Kierkegaardian Selfhood as Pursuit of the Greatest Commandment



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SHORT ABSTRACT

"Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). Refusing to regard Kierkegaard's grasp of Jesus' injunction within the Greatest Commandment as referencing one love that is either synonymous with faith or mere sidebar concern en route to exposition of an ethics of neighbour love, this thesis examines what it means for a human being to love God *per se*. It is proposed that, for Kierkegaard, loving God is a spiritual act that incorporates a dynamic process of dying away in love to enact one's death to psychogenic idols of the mind, therein striving to become a self in giving all one's heart, soul, and mind to God and not to sundry idols or proxies for God.

Following consideration of the relationship between nihilism and love of God in Chapter I, and in contrast to studies which equate nihilism (i.e., willed negation of self and world) with, for example, irony and despair, Chapter II argues that nihilism is profitably understood as a philosophy of will arising from a trajectory of thought tracking to Arthur Schopenhauer. To begin disclosing the way in which Kierkegaardian love of God deploys dying away, which, taken out of context may sound nihilistic but in fact entirely eschews Schopenhauer's foremost expression of nihilism, Chapter III examines Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer. Then, Chapter IV considers three deliverances of the Moravian Pietism in which Kierkegaard was raised—kenotic Christology, apophaticism, and a distinctive doctrine of grace—that shape his conception of loving God and distinguish it from Schopenhauerian nihilism. In turn, the concluding Chapter V asserts that, for Kierkegaard, to love God is to employ love's dying away to purge oneself of adherence to idols of the mind

(including Schopenhauerian knowledge of the *nihil* or nothingness of self, world, and God) and therein offer a love to God that is individually one's own.

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LONG ABSTRACT

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:36–40; see also, e.g., Lev. 19:18, Deut. 6:5, Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28, Rom. 13:9, Gal. 5:14, James 2:8; cf. Exod. 20:6, Matt. 5:43, 19:19). Whereas multiple prior investigations have more or less exclusively attended to the 'second commandment' or else regarded the 'first commandment' as identical with faith and a mere conceptual aside or self-explanatory and self-evident minutia of the 'second' in expounding Søren Kierkegaard's (1813–1855) ethical and theological thought, the Danish theologian and philosopher's grasp of the 'first commandment' and attending love of God just as such remains relatively uncharted. Indeed, many studies of Kierkegaard's theological ethics have sought to illumine the topic of love and, in doing so, positively identified the love of God with faith on the one hand or the normative ethics of neighbour love on the other. However, refusing to regard Jesus' first injunction within the Greatest Commandment as referencing one love of God that is either wholly synonymous with faith or a sidebar concern en route to exposition of Kierkegaard's Christian ethics, this dissertation analyses the writings of Kierkegaard in a novel way to examine the question of what it means for a human being to love God *per se*. The dissertation proposes that, for Kierkegaard, loving God is a spiritual act which specifically incorporates a dynamic process of dying away in love to enact one's death to psychogenic idols of the mind. In this way, it is argued, one authentically strives to become a

self, individually and subjectively loving God by, in the vernacular of the Greatest Commandment, giving all one's heart, soul, and mind to God rather than to sundry idols or idolatrous proxies for God.

The central argument of this dissertation—that which aims to illumine the love of God in Kierkegaard as the death to the psychogenic idols of the mind—is articulated across five substantive chapters. Chapter I sketches the importance of grasping a robust sense of nihilism and distinguishing it from the love of God within Kierkegaard's thought for the full illumination of the latter. This is done through a consideration of certain of Kierkegaard's explicit and recurrent statements of the entailments of loving God (which seem to suggest something like 'nihilism') as well as noting nihilism as a concept that, whilst related to such terms as Kierkegaardian irony, despair, and levelling, nevertheless is not blanketly identical to such. Further establishing the significance of identifying/distinguishing nihilism and the love of God within Kierkegaard's thought, Chapter I additionally includes a targeted review of the extant secondary literature appertaining to Kierkegaardian selfhood, love, and nihilism-proximate ideas including negation, annihilation, resignation, and renunciation as well as discussion of Kierkegaard's pivotal concept of love's dying away (Danish: *Afdøelse*) or 'to die away' (*at afdø*) as the idea abridging nihilism and the love of God.

If nihilism is to be meaningfully cleaved from Kierkegaardian love of God and the latter thereby illuminated all the more, then it is important to specify nihilism amidst the confounding plethora of nihilism*s* one prospectively encounters if reading thinkers writing before, during, and after Kierkegaard's life. To this end, Chapter II hews close to Kierkegaard's own historical milieu to give specific form to the nihilism invoked in this dissertation (i.e., a willed spirit of negation culminating in total loss of self, world, and God). That is, Chapter II traces a philosophy of will beginning with Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) transcendental idealism and continuing through J. G. Fichte's (1762–1814) idealist doctrine

of the absolute I or ego, which, in the eyes of Fichte's contemporary, F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819), was the original expression of nihilism (German: *Nihilismus*). