the individualism of Kierkegaard on the one hand, and the universalism of Hegel on the other.

For Martensen, neither extreme adequately accounts for the authentic Christian relationship between God and man. Individualism rips persons from their context of culture and morality and negates the importance that historical development has for Christian truth. On the other side, universalism elevates the development of history *too* highly. Martensen censures Hegel for making the history of the unfolding Idea the be-all and end-all, relegating religion to a level below philosophy and making universalism incompatible with revelation and the historically necessary moment of the incarnation. According to Martensen, such a system bereft of revelation does not allow for persons to attain their authentic identity, as it is only the incarnation which mediates between God and man and reveals God's will to men, thus completing their existence as individuals.

Martensen's solution is to 'go beyond Hegel'.⁴⁰ For Martensen's system, this means retaining Hegelian speculation and a sense of historical development, but rejecting Hegel's final formulation, which placed philosophy as the key player in the unfolding drama of the Big Idea. According to Martensen, what philosophy searches for, theology possesses, namely, an apprehension of revelation. Specifically, revelation occurs in the form of the incarnation. History is the track or process by which the world is made ready for the incarnation, and then after the fact, develops according to the economy of God's plan for creation. For Martensen, the key factor in the incarnation event was not atonement, but mediation. Atonement is contingent on human sin, and thus, in a world of free creatures, is not *necessary* to creation. Mediation is necessary however. Even if there were no 'Fall', the incarnation would still have occurred, for it is mediation that history demands. The unfolding idea for Martensen is the attainment of the God-man relationship. Man was not created with the full capacity to enjoy union with God, and it is only in the development of history, with the growth of culture, religions and ethics, that mankind has come to the place where true relationship with God is possible. This occurs with the advent of the incarnation, the revelation of God to man as the model and mediator of an authentic God-man existence. It is only in this

⁴⁰ 'Going beyond' [*at gaae videre*] is an important idea for Martensen and the phrase was closely identified with him. In his memoirs, he describes the aim of his 1838–39 lectures as getting his listeners to go beyond Hegel. *Af mit Levnet: Meddelelser* [From My Life: Notes] (København: Gyldendal, 1882–83), 2:4–5. Quoted in Stewart, *Relations*, 65, also Thompson, *Beyond*, 8. Kierkegaard uses it pejoratively as a code-phrase to identify when he is attacking Martensen. For example, see *FT*, 5–7 and the impossibility of going beyond doubt that is exemplified in *JC*. See also Schjørring, 'Martensen', 199–202, and Stewart, *Relations*, 308–10.

stance before God that 'the individual' truly exists. The realization of authentic existence and the apprehension of the incarnation can only happen within our historically developed context of society and culture and all that this entails. Thus, Martensen rejects 'Kierkegaardian' individualism, which he claims has no comprehension of history or sociality, and he rejects 'Hegelian' universalism, which denies the possibility of divine revelation for the sake of idealism.

With talk of the historically developed context of society and culture, we are brought to Martensen's vision of the state. It was mentioned above how, for Martensen, history was the track that charts the world's process before and after the incarnation. To extend the analogy, if history is the track, then the state is the train. Within Martensen's system, the state serves the invaluable purpose of providing the 'place' where salvation history happens, the vehicle in which development occurs. Throughout Martensen's works, the state and all that it protects and provides remains of utmost importance to his system.

4. THE CRITIQUE OF KIERKEGAARD IN SOCIAL ETHICS

A good way in to considering Martensen's vision of the state comes *via* his treatment of Kierkegaard in the first part of the *Christian Ethics*. It is questionable to what extent Martensen recognized the fullness of Kierkegaard's challenge to his speculative thought.⁴¹ The best evidence we have of Martensen's responses to Kierkegaard demonstrates a curious mix of accurate criticism and apparent misapprehension of Kierkegaard's position in some key places. At times the misrepresentation of Kierkegaard's position is so gross that one is left with only two alternatives: *either* Martensen did not understand what Kierkegaard was trying to say, *or* he wilfully obscures Kierkegaard's point in order to avoid the challenge that it poses to his own position.⁴² Nonetheless, whether Martensen admitted it or not (and he did not), Kierkegaard remains the Bishop's best and most insightful critic. The challenges posed by Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom strike at the heart of Martensen's project, and thus Martensen's 'response' to Kierkegaard reveals what was most important to his theology, even though he was not framing his response with this in mind. It is to this treatment of Kierkegaard that we now turn, providing a brief

⁴¹ On the related (and as yet unanswered) question of Kierkegaard's influence on Martensen, see Horn, *Positivity*, 225–6.

⁴² Martensen's first and only response to the attack during Kierkegaard's lifetime was in an 1854 edition of *Fatherland*, where he builds up and then tears down a straw-man version of Kierkegaard's category of the 'authentic truth witness'. Cf. *Moment*, 360–6. Martensen's other significant response to Kierkegaard occurs in *Christian Ethics*. Here he caricatures Kierkegaard as an incompetent revivalist preacher. This is discussed below.

overview of Martensen's main criticisms before unpacking the three key components.

In the section entitled 'Sociality and individualism',⁴³ Martensen argues against Kierkegaardian individualism at the same time as defending his own reputation against charges of 'Hegelian' universalism. *Universalism* is identified as the 'tendency of mind which places the universal highest . . . this theory found, as is notorious, its representation in our day in the philosophy of Hegel'.⁴⁴ Hegelian universalism makes pure ideas and philosophical idealism higher than the ethical and religious categories. Thus, Hegelian philosophy strives to find an 'impersonal ideal' of universalism separate from the concerns of real life.⁴⁵ Martensen distances himself from the heady days of Danish Hegelianism (of which he was one of the leading lights), talking about it as a passing phase, a swirl of idealism and speculation that entranced a lot of Danish thinkers.⁴⁶ In such a context, Martensen counts it unsurprising that reactions against extreme universalism should rear up. The presence of such one-sided universalism demanded a reaction on the side of ethics and religion, of personality and individuality.

Martensen thinks that Kierkegaard provided just such a reaction, and portrays him as an advocate of the immediate life against a present age which had forgotten how one could exist as an authentic Christian.⁴⁷ In the face of a 'Hegelian' universalism that sees religion as 'only valid as a lower form of knowledge' and which elevates philosophy as having 'the truth in the form of conception' resulting in an impersonal ideal,⁴⁸ Martensen finds that Kierkegaard's assertion that Christianity must stand and fall with the category of 'the individual' to be 'perfectly justifiable'.⁴⁹

While Martensen praises Kierkegaard for recognizing the importance of the category of the individual for Christianity, and is generous about Kierkegaard's writing ability,⁵⁰ he does not think Kierkegaard was quite the right man for the job. Nor, indeed even the first man on the job.⁵¹ Martensen is keen to downplay Kierkegaard's contribution to the debate, and he suggests that there are others who 'in a far more comprehensive sense desire to uphold the *principle of personality*, to maintain the personality of God and of man in opposition to Pantheism'.⁵² At every stage of his argument, Martensen compares Kierkegaard to 'others', or to 'someone', that is, to anonymous thinkers who are better than Kierkegaard is at arriving at the authentic individual (or the 'principle of personality'). It is worth noting that the 'someone' is not

⁴³ CE, 217–36.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217, 219.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁰ See CE, 226.

⁵¹ 'At the time when S. Kierkegaard appeared, individualism was already in full activity by the side of universalism.' CE, 219.

⁵² Ibid., 219–20.

named in this section, and one has to read through the unfolding *Ethics* series before it becomes clear that the 'someone' is, of course, Martensen himself.

Unlike these 'other' thinkers who care about the category of the individual, Martensen holds it against Kierkegaard that he does not seek a desired system of totality. Kierkegaard's individualism is too extreme, his rejection of speculation too complete. He combats all 'speculation and system' because he sees the category of the individual as existing only in a negative relation to the category of the Ideal.⁵³ By so doing, Martensen claims that Kierkegaard is fighting the very systems that 'seek precisely to work out his own category [i.e. the individual], though in a far more universal sense than he has done'.⁵⁴ He describes Kierkegaard's 'reckless polemic' as 'entirely uncritical' and 'merely an attack in flank'.⁵⁵ With a hint of wounded pride, Martensen complains:

All these views he classes together under the names of 'speculation' and '*mediation*', without in any way permitting himself to institute a closer examination into their internal diversities, especially the diversity in the position they assume towards revelation.⁵⁶

In Martensen's eyes, Kierkegaard's rejection of all forms of speculation and the universal ideal is represented by the fact that his deepest passion is not the 'ethical' or the 'ethical-religious'. Instead it is the paradox of the divinely absurd that must be believed in defiance of reasonable, religious or moral categories. Martensen does not mention Kierkegaard's books by name, but it is likely that he is here referring to *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*. *FT*'s equation of the universal with the ethical, and then the suspension of both for the sake of the individual, would have been particularly galling to Martensen, and he censures Kierkegaard for 'his very defective non-ethical conception of God'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Kierkegaard's particular emphasis on the paradox (in *PF*) reveals another point of contention:

It may also be complained that existence, particularly the fact of revelation, is so imperfectly exhibited, as that God's becoming man in Christ . . . which is to him the paradox, is represented as an entirely isolated fact,—a *deus ex machina*, without any connection with the *economy* of revelation and its universal principles.⁵⁸

Martensen thinks that Kierkegaard does not explore this economy of revelation because then he would be 'brought too deeply in to the ideal and the objective,

⁵³ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. The position that Martensen assumes towards 'revelation' is deeply intertwined with his view of 'history', as discussed below.

⁵⁷ CE, 224. Martensen's ethic is discussed below.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 224–5. See below.

and that thus too much wisdom and intellect would be brought in to the whole'.⁵⁹ He says some nice things about Kierkegaard's remarkable output and occasional displays of psychological genius, but in the end concludes:

But with all this, it must also be acknowledged that the real significance of this diffuse literature does not equal its pretensions . . . [Kierkegaard's literary project] harmonises but little with the essence of Christianity . . . to him God is only the God of the individual, not of the Church—Christ is only the Saviour of the individual, not of the world.⁶⁰

This last point emerges as Martensen's greatest problem with Kierkegaard, and he devotes the rest of the chapter to a closer contemplation of his position towards sociality:

Ethical organisations of society on earth lie quite beyond [Kierkegaard's] contemplation . . . and are merely sometimes mentioned as 'concretions of individuality' . . . Of a solidaric union between individuals and races of mankind, of history and tradition in the intellectual and organic signification, there is here not the most distant idea.⁶¹

Kierkegaard speaks only of 'the multitude' and 'the public' and as a result he knows only the lowest forms of society.⁶² From this low view comes Kierkegaard's critique of 'levelling',⁶³ which Martensen identifies as pessimism. Kierkegaard's pessimism undermines *all* socially derived authority, and thus he thinks that it is absurd to view the state or the Church as a sustaining or supporting power for the individual.⁶⁴ Contra 'others', Kierkegaard is said to see the idea of sociality not as the salvation of the age, but rather its sepsis.⁶⁵

Because of Kierkegaard's low view of society, he has a negligible ecclesiology, and Martensen claims to have looked in vain throughout the whole literature for Kierkegaard's idea of the Church.⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, he argues, excludes the concept of a Christian community from his idea of edification, making it only a matter of an individual before God.⁶⁷ Martensen grants that Kierkegaard's critique has some use for those who think that they can abrogate all personal responsibility to the Church, and he identifies this as a problem of 'nominal Christianity'.⁶⁸ Given that this is a problem within Christendom, Martensen goes on to claim that 'what Kierkegaard as a religious writer has endeavoured to accomplish is, however, neither unheard of nor even very unusual . . . it is what the Church calls "awakening" or revival'. Thus, Martensen sums up Kierkegaard's authorship as the work of a revivalist preacher, and not a very good one at that.⁶⁹ Because of Kierkegaard's absent ecclesiology, and the

⁵⁹ CE, 225.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 229.

⁶³ Levelling is the process by which anyone of daring, skill or authenticity is pulled back and punished by the mediocre communal expectations of the 'herd'. See especially TA, 84–96.

⁶⁴ CE, 232.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 231. Also 225.

circuitous, pseudonymous manner in which he carries out what should be a simple mission, he ends up calling people away from the Church, rather than into true communion.⁷⁰

In Martensen's eyes, all of this adds up to a vastly inferior apprehension of the individual, of society and of the very essence of Christianity. Kierkegaard, simply, has got it wrong. 'Never in any case will Christianity appear in individuals, without at the same time appearing in the form of society.'⁷¹ What is more, because Kierkegaard does not do justice to the principle of society or society itself, as a result he does not do justice to his beloved principle of the individual either.⁷² If only, sighs Martensen, Kierkegaard could have got sight of the idea of 'the kingdom':

Then his horizon would also have widened, and he would have perceived a higher and nobler universalism than that which he at first combated. *Then would he also, in the history of the world, in the struggles of nations for the ideals of society, have seen more than mere external circumstances and personalities . . . and before everything else, he would have learnt from the history of revelation.*⁷³

5. THREE 'PILLARS' OF THE STATE

Martensen's vision of 'the state' is supported by underlying philosophical/theological commitments in three key areas: *personality*, *ethics* and *history*.⁷⁴ We will consider each aspect in full below, but first a brief overview of how they fit together in Martensen's system is in order. The teleological aim of history is to create unity (right relations) between Creator and created. The individual attains authenticity when he or she stands in a right relation to God's will, which is the Good as revealed by Christ. As the Good is an ethical category, the right relation can only occur within the historically developed moral framework of a society (i.e. 'morality' or 'civic virtue'). In turn, societies

⁷⁰ Ibid. Of course Kierkegaard recognized the problem of nominal Christianity, but he also specifically (and publicly) included Martensen in that category in his attack, extending the problem to all of modern Christendom. Kierkegaard's point is not that there are some 'Christians' who have not yet made a choice of faith. Instead it is that Christendom with 'sophisticated villainy' has lost contact with authentic Christianity (*Moment*, 35). As a result even self-professed believers have been given false options to choose from in the first place (*Moment*, 39). Martensen has either misunderstood this or he has conveniently left it out of his account, thus avoiding the need to deal with Kierkegaard's accusation.

⁷¹ CE, 234.

⁷² Ibid., 235.

⁷³ Ibid. (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ These categories are my own, and I have teased them apart for the purpose of comment and analysis. Martensen himself does not refer to them separately, but integrates personality, ethics and history into his whole system.

with their national peculiarities can act as 'persons' in their own right, with nations effectively relating to God as individuals. This ultimately leads to the possibility of Christian states, the highest forms of state and of Christianity that can be historically developed, and the home of the individual's highest moral framework. All of these points bring Martensen into sharp disagreement with Kierkegaard, whether Martensen acknowledges it or not.

5.1 Personality

Against Kierkegaard (and Hegel) Martensen thinks that it is his category of the individual—his *principle of personality*—which provides the best account of authentic 'becoming'. It is this principle which marks the high point of his speculative system:

In its actual relation to the Good the will determines itself as *personality*. Personality is the free-willing I . . . [in its] peculiar individuality, in these determinate relations of life . . . To consider the human individual under the category of personality is therefore to gather the entire ensemble of its multifarious relative moments of life under the one absolute viewpoint. There remains then not the question of what the individual is in its determinate forms of activity, but how through these it relates itself to life's fundamental requirement, how thereby it solves life's *universal* task.⁷⁵

'Personality', or the 'free-willing I', has two determining components. First are the 'relations of life' and its 'forms of activity'. At the most basic level, the 'multifarious relative moments' of life are comprised of time and nature—elemental forces that provide the limits and boundaries that help to forge peculiar individuality. In an 1844 journal article, Martensen considers how rather than considering the universe as subordinate to the laws of nature and necessity, the Church can regard it from the 'view point of freedom and personality'.⁷⁶ The laws of the universe serve God's purposes. 'The powers of nature and of history must all serve to establish the eternal realm of the personal.'⁷⁷ As we shall see, the laws of history and nature ultimately work themselves out to find expression and form in the 'structures of this world', or, the life of society.

⁷⁵ *Outline*, 266.

⁷⁶ 'Kirke-Aaret', *Urania: Aarbog for 1844* ['The Church Year', *Urania: Yearbook 1844*] (København, 1844), 163. Quoted and translated by George Pattison in *Kierkegaard: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158.

⁷⁷ *Urania*, 188, in Pattison, 159. Cf. John Elrod, who notes how Kierkegaard criticized Danish thought, and particularly Martensen's theology, for its co-option of philosophy and the natural sciences into 'pure thought' at the expense of honest self-reflection. *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 58. On Kierkegaard and 'science', see 58–61.

The second component is the individual's relation towards 'life's universal task', which is related to the Good. In this way, the category of the individual and its 'becoming' is inseparable from the ethical/moral. 'The virtuous individual can only reach its destination and realise its ideals in the world of *morality* [*Sædeligheden*], in the *kingdom* of personality.'⁷⁸ What is this ideal Good that the individual must relate to in order to attain authenticity? 'In a practical respect the ideal is determined then *as the imitation of Christ*.'⁷⁹ Martensen makes it clear that this imitation is accomplished only when 'the individual settles on a particular vocation in God's kingdom. *In this way the religious ideal passes over into the larger context of life-in-the-world*.'⁸⁰

The duty towards the Good, and thus the becoming of the individual, can only be carried out within the structures of this world. Martensen develops the point in his section entitled 'The Good as kingdom of personality':

The ethical life of society is developed through the family life and national life with its end in state, art and science into church life [*Kirkelivet*], where it receives the meaning of the community of saints. *Each of these forms of objective life can be considered as stages in the individual's way to its ideal, and as the means to the actualisation of the individual's personal perfection.* But if in this way, on the basis of the individual's infinite significance, society can be said to exist for the sake of the individual, then on the other hand the individual may just as well be seen to exist for the sake of society.⁸¹

The fortunes of the individual and of society are combined in Martensen's system. Not only do they share in the same ideal endpoint (as discussed below), but the authentic individual can only exist within society, and, in turn, contributes to the unique personality of that society.

The principle of personality *requires* the 'objective life' of society, which provides the 'larger context of life-in-the-world'. It was said above how Martensen considered this to be one of Kierkegaard's fatal flaws. Because Kierkegaard did not do justice to the idea of community, he could not do justice to the individual. In opposition, Martensen claims: 'I am not formed to stand alone . . . whilst I am formed for independence, I am at the same time fitted to be a *member* of one great whole.'⁸² Later in the *Social Ethics* Martensen will describe

⁷⁸ *Outline*, 267.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* (emphasis added). Note that 'God's kingdom' is not eschatological, but here refers to the life lived now in creation. 'The true faith in the religious ideal leads to considering the development of the world as the development of God's kingdom.' *Outline*, 284. Martensen's understanding of the imitation of Christ as one which primarily contributes to society is diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard's understanding of *imitatio Christi* which can only lead to suffering in this world. See ch. 6 below.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 298 (emphasis added).

⁸² *CE*, 230. In a related comment in the *Christian Dogmatics*, Martensen is almost certainly alluding to Kierkegaard when he writes: 'Where religion becomes a merely private thing, *only* a

the idea of a citizen abstracted from his society as a fiction. 'No one is a human being in pure generality, but only in a definite peculiarity . . . in a definite occupation, in a certain circle of society.'⁸³ In *Outline* society is portrayed as that which provides the dialectical partner for the 'becoming' free individual. 'Amidst its striving to actualise its freedom the will *must* enter into a system of conditions and barriers.'⁸⁴ For freedom of the will to happen, and thus for the individual to become authentic, it needs the limits and boundaries that are represented by the various systems of society. 'Only through the determinate, human *individuality* and its actual life in *the state* and *religion* can a concrete content of duty be developed.'⁸⁵ The ethical choices that the will must make in accordance with the Good are presented to the individual in terms of civic morality through the structures of society. 'In order for civic virtue to be developed the individual must belong to a definite *station* [*Stand*], appoint itself as an instrument for one of the general ends of the life of the state.'⁸⁶

A further claim of the principle of personality is that *groups* can be *persons* too. Just as the structures of society work to forge the individual, so too the individual contributes to the 'general ends' and particular characteristics of his national state. Note again the importance that Martensen places on a nation's unique nature:

Between the people and the country there exists and develops during the course of ages a relation of reciprocity, in consequence of which the country receives in many respects, by means of culture, an impression of the *national peculiarity*.⁸⁷

Within his system, Martensen envisions that nations each offer their particular skills and gifts to the service of the larger kingdom of God, in the same way that individual people contribute to their larger social units. Martensen's fluid conception of 'person' stretches to include all collectives of individuals and social groupings. He describes the several 'social organisms' of family, state, culture, science, Church, etc. as 'moral individuals on a large scale, having each its special office to discharge'.⁸⁸ The social grouping that he spends most time on, however, is the state or nation. 'A nation is an individual social organism . . . which again is an individual member of the great body of the human race, and exhibits human nature on a small scale.'⁸⁹

concern of individuals, then we may discern a sign of a state of dissolution, of a break between the individual and society.' *CD*, 7.

⁸³ *SE*, 196.

⁸⁴ *Outline*, 259 (emphasis added).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸⁷ *SE*, 88.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1. At one stage in the *Dogmatics* Martensen even goes so far as to speak of the universe as having an individual life of its own. See *CD*, 138.

⁸⁹ *SE*, 88. See also *SE*, 87–8, 90, 98, 125; *CD*, 147, 233; *Outline*, 304.

The 'special office' that individual nations are to discharge is ultimately made known only *via* revelation. 'It is only by means of Christianity that nationalities can attain the development to which they are really appointed.'⁹⁰ For this reason, a nation's highest development only occurs in the event that it is a Christian state, as it is only then that it is able to know and attain the full potential allotted to it in the divine scheme of history. This is not to say only that individuals *within* the nation are guided and transformed by Christian revelation. On the contrary, nations themselves can, and must, be Christian. In short, not only can nations and groups act as individuals, they can also be *Christian* individuals, enjoying a relationship with each other and with God that is analogous to that of individual persons. Martensen's conception of how a group, nation or state can be authentically Christian is connected to his category of 'the ethical'. Thus it is to a closer examination of the second theoretical pillar supporting Martensen's vision of the state that we now turn.

5.2 Ethics

Martensen postulates that it is the category of 'the ethical' that lies at the heart of Christianity, and so it is by participating in the ethical that a state can be Christian. By 'Christian state' and 'Christian nation', Martensen is clear that he does *not* mean 'that vital personal Christianity must be possessed by all' but instead 'that the nation should on the whole bow to the authority of Christian tradition'.⁹¹ In defence of his idea of a 'Christianity' imputed to a nation on behalf of its tradition, culture and history, Martensen writes against 'that *spurious, irreligious, and immoral individualism*', which at the same time appears as a doctrine, a form of antinomianism'.⁹² Groups and especially states can be authentically Christian because the core of Christianity lies not in an I-Thou relation between individual human persons and a personal God, but rather in the category of the ethical. Throughout his works, Martensen conflates 'ethics' with 'Christianity', both explicitly and by inference.⁹³ 'Morality and religion are, in their inmost nature, one.'⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *SE*, 94.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 102–3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 103. The allusion to Kierkegaard is implicit.

⁹³ Cf. *CD*, 6, 57–8; *CE*, 218, 221; *Outline*, 248, and 254 where the 'Moral Philosophy' that Martensen is attempting has its 'final ground' in the 'actual morality which in all nations is intimately connected with religion'. *SE* often links the lack of Christian religion in a state to the removal of morality itself: 24, 87, 229, 347. See also 135, 160 where the removal of Christianity from questions of national prosperity is said to be equivalent to the absence of morality from political economy.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

For Martensen groups can be Christian because groups can be ethical. It is here that we can see how Martensen's 'ethical' is indistinguishable from social morality. This is because the ethical finds its natural home in the historically developed systems, organizations and limits provided by social structures. At their most developed, nations demonstrate the highest form of the ethical, and therefore the highest form of Christian life on earth. Within Martensen's scheme, the highest ethics are expressions of the universal ideal embedded in the particular life of society.⁹⁵ And yet, the universal ethical Idea does not fall from Heaven fully formed. It is in the dialectical and historical development of human society that the ethical comes to its fulfilment.

5.3 History

For Martensen, the universal ethical ideal begins to take on expression in the mores, customs and moral structures of society as those structures unfold in history. In the *Outline* he censures Kantian thinkers for dividing matters of revealed religion and universal ethics from socially developed morality. They are not mutually exclusive categories, argues Martensen.⁹⁶ The Good, he writes in *Christian Dogmatics*, can be realized in the 'kingdom of freedom only, and Providence can therefore be revealed . . . not in nature but in history only. Goodness must be realised in history as the development of the freedom of the race'.⁹⁷

The historical development of human society can be divided into two 'phases': pre- and post-revelation.⁹⁸ As products of fallible humanity, the ethics worked out in pre-revelation society will necessarily be imperfectly realized. Martensen's first presupposition in the area of 'history' is that even these pre-revelation societies have their place. In the grand scheme of temporal history, non-Christian cultures have a practical purpose. Martensen charts the progress of civilizations in a Hegelian fashion, with special emphasis on their religious/ethical development.⁹⁹ He identifies *Heathenism*, *Judaism* and *Christianity* as the three great stages in the development of the religious and ethical consciousness.¹⁰⁰ Pantheistic cultures give way to monotheism, which prepares the ground for revealed truth. As the penultimate ethical-religious civilization (according to Martensen's system) Judaism's failure to recognize

⁹⁵ Hence Martensen's criticism that Kierkegaard ignored ethics and thus missed Christianity because of his faulty view of society. *CE*, 236.

⁹⁶ *Outline*, 255.

⁹⁷ *CD*, 215.

⁹⁸ By 'revelation', Martensen means the incarnation. See, for example, *Outline*, 257, 283; *CD*, 171: '... the advent of Christ, the revelation of the highest good'. Also 16, 20, 172, 239.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard criticizes precisely this method in *CUP*, 150n. Cf. ch. 5 below.

¹⁰⁰ *CD*, 14.

Christ comes in for special consideration. For Martensen, Judaism's contribution was that it had developed to the point where it truly recognized the gap that existed between creation and the Creator.¹⁰¹ For this reason, the sacred history of revealed truth finds its initial home in Israel. However, it finds its fullness and completion only in the sacred history of Christ.¹⁰² Martensen reads the events in the light of national destiny: 'It was the task of Israel to develop the susceptibility for Christ to a point when it might be able to manifest itself as the profoundest unity of nature and spirit.'¹⁰³

Talk about the destiny of nations is apposite here. Not only does a society require revelation in order to attain full development, but the revelation itself has been *necessarily* determined by history for this very purpose. This means that within Martensen's system, the incarnation is an historically necessary event and it is the source of Martensen's complaint against Kierkegaard that his concept of revelation is 'imperfectly exhibited . . . without any connection with the *economy* of revelation and its universal principles'.¹⁰⁴ By the 'economy of revelation' Martensen is referring to the developing expression of the ethical through the warp and weft of ideas, culture and social morality.¹⁰⁵ Revelation is not tangentially connected to all of this, but instead 'a direct, unambiguous revelation can be found only in the world of spirit, of the word, of conscience, and of freedom, in other words, of *history*'.¹⁰⁶ The incarnation is the absolute, unconditional point in the course of history wherein the economic and the eternal necessities coincide. 'Revelation and history are therefore not to be separated.'¹⁰⁷

As the unconditional point in the course of history, the event of the incarnation is not primarily connected to redemption and atonement, but rather to mediation. Martensen thinks that the incarnation itself was an *unconditional* necessity, whereas the atonement event was a *conditional* one.¹⁰⁸ Redemption was only conditionally related to the incarnation because of mankind's free will to sin. If sin had not appeared, then Christ would not have appeared to punish and redeem. He would, however, still have appeared. 'The divine decree submits itself to the conditions of history . . . No ideal, no eternal truth, is destroyed by the fall of man.'¹⁰⁹ According to Martensen, since there was no metaphysical necessity for sin entering the world, 'Christ could not be our Redeemer, if it had

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 16 See also *SE*, 212, where he writes that the Jews were indeed 'conscious that the time had now arrived in which Christ must appear'. But they deluded themselves by looking for a military messiah instead of correctly understanding the spirit of the age.

¹⁰² *CD*, 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰⁴ *CE*, 224–5. Discussed above.

¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere described as 'the living drama of freedom'. *CD*, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. See also *CD*, 20, 172.

¹⁰⁸ *CD*, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 170. See also 263.

not been eternally involved in His idea that He should be our Mediator'.¹¹⁰ It is the destiny of man to bear the image of God, and it is the Mediator who makes this possible by bridging the gap, yet Martensen intimates that it is not the presence of sin that constitutes the essential difference between Creator and created. Even apart from sin, this union of the human race with God is 'involved in the idea of the perfection of the world'.¹¹¹ Christ is the Redeemer of the world, yes. But this is separate from the more eternal truth that Christ is primarily the Perfector of the world.¹¹² Thus, the incarnation is not *essentially* related to atonement or the sinful gap between man and the divine at all, but instead is teleologically related to the development of creation. It is in the Mediator that the heavenly and earthly, the visible and invisible, the forces of the universe, principalities and powers 'are summed up and combined'.¹¹³

In the dialectical system the ideal Good finds expression in actuality, and it does this through the developing stages of civilization. Pre-revelation, history had developed to the point of necessity that required the incarnation. Post-revelation, it continues to be the aim of history to give expression to this revealed Good, however, it is not for any and all stages of civilization to enjoy this 'new development'. Martensen's system of historical development means that only certain cultures can apprehend the importance of the incarnation, and put into practice the expression of the Good that it reveals. The teleology of creation, which is the ideal relationship between God and men, finds its fullest expression in the Christian states of Christendom. It is here at this stage of civilization, and only here, where the development of history will find its proper completion.

The problem with so-called lesser-developed cultures is one of *recognition* and *apprehension*. 'Heathendom' was and is forever destined to be destitute of truth because its cultures do not recognize the difference between the 'worldly' and the 'divine' spirit.¹¹⁴ It is a characteristic of 'heathen' societies (Martensen means pantheistic, Buddhist and Hindu cultures) that history is represented as a cycle of repetition—endless and meaningless. Martensen describes history without enlightenment (i.e. revelation) as knowing neither beginning, end, nor purpose.¹¹⁵ It is important to note that the solution to Heathendom is not a simple matter of evangelism or preaching Christianity to various nations.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 260.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 261.

¹¹² Ibid. Cf. Thompson, *Between*, 18.

¹¹³ Ibid., 262–3. In this light it is worth noting Climacus' objection to theological systems that downplay sin: 'Sin is a crucial expression for the religious existence. As long as sin is not posited, the suspension [of the God-Human relationship] becomes a transient factor that in turn vanishes or remains outside of life as the totally irregular.' *CUP*, 267. Also *PF*, 47.

¹¹⁴ *CD*, 12.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 233.

Instead the reception of the gospel is dependent upon a parallel development of the right kind of civilization.¹¹⁶ The *Outline* states that it is the free development of culture and society in its art, science and organization of state that conditions the development of the spiritual. Individuals will only be able to apprehend the free ethical choices offered to them in relation to the Good insofar as their society provides the framework, and points 'to a higher substantial world of reason which is reflected in culture'.¹¹⁷

The state's Christianness *depends not on the fact that it assumes an immediate religious character* . . . but on the fact that the same general principle, which the church develops through the categories of religion, *is developed through the peculiar categories of the state*.¹¹⁸

6. SOCIAL ETHICS, THE STATE AND CHRISTENDOM

It is not until *Social Ethics* that we see the full fruits of the theology laid out in *Outline* and *Christian Dogmatics*. Nations and countries appear as major characters throughout the works as we have seen, but it is in *SE* that we find Martensen's specific treatment of the state. Furthermore, it is in *SE* that the relationship between Christianity and developed culture sketched above comes into focus, and thus it is here that we can see the true place of the state within Martensen's theological system.

It is worth noting from the outset that Martensen only occasionally differentiates between 'state', 'country' and 'nation'.¹¹⁹ Throughout his writings he does not consistently adhere to these theoretical divisions, and in practice the concepts are all but indistinguishable in Martensen's thought. At times Martensen uses a concrete definition of the state, referring to a straightforward organization comprised of laws, boundaries, familial groups, governors and the governed:

The family enlarges into the people, and when a people is organised into a community subject to common legal institutions determining the relation between authorities and subjects, a *state* has come into existence.¹²⁰

However, this apparently simple usage, when combined with the high dialectical value that Martensen places on such phenomena as historically developed

¹¹⁶ ' . . . for without a minimum of culture, Christianity cannot be truly appropriated, nor the Christian Church attain its development.' *SE*, 333. See below.

¹¹⁷ *Outline*, 302.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 311 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁹ For example, see *SE*, 90. The difference between 'state' and 'nation' was discussed in ch. 1 above.

¹²⁰ *SE*, 82.

public ethics, language and nationality, results in a view of the 'state' that goes far beyond simple political practicalities.¹²¹ For Martensen, the state presupposes the existence of a nation and a country.¹²² 'Country' refers here to the 'spot of earth': physical land and geography.¹²³ 'Nation', however, is by far the most important factor, and Martensen identifies it as the 'natural basis of the state' and as the 'condition of all human, all moral and mental development'.¹²⁴ Nations are unique:

Between the people and the country there exists and develops during the course of ages a relation of reciprocity, in consequence of which the country receives in many respects, by means of culture, an impression of the *national peculiarity*.¹²⁵

This peculiarity is composed of the accumulated cultural artefacts of a people, primarily identified by Martensen as their language, literary and scientific output.¹²⁶ Together, these elements constitute 'a people'. This has been laid out earlier in *Outline*:

The concept of the state is inseparable from the concept of *the people*. The folk-spirits or spirits of the people, whose natural boundary lines are language, are given a right to external existence in the states.¹²⁷

Not only language, but also the 'political and scientific, the artistic and religious life which is stirring in the age'¹²⁸ contribute to the colour and contents of national culture, all of which are necessary components of the state.

The question then arises: what is to be the *Christian* attitude towards the national state? The extent and nature of Christian participation in the life of the state was a 'live' question in nineteenth century Denmark. Different groups of dissenters supported varying degrees of non-cooperation with the secular sphere and the official Church. Revivalists and pietists encouraged separation between nominal Christians and the 'awakened'. Danish nationalists like Grundtvig (discussed in the following chapter) agitated for a 'People's Church', based in part on christianized Norse-Scandinavian culture and

¹²¹ Martensen's use of 'state' here is analogous to Kierkegaard's use of 'Christendom' in that it is initially a term that seems to denote a relatively uncomplicated notion, but which in fact comes to represent a whole nexus of ideas, assumptions and values. 'Martensen viewed the state both as the expression of the religious, moral and intellectual development of a hierarchical and organic Christian society and as the means of that society's further development.' Kirmmse, *Golden*, 170.

¹²² *SE*, 88.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 88. The use that Martensen makes of the notion of 'national peculiarity' is discussed below.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* See also the extended discussion of specifically national theatre, art, poetry, science, language, education, etc. at 242–305.

¹²⁷ *Outline*, 303 (emphasis added).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

separated from any coercion or collusion with the modern state. Representing his own singular position, Kierkegaard had years earlier made his mark as the most vociferous opponent of the marriage of Christianity and politics. 'What the devil do these two things have to do with each other?' he asked, providing a resounding negative answer to his own question.¹²⁹

In *SE*, Martensen considers this possibility that the concerns of Christianity and the affairs of state do not mix, asking his own rhetorical query: What does Christianity have to do with the national state? Could it be, he asks, that his opponents are correct and that Christianity 'denied instead of acquiesced in national feelings and decisions'?¹³⁰ Martensen runs through the list of possible biblical reasons why one might conclude that Christians should be ambivalent about national states: Paul's assertion that in Christ there is no Greek and no Jew (Gal. 3:28); the New Testament's insistence on the universal nature of the gospel; the emphasis on God's kingdom rather than man's; the fact that the apostles forsook their native lands and people for the sake of missions and Christ's prediction of the destruction and scattering of the Jewish state (Mtt. 24).¹³¹ But with an eye to proponents of Kierkegaardian 'New Testament' Christianity, Martensen finally concludes:

This position [of separation], alien to nationality, this circumstance of living as a citizen of heaven, without a native land or home on earth, was by no means intended to be permanent. The kingdom of God was to be the leaven which should leaven the life of the world.¹³²

6.1 Patriotic citizens

In a telling sermon printed in 1875, Martensen expounds on Matthew 22:15–22 ('Give to Caesar what is Caesar's . . .'), censuring those who would falsely separate Christianity from the social life, and finding Christ as the prime exemplar of the Christian citizen.

It is often said . . . that the servants of the Word must not have anything to do with what pertains to civic life [*borgerlige Livs*], must not here impose and resume the civic political struggle [*borgerlige Partikampe*] and disputes, and that we should not come here to the house of God in order to hear sermons on this subject, to hear about the kingdom of the world, but together to edify each

¹²⁹ *Moment*, 109. Kierkegaard refers to 'this disastrous confusing of politics and Christianity' in 'An Open Letter' in *The Corsair Affair*, 53. See also Kirmmse's essay in Robert Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), 179–84. Kierkegaard's opposition both to the idea of 'state Christianity' and to populist, 'national' movements is discussed in the following chapters.

¹³⁰ *SE*, 92.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 92–3.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 93.

other, to hear about eternal life . . . however, today's reading shows us that there is another meaning, and we cannot dare to remove ourselves from the position that deals with civic virtue, because our gospel also clearly shows us that the Lord himself did not remove himself from these matters.¹³³

When faced with the question of whether God's people should pay tax, Jesus' response to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's 'gives us a rule and a benchmark for our duty towards civic authorities [*borgerlige Øvrighed*] and our duty towards God and God's kingdom'.¹³⁴ Rather than seek a sharp distinction between what is Caesar's and what is God's, Martensen interprets Jesus' response as a demonstration of how closely the duties are intertwined. Regarding the state and the Church, Martensen claims that 'these main institutions there constitute the whole human society [*menneskelige Samfund*]' . Because these institutions 'are deeply and intensely combined . . . we have a duty in both', for the same 'people [*Menneske*], the same nation [*Folk*]' live their lives in both.¹³⁵

Martensen makes a direct analogy between giving the civic authorities their due, and giving God his due. Refusal to undertake civil duties because of a sense of separation or 'set-apartness' is misguided and un-Christian. According to Martensen, at the same time that the Pharisees and the 'Jewish nation' refused to give to Caesar, they thereby failed to give to God. This is because they 'would not acknowledge God's revelation [*Åbenbarelse*] in the Saviour who said to them, "Everyone who does sin is in sin's thrall, but if the Son sets you free, then you are truly free"'.¹³⁶ Freedom from sin means freedom to partake in the life of the (admittedly sinful) state without participating in its sin, it does not mean freedom *from* the state. Christ is held up as the prime example of one who, sinless, nonetheless submitted to Caesar's rule: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and submit yourself like this under God's will.'¹³⁷

Martensen's sense of 'what is due' to Caesar may be summed up in one word: *patriotism*.

[Patriotism] may be more particularly defined as an affection for the country, 'the spot of earth' where we first opened our eyes to the light of this world . . . where we grew up and learned what home meant . . . patriotism attains its full moral character when it is love of a certain state.¹³⁸

¹³³ *Prædikener paa alle Søn-og Helligdage i Aaret, forhen trykte og utrykte af Dr. H. Martensen*. [Sermons for all Sundays and Holydays in the year, formerly printed and publicized by Dr. H. Martensen] (København: Gyldendal 1875), 544. Hereafter *Sermon*.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 546. (John 8:36).

¹³⁷ *Sermon*, 546. Martensen also alludes briefly to Matt 22:21 in the *Social Ethics* in relation to the demand of obedience that the state has over Christians. *SE*, 100.

¹³⁸ *SE*, 206.

Patriotism forms the foundation for all civic virtue.¹³⁹ Commenting on Romans 13, Martensen finds that 'in its political aspect, civic virtue appears in the submission of *subjects to rulers*'. Patriotism, especially insofar as it extends to participation in military duty, is singled out here as primarily included in 'what is due' in 13:7.¹⁴⁰ Quietistic submission is not enough. 'The subject relation must develop into the *patriotic*, and this implies that the idea of the state itself (the state as the whole) is active in the individual citizen.'¹⁴¹ In service of the kingdom of God, the Christian is to spend himself on behalf of his nation.

Never should he doubt that the faithfulness to duty, carried out to the uttermost by labour and conflict for his earthly fatherland, will have its importance with respect also to the heavenly country.¹⁴²

War has its downside, admits Martensen, but at least it arouses a slumbering patriotism, and calls citizens from their self-interest into sacrificing for the common cause.¹⁴³

One important outcome of Christian patriotic participation in the state is that it might succeed as an earthly power. As an alternative to the extremes of individualism on the one hand and the excesses of revolutionary populism on the other, Martensen proposes what he calls *Christian* or *Ethic Socialism*.¹⁴⁴ The theory attempts to combine Christian ethics with the practical economic concerns of the state, and is concerned with achieving success and social stability. The material life of the state cannot be separated from its religious-ethical life. Martensen thinks that it is part of the Christian's duty 'to struggle against care and want, so that the kingdom of God, and therewith the true kingdom of man, embracing, as it does, not only his spiritual but also his material life, may come upon earth and prosper'.¹⁴⁵ Christians are to provide and preserve the moral framework in which the state conducts its business, and in so doing, they provide for and preserve the state itself.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 207.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. See also 234: 'Obedience, indeed, to be of true inward value, must be inspired by love for king and country.' And the *Outline*, where Martensen provides a more idealistic definition of patriotism, linking it to free and conscious life lived 'on behalf of the ideals of the spirit of the people'. *Outline*, 305.

¹⁴² *SE*, 208–9. See also 6.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 233. If he had been alive to comment on *SE*, doubtless Kierkegaard would have had something to say about the fact that immediately after Martensen argues for '*universal compulsory defensive service*', he takes pains to exempt clerics like himself from military duty. *SE*, 236.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 160–71. *Social Ethics* incorporates material published four years previously in the tract *Socialism og Christendom. Et Brudstykke af den specielle Ethik* [Socialism and Christianity. A Fragment of the Special Ethic] (Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendal, 1874).

¹⁴⁵ *SE*, 160.

¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard's contrasting views of worldly success and Christian suffering is discussed in ch. 6 below.

6.2 The Christian state

Christians are to work in and for all manner of societies; however, Martensen's ideal state is the 'Christian state'. Ideally, the Christian state exists in a relationship with other Christian states, which together make up Christendom. Only in Christendom will nations be able to attain their full, divinely appointed purpose. Christianity can make states Christian because of its intimate relationship with nations.

The relation of Christianity to nationality is not only a purifying, but a cultivating or perfect one . . . It is only by means of Christianity that nationalities can attain the development to which they are really appointed.¹⁴⁷

It is Christianity's role to redeem not only individuals, but also 'to make nations Christian'.¹⁴⁸ For a nation to become Christian means that its 'heathenism and national selfishness' are ended, and that it submits itself to the guidance and purification of the Spirit.¹⁴⁹

According to Martensen, Christian nations are recognized by the way in which they partake, by faith, in the blessings of the gospel, finding in it refuge and support. In its national life, the Christian state will cultivate the unique gifts bestowed on it by the Spirit (the 'national peculiarities' discussed above), and it will occupy its God-ordained position in the entirety of the human race, contributing to the time when all nations shall be comprised under Christ in one Christendom.¹⁵⁰ Martensen stresses that this relation is not merely ephemeral and 'spiritual', for 'Christendom' here also presupposes a direct involvement in legislative bodies and state institutions. It is precisely because states exist 'for the sake of human nature itself' and the general development of human culture and prosperity that it is necessary for Christianity to make its mark on social life in its entirety.¹⁵¹

For Martensen, it is only as an established institution that the Church can fully preserve and promote Christian tradition to the nation. One cannot have a Christian state without a state Church.¹⁵² There are, of course, dissenting Christian sects (and certain rabble-rousers with uneven trouser legs whom Martensen does not mention by name) who count the collusion of Constantine and the Christian Church as a transition to corruption. Martensen describes them as pessimists who 'regard the entire development of Church history as a failure, national churches as a Babel . . . as civil institutions with a

¹⁴⁷ SE, 93–4. ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 98. ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. ¹⁵¹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵² See SE, 341: 'When the notion of a Christian state finds acceptance, the necessity for the existence of a Christian state Church . . . is thereby admitted.'

Christian appearance, etc.¹⁵³ Instead, Martensen optimistically attributes to the state a higher ethical significance with a divine vocation that can only be fulfilled as a Christian state and he does not accept that a state Church can, 'in principle and nature, be of evil'.¹⁵⁴ Rather than marking the beginning of the end, it was through the Constantinian settlement that the Church

entered upon that course in which she first became capable of fully carrying out her mission. [The state Church] is a thing which must and ought to exist, a thing which, despite all false individualism, must be maintained and defended.¹⁵⁵

The established Church is the means by which states become, and remain, Christian. This does not happen primarily through legislation (although that does have its place), but through the Church's maintenance of national culture.

How far the Christian state can be a fact, depends chiefly on whether the 'Christian nation' is a fact. By this it is not meant that vital personal Christianity must be possessed by all, but that the nation should on the whole bow to the authority of Christian tradition.¹⁵⁶

It is important to note that for Martensen, 'Christian tradition' includes customs specifically associated with Church life, such as the observance of Sundays and Holy Weeks, but it also extends to areas such as law, education, science and art.¹⁵⁷ In short, Martensen sees the remit of 'Christian tradition' as extending over all human culture, and not just being confined to ecclesiastical matters. In working for the kingdom of God the Church is also working for the kingdom of humanity and all that this encompasses, very much including 'the ideals of humanity, a Christian family and a Christian state, Christian art and Christian science'.¹⁵⁸ For Martensen, the refined European, there was ultimately no difference between a nation's highest civilized culture and a fully developed state Christianity.¹⁵⁹

In the *Social Ethics* section headed 'Foreign and Home Missions', Martensen takes Christ's command to preach the gospel to all nations (Mtt. 24:14) as

¹⁵³ Ibid., 312. See also 344.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 345.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 102–3. This is similar to the tone struck by later defenders of established religion in England such as T. S. Eliot, who defines a Christian society as a society of 'men whose Christianity is communal before being individual' in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber, 1939), 59. Also John Baillie, *What is Christian Civilisation?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 102. See also 242–305.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 357, also 313.

¹⁵⁹ As Kirmmse points out, this is why Martensen was incapable of interpreting Kierkegaard's attack on the officially 'Christian' social order as anything other than an attack on the religion itself. 'In the Golden Age view, social and religious order were inseparable, and *Christianity* was inconceivable apart from *Christendom*.' Kirmmse, *Golden*, 192.

a command to form all nations into 'civilised' Christian nations. What this entails in practical terms for Martensen is clear:

The relation between the Christian and the *human* is shown in missions, on the one side, by the fact that Christianity cannot be brought to uncivilised nations unless we bring them civilisation—for *without a minimum of culture, Christianity cannot be truly appropriated, nor the Christian Church attain its development.*¹⁶⁰

According to Martensen, then, there exist different levels of nationalities, some of which exhibit a form of culture, which, being uncivilized and un-Christian, are less than human.

Earlier in *SE*, Martensen refers to nationalist theologians who fail to see that, while Christianity purifies and criticizes worldly nationality, it does not revive a non-critical sense of national mythology.¹⁶¹ To do so is to look back at an earlier stage of development. History has moved on—Christianity judges those forms of nationality in order to arrive at the fullness of its history. Christianity is intimately connected to nationality, but it is concerned with nationality only insofar as the possibility of true *humanity* lies in the national consciousness. 'Humanity is above nationality, indeed the latter is only a natural form in which the former is realised.'¹⁶² Thus, it is backwards and wrong when a nation sets its own peculiarity above its general humanity, reverting to its own unique (and heathen) nationalistic religion as a symbol of uniqueness. The '*state of humanity*' signifies more that a *state of culture*, since the inmost and deepest interests of humanity is not culture, but morality and religion.'¹⁶³ It is only under the influence of the true religion, Christianity, 'that [humanity made up of nations] can reach its full and true development . . . Hence the truly humanistic state is one and the same with the Christian state.'¹⁶⁴

It is with the notion of a 'truly humanistic state' that we come to Martensen's vision for the vocation of the state itself. We have seen that in service of the state, it is the Church's duty to aid and foster the development of a Christian nation and culture and so produce a Christian state. It is important to note that for Martensen, Christianity does not transcend states, but rather the reverse is almost true. It is in the Christian *state* that Christianity finds its *raison d'être*, consequently enabling the state to find *its* fulfilment and purpose in history. Thus, in Martensen's system, the state (albeit a Christian one) occupies a higher stage in the dialectic of historical development than does the Christian religion itself. The Christian state is the highest form of state, whose duty it is in turn to promote and enable the flourishing and 'becoming' of authentic humanity before God, the endpoint of Martensen's dialectic. A state

¹⁶⁰ *SE*, 333 (emphasis added).

¹⁶¹ Although not mentioned by name, this is an allusion to Grundtvig. See ch. 3 below.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

has not reached its full potential until it is Christian. But more importantly, Christianity has not reached *its* potential until it is embedded in a state.¹⁶⁵ Only when 'a people' arrive at a concrete set of social laws and customs (what Martensen refers to as an 'actual condition of rights'), does it 'come into possession if its spiritual property, does it come to feel and know itself as a people'.¹⁶⁶ It is here that 'nationality' transcends the everyday transactions of family, property and the like.

Nationality is sacred because it is the means through which the in-and-for-itself sacred, the eternal and universal shall be taken up and appropriated. For if the spiritual is to become our actual property, if it is to become life and nature in us, *then it must be presented for us in a native form*.¹⁶⁷

Martensen has already established in *CD* that it is only where Christianity is combined with a certain level of cultural development that human societies look back 'upon a past which is full of meaning . . . and can contemplate its development as an organic whole'.¹⁶⁸ Thus for Martensen the relationship between Christianity and highly developed culture is not one of simple cause and effect. It is not merely the presence of Christianity that produces civilization, but rather revelation itself needs a certain level of culture and social development in which to adhere.

In turn, that culture will be given fresh impetus to continue the course of its development, moving from strength to strength. It is only then that the endpoint of earthly history can finally be fulfilled: *Christendom*.

Now will be found in a true and full sense an alliance of nations . . . Christendom will be one flock under one Shepherd (Christ), and the ideals of humanity, a Christian family and a Christian state, Christian art and Christian science, will be fully realised.¹⁶⁹

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Behind Martensen's vision of the state lie a number of important philosophical and theological presuppositions relating to the areas of *personality*, *ethics* and

¹⁶⁵ In this light it is worth noting Martensen's role in the censuring of the left-Hegelian theologian Hans Brøchner, who was denied permission to take the pastoral candidacy exam in 1841. Martensen agreed that the state should intervene in the case of conscious 'anti-Christian' positions that do not remain in a positive dialectical relationship to ecclesiological principles. See Horn, *Positivity*, 183, 184.

¹⁶⁶ *SE*, 206.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 305 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁸ *CD*, 223.

¹⁶⁹ *SE*, 357.

history. Regarding the *person*, Martensen is committed first to a definition that finds the identity of the authentic person in its free choice of the Good, which is identified as God's will. This does not take place in a vacuum, but only within the web of relations, barriers and customs given form by culture and society.

Secondly, Martensen assumes that groups can be 'persons' too. Societies and nations relate to each other and to God in a manner analogous to the relationship that exists between God and individual human beings. Thus, states can be *Christian*. This can happen because (unlike Kierkegaard) Martensen does not locate at the heart of Christianity a relationship of individual persons before a personal God. Instead, his first commitment in this area is to find the core of Christianity to be synonymous with highest expression of 'the ethical'. Secondly, whilst it represents a universal ideal, the category of the ethical is not primarily a matter of abstract thought. Instead ethics finds its natural home in the concrete culture, morality and laws of human societies. What is more, as cultures inhabit different stages of development, some societies express the ethical ideal better than others. 'Historically', this is reflected by Martensen's idea of pre- and post-revelation cultural development. Pre-revelation societies have their part to play in the grand unfolding drama of history, especially Israel of the Old Testament, which represents the necessary penultimate stage of cultural development. Secondly, the divine revelation that took the form of the incarnation was an historically necessary event. It could not but have taken place at the point in time and in the culture that it did. As such it is *essentially* related to the mediating of God to man and the development of the ethical idea of the Good in human society, rather than to the conditional event of atonement and defeat of sin.

Martensen's third commitment is related to this idea of post-revelation development. The presence of certain 'Christian' tropes in a society does not in itself make a culture civilized. Rather it is only in cultures developed to a sufficient stage that the revelation of the incarnation can be correctly apprehended at all. It is only in the most 'civilized' cultures that the meaning of the incarnation is understood, and the Good given expression. Authentic Christianity, and thus the authentic ethical relation of 'persons' to God, finds its true home only in the conditions best described as the world of (European) Christendom. This is made up of Christian states that bear a striking resemblance to Martensen's idealized picture of his own Denmark, with its national culture, morality and established Church. Over all of which, incidentally, Martensen presided as Bishop.

Thus Martensen's entire body of writing works out to a robust defence and justification of the very Christendom against which Kierkegaard was so opposed. Not only does Kierkegaard's attack take on the surface manifestations of the Christian state that Martensen extols in *Social Ethics* and elsewhere, but, as we shall see, he is also brought into fundamental disagreement

with each of the commitments that undergird Martensen's vision of the state. Kierkegaard's attack was not sparked by mere personal dislike of Martensen, but rather it stems from a critique that strikes at the heart of all such approaches to the development of history, the nature of true Christianity and the role that the state plays in the becoming of the authentic individual. However, it was not only Martensen's theology of sophisticated christianized culture which bore the brunt of Kierkegaard's critique, and thus it is to N. F. S. Grundtvig and his brand of populist religious nationalism that we must now turn.

N. F. S. Grundtvig

If no racial spirit exists it must first be created before it can receive the Gospel.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

If Martensen's theology can be said to focus on the related issue of the *state*, then N. F. S. Grundtvig's theology focuses on the *national* life of a people. Historian, linguist, poet, hymn writer, theologian, preacher, schools reformer, politician and champion of the national cause, Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) was unquestionably one of the most important figures in Denmark's Golden Age. Outside of Denmark there are occasional spikes of interest in Grundtvig in his own right, however it is fair to say that he is primarily known to English readers only as a footnote in Kierkegaardian studies.² In his native country, however, Grundtvig remains a cultural treasure. Danish people still sing Grundtvig's songs and hymns, they attend his schools, and their economy enjoys the fruits of his political reforms.³ He has been accredited with enriching the Danish language and 'reloading it with reality'.⁴ As a writer and cultural commentator Grundtvig retains his influence. In home-grown conferences on 'Danish thinkers' he is often given pride of place above and beyond that of any other 'Danish thinker' that might come to the international mind.

¹ N. F. S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte Skrifter* IX, 80 (trans. Lindhardt, *Grundtvig*), 100.

² One British champion bemoans Grundtvig's fate. Would that the English-speaking world had discovered Grundtvig first, he writes, for then 'Grundtvig's influence would have been far healthier than Kierkegaard's is ever likely to prove'. E. L. Allen, 'Grundtvig and Kierkegaard' in *The Congregational Quarterly* vol. XXIV 1946, 205–12, at 205.

³ Vagn Wählin, 'Denmark, Slesvig-Holstein and Grundtvig in the Nineteenth Century' in A. M. Allchin et al. (eds), *Heritage and Prophecy* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1994), 243.

⁴ Lorenz Rerup, 'Grundtvig's Position in Danish Nationalism' in *ibid.*, 239.

Grundtvig began writing as a young man, and remained active up until his death.⁵ It is difficult to demarcate his output into neat genres, as his work on mythology, philology and history is closely bound up with his theology, educational and political interests. Above all, Grundtvig was a poet and hymn writer, and many of his most important ideas appear in verse.⁶ Grundtvig was passionate and volatile, and his life was marked by key points of emotional or spiritual turmoil that served as catalysts in his writing career. Commentators tend to agree in broadly identifying three stages, marked by events or 'discoveries' in Grundtvig's life. The first stage (1803–1810) marks Grundtvig's youthful enthusiasm for pagan and especially Norse mythology. Although he was a young clergyman, Grundtvig's writings from this time express a Romantic enthusiasm for primitive, mythical 'religion' that was not necessarily Christian. An unsuitable, and failed, romantic attachment in 1810 sparked in Grundtvig a time of internal assessment and religious reflection which led to perhaps his most fruitful period.

This second stage (1811–1830) is characterized by Grundtvig's embrace of his idea of true Christianity and the polemical stance that he took against the established clergy in defence of his idea. Grundtvig's 'matchless discovery' from this time is his insistence that the true Church is defined by and founded on the oral transmission of the Apostles' creed, and not on scripture. Grundtvig pitted the 'dead letter' of the Bible against the 'living word' of the Apostolic tradition, tracing the confessional beliefs back to Christ himself. The position won him official censure, but also much popular support, and the 'Grundtvigian' movement became (and still is) a significant part of the Danish ecclesiastical landscape, as will be discussed below.

A rising awareness of the political and cultural consequences of modern industrialism, coupled with a series of visits to England in the 1830s mark the third stage of Grundtvig's career. Grundtvig was politically active during this time, and supported the democratic reforms resulting from the revolutions of 1848. He was also galvanized by the encroachment of German language and Prussian culture in Denmark and Prussia's claims over the territories of Slesvig-Holstein. Grundtvig opposed all forms of coercion in political, cultural and especially spiritual matters. He anticipated Christianity's future triumph in the world, but was critical of modern attempts to force people into certain cultural patterns or beliefs. Thus, to his abiding enthusiasm for Norse culture and his fervent belief in his 'matchless discovery' of the confessing community was added a vigorous defence of the *human* against the dehumanizing effects

⁵ Grundtvig was prodigiously prolific, and a comprehensive set of his writings is not yet available in Danish, let alone in English translation. See bibliography.

⁶ In an examination that concerns the relationship between mythology, history and Christianity in Grundtvig, Auken claims that he 'transcends' the difference between literature and theology. Sune Auken, *Sagas Spejl: Mytologi, historie og kristendom hos N. F. S. Grundtvig* (København: Gyldendal, 2005), 632–3.

of industry, individualism and 'Manichean' Christianity. It is from this stage that we get Grundtvig's idea that *first* one must be fully human, and *only then* can one be truly Christian.

Although this is a topic of debate within Grundtvigian studies, I do not intend to dwell overmuch on the development of the three stages and their internal relationship to one another.⁷ Instead, it is my intention to draw from the stages of Grundtvig's thought in order to present a clear picture of his mature nationalistic theology, especially as Kierkegaard would have known it. It is not an exaggeration to call Grundtvig's theology 'nationalistic'. Nationalism is not an afterthought or an addendum to Grundtvig's theology, it is integral to it, and Grundtvig's concern to foster national identity has rightly been described as 'the crimson thread' that runs throughout the span of his writings.⁸ Grundtvig pursued his project with the explicit aim of awakening the patriotism of the Danish people, and self-consciously sought to locate the unique Scandinavian cultural heritage at the centre of the Divine will as revealed in world history. Along with Grundtvig's national concerns comes his effort for 'clarity', namely, his attempt to speak to the common man in his or her mother tongue. Grundtvig's great enemies were the academics, politicians and clergy who imported 'foreign' words and concepts into the Danish culture, thus serving to alienate the average person from otherwise accessible truths. 'Enlightenment', he wrote, referring to the mindset of the learned elite, 'was the destruction of the spiritual dwellings of our forefathers.'⁹

To this end, it is significant that the three essential components of Grundtvig's nationalistic theology are easily and simply stated. The first is Grundtvig's 'matchless discovery' and his claim that the oral, communal tradition as demonstrated in the Apostles' Creed and confessed by a living community is the only basis for the authentic Church. The second is Grundtvig's idea, 'First Man and then Christian', with its emphasis on the importance of a full human life and culture as a necessary pre-condition for the acceptance of Christianity. Thirdly, Grundtvig's theology finds in world history a series of national cultures that have served God's purpose so that the Kingdom of Heaven might be fulfilled. History, says Grundtvig, has now developed to a point where there is a need for 'a people' whose task it is to demonstrate to the world

⁷ On the 'stages' see for example Auken, *Sagas*; Anders Holm, *Historie og Efterklang: En studie i N. F. S. Grundtvigs tidsskrift 'Danne-Virke'* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001); Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Kaj Thanning, *N. F. S. Grundtvig* trans. David Hohnen (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab [The Danish Institute], 1972).

⁸ Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 15.

⁹ Kirmmse, 205 (*Værker i Udvalg* II, 246); 'It was Grundtvig's love for the common man which led him to this "incomparable discovery", for he wanted to liberate him from the authority of the scholars.' Allen, 'Grundtvig', 206. See also Hal Koch, *Grundtvig*, trans. Llewellyn Jones (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1952), 124.

authentic Christianity. It was to the Northern peoples that the matchless discovery and a robust linguistic culture have been bequeathed, thus it is to Denmark, Queen of the Northern races, that the Divine mission to the world falls.

2. *MAGELØSE OPDAGELSE*—THE MATCHLESS DISCOVERY

Perhaps the most distinctive facet of Grundtvig's thought is his *mageløse opdagelse*—his 'matchless' or 'unparalleled' discovery in the 1820s. The matchless discovery maintained that the definition and markers of the true Church are not to be found within the pages of a biblical text but rather in the Apostolic confession of specific, active communities. The relationship between the consequences of the *mageløse opdagelse* and Grundtvig's nationalistic theology is direct: true Christianity exists only in what is expressed in the native language of a common people, passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation. Authentic Christianity is not a matter of an individual understanding or obeying what is found in the (Greek) New Testament, let alone the (Hebrew) Old Testament. There is no abstract 'Church' which transcends time and place. Only individuals who participate in the life of a congregation which confesses the Apostolic creed—a congregation and confession bounded by the language and idioms of a shared national culture—have access to authentic Christianity and the true Church. It is worth noting here that Grundtvig's theology remains vigorously sacramental, and the mere verbal recitation of the Creed is not sufficient unto itself. The sacraments, especially baptism and Eucharist, provide the occasion for the Creed, and are done under its auspices. It is at the *bad og bord* [bath and table/font and altar] that the transgenerational transmission of Apostolic Christianity occurs. The oral tradition of the Apostles comes alive when it is confessed aloud in the congregation's native tongue during the practice of the sacraments.

The matchless discovery came out of Grundtvig's desire to define 'the Church' in the face of the various protesting and persecuted religious assemblies in Denmark. Grundtvig realized that he had no precise ecclesiastical criteria for determining the authentic parameters of the faith. As a basis for Christianity, it was clear that the Bible must be abandoned, for the Christian community pre-dated the New Testament.¹⁰ In the 1820s, Grundtvig was exploring Church history, and was attracted to Irenaeus's 'positive' theology of growth, development and belief in the progress of mankind. Crucially, it

¹⁰ Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 50.

was also study and translation of Irenaeus that led to the discovery itself, for Grundtvig (who worked on the assumption that John was the author of the fourth Gospel) found in Irenaeus a continuation of the tradition handed down to him by word of mouth from Polycarp, who in turn had had direct connection to the Evangelist.¹¹ By 1825, Grundtvig had his answer to the problem of the authentic Church and of biblical interpretation, namely the Apostles' Creed. Using this, 'the only true historico-Christian Church criterion', Grundtvig was able to define the Church and read the Scriptures aright.¹² Its first major expression was found in *Kirkens Gienmæle* [The Church's Retort],¹³ a scathing indictment of H. N. Clausen, a conventional and not particularly controversial churchman of the time. Grundtvig used his 'discovery' to attack the traditional Lutheran establishment *via* Clausen, accusing 'scripture theologians' of betraying and abandoning Christianity. The publication caused widespread outrage and resulted in a suspension of Grundtvig's living and placing him under official censorship, which was to last for a number of years.¹⁴

Despite its apparent 'pastoral' emphasis on the life of the congregation, in keeping with the tone set by the *Church's Retort* the matchless discovery tends to serve a polemical purpose in Grundtvig's sermons and writing. Grundtvig's three main targets are Lutheran individualism, 'dead letter' Scripturalism, and the elevation of 'foreign' ideas over the local common-sense confession of Christianity. Against each he sets the Christianity of 'the people', that is, the life of the culturally and linguistically defined community of ordinary folk.

2.1 Individual vs. congregation

The 'matchless discovery' is also sometimes referred to as *Kirkelige Oplysning* (which has variously been translated—rather awkwardly—into English as 'Churchly views' or 'ecclesiastical enlightenment'). Grundtvig uses his 'Churchly view' to combat the Protestant tendency towards individualism, instead emphasizing the continuing witness of a community preserving the tradition and passing it on from generation to generation.¹⁵ In 1868, *Den*

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ In *Udvalgte Skrifter* IV, 395ff.

¹⁴ Thanning reports that the attack on Clausen caused such a furore that business was disrupted and the stock exchange in Copenhagen was brought to a halt. While Grundtvig retained belief in his discovery, he later regretted his abrupt tactics and the censure that was applied to him and softened his judgement on the ability of the Church to receive people of differing opinions. It is worth noting that Kierkegaard, no fan of the matchless discovery, nonetheless saw Grundtvig's concession as yet another example of the compromise prevalent in Christendom that valued worldly comfort above passionate conviction.

¹⁵ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 214.

christelige Børnelærdom [Elementary (or Childhood) Christian Teachings] collected together a set of essays that had appeared individually in the years between 1855 and 1861.¹⁶ Despite their name, the ‘elementary’ teachings are not a primer for school children but rather an occasion for Grundtvig to expound further on his ‘Churchly view’, a view that he claims is basic, or elementary, to all Christians. In this work, Grundtvig has much good to say about Luther’s catechism. However, in a move against individualistic voluntarism Grundtvig thinks that the traditional Lutheranism of the catechism ‘confuses the witness of the church with the individual’s opinion on it and explanation of it’.¹⁷

As part reaction against what he thought of as Lutheran excess, Grundtvig’s preference for community over and above the individual prompted him to think of the Church—and not God—in which faith takes refuge. At times he speaks of the prodigal son who returns to the Mother Church and not to the Heavenly Father.¹⁸ Grundtvig emphasizes that salvation comes out of living with Christ, rather than the death of Christ. Thus, it is baptism into the living Christian community, and not the cross (with its individualistic connotations of personal sin, sacrifice and forgiveness) that forms the focus of his theology.¹⁹ In an essay concerning the third article of the faith, Grundtvig writes that as long as we have no conception of our admission into the people of God as a community, ‘then we cannot have adequate conviction of the forgiveness of sins . . . For it is not sent to any individual but to the whole church. . . .’²⁰

2.2 Dead letter vs. living word

It is primarily because of the occasion of baptism that the current community has the opportunity to loudly confess the Creed, thus orally transferring the Christian tradition onto the next generation, as it was orally handed down to them.

This vocal and clear witness of the congregation . . . which must be accepted and believed in as His Apostle’s and His own witness, passed on from mouth to mouth and generation to generation as the Word from his own mouth . . . *these* [in the truest sense] are the elementary Christian teachings . . .²¹

¹⁶ ‘Elementary Christian Teachings’ in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, trans. Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lykne Jensen (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1984).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁸ See E. L. Allen, *Bishop Grundtvig: A Prophet of the North* (London: James Clarke, 1949), 70.

¹⁹ See Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 124.

²⁰ ‘Concerning our Third Article of Faith’ in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 146.

²¹ ‘Elementary’, 131; also P. G. Lindhardt, *Grundtvig: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1951), 35–6 (*US IV*, 386).

As a result of his high view of confession and the other verbal aspects of Christian practice, it became essential for Grundtvig to maintain that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the words of baptism and communion are all from an authentic oral tradition traced back to 'the mouth of the Lord'.²² Kirmmse notes that Grundtvig's proof of this point is not always clear, but that in any case 'Grundtvig attributes a directly divine origin and a much earlier date to the Apostle's Creed than scholarship has been able to establish'.²³ Grundtvig in fact has a Kierkegaard to thank for this aspect of his discovery. Søren's older brother, Peter Kierkegaard, was a priest in the Grundtvigian camp who refused to assist in a forced baptism on confessional grounds. In *Om Religionsforfølgelse* [On Religious Persecution]²⁴ Grundtvig took his part and the action against Peter was dropped. Peter returned the favour and, in 1840, he developed the idea that the Creed had been delivered to the disciples by Christ himself during the 40 days after the resurrection.²⁵ Grundtvig liked this hypothesis, and recommended it to his friends and followers as a neat solution to an acute Apostolic problem. It seemed to him 'absolutely necessary that the Lord himself before his ascension verbally instituted baptism'.²⁶

The emphasis on the Creed sets Grundtvig's Churchly view against so-called 'Scripture Christianity'. By this Grundtvig did not mean biblical literalists only, but also those who focussed their energies on translation, source criticism or idealistic conformity to the text. 'The Church' grumbles Grundtvig, 'is not a reading society' but 'a community of faith'. Preaching is not writing or talking about writing, it is to 'proclaim the word of faith'.²⁷ The 'elementary' basics of the authentic faith 'have laid not in a book but in the church itself as a community of Christian people'.²⁸

That the Christianity of the 'matchless discovery' parts ways with many contemporary conceptions of 'authentic' Christianity, Grundtvig is in no doubt. In an allusion to Søren Kierkegaard's insistence on living a life consistent with the biblical model of Christianity, Grundtvig writes:

If one now says what many both have said and will say, namely, that this Christianity is not 'the Christianity of the New Testament', then in a way one has appearances on one's side. For if by the 'New Testament' one understands

²² Kirmmse, *Golden*, 213 ('Kirkelige Oplysninger' in *VU* III, 438).

²³ *Ibid.*, 507 n. 81.

²⁴ In *US* VIII, 450ff.

²⁵ The Roman Catholic Church in the late nineteenth century also made recourse to the 'esoteric teaching' of the 40 days in order to add weight to its own ecclesiastical/apostolic claims. See, for example, Alfred Loisy's account of the 'Society of Christ' which was said to form the foundation of the primitive Church. *The Gospel and the Church*, trans. Christopher Home (London: Ibister, 1903), Section IV 'The Church', esp. 146–9.

²⁶ From an unreferenced letter in Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 86.

²⁷ Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 37 (from the preface *Christelige Prædiker* I).

²⁸ 'Elementary', 129.

only the book...and not the New Covenant itself, *which is the baptismal covenant*, then indeed we ourselves confess that our Christianity is not some sort of book Christianity, but the Christianity of Christ and his Church.²⁹

Grundtvig sometimes describes the Creed as 'a source of life' [*Livskilde*], while the Bible is merely 'a source of light' [*Lyskilde*].³⁰ In a controversial move that caused him to lose some of his more traditionally minded followers, Grundtvig also often refers to the Bible as the 'dead letter', at one time going so far as to refer to bibliocentric Christianity as 'the Tree of Death' in the Garden of Eden, in that it replaces the paradise of freedom and life with the constrictions of scholarly arrogance.³¹ Calvinists and Lutherans are said to base their doctrinal systems 'on the dead letter and on the concept of scripture' and are thus accused of having a form of Christianity that the temporal life of man 'must be cancelled out in the name of salvation'.³² Opposed to this, Grundtvig sets his Churchly view of the Christian congregation and its 'living expression' of faith, suggesting that the new congregational Christian life is more human than the old life ever could be.³³

2.3 Foreign ideas vs. common sense

The verbal expression of faith involved in Churchly activities such as baptism and communion represent the common person's expression of Christianity, and thus, for Grundtvig, the *authentic* one. True Christianity is found 'in the loudly proclaimed confession of the Church by baptism and communion'.³⁴ On the other hand, the faith of the scripture theologians (if they claim to have faith at all) is in thrall to Rationalism, sophistry and academic pedantry. Grundtvig's main problem with scripture-based Protestant Christianity, however, was that it relied on a book that was translated from foreign languages, placing a further obstacle between the people and the reality of the truths that the biblical writers were trying to express. For Grundtvig, Roman Catholicism fares no better. Catholics trace their authority back to the person of the

²⁹ Ibid., 135 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 214 (VU III, 440).

³¹ 'Christian Signs of Life' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 157.

³² 'Signs of Life', 151. This 'anti-life' attitude is later explicitly linked to Kierkegaard and his view that the only true disciple of Christ will look like a solitary 'begging monk', 152.

³³ Ibid., 152. In 1857, with reference to the creedal nature of his church (and against the memory of his brother) Peter Kierkegaard would write in defence of Grundtvig by referring to his present age as the 'living generation', which is an 'ever more splendid renewing repetition in the life of the Church'. One which stands as prophetic proof and demonstration [*Spådomsbeviset*] of the path by which the God-man will lead the human race to the 'fulfilment of the age' [*Tidens Fylde*]. Fr. Hammerich (ed), *Det Første Skandinaviske Kirkemøde* (København: C. G. Iversens Boghandel, 1857), 114.

³⁴ Unreferenced quotation in Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 37.

Apostle Peter, yet Grundtvig suggests that 'the Rock' of Matthew 16.18 upon which the Church was built was not Peter himself, but instead it was Peter's *confession* 'Thou art the Christ'.³⁵ Grundtvig also claims to differ from Roman Catholicism because it is the rank and file community, and not the learned clergy class, who are the custodians of the tradition. Instead, the living voice of the Spirit comes to the people in the faith of their fathers, and, crucially, in the common language of the community.³⁶ If, writes Grundtvig,

we try to derive the faith from Scripture, we shall be arguing till the Day of Judgement . . . about what the Christian faith is that we are to defend . . . No book can confer life, not even the Bible. [The Christian community] is a fellowship of faith begotten and preserved through the spoken word as this goes down from generation to generation.³⁷

In a sermon on Luke 7.13 Grundtvig claims that

the reason why the Lord's presence became steadily weaker and more unrecognisable amongst us and our forefathers was none other than that faith in the means of grace that the Lord has instituted gradually faded and swung over either to the Scriptures [or] to our self-made devotions . . .³⁸

The 'self-made devotions' of the elite clerical class, and the language/translation issue with the Scriptures, was, for Grundtvig, of vital importance. Until Christianity is expressed in the language of 'the people', thus allowing them to participate in Christian community and witness, it is no Christianity at all. One of Grundtvig's favourite adjectives is *folkelig*, which expresses both the 'popular' and the 'national' character of a people and leads to the noun *folkelighed*, which denotes the more political sense of 'what belongs to the people'. For Grundtvig, it is a pseudo-Christianity that relies on an elite class (whether priestly or academic) for its authority, and it is a 'foreign' religion. By relying on other languages, or on learned scholars, this form of Christianity is far removed from the popular, folksy roots that Grundtvig thinks give life to the authentic Christianity of the confessing community. Thus, in keeping with Grundtvig's overriding concern that Christianity should be *folkelig*, he is keen to use his discovery in aid of wresting the reins from the elite-minded clergy and the secular academic. Since Christianity is something that should 'be attractive to all "the little ones" in every sense' it is

clearly impossible that such a form of Christianity [can be] derived from and based on books—and in particular on an old book whose origin is obscure . . .

³⁵ Ibid. (*Christelige Prædikener* III, 389).

³⁶ See Allen, *Bishop*, 64, 65.

³⁷ Ibid., 65–6 (from the preface to *Christelige Prædikener* I).

³⁸ 'Sermon on the 16th Sunday in Trinity 1836: Luke 7.13' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 180–1.

whose original languages can only be very few and even those imperfectly known . . .³⁹

3. *MENNESKE FØRST*—HUMAN FIRST

We have just considered the factors that constitute Grundtvig's *mageløse opdagelse* or 'matchless discovery'—the first of the thoughts guiding his theology. The second essential guiding thought for Grundtvig which we must now consider is '*Menneske først og Kristen så*' or 'Human (or "Man") first and then Christian'. We have already seen how for Grundtvig true Christianity only exists within the oral confession of a living human community. Whereas the focus of the *mageløse opdagelse* was the content of 'Christianity', *Menneske først* focuses on the content of 'Humanity'.

The phrase is taken from the 1837 poem of the same name, but the idea can be found as early as 1815.⁴⁰ The poem '*Menneske Først*' warns against anachronistically finding 'Christianity' in human history:

Abraham was God's good friend
But Christian by no means.
Let it not be thought
That David and many faithful men of God
Were Christian before Christ came.
[This idea] has become the lie and vanity of Christianity
It is not an idea to be kept!
...
Human first and then Christian,
This is the main point.
Christianity we for nothing received,
This is the complete blessing.⁴¹

Drawing from his earlier enthusiasm for Norse mythology and pagan culture, Grundtvig developed his theory that the depth and breadth of human experience need not be understood exclusively within 'Christian' forms. Mankind and its cultures was a thing to be celebrated as part of God's good creation—Christianity was not an escape route but a participation in and completion of human culture. At its most basic, 'human first' maintains that until one comprehends the fully human, Christianity remains alien.⁴²

³⁹ 'Elementary', 136–7.

⁴⁰ Holm, *Historie*, 133.

⁴¹ In *Sang-Værk*, Bind I-V (København, 1944), Bind III, 296–7. Cf. Holm, *Historie*, 133 (VU VIII, 113–15).

⁴² Grundtvig never wavered in his conviction that 'the way to Christian discipleship lies through a truly human life . . . first a man and then a Christian'. Allen, *Bishop*, 210.

As an account of what makes up the 'fully human', there are three related facets to *Menneske først*. First, Grundtvig uses it anthropologically to tell the 'story' of general human existence. Secondly Grundtvig puts 'human first' to use as a way to champion the specific condition required for human flourishing, namely national culture. For Grundtvig 'fully human' is explicitly connected to national identity rooted in common culture, Mother Tongue and Fatherland. Thirdly, it is only in the 'fully human' life of language, land and culture that true religion will flourish.

3.1 Human existence

Grundtvig's anthropology or story of human identity is defined by his belief that humans are essentially *good* and that they are essentially *social* beings. With *Menneske først*, Grundtvig polemically opposes what he sees as Manichean and individualistic tendencies in rival Christian accounts of human existence. Some theological approaches presuppose a clash between the earthly and the divine world. Not so for Grundtvig. 'The conflict did not seem to trouble Grundtvig too much. But it took him a long time to resolve the problem and he dealt with it partly through his famous dictum.'⁴³

With regard to the 'goodness' of human life and existence, Grundtvig rejected all ideology condemning sinful man.⁴⁴ It has rightly been said of Grundtvig that he preached 'the grandeur of human nature more readily than its misery'.⁴⁵ Grundtvig is set in opposition to what he saw as the Calvinist and Lutheran 'anti-life' theologies, which tended to speak of salvation as redemption *from* human life, rather than redemption *of* human life. To propose that the temporal life of man must be cancelled out in the name of salvation is, for Grundtvig, 'an unjustifiable condemnation of the entire life of natural man'.⁴⁶ Inspired by Irenaeus's emphasis on God as creator of the world of mankind, Grundtvig writes in his 'Introduction to Norse Mythology' (1832):

Man is not an ape, destined first to ape the other animals and then himself until the world's end. Rather he is a glorious incomparable creature, in whom divine powers shall proclaim, develop and enlighten themselves through thousands of generations as a divine experiment . . .⁴⁷

⁴³ Wählin, 'Denmark', 256.

⁴⁴ See the introduction to 'Elementary', 128.

⁴⁵ Allen, 'Grundtvig', 210.

⁴⁶ 'Signs of Life', 151.

⁴⁷ 'Introduction to Norse Mythology' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 49; Thanning links Grundtvig's studies of Irenaeus directly to the inspiration of *Menneske først* (at 43).

In an 1841 article, Grundtvig speaks of 'the false and the dead Christianity that [sets] the great gulf between heaven and earth, between God and man, and between time and eternity'.⁴⁸ He continues:

The more kindly and the more inwardly we can link the divine and the human, the heavenly and the earthly, the temporal and the eternal, the spiritual and the corporal, the better it is and the more we are like our Lord Jesus Christ who was one with his heavenly Father and yet a human being...⁴⁹

It is this emphasis on the essential goodness of the 'stuff' of human life that lies behind Grundtvig's criticism of Lutheranism when he claims that they attempt to espouse 'the Christian renewal of human life without a previous human life to be renewed'.⁵⁰

The essential goodness of human life cannot be separated from the social context of that life. Grundtvig found it impossible to celebrate humanity while at the same time denigrating the cultural and institutional products that are a result of humanity's social and historical existence. When it comes to determining the ground for man's true identity, Grundtvig resists any individualistic solutions, for a human being is not an independent being who can be wrested from the conditions of time.⁵¹

It is a part of Grundtvig's opposition to so-called Lutheran individualism that his story of authentic existence also resists grounding human identity solely in the Divine-human relationship. For this reason Auken can place Grundtvig's project within the context of '*neue Mythologie*', that is 'the idea of the necessity of creating a new primary foundation for cognition, social morality and art'.⁵² An example of this aspect of Grundtvigian anthropology can be found in his early periodical *Danne-Virke*. In it Grundtvig formulates a philosophy where God may be the secure foundation on which all cognition rests, but that does not imply that man can reach a satisfactory and clear understanding of his own being merely by being involved in a 'God-ward' relation.⁵³ Instead, man's understanding arises from revelation, art and science.⁵⁴ In other words, authentic human identity is essentially grounded in the religious, artistic and intellectual cultural context of 'the people' among which the person lives. Grundtvig's ideal is the developed personality 'bound up with

⁴⁸ From an unreferenced 1841 article in Anders P. Thyssen, 'Grundtvig's Ideas on the Church and the People 1848-72' in N. F. S. Grundtvig: *Tradition and Renewal* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab [The Danish Institute], 1983), 359.

⁴⁹ Unreferenced 1841 article in Thyssen, 'Ideas', 359.

⁵⁰ 'Signs of Life', 151.

⁵¹ See William Michelsen, 'Grundtvig's place in Danish Intellectual Thought—With particular reference to Søren Kierkegaard' in N. F. S. Grundtvig: *Tradition and Renewal*, 300.

⁵² Auken, *Sagas*, 632.

⁵³ Ibid., 638. See also part III of *Sagas Spejl*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 638 (*Åbenbarig, Konst og Vidskab*, 1817).

others in the bundle of national life'.⁵⁵ Koch notes that for Grundtvig 'man is not an eternal timeless soul that can get along as well or as ill in one place as in another', going on to say that for Grundtvig, 'man is not an "ego" but a link in a great national continuity whereby he is joined not to timeless eternal ideas but to a particular concrete history'.⁵⁶

3.2 Human national culture

It is here that Grundtvig's notion of the fully human social life meets his nationalistic theology. The essential goodness and sociality of human life is not generalized or free-floating. It adheres only in the specific context of a people's cultural surroundings:

One must stick to the human nature that history in any particular place reveals as that which decides the yardstick for the reasonable demands people can make on one another and creates the natural ideal which society can endeavour to realise there successfully.⁵⁷

'Human' for Grundtvig means being human in a specific place and time within a specific society, and 'society' for Grundtvig is equivalent to 'nationality'. For Grundtvig humans do not exist in content-less general societies, but rather in concrete, specific instantiations of national culture. There exists no abstract language and culture, but only English, German, Danish and so on. Grundtvig always sees persons within the race and as a member of a race, as a citizen and as a member of the community. In short, *man*, apart from the nation to which he belongs, is an abstraction.⁵⁸ It is this thought that undergirds all that Grundtvig writes about *Menneske først*.

Yet Grundtvig does not hold that *all* expressions that spring forth from a particular nation are authentic representations of that nation's spirit and thus of the ground for human identity or 'man'. As we have seen, he was dismissive of the rarefied intellectual and artistic output emanating from much of what is now called Golden Age Denmark. In this, as in all things, Grundtvig strove for *folkelighed*, maintaining that the truth of full human flourishing lies in human life being national *and* popular. In *Danskeren* [The Dane] Grundtvig defines a real national life as

⁵⁵ Allen, 'Grundtvig', 210.

⁵⁶ Koch, *Grundtvig*, 127.

⁵⁷ 'Selections from Living Memory' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 94.

⁵⁸ 'For Grundtvig, the human always exists as something national.' Koch, *Grundtvig*, 125. See also Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 102; Allen, *Bishop*, 54.

one in which the lives of all the individuals that go to make up a people must find a loftier dignity, strength . . . and *explanation* than that which any individual person confined to his own limits can achieve.⁵⁹

In opposition to the representations of cultural elitism of people such as Mynster, Martensen and the poet Heiberg (and, in Grundtvig's opinion, Kierkegaard) who seemed to espouse an attitude of rising above the masses as an act of Danish sophistication, Grundtvig sought to come down amongst the people.

Grundtvig 'rediscovered' the peasant as the true guardian of ethnicity and national authenticity, writing in the poem *Nyårs-Morgen* [New Year's Morning] (1824) that 'the Spirit must fly, but low above the ground'.⁶⁰ The aim of the poem is to awaken the common peoples of the North 'from their deep soul-slumber'⁶¹ and reawaken in them an appreciation of their identity as a 'true folk'. Wrapped up in Grundtvig's understanding of 'Fatherland' are four elements of a true 'people': (1) a common land, (2) a common language, (3) a common history and forefathers and (4) common culture (songs, folk dances, etc.).⁶² Without these elements, there can be no human flourishing. With their foreign words and ideas and their disparagement of the 'low' and popular, the elites are forever seeking to escape the very things that will ultimately give them life. In his 'Introduction to Norse Mythology' (1832) Grundtvig claims:

popular knowledge or folk culture and education in the proper spiritual sense . . . simply must be made immediately wherever disintegration is to be prevented, folk-life to be saved and scholarship to prosper.⁶³

Furthermore, 'if nations and states are to prosper', true appreciation for the *folkelighed* is necessary.⁶⁴ Grundtvig opened an 1838 series of lectures with a polemic against the elitist educational establishment. Such attitudes, he maintained, bring only destruction. Instead 'learning exists for the sake of life, human life . . .'.⁶⁵

3.3 Human national religion

Grundtvig's emphasis on *Menneske først* was evident in his political and ecclesiastical decisions in practice as well as in his theories of mythology,

⁵⁹ Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 101 (*Danskeren* periodical 1848–51).

⁶⁰ Rerup, 'Position', 239 ('*Nyårs-Morgen*' in *US IV*, 239ff).

⁶¹ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157 (*US IV*, 240).

⁶² See Wählin, 'Denmark', 265.

⁶³ 'Norse Mythology', 48.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁵ 'Living Memory', 91.

education and human culture. Unashamedly populist in outlook, his insistence that human flourishing relied on healthy national culture led Grundtvig to support the 1848 democratic reforms and, significantly, moved him to argue for freedom in all matters of Church and state.

As a result of the 1848 revolution, in 1849 the 'People's Church' was created to replace the State Church. Although in practice this revision often amounted to not much more than a change in terminology, the reforms were intended to reflect the shift in emphasis of the locus of power within the Church, as well as suggest a new *raison d'être* for the national institution. Grundtvig passionately supported the move, and saw in it the potential for a reinvigorated *folkelig* religion. In effect, the new People's Church allowed for a number of 'free churches' within a parochially based system (a relationship that remains to this day), a result of Grundtvigian manoeuvring that dispensed with a separate Church constitution that could be hijacked by either minority liberal clergy or minority biblical literalist enthusiasts within the wider ecclesial body. An intentionally vague and broad vision, the Church was now identified more than ever with the varied popular life of the nation, rather than definite state regulations or laws. Paradoxically, by placing the emphasis on the (largely peasant) population and not the King and rule of law, the Grundtvigian solution tended to integrate the Church even further with the structures of state. In the post-1848 period of constitutional reform, any institution that represented the moral and spiritual will of 'the people' also had political and economic ramifications. The State Church belonged to the King. The People's Church belonged to the common man.⁶⁶

Visits to England in the 1830s had convinced Grundtvig that a stable, tolerant and free civil society was the best home for Christianity to flourish, as opposed to an officially institutionalized form of the religion. Less, not more, state intervention was needed in religious matters. It was, as Kirmmse describes, a 'free-market' approach to faith.⁶⁷ The *folk* attained their full status only in freedom. Grundtvig's 'free civil society' programme involved two elements: *Præstefrihed* [Priest freedom] and *Sognebåndløsning* [loosening of parish bonds, or congregational freedom].⁶⁸ In keeping with Grundtvig's *laissez-faire* approach, it was an unabashed attempt to let popular preachers swim and unpopular ones sink. Grundtvig was confident that those who preached old-fashioned traditions and did so in the down-to-earth language favoured by 'the people' would win out over the rationalist, academic (and state-sponsored) Christianity preached from some pulpits.⁶⁹ Well before the 1848 reforms, Grundtvig's *The Danish State Church, an Unpartisan View*

⁶⁶ See Kirmmse, *Golden*, 73–6; 219–20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Cf. Kirmmse, *Golden*, 215–16.

(1834) argued that the state was a *Borgerstat* [civil state] and not a Christian state. It said of the Church that it was a *Stats-Indretning* [arrangement of the state].⁷⁰ The 'People's Church' is one of no compulsion, enjoying the full fruits of a healthy civil society. 'The Church exists for the sake of the people, and not the people for the sake of the Church . . .'⁷¹

The ecclesiastical/political situation in Denmark chimed well with Grundtvig's theological project of promoting a national self-awareness in 'the people'. We have seen that for Grundtvig *Menneske først* sets the stage for the fully human only insofar as it is a fully realized *national* human. Grundtvig writes that before we can fully appreciate the community of saints and the Spirit of the Lord, 'we must first come to know the natural spirit of our nation and our natural love in their best guises'.⁷² Only when the cultural life of the *folk* is in rude health, and only then, can one go on to speak of authentic religion. 'A people [*folk*] has to be livingly aware of itself [as a people]' before it is of any use to talk about salvation and 'the word by which the spiritual world is opened to us'.⁷³ Or, as Grundtvig puts it more succinctly elsewhere: 'The spirit of the people is the necessary presupposition for living Christianity.'⁷⁴ Just as man must be conscious of himself as a man before he can hear the Gospel, so too 'a people must be strongly conscious of themselves as a people before it is any use to another spirit than their own speaking to them . . . *If no racial spirit exists it must first be created before it can receive the Gospel*'.⁷⁵

In the 1847 *Popular Culture and Christianity* (a sort of detailed commentary on 'human first and then Christian') Grundtvig states:

Only when Christians everywhere make common cause with the natural person [*Natur-Menneskene*] in this respect, only then will Christianity and Popular Culture [*folkelighed*] generally, and especially in Denmark, come into their original, free and only proper natural relationship.⁷⁶

It is true that Grundtvig occasionally makes mention of 'Christians everywhere' and the 'common cause' of Christianity and popular culture. However, it is to his own culture specifically that Grundtvig unapologetically devotes his energies.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Ibid., 216 (VU III, 316).

⁷¹ Ibid. (VU V, 379).

⁷² 'Third Article', 146. See also Kirmmse, *Golden*, 209.

⁷³ Wählin, 'Denmark', 265 (*Folkelighed og Kristendom*, 1877).

⁷⁴ Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 100 (US IX, 80ff). 'Christianity, for Grundtvig, was never forgotten. He had the conviction that a true people had to be or would become a Christian people by following the moral and ethical principles of being a "true folk".' Wählin, 'Denmark', 267.

⁷⁵ Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 100 (US IX, 80ff (emphasis added)).

⁷⁶ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 228 (VU V, 247 (emphasis added)).

⁷⁷ Grundtvig variously refers to the 'Northern', 'Norse', and 'Scandinavian' folk-identity having the Norwegians and the Swedes in mind, and occasionally the Anglo-Saxon English. The Danes, however, were unquestionably the jewel in the Scandinavian crown and Grundtvig does not differentiate Norse/Northern from Danish national culture.

Another 1847 article called for a *folke-skole* (People's School), which was to be exclusively Danish because 'first we have to be Danish . . . before it is of any use to talk to [the people] either about temporal or eternal life'.⁷⁸ Seeing 'foreign' ideas in the pronouncements of his elitist contemporaries, Grundtvig explicitly set himself against Mynster and Martensen with his view that the state should not quash the *folkelighed* spiritual groundswell within the Church. Only the person who naturally (i.e. nationally and culturally) has faith in God has true faith. Awakening pride in Danish culture 'is a precondition for the growth of true Christianity'.⁷⁹

The death of the *Danish* popular culture is the spiritual death of the people, which must be healed by the resurrection of popular culture before the people can be talked about *living Christianity* in any other sense than mere shouting into the wind . . . First we must be *Danish* . . .⁸⁰

4. VERDENS-HISTORIEN—WORLD HISTORY

Grundtvig's theological/nationalistic scheme does not rest with a blanket commendation of all 'nations' wherever they may be found as fertile soil for Christian flowering. General racial and national feeling is all well and good, but it is the *Norse* nation that takes pride of place not only in Grundtvig's personal opinion, but also within his world-historical system. Grundtvig's conclusions rest on two premises. The first is that 'history' has a linear structure, unfolding the Divine plan in a drama that has a definite beginning, middle and end. The second is that nations play a part as actors in this drama, with a few select cultures enjoying favoured status as God's Chosen Peoples, charged with specific roles for specific ages.

4.1 The Divine unfolding

Like many of his contemporaries, Grundtvig saw "history" as the medium through which the Divine Will is continually being realised in humanity'.⁸¹ Grundtvig worked with the assumption that 'the lines of communication between the sacred and the profane were still kept open'.⁸² His methodology is fed by his reflections on 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 ('now we see but through a

⁷⁸ Wählin, 'Denmark', 265 (*VU V*, 250–1).

⁷⁹ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 299.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 229 (*VU V*, 250–1).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 204.

glass darkly'), where he approaches history in the same way that he approaches biblical exegesis—the New interprets the Old. This exegetical typology becomes the template for interpreting human existence, understanding the past and at the same time giving hope for the future.⁸³ Grundtvig applied this directly to an interpretation of Denmark's history feeling that the study of the culture's past would serve to reveal an understanding of the spiritual status and religious tasks facing the present. Denmark is to its history now what the New is to the Old Testament. Furthermore, the tools for interpretation lie within the culture itself.⁸⁴

For Grundtvig, the will of God for humanity is not imposed from the outside, but rather is revealed in the inner workings and meaning of a people. It is not the development of the Church or of Scripture that marks the outline of world-history, but rather it is the development of fully human and free society. 'It is this which constitutes the proper subject of universal history.'⁸⁵ A good example of this is Grundtvig's *Handbook of World History* which did not look to official archives, but rather found its sources in the people's legends and songs for piecing together his narrative of world history and especially the character of the Danish race.⁸⁶ What Grundtvig finds in the myths and legendary past is 'an inborn heroism' to the Northern peoples which serves to describe their present character and in turn provides a clear prophetic element that suggests the people's Divine destiny.⁸⁷

The second edition of *Introduction to Norse Mythology* (1832 expanded edition of the 1808 original) owes a great deal to Herder's conception of history as the divine education of the human race in its various groupings. Herder's 'Law of Progress'⁸⁸ fits nicely with Grundtvig's longstanding debt to Irenaeus, and Grundtvig shares the Church father's historical apocalyptic theology, maintaining that the world was developing to a certain end-point. Within Grundtvig's narrative, humanity as a whole goes through stages analogous to the growth of a human individual, with times of youthfulness, adulthood and old age. Grundtvig equates the Youth of a people with their imagination and myths, Adulthood with their emotive religion and feeling, and finally Old Age with reflection and the potential for corruption.⁸⁹ Following Irenaeus's 6, 000-year timeline for the completion of creation, Grundtvig

⁸³ See Danne-Virke, 'Grundtvig's consciousness of history's resonance [*efterklangsbevidsthed*] in this way puts into practice Luther's point that the Bible is its own interpreter and schematic.' Holm, *Historie*, 131.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Unreferenced Grundtvig quotation in Allen, *Bishop*, 48.

⁸⁶ 'What concerned him was the development of peoples rather than the achievements of individuals.' Allen, *Bishop*, 44.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 40, 41.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁹ Allen points out that Grundtvig applies this schematic to people groups in a 'somewhat magisterial fashion'. Allen, *Bishop*, 46.

reckoned that by his time there may be about 600 or 700 years left to go.⁹⁰ By his calculations humanity was in the prime of its life, on the brink of 'old age' and at the point where it could either descend into senility or properly awaken to full knowledge. Grundtvig states that the world is out of joint, a great shipwreck. In order to be rescued 'we must strive to understand only as much of it as we need for the moment in order to recognise our calling and proceed on our designated path'.⁹¹ Grundtvig refers to 'nations, both past and present' who experience 'an enthusiastic youth and an active manhood [but which] give way only to spiritless, naked old age'.⁹² The reason why some nations lose their way is that they are chasing 'enlightenment that turns into a shadow' and Grundtvig calls on 'aboriginal Norsemen' to come to a rebirth in their higher learning by rediscovering their people's culture.⁹³

4.2 The nation's unique purpose

It has already been suggested that for Grundtvig, world-history was a universal drama in which the actors are not individuals but people groups.⁹⁴ Yet the role played by each 'actor' is not a task set in stone, and the essential phenomenon of freedom applies to nations as well as to individuals. Grundtvig holds that each 'people' reaches the pinnacle of its development only when it realizes the special spiritual role for which God has singled it out.⁹⁵ However, it is entirely possible that in a nation's freedom, it might well fail to properly complete its task. The Divine purpose might be appointed, but within the realm of 'freedom', that purpose is not inevitable. To that end, Grundtvig's 'literary nationalism' had a 'missionary character' and he devoted the full force of this history and theology to awakening the Danish spirit so that it might fulfil its task and choose to attain full development.⁹⁶ Working in popular periodicals such as *Danskeren* [The Dane] Grundtvig sought to rouse the Danish 'life force'.⁹⁷

Everything in Denmark is wonderfully prepared for an unparalleled golden age, which will also come if we just have the courage to await it and enough love for our country to bring it the sacrifices that we can anticipate which will repay themselves a hundredfold to our children and grandchildren!⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 43.

⁹¹ 'Norse Mythology', 35.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁴ See Allen, *Bishop*, 45.

⁹⁵ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 220.

⁹⁶ Rerup, 'Position', 242. See also Thyssen, 'Ideas', 359–60.

⁹⁷ Thanning, *Grundtvig*, 101 (*Danskeren*).

⁹⁸ Thyssen, 'Ideas', 347 (*Danskeren*).

It is for this reason that Grundtvig was thankful for the 1848 war with Prussian Germany and the Slesvig-Holstein crisis, for it helped to awaken a sense of hitherto dormant *Danishness*.⁹⁹

The historical/political events affecting a given nation were, for Grundtvig, tied to the cultural/spiritual state of that nation. Political successes and failures were directly applicable to the sensitivities of a nation to its Divine task and unique nature.¹⁰⁰ Many poems carry out the theme of national perdition being related to a shallow spiritual anaemia. 'Was there ever a God-fearing people that was annihilated by its enemies?' asked Grundtvig, answering his own question in the negative. That political and historical events contain judgments on the moral and religious conduct of peoples, is for Grundtvig 'as plain as day to every simple eye'.¹⁰¹ In his view 'political fate ultimately reflects spiritual health'.¹⁰² Grundtvig applies this critique to other nations. He notes the destruction inflicted on the communities and landscape of Britain thanks to the rapacious nature of the 'Anglo-Saxon' mercantile spirit,¹⁰³ and he was critical of the opulence of the Latin culture (and hence the Roman Church), which was merely derivative of the noble Greeks.¹⁰⁴ Closer to home, Grundtvig found the modern spirit of 'Enlightenment' and 'Rationalist' values to have its fruit in the French and their violent Revolution, which he claims is 'hostile to the life of man'.¹⁰⁵ Some nations have had their day. In his essay, 'The Christian Signs of Life', Grundtvig alludes to Luther's specifically *German* task of bringing preaching alive, and introducing the idea of presenting Christianity in mother-tongues. However, according to Grundtvig the Germanic people have now become arrogant and overbearing, a spiritual state that is reflected by their turbulent political reality.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ 'It was national self-consciousness and popular culture, then, rather than any political arrangements as such which for Grundtvig were the primary fruits of 1848.' Kirmmse, *Golden*, 235.

¹⁰⁰ Throughout his writing career Grundtvig 'persisted in seeing the links between the spiritual health and status of a nation and its political well-being'. *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 208 (*VU* II, 34).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰³ See 'Living Memory'. Schleiermacher expresses similar sentiments when he patriotically compares the 'sense for holy and divine things' of his fellow Prussians to that of the English, 'those proud islanders [who] know no other watchword than to profit and enjoy'. From the First Speech in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Coulter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

¹⁰⁴ Rome's greatest failure is that its literature, myths and traditions were swiped from the Greeks and were not 'lovingly cultivated over the centuries'. 'Norse Mythology', 39.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ In relation to the German desire for cultural hegemony, Grundtvig predicted disaster for Europe. If the Prussian German states were ever to be united under one leader, he writes, the result would be 'a power far more fearful in human eyes than France in her most dangerous period'. 'Living Memory', 101.

It is explicitly against this backdrop of competing national cultures that Grundtvig, who liked to call himself 'ultra-Danish',¹⁰⁷ intended to awaken Danish national pride. Pride and superiority is

The natural basis which every nation, just like every man, has for what is his own, which is therefore to a certain degree inseparable from the vitality of the national life of any country.¹⁰⁸

Grundtvig notes with approval the English attitude that would 'vote' for 'old England' even if that were to mean the rest of the world would perish:

In every nation this must be the way of thinking . . . it is a lamentable state of affairs [when] we hide our unquestionable partiality towards our Fatherland, our Mother-tongue, and all that belongs to them as though it were a crime . . .¹⁰⁹

Grundtvig's wish is to persuade

[a]ll those in whom there still runs a drop of Norse blood, reflecting a spiritual life, in order to unite them and lay the foundation of a new Danish spiritual culture . . . living, popular and all-embracing, while the ruins of the past might still be saved and used to advantage.¹¹⁰

Some important pieces on this theme are the poems in *Danne-Virke* such as *Påske-Lillien* [The Easter Lily]. The songs make the connection between Jesus' resurrection and the renewal of the Danish nation. Grundtvig notes repeatedly that the flower, like the hope of Denmark, is 'a peasant flower'.¹¹¹ In the face of the failure of the other nations, the Danes face the possibility of either following those nations into dissipation, or attaining their full Divine purpose as revealed in their own popular culture. Grundtvig recognizes that the current state of Danish national pride is in a precarious state. However, just as Christ rose again, so too can Norse culture. Drawing on the imagery of flowering and new growth, Grundtvig recommends his Denmark to the 'spring time' of resurrection, rather than the winter death of faded peoples, or the false fullness offered by the 'summer' of the Enlightened age:

Winter storm and hail and rain
Whistle and roar over the earth
But I stand firm under the sign
For it is Spring in the North.

¹⁰⁷ Koch, *Grundtvig*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ 'Living Memory', 103.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁰ 'Norse Mythology', 37–8.

¹¹¹ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 209 (VU VII, 284–91). Note that the Danish Easter Lily is the same as the common English daffodil.

We refuse with contempt
 Heady scents [*Rosenduft*] and summer splendour!¹¹²

Grundtvig also relies on an allusion to Matthew 4:1–11 (Christ's temptation in the wilderness) in which he plays on the word *sand*, which in Danish means 'truth', but also, as in English, refers to the stuff of the beach or the desert. Grundtvig uses this to make a poetic association between 'the truth' and the land and language of his forefathers:

Be quiet, You Tempter
 With the Ancestral Land
 Let it Be! [*Lad være*]
 I carve simple Runes in the sand (or: I carve only Runes in Truth)¹¹³

Anders Holm remarks of this poem: 'the poet can refuse temptation with nearly the same authority as Jesus'. Here Grundtvig recasts the 'stuff' of culture to his purposes, he is the Bard [*Skjalden*] who speaks of spiritual truth using the language of the land. 'The Truth is namely also the ground . . . and becomes the imagery of historical material that the poet can work with.'¹¹⁴

Drawing from his knowledge of its own 'heroic spirit', Grundtvig can look with hope towards Denmark's resurrection. If the people will only freely choose to embrace their destiny, the renewal will take place because Denmark has a pre-eminent place in God's plan for history. 'All of human history points to it [Scandinavia's awakening] like the finger of God . . . Denmark is history's Palestine.'¹¹⁵ The Danes were unquestionably God's chosen people for the present age for they are 'the divine experiment' and thus, Danish culture is also 'that of all the North, of humanity, of Christianity . . . and the cause of God Almighty'.¹¹⁶

Another key poem in this vein is *The Pleiades* (or *Seven Stars*) of *Christendom* [*Christenhedens Syvstjerne*], which perhaps marks the culmination of Grundtvig's historical-mythical-theological project.¹¹⁷ Written in 1854–55 the *Pleiades* interprets the seven churches of Revelations as the world-historical progress of Christianity through successive historical national congregations. Each nation brought, or will bring, Christianity to a higher degree of development. Every nation gets 300 years in which to dominate history's

¹¹² *Blomster-Tid* can be rendered 'Spring', but it is also literally 'the time of flowers'. Cf. Holm, *Historie*, 129 (DV II, s. 352).

¹¹³ The phrase attracting the word-play is '*jeg rister kun Runer i Sand*'. Cf. Holm, *Historie*, 110 (DV I, s. VIII).

¹¹⁴ Holm, *Historie*, 110, on the poem 'The Easter Lily' see also Kirmmse, *Golden*, 209. There is a further layer of allusion to the story of Christ writing in the dust in response to the woman caught in adultery (John 8.6).

¹¹⁵ From the poem 'New Year's Morn' (VU VII, 373). Cf. Kirmmse, *Golden*, 210.

¹¹⁶ Lindhardt, *Introduction*, 98 (US X, 45).

¹¹⁷ VU VI, 274–390.

development for better or for worse. In the introduction to the *Pleiades*, Grundtvig says that it is not supposed to be a work making a strict interpretation of Scripture. Instead, the essential thing was that the poem gave a beneficial overview of 'the course of the Christian people'. Grundtvig did not hide the fact that the poem points to the Nordic race as the most important, and the 'highest' of the present age. It is to the Northern race 'to whom the task has come to carry Christian life to a peak in modern Christianity'.¹¹⁸ Scandinavian culture was the penultimate nation and, according to Grundtvig's schematic, it is the place where Christianity's highest expression currently resides. 'Our hour has now arrived.'¹¹⁹

The mantle of history, and the ongoing revelation of full Christian truth, has now passed to the North.¹²⁰ Where the German gift to history was an awareness of the need to preach Christianity, it now falls to the Danes to give life to the Word by fusing the historical-cultural with the spiritual. As Grundtvig sees it, the Danish role is to clothe Christian truth in Fatherland and Mother-tongue:

The people's language, the mother tongue [*Moders-Målet*]
Mirror of the Spirit and speech of the heart,
[...]
Only in it, as in the womb [*Moders-Livet*]
Is the *Word* given to us by God.¹²¹

In the Scandinavian congregation the Lord has 'left his mouth behind on earth',¹²² leading Grundtvig to allude both to his 'matchless discovery' and to 'human first'. It is precisely because the ideas are Scandinavian that the world-historical task has fallen to them:

Only with us in the Scandinavian [*høinordiske*] congregation, can Christian life gradually regain *human form* . . . This is so, because in *God's word to us* we have found the *living concept* of faith, and hope and love.¹²³

Denmark is the place where the 'Christian' and the 'Human' will be united because it is in Denmark where *mageløse opdagelse* has come to light and *Menneske først* has come to life. In sum, Grundtvig takes his own theological inventions as the proof that the Danes are God's present chosen people.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Auken, *Sagas*, 642.

¹¹⁹ Thyssen, 'Ideas', 356 ('Pleiades', *VU VI*). The nations in order in the *Pleiades* are Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, German, Scandinavian and finally Indian, which Grundtvig wagers 'ten to one' will be the last of the Chosen nations. Cf. Kirmmse, *Golden*, 221 ('Pleiades', *VU VI*, 381).

¹²⁰ 'Christian Signs', 154.

¹²¹ Kirmmse, *Golden*, 222 (*VU VI*, 349).

¹²² *Ibid.* (*VU VI*, 337–8).

¹²³ *Ibid.* (*VU VI*, 283–4).

¹²⁴ 'This is most important to underscore, that Grundtvig thinks to have actual-historical [*sanselig-historisk*] contact with the Incarnation. Only he actually hears History's call [*klang*].'

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Grundtvig's matchless discovery, his vision of humanity and his ideas of the development of history and cultural destiny combine to make his a truly nationalistic theology. Søren Kierkegaard opposed Grundtvig and his followers throughout his career, often by name, as in the *CUP*, and often by implication, as seen in his formulation of contemporaneity in *PF* and *PC* and the cycles of the ages in *TA*.¹²⁵ At all points, whether explicitly or implicitly, Kierkegaard consistently counters the core elements underlying Grundtvigian nationalism.

These objections and correctives will be dealt with in full in what follows. However, at the end of this chapter, it is worth briefly sketching some points of Kierkegaard's explicit and implicit critique of Grundtvig. At a basic level, in *CUP* Kierkegaard has his pseudonym Climacus point out that the matchless discovery does not in any way 'solve' the problem of historical reliability when it comes to Christian accounts.¹²⁶ Grundtvig may have circumvented the issues surrounding source-critical approaches to scripture, but his appeal to apostolic witness continues to beg the question. Climacus asks why it is any more certain to base one's assurance of eternal happiness on a creed than on a book. In both cases, one is placing all one's hope in a message handed down *via* historical transmission, and thus the assurance of the completion of that message can only be an approximation. If faith is based on having all the information to hand, then faith can never get off the ground, for there will always be the possibility that not all the details are present, or that some more details might surface in the future. In other words, believers will always, in the end, have to have faith in the substance of the message, rather than the form of the message itself, if they are to have faith at all. In the following chapter we will look at Kierkegaard's answer to this problem, namely the attitude of 'contemporaneity' and the orientation towards the Moment of vision when the individual's continual need to make a decisive decision becomes apparent.

At a further level of critique, Kierkegaard provides conceptual challenges to some of Grundtvig's fundamental assumptions. Grundtvig clearly privileges language and verbal formulations over other aspects of communication, assuming as a matter of course that precise, native expressions can convey authentic truth. Yet as is well known, and as we shall explore in the following chapters, Kierkegaard draws the distinction between objective and subjective

This is because only he has the spiritual insight of the whole picture of history, and this picture resides in the same consciousness which is found in his understanding of the 'living word'. Holm, *Historie*, 132.

¹²⁵ Cf. *CUP*, 34–46; *PF*, 89–110; *PC*, 36–53, 96–102; *TA*, 61–8. The arguments are discussed at length in chs. 4 and 5 below.

¹²⁶ *CUP*, 38–9, 43–4.

truths. Objective truths are those facts which can be universally expressed and recognized in the world. Yet within the sphere of faith, authenticity and the God-relation, if there is any truth to be found, it will not be by way of the objective realm of language and number. The relation of a subject to a Subject is not a matter of quantitative proof, but of qualitative difference. Subjective truth is known only by appropriation and choice, and thus cannot be communicated directly as Grundtvig maintains. Instead, Kierkegaard employs the maieutic method of indirect communication in order to bring his readers to the point of decision for themselves, and not capitulation to the necessity of a knock-down argument or submission to the majority will of the group.

A connected problem is the emphasis that Grundtvig places on the sense of the common and the moral priority of the group over that of the individual. In *TA* and *POV*, to take but two examples, Kierkegaard explores the possibility that the 'crowd' is not the essential, primary source for authentic existence, and common sense not the best repository for eternal truth.¹²⁷ *WL* contains an analysis of patriotic love—the *eros* that Kierkegaard calls 'passionate preference' which highlights the instability inherent in offering one's complete allegiance to the ephemeral, and ultimately self-serving social construct of 'nation'.¹²⁸ Grundtvig prioritizes a person's 'culture-relation' over their 'God-relation', and thinks that 'man', apart from his nation, is an abstraction. Kierkegaard forcefully maintains that the abstraction occurs when one defines the individual as a mere component of a transgenerational cultural herd—which is the vision of identity Grundtvig seems to hold.

In a related vein, we have seen that for Grundtvig, it is 'plain as day' that national success is directly related to the nation's relation to God. This makes two assumptions, both opposed by Kierkegaard. The first assumption is that 'groups' can relate to God and to each other in a manner that is analogous to the way that individuals relate to each other and to God. Kierkegaard's attack upon the christianized culture of Christendom and his analysis of the phenomenon of 'the crowd' challenges this notion.¹²⁹ To be sure, groups, cultures and nations play their part in providing context and content to individual identity, but it remains the case that societies are made up of persons—they are not persons in their own right. The second assumption is that 'success' in the form of military, economic or cultural sophistication is a mark of a right relation to God. We shall see how Kierkegaard's reflections in *UDVS*, and his

¹²⁷ *TA*, 73, 78–80, 84ff: 'Anyone can see that levelling has its profound importance in the ascendancy of the category "generation" over the category "individuality"'; *POV*, 104–26. Kierkegaard's category of the single individual (and the Grundtvigian objections to it) is discussed at length in ch. 6 below.

¹²⁸ *WL*, 45–9, 52–5. See chs. 6 and 7 below.

¹²⁹ See for example *POV*, 110–11 and ch. 6 below.

use of the notion of 'offence' emphasize that in this world it is suffering, and not success, that bears the hallmarks of an authentic Christian life.¹³⁰

Together, these objections amount to a Kierkegaardian corrective to the assumptions underpinning theologies of nationalism. Each element will be discussed in full, but for the moment it is the 'philosophical tools' that Kierkegaard uses in aid of this critique that forms the focus of the next chapter.

¹³⁰ 'Let us properly dwell on [the sufferings], convinced that one learns more profoundly . . . what the highest is by reflecting on sufferings than by reflecting on achievements.' *UDVS*, 100; *PC* No. II, chs. 4, 6, and Kierkegaard's critique of triumphalism in ch. 5.

4

Philosophical Tools

Out of love for humankind . . . I comprehended that it was my task to make difficulties everywhere.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter we saw how some commentators have suggested that Kierkegaard be read as providing a critical assessment of absolutizing ideologies; ideologies which I claim fall under the banner of religiously justified nationalism. We have also seen in Martensen and Grundtvig two Danish theologians who espoused variations of just such a view. It is now time to further explore Kierkegaard's response to his contemporaries and their ideas, and in so doing construct a Kierkegaardian critique of Christian nationalism. This chapter looks at foundational notions important to Kierkegaard, theoretical 'tools' that are put to use in his critique. The Christian nationalism with which we are concerned represents that theological point of view which conflates notions of revelation with the national culture in which the revelation is embedded. As such it relies on assumptions about the role and nature of *history* and the ground and source of *identity*. In short, the historical development of the nation is imbued with theological significance, and the cultural network comprising people and place is given pride of place when it comes to what it means to be a human being. These aspects will be considered in full in the following chapters. However, before we do so it is good to lay the groundwork for the particular response that Kierkegaard gives to nationalist takes on history and identity. It is in this light that the key Kierkegaardian notions of *Øieblikket* [the moment of vision] and *Samtidigheden* [contemporaneity] come into play.

¹ CUP, 186–7.

Together *Øieblikket* and *Samtidigheden* represent what Kierkegaard means when he talks about authenticity, and they mark the contours of Kierkegaardian true Christianity as distinct from Christendom. This is because the notions cover the ground of history and identity. As a 'moment' or a 'moment of vision' *Øieblikket* refers to both a temporal/historical relation and also an orientation and way of being. Likewise, *Samtidigheden* has clear temporal connotations, but in Kierkegaard's schema, contemporaneity is also the means by which humans must relate to God in Christ, and, by so doing, attain authentic existence.

2. ØIEBLIKKET—THE MOMENT OF VISION

Øieblikket is the idea of the relation between time and eternity that lies at the heart of what Kierkegaard writes about history, faith and identity. 'The moment of vision' describes both a philosophical approach to temporality, and an existential orientation of authenticity that undergirds all the other key Kierkegaardian positions. The term *Øieblikket* and its related themes occur throughout the literature. It is not confined to one pseudonym, and cannot be relegated to a particular stage of Kierkegaard's project. As well as a motif occurring throughout the authorship, at the end of Kierkegaard's career *Øieblikket* became the title of his final, published works which together make up the so-called 'attack upon Christendom'.² The word *Øieblikket* is derived from *Øiets Blik*, or 'glance of the eye'. Occasionally this tempts the (incorrect) literal English translation 'the blink of an eye'.³ More commonly, especially in the earlier generation of translations, *Øieblikket* has been rendered as 'the instant'.⁴ Perhaps swayed by the evocative imagery of a singular eye-blink and the decisive polemic use to which *Øieblikket* is put in the later stages of Kierkegaard's career, some commentators tend to see the moment as a radically existential, isolating category where the individual somehow

² Cf. *The Moment*. An earlier collection of these writings was entitled *Attack upon Christendom*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). This phrase has become associated with the final stage of Kierkegaard's life and career. See T. H. Croxall for a brief history of the origin of the 'attack' title and phrase. *Kierkegaard Commentary* (London: James Nisbet, 1956), 237.

³ See, for example, Stephen N. Dunning, 'Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety' in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 19, 20.

⁴ Besides the work of Walter Lowrie, other examples include the translations by Alexander Dru, *The Journals of Kierkegaard 1834–1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), and Ronald Gregor Smith, *The Last Years: Journals 1853–1855* (London: Collins, 1965). Two recent examples are David Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007), and Louis Dupré, 'Of Time and Eternity' in *IKC*: CA, 124ff.

removes himself from time or sets himself against the flow of history and community.⁵

I argue instead that Kierkegaard's 'moment of vision' runs counter to isolation. Considered in its full context, *Øieblikket* does the opposite of removing the individual from his or her socio-historical context. Instead, *Øieblikket* grounds and promotes the integration of the subject within history, and describes the right relation between eternity and time that is necessary for religious and ethical authenticity. In light of the considerable complexity of *Øieblikket*, I think it is helpful to mark a distinction between two ways that Kierkegaard uses the idea: the moment serves both a 'technical/forensic' function and an 'existential' one. Such a distinction is useful for teasing out the attendant meanings of *Øieblikket*. Sometimes *Øieblikket* refers to the relation between temporality and eternity, and the creation of historical points in time. This is the technical version of moment, a reflection on the components of time and history that takes the form of an examination of what it is that makes eternity and necessity different from temporality and contingency. At other places within the literature, however, *Øieblikket* refers to an existential orientation of the subject, an authentic way of seeing the world. In this guise, the moment (or more accurately 'moment of vision') does the work of describing the state of being that exists when a person inhabits a right relation to such anxiety-inducing phenomena as the unknown, the sublime and the divine. This moment is not just descriptive or technical, for it also carries with it overtones of active freedom, referring to the ever-present choice facing a person in his process of becoming religious.

George Pattison identifies something like these two different uses of 'moment' at play in the texts. He notes a 'mathematical' or 'geometrical' moment (the 'atom of eternity') and the 'moment of vision' that refers more to an orientation or right way of apprehending the unknown.⁶ Pattison argues that the use of the mathematical moment in Kierkegaard's texts is marked by the Latin-derived *momentus* whereas the presence of *Øieblikket* marks the moment of vision proper. He considers it a problem of translation that the two moments are confused.⁷ However, an emphasis on the two distinct notions could give one the impression that Kierkegaard's original Danish texts rigorously distinguish the separate ideas. Yet it is not the case that the conflation of the types of *Øieblikket* is merely due to the vagaries of translation. In fact the same

⁵ James Collins ascribes to the Kierkegaardian 'moment' an individualism which 'does not extend to the historical continuity and relations between individuals and peoples'. *Mind of Kierkegaard* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), 173. The charge that Kierkegaard is a radical individualist is a staple of much critical secondary literature, and the issue is discussed in ch. 6 below.

⁶ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

word appears throughout the literature, doing double duty for both the forensic and the existential aspects. This can be seen for example in *Begrebet Angest* (*Concept of Anxiety*), which contains the authorship's fullest explication of the moment of vision. A key passage identifies *Øieblikket* with the mathematical/technical function:

In this way it is understood that the moment of vision [*Øieblikket*] is not strictly speaking an atom of time *but an atom of eternity*. It is eternity's first reflection in time, its first attempt, as it were, to suspend time. (BA, 176)⁸

Significantly, this identification occurs immediately after an extended discussion of *Øieblikket* as an emotive category of existential orientation. Haufniensis describes this in relation to the saga of two lovers, Ingeborg and Frithiof. At one point in the story, they are separated, and Ingeborg has to stand and watch her betrothed sail away, knowing that as he disappears over the horizon, all her hopes disappear as well and that she faces an ominous future. It is in this evocative event that Haufniensis finds his example:

The moment of vision [*Øieblikket*] is a figurative expression, and as far as that goes, it is not so easy to deal with. However it is a beautiful word to pay attention to. Nothing is so fleeting as a glance of an eye and yet it is commensurable with the substance [*Gehalt*] of the eternal. Just as when Ingeborg looks out to sea after Frithiof, so is the picture here, of what the figurative word means. A surge of her feeling, a deep sigh, a word which in itself already has the sound more than the destination of time, and is more present as something that is fleeting and that does not have in itself the presence of the eternal. (BA, 176)⁹

Here, the *Øieblikket* is presented as a surge of feeling that contains an intuition of one's place in time, and yet it is not differentiated from its more technical aspects.

As Haufniensis himself acknowledges, *Øieblikket* is a difficult idea. The following section will attempt to unravel some of the tightly bound constituent concepts. I will examine how the technical 'moment' of temporality and eternity is intimately related to the existential 'moment' of orientation towards the divine and the unknown. By doing so, I hope to show how the former category is related to matters of history, while the latter category has to do with identity. In the end, these are not separate ideas but instead complicated facets of a more complicated notion, a notion which Kierkegaard often uses as shorthand for nothing less than authentic temporal and spiritual existence itself.

⁸ *Begrebet Angest* in Søren Kierkegaard: *Samelede Værker* (emphasis added).

⁹ Ibid. It is worth noting also that the technical/mathematical Latin term '*momentus*' is introduced at the end of this passage in relation to Ingeborg's intuitive *Øieblikket*.

2.1 The existential Øieblik

We have seen how some commentators tend to read the moment as a literal eye-blink, a definite point in time, and a decision made on a specific occasion which in turn has become historical.¹⁰ Yet Kierkegaard's moment of vision has more to do with a persistent state of being or a way of seeing that comes from an orientation of the mind than with an isolated point in time. Edward Mooney helpfully notes how *Øieblikket* works to combat the 'dominance of clock time' while at the same time providing access to human temporality as 'lived time'.¹¹ Before looking at the technical use that Kierkegaard puts his moment to, we will first consider the existential orientation aspect of the moment of vision. The orientation described by the moment suffuses every other key Kierkegaardian concept. Any examination of Kierkegaard's vision of 'authentic' Christianity comes down to an examination of the existential moment of vision. In this respect, it is significant that throughout the authorship the moment is linked with anxiety,¹² repetition,¹³ the leap,¹⁴ faith,¹⁵ the paradox¹⁶ and religious authenticity¹⁷ to name but a few Kierkegaardian motifs.

Looking at work done on two of these categories goes some way to considering the state of mind that occurs with the moment of vision. George Pattison's treatment of 'anxiety' and Niels Eriksen's work on 'repetition' sheds light on the Kierkegaardian moment. Neither Pattison nor Eriksen are attempting to elucidate *Øieblikket* as such. However, by taking together their comments on anxiety and repetition respectively, I can suggest how *Øieblikket* works as an existential orientation.

2.1.1 Anxiety

Drawing heuristically from Kant's *Third Critique*, Pattison finds 'strong conceptual analogies' between Kant's treatment of the sublime and Kierkegaard's notion of anxiety.¹⁸ The sublime arises from the interplay between a viewing subject and an uncontainable, uncontrollable object. Instead of completely

¹⁰ Collins reads the Kierkegaardian 'instant' of believing as the point when a person engages himself 'in a temporal historical act, which has eternal import for him'. At 173 see also 168.

¹¹ Edward Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy and Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 107.

¹² CA, 49, 81.

¹³ Ibid., 90; PF, 19; PC, 123; *Repetition*.

¹⁴ FT, 41, 43; PF, 51, 59.

¹⁵ FT; PF, 58.

¹⁶ PF, 51.

¹⁷ *Moment*, 97, 214–15.

¹⁸ George Pattison, 'Sublimity and Experience of Freedom in Kierkegaard' in James Giles (ed), *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 189.

overwhelming all reason, however, the experience of over-stimulation brings with it a new level of appreciation. Faced with a situation too complex to comprehend (a storming seascape for example) one can pull back, or one can embrace the sublime. It is then that one may experience the ‘peculiar pleasure’¹⁹ of being sensually overwhelmed but still in possession of one’s liberty of reason. Situated at the point where systems of nature and systems of freedom intersect, ‘it is in sublime experiences that the mind, stimulated by experience, first enacts a form of judgement that goes beyond experience’.²⁰

Just as the sublime aesthetic can be generated in the service of freedom, Pattison suggests that there is a parallel in Kierkegaard’s notion of anxiety. Much like the one who stands gazing at that which has the potential to obliterate, the Kierkegaardian too faces the situation of freedom in annihilation. Here, the process of becoming a self is inextricably tied up with the coming to awareness that one ‘is capable of nothing’.²¹ There is in *Concept of Anxiety* an ‘experience of nothingness’ that occupies a pivotal place in the religious life of the individual. To have the possibility of the God-relationship is to be free, and to be free is to understand oneself as a sinner—as nothing.²² And yet it is in the being overwhelmed by God’s *rightness* that the individual finds his true state. Thus it is for Pattison that the Kierkegaardian anxiety/sublimity summed up as a ‘being nothing before God’ works to ‘establish the self’. It is, he writes, ‘a process of becoming free in a situation of experienced unfreedom’.²³

The phrase ‘being nothing before God’ does not describe an event, as much as it refers to an ever-present situation of existence, and, crucially, an *awareness* of that existence.²⁴ Similarly, the moment of vision does not refer to an occasion in which everything is known with perfect clarity. *Øieblikket* is not enlightenment to a god-like perspective. Indeed, it is more akin to the opposite situation. The moment of vision is not about knowing everything, but instead it is the awareness that one does *not* know everything, and in that knowledge orienting oneself appropriately.²⁵ Like the experience of the sublime, *Øieblikket* sees what cannot come to expression within the components of

¹⁹ Ibid., 188.

²⁰ Ibid., 187, 188.

²¹ George Pattison, *Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), 138, referring to *EUD*, 309.

²² Ibid., 185. Kierkegaard likes to remind his readers that before God, we are always in the wrong. See, for example, *E/O* part 2; ‘Gospel of Sufferings’ in *UDVS*.

²³ Pattison, ‘Sublimity’, 199.

²⁴ Pattison refers to this as a ‘regulative idea’ as opposed to a decision in one distinct point in time. Pattison, ‘Sublimity’, 186.

²⁵ Mooney, with reference to both Pattison and Niels Eriksen (see below), writes how *Øieblikket* appears ‘between our engaging in a kind of wilful projection of meanings on the world, and, alternatively undergoing a kind of subjection to meanings imposed by rules or force’. Mooney, *On Søren*, 109–10.

the image itself, without at the same time pretending to have understood or organized all the chaotic threads of the tapestry.²⁶ There is, perhaps paradoxically, freedom in the awareness of one's limitations; authentic becoming in the annihilation of the anxious self.

In CA it is at the cusp of the actualization of freedom that anxiety appears, and it is here that we enter the realm of *Øieblikket*.²⁷ Sin arises when, in the moment, the self succumbs to anxiety. CA describes someone standing on a cliff top to evoke the image of the one who, facing the God-relationship and the awareness of absolute need of God, feels anxiety. To step forward faithfully out over the chasm is to enter the sphere of freedom and authenticity. To step back anxiously is to rescind freedom and enter sin.²⁸ Sin is not founded upon one historical event (as for Augustine) as much as it is a matter of the moment, the possibility of which is faced by every person at all times. Again, talk of a temporal moment could be deceptive here. Like the sublime, anxiety is not a decision or a point on a timeline. It is, instead, a symptom of a relation between destabilizing forces and the self. The moment of stepping out or pulling back is not a choice so much as it is an orientation or an understanding of one's right relation to the divine. And as we shall see it is a state of mind that needs the repetition of constant renewal.

2.1.2 Repetition

Despite the imagery evoking a singular event, the Kierkegaardian moment of 'stepping out' into freedom is not a once-for-all action. Decisive, to be sure, but also ever-present, *Øieblikket* is a resolve that needs to be renewed and repeated.²⁹ This was seen by the family resemblance that *Øieblikket* has to anxiety. It is also seen in the connections made between *Øieblikket* and 'repetition', and I now turn to this concept in order to throw further light on *Øieblikket* itself.

Niels Eriksen is helpful here. Related to Pattison's emphasis on 'being nothing before God', Eriksen first considers the role that nihilism plays in the Kierkegaardian 'progression towards self-surrender'.³⁰ He traces the trajectory of nihilism in Western thought, finding it to be a product of metaphysics; an outcome of the Platonic project which invokes a partition of reality

²⁶ See Pattison, *Crisis*, 18.

²⁷ 'In the individual life, anxiety is the moment . . .' CA, 81.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁹ Pattison, with reference to *EUD*, writes of the concerned self, which is 'older than the moment', and which seeks to acquire continuity in time. This continuity, what Pattison calls 'having a self', can only be sustained by the constant renewal of the concern. Pattison, *Philosophy*, 137. With the constant renewal we enter into the realm of Kierkegaardian 'repetition'.

³⁰ Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 6.

into the 'sensory' and the 'suprasensory'.³¹ Yet the more the suprasensory is elevated over the sensory, 'the more distant, inaccessible and *irrelevant* it becomes'.³² Remote and cut off from pragmatic daily life, the inevitable result is that the values of the metaphysical realm are now rendered valueless.³³ In this way, nihilism is not a failure of metaphysics, as much as it is the fruit of the metaphysical project, what Heidegger identified as the essence and inner logic of Western history.³⁴ Yet Eriksen notes how the manner and mode of Kierkegaardian spiritual authenticity not only survives nihilism, it is somehow rooted in the nihilistic sentiment.³⁵ With Kierkegaard, nihilism appears, but its appearance is a meaningful, even welcome event.

For the self understood metaphysically, self-realization has to be a matter of remaining outwardly faithful to the inner world of the Ideal.³⁶ The Kierkegaardian term for discovering the Ideal essence which lies dormant in the self and awaits activation is 'recollection'.³⁷ And yet, in nihilism the distinction between inner and outer becomes untenable. If self-realization is a matter of recollecting the essential inner Ideal then the metaphysical collapse is inevitable. The Ideal is remote, inaccessible and impossible to 'remember', and for this reason Ideal values are too lofty, thus rendering them effectively valueless in relation to real life. As a result present existence is left without ground for ultimate meaning. In the face of nihilism another mode of becoming is needed, which leads Kierkegaard to the category of 'repetition'.³⁸ If recollection attempts 'becoming what one was', the category of repetition considers the 'becoming of what one is'. Repetition describes the notion of self-appropriation (*Gjentagelsen* literally means 'taking again') as a 'moment in which *nothing new is added to the old, but the old has become new*'.³⁹ In repetition, an already-existing life is taken up and injected with a newness that

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Ibid., 8 (original emphasis).

³³ Ibid., quotes Nietzsche: 'the highest values devalue themselves'. *Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), § 2.

³⁴ Eriksen, *Repetition*, 8, refers to Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Garland, 1977), 67.

³⁵ Eriksen, *Repetition*, 10, refers here to George Pattison's *Agnosis: Theology in the Void* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 84. It is also interesting to note that the difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is not in their recognition of the nihilistic state as much as in their existential approach to nihilism.

³⁶ See Eriksen, *Repetition*, 10.

³⁷ Kierkegaard often refers to the Socratic maieutic task of bringing to light within a life that which was already there. See, for example, *PF*, 13, 18–19, 58. Benjamin Daise provides a good discussion of Socrates and Kierkegaard via Climacus in *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999).

³⁸ See Eriksen, *Repetition*, 10.

³⁹ Ibid., 9 (original emphasis). Cf. 1 Cor 15:51–52: 'Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' (NRSV).

was not present in the original state.⁴⁰ Recollection approaches temporality by looking to the past to find the 'oldness in the new'. Repetition looks to the future for the 'newness of the old', what CA refers to as the Christian idea of 'the fullness of time'.⁴¹

Nihilism serves a similar function for Eriksen as the sublime does for Pattison. Both find in the Kierkegaardian experience a way of facing unmeaning chaos and emerging authentic and whole. The issue, as is often the case with Kierkegaard, turns on the mode of existing. Humans can, with too much reflection, orient themselves so that their backs are to the future. Metaphysical philosophers, in their drive to reconcile the actual with the Ideal, look back to the past in their search for an authenticity that has been determined from the first. For Kierkegaard, such an orientation is not merely an arbitrary choice, as if one way of looking at authentic identity was as potentially good as any other. Instead, the stance towards the past is not only ill-judged, it is false, for it does not map onto the reality of human existence. Kierkegaard refers to this state as 'living backwards'.⁴² One of his complaints about such a point of view is that whether one looks to the past or not, one is in fact always moving forwards into the future. The task then, is to orient oneself in the direction that one is already moving. The past, although it is formative, is not determinative, and humans can orient themselves to the future. Kierkegaard seeks to cultivate a view that faces the roiling nihilism of the present age and looks forward to freedom and possibility of contingent actuality. This is 'living forwards', which is 'repetition'.⁴³ Kierkegaard's category of repetition is a profoundly 'timely' one, rooted in temporality. It seeks to describe a paradigmatic way of looking at the past and the future and at their role in the becoming self in the present.⁴⁴ And with a repetition that looks forward to the unknown future we are once again in the sphere of *Øieblikket*—a connection made in CA.⁴⁵ As a way of thinking, an account of authenticity and an orientation within time, talk of repetition and talk of *Øieblikket* are often ways of describing the same thing.

⁴⁰ The process is examined further with respect to individual identity and society in ch. 6 below. See also Martin Matušík, *Postnational Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 120–3, and the discussion in ch. 7 below.

⁴¹ CA, 90. Note that this process is explicitly described with reference to *Øieblikket*. See below.

⁴² JP, 1030 (*Pap.* IV A 164).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mark Dooley writes of *Gjentagelsen* as being the movement by which one acquires a sense of oneself that has the capacity to exercise responsibility. *The Politics of Exodus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 75. The contradistinction between the self-love of passionate preference (national love) and that based on responsibility for the neighbour is explored in ch. 7 below.

⁴⁵ CA, 90.

2.2 The metaphysical Øieblik

I have so far resisted seeing the moment as ‘a’ point in time and have instead tried to see it as a mode of existence. There is another aspect to *Øieblikket* however, and we must now consider the metaphysical role that the moment plays in the dissection of time and the formation of history. A study of this aspect uncovers the surprising claim that not only does *Øieblikket* describe a right orientation to history and temporality, it is also the ground and source of temporality itself. Considering the right relation of the eternal to the temporal—and of the individual person to both—provides access to considering the right relation to history and historical events. As we shall see, this has ramifications for ethics, theology, and an anthropological account of human identity.

Øieblikket can refer to a mode of authentic existing because it has a claim to describing the very fabric of reality. The moment’s forensic relationship to time, temporality and eternity happens in three stages. The first stage describes the *present as uncoupled from temporality* by linking the moment to the present. The moment belongs with the eternal, not with the temporal. Having separated the moment from the temporal stream, Kierkegaard then puts the moment back into its right relationship with the temporal. The second stage therefore describes how the *moment gives temporality meaning*, for it is the moment that posits history and the future. History comes from the moment, which Kierkegaard describes as the eternal touching time. The future also comes from the moment, for in positing the past, we also posit the future. The third considers how *necessity is uncoupled from actuality*. This is related to the nature of the eternal, as well as being a way to lead into looking at historical facts. We shall now examine these three stages in more detail.

2.2.1 *Uncoupling the present from temporality*

Eternity is a very radical thought. Whenever it is posited, the present becomes something entirely different from what it was apart from it. This is something that men fear . . . the entire present generation is a tyrant who lives in fear of one restless element: the thought of eternity. (CA, 206–7)⁴⁶

In CA, Vigilius Haufniensis is primarily concerned with the source of sin in individual lives. To that end, he analyses the internal life of the freely choosing, ethical subjects. CA’s concern with authentic personal existence leads to what might be called a psychological anthropology of identity.⁴⁷ The discussion

⁴⁶ Supplement to CA, 151–3.

⁴⁷ See Louis Dupré for the connections between the anthropology of CA and the later SUD, as well as the links between the ‘self’ in CA and Kierkegaard’s other works such as CI and FT. I am more concerned in this chapter with a Kierkegaardian approach to ‘time’ than to the ‘self’,

culminates with the anthropological statement: 'Man, then, is a synthesis of the psyche and body, *but he is also a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal*' (CA, 85 (original emphasis)).⁴⁸ This provides Haufniensis with the occasion to dwell on the relationship between the 'temporal' and the 'eternal', which is bound up with his explication of *Øieblikket*.

Kierkegaard often works to reprioritize concepts that he thinks have been wrongly emphasized by the present age. This is true for matters of 'time' and 'history'. In CA (and elsewhere) the argument is not against the existence of temporality or history as such (how could it be?) but it does seek to put these concepts in their place within the greater scheme of religion and authentic existence. Thus, when Haufniensis considers the category of the temporal and finds that the usual ascription of 'present, past and future' to time is incorrect, he is not stating that 'temporality' is an invalid concept. Rather, Haufniensis argues that one goes astray if the flow of history—the process of possible future events becoming actual present events which in turn become realized past events—is considered to be implicit in 'time' itself.⁴⁹ Instead, these distinctions have their source somewhere else, and appear 'only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time'. (CA, 85) Haufniensis makes the grand claim that we only have 'history' because we first have 'eternity', and, crucially, that history proper belongs only to those with the ability to *reflect* on the relationship between eternity and time.⁵⁰ Temporality is not foundational to history—the eternal, and our capacity to reflect upon the eternal, is.

Haufniensis expands this claim by looking at the most problematic element of the commonly supposed 'past-present-future' trichotomy. Does the 'present' really belong in the category of the temporal? Haufniensis' answer is that it does not. The present is usually presented as the 'foothold' which distinguishes past from future (CA, 85). It is supposed to be the discrete point in time upon which the other two aspects derive their position on the temporal timeline. Common usage gives us a geographical conception of time—the past *behind*, the present *here* and the future *ahead*.⁵¹ And yet, as Haufniensis remarks, no actual point marked 'the present' is forthcoming if we look for it in temporality. This is because every time someone tries to locate the present on a 'timeline', it disappears and becomes the past. Seen temporally, the

although the two are of course intimately related within Kierkegaard's philosophy. See ch. 6 below.

⁴⁸ CA has earlier considered and rejected other formulations: 'The moment he becomes man, he becomes so by being animal as well.' CA, 49; 'Man is a synthesis of psyche and body that is constituted and sustained by spirit.' CA, 81. Cf. SUD, 13 and ch. 6 below.

⁴⁹ CA, 85.

⁵⁰ Cf. 'The Interlude' in PF.

⁵¹ See CA, 85. Pattison calls this the 'spatialized schema'. Pattison, *Crisis*, 15.

present can only be a process—a passing by.⁵² Within the temporal ‘the present’ *does not exist*. The implications are twofold. First, any assertion of the non-existence of the present is counter-intuitive to lived experience. Secondly, it is also totally inadequate to do the work that ‘the present’ is supposed to do. This is the case for people who place such stock on the temporal and the historical as comprising the fundamental premise of existence, let alone ethicists and theologians of a Kierkegaardian persuasion. Fortunately, Haufniensis is not setting out to somehow disprove the existence of the present. He is merely locating the present elsewhere. ‘The present . . . is not a concept of time’ (CA, 86).

Time is a quantitative category. To describe temporality is to describe a seemingly endless accumulation of discrete events preceding or succeeding each other. Adding up the quantity of timely events produces an idea of an ‘infinite succession’ of time. This is what Haufniensis means when he refers to the pagan Greek thought which ‘stretches out time’ by quantitative determinations (CA, 93). Yet *ad infinitum* as this process may appear to be, it is not actually infinite, or eternal. Instead it is ‘the parody of the eternal’ (CA, 86). For Haufniensis, the true eternal is a different quality of category altogether, and it is to this category that the ‘present’ belongs. For the eternal, as with the present, there is no incremental addition of discrete units of time added one to another. ‘So also in the eternal there is no division into the past and the future, because the present is posited as the annulled succession’ (CA, 86).

2.2.2 Giving meaning to time

It is at this point that the moment of vision enters the picture.⁵³ In CA the moment is related to the present, but under the aegis of the eternal. Like the present, the moment cannot be a determination of time, for the determination of time is that it ‘passes by’ (CA, 87). Yet, the moment is not totally disconnected from time. It is a synthesis of temporal and eternal. ‘If time and eternity touch each other, then it must be in time, and now we have come to the moment’ (CA, 87). Of *Øieblikket*, Haufniensis says that is ‘a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity’ (CA, 87).⁵⁴

‘The moment is not properly an atom of time but an atom of eternity. It is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt as it were of stopping

⁵² CA, 86.

⁵³ See CA, 87.

⁵⁴ In a footnote to his discussion on the gaze of *Øieblikket* Haufniensis thinks it significant that God is portrayed as an eye in Christian art and symbolism. CA, 87 n. ‘God as Spectator’ is explored further in ch. 5 below.

time' (CA, 88). Haufniensis has already noted how if we think of eternity as just a lot of 'present' moments added together, then we get a parody of eternity. If we uncouple the 'present' from 'time', however, then we begin to move in the realm of the eternal proper (which is the sphere of authentic identity, freedom and God). Haufniensis, therefore, now works to re-introduce the moment back into a right relation with time, since his intention is not to divorce human experience from time altogether. This would be absurd, and Kierkegaard is too much concerned with pragmatic applications of ideas and the importance of describing existence accurately to argue against temporality *qua* temporality. Instead, Kierkegaard (*via* Haufniensis) is keen to put temporality in its rightful place. And that place is subordinate to the moment, and to the eternal. The moment inhabits that place where eternity touches time. In this process, temporality itself, and thus history, is given life. The meaning of the parts of time comes into light only when the concept of time is grounded in the temporality of existence.⁵⁵ 'The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time' (CA, 89).⁵⁶ As we shall see below, for Kierkegaard, it is not units of temporality that create eternity, it is eternity breaking into time that creates temporality by engendering the possibility of continuity *via* reflecting subjects. And it is only reflective subjects with their gaze of the moment who can appreciate temporality and imbue it with meaning, in other words, they have *history*.⁵⁷ *Øieblikket* creates history by positing the past, and by positing the future.

Positing the past

In CA and elsewhere,⁵⁸ the category of the moment does not map directly onto the category of the present. The present is a generic state of persistent being, open to all of creation. Physical objects and unreflective animals have a present, but they do not experience the moment. The moment happens in the present, but it also provides meaning to the present, for it belongs only to existential subjects who have the capability for reflection (gaze) and decision. It might seem that something as fleeting as the moment is insignificant

⁵⁵ Cf. Eriksen, *Repetition*, 67.

⁵⁶ A related 1844 journal entry posits the moment as an atom of time, but only after eternity has entered the picture. 'For the moment is really time's atom, *but not until* eternity is posited, and this is why one may properly say that eternity is always in [the moment].' JP III, 2740 (Pap. V B 55:6 (emphasis added)).

⁵⁷ 'Objective time is grounded in the temporality of existence, rather than the other way around.' Eriksen, *Repetition*, 67. It is because of the relationship between 'repetition' and 'the moment of vision' that Eriksen can read *Repetition* as a way of providing for authentic historicity. See 39, 65ff.

⁵⁸ Most notably in *PF*, discussed below.

compared to 'nature's apparently secure endurance in time' (CA, 89). However, says Haufniensis, the contrary is the case. The terms 'history' and 'temporality' are ways of denoting time's meaning and significance. For this reason, history needs a mind (memory, reflection, decision) in order for it to exist. Time has no *significance* for nature.⁵⁹ 'Only within the moment does history begin' (CA, 89).

That the moment posits temporality and, in effect, creates the conditions needed for a conception of history to occur is a theme of the 'Interlude' in Johannes Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments*.⁶⁰ We have noted above how CA distinguishes between the 'present' that is shared by all created matter that persists in time, and the 'moment' of the thinking, willing, reflecting subject that gives meaning to the present and thus creates history. PF also develops these two orders of history open to existing things. The first order is a bare, generic sense of history that obtains simply because matter persists in creation. Climacus is happy to attribute a sense of 'history' to this state, but only with much qualification. 'Everything that has come into existence is *eo ipso* historical, even if no further historical predicate can be applied to it, the crucial predicate of the historical can still be predicated—namely, that it has come into existence' (PF, 75). Matter has become actual, therefore it enjoys a bare minimum sense of history. In this way, Climacus allows that unthinking nature has a history of a sort.⁶¹

However, Climacus is keen to stress that there is a 'more ingenious view' of history (PF, 76). Unthinking nature, although it can be said to have a history, cannot be said to be properly historical in the most important sense of the term. 'The difficulty arises because nature is too abstract to be dialectical . . . with respect to time' (PF, 76). This is the second order of the historical—the reflection on time that occurs in the moment thus dividing past, present and future. It is the being 'dialectical with respect to time' that Climacus thinks makes 'the historical' 'in a stricter sense' (PF, 76). Climacus refers to this as the second becoming, or redoubling. 'Yet coming into existence can contain within itself a redoubling [*Fordobling*], that is, a possibility of a coming into existence within its own coming into existence' (PF, 76).⁶²

⁵⁹ Cf 'Interlude' in PF.

⁶⁰ The 'Interlude' lays the groundwork for Kierkegaard's later application of the moment to real life and a person's attitude towards historical events. Despite this, the notoriously difficult passage tends to receive less attention in the secondary literature. For example, in a chapter dealing with the topic of 'history' in PF, Murray Rae devotes only one paragraph to the 'Interlude' in Kierkegaard's *Vision of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 89.

⁶¹ PF, 76.

⁶² Note the thematic connection to 'repetition' with the suggestion that with the redoubling of existence, the old becomes new.

Positing the future

The moment posits temporality (CA, 89). For Haufniensis, this means that it is not just the past that is posited, but the *future* also. It is worth briefly sketching this relation, as it has relevance to the move that both Haufniensis and Climacus make in uncoupling 'actuality' from 'necessity', which will be discussed below. Regarding the 'future', then, Haufniensis sees it as eternity's *in-cognito*.⁶³ In the Kierkegaardian authorship, '*in-cognito*' signifies a function of indirect communication which is an attempt to communicate by relying on the hearer's subjective and free appropriation. Communication *in-cognito* is a disguise intended to convey the truth by adopting another form so as not to override the subject's freedom when making a decision.⁶⁴ So it is that in CA we have the eternal being communicated in the form of the future, *via* the moment. The future encompasses the whole, of which the past is a part (CA 89). Future events are simply past events waiting to happen. This does not mean that they *have* to happen by necessity, only that once they do, they will become unalterable parts of the past. This does not deny freedom, for all future options, insofar as they are unactualized, are still possible—open to decision. As an unactualized totality of possibilities, the future shares an affinity with the eternal, for the eternal too, is an 'annulled succession', set apart from the process of becoming and actualization.⁶⁵ Seeing the future in this way is what allows temporal beings (albeit incompletely) to apprehend the eternal and maintains the link between the two qualities of temporal and eternal. 'The future is the *in-cognito* in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time' (CA, 89).⁶⁶

2.2.3 Uncoupling necessity from actuality

Talk of the future and of the past, and of our relationship with them in the present, leads naturally to talk of freedom and contingency, necessity and actuality. It is crucial for Kierkegaard's project of presenting authentic Christianity that freedom is preserved. Any view of the future which denies freedom is thus to be rejected from a Christian point of view. Faith is based on historical events, but just as faith is not necessary (it is free), so too those historical events that mark as catalysts for faith are not necessary. This is precisely the problem that Kierkegaard has with the world-historical speculators.⁶⁷ Such speculation looks to the past and finds God's irresistible will writ large. What

⁶³ CA, 89.

⁶⁴ See CUP, 79; PC, 123, 126, 133–9; *Moment*, 73, 236.

⁶⁵ The relation between actuality and necessity is discussed below.

⁶⁶ In the Kierkegaardian schema, because the future is the eternal *in-cognito*, the future takes priority over the past. This is contrasted to the Greek paradigm of 'recollection', whereby the past takes precedence over the future. See Eriksen, *Repetition*, 67.

⁶⁷ Cf. ch. 5 below.

has been could not have been anything else. Haufniensis traces the logical conclusion of this assumption through to a view of the future. The future is nothing less than the past waiting to happen. If past events were necessary, then future events must be necessary also, and hence freedom is annulled.

By way of Haufniensis Kierkegaard is here referring to the Hegelianism of his Copenhagen contemporaries. Martensen, although a champion of freedom at the personal level, in effect denies freedom within the sweep of history both for man and for the divine.⁶⁸ It is central to his system that the world had come to the point where the incarnation was an inevitable and necessary event. For Martensen, God could not but have entered the world when he did. History, so to speak, forced his hand.⁶⁹ Thus it is not only human freedom, but also divine freedom, that is at stake in Haufniensis' analysis of temporality, eternity, actuality and necessity. We will explore the Kierkegaardian objection to world-historical theology at length below. Yet it is not only on theological grounds or because of theological implications that Kierkegaard has problems with linking necessity and actuality. Anthropologically, the deterministic 'world-historical' point of view simply does not adequately describe the state of human existence.⁷⁰

CA opens with an attack on an unnamed author who 'entitles the last section of the *Logic* "Actuality"' (CA, 9). A draft to this passage contains the marginal note that this is what 'Hegel has done and the Hegelian school did' (CA, 180).⁷¹ Whether it is Hegel himself, or, more likely, Hegel's Danish followers whom CA is attacking, the result is the same.⁷² Haufniensis does not like the mixing of the quantitative world of logic (with its inevitable conclusions) with the qualitative realm of actuality and reality. 'Actuality is not served thereby, for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual,

⁶⁸ Martensen subsumes the 'innermost kernel of [man's] freedom' under the divine will, which itself is linked to the 'holy world-principle'. 'The divine decree submits itself to the conditions of history' (CD, 170).

⁶⁹ See CD, 262–3 and discussion in ch. 2 above.

⁷⁰ 'A fundamental proposition in Kierkegaard's authorship is that [Christian assumptions of human freedom] ultimately do represent the correct objective state of affairs in the universe.' Julia Watkin, 'The Idea of Fate in Kierkegaard's Thought' in James Giles (ed), *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 109.

⁷¹ JP III, 3653 (*Pap.* V B 49:1). See CA, 224 n. 14. Since the final chapter of Hegel's *Logic* is not entitled 'Actuality', Jon Stewart argues convincingly that it is the Hegelian visionary Adolph Peter Adler's book *Popular Lectures on Hegel's Logic* that is the target of the critique. *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 384.

⁷² It is worth stressing that it is the Hegelian formulations in vogue in some circles that are primarily in view and not necessarily Hegel himself. However, while I agree with Jon Stewart that it is Hegelians such as Adler and Martensen who are the target of Kierkegaard's criticisms, Stewart at times overstates his case when he paints a picture of a Kierkegaard who is working to defend Hegel against his lesser followers. See, for example, in his chapter on CA (Stewart, *Relations*, 378ff). Stewart often glosses over the times where Hegel is mentioned (and disparaged) by name, or where the trajectory of Kierkegaard's argument clearly moves away from Hegel's position.

cannot be admitted within the realm of logic' (CA, 10). Logically necessary truths can be known with perfect certainty. They encompass those statements that cannot be false.⁷³ The Hegelians and world-historians need to maintain that historical truths are necessary in something like the same way. Therefore their systems cannot accommodate the possibility that an event may or may not happen, or if it does happen, that it genuinely might not have. Within the realm of logic, if one has enough information to hand when considering a problem, there can only be one outcome. Real contingency, however, is essential for the moment, which for Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms is itself essential for faith, history and authenticity.

Haufniensis notes how the task of the moment is related to 'the actuality that is preceded by freedom's possibility' (CA, 49). This 'possibility' is not merely the possibility of choosing good or evil. Hegelian systems allow for a semblance of these choices but actually subsume freedom into a speculative framework in which history unfolds logically. People appear to choose good or evil, but their 'free choice' has in fact already been mapped out on a larger scheme. Not so for Haufniensis. He sees the possibility of freedom not merely in the choice between good or evil, but in terms of 'the possibility . . . to be able' (CA, 49). Hegelian logic would say that this is when 'possibility passes over into actuality' (CA, 49). Yet for Haufniensis, this confuses two separate categories. CA will later note that the transition from possibility to actuality is not so easy because 'transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom' (CA, 82).⁷⁴ Transition is a state of intermediacy which occurs in the present. And thus it is related to the moment, which in CA is related to the anxiety of genuine free will, the orientation aspect of which has been discussed above. 'The intermediate term is anxiety' (CA, 49).

The theme is also picked up in *PF*, where Climacus identifies 'coming into existence' as the 'transition from possibility to actuality' (*PF*, 74). In *PF* we see the same themes of actuality, possibility and necessity being worked over from a slightly different angle. Where CA brings the transition from possibility to actuality around to the moment, *PF* links it up with the decisions open to 'the god' when he chose to act in history as the 'god-man'. The Interlude of *PF* boasts the subtitle: 'Is the Past More Necessary than the Future? Or, Has the Possible, by Having Become Actual, Become More Necessary than It Was?' (*PF*, 72). It aims to evoke the passage of time that might exist between the first- and second-hand disciples of an important event. Climacus assumes, for the point of argument, that the Interlude represents the fact that 'precisely eighteen hundred and thirty-three years have passed' (*PF*, 72). This disingenuous

⁷³ Such as 'Circles lack angles' or ' $2+5=7$ '. Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 102–3.

⁷⁴ See also CA, 85, which pits quantitative preponderance against the leap.

date puts the reader on notice that, whatever other historical events might be covered by the following discussion, it is the event of the incarnation that is primarily in view.

Similar to the concerns expressed by Haufniensis, one of Climacus' main targets in the Interlude is the equation of 'actuality' with 'necessity' in philosophical thought—an elision that for Kierkegaard had profound theological consequences. It is worth noting, however, that the arguments do not merely pit the necessary *against* the actual, or assign a crude Manichean hierarchy to these categories. That the eternal is necessary and the historical contingent does not make the actual of less worth than the eternal. After all, the supreme event in history is an actual and temporal event. For Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, the incarnation is a contingent event, and not a necessary one.

Climacus considers whether something that is *necessary* can participate in this process of the possible becoming actual. 'Can the necessary come into existence?' (PF, 74). Precisely by coming into existence, a thing demonstrates that it is not necessary, 'for the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary *is*' (PF, 74).⁷⁵ An important corollary to the categorical difference between 'the necessary' and 'the becoming of the actual' is the difference between the necessary and the contingent. 'The actual is no more necessary than the possible, for the necessary is absolutely different from both' (PF, 75). If the change of coming into actuality is not necessary, then it is contingent. And if it is contingent, then it is free. 'The change of coming into existence is actuality; the transition takes place in freedom. All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity' (PF, 75).

Because the transition from possibility to actuality happens in time, everything that has come into existence is automatically rendered historical in some sense.⁷⁶ Climacus accepts the truism that what is past cannot be changed or undone. Considering the concrete nature of historical events, Climacus now asks: 'Is this unchangeableness the unchangeableness of necessity?' (PF, 76). Behind this question is Martensen's Hegelian notion that asks in effect whether an event can *become* necessary by dint of its unchangeable historical nature. To hold to this, however, is to ignore that coming into existence is itself a change. And change implies contingency. 'The past can be regarded as necessary only if one forgets that it has come into existence' (PF, 77). Events of the past are not necessary nor have they become necessary merely by having become history:

The past did not become necessary by having occurred, but, on the contrary, by having occurred it demonstrated that it was not necessary... If the past had become necessary, then it would not belong to freedom anymore. (PF, 77–8)

⁷⁵ See also PF, 75: 'Nothing whatever exists [*er til*] because it is necessary, but the necessary exists because it is necessary or the necessary *is*.'

⁷⁶ PF, 75.

In the hands of theologians such as Grundtvig and Martensen, the category of 'the historical' is expected to provide proof for the truth of Christian doctrines, to point inexorably to the historical and logical necessity of the incarnation, and act as a vehicle for God's unfolding revelation in the world. This is a weight that 'the historical' cannot bear. Using *Øieblikket* as his touchstone, Kierkegaard is able to comment on the rightful use of history in a theological context. History is not done away with within Kierkegaard's scheme; it is put in its appropriate place. The moment describes an orientation towards existence that is based on an explication of the threads that make up that existence, namely, the source of the historical and the relationship of necessity to the actual present. Far from removing the individual from 'temporality', this way of seeing places the individual into a right relation with past, present and future. And, far from mounting some sort of quixotic argument against 'the historical', this way of seeing allows Kierkegaard to move outward to comment on the beneficial uses of history in relation to Christianity, as well as critique the harmful effects of its abuses.⁷⁷

3. SAMTIDIGHEDEN—CONTEMPORANEITY

This brings us to another important theoretical 'tool' which is put to practical use in the Kierkegaardian approach to both history and identity, and that is the notion of contemporaneity [*Samtidigheden*]. Contemporaneity is primarily associated with the later works of Kierkegaard, although it has its roots in earlier ideas, most notably the 'leap' [*Spring*]. I contend that the Kierkegaardian leap is not a uniform idea as some commentators seem to assume, but instead that it changes and develops throughout the authorship, until it culminates in the idea of contemporaneity. I will first briefly consider the leap and its permutations before examining its full fruition.

3.1 Changing nature of the leap

The leap is a well-known motif that occurs throughout Kierkegaard's works (it is prominent, for example, in *CA*) and my attempt here is not an exhaustive review of each of its iterations. Instead, I wish to trace the 'leap' with specific reference to the pseudonymous works of Johannes de silentio, Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus: authors in Kierkegaard's schema who share a

⁷⁷ Cf. Dupré, 'Time': 'Far from abolishing history, [*Øieblikket*] gives it an unprecedented importance: the moment of the objective presence of the eternal in time divides history into A.D. and B.C. Yet it overcomes the purely *successive* character of history.' At 128.

particular relationship to each other and to the burgeoning idea of contemporaneity.

It is inaccurate to talk of 'Kierkegaard's leap' as a singular entity, for in fact the leap serves different functions in these different texts. Considering the distinctive stages of development for the leap motif evident throughout the pseudonyms, it is surprising how little this is commented on in the secondary literature. Scholars writing specifically on the leap either tend to conflate the different 'leaps' in order to arrive at a unified notion of *the* Kierkegaardian leap,⁷⁸ or they tend to focus on one of the pseudonyms at the expense of any others, thereby giving the impression that that one pseudonym speaks unambiguously for Kierkegaard himself.⁷⁹

3.1.1 *Johannes de silentio and the leap*

A recurring theme in these commentaries is the cliché of the so-called 'leap of faith'. Yet none of the pseudonyms ever use this phrase, let alone Kierkegaard's veronymous works. It is usually *FT* that gets saddled with the dubious honour of promoting such an idea, with Johannes de silentio's treatment of Abraham as the prime example of 'Kierkegaard's leap of faith'.⁸⁰ The best and most definitive treatment of this subject comes from Alastair McKinnon. Through the use of computer analysis, he concludes that the Danish counterpart to 'leap of faith' [*Troens Spring*] and its cognates never occur in *FT* or any other of Kierkegaard's works.⁸¹ Yet even when it is acknowledged that the 'leap of faith' does not exist as such, *FT* is still often taken to be emblematic of the Kierkegaardian leap in general. *FT* finds the pseudonymous author Johannes de silentio contemplating the Knight of Faith's balletic move that somehow combines resigning and receiving in the same movement.⁸² In *FT*, the leap is a

⁷⁸ One example is Arnold Come, *Kierkegaard as Humanist: Discovering My Self* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

⁷⁹ An example is M. Jamie Ferreira in *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and her essay 'Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap' in A. Hannay and G. Marino (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸⁰ This is the usual presentation in various surveys and 'introductions' to philosophy as well as more in-depth academic treatments. Among many examples are Frederick Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Newman Press, 1972), 153; Brand Blanchard, 'Kierkegaard on Faith' in Jerry Gill (ed), *Essays on Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1969), 113–26; Ronald M. Green, 'The Leap of Faith: Kierkegaard's debt to Kant' in *Philosophy and Theology* vol. 3 (1989), 385–411; George E. Arbaugh and George B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), index, 428; Louis Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 172; Michael P. Levin, 'Why the Incarnation is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard' in *Religious Studies* Vol. 18, 171–5.

⁸¹ Alastair McKinnon, 'Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith' in *Kierkegaardiana* vol. 16 (1993), 107–25.

⁸² *FT*, 41, 48–9, 115.

singular skill that allows the leaper to act without any regard for common reason, and Johannes de silentio can only look on in wonder and bemusement:

The next movement [the leap] amazes me, my brain reels, for, after having made the movement of resignation then by virtue of the absurd to get everything . . . that is over and beyond human powers, that is a marvel. (*FT*, 47–8)

And yet it should be noted that the pseudonym Johannes de silentio is not a Christian, nor does he claim to have faith of any sort.⁸³ As such, within Kierkegaard's scheme, Johannes de silentio's observations are intended to be read as untrustworthy to some degree. His very name represents his failure to communicate, and at key points in the narrative Kierkegaard has his pseudonym fall silent.⁸⁴ Furthermore, *FT*'s opinion of Abraham, and the idea that the figure of the Knight of Faith is paradigmatic for all believers, is never repeated in subsequent books. Indeed, Johannes de silentio and his positions are criticized by later pseudonyms.⁸⁵ In short, for all its profound reflections, *FT* is not to be taken as Kierkegaard's last and best word on what it is to have faith.

3.1.2 Johannes Climacus and the leap

The leap of *FT*, which is concerned with the lesser paradox of hope in the face of resignation, should not be read in the same light as Climacus' leaps of *PF* and *CUP*, which centre on the transition between knowledge and faith. In *CUP* particular attention is paid to the leap in the section on Lessing. 'Lessing has said that the transition whereby one will build an eternal truth on historical reports is a leap' (*CUP*, 93). For Lessing, the leap is one from certainty in certain immediate historical events to unsubstantiated trust in accounts of those events. He thinks that if he could only go back to the event of Christ's life, then he would have all the raw information that he needs to see that this man was God. What is more, he could not avoid coming to this conclusion. However, since Lessing cannot cross 'the ugly broad ditch' of history, he cannot come to the conclusion of faith.

Climacus agrees with Lessing that Christianity posits and requires a decision within time. Furthermore, he agrees with Lessing that the basic problematic element of Christianity is that it continually uses time and the historical in

⁸³ *FT*, 33, 51.

⁸⁴ Three times in the narrative, Johannes de silentio admits his inability to understand or communicate the matter at hand. 'Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however, then I am shattered.' *FT*, 33; also 14, 23.

⁸⁵ Climacus criticizes Johannes de silentio in *CUP*, 267–8. In *CUP*, 99, he mocks as a fable worthy of Münchhausen a version of the leap that bears strong similarities to the leap found in *FT*. People like Johannes de silentio also seem to lie behind Anti-Climacus' disparaging comments about admirers who do not imitate. *PC*, 249–50.

relation to the eternal.⁸⁶ However, where Lessing says ‘contingent truths of history can never become the demonstration of necessary truths of reason’ and despairs over finding a way to cross the gap, Climacus points out that *all* truths of history are contingent (*CUP*, 97). There are not any essential and eternal historical truths, including the events that Lessing could see with his own eyes.⁸⁷ Climacus takes issue with the high value Lessing places on direct experience (unmediated by historical reports) as proof for faith. If the decision is seen as a necessary result derived at the end of a process of information gathering (even as a first-hand eyewitness), then for Climacus this cannot properly be called a decision and thus the result is not properly *Christian*. This is because the decision required for authentic Christianity to obtain is not one of submission to the inexorable weight of the facts of the event, but rather of right orientation towards the indirect meaning of the event itself. If the believer is compelled to believe, and cannot logically have done otherwise, then this is not belief—it is knowledge. For this reason, the process of ‘fact-finding’ does not apply to the category of becoming a Christian, a process that Climacus refers to as ‘quantifying oneself into a qualitative decision’ (*CUP*, 95). Here is ‘the entire misunderstanding that recurs time and again in modern philosophy: to make the eternal historical as a matter of course and to assume an ability to comprehend the necessity of the historical’ (*CUP*, 98). Following Climacus’ exploration of eternity and temporality (as discussed above), everything that becomes historical is contingent. Therein ‘lies again the incommensurability between a historical truth and an eternal decision’ (*CUP*, 98). If these incommensurables are to be crossed, it can only be done by a leap. In light of the problem of bridging the qualitative gap that exists between knowledge of an event and the eternal significance of that event, Climacus identifies three leaps in *PF* and *CUP*: the ‘leap of letting go’,⁸⁸ the ‘leap of a qualitative transition or shift’,⁸⁹ and the ‘leap of the small step’.⁹⁰ We will briefly consider examples of the three categories as they appear in Climacus, before considering the use that Anti-Climacus makes of them in the service of contemporaneity.

Climacus’ leap first makes its appearance in the third chapter of *PF* with a discussion of *letting go* of apologetic arguments for the existence of God. We can build up an argument for God, Climacus writes, but eventually one must come to the end of the logical manoeuvres. God either *is* or he *is not*, and the believer, in order to be an authentic believer, must give up trying to argue the point:

⁸⁶ *CUP*, 95.

⁸⁷ At this point Climacus refers the reader to the discussion in the ‘Interlude’ in *PF*. *CUP*, 97.

⁸⁸ *PF*, 43. Also 18–19; *CUP*, 99, 100, 595.

⁸⁹ *CUP*, 98. Also 83, 93, 95; *PF*, 62, 63, 72–6.

⁹⁰ *CUP*, 102. Also 95, 99, 100, 140, 204, 232, 288, 323; *PF*, 43.

Yet this letting go, even that is surely something; it is, after all, *meine Zuthat* [my contribution]. Does it not have to be taken into account, this diminutive moment, however brief it is—it does not have to be long, because it is a *leap*. (PF, 43 (original emphasis))

The leap also describes a *qualitative transition*. This is not the smooth transition of logical necessity, as if all that was needed was the collection of data and more incontrovertible evidence in order to effect the change as a matter of course. There cannot be a natural or obvious transition from historical reliability and apologetic arguments to eternal truth. 'The transition whereby something historical becomes decisive for an eternal happiness is a shifting from one genus to another . . . It is a leap' (CUP, 98).⁹¹ The leap for Climacus is directly linked to his project of presenting authentic Christianity as distinct from its quantitative formulations:

Since I neither presumed in *Fragments* nor presume here to explain the issue, only to present it . . . please note that this presenting is of a singular nature, because from the introduction there is no direct transition to becoming a Christian, but on the contrary, this is the qualitative leap. (CUP, 381)

Climacus is keen to show the unique volitional nature of the leap as a *small step* or contribution made by the would-be believer.⁹² While the actual transition to faith is a given (something that cannot come from us) the gift is related to something that we do—we let go, we respond, we embrace the paradox, etc. These 'doings' are the small contributions that the individual can make in preparation for the transformation.⁹³ Climacus often sees the leap as a decision to prepare for change. It is the small step onto the springboard that constitutes one's contribution as a leaper, and not the flight through the air.⁹⁴ A similar idea guides Climacus' image of faith as stepping out over 70,000 fathoms of water.⁹⁵ One must place oneself in the right position before faith can happen—this is our small step or contribution to the transition. Note that

⁹¹ Cf. PF, 72–6.

⁹² Cf. *ibid.*, 43 quoted above where the leap is 'surely something; it is, after all, *meine Zuthat* [my contribution]'.
⁹³ The question whether faith is a gift or a task is a vexed one in Kierkegaardian studies. 'With ostensible inconsistency Climacus mingles the language of human passivity with the language of human agency.' Lee Barrett, 'The Paradox of Faith in *Philosophical Fragments*' in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994), 263. My reading suggests a point of disagreement with M. Holmes Hartshorne, who argues that Climacus ironically stresses the spiritually strenuous action of leaping in order to 'deceive' the reader away from works and into grace. *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). It also suggests a possible solution to Louis Pojman's complaint that when it comes to the 'condition' character of faith versus the 'leaping' character of faith 'whether Kierkegaard could not have done more to reconcile his categories' *Logic*, 92.

⁹⁴ CUP, 102.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 204, also 140, 232, 288.

this is not a matter of accumulating information, for this would be to return to immanence and quantification. Instead, it seems that the preparatory action of the leap is merely the will to expose oneself to a given 'picture' of the world that is not objectively certain or in line with received wisdom. 'To be infinitely interested and to ask about an *actuality that is not one's own* is to will to believe and expresses the paradoxical relation to the paradox' (*CUP*, 323 (emphasis added)). The change occurs when the individual is transformed by the actuality that is not his own, but this is not due to the individual's own piecemeal efforts to build a new worldview.⁹⁶

The leap as it appears in Climacus has opened Kierkegaard up to much criticism. Perhaps the most persistent charge is that of fideism. The argument that Kierkegaard ascribes to blind faith over reason is commonplace amongst the secondary literature. Karen Carr argues that Kierkegaard is an 'anti-rationalist' and that, for Kierkegaard, Christianity is *always* a battle with reason.⁹⁷ Gordon Kaufman accuses Kierkegaard of 'unqualified fideism'.⁹⁸ Alastair MacIntyre paints a picture of a Kierkegaard who was trapped in an inescapable dilemma of basing truth on subjective passion.⁹⁹ This type of criticism is well known and often made. Yet ironically this image of Kierkegaardian Christianity has not taken into consideration the further development of 'the leap' as it appears in works after *CUP*—significantly, the very works and pseudonyms which Kierkegaard intended to be read as his vision of true Christianity.

In the same way that Johannes de silentio does not exhaust what Kierkegaard has to say about faith, Johannes Climacus is not Kierkegaard's final word on Christianity. This is not simply a matter of Kierkegaard later deviating from positions that he held at the time of writing. It is significant that throughout Kierkegaard takes pains to emphasize that Climacus is not yet a Christian, he only thinks he knows what Christianity is, even though he himself has been unable to make the transition.¹⁰⁰ It is Anti-Climacus, the next pseudonym in the series, who rounds out Climacus' categories and provides a fuller picture of Kierkegaard's vision of Christian faith and its relation to history and identity. Throughout *PC*, Anti-Climacus diffuses Climacus' language of the leaps, developing yet further a specifically Christian

⁹⁶ Ferreira describes this process with reference to the psychological phenomena of the Gestalt shift. *Transforming*, 34–6, 72–6; 'Faith', 217ff. With the image of the individual facing the churning sea and finding the confusion transformed into some sort of meaning, we are led back into the sphere of *Øieblikket*.

⁹⁷ Karen L. Carr, 'The Offence of Reason and the Passion of Faith: Kierkegaard and Anti-Rationalism' in *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996), 241.

⁹⁸ Gordon Kaufman, 'Mystery, Critical Consciousness and Faith' in William J. Abraham (ed), *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 57.

⁹⁹ Alastair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 39–43.

¹⁰⁰ See *CUP*, 16, 597, and also 369–81, 555–61.

category of the leap.¹⁰¹ This category is 'contemporaneity', and it is this that gets put to practical use in the final stage of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom.¹⁰² Without the 'leap' into contemporaneity there can be no possibility for offence. And without offence there can be no Christian faith.¹⁰³ It is this shift in focus from the intellectualized problem of the Absolute Paradox faced by Climacus to the ethical response to Jesus Christ posed by Anti-Climacus that goes some way to rescue Kierkegaard from charges of fideism, and which, as we shall see, speaks to constructing a specifically Christian response to Christian nationalism.

3.2 Anti-Climacus and the leap as contemporaneity

Anti-Climacus is Kierkegaard's only properly Christian pseudonym, and as such, he occupies an important place when considering the development of Kierkegaard's thought.¹⁰⁴ Anti-Climacus does not drastically alter Climacus' categories, but instead brings to them an 'insider's' point of view that is unavailable to the earlier pseudonyms. A fact that appears not to have been noticed by commentators concerned with 'Kierkegaard's leap' is that Anti-Climacus rarely uses the word. Relative to the use made of it in other pseudonyms, the specific event of 'leaping' is conspicuous by its absence in *PC*.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps this is because Anti-Climacus, having already leapt, is not as worried as the previous pseudonyms are by the intellectual and aesthetic problems posed by the leap. His focus is on the actual living, breathing God-man and the possibility of offence that must be passed before faith in Christ can be said to exist.¹⁰⁶ It is significant that whereas Climacus emphasizes the

¹⁰¹ *PC*, 18–19, 26–8, 52, 63, 82, 96.

¹⁰² Cf. *Moment*, 17, 39, 99–100, 162, 226, 248, 287–92, 316, 345. The idea is implicit in the passages on the disciple at second-hand in *PF*, but not developed there. See discussion below.

¹⁰³ *PC*, 65. The point is discussed fully below.

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard muses in his journals that Anti-Climacus is a character who 'considers himself to be a Christian on an extraordinarily high level' (*JP* VI, 6433). As the recipient of pure ideal Christianity, Anti-Climacus stands as a judge over the other pseudonyms, and over Kierkegaard himself. *JP* VI, 6431, 6501; *POV*, 13. On Anti-Climacus as a Christian, see also Hong's comments in *PC*, xiii.

¹⁰⁵ *Spring* occurs only twice in *Indøvelse i Christendom* [Practice in Christianity]. Once in the mouth of a hypothetical Hegelian clergyman discussing the historical necessity of the Expected one [*Forventet*]: 'But the world's government does not happen in riotous leaps [*tumultuarisk i Spring*], the development of the world is not... *revolutionair* but *evolutionair*.' (SV XII, 45; Cf. *PC*, 47). The other time is when Anti-Climacus is concerned about using precise words to describe action: 'So it is that understanding is related to behaviour like the diving board [*vippende Bræt*] from which the jumper takes his leap [*Springende tæger Springet*]' (SV XII, 148; Cf. *PC*, 158).

¹⁰⁶ *PC*, 65, 81–2.

challenges that faith poses to reason, Anti-Climacus dwells exclusively on the demand for obedience and imitation that Christ makes.¹⁰⁷ Anti-Climacus' contemporaneity is the completion of an idea first found in *PF*, where Climacus deals with the fact that there can be no second-hand disciples.¹⁰⁸ There Climacus argues that even those who personally knew the God-man still had to make exactly the same decision that those who only hear about the God-man have to make.¹⁰⁹ This is because what is essentially important about the God-man is not anything that can be seen or experienced empirically, and so everyone is in the same position with regard to the Absolute Paradox.¹¹⁰ Contemporaneity for Climacus is primarily bound up with the category of *communication*. It is Anti-Climacus who develops further the implications of contemporaneity specifically for Christian faith. More so than Climacus, Anti-Climacus removes the faith discussion from the sphere of the intellect, not because faith is opposed to the intellect, but because it is of a different quality altogether.

Contemporaneity describes both the imaginative positioning of oneself next to Christ, and the reality for those Christians who are aware of standing 'before God'. Contemporaneity allows no intermediary interpreter or the history of Christendom's triumph to blunt the impact of standing before a lowly man who claims to be God. Contemporaneity is important because it is by facing *this* man that the possibility of the essential offence of the God-man remains a live option. Furthermore, it is only by not being offended that one can be a true Christian, for the only options available to the contemporaneous person are rejection or faith.¹¹¹ Again, the moment of vision makes its appearance as that stance that one takes towards a potentially overwhelming experience, and the coming through the other side with identity intact. In short, contemporaneity describes the place where *Øieblikket*, and thus faith and authentic existence in history, can occur.

This, then, is the contemporaneity that Anti-Climacus crafts from Climacus' leap. The three Climacean leap categories that Anti-Climacus uses (but does not name) are 'letting go',¹¹² 'shifting-genus' or 'qualitative transformation',¹¹³ and the 'small contribution'.¹¹⁴ By using the themes with reference to contemporaneity but without actually mentioning the word *Spring*, Anti-Climacus manages to steer clear of the non- or pre-Christian associations

¹⁰⁷ *PC*, 52, 249–50.

¹⁰⁸ *PF*, ch. V, 'The Follower at Second Hand', 89–110.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 104–5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 'Interlude', 72–88.

¹¹¹ See, for example, *PC*, 65, 81–2.

¹¹² *PC*, 26–7, 96, 52.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 27–8, 62–3, 102, 140.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18–19, 82.

and problems connected to the leaping while at the same time retaining what is most useful about the category.

3.2.1 Contemporaneity and letting go

In *PF*, in keeping with his emphasis on reason and the intellect, Climacus talks of 'letting go' of demonstrations and philosophical arguments for the existence of God. His letting go 'is a leap' (*PF*, 43) which represents the domination that the paradox has over the understanding. Anti-Climacus retains the idea of letting go of demonstrations, but his emphasis is more on historical arguments than on the demands of logic. He speaks of a 'theological professor' who writes a new book on the historical 'demonstrations of the truth of Christianity' and who would be disappointed if his readers did not afterwards admit that Christianity has now been proved (*PC*, 96). The theological professor is merely reflecting a mistaken attitude that runs throughout all of Christendom. The 'calamity of Christendom' is that Christ is seen as an historical figure—'some kind of great somebody' (*PC*, 35). Preachers point to the miracle accounts in the New Testament and to the victorious 1,800 years that have elapsed between the time of Christ and their present situation. Has not Christianity triumphed over the world? 'Has not history established adequately, or more than adequately, established who he was, that he was—God?' (*PC*, 26). This is directly opposite to the attitude that Jesus took towards his own actions and presence in the world:

Christ himself, however, says no more than that the demonstrations are able to lead someone—not to faith, far from it . . . but to the point where faith can come into existence, are able to help someone to become aware and to that extent help him to come into the dialectical tension from which faith breaks forth: Will you believe or will you be offended. . . . in the situation of contemporaneity it is impossible to demonstrate directly. (*PC*, 96)

Thus Anti-Climacus considers historical demonstrations to be useless for the kind of job that their proponents want them to accomplish. 'Can any more foolish contradiction be imagined than this, to want to *demonstrate* . . . that an individual human being is God?' (*PC*, 26). Such a demonstration assumes a relation of degrees:

If we begin [with this demonstration], we cannot, without somewhere or other being guilty of a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* [shifting from one genus to another], suddenly by way of a conclusion obtain the new quality God, so that as a consequence the result or results of a human being's life at some point suddenly demonstrate that this human being was God . . . how many centuries must pass in order to have it demonstrated . . . ? (*PC*, 27)

It is only contemporaneity that brings people to the state whereby they feel the full force of divine demands coming from the actual man Jesus Christ. Christ is, of course, a man with an historical past, but it is not this history that produces Christian faith, and it is certainly not the common sense of making a decision based on the accumulation of data. 'So imagine yourself contemporary with him, the inviter . . . He, the inviter, demands that you shall give up everything, *let everything go*' (PC, 52 (emphasis added)). Contemporaneous faith invokes a stance that is opposite to triumphalism, fact-gathering or apologetics. It is precisely a letting go of these things, a willingness to be offended and in turn to cause offence against the sense (and sophistication) of the common that marks a qualitative shift in the orientation towards one's place in history.

3.2.2 *Contemporaneity as transition*

Contemporaneity reminds the individual that the Christian situation is given, not self-induced or produced as a matter of degree. Faith in Christ is a 'special kind of reception', and does not come as a transition in increments little by little (PC, 140). Anti-Climacus here builds on Climacus' category of the leap of a shifting-genus or qualitative transition. Whereas Climacus deals with the rather abstract and speculative ideas of immanence and transcendence, Anti-Climacus instantiates those ideas in the transformative situation of the Christian life. It is nothing new for Kierkegaard's pseudonyms to talk of the difference between God and man,¹¹⁵ but we have seen that previous characters have had trouble crossing the gap. Anti-Climacus introduces the idea that God wills to transform humans—to transform them 'into likeness with God' (PC, 63).

What this means for Anti-Climacus is expressly *not* what Christendom's preachers mean. The idea of a religion that reflects and gloriously completes the 'good life' is far removed from Anti-Climacus' authentic Christianity.

If [Christianity] is relaxed to the merely human, to what has arisen in the human heart, then people naturally think well of it and in turn naturally think well of the kind speaker who is able to make Christianity so mild . . . (PC, 62)

Instead, the contemporaneous one will recognize that 'Christianity came into the world as the absolute, not, humanly speaking, for comfort; on the contrary, it continually speaks about how the Christian must suffer' (PC, 63). Thus, because there is indeed such an 'infinite chasmic difference between God and man' (PC, 63), to be transformed into the image of God (in Christ) is to be transformed away from the comfort of the merely human, and into, '*humanly*

¹¹⁵ Problema II. 'Is there an Absolute Duty to God?' in *FT* speaks of the difference between the sphere of men and the sphere of God. At 68ff. See also *PF*, 44–8.

speaking, an even greater torment' (PC, 63 (emphasis added)). The transformation is a qualitative transition, which cannot be effected by innate human skill.

Earlier Anti-Climacus has said that to start historically and move from Jesus to God cannot be done without involving a 'shift from one genus to another' (PC, 27). Man and God do not resemble each other as a matter of degrees, but are separated by an 'infinite qualitative difference' (PC, 28). With Climacus' paradigm of the leap as a 'transition in kind' as a theoretical foundation, Anti-Climacus statements about *becoming* take on a stronger significance than the preacher's rhetoric normally suggests. 'One becomes a Christian only in the situation of contemporaneity with Christ, and in the situation of contemporaneity everyone will also become aware' (PC, 102). Being in the state of contemporaneity and Christianity is a transcendent gift, but one that is given only to those who are willing to put themselves in a situation where they can receive it in the moment of vision.

3.2.3 *Contemporaneity as a small contribution*

Climacus' leap of letting go was his small contribution. Without resorting to an overemphasis on the human contribution to the becoming of the Christian state, Anti-Climacus also retains a 'small something'. Here, he is building on Climacus' category of the small step that one takes before being catapulted into the leap.¹¹⁶ Like Climacus, Anti-Climacus recognizes that a tiny movement can have infinite consequences, but again, unlike Climacus, Anti-Climacus sees this step through the lens of contemporaneity.

The invitation stands at the crossroad . . . come here, you are so close to [Christ]; one single step onto the other way and you are so infinitely far away from him. . . . Oh, turn around [*vende om*] and come here, here is rest! (PC, 18, 19)

It is precisely this call to rest, however, which contains the possibility of offence, for here we have the individual man Jesus drawing all men to himself, as in Matthew 11:28.

It is in the situation of contemporaneity with an individual human being, a human being like others—and he speaks about himself in such a manner! . . . he directly makes himself totally different from what it is to be a human being, makes himself the divine—he, an individual human being. (PC, 100)

The natural response of Christendom to such a proposal is to remove the sting of the offence by suppressing the humble ordinariness of Christ and expounding instead on his 'obvious' glory. A triumphalist history is used to erect a barrier between the real being of Christ and his followers.

¹¹⁶ CUP, 101ff.

Well, if one goes and lives intoxicated in fantasies, if one allows the fantasy to create a fantastical figure of Christ, to which one then relates at the distance of imagination—well, then one perhaps does not notice the offence. (*PC*, 100)

Anti-Climacus urges that the small contribution of the potential believer is simply not to keep at a distance he who is asking to draw near, the contribution of allowing contemporaneity to take place: ‘no relation to the God-man is possible without beginning with the situation of contemporaneity’ (*PC*, 82). Contemporaneity is very rare. Without contemporaneity there can be no possibility of offence, and hence no Christianity.¹¹⁷

3.3 The offence of contemporaneity

The possibility of offence marks the point where the individual in contemporaneity with the historical event of the incarnation, chooses to turn to the God-man in faith or turn away in disgust. As such, offence linked to contemporaneity forms another key plank in providing a Kierkegaardian corrective to Christendom’s approaches to historical events and to identity formation.¹¹⁸

One rival approach to historical events is to treat them as raw sources of data that make belief in Christian doctrines a matter of inevitable submission to the demands of logic. When considering the central historical event of Christianity, namely the incarnation, such an approach leads one to viewing the becoming of the God-man as a necessary fact that can be known directly. What is more, with enough evidence and skilful apologetic argument, the event can be known *obviously*. To accept this central tenet of the Christian faith, then, is to enter the realm of the reasonable and secure. By contrast, the final Kierkegaardian approach to history sees the individual in contemporaneity face the full force of the historical event of the incarnation. Only in contemporaneity can the potential offensiveness of this event be appreciated. Such offence is not caused by the intellectual problems that the Paradox causes for the understanding, but instead the ethical problem that arises when *this*

¹¹⁷ Compare the essentially Christian notion of contemporaneity with Sartre’s use of the term in his essay ‘Kierkegaard the Singular Universal’. Sartre says Christianity is a dead issue, and that ‘Kierkegaard’s’ contemporaneity will help us ‘go further’. ‘We are all contemporaries,’ he says. Harold Bloom (ed), *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 76–98.

¹¹⁸ Christian Tolstrup argues that ‘contemporaneity’ in *PC* was especially offensive to Mynster’s world-historical sensibilities. ‘Playing a Profane Game with Holy Things’ in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004). See the discussion on Mynster in ch. 2 above. I think that ‘contemporaneity’ undermines more than Mynster, even though he was obviously one of the main targets of *PC*. See ch. 5 below.

man claims to be *God* and asks for your obedience.¹¹⁹ In this way, historical events are important for Kierkegaardian Christianity, not as sources of data to help solve a logical quandary, but as a catalyst for a moral decision to obey in love and faith, or turn away in offence and disgust.

With Anti-Climacus and contemporaneity, Kierkegaard develops his highest conception of 'offence' and shifts the essential problem of Christianity from one of intellect and reason to one of moral obedience and ethical choice. The essential offence of Christian faith is not the impact that it has on reason, or one's ability to somehow comprehend the incomprehensible. Anti-Climacus thinks that the intellectual categories of 'doubting' and 'understanding' are too shallow when it comes to the heart of the matter.¹²⁰ He moves beyond trying to comprehend the God-man composition, saying that those who try to fêete its profundity are merely performing tricks.¹²¹ The real essence of the offence is not in trying (or failing) to understand the composite; it is the composite itself.

[T]he *situation* belongs with the God-man, the situation that an individual human being who is standing beside you is the God-man. The God-man is not the union of God and man—such terminology is a profound optical illusion. The God-man is the unity of God and an individual human being. That the human race is or is supposed to be in kinship with God is ancient paganism; but *that* an individual human being is God is Christianity . . . (PC, 81–2)

The offence is felt in contemporaneity, where by imaginatively crossing the span of centuries, the would-be believer is removed from the 'present age' and is placed next to Christ.¹²² Climacus has laid the foundations but it is Anti-Climacus who draws out the significance of contemporaneity for the possibility of offence and makes the problem of the first- and second-hand disciples more acute. With true Christianity, there can be no case of the so-called 'second-hand disciple'. 'If you cannot bear contemporaneity . . . then you are not *essentially* Christian' (PC, 65 (original emphasis)). It is in PC that Anti-Climacus introduces the possibility of the essential offence as *only* occurring for those who see Christ as a contemporary,¹²³ that is for people who are able

¹¹⁹ Concurrent with the developing nature of the leap from Climacus to Anti-Climacus, the nature of 'offence' also develops. Here I am in agreement with Westphal, who also recognizes 'a gradual transformation' of offence from intellectual (Climacus) to ethical (Anti-Climacus). 'Kenosis and Offense' in *IKC: PC*, 36–7.

¹²⁰ PC, 81–3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 81. This passage is another example of Kierkegaard using one pseudonym to comment on another, in this case Climacus.

¹²² For example, PC, 63, 144. On PC's proposal that contemporaneity allows one to stand with the 'sacred history' of Christ's life on earth (PC, 64), see Douglas Farrow, 'The sacred history stands alone not because it *negates* time, or is somehow ahistorical, but because here and only here is time linked with eternity, the life of man with the life of God.' *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 224 n. Also Murray Rae, 'The Forgetfulness of Historical-Talkative Remembrance in Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*' in *IKC: PC*, 89–90.

¹²³ PC, 106–7.

to apprehend that the challenge of the God-man applies to them personally in inwardness and immediacy. Relegating Jesus to a point where he is thought of only as a figure of the past does not make him 'actual', that is, his demands do not impinge on anyone's immediate life.¹²⁴

Only that which is contemporary (that which is 'for you'), is 'actual' for an individual. The qualification that is lacking—which is the qualification of truth (which is inwardness) and of all religiousness is—for *you*. The past is not actuality—for me. Only the contemporary is actuality for me. That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality—for you. (PC, 64)

In PC Anti-Climacus finds that the possibility of offence occurs in two forms—that of loftiness and that of lowliness. With the 'offence of loftiness' the individual must face the opportunity for moral indignation that *this* man (i.e. Jesus Christ) is, or is claiming to be, God.¹²⁵ This man 'speaks and acts as if he were God, declares himself to be God' (PC, 94). With the offence of lowliness, the problem comes when one considers that God in all his majesty is *this* man.¹²⁶ Where the one 'who passes himself off as God proves to be the lowly, poor, suffering, and finally powerless human being' (PC, 102). Anti-Climacus identifies both as 'forms of essential offence' (PC, 121).

Significantly, both forms of offence can only occur for the one in a contemporaneous orientation towards the person of Christ, and not for the one contemplating the logical puzzle of a theoretical God-man. Anti-Climacus does not define either of these categories of essential offence in relation to reasons and arguments. Indeed, Anti-Climacus insists that it is to Christendom's shame that the preachers have turned Jesus' life and actions into a logical 'proof' for his divinity, for by taking away the possibility of offence at this lowly man who claims to be God, they have taken Christ away as well.¹²⁷ Christendom thinks (as a delusion) that the God-man was directly visible, and that Christianity's cultural success merely confirms this straightforward proposition.¹²⁸ The preachers point to miracles as evidence, forgetting that the biblical accounts have Jesus himself putting no great stock in the persuasive effects of his actions.¹²⁹ For example, the gospels tell how when Jesus recounted a litany of his own healing miracles to John the Baptist's disciples, he ended the account by stating that the man who does not take offence on

¹²⁴ Ibid., 63–4.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 94–102.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 102–21.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 94.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 95. Cf. Rae, who draws this out as a challenge to the 'Hegelian' concept of the world-historical in which the passage of time brings certain improvement in knowledge. 'Forgetfulness', 83. I think this is correct, although the 'world-historical' is by no means confined to 'Hegelian' thinkers, as discussed in ch. 5 below.

¹²⁹ PC, 95–7.

account of Christ will be blessed.¹³⁰ It is significant to Anti-Climacus that these demonstrations do not lead to faith, as if faith was a matter of proof and reasons, but that they lead instead to the possibility of offence.¹³¹

if someone says directly: I am God; the Father and I are one, this is direct communication. But if the person who says it, the communicator, is this individual human being, an individual human being just like others, then this communication is not entirely direct, because it is not entirely direct that an individual human being should be God . . . (PC, 134)

When a particular lowly man invokes the divine by saying 'Believe in me', there is a direct statement coming from an incognito source, and it is this disjunction between the saying and the person saying it that produces the possibility of offence. One would not be offended if a being who was *obviously* God claimed to be God, the knowledge of which followed as a compelling matter of course. But if one does not face the possibility of that offence, then one is not a Christian. At best one is in the realm of information, knowledge and proof, but such a one has not yet faced the God-man as a moral agent, and thus has not made a decision about obeying Jesus Christ. There is within Christendom a version of Christianity that has adopted precisely this quantitative view that has ignored the potentially offensive, and therefore *ethical*, nature of the choice to be made in relation to faith. Kierkegaard calls this view *world-historical*, and it is that which forms the focus of the next chapter.

¹³⁰ Mtt. 11:6.

¹³¹ PC, 95.

History

The religion of progress . . . [is] a religion of death . . . Such a sacrifice of all human destinies to the messianic consummation of the favoured race can only revolt man's moral and religious conscience.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Kierkegaard's existential approach is often caricatured as radically separating the individual from all 'outside' influences—including all meaningful relations to history and historical events. As we have seen however, Kierkegaard's formulation of the moment does not allow us to reach this conclusion. Not only is a right relation to history important to Kierkegaard, it is precisely a right relation to historical facts and events that are crucial to his project of reintroducing Christianity back into Christendom. The Christianity assumed by Christendom is taken for granted because it is as easy as being born a European. So it is that the Kierkegaardian programme is one of making faith more, rather than less, difficult. Kierkegaard was not a-historical or anti-historical. Instead he agrees that Christianity is a profoundly historical phenomenon.² However, for Kierkegaard historical events serve as catalysts for authentic faith, they do not in themselves constitute a body of knowledge that can automatically be called Christian. The accumulation of historical facts do not contribute to the proof of essential Christianity, and belief is not a matter of feeding enough information into a logical system so that 'faith' occurs as a matter of course. Indeed, in many ways it is the accretion of information about Christianity that has led to the loss of Christianity in Christendom.

¹ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, trans. George Reavey (London: Centenary Press, 1936), 189.

² Prompting Søren Holm to comment: 'The most central problem in [Kierkegaard's] works is, namely, the dialectical idea of the philosophy of history.' *Søren Kierkegaards Historiefilosofi* (København: Bianco Luno Bogtrykkeri, 1962), 5. Contra Don Cupitt and others. See below.

Kierkegaard thinks that his contemporaries have confused knowledge with faith. The former is a category quite at home in the world of logical necessity, common sense and apologetic arguments. The latter has to do with a right emotional and spiritual orientation towards the unknown, and an ethical obedience that comes from trust—even love—more than it comes from calculated interest and the weighing of evidence.

To this end *Øieblikket* does not remove people from history but it does work to put history in its place. The historical is a product of the eternal touching time in the moment, and not the other way around. In other words, the hand of eternity is not forced by history. For Grundtvig and Martensen and their schools of thought, the project of scrying the divine will in the history of human groups involves seeing historical events as necessary events and historical facts as evidence of the logical truth of their theological positions. Yet Kierkegaard's sharp distinction between logical necessity on the one hand and contingent actuality on the other, and his account of the moment's orientation towards the eternal, leads to the conclusion that contingency and freedom are intrinsic features of historical life. To ascribe necessity to historical events is to make a fundamental category mistake. As we shall see, this has consequences for ethics and the expression of identity of groups and individuals.³ Furthermore, *Øieblikket* has to do with the right relation of persons to the divine, or in other words, with faith. When considering *the* event of history, namely the incarnation, Kierkegaard does not de-historicize this event in order to make faith more palatable to a sophisticated modern audience. Instead, employing contemporaneity he accentuates the historicity of the event, and then identifies our response to it as *either* faith *or* offence. In this way coming to have faith, and thus becoming a whole, authentic person, is essentially and inextricably tied up with the attitude towards an historical event.

Building on the formulations suggested by contemporaneity, and considering the practical outworkings of an orientation informed by *Øieblikket*, the question now arises: what, then, is the right relationship of Christianity to historical events and facts? As human culture develops and progresses, does the essential task of the human condition change along with it? The family of ideas that I am calling 'Christian nationalism' includes a commitment to the notion of a hierarchical historical development of national cultures, and to the idea that the spiritual task of the group changes from age to age as humanity progresses. It is precisely these ideas that Kierkegaard challenges with his attack on the 'world-historical' point of view. It is his project to dismantle Christendom's too-easy systematic assumptions and 'to make difficulties everywhere' that forms the focus of the present chapter.

³ This is the subject of ch. 6 below.

The 'world-historical' is not a particular system that can be attributed to one thinker. Instead, Kierkegaard uses the label 'world-historical' to apply to a number of related assumptions held by a broad range of scholars and popular writers alike. Kierkegaard is less concerned with the academics who are world-historical than he is with the way that their world-historical ideas have been internalized by an unreflective public. More accurately, he is concerned with the way that the *Christian* public has absorbed world-historical assumptions into its view of the nature of God and the destiny of man.

It is in this theological light that we see Kierkegaard's practical challenge to the world-historical point of view. His understanding of authentic faith, grounded on the moment of vision and the leap, brings him into direct opposition with world-historical philosophies. For Kierkegaard each person faces essentially the same task no matter where or when they are situated. His notion of authentic Christianity, which is predicated upon an orientation of contemporaneity with the God-man, challenges any theology that maintains that the human condition, and thus the religious requirements of that condition, changes or develops from age to age.

We will first consider Climacus' quarrel with the 'world-historical'. This is not directed solely against Hegel, as is often supposed, but against a range of opponents. Looking at *CUP*'s treatment of Grundtvig (and to a lesser extent Martensen) leads to identifying the prime complaint that Kierkegaard has with all world-historical versions, namely, that the world-historical has done away with the ethical. In Climacus' hands, the category of 'the ethical' refers not to systems of social morality, but to the essential task facing all persons, which is the decision of becoming authentic before God. We will consider the way in which the world-historical elevates the task of the 'age' or cultural group over that of the individual, and the way that it relativizes ethics by replacing 'the good' with 'the great'. This leads us to an examination of the damage that world-historical theologies can have on an understanding of the essence of Christianity, which in turn has consequences for locating the ground of personal identity and the perception of individuals as willing, acting, ethical agents.

The chapter will then go on to examine the question of historical development and Kierkegaard's attitude towards his present era. Again, the issue at stake is whether individuals of one age face a different task from that faced by another. Is it the case that Kierkegaard subscribed to the common belief in the linear movement of the ages? Building on the observations taken from *CUP*, and drawing extensively on *TA*, I argue that he did not. This is in opposition to a number of secondary commentators, who ascribe to Kierkegaard *either* optimism for his culture and its future development *or* (more commonly) pessimism about his present age in comparison with a lost golden age or a hankering for some *ancien régime*. Instead, I will demonstrate how Kierkegaard's numerous allusions to historical figures and eras do not fall neatly into

a paradigm of historical progression or regression. Kierkegaard's prior commitment to *Øieblikket* and contemporaneity, as well as his critique of world history, leads him to adopt a philosophy of history that is more cyclical than it is linear or hierarchical. While it is true that the trappings of culture change from age to age, what is essential about the human condition does not.

Occasionally one finds the opinion that because Kierkegaard rejected world-historical theories of history, he had no theory or appreciation of history at all.⁴ Yet as I argued in the previous chapter, and hope to enforce here, Kierkegaard's Christianity is a profoundly historical phenomenon. For Kierkegaard it is inextricably bound up with history and real historical events, primarily the event of the incarnation. However, it is true that Kierkegaard's approach to history is significantly different from that of the world-historians. To the theoretical notions of the moment, the leap and contemporaneity are added a strong sense of equality of opportunity and the pressing call of the God-man on every person's life regardless of their historical situation:

In relation to the absolute, there is only one time, the present; for the person who is not contemporary with the absolute, it does not exist at all. And since Christ is the absolute it is easy to see that in relation to him there is only one situation, the situation of contemporaneity . . . Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the holy history, stands on its own, outside history. (*PC*, 63)

The present chapter aims to continue to unpack the themes contained in the quote above, and to demonstrate how Kierkegaard's criticism of the world-historical amounts to a significant challenge to key planks of any nationalist theology.

2. THE WORLD-HISTORICAL IN *CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT*

Christianity itself attaches an enormous importance to the individual subject . . . It is in a way an un-Christian use of eighteen centuries to intend with them to entice the single individual into Christianity or to frighten him into it: he still does not

⁴ For example, Don Cupitt makes much of Kierkegaard's supposed a-historicism. *Sea of Faith* (London: BBC, 1984), esp. 154ff; *Radicals and the Future of the Church* (London: SCM, 1989). On this topic see David Mercer, *Kierkegaard's Living Room* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 4; John Hoberman, 'Kierkegaard's Two Ages and Heidegger's Critique of Modernity' in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984).

enter into it. And if he does enter into it, he does so whether he has eighteen centuries for him or against him. (*CUP*, 49)

There are some (like Lessing) who think that the passage of time counts against Christianity, concluding that the accumulation of years that have passed between the potential believer and the events of the incarnation serve to make faith more difficult.⁵ But there are also those who find a positive role in the accumulation of history in relation to Christianity. Kierkegaard's response to those who adopt a negative interpretation was to demonstrate that when it comes to faith, even first-hand disciples do not have it so easy.⁶ Now, in response to those who put a positive spin on the distance between the original events and the current age, Kierkegaard points out that the disciples at second-hand do not have it so easy either. By looking to the glory of the passing years and successive generations as demonstrations of the truth of its religion, Christendom has done away with the sharp shock of having to make a decision that *this* man is *God*, and thus, for Kierkegaard, has done away with Christianity altogether.⁷

It is to the assumption that Christendom's success proves Christianity's truth that much of *CUP* is addressed.⁸

The reliability of the eighteen centuries, the fact that Christianity has permeated all relations of life, reshaped the world, etc., this reliability is just an illusion . . . In relation to an eternal truth that is supposed to be decisive for an eternal happiness, eighteen centuries have no greater demonstrative weight than a single day. On the contrary, eighteen hundred years and everything, everything that can be told and said and repeated in that regard, have a diversionary power that is extremely distracting. (*CUP*, 47)

It is in this light that *CUP* contains the bulk of the critique of the world-view that Kierkegaard *via* Climacus summarizes as 'world-historical':

The world-historical idea increasingly concentrates everything systematically. What a Sophist once said that he could carry the whole world in a nutshell, now seems to be accomplished in modern surveys of world history: they are becoming more and more compendious . . . In our day it is not a matter of a particular scholar's or thinker's occupying himself with world history; no, the whole age is clamouring for world history. (*CUP*, 133–4)

Given the number of commentators who read the critique of the world-historical as primarily (or only) an attack on Hegel, it is worth emphasizing

⁵ Cf. the second chapter of *CUP* and discussion in ch. 4 above.

⁶ Cf. 'Interlude' *PF*; *PC*; ch. 4 above.

⁷ See *PC* and the delineation of the double-edged offence of 'loftiness' (94–101) and 'lowliness' (102–21).

⁸ See for example *CUP*, Part One, Chapter One, and especially the third section entitled 'The Evidence of the Centuries for the Truth of Christianity'.

that Kierkegaard is attacking more than one thinker here.⁹ Kierkegaard's complaint with the world historians should not be read as if he was simply scrutinizing Hegel's system. Instead, *CUP* reveals unease at the mis-use of history and a distortion of Christianity that exists across a spectrum of popular and theological thought. The writers whom *CUP* alludes to as world-historical often disagree with each other, even as they share assumptions about the direction of history and its relation to Christianity. To be sure Hegel and his Danish followers such as Martensen and Adler belong in this category, but so do Grundtvig and Schelling, neither of whom were Hegelians.¹⁰ What unites them is not a set of particular phenomenological commitments, but rather a basic belief in the ability of the passing of years to reveal more of the divine in creation, as well as the assumption that history was following a linear trajectory of development.

As a category, the world-historical vision has many aspects that do not endear itself to Kierkegaard. First, it is quantitative—seeing the primary source of Christian truth as residing in data derived from what might now be called 'empirical historical research'.¹¹ Secondly, world-historians are speculative—making assumptions about the *telos* and divine function of various peoples as they develop from age to age. For Kierkegaard this speculation serves only to abstract individual persons from the real ethical choices facing them in their present life. Thirdly, the world-historians privilege the group over the individual, with specific attention paid to the hierarchy of popular and intellectual movements within the sweep of history. World-historical views invariably pit national groups against others and rank them according to a standard of spiritual/cultural development. Inevitably, it is one of the various European Christian cultures that gets placed at the top of the pile, depending on the

⁹ While mention of Hegel appears throughout their treatments of *CUP*, neither Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. G. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), nor Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), devote any time to other potential targets of Kierkegaard's criticism. See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983), 17–21, which strongly identifies Hegel with the world-historical philosophy. Cf. Jon Stewart, whose *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) successfully demonstrates that it is especially Grundtvig and Martensen and not Hegel who are in view in *CUP*. However, I suggest that in his attempt to find affinities between Hegel and Kierkegaard, Stewart occasionally overstates his case.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard had hoped to find in Schelling a worthy opponent to Hegelian philosophy. However after a brief burst of enthusiasm, he grew increasingly disillusioned when he attended Schelling's lectures in Berlin in 1842 and found that he too subscribed to the idea that God uses the development of human consciousness in history as a means of self-revelation. See the historical introduction to *Concept of Anxiety*, and *Kierkegaard's Letters and Documents*, trans. Henrik Rosenmeier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 97–8; Robert F. Brown, *Schelling's Treatise on 'The Deities of Samothrace': A translation and an interpretation* (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1977).

¹¹ Climacus explicitly links the world-historical with quantification and calculation of 'enormously huge quantities'. *CUP*, 143.

nationality of the speculator. Some examples are Hegel, who finds solace in the Prussian State as the best expression of the divine's self-revelation in the world, Martensen, who waxes eloquently about his own civilization as being the necessary ingredient for Christianity, and Grundtvig, who can claim that it is with the Scandinavians that God has placed his mouth on earth.¹²

Climacus does not deny that Christianity is bound up with the historical. Indeed, as he reminds us in *CUP*, *PF* was about this very topic, attempting to trace the means by which the crucial Christian events of the past can have eternal significance.¹³ Yet faith does not arise from exhaustive scholarly research or identifying with privileged historical groups.¹⁴ Christianity is spirit—that is, it is inwardness and passion.¹⁵ Above all, Christianity is a decision about the God-man and 'all decision, all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity' (*CUP*, 33). Climacus' complaint is not that the world-historical view looks at the historical aspects of Christianity. Instead, he charges the world-historical method of using historical research into Christian events and scriptures as an excuse not to have to make a decision about those things.¹⁶

It is in the perceived tendency of world-historical speculators to postpone a decision that we find shades of Kierkegaard's complaint with Martensen's maxim 'doubt everything'.¹⁷ Kierkegaard accuses Martensen of affecting a stance of suspended scepticism which delays a decision. In a similar way, speculators and world-historians are always looking to the past for more information to add to 'the system' before it is deemed adequate to explain present reality. Not only do they put off making immediate ethical and religious choices as a consequence, but work on the ever unfolding 'system' effectively replaces the need to have to make choices at all. As such, people can never fully know themselves in their present era. At best, each generation can

¹² In a footnote in *CUP*, Climacus comments wryly on the inability of various world-historical systems to deal with China. He takes this as evidence of the world-historical speculator's inability to reflect on the source of his own system, for his own culture always just happens to come out on top. China gets a paragraph (that changes from system to system), but Prussia gets pages, because it invented the system. 'The method admits only one Chinese, but not a single German assistant professor is excluded, especially no Prussian, because whoever has the cross blesses himself first.' *CUP*, 150 n.

¹³ 'Christianity is something historical . . . and yet qua historical and precisely by means of the historical, it proposes to have decisive significance for a person's eternal happiness.' *CUP*, 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 27. On the use of study of scripture to avoid obedience to scripture, see Richard Bauckham on Kierkegaard's use of the book of James. *James* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁷ Sometimes assumed by commentators to be a reference to Descartes, Kierkegaard's repeated allusions to '*de omnibus dubitandum est*' in fact signals his debate with Martensen, who adopted Cartesian phrases in his lectures and was publicly identified with the phrase. See Stewart, ch. 5 and 110–12. Also Kierkegaard's unfinished essay, *Johannes Climacus*.

only come to know what was true for the preceding generation.¹⁸ Even then, world-historians must recognize that this is an approximate knowledge for:

the world-historical material is endless, and consequently the limit must in one way or another be arbitrary . . . Although the world-historical is something past, as material for cognitive observation it is incomplete; it continually comes into existence through ever-new observation and research . . . (*CUP*, 150)

And yet, as Lessing has already discovered, what is approximate is of no use to faith. 'There is an essential misrelation between [approximation] and a personal, infinite interestedness in one's own eternal happiness' (*CUP*, 24). The 1,800 years between the reader and the incarnation do not help the decision concerning eternal happiness. In fact, the numbers 'have a diversionary power that is extremely distracting' (*CUP*, 47). Climacus describes a situation in which the world-historian confronts a poor questioning sinner 'with countless generations and millions upon millions upon millions. Then he says to him: Do you now dare to be brazen enough to deny the truth?' (*CUP*, 48). Says Climacus, 'such a rhetorical shower bath [*styrtebad*] from an altitude of eighteen centuries is very bracing' (*CUP*, 48). Yet the shower bath is wasted if the sinner is brought into pondering his relation to the millions upon millions rather than to Christianity. 'Christianity . . . attaches an enormous importance to the individual subject; it wants to be involved with him, him alone, and thus each one individually' (*CUP*, 48–9).

2.1 Grundtvig

For his part, Grundtvig was no stranger to the shower bath of 1,800 years. Indeed, as was shown in chapter one, he used exactly this argument of countless generations to beat down his ecclesiastical opponents. As such, he is the primary target of Climacus' conclusion that by focussing on the millions, the world-historian has lost sight of the individual, and that Christendom has confused its culture with its Christianity. Hegelians such as Martensen are undoubtedly also within view in these pages; however, it is Grundtvig who bears the brunt of *CUP*'s attack on the world-historians. Certainly Grundtvig is named and mocked more readily than other candidates that Kierkegaard could have brought into his book.¹⁹

¹⁸ 'According to Hegel, the truth is the continuous world-historical process. Each generation, each stage of this process is legitimated and yet is only an element in the truth' (*CUP*, 33).

¹⁹ Grundtvig is explicitly singled out as a 'world-historian' in *CUP*, 36. Even where Grundtvig is not mentioned by name, the discussion on the world-historical is peppered throughout with allusions to Grundtvigian ideas such as the 'matchless discovery' and the 'churchly solution'. See especially 34–46. On Grundtvig as a target of *CUP* see Stewart at 464–5.

In this respect, *CUP* follows in the spirit of Kierkegaard's scornful attitude found in unpublished manuscripts. 'Grundtvig at times goes so deep into history that one sees nothing at all.'²⁰ Grundtvig's affectation as a prophet of the North in the manner of Odin is a reoccurring source of ridicule for Kierkegaard:

Grundtvig appears on an elevation in the forest background . . . He is artistically draped in a great cloak, has a staff in his hand, and his face is concealed by a mask with one eye (deep and profound so as to see into world history) and a mossy beard with bird's nests in it . . . When he has finished his speech (that is, when the committee in charge of the festivities says 'Enough' for otherwise he would never finish), a bell rings, a cord is pulled, the beard falls off, followed by the enormous cloak, and we see a slim young man with wings; it is Grundtvig as the spirit of the Scandinavian idea.²¹

The allusions also appear in print in *CUP*: 'In truth all that is said about Grundtvig is highly dubious, that he is a seer, bard, skald, prophet, with an almost matchless outlook upon world history and with one eye for the profound' (*CUP*, 46).

Despite the mocking tone it is worth noting that although Kierkegaard seems flippant when dealing with Grundtvig, large portions of the argument in *CUP* and elsewhere deal seriously with Grundtvigian assumptions and ideas.²² Kierkegaard is not as dismissive of Grundtvig and the implications of Grundtvigianism as his off-hand comments might suggest. That being said, he acknowledges far less common ground with Grundtvig than he does with any other opponent. 'No one wishing to know definitely where he stands could possibly wish to have Grundtvig for an ally' (*CUP*, 46).

As we have seen, Grundtvig's solution to the uncertain nature of 'scripture theologians' and their foreign texts was to offer his 'Churchly view'. For Grundtvig the true Church does not reside in its ability to know all there is to know about words on a page. It lives only in the communal life of believers confessing Apostolic formulations. Climacus is happy to lend his support to the first part of Grundtvig's analysis. Christianity cannot be just a reading

²⁰ JP 6: 6733; *Pap.* X-4 A 56.

²¹ JP 5: 5832; *Pap.* VI B 235, 293. See the scattered references in *Prefaces/Writing Sampler*, trans. Todd Nichol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). In 1808, Grundtvig published the poem 'Gunderslev Wood' in which, in a quest to find an authentic Scandinavian expression of faith, he imagines following an ancient forest path to find a grove dedicated to the religion of the Norse people. there he is free 'to praise the gods who have passed away'. In Steen Johansen (ed), *Udvalgte Digte* [Selected Poems] (København: Reitzel, 1963), 140–7. See Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 200–1.

²² Here I am in disagreement with Bukdahl when he writes, 'Kierkegaard's entire critique of Grundtvig, however, rested on a flimsy foundation and was based on an emotional reaction to the overwhelming bombast and fecundity of Grundtvig's personality.' *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 23. The issue is discussed further in ch. 6 below.

society that collects information. If one tries to base infinite interest on Christianity's historical documents, then one will be disappointed. Eternal happiness cannot be predicated on an attempted exhaustive knowledge of ancient texts, for more information could always come to light. 'With regard to the historical, the greatest certainly is only an approximation' and an approximation is always too little to build an eternal happiness on (*CUP*, 23).

But what of Grundtvig's alternative? Positing the Apostolic community as a solution to the problems posed by the approximate knowledge of biblical scholarship is, as Climacus patronizingly announces 'indeed a Danish idea'. Nevertheless, 'I cannot in the name of compatriotism either rejoice personally over this "matchless discovery" or find it desirable for the government to order a *Te Deum* from the entire population in pious thanksgiving for the "matchless discovery"' (*CUP*, 36). This is because the Churchly view does not avoid the problems of historical (un)certainly.²³ Grundtvig supposes that the Church (which is 'something present') cancels out the difficulty of the historical reliability of the New Testament (which is 'something past').²⁴ Climacus concedes that what is essentially Christian can only be learned from the Church; however, it is another matter to insist that the present Danish Church is the Apostolic Church. To do so 'designates pastness, consequently a historicity in quite the same sense as that of the Bible' (*CUP*, 39). This is because Grundtvig has merely replaced one form of historical certainty (scriptural warrant) for another (authentic apostolicity).

Thus Grundtvig has not evaded the problem of using quantitative resources to get to a place of relating to God.²⁵ As Grundtvig acknowledges, the Apostolic community adheres around the rite of baptism and the creeds that have been successfully passed from generation to generation. Yet because of the dependence of Grundtvigian claims on historical events and formulations, such a position is itself reliant on data that amounts only to approximation. On the individual level, one's standing with the 'true' Church relies on the historical event of one's baptism—a one-off episode that can only be approximately demonstrated by recourse to other's testimony and fallible parish records. Furthermore, as difficult as it is to prove beyond doubt that one's own baptism happened, the difficulty is only magnified when one considers whether the people doing the baptism were baptized themselves, and whether the creedal formula they used was sufficiently Apostolic.²⁶

If someone wants to emphasize the Sacrament of Baptism and base his eternal happiness on having been baptised, he again becomes comic, not because the

²³ *CUP*, 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵ An attempt that Climacus calls 'quantifying oneself into a qualitative position' (*ibid.*, 95).

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 43–5. In a note at 45, Climacus makes the point that Grundtvig's faith is in the fact of being baptized, rather than in God.

infinitely interested passion is comic (far from it . . .), but because the object is only an approximation object . . . But if Baptism is to be decisive . . . then I must ask for certainty. Alas, the trouble is that in relation to a historical fact I can only obtain an approximation. (*CUP*, 43–4)

Climacus complains that Grundtvig implicitly portrays Christianity as an objective matter of historical research and numerical population—the more people who celebrate the Apostolic creed the truer the religion is. ‘The Church theory has been sufficiently lauded as objective, a word that in our age has become a way of honourable amends by which thinkers and prophets believe they are telling one another something of great importance.’ Yet if all one had were these objective arguments of historical detail and parish records and nothing else, then Climacus suggests that one is ‘*eo ipso* a pagan’. This is because Christianity is ‘precisely a matter of spirit and of subjectivity and of inwardness’ (*CUP*, 43). For this reason, Climacus’ answer to Grundtvig’s historical optimism is the same as his earlier response to Lessing’s historical pessimism. ‘The only historicity superior to proof is contemporary existence’ (*CUP*, 39). Only in the repeated contemporary existence before the God-man can the essential choice about the God-man occur. Thus it is the ethical problem faced by the first-hand disciple, and not the intellectual puzzles faced by the second-hand disciple, that points to what is essential about Christianity.

2.2 The ethical and Christianity

For Kierkegaard, what it means to be a person is intimately bound up with what it is to be a Christian. In this light *CUP* attacks the conception that sees Christianity as essentially an historical phenomenon culminating in the present age. If the present era is ‘Christian’, then it follows as a matter of course that anyone living in that era must also be a Christian merely by dint of being born in the present age and quite apart from their free decision.²⁷ Instead, *CUP* (in a quote I used in the introduction) considers the possibility that someone might read the New Testament and conclude that perhaps Christianity is not in its essence a matter of geography, language or cultural sophistication after all:

Now, if someone thinks that this is not quite right, that he is not a Christian, he is considered an eccentric. His wife says to him: ‘How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish aren’t you? Doesn’t the geography book say that the predominant

²⁷ Ibid., 50. In an article in *Fædrelandet* (27 April, 1855), Kierkegaard points out one of the absurdities of Christendom in the case of Rabbi A. A. Wolff, who, as a Knight of the Dannebrog, was legally considered ‘to profess the evangelical Christian religion’. *Moment*, 58.

religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? . . . Don't you tend to your work in the office as a good civil servant; aren't you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran Christian state? So of course you are a Christian.' (*CUP*, 50–1)

If Christian theology is to affirm the existence of a relation to the eternal, then it cannot do so by appealing to one's cultural context or to an exhaustive knowledge of particular historical events. Kierkegaard locates the essentially Christian in the ethical response that an individual has to those particular events, rather than intellectual mastery over the details themselves. It is significant that Kierkegaard's philosophical analysis of the difference between necessary truths and contingent events, his attack on apologetics, his criticism of Martensen's scepticism and Grundtvig's nationalistic confidence all culminate in the charge that the world-historical has done away with the ethical.²⁸

Spoiled by constant association with world history, people want the momentous and only that, are concerned only with the accidental, the world-historical outcome, instead of being concerned with the essential, the innermost, freedom, the ethical.

Continual association with the world-historical makes a person incompetent to act. True ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost of one's capability, but also . . . never thinking whether or not thereby one achieves something. As soon as the will begins to cast a covetous eye on the outcome, the individual begins to become immoral . . . the individual demands something other than the ethical itself. (*CUP*, 135)

Throughout Kierkegaard's literature, the category of 'the ethical' means different things to different pseudonyms.²⁹ For Climacus, the ethical refers not to a system of social mores but instead to the set of possibilities, capabilities and responsibilities that come with making decisions—or, more accurately, making *the* decision about the God-man.³⁰ In this way, talk about the ethical is talk about a person's self-commitment—the matter and manner that a person makes choices is essential to their becoming authentic selves. As a corollary, the matter and manner by which a person abrogates the responsibility for their choices has consequences for their inauthentic existence as well.

'The ethical' is integral to what Kierkegaard means by existing in the strong sense. It is not a sentimental bolt-hole to which Kierkegaard's characters retreat in the face of intellectual challenges to faith. Instead, the ethical is the

²⁸ See esp. *CUP*, 129ff.

²⁹ The christianized pagan Johannes de silentio is concerned about the damage that a God-relationship may do to a system of universally recognized social mores (see *FT*, 52–3, 55–6, 60–1, 66). Anti-Climacus on the other hand specifically repudiates this sense of 'the ethical', and proposes a 'truly ethical' Christian category which 'reshapes all ethical concepts and gives them one additional range' (*SUD*, 83, at 85, 89, 94). He binds the truly ethical to the essential offence posed by the incarnation (*PC*, 70, 111).

³⁰ As discussed above. See *CUP*, 27, 33, 48–9.

source and home of faith, precisely because it is a matter of free choices and the relation between subjects and not impersonal objectivity.³¹ There is no Christianity without the ethical choice of assent to the God-man who says 'come unto me and I will give you rest' even while appearing at the same time to be a lowly human.³² To take this possibility away and replace it, as the world-historical theologians do, with a set of objective and obvious propositions, is not to provide a different sort of Christianity, it is to do away with Christianity altogether.³³

2.3 Individual existence

Kierkegaard's claim is that because it obscures the ethical, academic study in the world-historical mould is inadequate for addressing matters of authenticity and identity. 'All essential knowing pertains to existence... Therefore, only the ethical and the ethical-religious knowing is essential knowing' (CUP, 197–8).

The scope which Kierkegaard allowed for bona fide academic research is an open question. On the one hand, the title of Climacus' concluding postscript is itself a satire of the new type of academic class appearing in the universities. The term *uvidenskabelig* is usually translated 'unscientific', however, a fuller rendering would be 'unscholarly'. Elsewhere in his journals, Kierkegaard refers to a 'Concluding Simple Postscript', 'simple' because 'there can be no schoolmaster, strictly understood, in the art of existing'.³⁴ On the other hand, there are passages defending the work of the scholar: '[Scholarship] is wholly legitimate, and the present author certainly has respect, second to none, for that which scholarship consecrates' (CUP, 25).³⁵ Rather than attributing

³¹ C. Stephen Evans makes a similar point when he argues that Kierkegaard's turn to subjectivity is not motivated by the claim that theism was once intellectually credible but is no longer. For Kierkegaard, abstaining from faith due to lack of intellectual evidence is a symptom of rebellion and pride, disguised as intellectual honesty. 'The Possibility of Metaphysics' in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds), *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 20–1.

³² See especially Anti-Climacus' reflections on Matthew 11:28 in PC No. 1, 3–69, 94, 101, 106, 136.

³³ Here we can see how in Climacus' treatment of history, Kierkegaard's later attack upon Christendom is anticipated.

³⁴ JP I 1038, Pap. VI A 140 (CUP, 2, ix, x, 107); This is the source of Kierkegaard's constant disparaging references to systematizers and the 'assistant professor' [*Privatdocent*]: 'The *Privatdocent* is a didacticizing braggart, a lightly armed encyclopedist.' Pap. VII–1 B 88, 293–4 (CUP, 2, 133–4); See Stewart, 461–3. Martensen is usually the target of the 'assistant professor' slur, but the Hegelian philosopher Rasmus Nielsen is also in view. Nielsen would eventually lend qualified support to the attack upon Christendom, a move not welcomed by Kierkegaard. See *Moment*, 343 (from *Øieblikket* 10, published posthumously).

³⁵ 'Honour be to speculative thought, praise be to everyone who is truly occupied with it.' CUP, 55, 56. Although he overestimates the degree to which Kierkegaard can be enlisted as a

a stark 'pro' or an 'anti' position to Kierkegaard with regard to academics and their trade, it is more illuminating to see that the issue at hand is not the value of the work in itself, it is the way that certain academics overreach their capabilities into areas where scholarly study does not pertain.³⁶ As with other targets of Kierkegaard's analysis, the point is not to decimate the object of criticism but to put it in its rightful place.³⁷ It is not scholarship *per se* that attracts Kierkegaard's ire, but the world historian's pretension of objectivity and 'systematicity' and the related impulse to postpone existential decisions that comes with it.

According to *CUP* the speculative objective thinker produces a flawed picture of human life that fails to encapsulate the reality of lived existence. *CUP* refers to 'positive' speculators (i.e. Martensen) who base their views on the sweep of historical development and accumulated knowledge and claim to be able to positively state what an authentic person is. 'But this positive is precisely untrue . . . The positive fails to express the state of the knowing subject in existence; hence it pertains to a fictive objective subject' (*CUP*, 81). Rather than focus on the individual at hand, the speculator produces abstract theories of 'the age' or 'the people'. With this world-historical point of view the subject who follows such a system thinks that he has come to know much about the world, but at the same time he learns nothing about himself (*CUP*, 81).

Here we see that Kierkegaard's concern is not only with scholars formulating their systems as much as it is with the people who follow these ideas, internalizing them in daily life. 'Hegelian philosophy has now become so popular that finally the street-corner loiterers become the objective spirit' (*JP* VIII.1 A 283).³⁸ Kierkegaard's complaint with Martensen was not only that he misread Hegel, but that he preached this world-historical mis-reading as a leading representative of the Danish Church. The result is a distortion of the task of the common man. Kierkegaard's is not merely a jeremiad against speculative academics in the university (although it is that as well), but against a symptom of the present age, the population of which has taken on the

Christian apologist, on the positive value that Kierkegaard places on historical research, see C. Stephen Evans, 'The Relevance of Historical Evidence' in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Of 'critical theological scholarship' Climacus observes: 'It always looks as if something for faith, something pertaining to faith should suddenly result from this criticism. Therein lies the dubiousness' (*CUP*, 25). See *CUP*, 26, where the problem of scholarship is that until it receives all the data about Christianity it holds *in suspenso* the decisions pertaining to faith in Christ.

³⁷ For example the relationship between historical facts and faith seen in the previous chapter, or the role of reflection and levelling in the process of authenticity as discussed below.

³⁸ See *JP* VI B 54 where Kierkegaard jokingly conjectures about ordinary workmen baptizing their children into the philosophy and bringing them up as Hegelians. Also *JP* VII.1 A 153 (on the *Book on Adler*): 'On the whole, it is incredible what confusion Hegelian philosophy has brought into personal life . . . '.

'objective' thesis wholesale. 'It is supposed to be certain that world history is the task assigned to our observing nineteenth century—the objective orientation is the way and the truth' (*CUP*, 133).³⁹ Thus, it is not just that scholars are world-historians. 'No, the whole age is clamouring for world history' (*CUP*, 134).

As a consequence the citizens of the age adopt a sense of 'person' whose identity is primarily grounded in its relation to the era and group.⁴⁰ The upshot is that the individual is separated from the ethical essence of his or her own existence.⁴¹ This is because a 'person', if defined in relation to an abstract movement of world history, is but a cog in a much greater machine. World-historical movements can only be judged according to world-historical measures of greatness and effect. Thus, the decision of such a cog who has no essential existence apart from the group is rendered inconsequential. Either his choices do not matter because they will have no effect on the development of the world-historical age, or they do not matter because even an important man's actions will be judged by their success or failure, not by their moral rightness or wrongness. Yet *CUP* points out that the historical greatness of an event can only be bestowed in retrospect, and not known in the present time of acting. Grundtvig, Martensen and the Hegelians in their different ways claim to have discovered this mechanism of history, but the result is the same. The world-historians remove any meaningful sense of the ethical from the reach of everyday persons, for the impetus for making decisions has been relegated to those who can pass judgement on what history says is great, rather than making an appeal to each individual to choose the good.

There is some irony in the fact that Kierkegaard, who is often criticized for his purported extreme subjectivism, here uses his category of 'subjectivity' to counter ethical relativism. When *CUP* talks of 'ethics and the ethical' as being 'the essential stronghold of individual existence', it is grounding the authentic subject in something other than a web of ever-changing world-historical data.⁴² Quantitatively, the world-historical does away with the ethical by referring to actions and events as 'important' or 'insignificant' rather than right or wrong.

That is also why the absolute ethical distinction between good and evil is world-historically-aesthetically neutralised in the aesthetic-metaphysical category of

³⁹ Note the suggestion of idolatry with the allusion to John 14:6. That christianized culture has replaced Christ as 'the way and the truth' is a theme that will increase in importance in the later attack upon Christendom, an attack explicitly written for the 'common man'. The 'crowd as untruth' is opposed to John 14:6 in *Point of View*, 105ff.

⁴⁰ The problem is discussed at length in ch. 6 below.

⁴¹ Climacus attributes this problem to Martensen: 'Alas, while the speculating, honourable Herr Professor is explaining all existence, he has in sheer absentmindedness forgotten . . . that he is a human being.' *CUP*, 145.

⁴² 'The ethical quality is jealous of itself and spurns the most amazing quantity.' *CUP*, 134.

'the great', 'the momentous', to which the bad and the good have equal access. (CUP, 134)

The confusion generated by the category of the world-historical is that good and evil are considered to be 'quantitatively dialectical'. As a result, there can be 'a certain magnitude of crime and cunning linked to millions and the nation, where the ethical becomes as shy as a sparrow in a dance of cranes' (CUP, 142). This particular problem of statistics occluding ethics is not confined to CUP. In *Stages On Life's Way*, Kierkegaard has already commented on the way that shifting numbers and historical/social trends can obviate the sharp ethical demands facing individuals:

Well, well, what a priceless invention statistics are, what a glorious fruit of culture . . . with the help of statistical tables one laughs at all of life. . . . After all, a person can shut his door on the poor, and if someone should starve to death, then he can just look at a collection of statistical tables, so how many die every year of hunger—and he is comforted. (SLW, 479–80)

In a similar way the individual who wills his utmost, or who wills evil, does not matter to the world-historical. What matters is the swell of circumstances on the world's stage, and these change over time. Supposedly 'good' actions that lead to success in one age might well lead to failure in another, thus world history judges that they are no longer good because they are not great.⁴³ There comes a point where certain people stop being thought of as moral agents, and start being thought of as beyond good and evil due to their historical significance.⁴⁴ Within the world-historical framework 'the more important the parties are, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle the matter, even for a judge' (CUP, 142).

2.4 Decision

Because it has done away with 'the ethical', Climacus warns: 'An age or a person can be immoral [*usædelig*] in various ways, but it is also immoral or at least a temptation to consort too much with the world-historical' (CUP,

⁴³ See CUP, 134. The vicissitudes of human history and 'greatness' being conferred upon some persons while being denied to others despite their individual moral qualities is explored by Tolstoy in *War and Peace* in his comparison of the generals Napoleon and Kutozov.

⁴⁴ A curious example comes by way of Karl Barth, who in a 1949 journal article used just this reasoning to defend Stalin's socialist programme. 'It would be quite absurd to mention in the same breath the philosophy of Marxism and the "ideology" of the Third Reich, to mention a man of the stature of Joseph Stalin in the same breath as charlatans as Hitler, Göring, Hess . . . etc. What has been tackled in Soviet Russia—albeit with very dirty hands and in a way that rightly shocks us—is, after all, a constructive idea, the solution of a problem . . . the social problem.' *World Review*, (New Series No. 6, August 1949, 32–7 at 34).

135). An aspect of this temptation is that for the individual living according to the world-historical, the individual fails to make any decisions. 'Continual association with the world-historical makes a person incompetent to act' (*CUP*, 135).⁴⁵ The world-historical leads to the unethical because in speculation the individual is encouraged to observe and be an objective observer—to act by not acting' (*CUP*, 148).

Another danger is that such an individual will be tempted to think that if he is an insignificant person, his inward life is of no importance and his decisions do not matter. Or, if he is a great person, he consoles himself with thinking that his errors will be made into something good by the power of his magnificence.⁴⁶ Instead of being subjectively concerned with the ethical decision of the will, the individual looks to the world-historical. Rather than ask 'what should I do?' such a person asks 'what is everyone around me doing?'. What Kierkegaard will later identify (in *TA*) as the mentality of the herd takes over, when people attempt to 'become something more than one is' by 'lumping together socially in the hope of impressing the spirit of history numerically' (*CUP*, 135). By contrast, true ethical enthusiasm consists of willing the utmost but 'never thinking whether or not one thereby achieves something' (*CUP*, 135).

Like Kant, Climacus sees the ethical as meaning that 'every effect is infinitely indifferent' (*CUP*, 155). Kierkegaard's relationship to Kant is of much interest, the depths of which cannot be gone into in the present discussion.⁴⁷ In any case, *CUP*'s strong deontological emphasis on the good will, as opposed to good results, exists without an overt acknowledgement of debt to Kant.⁴⁸ If Kant is in view, nonetheless Kierkegaard adds his own subjective stamp. If 'the ethical'

⁴⁵ A theme crucial to *TA*. See discussion below.

⁴⁶ *CUP*, 143.

⁴⁷ The issue of Kierkegaard's reliance on Kant is the theme of Ronald Green's *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Green has been accused of 'over-Kantianising' his reading of Kierkegaard. See for example Jack Verheyden, 'The Ethical and the Religious as Law and Gospel' in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds), *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000). For his part, Ulrich Knappe, *Theory and practice in Kant and Kierkegaard* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), argues that Kierkegaard does not simply repeat Kant, but nevertheless owes much to Kant in crucial aspects of his conception of the ethical. 'The basic features of Kierkegaard's account of the ethical are in full harmony with what Kant says about morality.' That said, Knappe does not think that we *have* to read Kierkegaard in this way, and leaves the question open of whether Kierkegaard was a straightforward Kantian. At. 77, 78 and esp. ch 4 above.

⁴⁸ Out of distaste for 'lumping together socially' Kierkegaard often explicitly avoids appealing to other writers as authorities. In *CUP* such an appeal 'is already an attempt to become objective, is a first step towards getting the majority vote on one's side and one's God-relationship transformed into a speculative enterprise on the basis of probability and partnership and fellow shareholders'. *CUP*, 66. Verheyden suggests that a further explanation could be the pseudonymous nature of the authorship itself: 'I believe that Kierkegaard's concern for indirect communication turned him away from procedures such as scholarly attribution.' Verheyden, 'Ethical', 157.

is given over to objective speculation, then it is dissipated on the waves of historical relativism. For this reason, Kierkegaard locates the ethical within the sphere of the subject. Ethically what makes the deed the individual's own is intention. This is precisely what is *not* included in the world-historical that sees only the effect. For the Kierkegaardian moral agent, any success, fame or notoriety that happens because of an action is incidental: the result does not affect the quality of the individual's will.⁴⁹

It is God who will make an action have significance in the world, and not one's own greatness or insight into historical necessity.⁵⁰ Climacus does not deny that a truly world-historical personage might exist—that is, that there can be an agent who can tie up all the loose ends and judge what it amounts to, and what it means. But that person cannot be a human speculative thinker. Only with God's complete knowledge can there be an ethical assessment of history.⁵¹ Only God can make an ethical judgement on this scale because only God can know 'the conscience of the greatest and of the lowliest human being' (*CUP*, 141). 'But to God, world history is the proper stage where he, not accidentally, but essentially, is the only spectator, because he is the only one who *can* be that' (*CUP*, 158).⁵² Kierkegaard, profoundly uninterested in apologetic proofs for God's existence, at this point steers clear of developing a Kantian deontological argument for the necessary existence of a deistic Final Arbiter. Instead, the discussion remains aimed at those readers who are already theologically committed (at least superficially) to the Christian God. His appeal is to the inconsistency of conceiving of an ethical system where it is man and not God who decides what is right or wrong.

Kierkegaard's target audience are world-historical citizens who think they can substitute their necessarily subjective point of view with an objective view that is, in reality, unavailable to them. In keeping with the authorial project of reintroducing Christianity into Christendom, Kierkegaard is here introducing a catalyst for a choice by drawing a stark contrast between the nature of the God to whom people pay lip service and the ethical dishonesty of trying to

⁴⁹ See *CUP*, 136. The related issue of whether Kierkegaard here reverts to a crude voluntaristic decisionism was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁰ See *CUP*, 138–9.

⁵¹ Climacus uses the language of finding commensurability of the outer (actions) with the inner (intentions).

⁵² Kierkegaard employs the divine spectator image in more than one work (e.g. *CA*, 87, discussed in the previous chapter). Stewart suggests that this is a point of contact between Kierkegaard and Hegel's Absolute Spirit (see Stewart, *Relations*, ch. 11). However, Kierkegaard's rhetorical device either serves to remind individuals of their limitations (as in *CUP*) or is used in the context of promoting worshipful integrity (e.g. *UDVS*, 124ff.), both completely different functions than that of the unfolding revelation of the *Geist* in history. The dialectical-materialistic implications of the Hegelian Spectator-God are traced by Lucien Goldmann: 'The Tragic Vision' in *The Hidden God*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Routledge, 1964), esp. at 22ff, 37–9. See also Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974).

usurp this God's place. The argument is that it is not within our remit as finite beings to make the ethical judgements posited by the world-historical point of view. Finite spirits who attempt to know the whole world and judge everyone's place in it end up ignoring the one thing that they *can* know, and that is their own hearts and wills. 'In order to study the ethical, every human being is assigned to himself' (*CUP*, 141).

Fortunately, because the ethical is a matter of subject and quality and not objective quantification, this is eminently possible.

The more the ethical can be simplified, the better one sees it. Thus it is not the case, as is deceitfully imagined, that the ethical is seen better in world history, where everything involves millions, than in a person's own poor life. (*CUP*, 142)

It is far better to look for the ethical in a single life, because the ethical is inwardness. Climacus suggests that it is only the ethically immature who look to mass opinions or world-historical effects.⁵³ 'The ethical as the absolute is infinitely valid in itself and does not need embellishment in order to look better' (*CUP*, 142).

The world-historical confuses the ethical task of the single individual with the task of the human race (*CUP*, 151). This means that the demands and opportunities open to all persons become abstracted into a demand of 'the age', a demand that will change as history develops. Kierkegaard opposes this with the assertion that the ethical task is the same for all humans and is not relative to their 'age'. 'The ethical is the only certainty, to concentrate upon this the only knowledge that does not change into a hypothesis at the last moment' (*CUP*, 152). The ethical remains both the highest task assigned to a human being, and the ground of their identity.⁵⁴ 'World-historically, to be a single individual is nothing at all . . . and yet this is a human being's only true and highest significance, and thus higher than any other significance' (*CUP*, 149).

3. DEVELOPMENT AND THE AGE

There is disagreement in the secondary literature about Kierkegaard's disposition towards his present age and cultural context. On the one hand, some commentators think that despite his criticisms, Kierkegaard thought that his contemporary age compared favourably to previous ages. On the other hand, most commentators look to his polemical attacks and conclude that

⁵³ *CUP*, 143.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 151.

Kierkegaard was fundamentally a conservative thinker who disliked the changes in society and who judged his current age by the standards set by ages past.

The divergence in views can be explained in part by Kierkegaard's ambivalent attitude towards society in general, and his society in particular. Thus it is that we can find effusions about the people of his present age: 'You common man! I have not segregated my life from yours, you know that; I have lived on the street, am known by all . . . If I belong to anyone, I must belong to you, you common man' (*Moment*, 346).⁵⁵ At the same time, Kierkegaard's reputation for social misanthropy seems well deserved:

The public is all and nothing, the most dangerous of all powers and the most meaningless. One may speak to a whole nation in the name of the public, and yet the public is less than one ever so insignificant actual human being. (*TA*, 93)⁵⁶

3.1 Progressive liberal?

Occasionally the argument is made that Kierkegaard was largely optimistic about his current age within a framework of historical development. Julia Watkin maintains that Kierkegaard subscribed to the popular nineteenth-century view in which other ideologies, religions and cultures inevitably lead up to (European) Christianity as 'top religion'.⁵⁷ Watkin thinks that Kierkegaard puts classical paganism, Judaism and Christianity in a three-step relation of historical development similar to the progress charts produced by the world-historians.⁵⁸ She points out that Kierkegaard portrays the Greek cult of the oracle as naïve and that he disparages the Hebrew sacrificial system as despairing fatalism.⁵⁹ James Collins also assumes that Kierkegaard worked with a conception that specific cultures had a higher or lower apprehension of religion. He too makes the argument that Kierkegaard placed the Christian era above the classical era, and that he was generally happy with the project of the world-historians as long as they respected the limits of the subjective

⁵⁵ The question of what constitutes 'the common man' for Kierkegaard will be discussed in the following chapter. See *Pap.* IX A 298 where Kierkegaard describes his project in terms of his commitment to his country: 'Denmark must seek its strength in spirit and intelligence. I am proud of my mother tongue whose secrets I know . . . I know that I have sincerely loved every person.'

⁵⁶ In *TA*, 63, the mentality of the masses is equated with 'violence, anarchy, riotousness . . . Instead of joy there is a kind of snivelling discontent . . . instead of enthusiasm the garrulous common sense of experience.'

⁵⁷ Julia Watkin, 'The Idea of Fate in Kierkegaard's Thought' in James Giles (ed), *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 114.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

⁵⁹ Watkin draws examples from *CA*, 92–3, 104. Watkin, 'Idea', 114.

observer.⁶⁰ Jon Stewart makes a similar point regarding Kierkegaard's views of the world-historical method. Stewart consistently downplays the difference between Kierkegaard and Hegel, attempting to show that Kierkegaard's quarrel was with Hegel's incompetent followers, rather than Hegel himself. So for example, Stewart argues that Kierkegaard's critique of Adler's view of revelation in history was aimed at Adler's mistaken application of Hegel's world-historical analysis to his own life.⁶¹ Robert Perkins suggests that Kierkegaard has a philosophy of history that is much smaller in scope, but that nonetheless bears comparison to Hegel. He claims that both histories are monolinear and both are Eurocentric.⁶²

For his part, Jørgen Bukdahl tries to find more affinity between Kierkegaard and Grundtvig than is usually supposed. The result is that he locates in Kierkegaard a positive attitude towards the 'common man' whose age has come.⁶³ In arguing that Kierkegaard supported the contemporary political upheavals in Denmark and was on the side of the working man, Bukdahl draws affinities between Kierkegaard's position and the class struggle dialectic found in Marx.⁶⁴

3.2 Nostalgic conservative?

More common is the opposite thesis: that Kierkegaard was thoroughly pessimistic about his current age, and that his socio-political conservatism led him to denigrate the culture of the present in favour of a lost golden age of the past. This seems now to be a fairly standard view. John Hoberman, for example, criticizes Kierkegaard for not having a forward-looking conception of history that allows him to conceive of an ultimate endpoint for humanity and the stages of its development. 'Clearly,' he writes, Kierkegaard 'felt an active contempt for the present age'.⁶⁵ This supposed contempt of the present is closely connected to Kierkegaard's default stance as a social and political traditionalist, prompting David Mercer to comment, 'Kierkegaard is a conservative through and through'.⁶⁶ For Kresten Nordentoft, Kierkegaard's 'show-down' [*Opgør*] with his current age fits within the mould of a traditionalist's complaint with the changing times. 'Kierkegaard is by his upbringing and

⁶⁰ James Collins, *Mind of Kierkegaard* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), 166–7.

⁶¹ 'At best one can argue that Hegel's philosophy misleads irresponsible or absent-minded people like Adler . . . but there is nothing necessary in Hegel's philosophy itself that would lead one to this.' Stewart, *Relations*, 545.

⁶² Robert L. Perkins, 'Envy as Personal Phenomenon and as Politics' in *IKC: TA*, 126–7.

⁶³ For example Bukdahl, *Common*, 23.

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 105–6. Bukdahl is discussed at length in the following chapter.

⁶⁵ Hoberman, 'Two Ages', 234.

⁶⁶ Mercer, *Living*, 4.

cultural descent a conservative.⁶⁷ Kierkegaard is often located firmly within the conservative mainstream position, a camp that included all the leading lights of nineteenth-century Danish society and which was fiercely opposed to the liberalizing, modernist project.⁶⁸

The keystone conservative ideas were support for a paternalistic monarchy and revulsion at the excesses of the French Revolution. In the 1830s and '40s, the conservatives opposed liberal demands for a constitution and an elected legislature, and the call for universal (male) suffrage. Liberals also called for the dismantling of the guild system and other social reforms. Michael Plekon thinks that it is these reforms that lie behind Kierkegaard's problem with levelling and the monstrous crowd, expressed as a classically conservative problem of elites versus the masses.⁶⁹ Theodor Adorno takes the Kierkegaard-as-elitist proposition further, and finds him to be a prime example of a misanthrope more concerned with the static world of the individual *intérieure* than with the real world of changing *things*.⁷⁰ For Adorno, Kierkegaard does not account for the modern reality of society and history at all. He accuses Kierkegaard of using the category of inner history to 'exclude external history from the context of his thought'.⁷¹ *Either/Or*, *PC* and the material from the *Moment* are all presented as examples of Kierkegaard's retreat from ever-developing objective reality. 'Inwardness attempts to still the external world that crowds in on it by anathematizing history.'⁷² Georges Lukács agrees. For him, Kierkegaard's rejection of the quantitative socio-historical world as a basis for truth means that he 'increasingly became [a] pure apologist of bourgeois decadence, and nothing else'.⁷³ Kierkegaard's brand of inward-

⁶⁷ Kresten Nordentoft, 'Hvad Siger Brand-Majoren?' *Kierkegaards Opgør Med Sin Samtid* (København: G. E. C. Gad, 1973), 64. Nordentoft describes Kierkegaard's critique as an attempt to apply a reactionary fantastical dialectic to real life. See below.

⁶⁸ Although he does not think that Kierkegaard was a conservative, for more on the conservative mainstream position, see Kirmmse, *Golden*. Some others who do regard Kierkegaard as a social conservative include Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard: The myths and their origins*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Howard Johnson, 'Kierkegaard and Politics' in Howard Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (eds), *A Kierkegaard Critique* (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), 79–84; Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 365–6; Gregor Malantschuk, 'Kierkegaard and the Totalitarians' in *American-Scandinavian Review* 34 (September 1946), 246–8, and *The Controversial Kierkegaard* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980).

⁶⁹ Michael Plekon, 'Towards Apocalypse: Kierkegaard's Two Ages in Golden Age Denmark' in *JKC: TA*, 43–4. See Plekon's articles 'From Angst to Ambivalence: Kierkegaard's Social and Theological Modernity Reconsidered' in *Dialog* vol. 20 (1981), 45–51, and 'Introducing Christianity into Christianity: Reinterpreting the Late Kierkegaard' in *Anglican Theological Review* vol. LXIV, 327–52.

⁷⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 41, 42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Georges Lukács, *Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980), 296.

looking conservatism means that he has nothing more to offer to the theory or practice of positive social change.⁷⁴

So it is that the secondary literature offers conflicting images of Kierkegaard: on the one side he is a champion of the working common man yet on the other a decadent bourgeois. How can it be that some can attribute to Kierkegaard a forward-looking radicalism while others an entrenched conservatism? How is it that Kierkegaard can emphasize Socrates and Abraham as ideal figures and then also accuse the Greek and Hebrew cultures as containing pagan and fatalistic elements?

3.3 Neither radical nor reactionary

The diverging conclusions from commentators come in part from their shared attempt to locate Kierkegaard within a world-historical timeline of development or decline. Such diametrically opposing interpretations suggest that another way of tackling the issue is in order. Seen in his own terms, Kierkegaard is committed neither to an optimistic nor to a pessimistic view of history. Against those who think that Kierkegaard was essentially happy with his world-historically advanced culture, I suggest that Kierkegaard's opposition to a theory of epochal development ran deeper than merely disparaging the hubris of finite humans attempting to judge beyond their means. On the other hand, against those who read Kierkegaard's critique of the present age as evidence of nostalgia for a past era, I wish to uncouple his assessment of the different ages from any implied judgement of the historical regression from the past to the present.⁷⁵

A clue that Kierkegaard did not rank different historical ages hierarchically is seen in the fact that the writings contain an admixture of historical figures and ideas side by side. Historical examples are used to demonstrate different types of believers and non-believers, and do not stand in as representatives of their particular epoch. This does not lend itself to a reading of linear (or monolinear) movement in either direction from age to age. In support of her argument that Kierkegaard held a sort of historical triumphalism whereby Christianity was 'top religion', Watkin points out where *Concept of Anxiety* is ambiguous about the Greeks. She thinks that Kierkegaard *via* Haufniensis is trying to make an historical point by comparing classical fatalism with

⁷⁴ The issue of a person's relationship with their wider society, and the related question of Kierkegaard's supposed anti-social tendencies is dealt with in full in ch. 6 below on Identity.

⁷⁵ Here I am in agreement with Steven Shakespeare when he argues that Kierkegaard's texts contain 'a refusal of nostalgia'. See 'Books about Nothing? Kierkegaard's Liberating Rhetoric' in George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (eds), *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 97.

Christian freedom.⁷⁶ Yet the 'fatalism' of CA is not confined to the Greeks. Indeed, in CA the same pagan idea is attributed to Napoleon⁷⁷ and to Hegel and Hegel's system.⁷⁸ CA talks of Greek oracles, Jewish sacrifices and modern fatalists in the same paragraph, and finds the same principle of anxiety at work in their different ages.⁷⁹ Further afield, Quidam, one of the pseudonymous characters in *Stages on Life's Way*, lives in Christendom but shares the pagan Greek mindset.⁸⁰ Some more examples of the mixing of the ages can be found in the way that both the pre-Christian (and even pre-Hebraic) Abraham and the modern Knight of Faith living in Christendom stand together as ideal types in *FT*. Significantly Job, Anna and the Apostle Paul all feature in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* as examples of authenticity in history.⁸¹ Their patience in suffering is especially recommended to the reader of the present age.⁸² Socrates—the 'simple wise man'—is Kierkegaard's most consistent historical foil.⁸³ Often he is held up as a positive example against whom modern thinkers pale in comparison.⁸⁴ Yet Kierkegaard's attitude towards Socrates is ambiguous. While the tone is always respectful, sometimes it is clear that Socrates does not have the final say, as in *CA*, *Repetition* and *PF* where Socrates' paradigm of recollection is surpassed by the repetition of the moment of vision.⁸⁵ One cannot infer from Kierkegaard's use of Socrates that he always intends the classical sage to represent the past age having precedence over the present, or *vice versa*. Indeed the fact that Kierkegaard thinks we can think contemporaneously with Socrates at all, or that the simple wise man's wisdom (as well as that which surpasses it) is not confined to his age only speaks against any attempt to place Kierkegaard in an historical schematic of

⁷⁶ Watkin, 'Idea', 114, 115 referring to *CA*, 92–3; 96–103.

⁷⁷ *CA*, 101.

⁷⁸ See the treatment of Hegel in the 'Interlude' of *PF*.

⁷⁹ *CA*, 104.

⁸⁰ See *SLW*, 195, 472, 484. Note that Watkin recognizes the Greek 'pagan' aspect of Napoleon, Quidam, etc. but fails to see how this undermines her argument that Kierkegaard was making a world-historical point. See Watkin, 'Idea', 108–9.

⁸¹ Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 39.

⁸² *EUD*, 222–5 (Anna); 118–19 (Job); 332–4 (Paul).

⁸³ *JP*, 6871, 6.508 (*Pap.* XI–1 A 133). Kierkegaard mentions Socrates by name in his journals and papers well over 200 times. Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 209. On Kierkegaard's declaration that his task was a Socratic task (see *Moment*, 10, 341) and the use that Kierkegaard makes of Socrates, see George Pattison, 'A Simple Wise Man of Ancient Times: Kierkegaard on Socrates' in Michael Trapp (ed), *Socrates in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁸⁴ Beginning with *CI* where Socrates as a master of irony is used to counter Hegel's claim that irony is a historically conditioned concept. Socrates is present in some form in most of Kierkegaard's subsequent books.

⁸⁵ On 'recollection', see the discussion in the previous chapter. Eriksen, *Repetition*, 67ff. On Socrates as diverging from Christianity, Pattison, 'Simple', 25.

either the liberal myth of progress on the one hand, or the conservative myth of decline on the other.

These are but a few examples from many possible sources. Considering the ways in which Kierkegaard uses historical figures in his books and the *timbre* of the language which assumes their relevance to any age, it is surprising how often commentators try to fit Kierkegaard into a world-historical epochal system. This is unfortunate because when it comes to discussing authenticity and the essence of the human condition, Kierkegaard expressly does not posit a linear movement of progression, nor of regression, from age to age. I have argued that Kierkegaard refused to adopt either a positive or a negative view of the number of passing years in relation to faith. Instead he questioned the basis of both views by attacking what we might call the 'quantification thesis' itself. Similarly, Kierkegaard declines to be drawn into a discussion of which stage of civilization is more or less advanced, and instead offers a vision of human life that does not recognize a qualitative change from age to age. We need a new way of reading Kierkegaard on history, ethics and authenticity that recognizes his antipathy to progression *and* regression and which avoids the language of unfolding historical development altogether.

3.3.1 *The essential task of any age*

Kierkegaard draws a distinction between the trappings of the age which do change, and the essential task open to all people which does not. In the human's relation to the eternal, every person faces the same task—the task of authenticity of becoming a self. The outward form of the task may change as the historical context changes, but the essential, inner problem remains the same from age to age.⁸⁶ Authenticity is not grounded on one's right relation to others in the group, but instead on one's right relation to the ground and source of all being.⁸⁷ This 'right relation' is not the solution to an intellectual problem of being able to talk about God with certainty. Instead it is the response to the ethical problem of obedience and humility towards God, a stance that only obtains within the orientation of *Øieblikket* and a contemporaneous response to the possibility of offence of the God-man.

⁸⁶ Contra Don Cupitt: 'Living after the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement, Kierkegaard knows that the modern self is different from the self of earlier epochs.' *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM, 1980), 70.

⁸⁷ Both Adorno and Lukács claim that by refusing to locate 'identity' within a group social context, Kierkegaard has abstracted the individual from the very things that are necessary for constituting his identity. I think that their Marxist-materialist assumptions beg the very question that Kierkegaard was concerned with, and their criticisms will be discussed in ch. 6 below.

It is the work of getting to that place of the moment of vision that is affected by the vicissitudes of history, but not the essential task of becoming authentic itself.

Insofar as it is concerned with emphasizing how every person has equal access to God and authenticity, *CUP* contains some suggestion of Kierkegaard's antipathy towards the thesis of epochal change. For Climacus becoming subjective is the highest task assigned to a human being:

From this it first follows that he no longer has anything to do with world history . . . Second, there is no squandering, for even though individuals are as innumerable as the sands of the sea, the task of becoming subjective is indeed assigned to every person. (*CUP*, 159)

Rather than rely on a prophet who with his 'one good eye' can discover in world history the unique task assigned to the present generation of the nineteenth century (*CUP*, 144),⁸⁸ Climacus emphasizes the ethical task that can only be discovered 'by the individual's becoming immersed in himself and in his relationship with God' (*CUP*, 144). Climacus reminds us that the 'great' world-historical personalities also had to make choices based on subject ethics. 'This is of no concern world-historically, because everything is understood afterward, and *thus it is forgotten that the dead were also once alive*' (*CUP*, 156 (emphasis added)). Because it is a matter of relating to the eternal this must be a task open to anyone of any age. Each age faces the same ethical problem, but in a different way.⁸⁹ God does not develop with history but is the same for each age and for every individual. 'His presence is an eternal contemporaneity [*Samtidig*]' (*CUP*, 183).

Building on the themes discussed in the previous chapter: the equality of all people before God; the centrality of *Øieblikket*; the careful delineation between necessity and actuality; the opposition to the quantification of faith; the stress on ethical decisions made in freedom, and the importance of contemporaneity for Kierkegaard's project all suggest that we cannot attribute to him a simple historical paradigm of linear progression or regression. There are hints of this in *CUP* and elsewhere;⁹⁰ however, it is in *TA* that we find Kierkegaard's fullest expression of his judgement on the idea of historical development.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Another allusion to Grundtvig.

⁸⁹ See *CUP*, 144.

⁹⁰ Haufniensis' treatment of Adam, original sin and the human race in *CA* is of relevance to a discussion on history, however, as it also has to do with the relationship of the particular individual to humanity in general; this will be considered ch. 6 below.

⁹¹ On the ability to find in *TA* a reliable view of Kierkegaard's philosophy of history I am in disagreement with Michael Plekon. Plekon, 'Apocalypse', 23. See below.

4. THE AGES IN *TWO AGES*

My examination of *TA* serves a dual purpose. One is to provide an alternative reading of the text that avoids ascribing to Kierkegaard a philosophy of the linear movement of history. Considering the place that *TA* has in the authorship, and dealing as it does with key Kierkegaardian themes, the importance of moving towards a fuller understanding of this book should not be underestimated.

The other purpose is that an examination of *TA*'s themes of 'levelling', the individual and the crowd, and reflection and action, contributes significantly to a critique of Christian nationalism. Kierkegaard's insight into the process by which the individual gives up ethical responsibility—and hence authentic identity—to the mentality of the herd has much to say to the nationalist emphasis on the common sense of the group. Furthermore, his analysis of the relationship that exists between reflection and action does not allow one to neatly assume a hierarchy of historical development by assigning particular 'spiritual' traits to particular cultural groups. The argument of *TA* is grounded in an incarnational approach to history and a strong theological commitment to the equal access of everyone to the God-relationship. As such, it becomes difficult to retain a nationalist theology of essential historical development and progressive revelation of the divine in the face of Kierkegaard's critique.

Kierkegaard probably began writing *TA* in 1845, but he broke off to write *CUP* before returning to finish his analysis of the present age.⁹² Eventually, both books were published in 1846. The non-pseudonymous *TA* is ostensibly a review of a novel written by Thomasine Gyllembourg, mother of the poet (and influential Hegelian) J. L. Heiberg. *TA* uses the novel as a platform from which to discuss, amongst other things, the effects of the crowd on the individual, and a comparison of the spirit of different 'ages'. These two ages are the 'revolutionary age' of passion, and the 'present age' of reflection. The present age has many problems, the most serious of which is its tendency towards 'levelling'. Levelling is the process by which individuals are pulled back by the crowd before their singularity can be allowed to challenge the herd mentality. For Kierkegaard, one can be a human without being a *person*, for in levelling, people are able to abrogate their moral responsibility to the group, thus denying the one thing needed for becoming an authentic self.

A common approach to *TA* is to read it as Kierkegaard's argument against the 'Hegelian' view of history. I have already argued that these views are more properly deemed 'world-historical' than 'Hegelian', for they can be attributed to Grundtvig as well as Hegelians like Martensen. They maintain that past epochs embody lesser manifestations of universal truths, while present and

⁹² Introduction, *TA*, ix.

future ages reflect greater developments of the divine.⁹³ Some commentators assume that Kierkegaard attacks the world-historical assumption by turning on its head the conception that historical ages are inexorably improving. Thus instead of identifying the 'present age' as the highest and best (as Hegel, Martensen, Grundtvig and others do), Kierkegaard supposedly portrays it as the lowest and worst. It is thought that Kierkegaard's present age is the perverse age of the monstrous 'public' which prevents any individual from emerging from the masses and doing anything of value. Thus, instead of waxing lyrical about his present, Kierkegaard is thought to hark nostalgically back to a historically previous 'age of revolution', when men acted with passion and strove for love, truth and beauty. So it is that the argument of *TA* is assumed to be a straightforward inverse of the Hegelian trope: portraying the ages as declining, rather than developing, in the linear progression of history.⁹⁴

This reading of *TA* is problematic in a number of ways. While we know from his journals, and from the tone set in *TA* itself, that Kierkegaard did indeed think that his present age suffered many ills, it is not so easy to assume a sense of history's linear movement (either in regression or development) from Kierkegaard's writing. That Kierkegaard admires much about the passionate spirit, and desires a revolutionary injection into the reflective age is not in doubt. Yet his admiration for the revolutionary age is not couched in terms of a definable historic-socio-political order. In addition, he is not wholly positive about the revolutionary age, or wholly damning of the present. Instead Kierkegaard works to uncouple the facts of historical development from questions of the eternal and the ethical. He does not deny that cultures grow and change, only that this development affects the essential task facing each person. The result is a view of history that puts the 'ages' alongside each other, and blurs the boundaries between them.

Although it is unlikely to be an actual source for Kierkegaard, as an heuristic device the 'two ages' bear some similarity to Augustine's 'two cities'. Both pairs co-exist at many points along the historical timeline without being identified solely with one stage or age. The *City of God* consigns humanity to either earthly or heavenly citizenship. Yet Augustine resists all attempts to speculate further on which particular persons belong in which category. Eschatologically,

⁹³ So for example, Martensen identifies past epochs (The Greeks, The Jews, etc.) with religious positions (Pantheism, Monotheism, etc.) and systematizes them according to this theory of development. Grundtvig identifies key roles for each national age, and locates them in a spectrum.

⁹⁴ For example, John Elrod reads *TA* as primarily a polemic against modernism and Kierkegaard's 'radical opposition to his age'. *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 50; 47–85, 193–248; 'Passion Reflection and Particularity' in *IKC: TA*; Hoberman, 'Two Ages', 236–7; Robert L. Perkins, 'Envy', 126–7. This reading of *TA* is related to the argument discussed above that Kierkegaard wrote as a political and social conservative.

the two cities are very distinct, but temporally, they are intermingled in the *saeculum*.⁹⁵ The book often alludes to the Christian duty to suspend judgement over matters of citizenship. Book I appeals directly to the earthly Church, reminding her not to be too complacent for she 'has in her communion . . . some who shall not eternally dwell in the lot of the saints'. Neither should the Church be too quick to judge, for 'among our most declared enemies there are now some, unknown to themselves, who are destined to become our friends. In truth, these two cities are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effect their separation.'⁹⁶

The ages of *TA* similarly resist classification. Kierkegaard takes pains to avoid identifying the revolutionary age with any particular generation, nation or epoch. Even the 'present' age exhibits characteristics that can be found throughout history and in different cultures. What is more, whilst Kierkegaard obviously enjoys affinity with the passion of the revolutionary age, he does not judge it wholly better than the reflection of the present age. Indeed, it is only by going through the levelling process of the present age that the individual comes to have an apprehension of the authentically religious. Thus the passion of the revolutionary age is brought to bear on the reflection of the present age, and often the two cohabit the same historical space. Like Augustine's 'two cities', Kierkegaard does not think that it falls to humans in this world to separate one age from the other.⁹⁷

Kierkegaard's world-historical contemporaries were concerned with mapping particular characteristics to identifiable cultures on an historical timeline. If Kierkegaard also subscribed to this basic paradigm, then we would expect to find him attempting a similar task with his two ages. Yet this is not what we find. *TA* intends to look at the characters of the two ages 'purely dialectically without considering any specific age' (*TA*, 62). Despite its evocation of world history, in Kierkegaard's hands the term 'age' becomes more an indicator of ethical character expressed in individuals of any era, rather than a delineation of particular historical epochs for certain peoples. This is certainly the case for the passionate age, which in *TA* encompasses at least Socrates, Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the monastics, the French Revolution and perhaps Kierkegaard himself.⁹⁸ Surprisingly, even the present age is not defined with exclusive reference to Kierkegaard's political and social context.

In claiming that Kierkegaard resisted concretizing the present age in his local context, I am keen to avoid the conclusion that he was an individualist

⁹⁵ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 101.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), I.35.

⁹⁷ *TA* is here related to the concern in *CUP* that humans should not usurp God's rightful place as judge and observer.

⁹⁸ *TA*, 61–8.

with nothing to contribute to the social conversation. This extreme interpretation is found in Lukács' charge of decadent inwardness, and Adorno's claim that Kierkegaard was locked into the bourgeois *intérieure* and did not inhabit the 'hour' of his age.⁹⁹ Such claims do not bear up under scrutiny of the facts of Kierkegaard's authorship, which was firmly rooted in Danish society. Undoubtedly Kierkegaard laboured to offer a detailed comment on the situation of Copenhagen as he found it. *TA*'s critique of levelling and of a population that craves spectacle over substance has clear correlations to the urban, modern culture in which he lived.

On the other hand, by focussing on the literal 'present' aspect of the age, some commentators overemphasize the socio-historical element, restricting *TA*'s reach to cover *only* Kierkegaard's society in a specific time period. This is what Elrod tends towards when he strongly identifies the present age with nineteenth-century Denmark.¹⁰⁰ Michael Plekon argues that *TA* should be read strictly according to the historical contours of Denmark in the 1840s.¹⁰¹ As a result, Plekon does not think that *TA* provides a distillation of Kierkegaard's thought, let alone a reliable philosophy of history, tied as it is to one particular context at one small point in time. Nordentoft also locates Kierkegaard's critique of levelling firmly in his conservative reaction to cultural shifts in 1840s Copenhagen. Furthermore, Nordentoft questions the validity of Kierkegaard's analysis of his age, suggesting that it arose first as a reactionary invention and only then did Kierkegaard attempt to provide concrete social evidence to support his complaint. 'The matter is namely that Kierkegaard later put great weight on his prophecy [i.e. the prediction of levelling]. The nonsense was transformed into a scientifically valid [*videnskabeligt holdbar*] prognosis.'¹⁰² He argues that the material from *TA* was originally 'only a casual fantasy' which was projected onto society 'without thought about the practical serious difficulties [that would come with] an eventual realisation of the idea . . . It seems clear that the notion is unrealistic and little considered.'¹⁰³

Rather than reading Kierkegaard's assessment of the ages as either totally cut off from all social relevance, or conversely as amounting to an overly localized account with limited scope for application, we can adopt an alternative approach.

⁹⁹ See above discussion. Lukács, *Destruction*, 296; Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 10, 41ff.

¹⁰⁰ Elrod, 'Passion', 1–2.

¹⁰¹ Plekon, 'Apocalypse', 20; 'I am arguing that Kierkegaard's social, political and theological positions in *TA* reflect his thinking at one crucial point in his life and literary career . . . Too often it is forgotten that the "present age" [*Nutiden*] of which Kierkegaard writes is . . . the very small world of Golden Age Denmark's Copenhagen.' At 23–4.

¹⁰² Nordentoft, *Brand-Majoren*, 63.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 65. Nordentoft suggests that the idea of 'levelling' tells more about Kierkegaard's attitude towards his fellow men than it does about the atmosphere of the present age. This is discussed further in the following chapter.

A way out of the impasse is to see how *TA* uses local variants to comment on perennial historical themes. George Pattison is helpful here. When considering Kierkegaard's relationship to Copenhagen, Pattison maintains that a city, 'taken as a whole or in any of its parts, is always the bearer of human meanings'.¹⁰⁴ One can recognize Kierkegaard's intimate connection to his native city, without thereby restricting him 'to the old world of the market town'.¹⁰⁵ A similar hermeneutic can be applied to Kierkegaard's comments on the spirit of the present age.

Kierkegaard does not restrict the scope of the 'present age' of *TA* to his own temporal context of 1846.¹⁰⁶ For all that he does comment on his own society, at the same time *TA* goes to great lengths *not* to identify particular places and peoples with particular ages. One example of this is found in the way that 'culture' is used in *TA*. Kierkegaard once again puts his own stamp on a term normally associated with the world-historians, without adopting their meaning. Here, the revolutionary age exists *as* culture, not with reference to the particular characteristics of a people group. In *TA*, different ages do not have different cultures that can be mapped upon a scheme of hierarchical development. Culture is passion, and this is accessible to anyone with passion in any historical context. Thus even in a predominantly reflective age, wherever there is passion, there is culture. In this way even the 'unsophisticated' can be cultured, for culture is predicated upon decision and interest—not upon national traditions or advances in civilization.

The age of revolution is essentially passionate and therefore essentially has culture. In other words, the tension and resilience of the inner being are the measure of essential culture. A maidservant genuinely in love is essentially cultured. (*TA*, 61)

As with his description of the revolutionary age, Kierkegaard's description of the present age is usually couched in ethical and emotive terms more than it is described according to temporal or political markers.¹⁰⁷ 'The present age is

¹⁰⁴ George Pattison, *Poor Paris! Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 16. See the first chapter of Pattison's *Kierkegaard: Religion and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. 22–4.

¹⁰⁶ Pattison, *Crisis*, 69–70 points out how in *TA* the clamouring for spectacle that is indicative of the present age is present in the urban aesthetic culture of Rome. Furthermore, 'behind Rome stands Jerusalem, the city that did not know the hour of its visitation, and behind Jerusalem stands Babylon, the city of captivity, and behind Babylon stands the first city, founded not coincidentally by Cain, the first murderer'. The theme is not new to Kierkegaard, as when he has Judge William in *Either/Or* find analogies between the life-views of the Greek and Christian world (*E/O2*, 240–1) or when he writes: 'Our age reminds one very much of the disintegration of the Greek state; everything continues, and yet there is no one who believes in it.' *E/O2*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Note that the arguable exception to this rule is the time Kierkegaard spends on talking about the public press. See *TA*, 90–1. Even here, however, while it is obvious that he is referring to his own troubles with the *Corsair*, he does not restrict the problems of the 'present age' to his

essentially a sensible, reflecting, age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence' (TA, 68).

For this reason, it seems best to refer to it, as Kierkegaard often does, as the 'passionless' or 'reflective' age. The passionate age gets similar treatment. In TA Kierkegaard writes how it is fallacy to assume that certain historical epochs could, in themselves, have certain 'either/or' qualities that would make it easier to make decisions in one period as opposed to another. The quality of decision making lies not within an historical age or situation, but instead 'the presence of the crucial either/or depends upon the individual's own impassioned desire directed toward acting decisively, upon the individual's own intrinsic competence' (TA, 67). When comparing the revolutionary age to the passionless age, Kierkegaard undertakes his examination of the ages 'in terms of the dialectical category-qualifications and their implications, *regardless of their being factually present at the given moment or not*' (TA, 76 (emphasis added)).¹⁰⁸

4.1 Levelling

The opposite of passionate living and choosing is the indifference of the herd. Levelling [*Nivellering*] is 'an abstract power and is abstraction's victory over individuals' (TA, 84). Levelling is what happens when people do not passionately commit themselves to an idea that is greater than they are. Without inwardness and without an idea, writes Kierkegaard, people turn against each other *en masse* with suspicion, aggression and mediocrity (TA, 63). The passionate person breaks free from the mass, thus earning the approbation from his fellows, who grow weary of admiration and turn instead to envy:

Envy, in the process of establishing itself, takes the forms of levelling, and whereas a passionate age accelerates, raises up and overthrows, elevates and debases, a reflective age does the opposite, it stifles and impedes, it levels. (TA, 84)

One feature of the present age is the presence—or *possible* presence—of 'unrecognisable ones'. These are the individuals who have suffered levelling and survived, who now understand 'the diabolical principle of the levelling process' (TA, 107). Such people remain unrecognizable insofar as they do not set themselves up as leaders with authority (hence perpetuating the levelling process). Instead, their existence is marked by adopting ways of repulsing the crowd, in order to deflect attention from the herd back onto the responsibility for being a self.¹⁰⁹ To restrict Kierkegaard's 'unrecognisable

own historical period of mass printing presses and newspaper articles, but extends the essential challenge posed by levelling to any age.

¹⁰⁸ Also TA, 96, 110, 111.

¹⁰⁹ TA, 107.

ones' to nineteenth-century Denmark however, is to ignore the fact that in *TA* Socrates and Jesus also fell prey to levelling, faced the envy of the herd and came through the other side with their authenticity intact whilst 'repulsing' the crowd.¹¹⁰

Although levelling is the most prominent characteristic of the reflective 'present age', Kierkegaard finds examples of levelling throughout history, and does not confine it to one period, his own included.

The inability to stay continuously at peak level and keep on admiring is deeply rooted in human nature, which requires a variation. That is why even the most inspired age insists on joking enviously about excellence. (*TA*, 82)

Levelling appears in all historical periods and cultures. 'No period, no age, and therefore not the present one, either, can halt the scepticism of levelling . . . It can be halted only if the individual, in individual separateness, gains the intrepidity of religiousness' (*TA*, 86). To people like Martensen and Grundtvig, who place such high emphasis on the developed national character of their European civilization, Kierkegaard's answer is not to recommend to them the practices of a previous historical era. Instead, he maintains that no manifestation of culture can halt this process. 'Not even national individuality will be able to halt it, for the abstraction of levelling is related to a higher negativity: pure humanity' (*TA*, 87). Thus, the levelling that characterizes the present age is found in any human society. It is 'this spontaneous combustion of the human race, produced by the friction that occurs when the separateness of individual awareness in the religious life is omitted' (*TA*, 87).

4.1.1 *Levelling's positive effects*

Kierkegaard occasionally makes the explicit claim that he is not in the business of judging one age over the other.¹¹¹ However, we do not need to rely only on these proof texts in order to see that this is indeed the case, for Kierkegaard's positive treatment of reflection and levelling makes it clear that he does not have an unequivocal preference for some past, passionate age. Kierkegaard counts levelling itself as negative, and describes the 'servants of levelling' as 'servants of the power of evil, for levelling itself is not of God' (*TA*, 109). Yet much like the 'governing authorities' who oppress Christians and yet are counted as servants of God in Romans 13, good can come from levelling, even though it itself is a product of human envy and fear. So it is that we see

¹¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 81 where envy is used to pull down 'authentic ironists' such as Socrates, and, of course, Kierkegaard himself.

¹¹¹ 'Incidentally, the question of which age is the better one, the more significant, does not enter . . . into this review.' *TA*, 76, 110.

that levelling plays a positive role in Kierkegaard's conception of authentic religion and individuality. The passionate person who faces the passionless herd and suffers levelling as a result gains authenticity. It is in this sense that we can talk of the two ages co-existing within the schema of *TA*. Passion and reflection work together in the service of becoming a person.

In *TA* levelling serves as a necessary gateway to authentic religious awareness, and it is 'the point of departure for the highest life' (*TA*, 88).¹¹² Here we see Kierkegaard navigating between the extremes of the revolutionary age and those of the reflective age. The passionate age throws up exceptional heroes—men like Abraham or the prophets of the Old Testament who are singled out to hear God's voice and enjoy an unparalleled relationship with the Divine.¹¹³ However, this is not the highest religious sense, for these sorts of rugged individuals cannot communicate their relationship (even indirectly, as in *FT*) and the quality of their God-relationship remains inaccessible to anyone else. On the other side, 'equality' can have a false, envious sense as demonstrated by the levelling of the present age. It is here that we find 'the herd' fearfully (and gleefully) pulling back anyone who dares to strike out passionately on their own. Instead, Kierkegaard's conception of the highest manifestation of 'equality' recognizes the opportunity for any and all individuals to relate to God, as all people enjoy the same potential for relationship. 'The sharp scythe of levelling permits all, every single one, to leap over the blade—look, God is waiting! Leap then into the embrace of God' (*TA*, 108–9).¹¹⁴ Note that such a state is only accessible once one has gone through levelling:

But if the individual is not destroyed in the process, he will be educated by this very abstraction . . . to be satisfied in the highest religious sense with himself and his relationship to God, will be educated to make up his own mind instead of agreeing with the public, which annihilates all the relative concretions of individuality. (*TA*, 92)

While it is true that Kierkegaard admires the enthusiasm and action of the revolutionary age, it is not the case that he thinks passion alone will bring one to the highest religious sense.¹¹⁵ The two ages each bring to the table key elements, but it is only their co-existence that will lead to authenticity. If the age of revolution brings the passion, then the present age supplies the

¹¹² For the individual, levelling can be an educative experience whereby he learns that he is 'an essentially human being in the full sense of equality. This is the idea of the religious.' *TA*, 88.

¹¹³ See, for example, *ibid.*, 105.

¹¹⁴ With the leap here the apparatus of contemporaneity and the orientation provided by the moment of vision discussed in the previous chapter comes into play. Separated from the herd, and forced into a place of potential annihilation, the self faces a decisive moment. See *TA*, 89, 108. What the individual who has leapt leaps *into* (i.e. the social suffering that comes from contemporaneous faith) will be discussed in ch. 6 below on Identity.

¹¹⁵ Providing yet another problem to those who would ascribe fideism to Kierkegaard. See the previous chapter.

reflection. Reflection is the hallmark of the passionless age, a characteristic that governs all thought and can lead to levelling. Yet reflection itself contains great goods, especially when combined with passion. 'Reflection is a snare in which one is trapped, but in and through the inspired leap of religiousness, the situation changes and it is the snare that catapults one into the embrace of the eternal' (*TA*, 89). Reflection itself is not evil. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of a Kierkegaardian approach that is without any form of reflection whatsoever. However, enthusiasm must be allowed to intervene and persuade the reflective power to make a decision. Reflection is at its best when religiousness intervenes in the individual. Reflection is only evil when it results in stagnation (*TA*, 96). Kierkegaard speaks approvingly of the extensity of the passionless age, agreeing that it is probably far more worldly wise and informed than is the revolutionary age, and thus far less likely to make grievous errors of judgement.¹¹⁶ The present age, with its reflection and potential for apprehension of the highest equality, is like a chemical mixture awaiting only the catalyst of passion to make it into something better than the sum of its constituent parts. 'If and when empowered, it will act far more intensively in relation to the extensity at its disposal' (*TA*, 110).¹¹⁷

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Kierkegaard's assessment of the world-historical in *CUP*, and his account of the non-hierarchical relationship that exists between 'ages' in *TA* serve to undermine core notions key to the Christian nationalism espoused by Grundtvig, Martensen and others. For Kierkegaard, the ethical task facing all persons is the task of deciding either obedience or offence in the face of the God-man. This task is glossed over by the world-historians, who do away with the ethical by focussing on the group rather than the individual, and who relativize good and evil into quantitative categories of greater and lesser. The position that Kierkegaard takes against the world-historical is grounded upon his notion of the moment of vision and the leap that leads to contemporaneity. As such, his critique is a theological one, aimed at how his opponents are distorting Christianity into Christendom. Kierkegaard does not locate the essence of Christianity in one's membership of a privileged cultural group. Instead, his understanding of faith centres on an ethical orientation towards the divine that can only come from contemporaneity with the God-man. Without this

¹¹⁶ *TA*, 109. See also 97, 110.

¹¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 111 for another indication of the co-existence of the two ages and 77 and 80–1 in which Kierkegaard speaks of passionless reflection at the same time as leaving open the possibility that there can be passionate reflection in any age.

relation to the incarnation there may well be religion, but there can be no authentic faith: a central plank in Kierkegaard's argument that Christendom has lost Christianity. Contemporaneity is intimately connected to an actual historical event, but it is not itself restricted to a particular geo-historical location. In other words, the contemporaneous relation necessary for a right relation to God is open to all people. This is grounded upon a vision of authentic identity which recognizes the priority that an individual's relation to God has over the individual's relation to others in his or her group. This process is described in part by the account of levelling, a readjustment of the relationship between individuals and the crowd that is open to anyone of any age. Furthermore, the Kierkegaardian approach recognizes the central place that the singular event of the incarnation must have in any Christian account of God's revelation. Such an account of authentic faith and identity inevitably clashes with the commitments underlying nationalist theologies, which place a high emphasis on the sense of the common, the task of the nations and the historical development of culture as indicative of divine self-disclosure.

In his assessment of *TA*, John Hoberman accuses Kierkegaard of lacking any sense of historical movement. 'As a cultural polemic, *TA* scrutinizes a moment within history rather than the process of history. Such an approach to history has a basically rhetorical rationale.'¹¹⁸ Hoberman is here trying to dismiss Kierkegaard because he did not offer a philosophy of historical progress. Yet the idea of the progress of history in this sense is anathema to Kierkegaard. This does not mark an oversight on his part. Instead, it is part of the theological approach to history he is working with, built on the back of previous commitments to the contingent freedom of actuality, contemporaneity and the centrality of the moment of vision. This is the authentic relation of man to God set free from the restrictions of herd, group or epoch, and as a category of the eternal it must be something that is true for all men at all times. It is false to say that Kierkegaard does not have a theory of historical progress. He does have a theory, and his theory is that there is no essential progress in history:

In relation to the absolute, there is only one time, the present; for the person who is not contemporary with the absolute, it does not exist at all. And since Christ is the absolute it is easy to see that in relation to him there is only one situation, the situation of contemporaneity . . . Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the holy history, stands on its own, outside history. (*PC*, 63)

¹¹⁸ Hoberman, 'Two Ages, 247–8.

6

Identity

No matter how many have already been our days and the days of our fathers, they have all passed through this single present day of Yours, and from it they have taken their measure and their manner of being.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we considered Kierkegaard's approach to history and his critique of the world-historical attitude. The discussion ended with Anti-Climacus' entreaty for the human being to stand in contemporaneity with Christ alongside any other socio-historical age in which he might find himself. In Kierkegaard's scheme, issues of history and the world-historical are inextricably bound up with matters of authentic becoming, individual identity and the relation of the person to the group. In *CUP*, Kierkegaard has Climacus state:

If the world-historical is to amount to anything, it must be the history of the human race. Here is an issue that, in my opinion, is one of the most difficult: *how and to what extent does the human race result from individuals, and what is the relation of the individuals to the human race?* I shall not attempt to answer that question, and the attempt might fail anyway, but I shall entertain myself by bearing in mind that the survey of world history has for the most part been completed, or is at least in full swing, without having removed this difficulty. (*CUP*, 154 (emphasis added))

Although Climacus declines to wrestle with the difficulty in *CUP*, elsewhere Kierkegaard does not. By looking at his reflections on the 'single individual' (or the 'single one' [*den Enkelte*]) we can see that the relationship of the person to the wider group was a matter of great importance. It is this matter of

¹ *The Confessions of St Augustine* Bk I. Ch. 6 section 10, trans. John. K. Ryan (New York: Image, 1960).

identity formation and the single individual that forms the focus of the present chapter. Kierkegaard's category of the single individual undermines the confidence that Christian nationalists place in 'the group' as the primary referent of personal identity. Kierkegaard's anthropology—his account of essential human identity—provides challenges to the dominance of nation and state that no Christian theology can ignore. Kierkegaard reminds Christian social thinkers how it is that the self must be primarily rooted in God, and only secondarily connected to the cultural context in which the self is embedded.

Kierkegaard's 'single individual' resists attempts to ground identity in the group, class or nation. For this reason, he is often rejected by critics as an individualistic, apolitical misanthrope who had no awareness of the socio-historical network of language, culture and inter-personal relationships that necessarily underwrite modern conceptions of human identity. On the other side, Kierkegaard's defenders have rushed in to demonstrate his political awareness and social application, keen to avert the charge of individualism.

I propose that while it is true that Kierkegaard is a profoundly political writer with a deep concern for other human beings, it is also true that he remains an individualist. When defenders downplay Kierkegaard's overriding emphasis on the individual, they inadvertently gloss over an element of his thought that is fundamentally at odds with communitarian accounts of what it means to be a person. This fact is not lost on those critics who recognize that Kierkegaard's single individual is inextricably intertwined with his religious project and Christological commitments. As such it cannot be squared with a merely socio-economic materialist view of human identity. However, it is precisely what these critics deplore that can be a point of recommendation to theologically minded readers. Kierkegaard's individualism offers a route to healthy inter-personal relationships and an alternative to the idolatrous deification of the nation or of the group that any Christian account of human society needs to take seriously.

This chapter will first look at the charge that Kierkegaard is apolitical, with no social dimension. It will next preview some of the commentators contesting this interpretation, finding that in some ways their defence of Kierkegaard has been so successful that the pendulum has swung too far the other way, with a picture painted of a Kierkegaard who was *primarily* and *fundamentally* a social thinker with communitarian aims. I argue that some of Kierkegaard's Marxist-materialist critics have more accurately represented Kierkegaard's emphasis on the single individual—an emphasis that can only be called 'individualist'. However, instead of finding this to be a reason to reject Kierkegaard, I wish to defend Kierkegaardian individualism on the grounds that it offers something vital to Christian social thought, and is in no way elitist or misanthropic. The 'single individual' flows from Kierkegaard's other categories of the leap and *Øieblikket*, and (following his philosophy of history) contains a radical egalitarianism rooted in Christological commitments. I argue that Kierkegaard's

individualism provides an account of authentic identity that rivals commonly accepted socio-historical models, an account that takes seriously the priority of God as the ground and source of all being, and the effect of the incarnation on human existence. As such, Kierkegaardian individualism might not recommend itself to Marxists, but its theological credentials allow a critique of rival Christian constructs such as Grundtvig's and Martensen's group-centred accounts of human identity. This becomes especially apparent when we consider the ethical implications of an individual-focussed ethic as worked out in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in the final section of this chapter.

2. KIERKEGAARD AND SOCIETY

2.1 The anti-social Kierkegaard?

The charge that Kierkegaard is a radical, anti-social individualist is not new, and can be traced to the critiques of his contemporaries. Speaking of Kierkegaard in his *Christian Ethics*, Martensen wrote:

Ethical organisations of society on earth lie quite beyond his contemplation . . . Of a solidaric union between individuals and races of mankind, of history and tradition . . . there is here not the most distant idea.²

Martensen is but near the beginning of a long list of commentators making similar points.³ Martin Buber famously found Kierkegaard deficient in his awareness that every *I* needs a *Thou*.⁴ Karl Barth thought Kierkegaard a good introductory teacher to some of the pressing issues facing modern theology, but his vision of radical isolation means that everyone must one day 'leave the school of Kierkegaard' for more socially positive instruction.⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr concludes that 'the theme of isolated individuality is dominant . . . Hence cultural societies do not concern Kierkegaard. In state, family, and church he sees only the defections from Christ.'⁶

² Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, trans. C. Spence. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 228.

³ The views of contemporaries A. G. Rudelbach and Jørgen Victor Bloch are discussed below.

⁴ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965). 'According to Kierkegaard [the God-relationship] means that it is the excluding relation, excluding all others . . . [the God relation] drives all other relations into the realm of the inessential.' At 50.

⁵ Karl Barth, *Fragments Grave and Gay* (London: Collins, 1971), 102–4; 'Where in his teaching are the people of God, the congregation, the Church; where are her diaconal and missionary charge, her political and social charge?', 99.

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956), 183.

Some commentators find that Kierkegaard tried, but failed, to instil a social ethic, for example in *Works of Love*.⁷ Others conclude that the asocial nature of his philosophy runs even deeper. Mark C. Taylor is concerned by what he sees as Kierkegaard's excessive emphasis on the separateness of individuals. For Kierkegaard, 'the journey to selfhood cannot culminate in spiritual community but must be a solitary sojourn that separates self from the other'.⁸ In a similar vein Louis Mackey accuses Kierkegaard of acosmism.⁹ Mackey argues that for Kierkegaard the ethical reality of the subject is the only reality, other 'selves' are only possibilities, therein betraying a solipsistic blind alley. For Mackey, to follow Kierkegaard means accepting that other people are not as *real* as I am myself.¹⁰ 'The world is only a cluster of possibilities for [Kierkegaard], and as such does not offer him matter, content, locus, opportunity, or exigence for action.'¹¹

Many commentators share a fundamental sympathy with Kierkegaard's project, even while remaining constructively critical of it. Such a generous disposition cannot be attributed to the second class of trenchant critics. Coming from a Marxist socialist school of thought they see Kierkegaard's existential emphasis on 'the single individual' as doing little to halt the twentieth-century evils of fascism or rampant consumerist individualism. Indeed, Kierkegaard is often seen as providing intellectual credibility to these anti-social trends, and they see in Kierkegaard an unredeemable mix of religious superstition, asocial misanthropy and *bourgeois* class privilege.

Herbert Marcuse does not like Kierkegaard's single individual or its Christian foundation.¹² For Marcuse, Kierkegaard's individualism turns into the most emphatic absolutism: 'The individual's own existence is the sole reality that can actually be comprehended.'¹³ Because Kierkegaard repudiated the progressive elements of Hegel's view of the individual and the state, Marcuse

⁷ See, for example, the essays by Martin Andic and Peter George in George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (eds), *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (London: Macmillan, 1998). Andic argues that Kierkegaard's love of neighbour is too impersonal to be love. 'Is Love of Neighbour the Love of an Individual?', 112. Likewise George suggests that 'Kierkegaard constantly treats relationships as if they involved only one person'. 'Something Anti-Social about Works of Love', 79.

⁸ Taylor prefers what he calls 'Hegel's insistence on the sociality of spirit'. *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 179.

⁹ Louis Mackey, 'The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics' in *Points of View* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 158.

¹⁰ See Mackey, *View*, 143, 149–51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹² Marcuse thinks Kierkegaard's Christological emphasis marks a step back into a religion that has been undermined completely by modernity, and he is compared unfavourably to Marx. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), 262.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 264.

thinks that he contributes to the ideological situation of militarism and authoritarianism of the twentieth century.¹⁴

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner are explicit in their decision not to focus on Kierkegaard as a religious thinker, their reason being that Christian thought has little to say about modern culture and society.¹⁵ Identifying Kierkegaard's position with 'aristocratic individualism' and 'a premodern valorisation of antiquity'¹⁶ Best and Kellner find only an 'elitist contempt for the masses'.¹⁷ Preferring Marxist social praxis over the Kierkegaardian attack on the levelling herd, they conclude that Kierkegaard 'can only prescribe escape from history and society as the sole way of salvation from the trajectory of modernity'.¹⁸

Behind all such interpretations lie Theodor Adorno's and Georges Lukács' charge that Kierkegaard uncoupled authentic identity from the socio-historical web that necessarily surrounds and supports the idea of the 'person'. By denying that quantitative historical development is the engine for unfolding truth, and by refusing to locate authentic existence within and as a group, Kierkegaard is accused of abstracting the individual from the very things that *must* constitute the individual's identity.

For Adorno, Kierkegaard is essentially opposed to anything outside the subject, and thus he is opposed to reality: 'The world of things is for him neither part of the subject nor independent of it. Rather, this world is omitted . . . there is only an isolated subjectivity, surrounded by a dark otherness.'¹⁹ Adorno suggests that the key to Kierkegaard's entire authorship can be found in the world of the *intérieur*.²⁰ *Either/Or, Practice in Christianity* and the material from the *Moment* are all presented as examples of Kierkegaard's abiding retreat from the deluge of 'otherness' into inwardness. 'Inwardness attempts to still the external world that crowds in on it by anathematizing history.'²¹

¹⁴ Martin Matušík differentiates between the young and the mature Marcusean critique of Kierkegaard in 'Kierkegaard's Radical Existential Praxis, or Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian and Postmodern Categories' in M. Matušík and M. Westphal (eds), *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 244.

¹⁵ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, 'Modernity, Mass Society, and the Media: Reflections on the Corsair Affair' in Robert L. Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37, 42–3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61. A similar conclusion is reached by Karl Mennheim in *Ideology and Utopia: Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), 260.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42. Adorno's irresponsible reading of the pseudonymous 'Seducer's Diary' and of the fictional memoirs of Johannes Climacus is challenged by many commentators, including George Pattison: 'I do not therefore feel it necessary to "refute" Adorno as there is no argument to refute.' *Poor Paris! Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 14 n. 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

For his part Lukács traces the 'destruction of reason' in western thought and finds Kierkegaard, with his rejection of the quantitative socio-historical world as a basis for truth, to be a key player.²² Lukács makes the connection between Kierkegaard's separation of subjective ethics from world-historical developments with later existentialists' (especially Heidegger's) decision to opt for Hitler.²³ Kierkegaard 'increasingly became [a] pure apologist of bourgeois decadence, and nothing else',²⁴ and he has nothing more to offer to the theory or practice of positive social change.

Similar to Adorno's charge of 'anathematizing history', Lukács complains how Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectics signified a denial of the conversion from quantity into quality.²⁵ That is, Kierkegaard denies that the accumulation of passing years brings with it substantive development of the human condition. Opposed to this, Lukács places Marx's scientific dialectic, where human beings are comprehended as fundamentally historical and social, referring to this formulation as mankind's 'essential nature'.²⁶ By contrast, for Kierkegaard's philosophy: 'history and society need to be abolished . . . in order to create space for the existence of the artificially isolated individual'.²⁷

Lukács traces the problem of the artificially isolated individual to Kierkegaard's religious sensibilities, typified, for Lukács, in the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' in *Fear and Trembling*. For Lukács, it is in this book that Kierkegaard's theory of religion appears 'overtly and concretely'.²⁸ Here, 'Kierkegaard offers the clearest evidence that an "ethic of conviction" taken to a rigorous conclusion can only produce a moral solipsism'.²⁹ Lukács takes Abraham's 'insuperable incognito' as evidence of Kierkegaard's individualistic isolation.³⁰ The religious stage represented by Abraham is wholly other than the ethical (i.e. social) stage, and is proof of a fundamental flaw in the philosophy, for this 'annihilation of ethics' is at the same time the 'mental de-socializing of man'.³¹

2.2 The social Kierkegaard?

Occasionally, one will find some who seem to welcome this version of stark Kierkegaardian individualism.³² However, in the main the response to the

²² Georges Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980), 280.

²³ Ibid., 291.

²⁴ Ibid., 296.

²⁵ Ibid., 250.

²⁶ Ibid., 256.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 272.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 274.

³¹ Ibid., 280, 281.

³² Paul Holmer thinks Kierkegaard's freedom is absolute and he defends a decisionistic reading in 'On Understanding Kierkegaard' in Howard Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (eds), *A Kierkegaard Critique* (New York: Harper, 1962), 46; Walter Lowrie portrays Kierkegaard as a political conservative whose radical individualism was an exaggerated corrective to counter liberalism and incipient fascism. *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 365,

anti-social criticism has been vigorous.³³ Far from being a bourgeois misanthropic individualist with little to offer to political discourse, Kierkegaard's project is painted as one which is *primarily* concerned with fostering healthy interpersonal relations. The defenders highlight the political and cultural relevance of Kierkegaard's analysis of his age, and emphasize the strong communitarian current running throughout the works.

Merold Westphal regrets the common presentation of Kierkegaard's philosophy as lonely and worldless.³⁴ Such a view betrays 'a failure to notice how Hegelian Kierkegaard is' in respect to the individual.³⁵ Westphal argues that Kierkegaard shared Hegel's dialectical individualism of the "I" that is "We" and the "We" that is "I".³⁶ For Westphal, Kierkegaard is not about attempting to isolate the individual from collectives such as family, friendship and state, but instead about recognizing that the 'We' also stands in fear and trembling before God.³⁷ It is this, and not radical individualism, that lies behind Kierkegaard's critique of the herd.

Westphal finds some congruity between the Marxist position and the Kierkegaardian one.³⁸ Charles Bellinger also finds socio-political relevance beyond the traditional Kierkegaardian emphasis on the individual. He thinks that Kierkegaard provides useful insights into group dynamics.³⁹ Bellinger applies the Kierkegaardian category of 'stages on life's way' to modern mass movements such as Nazism and Stalinism. Rather than confining the stages to individual lives (such as Hitler or Stalin), he suggests that the analysis can be

524–5; ch. 1 above has already discussed how the Nazi political philosopher Carl Schmitt justifies his philosophy of totalitarian exceptionalism with reference to Kierkegaard's individual. *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT press, 1985 originally published 1922), 15.

³³ Two collections of articles, and their respective introductory essays, deserve special mention: Pattison and Shakespeare's *Kierkegaard: the Self and Society*, and George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (eds), *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992).

³⁴ Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard's Politics' in *Thought* (Vol. 55, No. 218, September 1980), 321.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 321, 323.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 321–2. He is referring to *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 110.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 324. András Nagy too finds it significant that Marxists and communists like Adorno and Lukács were initially inspired by Kierkegaard. Like Abraham these 'moral incognitos' made choices that lay beyond understanding for those who do not believe. 'Abraham the Communist' in *Self in Society*. Jason Wirth also mounts a defence of the Kierkegaardian communal spirit based on Abraham's silence in *FT*: 'In their shared silence, each individual "lets the Neighbour be".' In 'Empty Community: Kierkegaard on Being with You' in Elsebet Jegstrup (ed), *The New Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 220. Mark Dooley also takes Abraham as the paradigmatic Kierkegaardian individual: 'Risking Responsibility: a Politics of the Émigré' in *Self in Society*, 141ff.

³⁹ Charles K. Bellinger, *Genealogy of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Bellinger finds many points of congruence between Girard and Kierkegaard.

extended outward to encompass groups as a whole.⁴⁰ With explicit reference to Bellinger's project, Stephen Crites also argues that Kierkegaard's 'self' can be applied to social groups.⁴¹ He thinks that Kierkegaard's language of the individual self that despairs, fears, has faith and believes, has resonance for multi-personal communities in relation to one another.⁴² Crites notes that the self-relating self of *SUD* can be an individual human being, however:

It can also be a pair of lovers, or a family . . . or a labour union . . . For sheer relation is the self. Strictly as defined, the self is intersubjective, social, and an individual human being can be a self-relation only because he or she can also be related to others.⁴³

Michael Plekon portrays Kierkegaard as a religious thinker with a deep ecclesiology, and therefore fundamentally about social relations.⁴⁴ 'His writing contains a sociological focus which is inextricably entwined with his theology.'⁴⁵ Far from 'world-denying asceticism', Plekon finds in Kierkegaard a strongly optimistic theological affirmation of all creation and (redeemed) social life.⁴⁶ Robert Perkins ascribes to Kierkegaard a 'single-minded focus on the interhuman'.⁴⁷ His thesis is that Kierkegaard criticizes various forms of life 'precisely as providing or undermining the basis of society and politics'.⁴⁸ This 'primary critique' is said to be more important for the authorship than merely 'theological categories' like 'neighbour love'.⁴⁹ Jim Perkinson also undertakes a 'socio-reading of the Kierkegaardian Self' reading 'lowliness' as sociological in character.⁵⁰ Being contemporary with Christ is to be present with the 'concrete sociality of lower-class existence'.⁵¹ It is in this light that

⁴⁰ Charles K. Bellinger, 'Toward a Kierkegaardian understanding of Hitler, Stalin and the Cold War' in *Foundations*. Bellinger likens Nazism to a national group stuck at the 'aesthetic' stage, and the Stalinist regime to one displaying stark 'ethical' qualities.

⁴¹ Stephen Crites, 'Sickness Unto Death: A Social Interpretation' in *Foundations*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁴ Michael Plekon, 'Kierkegaard, the Church and the Theology of Golden-Age Denmark' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Vol. 34 (1983), 245–66; 'Prophetic Criticism, Incarnational Optimism: On Recovering the Late Kierkegaard' in *Religion* Vol. 13 (1983), 137–53; 'From Angst to Ambivalence: Kierkegaard's Social and Theological Modernity Reconsidered' in *Dialog* vol. 20 (Winter 1981), 45–51; 'Introducing Christianity into Christendom: Reinterpreting the Late Kierkegaard' in *Anglican Theological Review* vol. LXIV no. 3 (July 1982), 327–53.

⁴⁵ Plekon, 'Ambivalence', 46.

⁴⁶ Plekon, 'Introducing', 344.

⁴⁷ Robert L. Perkins, 'The Politics of Existence: Buber and Kierkegaard' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172, also at 174. See Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Critique of the Bourgeois State' in *Inquiry* vol. 27, 207–18.

⁵⁰ Jim Perkinson, 'A "Socio-reading" of the Kierkegaardian Self: Or, the Space of Lowliness in the time of the Disciple' in *Self and Society*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

Kierkegaard's appeal to the 'common man' in the *Moment* is said to be 'a cry for inclusion in a particular social location'.⁵²

One of the more influential arguments in favour of Kierkegaard's social significance is also based on Kierkegaard's self-identification with the common man. The purpose of Jørgen Bukdahl's *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man* was to rescue Kierkegaard from the caricature as an elitist arch-conservative.⁵³ As such, Bukdahl is at pains to locate Kierkegaard in the sphere of the peasant artisan, and he argues that the Kierkegaard family's rustic background of simple living and pietistic religion consciously shaped his identification as a common man.⁵⁴ Bukdahl's understanding of the 'common man' is socio-economic in character. To this end, he suggests thematic links between Kierkegaard and Marx.⁵⁵ Bukdahl also seeks to find similarities between Grundtvig and Kierkegaard's approach to the social class of the simple labourer.⁵⁶ Drawing largely from *Two Ages* and *CUP*, Bukdahl repeatedly equates the 'simple man' with the common man, and casts the conflict between simplicity and sophistication in overtly class-conscious terms.⁵⁷ Bukdahl thinks that Kierkegaard agreed with Grundtvig: 'It is the cultivated people, not the common people that are the problem.'⁵⁸

I will address Bukdahl's argument and the important category of the common man below, but first we need to examine the priority that Kierkegaard affords to the individual in any social configuration, and consider whether it makes any positive sense to retain 'individualism' as a feature of Kierkegaardian thought.

2.3 In defence of Kierkegaardian individualism

While the caricature of the anti-social Kierkegaard is still prevalent in some quarters, the cumulative effect of Kierkegaard's defenders seems to have shifted the balance. Even amongst those who would not go as far as proclaiming a proto-socialist Kierkegaard, it is now widely accepted that however much

⁵² Ibid., 157, 160. Cf. *PC*, 13; *Moment* no. 10.

⁵³ From the translator's introduction to Jørgen Bukdahl's *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), viii.

⁵⁴ 'Søren's relation to his father shattered any possible respect he might have had for the sort of education he saw among the upper-class elite, and the categories of the common man and the simple person became absolutely fundamental both to his philosophy and to his final actions.' Ibid., 30.

⁵⁵ See Bukdahl, *Common*, 105–6 where he claims that Kierkegaard was 'on the same wavelength' as Marx and Engels.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23, 25. See below.

⁵⁷ See, for example, at 30, 66, 72 and especially ch 6 below.

⁵⁸ Bukdahl, *Common*, 78, also at 63.

Kierkegaard focuses on the individual, he is certainly not a misanthropic, apolitical *individualist*.

I think that this may be to the detriment of reading Kierkegaard. His makeover as a fundamentally social thinker runs the risk of losing what is distinctive, useful, and indeed Christian about his anthropology of the individual.⁵⁹ Despite the negative connotations, 'individualistic' is the most apt description of Kierkegaard's vision of identity. Furthermore, as an account of the self, its foundation and its relation to others in society, Kierkegaard's individualistic anthropology is deeply rooted in his prior commitments to the moment of vision, history, Christology and the authentic orientation of faith. As such, it is bound to bring him into fundamental disagreement with materialist, reductionist or communitarian theories of identity. We need to preserve this difference, and not brush it away as an inconsequential misunderstanding.

The different labels attached to Kierkegaard are not synonymous, for he is an 'individualist' without being 'apolitical' or 'misanthropic'. In Kierkegaard's hands 'individualism' becomes a tool for authentic existence and true human sociality, but it is individualism nonetheless. By 'individualism', I mean not only Kierkegaard's commitment to the ethical priority of the individual above the group, but also his grounding of the essence of authentic identity in something other than the historical-political-cultural-linguistic context in which persons find themselves. This is not to equate individualism with a radical withdrawal from the ethico-political (as if this were even possible) rather it is to hold that a description of one's 'social web' does not exhaust the explanation of who they are. There is something prior, and more essential, to a human being's identity than the network of relationships provided by his or her culture.

It is Kierkegaard's critics, rather than his defenders, who are most helpful in tracing the contours of Kierkegaardian individualism. When Best and Kellner describe Kierkegaard as one who 'rejects all socio-historical determinations of an authentic individual existence', or when Peter George notes that 'Kierkegaard is unwilling to argue that a social and interactive relationship with other

⁵⁹ Here I am in agreement with George Pattison when he warns: '[W]e should be chary of assimilating Kierkegaard too easily to contemporary models of the liberal-democratic self.' *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses* (London: Routledge, 2002), 64 n. 19. Kierkegaard's individualism belongs within a wider nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse about person-alism, which also includes Martensen's 'Principle of Personality'. Amongst others the conversation also takes in Nicolas Berdyaev: 'The personality and society are not identical, as the various social doctrines upholding the organic theory of society would maintain.' *Solitude and Society*, trans. George Reavey (London: Centenary Press, 1938), 181. John MacMurray, whose philosophy distinguishes between 'real' and 'unreal' persons in *Freedom in the Modern World* (London: Faber, 1932), and the work of Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel, who emphasizes man's consciousness as a 'traveller' in the established stable orders of earth: *Homo Viator*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), 7, 153–4.

people is necessary if the self is to be authentically spiritual', what they intend critically could also be taken as an accurate description of the Kierkegaardian position.⁶⁰ In the same vein, Adorno recognizes (and deplors) the fact that for Kierkegaard 'history' proper is constituted by the free choice of a reflecting subject.⁶¹ And yet (as discussed in chapter 3 above), Kierkegaard's commitment to the contingency of created things and the priority of *Øieblikket* has theological roots that cannot be ignored lightly by the Christian. To do so would be to deify history by giving it a determinative role beyond its ken, a conclusion that any Christian theory of social history needs to take seriously. For Lukács, Kierkegaard's 'qualitative' dialectics 'took to a radical conclusion all the philosophical arguments which de-historicized and de-socialized Hegelian dialectics'.⁶² Lukács criticizes Kierkegaard for denying that the steady drip of history as represented by cultural development and population growth adds anything to the category of 'truth'. He recognizes that it is the inner man's relation to Christ that is 'the sole essential relation in Kierkegaard's view'.⁶³ Lukács points out that for Kierkegaard, history has been divided into two, marked by the appearance of Christ. Here is a paradox. On the one hand, there is now a change in the purpose, content and form of every mode of human conduct. On the other hand, the incarnation did *not* give rise to 'a real periodizing of a real historical course of events. It is a unique, sudden leap in the middle of "history" which is otherwise motionless'.⁶⁴ As we saw in the previous chapter, Lukács here nicely encapsulates Kierkegaard's challenge to the world-historians with their theories of religious and cultural development. However, it is all too much for Lukács. He prefers Marx's dialectic where man is comprehended as essentially historical and social and nothing more.⁶⁵ Lukács states boldly that historical materialism 'is not only qualitatively superior but also exclusively scientific, and for the first time illuminates past, present and future in a really clear way'.⁶⁶

In many ways these critical interpretations of Kierkegaard get to the essence of his account of authentic existence. Any reading which highlights the priority Kierkegaard gives to a Christological rather than a socio-historical grounding of human identity strikes close to the heart of Kierkegaard's philosophy. Yet Adorno, Lukács and others are content to take their observation that Kierkegaard's individualism does not conform to Marxist materialism as proof that he has nothing to offer to social discourse.⁶⁷ For the

⁶⁰ Best and Kellner, 'Modernity', 57; George, 'Anti-Social', 75.

⁶¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 29–32.

⁶² Lukács, *Destruction*, 255.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶⁷ The charge of Kierkegaard's 'anti-social' tendencies is particularly ironic coming from Lukács. Unlike that prominent member of the Hungarian Communist party, Kierkegaard did not play an active role in the purging and imprisonment of people who dissented from his ideological beliefs.

theological reader, this merely begs the question. An anthropology of identity reduced solely to the socio-historical web is itself making assumptions about the ground of human identity. Christian theology needs to consider what sense of identity can be had which takes seriously, indeed fundamentally, the effect that the (incarnate, personal, eternal) creator has on creation.

The aim here is not to recommend Kierkegaard's individualism to Marxists, but to people who already admit a prior commitment to Christian thought. To point out that Kierkegaard's position fundamentally differs from a materialist conception of existence is not to argue for one position over the other, but it is to mark clearly where the difference lies:

At the base of all actual disagreement, there is an understanding... That two people are actually in disagreement is no misunderstanding—they are actually in disagreement simply because they do understand each other. (POV, 113)

Too often Kierkegaard's defenders implicitly conflate his account of the individual with a reductionist socio-historical explanation. However, for Kierkegaard the source of identity is the very thing in question, and it is not simply given that it is essentially rooted in interpersonal relations and social history. To gloss over Kierkegaard's individualism is to lose something vital that he brings to theological and sociological theories of identity, not least when those views combine to undergird religious national allegiance.

It is a commonplace idea that human identity is *essentially* a construct of socio-historical and inter-personal factors, yet as we shall see below Kierkegaard provides a corrective to this truism by locating the ground of identity in something other than the surrounding material culture. And for Kierkegaard, that ground lies in the territory of theology (or theological anthropology), not sociology. It is significant that many of those who argue most strongly for a socio-political reading also recognize that at times they are going against the grain of Kierkegaard's thought.⁶⁸ Yet by shying clear of any hint of 'individualism', these defenders do damage to Kierkegaard's category of the single individual, and along with that the theological core of his project.

Attempts to align Kierkegaard too closely with an Hegelian or Marxist emphasis on the social 'We' can only do so by adopting a counterintuitive reading that runs against what Kierkegaard does with his category of 'the single individual'. Those like Dooley, Wirth, Nagy and others who look to Abraham as paradigmatic of a Kierkegaardian community of silent, hidden individuals are ignoring the fact that from Climacus onwards, the authentic individual is not portrayed as a quiet, invisible member of the status quo, but is instead an outspoken, offensive individual apart from

⁶⁸ Bukdahl, Crites, Nagy, Perkins, and Perkinson all acknowledge the divergent or ambiguous nature of their conclusions being drawn from the original source material.

the crowd.⁶⁹ Kierkegaard's rigorous distinction between individual persons and congregations of people is blurred when Bellinger and Crites apply the language of the individual to group-dynamics, in direct opposition to the trajectory of Kierkegaard's project. Plekon and Perkins find Kierkegaard's primary purpose to be in provoking healthy social relations between persons, either politically (Perkins) or ecclesiologicaly (Plekon). Without doubt there are many socio-political useful applications of Kierkegaard's critiques; indeed, this is the aim of the present book. However, to claim that these socially relevant applications constitute the *primary* purpose of his analysis is, at the very least, to gloss over Kierkegaard's own stated aim of separating individuals from their groups in order that Christianity might be reintroduced into Christendom.

3. KIERKEGAARD AND THE COMMON MAN

Perhaps one reason for the ambiguity surrounding the social aspect of Kierkegaard's project is his complicated association with 'the common man'.⁷⁰ Any attempt to explicate a Kierkegaardian critique of nationalism will need to consider his peculiar relationship to this category, which is a staple of nationalistic thought. Martensen references 'the people' which must know itself as a coherent popular culture before they can be Christian.⁷¹ Grundtvig looks to common people in constructing his theology whereby 'the Spirit must fly, but low above the ground'.⁷² Kierkegaard, too, clearly felt a great affinity for the common man, right up to the end of his life: 'You common man! I have not segregated my life from yours . . . So if I belong to anyone, I must belong to you . . .' (*Moment*, 346).⁷³ And yet who, or what, is the 'common man' in

⁶⁹ This aspect of the relationship between Kierkegaard's pseudonyms is discussed below. The relationship is convoluted to say the least, which should be enough to prompt a pause before positing the 'author' of *FT* as representing Kierkegaard's last and best word on sociality, faith or ethics.

⁷⁰ One of the many complaints that Kierkegaard historian Peter Tudvad has against Joakim Garff's 2000 biography *Søren Aabye Kierkegaard*, for example, is the extent to which Garff reputedly manipulates the evidence in order to paint Kierkegaard as socially superior at the expense of his associations with humble folk. '[Garff] makes [Kierkegaard] into a dandy when he was absolutely not one. The corresponding portrayal of Kierkegaard in *SAK* is of one who is more callous/insensitive [*ufølsom*] than the source material gives evidence for.' In 'SAK—en uvidenskabelig biografi om Søren Kierkegaard' [*SAK*—An unscholarly biography of Søren Kierkegaard] *Information*, 24 July 2004. Cf. Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 154ff.

⁷¹ '[W]ithout a minimum of culture, Christianity cannot be truly appropriated, nor the Christian Church attain its development.' *Social Ethics*, 333. Cf. ch. 2 above.

⁷² From the poem, 'Nyårs-Morgen' in *Udvalgte Skrifter* IV, 239ff. Cf. ch. 1 above.

⁷³ See also *Pap.* IX A 340; *Pap.* X(1) A 135.

Kierkegaard's works? Does it designate a socio-economic class distinction, an epistemological mindset, or a moral condition? Is the 'common man' an exclusively positive category on which Kierkegaard (like Grundtvig) projects his unreserved admiration, or does he subject it to criticism? Considering Kierkegaard's unremitting censure of 'the crowd', is he not then inconsistent when he appeals to the common man?

It is a problem that Bukdahl's influential *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man* does not consider these particular nuances. He does not sufficiently consider Kierkegaard's common man, and instead exclusively identifies the common man with a socio-economic understanding of the poor working masses. In his attempt to promote Kierkegaard's credentials as a socially aware thinker Bukdahl tends to read either Marx or Grundtvig into the text, substituting 'proletariat' or 'nation' for Kierkegaard's 'common man'. This distorts Bukdahl's interpretation to the point where he ignores essential differences between Kierkegaard on the one hand and more overtly 'social' thinkers on the other. Kierkegaard's common man is not a national group, nor is it an economic class. If we must substitute any term for 'common man' then we would go less wrong less often if we read 'the individual' into the texts. Kierkegaard's treatment of the common man is less a celebration of a particular *people* with endemic characteristics than it is the pool from which to fish potential authentic *persons*.

Bukdahl's (and others') emphasis on the socio-economic category of 'common man' as the working labourer comes at the expense of considering other ways that Kierkegaard understood that category, and thus skews the focus of the Kierkegaardian argument towards class-conscious polemic. While it is true Kierkegaard does think that the working poor have access to the goods of simplicity and equality, it is not the case that he thinks that these goods are exclusive to them, or inherent in any person merely because of the group to which they belong. Kierkegaard's concern for the individual leads him to write against the moral abrogation and blind assumptions of the herd mentality *wherever* it is found in society.⁷⁴ Rightly or wrongly, he is not engaged in a historical materialist struggle of class warfare.

To understand that a human being is capable of nothing (the beautiful and profound expression of the relationship to God) is equally difficult for a remarkably talented king and for a poor wretch . . . (CUP, 383)

[T]he Omniscient One . . . does not want the crowd. He wants only the single individual, wants to become involved only with the single individual, no matter whether the single individual ranks high or low, is eminent or wretched. (UDVS, 127)

⁷⁴ It is significant that when dealing with 'the crowd' Kierkegaard takes pains to avoid exactly the sort of socio-economic distinctions that Bukdahl ascribes to him. In *POV* Kierkegaard's 'crowd' is not populist or elitist see *POV*, 107, and discussion below.

All social groups come under Kierkegaard's criticism, and he does not commend the working man above all others. This is borne out in *TA*, in which the critique of the present age is directed not against a particular class but against a mindset infused through all levels of society. Indeed, considering the *Corsair* affair and the public's desire for something 'interesting' to level—the force of the argument here applies more to the man on the street than to the elite.⁷⁵ When Bukdahl says that *TA* praises the revolutionary spirit, it is a class revolution that he has in mind.⁷⁶ And yet Kierkegaard's praise of revolution is muted. He does not think it has any use apart from reflection; without inwardness revolutions can go diabolically wrong. Thus he commends the life of a revolutionary tempered with reflection—not a rustic labourer divorced from the goods that bourgeois 'cultivation' may bring.⁷⁷

Bukdahl's thesis that Kierkegaard was a champion of the common class relies on his downplaying the times when Kierkegaard attacks the populist, national majority aspects of society. As a result, Bukdahl is keen to explain away Kierkegaard's opposition to Grundtvig:

Kierkegaard's entire critique of Grundtvig . . . rested on a flimsy foundation and was based on an emotional reaction to the overwhelming bombast and fecundity of Grundtvig's personality.⁷⁸

Dismissing Kierkegaard's opposition as nothing more than a 'flimsy foundation' allows Bukdahl to conclude:

It would be too much to attempt to sort out the nuances here, but in brief, both men saw the hope of the future in the common man. For Kierkegaard this hope was to be understood in the specifically religious sense. For Grundtvig, it was to be understood across a broad religious, social and national front as the common folk on the way to becoming a people.⁷⁹

The thesis that apart from some slight nuances Kierkegaard shared Grundtvig's 'common man' and his religion cannot stand. Against Bukdahl's claims of positive identification we must place Kierkegaard's deep ambivalence about popular religious feeling and revival movements happening under Grundtvig's watchful eye. *CA*, to take one example, takes aim at 'religious' and 'holy' believers, the self-satisfied 'awakened'.⁸⁰ These targets are very much drawn

⁷⁵ Note that Bukdahl also downplays the significance of the *Corsair* and the public stir that Kierkegaard caused. This is because he needs to paint a picture of Kierkegaard who is just another common man, and not an extraordinary figure. See Bukdahl, *Common*, 67–9.

⁷⁶ Bukdahl, *Common*, 84. He also uses material from *CUP* (227–8, 383, 557) to suggest Kierkegaard's proto-Marxist leanings. At 105–6.

⁷⁷ In *TA*, 77, 80–1, 109–11, Kierkegaard leaves open the possibility that there can be passionate reflection in any age. Cf. ch. 4 above.

⁷⁸ Bukdahl, *Common*, 23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25. Quoted above.

⁸⁰ *CA*, 140–1. Cf. *Judge For Yourself!* 212–13; *Moment*, 212–13, 340–3, 568–73.

from the cultural group Bukdahl wishes to identify as the common man. According to Kierkegaard, their religious enthusiasm is a product of group-identity and herd instinct, an affliction that plagues simple and sophisticated alike. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's stance elsewhere makes it clear that he does not want to be followed by the awakened conservative 'reformers' and Grundtvigians any more than he wants to be affiliated with the sophisticated liberals of Denmark.

In 1851, the theologian A. G. Rudelbach referenced Kierkegaard in his argument for the emancipation from 'habitual and state Christianity'.⁸¹ Rudelbach's Grundtvigian position was that the Church should be let loose from official ties and duties (such as marriage licences), and he supported a *People's Church* over a *State Church*. Kierkegaard was quick to respond, and in an 'open letter' distanced himself from Rudelbach and 'the particular party' that he represented.⁸² While admitting that it is true that he hates habitual Christianity, Kierkegaard makes it clear that he hates the habit in all its guises—indeed, the populist religion of the Grundtvigian common man gets shorter shrift than that of the unthinking cultural establishment:

[I]f the choice were only between the sort of habitual Christianity that is a secular-minded thoughtlessness that nonchalantly goes on living in the illusion of being a Christian . . . and the kind of habitual Christianity that is found in the sects, the enthusiasts, the superorthodox, the schismatics—if worse came to worse, I would choose the first. . . . One could almost be tempted to smile at the first kind, because there is hope; the second makes one shudder. (COR, 52)

The 'open letter' goes on to stress that the solutions to Christianity's problems within Christendom do not lie in 'the saving power of politically achieved free institutions' (COR, 54). Kierkegaard reiterates that his work aims 'at inward deepening in Christianity in "the single individual"' (COR, 54). This single individual is not defined by external politics, institutions, constitutions or 'a lottery of numbers'⁸³ but is instead the one who enjoys 'victorious inwardness', a potential state which Kierkegaard reminds his readers 'may be in every person' (COR, 55). Kierkegaard's 'common man' retains a different emphasis than the 'common man' of other authors concerned with the masses, for the reason that his category of 'common man' cannot be understood apart from his understanding of the single individual. Kierkegaard's appeal is to the common *man* and not to common *men* as a socio-political group.

⁸¹ The relevant passages of Rudelbach's article, 'On Civil Marriage' [*Om det borgerlige Ægteskab*] are quoted in COR, 51. See also Bruce Kirmmse, "'This Disastrous Confounding of Politics and Christianity': Kierkegaard's Open Letter of 1851" in *IKC: CA*.

⁸² COR, 56.

⁸³ See *ibid.*, 55.

4. CHALLENGING THE SOCIO-POLITICAL

In this section I will further examine the Kierkegaardian challenge to the assumption that it is the socio-political sphere which provides the ground of authentic identity. For all his emphasis on individual persons, Kierkegaard was not apolitical, in any sense of the word.⁸⁴ The most cursory glance at his writings demonstrates the absurdity of claiming that Kierkegaard had no interest in politics whatsoever. Even his cry against 'this disastrous confusion of politics and Christianity' (*COR*, 53) belies an awareness of the place and importance of the sphere of politics as well as its potential to pervert the religious impulse.⁸⁵ The later attack upon Christendom (the seeds of which are already evident at the beginning of the authorship) is predicated upon the very issue of the political and its relationship to the religious.⁸⁶ It seems that the events of 1848 served to clarify Kierkegaard's thoughts on this topic, and the journals pertaining to this period contain much political comment especially as it relates to Christianity.⁸⁷ Although he rejected the solution of the Grundtvigian enthusiasts, Kierkegaard of course retained his ambivalence towards politically established Christianity:

Then I saw, with great fear, what is meant by a Christian state—and I saw this especially in '48 . . . So I intended to make a beginning here in Denmark, to drive up the price of being a Christian so that the entire notion—State Church, civil servants, clerical livings—is exploded. (*Pap.* X-1 A 541 p.345)

Kierkegaard's emphasis is individualistic, but it is not for that reason anti-social.⁸⁸ To see how, it is worth considering the contours of Kierkegaard's single individual as that individual appears in the cluster of writings surrounding the events of 1848. There were a few books that, in Kierkegaard's opinion,

⁸⁴ The strong sense of 'political' is that which pertains to party politics, democratic movements and the machinations of government. The weak sense refers to inter-human relationships and organizations. When Kierkegaard refers to 'politics' it always seems to be in the strong sense, although his thought clearly applies to the weak sense as well.

⁸⁵ See *COR*, 54ff, where Kierkegaard acknowledges the usefulness of civic politics, even while at the same time denying its jurisdiction over Christian inwardness. Also Kirmmse: '[Kierkegaard] makes no *prima facie* case against liberalism and representative government.' 'Disastrous', 181.

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard often sees the political impulse as one in competition with religion, calling politics that 'damned caricature of religion' (*Pap.* X-4 A 581). See Michele Nicoletti, 'Politics and Religion in Kierkegaard's Thought: Secularization and the Martyr' in *Foundations*, 187, where he makes the point that Kierkegaard does not condemn politics as such, only when it moves beyond its limits.

⁸⁷ Kirmmse refers to this time as Kierkegaard's 'post-1848 radicalism' when it became impermissible for him to confuse a national, official religion with Christianity. In "But I am almost never understood . . ." Or, Who Killed Søren Kierkegaard? in *Self and Society*, 181.

⁸⁸ Mark Dooley considers the possibility that a 'deconstructed subject' who can maintain a critical distance from its immediate surroundings is more keenly aware of what is at stake in any political or ethical decision. Thus such a subject is more, not less, of an example of responsible social praxis. 'Risking Responsibility: a Politics of the Émigré' in *Self and Society*, 139–40.

spoke especially to the zeitgeist of Denmark's own social revolution, yet these works remained resolutely focussed on the single individual. Two that I will consider below are *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Point of View*. Here we can see how Kierkegaard's single individual resists being reduced to the network of inter-personal relations, social mores and intellectual factors posited by materialistic alternatives. His vision of a self that 'becomes' authentic is rooted in something other than one's variable cultural context, even while he acknowledges the role that this 'social-web' plays in the formation of identity. By placing the kernel of the self outside of that which is merely socio-historical⁸⁹ the Kierkegaardian view challenges two of the overarching claims—*moral* and *epistemological*—that a social theory of the self must make if it is to answer for the total formation of identity.

4.1 *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, success and suffering

The first overarching claim of the social-web is that of a moral monopoly derived from locating an individual's ethical bearings primarily in the aggregate life of the common. The social-web is utilitarian; as such its ethics are relativistic, oriented towards a favourable outcome for the many over the few, ends over means. What constitutes the measure and manner of a self is reduced to that of a unit whose actions contribute to or detract from the wider whole. Furthermore, the meaning of one's action lies in the amount of success it generates, thus locating the identity of a person within a self-referential system of action and reward.

It is significant that Kierkegaard thinks his attacks on socially derived values of 'success' have an essential bearing on his category of the single individual. In Kierkegaard's schema there is a connection between the location of authentic identity and the distorted moral claims of society. He sees the twin cults of success and common sense as indicative of the deification of the group.⁹⁰ As such, when the conglomerate claims to determine what is right and good, it is placed in direct competition with the revelation offered by the singular Christ. If something like the incarnation did, in fact, happen, then all categories must be thought out along incarnational, and not merely material, historic or social

⁸⁹ Cf. The opening passage of *SUD* where whatever else a human being might be, it is also 'a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal', 13; See also Dooley, 'Risking', 148; CA, 81 and related discussion in ch. 4 above.

⁹⁰ Nicoletti (at 184ff) comments that politics must rely on success, while religion cannot. (Cf. *POV* where Kierkegaard claims that Christianity is 'impractical' because its followers seek to become nothing in the world. *POV*, 103.) Within the Kierkegaardian schema success-oriented politics grasps at unlimited power, attempting to achieve the salvation of everyone. Nicoletti, 'Politics', 186. This is analogous to the idolatrous claims that quantitative reason makes for itself in the 'Interlude' of *PF*.

lines. Thus for Kierkegaard the single individual must be grounded in Christ before it is grounded anywhere else. It is true that what a person knows and does is constitutive of his identity; however, it is a knowledge and set of actions not restricted to any one historically contingent social milieu. Kierkegaard's single individual shares in the eternal, and in an orientation to the incarnate Christ, therefore it cannot be historically relative, utilitarian or based on culturally mediated notions of success.

Kierkegaard thought these issues were especially relevant in the light of 1848. In an 1850 journal entry, he discusses the writing of *UDVS* and again reiterates his claim that his entire thought can be contained in the idea of the single individual.⁹¹ This emphasis on the single one is not news to readers of Kierkegaard. However, the entry also contains a curious allusion to the political events of two years previous. 'What the world revolution in 1848 certainly did not witness against or render untrue—emphasis upon the single individual—let me repeatedly remind [readers] of this.'⁹² There is a mystery contained in this passage. What is it about *UDVS* (written in 1847) that Kierkegaard found so apposite to the spirit of his age? It cannot be merely that they dealt with 'the single individual', for most—if not all—of Kierkegaard's writings do that. The solution must lie somewhere in the particular way that the single individual is treated in *UDVS*. I propose that the thematic thread running throughout these discourses is an extended reflection on *suffering*. It is the contradistinction between suffering and success in *UDVS* that makes Kierkegaard's 'single individual' such a challenge to the popular spirit of 1848.⁹³ Furthermore, this challenges the thesis that identity formation is primarily a matter of participating in the social mores and expectations of the common.

4.1.1 *Individual suffering as isolation*

Suffering in *UDVS* is not couched in terms of private spiritual, emotional or physical turmoil.⁹⁴ Instead, Kierkegaard consistently locates suffering in the

⁹¹ George Pattison recognizes that at the core of the discourses can be found 'a broadly coherent anthropology or psychology, a picture of the self in the throes of what Heidegger was to call the "ontic" or "existentiell" confrontation of the question of existence.' *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses* (London: Routledge, 2002), 35.

⁹² *JP* II 2033 (*Pap.* X-5 B 117); *UDVS*, 395.

⁹³ A similar reference to contemporary political events occurs in journal entries pertaining to 'Thoughts that Wound from Behind' in *Christian Discourses*. With reference to the discussion (*CD*, 222–33) about the suffering and mockery that the Christian will face at the expense of winning the crowd, Kierkegaard writes of both communism and revolutionary France as representing the tyranny of the mass majority. 'What communism makes such a big fuss about, Christianity accepts as something that is self-evident, that all people are equal before God, therefore essentially equal. But then Christianity shudders at this abomination that wants to abolish God and create fear of the crowd of people.' *JP* IV 4131 (*Pap.* VIII A 598). Cf. *CD*, 383.

⁹⁴ On the distinction between mundane unavoidable suffering caused by illness, old age, hunger, etc. and the avoidable suffering of authenticity, see Martin Andic, 'The Secret of

social realm of isolation from and opposition to the crowd. Suffering in *UDVS* is both a source for, and a result of, the life of the single individual and his quest for the good. Such a quest will inevitably bring the individual into opposition with the group, following Kierkegaard's contention that one cannot will the good in truth and please the crowd. In fact, the crowd works as a malignant force against the good, for it is in the crowd that 'the good' is replaced with 'the successful': notions of comfort, usefulness and worldly wisdom. As a result the judgement of the crowd against the one who wills the good in truth can only result in *suffering* for the individual. Fortunately (for Kierkegaard), this suffering speaks volumes:

[L]et us properly dwell on [the sufferings], convinced that one learns more profoundly . . . what the highest is by reflecting on sufferings than by reflecting on achievements, in which there is much that is distracting. (*UDVS*, 100)

The suffering of the good man is the suffering of an alien and an exile. He is on a pilgrimage, described as if he were 'emigrating to a foreign country' (*UDVS*, 102). Kierkegaard contrasts the comforts of earthly belonging with the good of God. 'O you suffering one, you who seem to have been abandoned by the race you belong to, alone in the world—you still have not been abandoned by God who created you' (*UDVS*, 107). In *UDVS*, finding God (or being found by God) and being accepted by one's fellow men are mutually exclusive categories.⁹⁵ Kierkegaard's location of the authentic individual in the wastelands of national civilized society, rather than at its heart, puts him in direct opposition to both Grundtvig⁹⁶ and Martensen.⁹⁷

Sufferings' in Robert Perkins (ed), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 201; an overview of the theme throughout the authorship can be found in Marie Thulstrup, 'Suffering' in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* 7: Neils Thulstrup and Marie Thulstrup (eds), *Kierkegaard and Human Values* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1980), 135–62. Thulstrup emphasizes Kierkegaard's own personal suffering as the guiding impetus and does not draw out the politically subversive significance of pitting 'suffering' against 'success'.

⁹⁵ See also *UDVS*, 205, 218. On 'being found by God' see Simon Podmore, 'The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-Forsakenness or Forsaking God in "The Gospel of Sufferings"' in *IKC: UDVS*. Podmore notes how in *UDVS* the authentic person is not absorbed into the divine, even while he is prised from the false comfort of the crowd (250–1). David Law also resists finding mystical union in Kierkegaardian authenticity in his *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 24–30. Pattison is cautiously open to the possibility of allowing mystical experience into the interpretation of the discourses, but does not think it an essential part of Kierkegaard's anthropology of being. Pattison, *Upbuilding*, 58–62.

⁹⁶ Grundtvig's philosophy of *Menneske først* leads him to claim that before we find ourselves in fullness of life 'we must first come to know the natural spirit of our nation'. 'Concerning our Third Article of Faith' in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, 146. See also 'If no racial spirit exists it must first be created before it can receive the Gospel.' *Udvalgte Skrifter* IX, 80ff. Cf. ch. 3 above.

⁹⁷ 'The ethical life of society is developed through the family life and national life with its end in state, art and science into church life [*Kirkelivet*] . . . as the means to the actualisation of the individual's personal perfection' in *Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy*, 298. Cf. ch. 2 above.

Besides kinship, the individual in *UDVS* is also described in terms of isolation from popular moral consensus. Kierkegaard talks of the solitary voice of the conscience as being ‘so easily outvoted—by the majority’ (*UDVS*, 129). The one who denies himself and wills the good stands as the one whose very existence offends the world. In this world, the man following Christ will suffer, and Kierkegaard sets this suffering against the backdrop of ‘successful’ notions of popularity and majority. Indeed, for Kierkegaard, whoever finds solace in the crowd is no Christian. He ‘never really becomes involved with God but comfortably walks the broad road or, admired, walks the popular middle road’ (*UDVS*, 239). In *UDVS*, successfully ingratiating oneself in the crowd is an ‘outward’ event. One can go very far indeed in this world by reading the signs of popular opinion, watching what others do and subsuming oneself in the majority. Suffering, on the other hand, turns a person ‘inward’, and it is only ‘inwardly’ that a person will be able to deny himself and appropriate the good (*UDVS*, 256).

4.1.2 *Individual suffering as aid to society*

Does this relation to the crowd separate the person from reality and lead to pathological solipsism as Adorno and others suggest? Indeed, Mackey’s charge that for Kierkegaard other people only exist as occasions for further inwardness does at first appear to be the case when we read how other people were only a concern for the Apostles insofar as they brought the Apostles to examine their own God-relationship. *UDVS* portrays the Apostles as being so exclusively concerned with their relation to God that they had ‘entirely forgotten their relation to people’ (*UDVS*, 335).

When the entire world concentrates all its power to attack an apostle, it cannot manage to struggle with him on equal conditions, because an apostle continually has a third, which is simply and solely the most important, to him is everything: the relation to God. (*UDVS*, 335)

The suffering of the single individual offends the world. But at the same time, as the example of the Apostles suggests, suffering is a condition of a God-relationship that in its authenticity is outward, visible and culturally embedded. While Adorno et al. are correct to identify the fundamentally individualistic nature of Kierkegaard’s thought, they do not admit the primary Theistic premise and so do not recognize the appeal that a subjective God-relationship can have for society.⁹⁸

Kierkegaard suggests that although the single individual publicly suffers in terms of separation from kin and popular consensus, in his very individuality

⁹⁸ On the Schleiermacherian influence of inwardness ‘as the site of humanity’s deepest traffic with the divine’ in the discourses, see Pattison, *Upbuilding*, 36.

people in the crowd have the opportunity to recognize something that they lack and desire. Kierkegaard is not removing the individual from his reality—he is instead making a claim of what it is that actually constitutes reality, whether the crowd recognizes it or not. In the *UDVS* (and elsewhere of course) the state of authentic existence is grounded in the relation of subjects, not objects; a single person's relation to a single God, not a group relation to an idea. If there is any sense to the Christian thought that man was made in God's image, then the essential subjective relation must follow.⁹⁹ Expanding on the basic theological idea to make a point about observation, *UDVS* talks about how the image of something cannot be found in comparison with another, similar *thing*. 'There can be no image of anything that is visible . . . not a single blade of grass, that is the likeness of any other or is its image: if that were to happen then the image would be the object of itself' (*UDVS*, 192). Instead, the person is instructed to look up from the surrounding material world of things so that his eye might not be distracted. 'To be Spirit, this is humanity's invisible glory' (*UDVS*, 193).¹⁰⁰

In this respect Kierkegaard is making a general anthropological claim: 'This awareness of being a single individual is the *basic consciousness in a human being* because it is his eternal consciousness' (*UDVS*, 134 (emphasis added)). The crowd in its deception and delusion scorns the very thing that the people in the crowd, unbeknownst perhaps even to themselves, most aspire to:

How strange that the most coveted good in the world is independence and that there nevertheless is almost no one who covets the only way that truly leads to it: sufferings. (*UDVS*, 252)

Ultimately for Kierkegaard the crowd's enmity towards the single individual stems from a different understanding of where the truth of reality is grounded. In short, who tells the truer story about what it is to be a real person? Is it the worldly crowd, with its historical development, popular consensus and social mores composed of a self-reifying system of successes? Or is it, as Kierkegaard suggests, that the ground of authentic existence lies in the single individual and his relation towards God regardless of material reward? For all his emphasis on the subjective nature of the apprehension of truth, Kierkegaard is no subjectivist pluralist. There is only one 'anthropological' account that can ultimately describe the source of human identity. Kierkegaard's anthropology of identity developed within the contours of an eternal God-relationship by necessity trumps merely socio-historical accounts of personhood. If it is the case that Kierkegaard's existential 'story' of personal existence is reliable, then

⁹⁹ Cf. *UDVS*, 192ff.

¹⁰⁰ Prompting Pattison to comment: 'The very possibility of our being made in and restored to being the image and likeness of God depends upon the suspension of the structure of subject-object relationships that holds in all intra-worldly relationships.' Pattison, *Upbuilding*, 60.

it will also be the case that persons who are not aware of the God-relationship are still governed by the truth of this reality, despite their deceptive, alternative conceptions of identity. In this way Kierkegaard can explain how it is that the world admires 'independence' and individuality while at the same time reacts with (misplaced) envy against the single individual and his suffering.

Throughout *UDVS*, the suffering that indicates the presence of authentic existence is set against the world's conception that what is true is proportional to the reward that it attains. In opposition to the common-sense assumption that the better one understands the truth the more success one will enjoy, *UDVS* consistently portrays suffering as a sign of veracity in this world. It is suffering that best tells the story of reality that has its source and ground in God. It is suffering that points the way to the good. The problem is that the crowd has confused temporality with eternity, or it has ignored the eternal altogether. The result is what *UDVS* refers to as the 'deification of the world' (*UDVS*, 56).

The deification of the world, by prioritizing the temporal over the eternal, necessarily results in an emphasis on the objective and material aspects of creation. This is particularly apparent in the worldly obsession with history, and historical development as a vehicle for the unfolding truth.

We do indeed hear, especially in places where people gather in a festive mood to deceive each other with many speeches, we do indeed hear glorious words about how the world is progressing and about our age and our century. (*UDVS*, 56)

By contrast Kierkegaard takes *eternity* seriously as a determinative factor in the composition of reality. This is in service to an account of human existence; it is not a flight from it. Truth, authenticity and the good, if they are to avoid being reduced to the relativistic vagaries of historical development, can only exist within the category of the eternal, and in the individual's right relationship to the eternal. When it comes to questions of ultimate truth, the answers cannot be found in the realm of the temporal. 'Only the eternal applies at all times and is always, is always true, pertains to every human being of whatever age' (*UDVS*, 9).¹⁰¹ The 'wisdom of the years' changes and is confusing, writes Kierkegaard, and so it is only the wisdom of eternity that is truly upbuilding [*opbyggelse*]. It is only the eternal that can speak to the authentic state of a person's life:

But with respect to the eternal, no time ever comes when a person has outgrown it or has grown older—than the eternal! If there is something eternal in a human being, then the discourse about it must be different; it must say that there is something that should always have its time, something that a person should always do, just as an apostle declares that we should always thank God. (*UDVS*, 11)

¹⁰¹ Also: 'Custom and use change . . . but eternity's custom, which never becomes obsolete, is that you are a single individual . . .' *UDVS*, 130.

4.1.3 Individual suffering as indirect communication

Another indication that Kierkegaard's individualism cannot be said to be radically anti-social is the fact that the single individual is intimately bound up with *communication*, a phenomenon which presupposes the presence of others. It is true that inward reflection on the eternal leads to the becoming of authentic identity, but it is an identity that is embedded in a cultural context. At no point does Kierkegaard's stress on individualism lead to isolationism. Kierkegaard's individual remains a social animal, even if his identity is not primarily rooted in society. To see how the suffering of authentic existence serves a communicative, and thus social, function, we need again to briefly consider the distinction that Kierkegaard makes between the great and the good.¹⁰²

In the *UDVS* (and elsewhere), common sense and cultivated wisdom are negatively compared to the way of suffering that leads to, and demonstrates, the presence of the good. From a merely temporal point of view, sagacity *works*, and works well, leading to success and admirable public morality. It is precisely these 'great' things that are denied to the suffering single individual who, willing one thing, is oriented towards 'the good'.¹⁰³ The sagacious ones who evade the eternal are eminently socially acceptable, sometimes they even amount to something great in the world (*UDVS*, 86). However, the deception lies in assuming a 'uniform transparency' between the accomplishments of eternity and that of temporality. If this were the case, then every eternal willing would be 'directly recognisable' in temporality, and the willing one would be obviously a successful person in this world (*UDVS*, 89). Common sense has confused the accomplishments of the great with the acquisition of the good, prompting Kierkegaard to ask the individualistic question: 'What does it profit a man to gain the world but lose himself?'¹⁰⁴

The introduction of the problem of direct recognizability brings us to the communicative function of the single individual. The individual does not oppose 'the great' as something evil so much as he is indifferent towards it in relation to the good. As a result, the single individual suffers, for in his break with common sense and his abandoning of prudential sagacity, he is unable to attain the success of this world. The suffering individual thus stands as a visible wound in his surrounding culture, his public and visible lack of success posing a challenge to the rest of the group. And, by providing the crowd with the opportunity to ponder the meaning for this otherworldly condition, in this way suffering itself provides a communication of the good.

¹⁰² This same theme was considered from a different angle in ch. 4 above.

¹⁰³ Willing the great, no matter whether it is good or evil (as in the criticism of the world-historical in the previous chapter) is described in *UDVS* as a 'presumptuous, ungodly enthusiasm', 30.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mtt. 16:26.

In true Kierkegaardian fashion, however, suffering as a refraction of the eternal is distinctly *indirect* communication. Only relatively unimportant things can be communicated directly, and the mechanisms of common sense and straightforward speech are more than adequate at conveying them. Direct communication is thus useful for universal facts, quantitative knowledge and temporal codes of conduct. It is useless at communicating those eternal truths whose 'truth' becomes evident only in inward appropriation. It is the suffering of the single individual that serves as an occasion for this disclosure:

The one who suffers essentially can always work for the good outwardly by the power of example . . . since his life, just because much is denied him, contains a challenge to the many to whom much is given. (*UDVS*, 117)

Note that the authentic individual of *UDVS* is markedly different from the Knight of Faith portrayed by the pseudonym Johannes de silentio in *Fear and Trembling*.¹⁰⁵ In *FT*, the Knight was invisible to the wider world, and unable to express himself—even indirectly. In the non-pseudonymous *Discourses* however, as the one who wills the good in truth, it is the suffering individual's chief task to break the 'silence', even if this involves his life rather than his words.

In a way analogous to the 'offence' of the incarnation detailed in *PC*,¹⁰⁶ suffering in *UDVS* is indirect communication because it acts as a catalyst. Suffering cuts through the many sagacious ways that the group comes up with in order to avoid its members making the *either/or* decision. 'Thus it is truly the case that if a person avoids choosing, this is the same as the blasphemy of choosing the world' (*UDVS*, 207).¹⁰⁷ Suffering as the route to truth is a wonderful equalizer in an age where success, social standing and cultivation are worshipped:

[W]hen it is a matter of learning anew through sufferings, then learning becomes hard and heavy, then aptitude does not help, but on the other hand no one is excluded even though he is ever so lacking in aptitude. (*UDVS*, 253)

In a foreshadowing of the 'attack' that would come ten years later, *UDVS* holds New Testament Christianity up against the state of Christendom. Kierkegaard wonders what the apostles would think of the present 'triumphant' Christian civilization, where power and glory is offered to the confessor—not as a bribe

¹⁰⁵ It poses problems for critics and defenders alike when they focus on *FT* as indicative of Kierkegaardian individuality. The Knight of Faith appears in none of the later works in the authorship, and indeed Johannes de silentio is criticized as missing the point by subsequent pseudonyms. Cf. *CUP*, 99, 267–8; *PC*, 249–50, and the discussion in ch. 3 above.

¹⁰⁶ See esp. *PC*, 94–101, 102ff, 139–44.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the offence of not choosing in *SUD*: 'The lowest form of offence . . . is to leave the whole issue of Christ undecided', 129. The talk of God's allowing himself to be chosen also has resonance with the parable of the King who loves the maiden in *PF*, 26ff, and the passages of *PC*, 3ff where Anti-Climacus reflects on Mtt. 11:28: 'Come unto me and I will give you rest.'

to stop proclaiming but as reward for doing so. The Apostles, suggests Kierkegaard, knowing the true relation between popular success and the good, would find Christendom inconceivable. The Apostles treat worldly success and mass acclaim as temptations and dangers, and persecutions as a joy.¹⁰⁸

The passage of history—even (or especially) ‘Christian’ history—has not altered the basic, eternal connection between suffering and willing the good:

A person's lot here on earth has not become different from before because Christianity entered into the world. A Christian can come to suffer exactly the same as was suffered before—yet the heavy burden becomes light for a Christian. (*UDVS*, 232)¹⁰⁹

The suffering that forms the kernel of *UDVS* and which lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's conception of truth and authenticity thus comes out into the open. This is no suffering of a silent Abraham, unable to communicate the God-relationship and isolated from the world. Instead, the suffering of *UDVS* is a public event and a challenge to the commonplace assumptions of what constitutes an authentic life. The social upheavals of 1848 were fuelled by a popular conception of the mass man, and they were justified by a sense of the inevitable success of Denmark's historical development. Suffering is an indication that an individual person has looked beyond the self-referential material connections of the social-web for his identity. In turn, the suffering of the single individual indirectly communicates to onlookers, providing the opportunity that others in the crowd might also take up the cross of authentic existence. Authentic becoming is an inward process with an outward direction, for true communal relations can only exist between concrete persons, and not amorphous groups. In this way, whatever one thinks about the theological assumptions that Kierkegaard builds on, one cannot say that his individualism was anti-social or apolitical. With ‘suffering’ as its guiding motif of the life of the single individual, Kierkegaard's *UDVS* were not irrelevant, witnessed against or ‘rendered untrue’ by the political events of 1848.

4.2 *Point of View* and common sense

The second claim of the material social theory is that of an *epistemological* monopoly. Deriving essential identity solely from the social-web can only be done by filtering all that can be known or considered ‘true’ through the

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *UDVS*, 338 referring to James 1:2.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lukács' comment that for Kierkegaard the incarnation does not give rise to ‘a real periodizing of real events’. Lukács, *Destruction*, 260, and discussion above.

network of inherited knowledge and culture. Here, the sense of the common becomes the primary constituent of the individual's frame of reference, and the truth that comprises the inner life and outlook of a person is mediated exclusively *via* one's culture. Such a position must necessarily place a high value on the inherited wisdom of past generations, the present state of popular opinion, and the role that numbers play in the determination of truth—the more people share a sense in common, the more true it is or becomes. Yet as the 'common' changes according to historical development so too does the 'sense' that constitutes the essence of a self. Kierkegaard recognizes that common culture is a constituent part of self-identity.¹¹⁰ But he challenges the claims to priority that people make about common culture in relation to self-identity. In this lies Kierkegaard's charge that the group deifies itself when it effectively assumes the mantle of the ground and source of all being. This is not to say that Kierkegaard was actively against social forces, or assumed a naive sense of splendid isolation. Instead, his work traces the consequences of Christology for anthropology, epistemology and the politics of sociality—putting them in their place without trying to annihilate any of these categories. In this way *POV* reveals a sense of the self that challenges the epistemological monopoly of the crowd and its sense of the common.

4.2.1 Reception of *POV*

It is unfortunate that the secondary literature on *POV* tends to be dominated by the discussion surrounding its claim to be a retrospective 'report to history'.¹¹¹ However, one does not need bluntly to accept the stated premise of *POV* in order to recognize that the book is also a rich source for Kierkegaard on politics and the person. Much like the cryptic comment on *UDVS*, *POV* also expresses Kierkegaard's awareness that democratic reforms have not rendered his assessments untrue. In a note at the end, he reminds his readers that the piece was begun in 1846, but that the time passed since then (i.e. the events of 1848) has shed light on his thesis that it is the single individual, and not the crowd, which is 'the category through which, in a religious sense, the

¹¹⁰ For example *Stages On Life's Way* contains an extended passage extolling the gifts that the Danish language provides, at 438ff.

¹¹¹ On the 'disgraceful inaccuracies' of *POV* as a normative account of the authorship, see Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: The Point of View and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author' in Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1998). Also Garff, 'To Produce was my Life: Problems, Perspectives Within the Kierkegaardian Biography' in Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (eds), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, trans. Stacey Elizabeth Ake (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997). Other critical voices include: Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard: The Myths and Their Origins*, trans. George Schoolfield (London: Yale University Press, 1980), and Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

age, history, the human race must go' (*POV*, 118).¹¹² From the start Kierkegaard signals his intention that whatever else it is about, the book also has a bearing on the political. 'In these times everything is politics' (*POV*, 103). However, as always, the task seems to be one of finding the right relation between the spheres of human identity, religion and civic life, a reprioritization that some might find unsettling. 'An impatient politician who hastily glances at these pages will certainly find only little for his upbuilding—so be it.' But, if he would persevere, Kierkegaard is confident that the politician would become aware 'that the religious is the transfigured rendition of what a politician, provided he actually loves being a human being and loves humankind, has thought in his most blissful moment' (*POV*, 103).

It is significant that the most substantial reviews of *POV* came from Kierkegaard's Grundtvigian contemporaries.¹¹³ And it was Kierkegaard's individualism, rather than his appropriation of the language of Divine Governance, or his claim to be a religious author through and through, that seemed most to exercise their critical faculties. Jørgen Victor Bloch unfavourably compared Kierkegaard's intended audience of the single individual in *POV* to the congregation of the Lord 'that was the homestead of all Grundtvig's discourse and song'. Bloch regrets that the 'melancholy disciplinarian in whom the human had died' had not come into an active association with Grundtvig, 'who more than anyone else had emphasised the humanity of Christianity'.¹¹⁴ For his part, A. G. Rudelbach managed to have the final word on his debate with Kierkegaard over the place of popular Christian movements. In his review of *POV* he sighs that Kierkegaard had succumbed to a position that was not much more than 'absolute isolation'.¹¹⁵ What Bloch and Rudelbach recognize, and reject, is that Kierkegaard's individual human being is fundamentally at odds with the kind of person derived from Grundtvig's vision of humanity.

4.2.2 *No truth in numbers*

In light of these Grundtvigian objections, it is worth considering how *POV* challenges the assumption that the truth of what it is to be a person is found only in groups of persons.

¹¹² See also 112, and the supplementary comments on 277.

¹¹³ *POV* was published, and thus reviewed, posthumously.

¹¹⁴ Jørgen Victor Bloch, 'To Skrifter af S. Kierkegaard paany fremdragne' [*The writings of S. Kierkegaard recently brought to light*] *Dansk Kirketidene* (col. 542, August 1885) in *POV*, Introduction, xxi–xxii.

¹¹⁵ A. G. Rudelbach, 'Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed' [*The point of view of my activity as an author*] *Evangelisk Ugeskrift*, (4–5, 20 January 1860), 50 in *POV*, Introduction, xxi.

[T]he crowd is untruth, the untruth of wanting to exert influence by means of the crowd, the numerical, of wanting to make the numerical the authority for what truth is. (POV, 126)

Of the many claims that Kierkegaard makes about his authorship in *POV*, one is that his project has been to offer a 'well considered view of *the life of the truth* and of *the way*' (POV, 105). Concerning the second of these, the *truth*, Kierkegaard of course means not the contingent facts of day-to-day expediency, but the necessary veracity that has its home in the religious, and in God. 'By *truth* I always understand *eternal truth*. But politics, etc. has nothing to do with *eternal truth*' (POV, 109–10). It is this sort of truth that Kierkegaard thinks is deserving of the name, and it is this sort of 'truth' that underpins the authentic becoming of a person. However, it is also this truth that is claimed by other sources. 'There is a view of life that holds that truth is where the crowd is, that truth itself needs to have the crowd on its side' (POV, 106).

No misanthrope, Kierkegaard freely admits that crowds are good for deciding all sorts of useful things necessary for daily life. But it remains the case that no amount of 'deciding, voting, noisy, loud significance' of the crowd will render its opinions true for all that they are popular or represent the common sense of the majority.¹¹⁶ Indeed, insofar as the crowd does express something true, if it assumes for itself authority *as a crowd*, then even the truth it agrees on is rendered untrue.¹¹⁷ If Kierkegaard were actually an isolationist, we would expect him to find fault in the accord of the group itself. Instead, he stresses that it is not agreement of a truth by the crowd that is the problem. Rather, the problem arises when the crowd thinks that the fact of its size and of its agreement is what makes the opinion true. The issue is thus one of authority, rather than an expectation that every single person ought to strike out on his or her own.¹¹⁸

Single individuals take the 'stuff' of the social-web and give it meaning.¹¹⁹ It is the individual, and not society, that has the final say. '*The single individual* is the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go' (POV, 118). To challenge the ultimate authority of social structures, however, is not to be atomistic. Matušík is useful here, when he argues that Kierkegaard's vision presents 'an equality of communicative

¹¹⁶ POV, 106. See 109 where he stresses that the crowd might have political and mundane significance, but no religious, spiritual or intellectual authority.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. This is an important distinction missed by those who would ascribe stark decisionism to Kierkegaard. He is not against people living together in agreement. Indeed, as we have seen, the ideal laid out in *TA* is that the healthiest state is one in which people, upon reflection, act to unite around a common idea. Note that it has to be a true idea if the common agreement is not to become pathological.

¹¹⁹ This is analogous to the manner in which 'history' is the product of the moment of vision, and not the other way around, as discussed in ch. 4 above.

praxis'.¹²⁰ He rightly points out that Kierkegaard's view of the self is relational, contextual and linguistic.¹²¹ In this way, Kierkegaard's response to Hegelian or other 'group'-centred philosophies is not to rip the individual (the 'embedded-I') from his cultured context, but instead it is to challenge the deification of the nation-state as *the* source and final end of identity, a phenomenon which Matušítk refers to as 'the concrete universal'. Instead, following Kierkegaard:

The most concrete universal is achieved not by the hermeneutically given cultural whole but by the individuals who take responsible relation to and choose themselves to be this or that whole which they already descriptively are.¹²²

Here, Kierkegaardian self-choice is to be distinguished from mere 'decisionism' (Lukács) or bourgeois retreat from the real world (Adorno). The Kierkegaardian individual is already a well-socialized member of society before self-choice occurs.¹²³ It will be remembered that repetition is about the old becoming new. Kierkegaardian self-choice is not about annihilation of the social context, but about taking these presupposed elements and making them one's own, after passing them through the critical lens of existential appropriation.¹²⁴ Following Charles Taylor self-choice need not occur *ex nihilo*. 'All the elements in my life may be the same, but they are now transfigured because chosen in the light of the infinite.'¹²⁵ Kierkegaard's choice takes place from within a social tradition, but entails a transformation of the linguistic, historical, familial and national material at hand. Or, as Taylor notes, 'the choice is not made for the sake of any finite thing but, on the contrary, all finite things get their value and significance from this choice'.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Matušítk, 'Radical', 239. Matušítk also reads POV as attacking the idea of nationalism, 240. See ch. 7 below.

¹²¹ In Matušítk's words: 'Every I-individual is always-already embedded in some cultural we-universal.' At 241. Dooley also makes the point that Kierkegaard's individual presupposes a complex network of relationships: 'As such, the individual is always embedded in a particular historical matrix.' Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus: Søren Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 10.

¹²² Matušítk, 'Radical', 241. Matušítk directs us to TA, 62ff. See also POV, 104, where the misfortune of the present age is said to be that it has made 'eternity superfluous by a well-contrived imitation', that is, by mistaking the passing of its years and its accumulation of time as something as good as eternity for the purpose of authority. Cf. ch. 4 above.

¹²³ 'I choose myself not in *abstracto* but as I already am.' Matušítk, 'Radical', 242.

¹²⁴ Here I am in agreement with Dooley when he writes of Kierkegaardian 'double reflection'. Such an orientation does not pretend to ask us to remove ourselves from the social matrix. Instead, through passionate and reflective scrutiny we can 'test the efficacy of the beliefs, truths, and values we currently privilege'. Dooley, *Exodus*, 10.

¹²⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 449. Taylor is here commenting specifically with respect to Kierkegaard.

¹²⁶ Taylor, *Sources*, 450. Herein lies another subversion of nationalist narratives which make absolutizing claims, as I will argue in the following chapter. Kierkegaard does not set self-relation against socialization, but at the same time he insists that 'in defining oneself one cannot take a

In a phrase comparable to the 'social-web', Kierkegaard refers to 'the sociable-friendly' view which looks to the reason of groups, rather than individuals, as the route to truth.¹²⁷ This modern view (which Kierkegaard identifies as also the old pagan view) is to describe human identity exclusively in terms of the frame of reference provided by one's social context.¹²⁸ Accordingly 'to be a human being is to belong as a specimen to a race endowed with understanding. Then the race, the species, is higher than the individual and then there are only specimens, not individuals' (POV, 107). The crowd is a conglomeration of power, influence and status.¹²⁹ As such it disregards the single individual as weak and powerless. 'Philosophically and socially', the category of the single individual is downplayed 'by means of *humanity* or fantastical social categories' (POV, 117).¹³⁰

The authority of the crowd is based on numbers, probability and quantifiable risk. However, while this works for market forces, military manoeuvres or variable matters of cultivation and fashion, it is singularly unsuited to the right orientation of created beings towards the eternal creator. The sociable-friendly view is eminently reasonable for thinking that groups stand a better chance than individuals for reaching the goal of standing in truth before God.¹³¹ In most areas of life it is prudent to seek power in numbers. And yet as reasonable as the position is, it is precisely here that the crowd is untruth. The crowd, in assuming the practical probability of sociable-friendliness, disregards the eternal truth that is only accessible *via* single persons. The result is 'a confusion that wants to teach an ungodly contempt for what is the first condition of all religiousness: to be an individual human being' (POV, 117).¹³² There cannot be a relation to the eternal *en masse* for to attempt to do so abolishes the truth of the divine-human relationship following the contours of incarnational revelation.¹³³

4.2.3 *The impossible Christian nation*

POV retains Kierkegaard's singular focus on God-as-Christ, as opposed to a generalized theistic emphasis on 'God' or the 'Divine'. Kierkegaard draws out

flight to a ready-made social definition of identity'. Martin Matušík, *Postnational Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 11. Cf. ch. 7 below.

¹²⁷ POV, 106–7.

¹²⁸ Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre: 'I confront the world as a member of this family, this household, this clam, this tribe, this city, this nation, this kingdom. There is no "I" apart from these.' *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 172.

¹²⁹ Cf. POV, 112.

¹³⁰ This has a bearing on the love due to one's co-nationals in contrast with that due to one's neighbours, and is discussed below.

¹³¹ Cf. POV, 106–7.

¹³² Also *ibid.*, 112.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 106–07.

the significance that Christ's appeal was not to the reasonable, accumulated wisdom of the groups to which he spoke, but to 'single ones' within the group. Jesus thrust the crowd away, but reached out to every person.¹³⁴ And, because the appeal is from the eternal God-man to every single person, it cannot be dependent on history, cultivation or geography, but must be 'eternally true' for all persons at any time.¹³⁵ The crowd is angered when Christ thrusts them away. Kierkegaard finds a parallel in the treatment that the witness to the truth receives in challenging the mentality of the herd. Both Christ and the truth witness, by their singular existence, represent a challenge to the assumed authority of the crowd. Such a witness is diametrically opposite to the self-styled 'reformer' or cultural critic, who seeks not to gain eternal truth, but followers who share his opinions. Kierkegaard disparages the irresponsibility afforded by the modern press which allows people to address the crowd in an arena where public opinion has become the hallmark of truth, but in which the opinion-formers remain hidden. Everyone seeks anonymity—in the press, in the crowd, to the point where everyone is no one! 'Nobody! Good heavens, and then nations even call themselves Christian nations!' (POV, 110).

To call a 'nation' Christian reveals two fundamental category mistakes. The first is that nations, insofar as they are collections of people, might be large or small, victorious or defeated, rich or poor. However, they cannot claim a relation *en masse* to the eternal, and the group cannot be oriented in such a way that it faces the moment of the possibility of offence. Any crowd or public (Kierkegaard here equates the terms) cannot relate to truth because a crowd is an object, not a subject.¹³⁶ That is why both Christ, and the witness to Christ, seek to split up a crowd in order to speak to each individual. Not to create a new crowd, but in order that some people might leave the crowd and become the single individual.¹³⁷

The truth can neither be communicated nor be received without being, as it were, under the eyes of God . . . without God being a participant . . . since God is the truth. Therefore it can be communicated by and received only by *the single individual*, who as a matter of fact could be every person who is living. (POV, 111)

¹³⁴ POV, 109.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 108–9; Cf. The extended reflection on Mtt. 11:28 in PC no. I.

¹³⁶ POV, 111.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 109. This is, of course, in direct contrast to the conclusion reached by D. F. Strauss, of which Kierkegaard was well aware. 'This is the key to the whole of Christology, that, as subject of the predicate which the church assigns to Christ, we place, instead of an individual, an idea . . . In an individual, a God-man, the properties and functions which the church ascribes to Christ contradict themselves; in the idea of the race, they perfectly agree. . . . It is Humanity that dies, rises and ascends to heaven . . . ' from 'The concluding dissertation' to *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. Peter Hodgson (London: SCM, 1973. [*Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, 1835–36]), 780.

This last clause (*every person who is living*) suggests the second category mistake. To talk of Christian nations is to miss the target recipient—the vehicle as it were—of eternal truth.

To recognise ‘the crowd’ as the authority with regard to *the truth* is to deny God and cannot possibly be loving *the neighbour*. *The neighbour* is the absolutely true expression for human equality. (POV, 111)

It is not the nation who benefits from a right relation to the Divine as revealed in Christ, it is the neighbour. Everyone has neighbours, and, in turn, everyone is a neighbour. It is not groups but only neighbours who can be single individuals. Thus, to talk of nations as if they were the primary end of Christianity is to miss the point, for eternal truth cannot be dependent upon the contingent variables that constitute a nation’s place in the scheme of history.¹³⁸

4.3 *Works of Love* for good neighbours

We have focussed on *UDVS* and *POV* as works marking out a sense of individual identity that is not *essentially* rooted in the shared social constructs constituting the individual’s context. The ethical implications of this view of identity are worked out in *Works of Love*, an extended reflection on the biblical command to love. Whereas Kierkegaard’s other works are concerned with the self—the coming to a sense of identity apart from false-absolutizing influences—*WL* is interested in the persistent existence of the ‘other’ (who, of course, is always also a self, or a potential self). If the ethical duty is to love, then there must be a target of that love, and a better or worse way of identifying that target. There is a tension underlying the duty of love, and that is the determination of who or what constitutes the locus of our responsibility: is it those who share the same social-matrix, the social-matrix itself or a ‘person’ whose definition transcends these socialized models? In other words, the ‘who’ of who should receive your love is affected by the ‘how’ of how you think that person is primarily defined. If a person must be ‘properly socialised’¹³⁹ in order to be considered a ‘person’, then in effect only those who share one’s social-web are ‘persons’ when it comes to identifying the targets of ethical duty. But if there is something above and beyond shared preferences that make a person a person, then that has implications for who and how we should love. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard’s ‘neighbour’ in *WL* stands in stark contrast to that of the nation or the co-national as the primary recipient of one’s ethical duty.

¹³⁸ In the draft notes to *POV*, Kierkegaard comments with respect to the crowd of the present age that ‘it was not nationalities that should be advanced but Christianity, and a Christianity relating to a single individual’. *POV*, 277.

¹³⁹ Cf. Westphal, *Critique*, 34.

4.3.1 Reception of WL

Although it is the work that was supposed to answer the criticism that he had no feeling for social relations, *Works of Love* has not always been accepted in the spirit that Kierkegaard intended.¹⁴⁰ Løgstrup argues that the book 'is a brilliantly thought-out system of safeguards against being forced into a close relationship with other people'.¹⁴¹ Adorno singled out WL as an example of religion which devalues the world and sociality—Kierkegaard's 'pure inwardness' resulting in indifference to the real needs of others.¹⁴² Barth dispensed with WL in a couple of footnotes, protesting that Kierkegaard over-accentuated the difference between worldly and Christian forms of love. Normal, inter-personal, merely human love is supposedly downgraded in WL, 'tracked down to the last hiding-place, examined, shown to be worthless and hauled before the judge!'¹⁴³ Thus George speaks from within a strong interpretive tradition when more recently he writes that 'it is dubious to base a theory of sociality on *Works of Love*'.¹⁴⁴ This is because he thinks that by opposing 'preferential' with 'disinterested' love, Kierkegaard removes the crucial Other from any sense of effective relationship. George recognizes that for Kierkegaard, authenticity is attained in relation to God, but he does not consider God an adequate substitute for the concrete, human Other that WL supposedly does away with, and he considers it a problem that for Kierkegaard all relationships are reduced to the God-relationship, which, in the final analysis, is not much more than an inward self-relationship. 'Kierkegaard constantly treats relationships as if they involved only one person.'¹⁴⁵

One may well put it to George that, if God exists, then it is not a 'reduction' to trace all relationships to and through the Divine, which after all would necessarily have to be the ground and source of all being. In any case, it is hard to imagine that Kierkegaard would be too troubled with the criticism that compared to other human beings, God is a less legitimate Person with whom to relate. It is in this vein that a number of secondary works have arisen against

¹⁴⁰ Cf. JP V 5972 (*Pap.* VIII-1 A 4 (1847)).

¹⁴¹ Knud Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, trans. Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997. Original *Den Ethiske Fordring* (København: Gyldendal, 1956)), 232.

¹⁴² Theodor Adorno, 'On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love' in *Studies of Philosophy and Social Science* 8 (1939–40), 413–29.

¹⁴³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 747. Also at 782. Cf. Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁴ George, 'Anti-social', 73. I have already argued against George's 'anti-social' reading above. He is writing from within the tradition that sees Kierkegaard's 'neighbour love' as providing no social ethic. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1967), 215–18. A good overview of other literature critical of WL is provided by M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ George, 'Anti-social', 79, also at 75.

the anti-social reading of *WL*, to the extent that, much like the larger question of Kierkegaard's isolationist tendencies discussed above, the view that *WL* is in fact deeply social and other-oriented seems to have claimed the interpretive high ground for the time being. A 'new wave' of commentators are largely in agreement that with *WL*, Kierkegaard was intending a work of ethics that set itself polemically against many assumed forms of social love, and did so based on theological reflection. Nevertheless, tangible, concrete social relations remain in view.¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard's defenders rightly point out that neighbour love does not cancel out the special relationships posed by friendship or marriage.¹⁴⁷ They are also correct to highlight the passages in *WL* and elsewhere where Kierkegaard expresses a deep concern for what would now be termed social justice.¹⁴⁸ I will argue in the following chapter that these defences touch on, but do not develop, the critique of nationalism inherent in *WL*, and I find Kierkegaard's 'neighbour' to stand as a concrete, living critique of the abstractions demanded by the 'compatriot'. In this sense I am going beyond or building upon their work. At this point however, I agree that Kierkegaard's neighbour love enhances rather than hinders love for one's special relationships. To see how this can be so, and to lay the groundwork for the implicit ideology critique, we need to look at the two loves of *WL* and the way these loves are related to the question of identity formation.

4.3.2 *Two loves*

In *WL* Kierkegaard distinguishes between the love of *erotic/friendship* [*Elskov*] and the love of *spirit/neighbour* [*Kjerlighed*]. *Elskov* includes sexual relations, but also encompasses any love which exhibits 'passionate preference'. Passionate preference is the love that is a matter for poets, of strong feelings and that which lends itself to extremes.

Erotic love and friendship are related to passion, but all passion, whether it attacks or defends itself, fights in one way only, either/or: 'Either I exist and am the highest, or I do not exist at all, either all or nothing.' (*WL*, 45)

On the other hand there is *spirit* love, which is also sometimes referred to as 'neighbour' [*Næst*] or 'Christian love'. Here Kierkegaard draws out the

¹⁴⁶ So, for example, C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chs 10–12; Ferreira, *Striving*, 11–12, 94–8; Hall, *Treachery*, 1–2, 12–13, ch. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard himself focuses on these aspects. 'Kierkegaard typically sticks to erotic love and friendship.' Evans, *Ethic*, 203. Hall and Ferreira also centre their apologia for *WL* in these two areas of social life.

¹⁴⁸ This is the general tone of most of the essays in *IKC: WL*. See esp. Lee C. Barrett, 'The Neighbour's Material and Social Well-Being in Kierkegaard's Works of Love: Does it Matter?' Barrett attempts to align *WL* with 'social, political and economic reform' 138. Also Mark Dooley, 'The Politics of Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard and Levinas on "Hospitality"' in the same volume.

difference between the pre-Christian, or pagan, Greco-Roman conception which preferred only those who shared one's passion, and the newer development in the form of the duty of love towards one's neighbours. Throughout *WL*, the two loves available to society are compared side by side. The contrast highlights interesting distinctions with relevance to neighbour and nation and the identification process inherent in each sphere.

Preferential love seeks only those who share one's passions—the more similar the lovers the more fervent the love. By contrast, neighbour love is not preferential and there is no question of loving for sameness' sake. It thrives in a situation of difference, able to include many people under its aegis. The drift of love based on passionate preference is always towards 'the one'. The drift of neighbour love is always towards 'the many'.

Just as unconditionally and powerfully as erotic love intensifies in the direction that there is but one and only one beloved, just as unconditionally and powerfully does [neighbour] love intensify in the opposite direction. (*WL*, 49)

It takes 'enormous self-willfulness' and acts of deliberate exclusion for the lover to love only according to preference, and not according to those who are his neighbours *because* they are his neighbours (*WL*, 55).

Yet what, really, is being admired? It soon becomes apparent in *WL* that the 'one person' of passionate preference is not really even another individual. It is the passionate lover himself that is the real target of the preference. Here Kierkegaard makes the connection between preferential love and self-love. He writes of friends that are friends who love each other by virtue of similar customs, characters, occupations, education, etc. 'That is, on the basis of the similarity by which they are different from other people, or in which they are like each other as different from other people' (*WL*, 56).

Erotic love and friendship are the very peak of self-esteem, the I intoxicated in the other I. The more securely one I and another I join to become one I, the more this united I selfishly cuts itself off from everyone else. (*WL*, 56)

We have seen that a common objection against Kierkegaard is his supposed misanthropy. Rather than reading Kierkegaard as disliking passionate preference because he is solipsistic, anti-material or indeed anti-life, instead the opposite is true. Kierkegaard posits neighbour love precisely *because* it is expansive, world-affirming and people-oriented.¹⁴⁹ His misgivings about passionate preference arise not because it is focussed on the stuff of this life, but because it excludes so many people, withdrawing into tighter and tighter circles of sameness, and thus abstraction away from reality.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *WL* IV, 'Our Duty To Love the People We See'.

¹⁵⁰ See *WL*, 53. The 'equality' that arises from seeing each common man as a single individual was discussed above.

Passionate preference's contrast with neighbour love is stark. 'Love for the neighbour cannot make me one with the neighbour in a united self. Love for the neighbour is love between two beings eternally and independently determined' (WL, 56). In praise of this love, Kierkegaard speaks of 'self-denial's boundlessness' which gives of itself in order 'not to exclude a single one' (WL, 53).

The neighbour is one who is equal. The neighbour is neither the beloved, for whom you have passion's preference. Nor is your neighbour, if you are a cultured person, the cultured individual with whom you have a similarity of culture . . . No, to love the neighbour is equality.

The neighbour is not so on the basis of his dissimilarity to you,

nor on the basis of similarity to you in your dissimilarity from other people. He is your neighbour on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally. (WL, 60)

Neighbour love has a further advantage over preferential love in that the identification of the subject to be loved is infinitely simpler. The love of preference (as with national/patriotic affiliation) needs to draw up endless distinctions and exclusions, in order to attain the purest expression of its passion.¹⁵¹ Bookshops and libraries devote much space to the subject of defining national identity and cultural allegiance. There is no shelf mark for 'neighbour'. This is because his or her identification is not in question. Kierkegaard remarks that when one is searching for one's neighbour, all one needs to do is open the door and go out. 'The very first person you meet is the neighbour, whom you *shall* love . . . There is not a single person in the whole world who is as surely and as easily recognised as the neighbour' (WL, 51–2).

Not only does Kierkegaard's Christian neighbour love ethically recommend itself over pagan passionate love as *love*, it is also the case that the *neighbour* provides a superior way to identifying persons than those suggested by national models driven by shared preferences. As a way of thinking of individuals, the neighbour has radical implications for all theories of interpersonal relations, challenging both political and ecclesiological formulations of the social settlement. It is to these, and to a suggestion of the fruits of the Kierkegaardian critique of Christian nationalism, that we turn in the final chapter.

¹⁵¹ 'If someone goes out into the world to try to find the beloved or the friend, he can go a long way.' WL, 51.

Undefined New Things: Church and State

When she told her French friends about it, they were amazed. ‘You mean you don’t want to fight the occupation of your country?’ She would have liked to tell them that behind Communism, Fascism, behind all occupations and invasions lurks a more basic, pervasive evil and that the image of that evil was a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Thus far I have concentrated upon Kierkegaard’s negative critique of the marriage of Christianity and culture, and of nationalist commitments to history and identity formation. The final portion of this book will now sketch some positive Kierkegaardian formulations of Church and society that provide alternatives to the traditional settlements. I have already suggested that an examination of Kierkegaard’s response to his contemporary Christian nationalist opponents could be fruitful. In this final chapter it is now time to consider more closely what some of these fruits might be. I think that the possible applications fall roughly into two (overlapping) areas: on the one hand, contributing to political thought on civic identity and participation, and, on the other hand, aiding Christian theological conceptions of ecclesia and community. As well as making frequent reference to the Kierkegaardian approaches to authentic Christianity, history, and group dynamics (as dealt with in the previous two chapters), the following discussion will also draw from the picture (presented in the first chapter) of the narrative nature of nations and nationalisms. In addition, I hope to show how the ‘philosophical tools’ of chapter 4, namely *Øieblikket* and contemporaneity, come into their own in the light of the positive Kierkegaardian approach indicated here.

¹ Milan Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 96.

In October 1855, shortly after his collapse and admission to hospital, one of Kierkegaard's acquaintances wrote to another:

[Søren Kierkegaard has] the desire to overturn everything that has been established for centuries and to *plunge everything back into a chaos from which only some undefined new thing will develop*...²

In this felicitous phrasing Bruce Kirmmse has rightly identified 'the burden of Kierkegaard's ecclesiastical and political message to his times and to ours', namely, that the old bonds of the established order must be loosed before some new way of being might arise.³ With an eye to the vexed question of Kierkegaard's ecclesiology (discussed below), Kirmmse's observation stands as a reminder to those of Kierkegaard's theological readers who tend to underestimate the radical nature of Kierkegaard's proposed overhaul of the marriage between Church and state, culture and Christianity.⁴ Undoubtedly, dread of the unknown, as much as the felt need to provide clear definitions of 'Church', has influenced attempts to tame and incorporate the logic of Kierkegaard's explosive polemics into the friendly folds of traditional Christian ecclesiology. Yet the same fear can also be detected behind strictly political readings of Kierkegaard and his implications for a new civic settlement. I shall argue below that Kierkegaard's philosophy of Churchly existence and his philosophy of social existence are simply two sides of the same coin. Kierkegaard's 'undefined new thing' is thus as much a political possibility as it is an ecclesial one, for he prises 'the individual' loose from those cultural and institutional factors that the established order considers inviolable. Granted, this unknown development can be (and is) unsettling, yet I suggest that what both Kierkegaard's cultured contemporaries and his contemporaneous readers view with anxiety needs to be seen along the lines marked by the moment of vision.

1.1 Øieblikket and the undefined

Following the logic of *Øieblikket*, undefined chaos and turmoil need not lead to nihilistic nothing—it could be the gateway to a sublime something. Earlier we considered the moment of vision in the light of Eriksen's reading of

² Carsten Hauch writing to B. S. Ingemann. Manuscript Department, Royal Library (Copenhagen), *Ny kongelige Samling* 3751, 4⁰, II, fasc. 2, no. 206 (emphasis added), trans. Bruce Kirmmse in 'The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard's Ecclesiology' in *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 17 (2000), 87–102, at 88.

³ Kirmmse, Unpublished, 2007.

⁴ Besides 'Thunderstorm' see esp. Kirmmse, 'Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: Possibilities for Dialogue' in John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (eds), *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (Chicago: Carus Publishing, 2001).

Kierkegaardian repetition.⁵ For Eriksen, the manner and mode of Kierkegaardian spiritual authenticity is rooted in nihilistic sentiment.⁶ In other words, for Kierkegaard the appearance of nihilism is a meaningful, even welcome event. In the face of nihilism—represented in part by the loosing of the bonds of establishment—another mode of becoming presents itself, leading Kierkegaard to the category of ‘repetition’.⁷ Recollection looks to a past that is not sufficient for providing for the sense of self. Only in repetition is an already-existing life taken up and injected with a newness that was not present in the original state.⁸

Similarly, following Pattison’s work on anxiety and the sublime, we see how the moment of vision emphatically does *not* refer to an occasion in which everything is known with perfect clarity.⁹ *Øieblikket* is not god-like enlightenment but a way of existing authentically within the opposite situation. The moment of vision evokes the awareness that one does not (and will not) know everything, and orienting oneself to that awareness appropriately.¹⁰ Living within *Øieblikket* means not having to pretend that one understands all the chaotic threads making up the tapestry of reality.¹¹ Freedom lies in the awareness of one’s limitations; authentic becoming in the annihilation of the anxious self. It is in this respect that Haufniensis in *CA* evokes the image of a self standing on a cliff top, facing out over that which can annihilate it. To step forward faithfully out over the chasm is to enter the sphere of freedom and authenticity. To step back anxiously is to rescind freedom and enter sin.¹² Similar imagery—of the self gaining itself, by setting out over that which threatens to annihilate the self—appears throughout Kierkegaard’s writings. For my purpose in this chapter, an excellent guiding analogy can be found in the first of the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*:

When the sailor is out on the ocean, when everything is changing all around him, when the waves are born and die, he does not stare down into the waves, because they are changing. He looks up at the stars. Why? Because they are faithful; they have the same location now that they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come. By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal. By the eternal one can conquer the future, because the eternal is the ground of the future, and therefore through it the future can be fathomed. (*EUD*, 19)¹³

⁵ See ch. 4 above. ⁶ Eriksen, *Repetition*, 10. Cf. Pattison, *Agnosis*, 84.

⁷ See Eriksen, *Repetition*, 10.

⁸ The process was examined further with respect to individual identity and society in ch. 6 above. See also Martin Matušík, *Postnational Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 120–3, and the discussion below.

⁹ See ch. 4 above. ¹⁰ Cf. Mooney, *On Søren*, 109–10.

¹¹ Cf. Pattison, *Crisis*, 18. ¹² *CA*, 61.

¹³ Cf. George Pattison’s discussion of this image in ‘Sublimity’, 196–7.

2. CIVIC LIFE

The citizen, cast like a vessel upon the changing waves of culture, needs a way to exist authentically in whatever context he or she finds him or herself—an authenticity that may include multiple strands of national narratives to be sure, but which is not exhausted by recourse to only one of these strands. In the first chapter I considered the nature of the reality of ‘nations’ as complex, imaginative constructs. One of the key problems of nationalistic ideology is that it attempts to simplify the messy reality of modern identity by singling out only one layer of this construct from many, granting it exclusive priority and imbuing it with an inviolable nature.¹⁴ Such ideologies, though popular, are fundamentally false, a lie which, when imposed upon the multicultural reality in which we live, has potentially destructive implications.¹⁵

The task facing the contemporary citizen is to find a way to account for identity in such a way that does not endorse simplified (and thus falsified) versions of his or her society on the one hand, and yet which enables civic participation on the other. It is a task which attempts to formulate a way of existing in the real world, honestly, without recourse to convenient fictions. Like Kierkegaard’s ocean, the matter of identity is vast and tumultuous, and a complete apprehension of it—that elusive objective stance—is impossible for finite minds. That leaves the would-be authentic individual two choices. Either to step back from the many-splendoured reality of life and fearfully clutch onto smaller, more manageable pieces; or, to set out over the roiling seas, in the knowledge that while one might not be able to say with certainty *what* it is, one can certainly say *that* it is. The Kierkegaardian citizen, living on the waves of national cultural identities, finds that although his or her actions are affected by their changing nature, he or she is not guided by them, and nor do they constitute the fundamental facts of his or her existence.

This task of existential being—negotiating the variable forces that contribute to personal identity and action in society—is problematic. How does one comprehend that which by its essence is incomprehensible, and yet which demands our attention? The reality of any person’s social existence is that who we are and who we interact with cannot be defined by one narrative only:

¹⁴ Hence the myth of the ‘pure’ race, a fabrication which does not bear up under even cursory scrutiny and yet which is found in all expressions of nationalism. Let alone the impossibility of isolating human cultural influences one from the other, consider the awkward position that supporters of the British National Party (peddlers of the idea of unadulterated British ethnicity) find themselves in the face of research identifying black West African genes in white Yorkshiremen who can trace their English surname back to the mid-fourteenth century. As reported in *New Scientist* (January 2007).

¹⁵ See, for example, Kateb, *Mistakes*; Sen, *Identity*, and the discussion in ch. 1 above.

unquestionably, our identity is composed of many narratives.¹⁶ What is questionable, however, is whether we can single out one dominant strand as *the* defining characteristic to govern all others. This nationalist 'singling-out' reduces and simplifies the individual, rather than recognizing the complexity and irregularity that goes into making a person a person. While trying to create a concrete personal identity, ironically the nationalist abstracts persons from the very things whose variety makes them who they really are.¹⁷

2.1 Postnational identity

One political philosopher, Martin Matušík, has recognized both this problem of the oversimplification and concretization within nationalism, and the potentially useful contributions to the question of identity and civic participation that Kierkegaard offers. Matušík does not draw upon Kierkegaard's language of the sublime, or of *Øieblikket*, but he follows this model nonetheless. He is interested in providing a workable, pragmatic account of lived existence that takes seriously the multivalent nature of modern identity in what he calls a 'postnational' context. That is, Matušík draws upon Kierkegaard's vision to imagine a civically contextualized identity that does not appeal to increasingly untenable 'national' markers, and yet acknowledges that nation talk constitutes a significant part of a person's identity.

Matušík's project brings Kierkegaard into conversation with the German political theorist Jürgen Habermas and the Czech politician and writer Václav Havel, claiming that Kierkegaard is 'the most unread modern socio-political thinker'.¹⁸ Matušík primarily uses Kierkegaard as a way to provide for personal identity in the modern (Euro-American) social context, where the old ways of nationalism and fundamentalism have run (or are running) their malignant course.

To be a good member of the human race, it seems insufficient to begin where the race of the nation or the church begin . . . to be a good Jew, or Czech, or American I cannot keep getting high on flag-waving and land conquest. To cure my patriotic addiction to the worship of family, flag, market and culture, [Kierkegaard] prompts me to become postnational.¹⁹

¹⁶ As Sen points out, 'nation' is only one of many forces at work in a person's identity, often far less important in daily life than others such as religion, gender, class, political interest, family roles, etc. 'Given our inescapably plural identities, we have to decide on the relative importance of our different associations and affiliations in any particular context.' Sen, *Identity*, xiii.

¹⁷ This point was touched on in ch. 1 above.

¹⁸ Matušík, *Postnational*, 183. Also 'Towards an Existential Politics: An Interview with Martin Matušík' in *Civic Arts Review* (vol. 9 no. 1 Winter 1996).

¹⁹ Matušík, *Postnational*, 160. On the term 'postnational', Catherine Thompson is illuminating: 'The prefix "post" does not necessarily indicate an after, but rather a beyond; we have passed

The post-fascist, multicultural, democratic and post-religious world that Matušítkin inhabits needs ways of guarding the 'authentic person' without succumbing to those forces which traditionally underpin identity formation. Matušítkin is interested in finding a way for the 'individual' to remain a useful category in societies with democratic multicultures.²⁰

My argument is that a radically honest critique is a necessary precondition for one's embodying postnational identity in a deliberative democracy and mature political culture.²¹

He finds Kierkegaard useful as one who takes a concept that transcends the ethical universal and yet locates it back into a concrete socio-political situation, all the while providing for a critical distance from the prevailing mode of social ethics (i.e. Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*). This critique does not seek to annihilate the status quo, or even separate from it. Instead, in self-choosing, the Kierkegaardian individual is 'always-already' socially embedded, but in a new, reflective way in opposition to the herd mentality. Matušítkin summarizes Kierkegaard's position in this way:

We are born situated in a social and linguistic world. The weight of this tradition comes to submerge the individual whence the necessity arises to open up some spaces of freedom so that individuals might flourish and, flourishing, become agents of effective social change.²²

Matušítkin's development of the 'situated individual' from Kierkegaard's writings marks an important contribution to both Kierkegaardian studies and theories of identity beyond nationalism.²³ For Matušítkin, 'Kierkegaard's individual lives as a situated, embodied, gendered, historical, and social self and other-relation'.²⁴ Yet at the same time he 'remains suspicious that individuation through socialisation is the whole basis of identity formation'.²⁵ Matušítkin reads Kierkegaard's individual as one for whom socialization is presupposed (thus defying atomistic individualism), yet for whom socialization is not

the point where the genealogical narratives of the nation can be lived out entirely credulously.' *Danmarkshistorier: National Imagination and Novel in Late Twentieth-Century Denmark* (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2003), 3.

²⁰ Martin Matušítkin, 'Kierkegaard's Radical Existential Praxis, or Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian and Postmodern Categories' in M. Matušítkin and M. Westphal (eds), *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 244.

²¹ Matušítkin, *Postnational*, 5.

²² Matušítkin, 'Interview', 3.

²³ In ch. 6 above, I found the 'always-already' socialized individual to be a key point justifying Kierkegaard in the face of claims that he has no concept of social relations. Matušítkin is here following lines suggested by Habermas and Westphal.

²⁴ Matušítkin, *Postnational*, 9. Matušítkin is here agreeing with Habermas' reading of Kierkegaard in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 164.

²⁵ Matušítkin, *Postnational*, 9. Cf. Westphal, *Critique*, 30ff.

commensurable with an exhaustive account of identity (thus defying communitarian or reductionist social theories).²⁶ Kierkegaardian self-choice is to be distinguished from mere 'decisionism' (what Matušítk elsewhere dismisses as 'textbook existential choosing').²⁷ Radical self-choice is not identified with self-assertions or with communitarian visions of the good. Kierkegaardian self-choice stands prior to having such dilemmas or decisions.²⁸ In other words, in choosing him or herself, the authentic individual is not making a free-market type of lifestyle acquisition, nor is he or she signing up or submitting to an overarching narrative of his or her identity. The Kierkegaardian individual is already a well-socialized member of society, and yet becoming an individual is not a matter of existing *via* socialization alone. 'I choose myself not *in abstracto* but as I already am.'²⁹ It is in this context that Matušítk makes the connection between the always-already socialized individual and Kierkegaard's repetition.³⁰ The critical space carved out by Kierkegaard provides a mode of existing by which the old becomes new: 'Through repetition I become what I already am (and this must include tradition) but then become myself in a decentred, posttraditional, multicultural manner.'³¹

Following Matušítk, I find an implicit critique of nationalism within the process of the Kierkegaardian individual self-choosing from within a given tradition. An individual's honest appropriation of elements found in the social matrix can only be had when that individual enjoys a critical distance from the thing being chosen. Such a distance introduces a note of relativity into the mix, a position deadly to nationalist narratives, which traditionally demand absolute allegiance.

The point of the existential critique is that we must take up a critical stance . . . and ask the prior question: Which traditions will I permit myself to be socialized into and which will I jettison?³²

Matušítk helpfully observes that Kierkegaard does not set self-relation against socialization, but at the same time insists that 'in defining oneself one cannot take a flight to a ready-made social definition of identity'.³³ In this light Matušítk defines the Kierkegaardian category of *the existential* as:

[A] form of praxis rooted in the attitude of a critical examination of those motives and presuppositions that influence the formations of identity, the parameters of communication, and theoretical ideals.³⁴

²⁶ Matušítk, 'Interview', 3.

²⁷ See Matušítk, *Postnational*, 118.

²⁸ Matušítk, 'Radical', 242.

²⁹ Ibid.; Matušítk, *Postnational*, 118.

³⁰ As discussed in chs. 4 and 6 above. Cf. Eriksen, *Repetition*.

³¹ Matušítk, *Postnational*, 120.

³² Matušítk, 'Interview', 5.

³³ Matušítk, *Postnational*, 11.

³⁴ Matušítk, 'Interview', 5.

However, one important element in the process of self-choosing is religion, and, surprisingly, Matušítk appears to have jettisoned this vital element altogether. Matušítk appears confident that he can read Kierkegaard without making any substantive reference to theology.³⁵ Indeed, he insists, 'my argument and use of Kierkegaard's self-critical attitude do not rely on Kierkegaard's Christianity'.³⁶ In Matušítk's hands, Kierkegaard's Christian categories are transmuted into a set of metaphors for a radical, critical communication with society.³⁷ Thus Matušítk tries to examine Kierkegaard's language of inwardness and verticality in a way that 'need not import theology into communications theory'.³⁸

Despite my agreement with Matušítk's postnational readings, I believe his resolutely secular stance fails to account for how Kierkegaardian inwardness offers a 'critique of certain socio-political and psychological theories of human existing'.³⁹ This is because inwardness is first and foremost a theological mode of existence. I have already argued (in chapter 1) for the importance of retaining the theology which lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's philosophy, and there is no need to rehearse the general points here. With regard to Matušítk, however, there are several important moments where his avoidance of Kierkegaard's Christianity detracts from the political extrapolations that he wishes to make of Kierkegaard's social thought.

By transforming Kierkegaard's Christian thought into supposedly more palatable forms, Matušítk follows a common tradition within Kierkegaardian studies. In this case, he intentionally allies with Habermas, who, finding Christianity 'philosophically uninteresting'⁴⁰ reduces the Kierkegaardian relation to the wholly Other to the sphere of inter-human relations.⁴¹ In his own reading, Matušítk asserts that Kierkegaard's existential critique is less about subjective inwardness (i.e. the religious) than it is about providing a new model of communication rooted in 'radical honesty and self-transformation' (i.e. the socio-political).⁴² Thus he presents Kierkegaard's pseudonymous

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Matušítk, *Postnational*, 103.

³⁷ '[Kierkegaard] found in nondoctrinaire Christianity crucial metaphors for open forms of communication and the radical equality of persons.' Matušítk, 'Interview', 7.

³⁸ Matušítk, *Postnational*, 20, also at 103.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20. Note that Matušítk distances himself from this judgement, even while aligning himself with Habermas' general reading of Kierkegaard's Christian categories.

⁴¹ See Matušítk, 'Radical', 246; Habermas stipulates that *either* religious claims can be translated into other aspects of the cultural sphere, *or* they are untranslatable into what can be validly communicated in modernity. Matušítk, *Postnational*, 8, n. 11 commenting on Habermas, *Texte und Kontexte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 138ff.

⁴² Wayne Gabardi, 'Matušítk's Postnational Identity' in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (vol. 27 no. 2, June 1994), 407–8, 407.

project as a bid to force the reader to face not relationship to God, but questions of social identity and community.⁴³

I would argue, however, that Kierkegaard's philosophy becomes twisted beyond recognition when his God is translated into various socio-political categories. So for example when Habermas (with Matušítk's approval) changes the language and ideals of Kierkegaardian religious inwardness into an outward, pragmatic ideal of a communicating community,⁴⁴ he turns the route to authenticity away from the individual's relation to God and instead toward the community's relation with itself.⁴⁵ Ironically, Habermas thus reinstates the very process Kierkegaard was trying to reverse with his category of the individual.⁴⁶ Matušítk welcomes this method of what he calls 'profanization'—namely, the translation of Kierkegaard's spiritual/inward categories into outward, social ones.⁴⁷ Kierkegaard's theological model of self-criticism and the language of upbuilding is requisitioned by Matušítk to support what he calls the 'philosophical equivalent' of building an ideal, communicating community.

The attempt to translate out of Kierkegaard's theology is a problem for Matušítk's self-professed Kierkegaardian approach. The tack he takes leads to positions that run directly counter to Kierkegaard's own. One cannot substitute 'the community' for God or 'interpersonal communication' for the radical offence of the God-man and disingenuously continue to call this the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Furthermore, to transpose 'God' and the 'Eternal' into metaphors or models of inter-personal discourse and politics is to bolster the tyrannies of the absolutizing, the contingent, and the historical: the very deification of the state that Matušítk sets out to avoid.

⁴³ See Matušítk, *Postnational*, 203–24.

⁴⁴ With regard to Kierkegaard locating the 'other that precedes the self of self-consciousness' in 'the Christian God of Redemption', Habermas thinks that we can and should look elsewhere. '[T]he rhetorical force of religious speech retains its right, *as long as we have not found a convincing language for the experiences and innovations conserved in it.*' *Postmetaphysical*, 25 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ Cf. Habermas, 'Historical', 259ff. In *Religion and Rationality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), Habermas sympathetically critiques Michael Theusnissen's attempt to provide a non-transcendental, post-metaphysical existential ontology with constant reference to SUD. With regard to the attempt which reconstructs Kierkegaard by opting for a materialistic, rather than theological, theory of social reconciliation and authentic selfhood, Habermas declares his 'sense of solidarity with [this] remarkable enterprise, one with which I feel closely allied in its practical motivation and intentions'. At 111.

⁴⁶ Although Habermas does acknowledge that 'it would be a mistake to think of group identities as ego identities on a large scale', nevertheless he remains confident that analogies with Kierkegaardian ethical and responsible self-choice can be applied to constitutional patriotism. 'In the public process of transmitting a culture we decide which of our traditions we want to continue and which we do not.' *Historical*, 261, 263.

⁴⁷ Matušítk, *Postnational*, 103.

We have seen how Matušík takes pains to argue that Kierkegaard's existential mode is not an arbitrary choice.⁴⁸ He explicitly sets Kierkegaard against the arbitrary choosing of Sartre and other philosophers (the 'textbook existential choosing' mentioned above). Yet one cannot translate Kierkegaard's 'choosing-before-God' into 'choosing-as-communicative-praxis' without indulging in just the sort of decisionism that Matušík wishes to avoid. 'God' becomes the community in the new formulation, and yet a community cannot be more than one historical, human construction amongst many. If God does not exist, or does not exist in any way analogous to the way that Christianity maintains, then it may well be that choosing contingent communities is the only choice available. But such an option cannot be gleaned from Kierkegaard. As I have argued, Kierkegaard's project is one of tracing the implications of the *if-then* propositions posed by the Incarnation.⁴⁹ As such, his self-choosing can only be grounded in the realm of choosing something eternal, as opposed to remaining solely within constructed and contingent human societies. Remove the God-man from the equation and Kierkegaard's self-choice/existential revolt against the established order merges into a position much like the arbitrary decisionism from which Matušík wants to stay away.

A further problem is that Matušík does not recognize how 'religious' nationalism is. The pseudo-religious roots of national constructions (discussed in chapter 1) mean that the study of nationalism is an inherently theological issue, which makes Kierkegaard's God-talk all the more pertinent to a critique of nation talk. Matušík's strictly political Kierkegaardian critique certainly highlights the malignant implications of the absolutized crowd. But absolutization is just deification by a different name. Furthermore, the theological Kierkegaard completes the critique with a positive answer to the problem of idolatrous national identity. Kierkegaard's Christian category of the 'neighbour' provides both a negative challenge to nationalist formulations of the person and also a positive new construct. As a way of identifying 'the person', the Kierkegaardian neighbour faces the multiple narratives and multifarious cultural streams of the 'something undefined' without anxiety and yet (presumably because of its theological overtones) which political commentators such as Matušík ignore. This is a shame, because the Kierkegaardian contribution to the socio-political sphere is most effective when the Christian underpinnings are allowed their rightful place.

⁴⁸ 'Self-choice does not occur in decontextualised leaps apart from validity domains.' Ibid., 118.

⁴⁹ Cf. *PC*, 62ff.

2.2 Neighbourhood or nation

Kierkegaard's neighbour is the kind of person who lives in the multivalent, ever-shifting world envisioned by the loosened established order (which for Matušík is our current, post-traditional, world). Paradoxically, the neighbour is a way to articulate undefined 'others' insofar as Kierkegaard's 'neighbour' is a cipher for 'the individual': the 'I' who is not oneself. Thus one can discuss persons in a way that preserves individuality and avoids collapsing groups of individuals into a gormless herd. As individuals, neighbours are real (not abstract) but their reality includes the fact that their personhood cannot be defined solely by recourse to an exhaustive inventory of cultural influences. They are in this sense objectively indefinable precisely because they are complex subjects—not simplified units defined primarily by their membership to certain groups such as nations. *Works of Love* demonstrates clearly how neighbour talk can subvert and supplant nation talk:

Are you my listener perhaps what is called a cultured person? Well, I, too am cultured. But if you think that you will come closer to this highest with the help of 'culture', you make a great mistake . . . the love of neighbour—is not a product of culture's *highest* expression. (WL, 59)

In the previous chapter I observed how secondary literature occasionally suggests that WL's remit may be extended to address matters of national/patriotic allegiance. However, as I noted, these suggestions tend not to be followed through. So for example Polk suggests that Christian neighbour love might 'wreak quiet but inexorable havoc with the idea of the nation-state' without developing the idea.⁵⁰ Evans recognizes that WL's concept of 'neighbour love' implies opposition to loves such as patriotism,⁵¹ yet he does not stress the patriotic angle and downplays the potential offence by integrating WL's 'neighbour love' with all the natural loves, including country-love.⁵² While Perkins proposes that: 'the philosophic appropriation of the Christian concept of neighbour love . . . could be a valuable source in the development of ethical theory and applied ethics', his list of suggested applications does not include an ethical theory of national allegiance.⁵³ Similarly, Ferreira acknowledges that WL requires focus on the 'negative implications of various meta-physical totalising systems' while offering 'a corrective with respect to issues of

⁵⁰ Timothy Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 43.

⁵¹ Evans, *Ethic*, 29.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 203, 273.

⁵³ From the editor's introduction to *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love* ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 2. See also Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Critique of the Bourgeois State' in *Inquiry* 27 (1984), 207–18. As the title suggests, this study considers Kierkegaard's view of the political and class-conscious aspects of modern society, but does not dwell on the underlying ideology critique of national identity and affiliation.

socio-economic equality and political conformity⁵⁴ yet she is clearly more interested in socio-economic class issues than in the political problems of systematic conformity.⁵⁵

Kierkegaard's defenders try to highlight Kierkegaard's concern for social justice, friendship and family relationships in order to counteract the various anti-social readings of *WL*. Yet in their haste to prove Kierkegaard's compatibility with communal norms, they move too quickly from the contrast of the different loves to their convergence. Contrary to these hasty defenders, I think that the neighbour of *WL* stands as an ethically and socially viable alternative to the person primarily defined as the 'co-national'. What I want to highlight here is the contrast between the erotic love of passionate preference and the disinterested love of neighbour; a contrast which creates a distinct social critique. This critique remains within the realm of social justice, but it is not confined solely to matters of the socio-economic status of the working poor. If these commentators had fully pursued the incipient critique of 'metaphysical totalising systems' that they rightly suspected lies in the text, they might have found in Kierkegaard's 'neighbour' a dissident element. In short, the neighbour is an alternative Christian category that undermines the confidence normally placed in the pagan, commonsensical (and ultimately unstable) category of the 'compatriot'. As a way of describing the recipient or target of our love, the neighbour competes with—and subverts—the compatriot, in a way that it does *not* subvert the friend or spouse. This is because the friend and spouse as 'neighbours' are real and concrete in a way that a person identified primarily along 'nationalist' lines can never be.⁵⁶

I have argued in the first chapter that national narratives should be recognized as fictional constructs, which, while useful and inevitable facets of our identity and existence, cannot bear the weight of an absolutizing load. The patriot who too closely identifies himself and his fellows with a national construct is grasping at abstractions which remove or distract him from interacting with the real people around him. In this light, Kierkegaard's warnings in *WL* are apt:

When it is a duty to love the people we see, *one must first and foremost give up all imaginary and exaggerated ideas about a dreamworld where the object of love should be sought and found—that is, one must become sober, gain actuality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of actuality as the task assigned to one.*

⁵⁴ Ferreira, *Striving*, 12, 11.

⁵⁵ Ferreira's defence of Kierkegaard as a social thinker hinges on her portrayal of Kierkegaard's concern for the 'poor and the downtrodden', 12. See also at 94–8. In this she shares much with Dooley, Bukdahl and others as discussed in ch. 6 above.

⁵⁶ Contra both MacIntyre ('Virtue', 44) and Nathanson ('Moderate', 538) who too easily equate love for family with love for nation, thus eliding the conceptual difference that exists between real and known family members who share one's immediate sphere and those theoretical persons defined by constructs of national narratives. See also ch. 1 above.

With regard to loving, the most dangerous of all escapes is wanting to love only the unseen or that which one has not seen. (WL, 161)

2.2.1 *Passionate preference*

We have seen in chapter 6 how WL contrasts *Kjerlighed*, or neighbour love, with *Elskov* or 'erotic' love. *Elskov* bears striking similarities to the ethos underlying patriotism, and indeed in the few direct mentions Kierkegaard makes of nation-love, he groups it with the other forms of passionate preference.⁵⁷ Passion, being a matter of preference and 'like for like', has a tendency to restrict the potential objects of its passion by an increasing number of conditions, always tending to exclude difference.⁵⁸ By contrast, neighbour love thrives in situations of difference and it is able to include many people under its wing.

Just as unconditionally and powerfully as erotic love intensifies in the direction that there is but one and only one beloved, just as unconditionally and powerfully does [neighbour] love intensify in the opposite direction. (WL, 49)⁵⁹

Kierkegaard's words affirm the criticism made above that nationalism is crudely essentialist in outlook. Passionate preference moves towards loving one single, supposedly essential object—an inherently abstract and anti-social tendency: 'But preferential love's most passionate boundlessness in excluding means to love only a single person' (WL, 52). This preference indulges in 'enormous self-willfulness' (WL, 55) as it inexorably excludes all others from its equation. We have already seen how Kierkegaard diagnoses this condition ultimately as self-love, albeit a self-love disguised as cultural allegiance. *Elskov* friends love each other by virtue of their similar customs and shared culture.⁶⁰ For the *erotic* poet (as for the patriot) the stronger and more intense the feelings of admiration, the better.⁶¹ It soon becomes apparent, however, that such feelings easily turn into self-love when we desire the singular object of our admiration to admire us back for the very selfsame qualities that we admire in him.⁶²

⁵⁷ WL, 144, 145.

⁵⁸ Dooley, following Caputo, notes how *Elskov* leads to 'a cultivation of colonies' in a culture of identity 'which gathers itself to itself in common defence against the other'. Dooley, *Exodus*, 232. Cf. John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 115.

⁵⁹ This quote was discussed earlier, in ch. 6 above.

⁶⁰ 'That is, on the basis of the similarity by which they are different from other people, or in which they are like each other as different from other people.' WL, 56.

⁶¹ Cf. Martensen: 'patriotism attains its full moral character when it is love of a certain state.' SE, 206.

⁶² 'Erotic love and friendship are the very peak of self-esteem, the I intoxicated in the other I.' WL, 56.

In 1995, Maurizio Viroli wrote in defence of patriotism: ‘Modern citizens . . . can love their republic *if the republic loves them*’.⁶³ Critiquing Viroli (though without using Kierkegaard to do so), Andrew Vincent remarks the selfish nature of patriotic *eros*: ‘*Eros* remains largely egocentric . . . it is a longing for union with an object which will fulfil the promise of self completion.’⁶⁴ Vincent then highlights the difference between *eros* and Christian *agape*— which is connected to ‘neighbour love’ and not self-seeking. *Agape* is not common to Greek thought (hence it is pagan). It is a Christian contribution.⁶⁵ Kierkegaard could only agree.

2.2.2 Neighbour love

The paring down of the group of potential persons who deserve our love from the many down to the self-like few appears to give focus to relationships by establishing a clear set of people who are like us enough for us to relate to. Yet this appearance belies the fact that when we do this, in effect we abstract ourselves from the real social situation which is composed of many, unlike, neighbours.

An essential part of ‘becoming sober’ and gaining truth ‘by finding and remaining in the world of actuality’ (WL, 161) must be to abandon deliberate acts of preferential exclusion according to a fictional sense of ‘proper socialisation’. To recognize that everyone is a neighbour regardless of their provenance is the alternative both to the extreme position of seeing *only* co-nationals and non-nationals in one’s ethical scope, but also to the more moderate (but still ethically problematic) position of granting prejudices in favour of the co-national for no other reason than that he is a co-national.

This is not to say that ‘neighbours’ rescind their respective national identities, only that the sum total of their identity as persons is not exhausted by their national story.⁶⁶ The Christian does not have an ethical duty only towards people whose national narratives dovetail with their own—the duty is to love the neighbour simply *because* he is the neighbour.⁶⁷ By contrast, patriotic love, as *Elskov*, requires feeling, allegiance and devotion in order to operate. ‘Have a poet describe how love must be in a person if he is to call it *erotic* love . . . he will add: “and then there must be admiration; the lover must admire the beloved”’ (WL, 54). Yet Kierkegaard is quick to point out: ‘The

⁶³ Viroli, *Love*, 184 (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ Vincent, *Nationalism*, 128.

⁶⁵ ‘[Agape] is theocentric and selfless. It can flow through us, but it is not “ours”. We only love, according to 1 John 4.19 “because he first loved us”.’ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sen, *Identity*, xiii. and discussion above.

⁶⁷ Cf. WL, 55. Following the parable of the Good Samaritan the neighbour is not the one who shares the same cultural markers as the one in need. It is the foreigner who is aware of the need and does something about it.

neighbour, however, has never been presented as an object of admiration; Christianity has never taught that one shall admire the neighbour—one shall love him' (WL, 54). Kierkegaard suggests that 'loving' the beloved is really not love at all, at least, not in any socially practical sense. Poets and patriots get excited about passionate attachment to friends and lovers, but in fact, 'no one in paganism loved the neighbour; no one suspected that he existed. Therefore what paganism called love . . . was preference' (WL, 53). Passionate preference ultimately becomes admiration for the self (loving that which, in similarity to the lover, loves one back). Only that which looks outward, and engages with other persons regardless of their similarity to the lover, can properly be deemed *love*. A social life based on infatuation for the group is far less stable and useful to members of that society than one based on practical regard for others. True sociality cannot be based on affection for the compatriot, trumped up and maintained by self-serving fictions. It must be directed instead at the existing subject in the here and now. 'Love for neighbour does not want to be sung about—it wants to be accomplished' (WL, 46).

2.3 Patriots or citizens

Kierkegaard's philosophical/psychological suggestion that patriotic fervour does not translate into regard for others is borne out in practice. Here, Kierkegaard's trajectory of passionate preference moving towards self-love and not sociality echoes those political scientists who try to ground the citizenship ethos in something other than nationalism.⁶⁸ In short, it is increasingly apparent that it is not patriots who necessarily make the best citizens.

That patriotic sentiment is no guarantee for good citizenship in society is evident from that flagship of constitutional patriotism, the United States. Americans are arguably the most patriotic people in the modern world. Foreign visitors to the United States are often struck by the way ordinary Americans express sentiments of national pride in conversation, posters, bumper stickers, clothing, daily routines like the Pledge of Allegiance (usually in schools), and periods of patriotic fervour during national holidays.⁶⁹ If patriotism were indeed the prime motor for a healthy civil society, America would surely be the place to find it.

⁶⁸ For example Kateb, *Mistakes*. On religion and civic participation in liberal democracies see Paul Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁹ See for example French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy's first impressions in *American Vertigo* (London: Gibson Square, 2006). Following the events of 11 September 2001, a special commission in Florida even amended its ordinances limiting view-obstructing roadside displays, considering that American flags were covered under the 'post-attack national emergency order'. *St Petersburg Times* (Florida, 2002).

Although voting is not the only way to measure individuals' participation in society, it is an accepted bellwether indicator of a population's citizenship ethos. On the basis of patriotic sentiment, therefore, one would expect a high turn-out of voters in America. In 2000, and again in 2004, after years of widely reported presidential elections touted by both Democrats and Republicans as the most important of their generation, barely half of the adult population bothered to turn up. In both contests, despite extreme partisan activism and lobbying, nearly 100 million eligible Americans did not participate.⁷⁰ With voter turnout at 59 per cent in 2004, America fell far short of turnout levels in other countries that same year, when Spain saw 77 per cent, El Salvador 66 per cent and Indonesia 81 per cent.⁷¹ The low voter turnout in America does not simply seem to be a product of dissatisfaction with particular politicians. Research suggests that turnout is not linked to mistrust of government or dissatisfaction with 'the system'. Turnout declined among the trusting and the cynical alike. In other words, even those willing to express support for the state are no more likely to participate in the process than others.⁷²

Concern for community has been replaced, over the past few decades, with a marked growth in American individualism. In 2003 the Pew Global Attitude Project questioned citizens of various democratic countries about their attitude towards other aspects of civic responsibility in the public realm. Asked whether they thought that public structures should take care of the poor who cannot take care of themselves, only 29.5 per cent of Americans agreed compared to 50.1 per cent in France and 58.5 per cent in the UK. In similar studies, less than one-third of Americans believed that civic society had a responsibility for income inequality or guarantee of income for the poorest, compared with two-thirds of Europeans who opted for a sense of personal liberty tempered by responsibility in the public realm.⁷³ A sense of responsibility for other civic structures is also in decline. The United States possesses the best doctors and hospital facilities in the world, and yet 43 million of its people remain without any form of health insurance. Those who do vote routinely reject moves towards nationalized healthcare, and even the idea of

⁷⁰ Morris Fiorina et al., *America's New Democracy* (New York: Longman, 2006), 135.

⁷¹ IFES election guide (<http://www.ifes.org/eguide/turnout/2004.htm>). Voter turnout in America is even less for local elections. For example, the 2002 Congressional elections saw approximately 40% turnout, even though control of the House and Senate hung in the balance. Fiorina, *Democracy*, 136. This is not a recent blip. Mark Franklin contrasted the average turnout for elections to the lower house of legislature or parliament in 37 countries between 1960 and 1995. France (76%), Canada (76%) and the United Kingdom (75%) all saw participation significantly higher than the US, with its 54%. Franklin, 'Electoral Participation' in *Comparing Democracies* (London: Sage, 1996), 218.

⁷² Jack Citrin, 'Comment: The political relevance of trust in government' in *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974), 973–88.

⁷³ Fiorina, *Democracy*, 77, 78.

national healthcare remains a controversial issue for politicians to address.⁷⁴ Investment and interest in public schools is dropping. A 1973 Gallup poll showed 58 per cent expressing 'a good deal/ quite a lot of confidence' in public school. When the question was repeated in 2003, pollsters saw the number fall to 40 per cent. Clearly, the American aversion to 'big government' affects all of these findings, yet analysing these figures, the American political scientist Fiorina comments: 'Part of the problem is simple self-interest.'⁷⁵ Americans are increasingly choosing to remove their support and contact from these schools, and, as with healthcare, those who do vote consistently vote for less money to go to the public system. The result is a negative effect on the average American's awareness of his or her context and role as a citizen as evinced by the level of basic knowledge necessary for important aspects of civic participation. A 2003 poll done by the 'Representative Democracy in America Project' revealed widespread ignorance amongst US citizens about their own country. Only one-third of adults over the age of 36 could identify the party controlling their state legislature. Less than one-quarter could identify the speaker of the House of Representatives. More than one-third could not even identify the political party in charge of the country. Young people did even worse in their answers.⁷⁶ Taken together, such evidence suggests that a population can remain proudly patriotic even while its members are disengaged, unaware and uninterested in contributing to the mechanics of their own civil society.⁷⁷

This is not a question of which country has better citizens.⁷⁸ However, if the relationship between patriotism and citizenship were really effective, then we would expect to see America's civic society in a significantly more healthy state. We do not see this. Indeed in some ways, American society is arguably worse off than parts of Europe. Yet in response to the collapse of the civic ethos in western democracies, many political leaders and commentators invariably make an appeal to renewed patriotism and national pride.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ William Frey et al., *America by the Numbers* (New York: New Press, 2001), 172 in Will Hutton, *The World We're In* (London: Little Brown, 2002), 32.

⁷⁵ Fiorina, *Democracy*, 60, 61.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁷ The cumulative effect of civic apathy has resulted in a warning from the sociologist Robert Putnam that the reservoirs of social capital are running dangerously dry. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

⁷⁸ Moribund voter turnout is not confined to America by any means. Likewise the absence of engaged social participants: a recent YouGov poll found that 71% of Britons currently have no ties to any group or civic association. YouGov Poll (<http://www.yougov.com>), 2 April 2007).

⁷⁹ Examples are legion. A recent one is Prime Minister Gordon Brown's widely reported suggestion that the British people consider flying flags in their front gardens. See his keynote speech to the Fabian Society (14 January 2006). Similar sentiments are expressed in Brown's *Moving Britain Forward: Selected Speeches 1997–2006* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

Against this temptation to drum up spurious nationalistic love, it seems clear that what is needed is not stronger feelings about the idea of the nation, but more commitment and engagement with real social communities, otherwise known as neighbourliness.⁸⁰ Here, Kierkegaard's work on the love of neighbour that needs not be sung about if only it is done can be usefully recommended to political theorists seeking to foster civic participation. I have already suggested the development of the 'neighbour', rather than the 'co-national'—as the most useful focus of political and social ethics. The identity of the co-nationalist is unstable because it depends on shifting definitions of nationhood. The neighbour, on the other hand, has an unchanging definition, that is, he or she is the one who lives nearby. As such, the neighbour is always tangible, present and understandable. Neighbours have a common stake in their shared, multifaceted society, without requiring affiliation to any particular facet of that society. In this way a Kierkegaardian critique of nationalism can be fruitful when we see how it is that neighbour talk contributes to the current debate regarding citizenship and social participation.

3. CHURCH LIFE

Notoriously, ecclesiology is the major weak spot for any attempt to comment on Kierkegaard's vision of Christianity. The paucity of constructive remarks on the Church universal, coupled with his heightened and polemical attacks on the Church actual, serve to render the subject of a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology a moot point. Indeed, it may well be that constructing a fully satisfying 'Kierkegaardian ecclesiology' is impossible. If so, this would presumably come as no surprise to Kierkegaard, whose compulsive authorship touched on history, philosophy, existentialism, Christology, communication theory, media criticism, political comment and literary review amongst other things and yet who did not see fit to significantly incorporate ecclesiology into his work. It is no failure to come up empty handed when the goods were intentionally withheld in the first place.

That being said, the question of Kierkegaard's Church naturally follows from any discussion of Kierkegaard's Christianity. A study of what Kierkegaard actually wrote about the Church and churches is worth making. Such a study would provide a full survey of his mention of ecclesiology, necessarily

⁸⁰ For the renewed taste for neighbourhood politics see for example the think-tank report by Ben Rogers and Rick Muir, *The Power of Belonging: Identity, Citizenship and Community Cohesion* (London: IPPR, 2007). Alistair Hannay also makes an appeal to an appreciation for local community over against larger attempts at conglomerate networks in *On The Public* (London: Routledge, 2005) see esp. ch. 8.

taking in how Kierkegaard's attitude to the Church altered and apparently hardened over the years. The study would then especially deal with the later polemical material of the *Moment*, seeing its attack on the Church as a corrective to the established order, part of a dialectic whose meaning is not 'self-contained' and is thus *indirect* and *non-normative*.⁸¹ This, however, is not that study. I am less concerned here with what Kierkegaard explicitly said about the Church as I am with attempting to begin to tease out the implications for Churchmanship in the light of Kierkegaardian history, politics and personhood. If something like a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology is at all possible, then it will have to incorporate the strands of thought detailed below.

The Kierkegaardian critique of the absolutizing group and the recommendation of the 'neighbour' in place of the 'co-national' can be put to the political sphere as a helpful, largely inoffensive suggestion for the construction of civic society. Indeed, applied to the socio-political scene, talk of the 'neighbourhood' as the ideal model for relational persons can seem benign, perhaps even boring for a population expecting patriotic rhetoric from their politicians. Yet these same Kierkegaardian categories, when applied to Christian ecclesiology, have explosive results. Kierkegaard's subversion of nation talk and subsequent elevation of neighbour talk has radical implications for traditional Christian views of 'church' and 'congregation'. For all its repercussions in the theological sphere, this way of looking at individuality and sociality is rooted in the logic of the incarnation, and thus for the Christian it is as compelling as it is unsettling.

In a piece written in 1854, Kierkegaard traces the problem that lies at the heart of Christendom, not to smug Europeans or purveyors of the Constantinian settlement but instead to:

Those 3000 who were added to the congregation *en masse* on Pentecost—isn't there fraud there, right at the very beginning? . . . With Christ, Christianity is the individual, here the single individual. With the Apostles it immediately becomes the congregation. . . . It is this concept [i.e. the concept of the congregation] that has become the ruination of Christianity. It is to this concept that we owe the confusion about states, nations, peoples, empires, which are Christian.⁸²

Kierkegaard's radical conclusion might seem surprising, but its trail is evident throughout his writing. Behind Kierkegaard's attacks on both the 'State' and 'People's Church' formulations in Danish Christendom lies a deeper criticism against *congregations* of all sorts. For example, in 1848 he has Anti-Climacus say in *PC*: 'To apply such a term as "congregation" . . . to this life is really an impatient anticipation of the eternal' (*PC*, 223). And in 1853 he muses with

⁸¹ Cf. *Moment*, 12, 24, 34, 40–1, 51, 67, 99–100, 106–7, 130, 143, 211, 217–20, 226, 335.

⁸² *Pap.* XI-1 A 189. Trans. Kirmmse in 'MacIntyre', 204. See also 'Thunderstorm', 98.

reference to individuals and groups that in 'a number of ways, the heresies of "Christendom" are rooted in the doctrine of "the Church"'.⁸³

It is sentiments like these that have led Bruce Kirmmse to argue for a much deeper understanding of Kierkegaard's radical, or perhaps *anti*-, ecclesiology. '[I]n the end it is doubtful whether he viewed any form of earthly congregation as compatible with what he believed to be "the Christianity of the New Testament."⁸⁴ Taken as a whole, the Kierkegaardian argument appears to undermine all attempts to situate the Church in any social structures. Or, to put it another way, as soon as individual believers start to identify themselves in and as congregations, they cease to be the authentic Church.⁸⁵

The thrust of the argument is wrapped up in Kierkegaard's opposition to 'the established order': 'The Establishment is an absolutely un-Christian concept.'⁸⁶ Again, Kirmmse is helpful here when he points out that the reason why Kierkegaard posits the Establishment as anathema to Christianity lies in the literal meaning of *Det Bestaaende*, which refers not just to cultural settlements of Church and politics but to the state of existence which continues to remain in force.⁸⁷ It is in this spirit that Kierkegaard writes elsewhere:

'The Church' must really represent 'becoming', while 'the State' represents 'the Established'. This is why it is so dangerous if the State and the Church grow together and become identified . . . [The Church's] idea is becoming. 'Becoming' is more spiritual than being 'Established'.⁸⁸

Kirmmse reads Kierkegaard's call for a stark divorce between the Church and the Establishment (a separation of the infinite from the finite)⁸⁹ as a call to separate the Church from all forms of actualized sociality. Kierkegaard's 'Christianity of the New Testament' is, for Kirmmse, 'a railing against mobocracy [which] finally turns against the value of community for any other than pragmatic, material purposes, rejecting any positive connection between matter and spirit, between pragmatic association and any higher communal purpose'.⁹⁰ With this position, Kirmmse thinks that 'Kierkegaard has gone too far'.⁹¹

Kirmmse is right to highlight how Kierkegaard's theological readers tend to overlook or ignore the extreme implications that his anti-congregationalism

⁸³ *Pap. X-5 A 97*. Trans. Kirmmse in 'Thunderstorm', 95.

⁸⁴ Kirmmse, 'Thunderstorm', 87.

⁸⁵ It is this trend of identifying what the true Church is not with reference to church congregations as they exist in the world that has led Christopher Barnett in conversation to refer to Kierkegaard's 'apophatic ecclesiology'.

⁸⁶ *Pap. X-1 A 407*. Trans. Kirmmse, 'Thunderstorm', 93.

⁸⁷ Kirmmse, 'Thunderstorm', 93.

⁸⁸ *Pap. X-1 A 552*. Trans. Kirmmse, 'Thunderstorm', 93.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Moment*, 162.

⁹⁰ Kirmmse, 'MacIntyre', 204.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 205.

has for Christian ecclesiology. It would indeed be naïve to try to incorporate Kierkegaard's insights into Christian life and practice without due regard for the effects that Kierkegaardian individualism has for traditional Christian conceptions of the Church. Yet without deviating too much from the course suggested by Kirmmse, I think that the harsh anti-social sentiment that he reads in Kierkegaard's ecclesiology can be tempered somewhat by looking at the *kinds* of sociality that Kierkegaard opposes. I agree with Kirmmse that Kierkegaard's Church does not allow for congregation, and that certainly a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology would be radical, open-ended and tempestuous. However, I do not think that the Kierkegaardian position, as Kirmmse intimates, means that Kierkegaard offers *no* 'positive socio-political arrangement'.⁹² I suggest that the Church which bases itself on something other than passionate preference will look less like a Kierkegaardian 'herd' and more like a Kierkegaardian 'neighbourhood'. This is the key, I would argue, to unlocking the sense of a 'positive socio-political arrangement' that a Kierkegaardian orientation can bring to the issue of Christian association, an orientation that avoids the problems implied by nationalist or otherwise absolutized narratives.

3.1 Neighbourhood or congregation

It is true that Kierkegaard provides no fully worked-out theology of Church—it is underdeveloped to say the least. For the present, I will merely attempt to sketch out how it might make sense to talk of a positive Kierkegaardian contribution to ecclesiology, despite accepting that Kierkegaard's Christianity had no place for the concept of congregation.

There are two ways that the 'neighbourhood' (as a model of sociality alternate to the nation) and 'the neighbour' (as the way to understand individuals) can be applied to the Church. The first is to recall Kierkegaard's objection to the epistemological monopoly of the crowd, and the second is to refer once again to the authenticity that comes from contemporaneity, an incarnational view of human identity. These two ways suggest the unexpected presence of a high sort of ecclesiology in Kierkegaard's anthropology.

3.1.1 Congregations and crowds

The Kierkegaardian neighbourhood in all its messy glory is also partly a window into what a 'Kierkegaardian' Church might look like. I have argued that the 'something undefined' of the Kierkegaardian settlement begins,

⁹² *ibid.*, 209, n. 13.

fearlessly, with open-ended reality.⁹³ In the same way, the neighbour accounts for the identity of a person without reference to absolutizing narratives or institutionalized forms. Similarly it is possible to argue that the form and function of Christian community and duty is more than an institution or a congregation defined by a monopolized narrative. It is for this reason that I think that Kierkegaard's attacks on 'congregation' need not be read as attacks on all 'sociality' as such. The possibility of inter-personal social relations is only denied if we conceive of the Church as a crowd of 'people-like-us' who find strength in numbers. This is what I believe Kierkegaard means when he attacks the congregational mentality of post-New Testament (or, more accurately, post-Christ) Christianity.

Thus we return to the Kierkegaardian critique of the crowd. In chapter 6, I argued that Kierkegaard's objection to the crowd was not against a collection of people agreeing upon an idea or sharing a belief, but rather against the group that finds affirmation for its shared belief by referring to the number of those who share it.⁹⁴ 'There is a view of life that holds that truth is where the crowd is, that truth itself needs to have the crowd on its side' (POV, 106). The Establishment erroneously assumes that the more people share a sense in common, the more true it is:

[T]he crowd is untruth, the untruth of wanting to exert influence by means of the crowd, the numerical, of wanting to make the numerical the authority for what truth is. (POV, 126)

Kierkegaard's attack on the deified congregation does not render him a proponent of anti-social splendid isolation. This is not a complaint with social agreement as such, but rather it is a conflict of open-endedness *versus* absolutization. The temptation of institutions is to demarcate their boundaries, concretizing their constituent narratives into one set form, effectively halting further development or the possibility of 'foreign' influence. The problem is that this is an impossible position to maintain, thus thrusting the institutions into a state of permanent denial. If human beings are complex, free and objectively indefinable, then their associations will be too, always open to review. The trick, as Kierkegaard maintained with respect to the human being's orientation to the future, is to face the way one is already going.⁹⁵

⁹³ Cf. Eriksen on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's different approaches to 'nihilism' in *Repetition*, 8–10. The point is discussed in ch. 4 above.

⁹⁴ See for example POV, 106, where Kierkegaard allows for the real possibility that a number of people might agree on something true. It is only if the authority for that truth is granted to the crowd by dint of its agreement that the truth will be rendered untrue. TA presents a picture of a population that, upon reflection, unites in agreement around a common idea, and acts accordingly. See ch. 6 above.

⁹⁵ Cf. Kierkegaard's admonition against 'living backwards' and his proposal for 'living forwards' which is 'repetition'. JP 1030 (Pap. IV A 164). The point is discussed in ch. 4 above.

Just as the love of neighbour can be a model for social relations without crowds, so too the Church can be understood as neighbourhood without congregation. Just as the 'neighbourhood' ideally has no policy of like-for-like affiliation but instead a family of shared agreements (ranging from mundane municipal matters to, above all, a commitment to 'letting the neighbour be' without imposing a falsified structure upon them)⁹⁶ in a similar way, although Christian ecclesiology inevitably touches on matters of doctrine and dogma, it is not regimented agreement which essentially constitutes the existence of the Christian neighbourhood but the relation of 'contemporaneity'.

3.1.2 *Contemporaneity and community*

In chapter 4 we considered how contemporaneity describes both the imaginative positioning of oneself next to Christ, and the reality for those Christians who are aware of standing 'before God'. Contemporaneity does not allow the history of Christendom's triumph to blunt the impact of standing before a lowly man who claims to be God. By definition excluding the possibility of accepting an inherited or vicarious faith,⁹⁷ contemporaneity also offers a stark challenge to some traditional congregational ecclesiological models. Yet Kierkegaardian contemporaneity also presupposes the existence of individuals who indirectly communicate the possibility of essential offence to other individuals.⁹⁸ Furthermore, these individuals associate with each other insofar as they help each other trace out the implications of the incarnation event (or perhaps more accurately *belief* in the event), as indeed Kierkegaard himself does as a writer relating to his readers and his contemporaries. Might not associations of this type be considered to constitute 'church' in certain non-trivial ways? The individuals involved in this relationship need not delude themselves by thinking that it is their agreement about their contemporaneous faith that makes the object of their contemporaneous faith more true or likely, but they agree with each other all the same. Furthermore, such agreement has socio-political ramifications, producing a network of people whose sociality resembles a neighbourhood in which shared cultural cues are of

⁹⁶ Although I think he focuses too much on Abraham and the pseudonym Johannes de silentio as paradigmatic for all of Kierkegaard, nevertheless Jason Wirth draws from the theme of silence and secrecy to describe a similar possibility of a Kierkegaardian society which lets each individual be as they are without imposition. 'Empty', 220ff. Wirth is discussed briefly in ch. 6 above.

⁹⁷ 'If you cannot bear contemporaneity... then you are not *essentially* Christian.' *PC*, 65 (original emphasis). Climacus and Anti-Climacus' discussion of the problem of the disciple at second-hand was dealt with in chs. 4 and 5 above.

⁹⁸ Cf. ch. 4 above.

minor importance compared to more pressing realities for the everyday life of the people.

I hope that I have begun to elucidate the radical and potentially offensive implications for ecclesiology which lie within Kierkegaard's theory of contemporaneity. Paradoxically, however, far from undermining all moves towards ecclesial relations in favour of the authentic individual, it would seem that Kierkegaard's suggestion is *that no one is an individual unless they are in a relation to this community*. In the Kierkegaardian scheme, becoming an authentic person is dependent upon facing the possibility of offence of the God-man, which for the present age is catalysed not *via* participation in christianized culture but *via* the indirect communication of another first-hand disciple. Truly authentic existence is therefore predicated upon an encounter with other Christians, which implies a neighbourhood of believers.⁹⁹ If anything, this suggests a very high—perhaps impossibly high—ecclesiology, not the opposite view which is sometimes attributed to Kierkegaard.¹⁰⁰

In any case, this high view of Christian sociality is derived from Kierkegaard's conviction that whatever constitutes the 'Church' it cannot appeal only to a certain type of culture or national narrative.¹⁰¹ The possibility of authentic individuals relating to each other as neighbours is fundamentally at odds with an ideology of the 'pure' group. Here again is the blurring between theological and political spheres, a mode of existence that intentionally leaves the boundaries ambiguous, precisely because the definition of the individuals within these spheres is ambiguous. I have suggested that Kierkegaard's Church might be read as a neighbourhood—but like all neighbourhoods it must be left somewhat undefined if it is to avoid becoming absolutized into the false idol following the logic of the Christian nation.

⁹⁹ At the very least a neighbourhood of two—one believer and the potential believer to whom he or she is indirectly communicating.

¹⁰⁰ As always with Kierkegaard, the use of the word 'Christian' is problematic, as strictly speaking it names a state of being that cannot properly be said to exist anywhere. Cf. 'I am not a Christian, I do not speak of myself as a Christian.' *Moment*, 340. This very difficulty suggests the high standards that Kierkegaard has placed on membership of the community of Christ-imitators. For ease of use, it seems helpful to retain the word 'Christian', always remembering that what is in view is the relation of the individual to the God-man in honesty before God, a constant state of becoming that does not imply having arrived at perfect Christ-likeness.

¹⁰¹ This model recalls traditional parish-centred Anglicanism, which resists confining the life of the Church to believers only in favour of the local population. There is relevance here also for Protestant congregationalist models, which explicitly seek to cater only to certain cultural niches and sub-groups of the population. See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Volf's cautionary but ultimately positive assessment of congregational ecclesiology refers to Kierkegaard only once, but in his support of non-institutionalized community there are points of congruence all the same.

4. CONCLUSION

There is no shortage of sociologists, historians and political philosophers who provide comment and critique on the thorny issue of nations, nationalism and patriotism. Yet despite some religious unease noted above, sustained theological assessment of these phenomena is relatively thin on the ground. I have argued that Kierkegaard is well placed to provide this assessment. His critique of cultural Christianity invites dialogue with the modern theorists on nationalism whose work was surveyed in the first chapter of this book. The Kierkegaardian can agree with Kateb's caution of group-sustaining fictions, or with Smith's, Weber's (and others') critical assessment of the pseudo-religious nature of nationalism. With Sen, Kierkegaard would be sceptical about the way national culture is seen, rather arbitrarily, 'as the central, inexorable, and entirely independent determinant of a society.'¹⁰² But Kierkegaard outruns these critiques, with an account of identity and identity formation that goes far deeper than the sense of self offered by Sen and others.¹⁰³ A Kierkegaardian assessment of the dangers of nationalistic 'group' ideology and identity politics not only anticipates critical social theorists; it also incorporates a theological impetus which speaks directly to nationalism's pseudo-religious roots and the expressions of christianized patriotism that currently thrive in some western democracies. While Kierkegaard's religious framework may not recommend itself to all socio-political readers, nevertheless his thought bridges secular critics of nationalism and those groups for whom the critique is most salient—namely, those who use their Christianity to prop up their nationalism.

I have argued that nationalism is a socio-political problem which, when combined with Christian discourse, also becomes a theological problem. Kierkegaard's insights into nationalism are relevant and persuasive, but primarily as insights into specifically *Christian* nationalism. Furthermore, the full force of his critique is felt by those who are in some sympathy with his presuppositions about the unique nature of the God-man and a commitment to some sense in which the New Testament is normative for Christian life and practice.¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard's 'political' application is itself 'theological', aimed as

¹⁰² Sen, *Identity*, 112.

¹⁰³ It is significant that the political commentators mentioned here are adept at pointing out the negative 'fictions' or 'lies' of nationalism, but do not tend to provide a positive anthropology by way of replacement. As we have seen above, this problem is in part the spur for Matušík's endeavour to construct a meaningful postnational identity.

¹⁰⁴ This is similar to the spirit in which Stanley Hauerwas (with typical Kierkegaardian *élan*) addressed a group of youth ministers: 'I assume most of you are here because you think you are Christians, but it is not at all clear to me that the Christianity that has made you Christians is Christianity. For example: How many of you worship in a church with an American flag? I am sorry to tell you that your salvation is in doubt.' In 'Why Did Jesus Have to Die?: An Attempt to Cross the Barrier of Age' re-printed in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* vol. 28 no. 2 (2007), 181–90, 182.

it is at a Christian culture that is tempted to confuse its Christianity with its nationality.

4.1 Family resemblance of Christian nationalisms

Differing Christian nationalisms make similar assumptions about three principal matters: the nature and role of individuals, the meaning of historical development, and the role of 'the people'.¹⁰⁵ For each of these, the Kierkegaardian vision presents significant challenges.

Concerning the role of individuals, there are two assumptions made when nationalism attempts to tell the story of the nature and destiny of man, and claims for itself the mantle of authenticity. The first assumption is that national groups can operate like authentic 'persons' with a single identity.¹⁰⁶ The second assumption is that a group affiliation can also encapsulate an individual person's authentic identity. Kierkegaard's separation of the individual from the crowd challenges Christian nationalist dogma, not for socio-political reasons only (although, as we have seen above, those do exist) but on Christological (and ecclesiological) grounds. Only individual subjects can relate to the Subject, who has made himself knowable as a possibility of offence through the embodiment of a person: a group cannot do it for the individual. It is one's orientation to Christ in contemporaneity, itself the occasion of *Øieblikket*, which leads to the becoming of authenticity. Such a 'becoming' is not an isolated event, temporally or socially, but it is not constituted by one's temporal or social context either. If we are in any sense to say with Qohelet that there is eternity in the hearts of man (Ecc. 3:11), or indeed, as *SUD* intimates, that man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, then this 'eternal' must exist alongside and apart from temporal factors. For this reason, becoming a true self in relation to the eternal is open to all persons, and no one can be barred based on historical contingencies such as class, culture or nation.

The second tendency of christianized nationalist thought is that historical development is taken to be a vehicle for unfolding truth. Theological nationalists tend to see their nation as a 'chosen people', divinely selected to undertake a

¹⁰⁵ The family resemblance between different Christian nationalisms is borne out repeatedly in historical studies. I have focussed on but two examples by way of Grundtvig and Martensen. Similar sentiments can be found, for example, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Prussian and Russian theology and literature, Christian rhetoric from the Victorian British Empire and the 'Chosen People' conviction underlying much popular American Christianity as mentioned in ch. 1 above.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Martensen: 'A nation is an individual social organism . . . which again is an individual member of the great body of the human race, and exhibits human nature on a small scale.' *SE*, 88. See also *SE*, 87–8, 90, 98, 125; *CD*, 147, 233; *Outline*, 304. Martensen is here aligned with Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §321ff.

unique culture mission to the world. The development of culture is taken to be following a teleological course, steadily moving towards a manifestation of the 'highest'. With such an assumption necessarily comes a culture that sees its success as indicative of the presence of the Good.¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, of course, tempers any too-high valuation of the vagaries of historical development, but he also demands that Christians fully comprehend the consequences that the unique, historical incarnation would have for any theology of unfolding, or developing, revelation. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's distinction between mundane quantitative facts and exceptional qualitative states needs to be upheld, if the Christian is to maintain the distinction between knowledge and faith. To collapse the latter into the former, as triumphalists and apologists inadvertently do, is to miss the crucial role that the possibility of offence plays in Christian notions of discipleship and belief. Jesus is no more obviously God than being a witness to the truth is obviously a path to worldly comfort and success—yet nationally minded Christendom has adopted both ideas, to the detriment of its authentic Christianity.

This brings us to the third characteristic that Christian nationalisms share, the priority afforded to 'the people'. Where nationalism defines a person by virtue of the 'givens' of language, kin and inherited culture, Christian nationalism baptizes social morality, customs and public common sense, incorporating these into its theological narratives. The public communicability of an idea or an ethical action is prioritized over and above individual apprehension or identification of the same, and individual deviation from group consensus is not tolerated (especially, but not only, when a challenge to national allegiance is perceived). Thus, individuals who act without primary reference to an easily recognizable 'sense' of the 'common', whether intellectually, morally or religiously, face castigation or relegation.¹⁰⁸ It is a part of the nationalist narrative that 'truth' in these matters is to be found in wisdom inherited from past generations, in the developed culture of the people or in the view accepted by the majority. Against this stands Kierkegaard's 'single individual' who is also his 'common man': not derived from cultural or class categories, and thus not confused with either. Kierkegaard treats his common man with the respect that a single individual with the *imago Dei* deserves. His is not the paternalism of an

¹⁰⁷ The ideology of American exceptionalism (discussed in ch. 1 above) is but the present example of an oft-repeated motif in the history of Christendom.

¹⁰⁸ Note the furore surrounding the comments from Barak Obama's pastor, Jeremiah Wright, regarding what should happen to his country if it does not live up to biblical demands of social justice. 'God Damn America! That's in the Bible. For killing innocent people. God Damn America for treating us citizens as less than human. God Damn America as long as she tries to act like she is God and she is Supreme.' From the sermon 'Confusing God and Government' (delivered 13 April 2003). It is significant that this Christian, using Christian texts to appeal to the common consensus of a christianized culture, has been largely criticized on patriotic, and not theological, grounds. The issue has been widely reported, but see Eudora Smith, 'The Liberation of Reverend Wright' in *The Nation* (5 May 2008), 12–14.

elitist, nor the utilitarian rabble-rousing of a revolutionary. Kierkegaard's single individual breaches with the sense of the common that assumes for itself the mantle of authenticity by force of its numbers—both the number of years that an idea has been held and the number of people holding the idea is irrelevant to its eternal truth. Again, such a breach will more often than not result in suffering for the individual, and it is here that the possibility to become a witness to the truth is raised. Rather than the crowd communicating its truth to the individual, it is the person's suffering at the hands of the crowd that indirectly communicates to the others in the herd. As a sign of offence, the single individual here acts as a catalyst to prise others from the group, thus opening the way to *Øieblikket* and contemporaneity once again. It is the person who communicates truth to the people, and not the other way around.

4.2 The individual and true sociality

In *POV* we saw Kierkegaard using his brand of radical egalitarianism to counteract the effects of the epistemological monopoly of the crowd:

A crowd—not this crowd or that, the contemporary crowd or a deceased crowd, a crowd of commoners or of the elite, of rich or poor, etc., but a crowd understood in the concept—is untruth. (*POV*, 107)

The frame of reference with regard to apprehension of the truth is wrested from the group and re-focussed on the individual—*any* individual, regardless of his or her common culture. When the Apostle Paul says that only one reaches the goal, Kierkegaard takes this to mean that everyone can be this 'one',¹⁰⁹ but not as part of a group, only as an individual. God 'without the least tremor of dizziness' can survey the countless millions of people on earth and recognize each and every individual. And he says to them that only one reaches the goal.¹¹⁰

The single individual can mean the most unique of all, and *the single individual* can mean everyone . . . The pride in the one thought incites a few; the humility in the other thought repels others . . . (*POV*, 115)

Thus, for Kierkegaard, an individual does not have to be outstanding or especially gifted, nor, for that matter, does the category apply to those who are common or especially ordinary.¹¹¹ Here Kierkegaard pre-empts future commentators such as Bukdahl on the one hand, and 'exceptionalist' political

¹⁰⁹ *POV*, 106 referring to I Corinthians 9:24.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107. The critique of the world-historical which attempts to be the ultimate observer was discussed in ch. 5 above.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107, 117.

philosophers such as Carl Schmitt on the other.¹¹² Such a definition of identity contravenes both Martensen's cultured Christian elitism and Grundtvig's romantic notions of the spiritual rustic peasant: To be a real person is not dependent upon full integration within a given crowd, for the group is a temporal, contingent, abstract association. In *POV* '[t]o be a human being is to have kinship with the divine' (106). Here again is the high (rather than absent) sense of Christian community that Kierkegaard implies. As discussed above, there are ways for believers to exist in sociality with one another that is not excoriated by Kierkegaard's attack on the herd mentality. Yet while every person can be an individual, not everyone is. For Kierkegaard, only those who have been confronted by the possibility of the essential offence of the God-man will enjoy existence in authenticity, and this confrontation occurs by way of the (indirect) communication of other authentic persons.

Only that which is eternal can relate to the eternal. Thus we return to the anthropological claims running throughout Kierkegaard's authorship:

Ultimately only the essentially religious can with the help of eternity effect human equality [*Menneske-Lighed*] . . . and this is why—let it be said to its glorification—the essentially religious is the true humanity. [*Menneskelighed*] (*POV*, 104)

With his category of the single individual, Kierkegaard is doing more than justifying his right to speak against the established order of nineteenth-century Denmark. Kierkegaard's single individual represents a repudiation of the wisdom of the crowd, insofar as the crowd is assumed to have a monopoly over the content and means of what a person can know. If a personal creator-God exists, then there is truth that lies at the heart of authentic human existence that cannot be accessed *via* social structures and congregations, because groups are incapable of relating to God *as a group*. Kierkegaard's claim is that to be a human being is to have kinship with the divine, and this kinship—what each person shares with the Divine—is 'the eternal'. With that we come again under the aegis of *Øieblikket* and contemporaneity, which is to say, subjects relating to a Subject in a way that only subjects can.

The radical egalitarianism implicit in Kierkegaard's anthropology of what it is to be a human being again suggests how Kierkegaardian individualism is not anti-social. His stress on the equal opportunity open to all persons bypasses absolutizing social structures in the service of authentic sociality. True relations between neighbours can only occur when both parties in the relationship are aware of their status as persons, rather than units in an amorphous group. If identity is wrapped up entirely within the frame of reference provided by the social-web, then inter-personal relations can only be based on historically contingent factors comprised of like-for-like qualities. In short, only the

¹¹² Cf. Bukdahl, *Common*, discussed in ch. 6 above; Schmitt, *Political*, discussed in ch. 1 above.

person who shares your set of identity markers is 'real' to you. By contrast, identity derived from a source which transcends the variables of culture, language, class, etc. (even while remaining embedded in them) and which is common to all provides for an appreciation of the neighbour as a *person* that is denied to merely socio-cultural accounts of personality. Equality cannot exist in a vacuum. By definition 'equality' assumes the existence of persons in relation to each other. Yet it is also a concept that derives its power from a reflection on what is intrinsic to the 'person', and not the 'relation' between them. In this way, we see that Kierkegaard's single individual lives in a world of real inter-personal relations. He does not flee from it, as Kierkegaard's 'anti-social' critics argue. Furthermore, contrary to those commentators who gloss over Kierkegaard's individualism, in fact it is Kierkegaard's individualistic focus that provides the ingredient vital to true sociality.

In conclusion I hope that this book contributes to a fuller understanding of the cultural space in which Kierkegaard wrote, and of the strong connections that exist between his theological, philosophical and political endeavours. Any attempt to demarcate between these three aspects of Kierkegaard's thought can only be artificial and temporary at best. Considered as a whole, Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to identity, actuality and history is inseparable from his theological concern to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom— itself a project with profound and far-reaching ecclesial and political ramifications, not least for considering the Christian's attitude toward his or her nation and relationship to his or her neighbour.

Both Christian political practice and Christian theological thought would be enriched and clarified by taking seriously Kierkegaard's attack on those who have confused membership of a common culture with authentic existence before God. This is not a peripheral feature of Kierkegaard's thought; rather the critique of Christian nationalism lies implicit throughout his work. As in Golden Age Denmark, Christian citizens of christianized cultures today would do well to heed Kierkegaard's warning: 'Every effort that tends toward the establishment of a Christian State, a Christian people, is *eo ipso* un-Christian, anti-Christian.'

Bibliography

In the majority of cases I have relied on the latest English translations of the Danish texts. All other translations of the primary and secondary sources are my own.

Kierkegaard

- Søren Kierkegaard: Samlede Værker* [Collected works], eds. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg et al. 20 volumes (København: Gyldendal) 1962–64.
- Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* [Writings], eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, et al. 55 volumes in process (København: Gads Forlag) 1997 to present.
- Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* [Papers and journals], eds. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting, N. Thulstrup, vols. I–XIII (København: Gyldendal) 1909–48; 1968–70; 1975–78.

Kierkegaard Translations

- Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. 7 volumes (Indiana: Indiana University Press) 1967–78.
- Kierkegaard's Writings*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. 26 volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1978–98.

Princeton Editions Cited

- The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1998.
- The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. R. Thomte with A. B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1980.
- The Concept of Irony*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1989.
- Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1992.
- The Corsair Affair*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1982.
- Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1992.
- Fear and Trembling* (Published with *Repetition*), trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1983.
- The Moment and Other Late Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1998.
- Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1985.
- Point of View*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1998.
- Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1991.

- Repetition* (published with *Fear and Trembling*), trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1983.
- Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1980.
- Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1988.
- Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1978.
- Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1993.
- Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1995.

Other Kierkegaard Translations

- Attack upon Christendom*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Boston: Beacon Press) 1960.
- The Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1957.
- Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Walter Lowrie with David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1968.
- Fear and Trembling* (published with *Sickness unto Death*), trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1973.
- Kierkegaard's Letters and Documents*, trans. Henrik Rosenmeimer (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1978.
- The Last Years: Journals 1835–1855*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins) 1965.
- Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1967.
- Point Of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper Torchbooks) 1962.
- Sickness unto Death* (published with *Fear and Trembling*), trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1973.
- Training in Christianity*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1944.

Grundtvig

A complete edition of the collected works of Grundtvig does not exist. The main partial collections are:

- Grundtvigs Christelige Prædikene* [Grundtvig's Sermons], ed. Christian Thodberg, I–XII.
- Udvalgte Skrifter* [Selected Writings], ed. Holger Begtrup, I–X (København) 1904.
- Værker i Udvalg* [Selected Works], eds. George Christensen and Hal Koch, I–X.
- Grundtvigs Sang-Værk* [Grundtvig's Songs] I–V (København) 1944; 1983.

Grundtvig Texts Cited

- Christenhedens Syvstjerne* [Pleiades of Christendom] VU VI.
- Danskeren* [The Dane] periodical 1848–51.
- Danne-Virke* [Cultural Activities] periodical 1816–19.

- Den danske Stats-Kirke upartisk betragtet* [The Danish State Church, an Unpartisan View] VU III.
- 'Gunderslev Wood' in *Udvalgte Digte* [Selected Poems], ed. Steen Johansen (København: Reitzel) 1963.
- Håndbog i Verdens-Historien. Efter de bedste Kilder* [Handbook of World History: According to the best sources] Vols. I–III, 1833–43.
- Kirkens Gienmæle* [The Church's Retort] US IV.
- Kirkelige Oplysninger* [Churchly View] VU III.
- Menneske Først* [Human First] *Sang-Værk* Vol. III; VU VIII.
- Nyårs-Morgen* [New Year's Morning] US IV; VU VII.
- Om Religionsforfølgelse* [On Religious Persecution] US VIII.
- Påske-Lillien* [The Easter Lily] VU vol. VII, 284–91; DV I VIII.
- Åbenbarig, Konst og Vidskab* [Revelation, Art and Knowledge] 1817.

Grundtvig texts in *A Grundtvig Anthology*, trans. Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lykne Jensen (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.) 1984:

- 'Christian Signs of Life'
- 'Concerning our Third Article of Faith'
- 'Elementary Christian Teachings'
- 'Introduction to Norse Mythology'
- 'Selections from Living Memory'
- 'Sermon on the 16th Sunday in Trinity 1836: Luke 7:13'.

Martensen

- Af mit Levnet: Meddelelser* [From My Life: Communications] 3 volumes (København: Gyldendal) 1882–83.
- Den christelige Dogmatik* [Christian Dogmatics] (København: C. A. Reitzel) 1849.
- Den christelige Ethik* [Christian Ethics] (København: Gyldendal) 1871.
- Den christelige Ethik. Den specielle Deel. Første Afdeling; Den individuelle Ethik* [Christian Ethics: Special Part, First Division; Individual Ethics] (København: Gyldendal) 1878.
- Den christelige Ethik. Anden Afdeling; Den sociale Ethik* [Christian Ethics: Special Part. Second Division; Social Ethics] (København: Gyldendal) 1878.
- Jacob Böhme: Theosophiske Studier.* [Jacob Boehme: Theosophical Studies] (København: Gyldendal) 1882.
- Leilighedstaler (Prædiken holdt i Christiansborg Slotskirke, paa 5te Søndag efter Hellig-Tre Konger, Søndagen før Biskop Dr. Mynster's Jordefærd.* [Special Occasion Talks. (Sermon held in Christiansborg palace chapel on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany, the Sunday before Bishop Dr. Mynster's funeral)] (København) 1884.
- Grundrids til Moralfilosofiens System* [Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy] (København: C. A. Reitzel) 1841.
- Prædikener paa alle Søn-og Helligdage i Aaret, forhen trykte og utrykte af Dr. H. Martensen* [Sermons for all Sundays and Holydays in the year, previously printed and unprinted by Dr. H. Martensen] København: Gyldendal) 1875.
- Socialism og Christendom: Et Brudstykke af den specielle Ethik.* [Socialism and Christianity. A Fragment of the Special Ethic] København: Gyldendal) 1874.

Martensen translations

- Christian Dogmatics*, trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1866.
Christian Ethics, trans C. Spence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1873.
Christian Ethics: Special Part, First Division; Individual Ethics, trans. William Affleck (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1881.
Christian Ethics: Special Part. Second Division; Social Ethics, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1882.
Jacob Boehme: Studies in his Life and Teaching, trans. T. Rhys Evans. Revised edition with notes by Stephen Hobhouse (London: Rockliff) 1949.
Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy printed in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1997.

Secondary Sources

- Adorno, Theodor, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1989.
 Adorno, Theodor, 'On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love' in *Studies of Philosophy and Social Science* 8, 1939–40: 413–29.
 Aiken, David, 'Kierkegaard's Three Stages: A Pilgrim's Regress?' *Faith and Philosophy* 13, 1996.
 Allen, E. L., 'Grundtvig and Kierkegaard', *The Congregational Quarterly* vol. XXIV 1946: 205–12.
 — *Bishop Grundtvig: A Prophet of the North* (London: James Clarke & Co.) 1949.
 Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso) 1991.
 Andic, Martin, 'Is Love of Neighbour the Love of an Individual?' in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
 — 'The Secret of Sufferings' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 2005.
 Antonio, Edward P., 'Søren Kierkegaard' in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan, Don Compier, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 2007.
 Arbaugh, George E. and George B. Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship* (London: Allen and Unwin) 1968.
 Auken, Sune, *Sagas Spejl: Mytologi, historie og kristendom hos N. F. S. Grundtvig* (København: Glydendal) 2005.
 Baillie, John, *What is Christian Civilisation?* (London: Oxford University Press) 1945.
 Barker, Ernest, *National Character and the Factors in its Formation* (Methuen: London) 1927.
 Barrett, Lee, 'The Neighbour's Material and Social Well-Being in Kierkegaard's Works of Love: Does it Matter?' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1999.
 — 'The Paradox of Faith in *Philosophical Fragments*' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1994.

- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1958.
- *Fragments Grave and Gay* (London: Collins) 1971.
- *World Review*, New Series No. 6, August 1949: 32–7.
- Bauckham, Richard, *James* (Abingdon: Routledge) 1999.
- Bellah, Robert N., 'Civil Religion in America', *Daedalus* 96, Winter, 1967.
- Bellinger, Charles K., *Genealogy of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2001.
- 'Toward a Kierkegaardian understanding of Hitler, Stalin and the Cold War' in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (New Jersey: Humanities Press) 1992.
- Bendersky, Joseph, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1983.
- Berdyaev, Nicolas, *The Meaning of History*, trans. George Reavey (London: Centenary Press) 1936.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner, 'Modernity, Mass Society, and the Media: Reflections on the Corsair Affair' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1990.
- Billig, Michael, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage) 1995.
- Blanchard, Brand, 'Kierkegaard on Faith' in *Essays on Kierkegaard*, ed. Jerry Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess) 1969.
- Blatburg, Charles, *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2000.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM) 1955.
- *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller, Frank Clarke, John Bowden, et al. (New York: Macmillan) 1971.
- *Sanctorum Communio*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins) 1963.
- *True Patriotism: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1939–45*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (London: Collins) 1973.
- Brookfield, Christopher, 'What was Kierkegaard's Task? A Frontier to be Explored.' *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* vol. 18, 1962: 23–35.
- Brown, Gordon, *Moving Britain Forward: Selected Speeches 1997–2006* (London: Bloomsbury) 2006.
- Brown, Robert F., *Schelling's Treatise on 'The Deities of Samothrace': A Translation and an interpretation* (Missoula: Scholar's Press) 1977.
- Buber, Martin, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan) 1965.
- Bukdahl, Jørgen, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing) 2001.
- Carr, Karen L., 'The Offence of Reason and the Passion of Faith: Kierkegaard and Anti-Rationalism', *Faith and Philosophy* 13, 1996.
- Canovan, Margaret, 'Patriotism is not Enough', *British Journal of Political Science* 30, 2000: 413–32.
- Cavanaugh, William T., 'Pledging Allegiance: A Theological Reflection on the Kobasa Case' in *Sign of Peace* vol. 5.1 Spring, 2006.
- *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: Continuum) 2002.
- Clements, Keith W., *A Patriotism for Today* (Bristol: Bristol Baptist College) 1984.

- Coleman, John, 'A Nation of Citizens' in *Concilium: Religion and Nationalism*, eds. John Coleman and Miklós Tomka (London: SCM) 1995.
- Collins, James, *Mind of Kierkegaard* (London: Secker and Warburg) 1954.
- Come, Arnold, *Kierkegaard as Humanist: Discovering My Self* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press) 1995.
- Conner, Walker, 'A Nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group, is a . . .', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 1 No. 4, October 1978: 377–400.
- Copleston, Frederick, *Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Newman Press) 1972.
- Cranfield, C. E. B., 'Some Observations on Romans XIII: 1–7' *New Testament Studies* 6, 1959–60.
- Crisiti, Renato, *Carl Schmitt and Authoritarian Liberalism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press) 1998.
- Crites, Stephen, 'Sickness Unto Death: A Social Interpretation' in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (New Jersey: Humanities Press) 1992.
- Croxall, T. H., *Kierkegaard Commentary* (London: James Nisbet) 1956.
- Cupitt, Don, *Sea of Faith* (London: BBC) 1984.
- *Radicals and the Future of the Church* (London: SCM) 1989.
- Daise, Benjamin, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1999.
- Dooley, Mark, 'The Politics of Statehood vs. A Politics of Exodus' in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* Issue 40: August 2000.
- *The Politics of Exodus: Søren Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Fordham University Press) 2001.
- 'The Politics of Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard and Levinas on "Hospitality"' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1999.
- 'Risking Responsibility: a Politics of the Émigré' in *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- Dunning, Stephen N., 'Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1985.
- Dupré, Louis, 'Of Time and Eternity' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1985.
- Dru, Alexander, *The Journals of Kierkegaard 1834–1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1938.
- Elrod, John, 'Climacus, Anti-Climacus, and the Problem of Suffering', *Thought* vol. 55 no. 218, 1980: 306–19.
- *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1981.
- 'Passion Reflection and Particularity' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1984.
- 'The Self in Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol. IV, 1973: 218–40.
- Eriksen, Niels Nymann, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction* (New York: Walter de Gruyter) 2000.
- Evans, Stephen C., *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans) 1998.

- Evans, Stephen C., *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2004.
- *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript* (New Jersey: Humanities Press) 1983.
- 'The Possibility of Metaphysics' in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, eds. D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (London: Macmillan) 2000.
- 'The Relevance of Historical Evidence' in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press) 2006.
- Farrow, Douglas, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1999.
- Fenger, Henning, *Kierkegaard: The Myths and Their Origins*, trans. George Schoolfield (London: Yale University Press) 1980.
- Ferreira, M. Jamie, 'Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. A. Hannay and G. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1997.
- *Love's Grateful Striving* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2001.
- *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1991.
- Fiorina, Morris P. et al., *America's New Democracy*, Third edition (New York: Longman) 2006.
- Franklin, Mark, 'Electoral Participation' in *Comparing Democracies* (London: Sage) 1996.
- Gabardi, Wayne, 'Matušík's Postnational Identity', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* vol. 27 no. 2, June 1994: 407–8.
- Garff, Joakim, 'The Eyes of Argus: The Point of View and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author' in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell's) 1998.
- 'Johannes de Silentio: Rhetorician of Silence', *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1996, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Herman Deuser (New York: Walter and Gruyter) 1996.
- 'To Produce was my Life: Problems, Perspectives Within the Kierkegaardian Biography', *Kierkegaard Revisited*, trans. Stacey Elizabeth Axe, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter de Gruyter) 1997.
- *Søren, Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 2005.
- Geertz, Clifford, 'The Integrative Revolution' in *Old Societies and New States* (London: Macmillan) 1963.
- Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell) 2006.
- George, Peter, 'Something Anti-Social about Works of Love' in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- Goldberg, Michelle, *Kingdom Coming: The rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton) 2006.
- Gomberg, Paul, 'Patriotism is like Racism' in *Patriotism*, ed. Igor Primoratz (Humanity Books: New York) 2002.
- Goold, Patrick, 'Reading Kierkegaard: Two Pitfalls and a Strategy for Avoiding Them', *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 7 no. 3, 1990: 304–15.
- Green, Ronald, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 1992.

- 'Developing' Fear and Trembling' *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. A. Hannay and G. Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1998.
- 'The Leap of Faith: Kierkegaard's debt to Kant', *Philosophy and Theology* vol. 3, 1989: 385–411.
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Citizenship and National Identity', *Praxis International* 12/1, April 1992: 1–19.
- 'Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity' (1987 Copenhagen Lecture) in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press) 1989.
- *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge: MIT Press) 1992.
- *Religion and Rationality* (Cambridge: Polity Press) 2002.
- Hall, Amy Laura, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2002.
- Hammerich, Fr., ed., *Det Første Skandinaviske Kirkemøde* (København: C. G. Iversens Boghandel) 1857.
- Hannay, Alastair, *On the Public* (London: Routledge) 2005.
- 'Two Ways of Coming Back to Reality: Kierkegaard and Lukács' *Kierkegaard and Philosophy* (London: Routledge) 2003.
- Hartshorne, M. Holmes, *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver* (New York: Columbia University Press) 1990.
- Hauerwas, Stanley, *After Christendom?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press) 1999.
- 'Why Did Jesus Have to Die? An Attempt to Cross the Barrier of Age' re-printed in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* vol. 28 no. 2, 2007: 181–90.
- Heidegger, Martin, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1959.
- Herbert, Jerry, ed., *America, Christian or Secular?* (Portland: Multnomah Press) 1984.
- Hoberman, John, 'Kierkegaard's Two Ages and Heidegger's Critique of Modernity' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1984.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1983.
- Holm, Anders, *Historie og Efterklang: En studie i N. F. S. Grundtvigs tidsskrift 'Danne-Virke'* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag) 2001.
- Holm, Søren, *Søren Kierkegaard's Historiefilosofi* (København: Bianco Luno Bogtrykkeri) 1962.
- Holmer, Paul, 'On Understanding Kierkegaard' in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, eds. Howard Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (New York: Harper) 1962.
- Howland, Jacob, *Kierkegaard and Socrates* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2006.
- Huntington, Patricia J., 'Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin Matušík and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1995.
- Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1994.
- Hutton, Will, *The World We're In* (London: Little Brown) 2002.

- Ingram, Attracta, 'Constitutional Patriotism', *Philosophical and Social Criticism* 22 no.6, 1996: 1–18.
- Jewett, Robert and John S. Laurence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans) 2003.
- Johnson, Howard, 'Kierkegaard and Politics' in *A Kierkegaard Critique* (Chicago: Regnery) 1962.
- Kangas, David, *Kierkegaard's Instant* (Indiana: Indiana University Press) 2007.
- Kateb, George, *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 2006.
- Kaufman, Gordon, 'Mystery, Critical Consciousness and Faith,' *The Rationality of Religious Belief*, ed. William J. Abraham (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1987.
- Kedourie, Elie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Hutchinson) 1960.
- Kelly, Duncan, *The State of the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2003.
- Kirmmse, Bruce, 'But I am almost never understood... Or, Who Killed Søren Kierkegaard?' in *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- 'Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: Possibilities for Dialogue' in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Carus Publishing) 2001.
- *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press) 1990.
- 'On Authority and Revolution: Kierkegaard's Road to Politics', *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference 'Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It' Copenhagen, May 5–9 1996*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter and Gruyter) 1997.
- 'This Disastrous Confounding of Politics and Christianity': Kierkegaard's Open Letter of 1851' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1990.
- 'The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard's Ecclesiology', *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 17, 2000: 87–102.
- Knappe, Ulrich, *Theory and practice in Kant and Kierkegaard* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter) 2004.
- Koch, Hal, *Grundtvig*, trans. Llewellyn Jones (Yellow Springs: Antioch Press) 1952.
- Law, David R., 'How Christian is Kierkegaard's God?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 48, 1995: 301–14.
- *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1993.
- Levin, Michael P., 'Why the Incarnation is a Superfluous Detail for Kierkegaard', *Religious Studies* vol. 18, 1982: 171–5.
- Levy, Bernard-Henri, *American Vertigo* (London: Gibson Square) 2006.
- Lewis, C. S., *Four Loves* (London: Collins, 1977).
- Lindhardt, P. G., *Grundtvig: An Introduction* (London: SPCK) 1951.
- 'Martensen, Hans Lassen', *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* (Tredje Udgave) Bind 9 [Danish Biographical Dictionary (third edition), Vol. 9] (København: Gyldendal) 1981.
- Longley, Clifford, *Chosen People: The Big Idea that shapes England and America* (London: Hodder and Stoughton) 2002.
- Loisy, Alfred, *The Gospel and the Church*, trans. Christopher Home (London: Ibister) 1903.

- Lowrie, Walter, *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press) 1938.
- *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (New York: Anchor Books) 1961.
- Lukács, Georg, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press) 1980. Original 1962.
- *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press) 1974.
- Løgstrup, Knud, *The Ethical Demand*, eds. Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press) 1997.
- Lübke, Poul, 'Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication', *History of European Ideas* vol. 12, 1990: 30–40.
- MacIntyre, Alistair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth) 1985.
- 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' in *Patriotism*, ed. Igor Primoratz (Humanity Books: New York, 2002).
- *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge) 1967.
- Mackey, Louis, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 1971.
- *Points of View* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press) 1986.
- Malantschuk, Gregor, *The Controversial Kierkegaard* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press) 1980.
- 'Kierkegaard and the Totalitarians', *American-Scandinavian Review* 34, September 1946.
- *Kierkegaard's Thought*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1971.
- Malik, Habib C., *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press) 1997.
- Mannheim, Karl, in *Ideology and Utopia: Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.) 1936.
- Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Humanities Press) 1963.
- Markus, R. A., *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (London: Cambridge University Press) 1970.
- Marsden, George, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press) 2006.
- *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans) 1991.
- Marsh, James. L., 'Kierkegaard and Critical Theory' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin Matušík and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1995.
- 'The Corsair Affair and Critical Social Theory' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1990.
- Matušík, Martin, 'Kierkegaard's Radical Existential Praxis, or Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian and Postmodern Categories' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. M. Matušík and M. Westphal (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press) 1995.
- *Postnational Identity* (New York: Guilford Press) 1993.
- 'Towards an Existential Politics: An Interview with Martin Matušík', *Civic Arts Review* vol. 9 no. 1, Winter, 1996.

- McCormick, John P., *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1997.
- McCracken, David, *The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story and Offence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1994.
- McKinnon, Alastair, 'Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith', *Kierkegaardiana* vol. 16, 1993: 107–25.
- Mercer, David, *Kierkegaard's Living Room* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press) 2001.
- Michelsen, William, 'Grundtvig's place in Danish Intellectual Thought—With particular reference to Søren Kierkegaard', *N. F. S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal* (Copenhagen: The Danish Institute) 1983.
- Mooney, Edward, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy and Time*. (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2007.
- Munro, R. (?), 'Bishop Martensen', *Methodist Review* 68S, 1886: 701–17.
- Müller, Jan-Werner, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 2003.
- Nagy, András, 'Abraham the Communist' in *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- Nathanson, Stephen, 'In Defence of 'Moderate Patriotism'', *Ethics* 99, no. 3, 1988/89: 535–52.
- Nicoletti, Michele, 'Politics and Religion in Kierkegaard's Thought: Secularization and the Martyr' in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (New Jersey: Humanities Press) 1992.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks) 1956.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons) 1932.
- Noll, Mark, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press) 2002.
- Nordentoft, Kresten, 'Hvad Siger Brand-Majoren?' *Kierkegaards Opgør Med Sin Samtid* (København: G. E. C. Gad) 1973.
- O'Donovan, Oliver, *Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1996.
- 'The Loss of a Sense of Place', *Irish Theological Quarterly* vol. 55, 1989.
- Pattison, George, *Kierkegaard: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2002.
- *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses* (London: Routledge) 2002.
- *Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen) 2005.
- *Poor Paris! Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (New York: Walter de Gruyter) 1999.
- 'A Simple Wise Man of Ancient Times: Kierkegaard on Socrates' in *Socrates in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Michael Trapp (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2007.
- 'Sublimity and Experience of Freedom in Kierkegaard' in *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, ed. James Giles (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) 2000.
- Perkins, Robert L., 'Envy as Personal Phenomenon and as Politics' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1984.
- 'Kierkegaard's Critique of the Bourgeois State', *Inquiry* vol. 27, 1984: 207–18.

- 'The Politics of Existence: Buber and Kierkegaard' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. M. Matušík and M. Westphal (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press) 1995.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (Macon: Mercer) 2003.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer) 1985.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Macon: Mercer) 1997.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Corsair Affair* (Macon: Mercer) 1990.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: For Self-examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Macon: Mercer) 2002.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments* (Macon: Mercer) 1994.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity* (Macon: Mercer) 2004.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages* (Macon: Mercer) 1984.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer) 2005.
- ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love* (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1999.
- Perkinson, Jim, 'Illin' the Evil, Outing the Absurd' in *Black Theology* vol. 5 no. 3, 2007.
- 'A 'Socio-reading' of the Kierkegaardian Self: Or, the Space of Lowliness in the time of the Disciple' in *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- Plekon, Michael, 'From Angst to Ambivalence: Kierkegaard's Social and Theological Modernity Reconsidered', *Dialog* vol. 20, 1981: 45–51.
- 'Introducing Christianity into Christendom: Reinterpreting the Late Kierkegaard', *Anglican Theological Review* vol. LXIV, 1982: 327–52.
- 'Kierkegaard, the Church and the Theology of Golden-Age Denmark', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol. 34, 1983: 245–66.
- 'Prophetic Criticism, Incarnational Optimism: On Recovering the Late Kierkegaard', *Religion* vol. 13, 1983: 137–53.
- 'Towards Apocalypse: Kierkegaard's Two Ages in Golden Age Denmark' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1984.
- Podmore, Simon, 'The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-Forsakenness or Forsaking God in the "The Gospel of Sufferings"' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 2005.
- Pojman, Louis, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press) 1984.
- Polk, Timothy, *The Biblical Kierkegaard* (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1997.
- Poole, Roger, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia) 1993.

- Poole, Roger, 'My Wish, My Prayer: Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart', *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference 'Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It' Copenhagen, May 5–9 1996*, eds. Niels Jorgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter and Gruyter) 1997.
- Putnam, R. D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster) 2000.
- Rae, Murray, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1997.
- Rerup, Lorenz, 'Grundtvig's Position in Danish Nationalism' in *Heritage and Prophecy*, ed. A. M. Allchin et.al. (Norwich: Canterbury Press) 1994.
- Riley, Patrick, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1986.
- Roberts, Robert C., *Faith, Reason and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1986.
- Rogan, Jan, 'Keeping Silent Through Speaking' *Kierkegaard on Art and Communication*, ed. George Pattison (London: St Martin's Press) 1992.
- Rogers, Ben and Rick Muir, *The Power of Belonging: Identity, Citizenship and Community Cohesion* (London: IPPR) 2007.
- Sartre, J. P., 'Kierkegaard the Singular Universal', in *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House) 1989.
- Schildkraut, Deborah, 'The More Things Change . . . American Identity and Mass and Elite Responses to 9/11', *Political Psychology* vol. 23 no. 3, 2002: 511–35.
- Schjørring, J. H., 'Martensen' in *Kierkegardiana 10: Kierkegaard's Teachers*, eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel) 1982.
- Schmitt, Carl, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: The MIT Press) 1986.
- *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT press) 1985. Originally published 1922).
- Schneider, Heinrich, 'Patriotism and Nationalism' in *Concilium: Religion and Nationalism*, eds. John Coleman and Miklós Tomka (London: SCM) 1995.
- Scruton, Roger, 'In Defence of the Nation' in *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (London: Macmillan) 1990.
- Sen, Amartya, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Allen and Lane) 2006.
- Shakespeare, Steven, 'Books about Nothing? Kierkegaard's Liberating Rhetoric' in *Kierkegaard: The Self and Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan) 1998.
- Sieyès, Emmanuel, *What is the Third Estate?*, trans. M. Blondel (London: Pall Mall Press) 1963 [*Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat?* (1789)].
- Smith, Anthony D., 'The Nation: Real or Imagined?' in *People, Nation, State*, ed. Edward Mortimer (London: I. B. Tauris) 1999.
- Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge) 1998.
- Smith, Eudora, 'The Liberation of Reverend Wright', *The Nation*, 5 May 2008, 12–14.
- Smith, Ronald Gregor, *The Last Years: Journals 1853–1855* (London: Collins) 1965.
- Stewart, Jon, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2003.
- Strauss, D. F., *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. Peter Hodgson (London: SCM) 1973 [*Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, 1835–36].

- Strawser, Michael, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press) 1997.
- Taylor, Charles, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1992.
- 'Nationalism and Modernity' in *The Morality of Nationalism*, eds. R. McKim and J. McMahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1997.
- *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1989.
- Taylor, Mark C., *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1980.
- Thanning, Kaj, *N. F. S. Grundtvig*, trans. David Hohnen (Copenhagen: The Danish Institute) 1972.
- Thompson, Catherine C., *Danmarkshistorier: National Imagination and Novel in Late Twentieth-Century Denmark* (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh) 2003.
- Thompson, Curtis L., 'H.L. Martensen's Theological Anthropology' in *Faith, Knowledge, and Action*, ed. George L. Stengren (Copenhagen : C. A. Reitzel) 1984.
- and David J. Kangas, *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1997.
- Thompson, Josiah, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Alfred A Knopf) 1973.
- Thulstrup, Marie, 'Suffering' in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana 7: Kierkegaard and Human Values*, eds. Neils Thulstrup and Marie Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels) 1980.
- Thulstrup, Niels, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. G. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1980.
- 'Mynster' in *Kierkegaardiana 10: Kierkegaard's Teachers*, eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel) 1982.
- Thyssen, Anders P., 'Grundtvig's Ideas on the Church and the People 1848-72' *N. F. S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal* (Copenhagen: The Danish Institute) 1983.
- Tilly, Charles, *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1975.
- Tolstoy, Leo, 'Christianity and Patriotism' in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1936.
- Tolstrup, Christian, 'Playing a Profane Game with Holy Things' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 2004.
- Tomka, Miklós, 'Secularisation and Nationalism' in *Concilium: Religion and Nationalism*, eds. John Coleman and Miklós Tomka (London: SCM) 1995.
- Towner, Philip H., 'Romans 13:1-7 and Paul's Missiological Perspective' in *Romans and the People of God*, eds. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing) 1999.
- Tudvad, Peter, 'SAK—en uvidenskabelig biografi om Søren Kierkegaard' [SAK—An unscholarly biography of Søren Kierkegaard] *Information*, 24 July 2004.
- Verheyden, Jack, 'The Ethical and the Religious as Law and Gospel' in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, eds. D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (London: Macmillan Press) 2000.
- Vincent, Andrew, *Nationalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2002.
- Viroli, Maurizio, *For Love of Country* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1995.

- Viroli, Maurizio, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1988.
- Volf, Miroslav, *After Our Likeness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans) 1998.
- Wallis, Jim, *God's Politics: Why the American Right gets it wrong and the Left doesn't get it* (Oxford: Lion) 2005.
- Watkin, Julia, 'The Idea of Fate in Kierkegaard's Thought' in *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, ed. James Giles (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) 1988.
- Webb, Stephen H., *American Providence* (New York: Continuum International) 2004.
- Weber, Max, 'The Nation' in *Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge) 1948.
- Weithman, Paul, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2002.
- West, Cornel, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge) 1993.
- *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) 1982.
- *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans) 1988.
- Westphal, Merold, 'Kenosis and Offense' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 2004.
- *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press) 1991.
- 'Kierkegaard's Politics', *Thought*. vol. 55, 1980: 320–32.
- Williams, Michael, *This World is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Glasgow: Mentor) 2003.
- Wirth, Jason, 'Empty Community: Kierkegaard on Being with You' in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. Elsebet Jegstrup (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 2004.
- Wright, N. T., 'Romans and the Theology of Paul' in *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans*, eds. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1995.
- Wählin, Vagn, 'Denmark, Slesvig-Holstein and Grundtvig in the 19th Century' in *Heritage and Prophecy*, eds. A. M. Allchin et al. (Norwich: Canterbury Press) 1994.
- Yoder, J. H., *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing) 1972.

Index

- 1848 (date) 31, 37–38, 67, 80, 85, 177–178,
179, 186, 187–188, 216
- Abraham 23, 75, 111–112, 147, 148, 158, 166,
172, 186
- Adler, A. 107, 130, 138, 145
- Adorno, T. 146, 149, 154, 165–166, 171, 181,
190, 194
- Africa (African) 20, 33, 201
- America (American) 2, 15–20, 33, 202,
212–214, 222, 223, 224
- Anderson, B. 5
- Anglican (Anglicanism) 221
- anxiety 96–98, 200, 207
- apologetics 27, 113, 114–115, 118–119, 121,
123–124, 136, 142, 224
- Apostle (Apostles) 39, 57, 74, 148, 181, 183,
185–186, 216, 225
- Apostle's Creed 67, 68, 69–73, 89,
133–134 *see also* Grundtvig, N.F.S.
- Arendt, H. 1
- Augustine 98, 152–153, 161
- Barth, K. 140, 163, 194
- bible (biblical) 17, 19, 32, 36, 37, 57, 64, 67,
69, 70, 71–75, 80, 83, 118, 123, 131,
133–134, 135, 158, 185, 193, 216–217,
219, 222, 224
- 1 Corinthians* 9:24 225
- 1 Corinthians* 13:8–12 82–83
- 1 Corinthians* 15:51–52 99
- 1 John* 4:19 211
- Acts* 2:42–47 216
- Ecclesiastes* 3:11 223
- Galatians* 3:28 57
- Hebrews* 10:23 19
- James, 131
- James* 1:2 186
- John* 1:5 18–19
- John* 8:36 58
- John* 14:6 139
- Luke* 10:25–37 211
- Matthew* 4:1–11 87
- Matthew* 11:6 124
- Matthew* 11:28 120–121, 137, 192
- Matthew* 16:18 74
- Matthew* 16:26 184
- Matthew* 22:15–22 57–58
- Matthew* 24 57
- Luke* 7:13 74
- Romans* 13 59, 157
- Billig, M. 1
- Bloch, J. V. 188
- Bonhoeffer, D. 12
- Britain (British) 4, 15, 33, 85, 201,
214, 223
- British National Party 201
- Brown, G. 15, 214
- Buber, M. 164
- Bukdahl, J. 133, 145, 169, 174–176,
225
- Bush, G.W. 17–19
- China (Chinese) 20, 33, 131
- chosen people 5–6, 9, 16–19, 82, 87, 88,
223–224
- Christ (Christology, Christological)
and congregations 216, 219
and contemporaneity and offence
116–124, 220–221, 223–224
in history 151, 153, 157
importance of for Kierkegaard's
project 32–33, 160, 162, 170–171,
178–179, 187, 191–192, 206
political significance of according to
Martensen 57–58
see also incarnation
- Christendom
and contemporaneity and offence
116–120, 123–124, 224
defense of 34, 37–38, 39–65, 216–217
as distinct from Christianity 36–37, 93,
125, 137, 185–186, 216–217, 227
and history (world-history) 129–132, 135,
142, 159–160
Kierkegaard's attack upon 30–33,
40, 47, 93, 125–126, 159–160,
176–177, 185
as self-deification 26, 29, 36
see also Martensen, H.L.; Mynster, J.P.
- Christianity
and history (world-history) 110, 125–137,
144, 147–148, 185–186
and Kierkegaard 21, 24–26, 29–33, 96, 125,
142–143, 172–173, 205–207, 215–223,
227
and the leap 112–124
in support of nationalism and
patriotism 5–6, 16–20, 26, 223–224

- Christianity (*cont.*)
 in opposition to nationalism and
 patriotism 6–7, 12, 21, 57, 159–160, 193,
 198–199, 222–225, 227
see also Grundtvig, N.F.S.; Martensen, H.L.
- church 46–47, 60–61, 138, 153, 176–177,
 198–199, 215–221
 Grundtvig's 'Churchly view' 72–74,
 132–135
 as 'neighbourhood' 218–221
 and state 20, 37, 50, 55–56, 58, 60–64,
 80–81, 176–177, 199, 216–217, 222
see also People's Church
- citizen (citizenship, civic) 1, 3, 11–16, 57–59,
 201–207, 211–215, 216
- civil religion 16, 20
- Clausen, H. N. 70
- common man 138, 144, 145, 169, 173–176,
 224
- common sense 90, 151, 160, 178, 183, 184,
 186–193, 209, 224–225
- congregation 69–73, 88, 163, 173, 188,
 215–221, 226
- Constantine (constantinianism) 60–61, 216
- contemporaneity 21, 89, 92–93, 110–124,
 150, 159–160, 198, 220–221, 226
 and the possibility of offence, 117–124,
 223, 225
- country *see* state
- crowd, the 174, 189, 191–193, 207, 225–226
 as source of identity 90, 139, 172–173, 179,
 187, 189–191
 and levelling 146, 151, 156–160
 and the neighbourhood 218–220
 and the suffering individual 180–186
see also group, the; herd, the
- Cupitt, D. 125, 128, 149
- Denmark (Danes, Danish) 37–39, 56, 66–69,
 78–79, 81–88, 135–136, 145, 154, 178 *see also*
Grundtvig, N.F.S.; Martensen, H.L.
- Derrida, J. 24, 25, 28
- Dooley, M. 24–26, 28–29, 33, 190
- ecclesiology 215–221 *see also* church;
 Christianity
- England (English) 17, 40, 61, 67, 78, 80, 81,
 85, 86, 201
- Enkelte see* individual
- Eriksen, N. 98–100, 200, 219
- ethical, the (ethics)
 and Christianity 135–137
 and history (world-history) 126–127,
 130–131, 139–143, 159–160, 166, 224
 and levelling 151–153
 and the possibility of offence 116, 121–122,
 124, 149–150
 social implications of 178, 193, 197, 203,
 209, 211
see also Martensen, H.L.
- eternal, the (eternity)
 and the historical (history) 129, 131–132,
 134, 136, 149–150, 152, 159–160
 and the individual 179, 182–186, 189,
 191–193, 197, 206–207, 223, 225–226
 and the leap 112–114, 159
 and the moment 93–95, 101–110, 126, 200
- fascist (fascism) 21–23, 164, 166, 198, 203
- faith
 and ethics 135–137
 and history (world-history) 89–90,
 106–113, 125–127, 129, 131–132,
 138, 149, 159–160, 220
 and Kierkegaard's project 32–33, 125,
 170, 224
 Knight of 111–112, 148, 185
 and the leap 111–124
 and the moment 93, 96, 200, 220
see also contemporaneity; offence
- fideism 115–116, 158
- France (French) 7, 85, 179, 198, 212, 213
 French Revolution 3, 85, 146, 153, 179
- Germany (Germans) 3, 7, 9, 15, 22, 24, 67, 78,
 85, 88, 131, 202
- God-man (god-man) *see* incarnation
- Greece (Greek, Greco-Roman) 13, 85, 103,
 147–148, 152, 155, 196, 211
- group, the (groups) 186–193, 221–226
 and historical development 126, 130–131,
 149–151, 155, 159–160
 and the individual 8–9, 21, 27, 90, 126, 139,
 149, 161–163, 165, 170–176, 180, 208
 narratives of 10, 13, 27–29, 162, 178, 212,
 216–217, 222
 as person 50–52, 64, 84, 90, 167–168,
 191–193, 206, 223
see also crowd, the; herd, the; individual, the
- Grundtvig, N.F.S. (Grundtvigians) 5, 6, 8–10,
 38, 66–91, 110, 126–127, 130–136, 139,
 145, 150–152, 157, 159, 163, 169,
 174–177, 180, 188, 223, 226
 and 'Human first and then Christian'
 (*Menneske først*) 68, 75–82, 88
 as critical of Kierkegaard 72–73, 79, 89–91
 as nationalist theologian 68, 74, 78–82,
 84–88
 and the 'matchless discovery' (*mageløse
 opdagelse*) 67–75, 88–89

- and 'world-history' (*verdens-historien*)
68–69, 82–88
Gyllembourg, T. 151
- Habermas, J. 3, 11, 13, 202, 203, 205–206
Hauerwas, S. 222
Havel, V. 202
Hegel, G.W.F. (Hegelians, Hegelianism) 14,
25–26, 27, 35, 38, 42, 44, 107–108, 109,
116, 127, 129–132, 138, 139, 145, 148,
151–152, 164–165, 167, 171, 190, 203,
223
Heiberg, J. L. 151
Heidegger, M. 21–22, 99, 166
herd, the 141, 167, 174, 176, 192, 203, 208,
218
and levelling, 46, 151, 156–158, 165
see also crowd, the; group, the; individual,
the
Herder, J.G. 2, 83
history (historical) 125–160, 161, 165–166,
170–171
and Christianity 109–113, 118, 121–123,
126–132, 179, 186, 193, 220–221
and nationalism 4, 6, 8, 14, 92, 193,
223–224
and progress (development) 18, 52–55, 69,
82–88, 125–128, 130, 143–160, 166, 171,
183, 186, 223–224
and temporality 94, 101–106
world-history (world-historical) 82–91,
106–108, 121, 124, 126–143, 147–156,
159–160
see also faith; Grundtvig, N.F.S.; Martensen,
H.L.; moment, the
Hitler, A. 140, 166, 167
Hobsbawm, E. 4
Hungary (Hungarian) 171
Huntington, S. 9
- identity 161–197
as authentic individual existence 4, 42, 64,
95, 100, 101–102, 104, 117, 137–140, 143,
151, 160, 162–163, 170–172, 177–191,
193–195, 200–206, 218–219, 221, 223,
225–227
and Christianity 21, 29, 42, 160, 218–219,
227
and contemporaneity and offence 121–124
and the moment 95, 100–103
and nationalism 1–10, 14–16, 151, 197,
201, 207, 211–212, 215, 223,
conflicting sources of 4–5, 7–11, 14, 21,
25–28, 76–79, 92–93, 127, 137–140, 143,
162–163, 165, 170–173, 177–187, 191,
201–202, 209–210, 222, 226–227
- incarnation (incarnational)
and contemporaneity and offence 117,
121–124, 129, 135, 137, 149–150, 191,
218, 220–221, 226
and historical necessity 42–43, 53–54, 64,
107–110
importance of for Kierkegaard's project 21,
29, 32–33, 126, 160, 172, 178–179,
191–192, 206–207, 224
see also Christ; Martensen, H.L.
indirect communication 90, 106, 113,
124, 158, 184–186, 216, 220–221,
225, 226
individual, the 25, 33, 89–90, 128–129, 132,
136–142, 150, 169–173, 199, 202,
225–227
identification with the common man 174
and the crowd (group, herd) 27, 130,
151, 155–160, 161–165, 174, 177–187,
189–192, 208, 216, 221
and contemporaneity 114–115,
119–124
and the moment 93–94, 110
identification with the neighbour 208–210,
221
see also identity; individualism; levelling;
Martensen, H.L.; neighbour
individualism 21, 26, 42, 44–45, 70–71, 76, 77,
162–166, 213–214, 218, 227
defense of 162–163, 169–173, 227
Irenaeus 69–70, 83
Israel 17, 19, 53, 64 *see also* chosen people;
Judaism
- Japan (Japanese) 9
Jesus 25, 32, 58, 77, 86, 87, 116, 118–124, 153,
157, 192, 224 *see also* Christ
Judaism (Jew, Jewish) 5, 52–53, 135, 144,
152, 202
- Kant, I. (Kantians) 52, 96, 141
Kierkegaard, P. 72
Kierkegaard, S.
Christian Discourses 179
Concept of Anxiety xiii, 95–98, 100–108,
147–148, 175, 178, 200
Concept of Irony 23, 101, 148
Concluding Unscientific Postscript xiii, 54,
89, 92, 106, 112–115, 120, 128–143, 150,
151, 153, 161, 174
Corsair (affair of) 31, 175, 176, 177
Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses 97, 98,
148, 200
Either/ Or 23, 97, 155
Fear and Trembling 23, 42, 45, 96, 101,
111–112, 119, 148, 158, 185

- Kierkegaard, S. (*cont.*)
Journals and Papers (Papirer) xi, 36, 100, 104, 107, 116, 133, 137, 138, 144, 148, 173, 177, 179, 194, 216–217, 219
Judge for Yourself! 175
The Moment xi, 32, 47, 57, 93, 96, 106, 116, 135, 137, 144, 169, 175, 216, 217, 221
Philosophical Fragments xiii, 45, 54, 89, 96, 99, 104, 105, 108–110, 112–116, 117, 118, 119, 129, 131, 148, 178
Point of View xiv, 31, 90, 116, 139, 172, 174, 178, 186–193, 219, 225–226
Practice in Christianity xiii, 24, 27, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 89, 91, 96, 106, 115–124, 128, 129, 137, 160, 169, 185, 192, 216, 220
Repetition 23, 96, 148
Sickness Unto Death 101, 102, 136, 168, 178, 185, 206, 223
Stages On Life's Way 140, 148, 187
Two Ages xiii, 23, 25, 89, 90, 141, 143–160, 175
Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits xiv, 90–91, 97, 174, 178–186
Works of Love xiv, 24, 90, 193–197, 208–212
Kirkelige Oplysninger *see* Grundtvig, N.F.S.
Kirmmse, B. 199, 217–218
- leap, the 21, 33, 96, 108, 110–121, 158, 159, 162
in *Fear and Trembling* 111–112, 115
in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 112–115, 118, 120
in *Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* 115–121
- Lessing, G. 112–113, 129, 135
- levelling 23, 46, 90, 146, 151, 153–154, 156–159, 165, 175
- Lewis, C.S. 12
- Lukács, G. 23, 146–147, 149, 154, 165–166, 171, 186, 190
- Luther (Lutherans) 37, 40, 70–71, 73, 76, 77, 83, 85, 136
- MacIntyre, A. 13, 14, 115
mageløse opdagelse *see* Grundtvig, N.F.S.
- Marcuse, H. 164–165
- Martensen, H.L. 5, 8, 9, 10, 21, 30, 34–65, 66, 79, 82, 107, 109–110, 126, 127, 130, 131, 132, 136, 138, 139, 151, 152, 157, 159, 163, 180, 223, 226
and Christendom 34, 40, 51, 54, 60–65
and ethics 51–52, 55–63
and history 42, 47, 52–55, 63
and the individual (persons, personality) 41–51
and the incarnation 42–43, 53–54
as critical of Kierkegaard 34–35, 40–41, 43–47, 57, 59, 60, 64, 163
and nations (nationality) 34, 47–50, 56–57, 60
and the state 34, 40, 43, 47–51, 55–59, 60–65
- Marx, K. (Marxism, Marxist) 140, 145, 149, 162–163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 169, 171, 172, 174
- Matušík, M. 5, 189–190, 202–207
- Menneske først* *see* Grundtvig, N.F.S.
- Moses 153
- Mynster, J. P. 36–39, 79, 82, 121
- moment, the (moment of vision) 21, 92–110, 117, 126, 149–150, 160, 162, 170, 171, 198, 199–200, 223, 225, 226
and anxiety 96–98
and repetition 98–100
and time 101–106
and freedom 106–110
see also contemporaneity
- multicultural (multiculturalism) 15, 201, 203, 204
- nation (nations, national, nationality) 2–10, 28–29, 55–57, 66, 68, 78–79, 90, 126, 144, 155, 157, 162, 174–175, 180, 190–193, 196–198, 201–202, 207–212, 215, 216, 222–224
as Christian 16–20, 51–52, 60–63, 69, 74, 79–82, 126, 136, 191–193, 216, 221, 227
see also church, state
as person 6, 8–947–51, 64, 83–84, 90, 223
and destiny 9–10, 17, 21, 53, 82–88, 126, 160
see also Grundtvig, N.F.S.; Martensen, H.L.; state
- nationalism (nationalist) 1–20, 28–29, 173–174, 197, 198, 201–204, 209, 210, 211, 212, 215, 218, 221, 222–227
and Christianity 5–7, 16–20, 29, 33, 80–82, 92, 116, 126, 128, 151, 159–160, 162, 172, 207, 222–227
see also Grundtvig, N.F.S.; Martensen, H.L.; patriot
- Nazi (Nazism, National Socialism) 21–24, 85, 140, 167
- neighbour (neighbourhood) 2, 12, 33, 164, 193–197, 208–215, 216, 218–221, 226–227
as distinct from nation 193, 197, 207, 208–215, 216, 226–227
and ecclesiology 218–221
- New Testament *see* bible
- Niebuhr, H.R. 163

- Nietzsche, F. 24, 99, 219
 nihilism 98–100, 200, 219
 Norse (Norsemen, Northern) 6, 56, 67, 69, 75,
 79, 81, 82–84, 86–88, 133
- Obama, B. 19, 20, 224
 offence (possibility of offence) 91, 116–124,
 126, 192, 206, 220–221, 223, 225, 226
see also contemporaneity; faith
Øieblikket see moment, the
 Old Testament *see* bible
- Palestine 17, 87
 passion, age of *see* revolutionary age
 patriot (patriotism) 2, 4, 11–20, 57–59, 68, 90,
 197, 208–215, 222, 224
 Pattison, G. 24, 94–95, 96–98, 155, 200
 people, the 8–9, 15, 38, 70, 79, 81, 224–225
 People's Church 37–39, 56–57, 80–82, 176,
 216
 person (persons, personal) *see* individual,
 the; Martensen, H.L.
 Polycarp 70
 postnational identity 28, 202–207 *see also*
 Matušík, M
 present age, the 151–159, 175
 Protestant (Protestantism) 17, 23, 70, 73, 221
 Prussia (Prussian) 67, 85, 131, 223
- race (racial, racism) 1, 2, 11, 14, 16, 66, 122,
 180, 191, 201
 Reagan, R. 19
 reflection, age of *see* present age
 Renan, E. 8
 repetition, 96, 98–100, 190, 200
 revolutionary age, the 151–159
 Roman Catholic (Catholics, Catholicism) 72,
 73–74, 85
 Rousseau, J.-J. 7
 Rudelbach, A.G. 176, 188
 Russia (Russian) 223
- Samtidigheden see* contemporaneity
 Sartre, J.-P. 33, 121, 207
- Scandinavia (Scandinavian) 68, 81, 88, 131
see also Denmark; Norse
- Schelling, F. 130
 Schleiermacher, F. 85, 181
 Schmitt, C. 21–24, 226
 Scotland (Scottish) 4, 8
 scripture, scriptural *see* bible
 Sen, A. 9, 202, 222
 Sieyès, E. 7
 single individual, the *see* individual, the
 Slesvig-Holstein 67, 85
 Smith, A.D. 3, 6
 Socrates (Socratic) 27, 99, 147, 148, 153, 157
 Stalin, J. (Satlinism) 140, 167, 168
 state (statehood) 3, 21–26, 131, 162, 164–165,
 190, 208, 210, 213
 Christian state 60–64, 136, 176–177, 199,
 216–217, 227 *see also* church
 as object of patriotism 11–14
 see also Martensen, H.L.; nation
- Strauss, D.F. 192
 Stroner, G.J. 94
 success 178, 179, 181, 183–186, 224
 suffering 178–186
- Taylor, C. 15, 190
 time (temporality) 92, 96, 98, 100, 101–106,
 109, 183 *see also* history; moment, the
 Tolstoy, L. 1, 140
- United Kingdom 213 *see also* Britain;
 England; Scotland; Wales
 United States of America *see* America
verdens-historien see Grundtvig, N.F.S.
- Viroli, M. 211
 Vincent, A. 211
 Volf, M. 221
- Wales (Welsh) 4
 Weber, M. 5–6
 West, C. 28
 Westphal, M. 7, 26–29, 167
 world-history (world-historical) *see* history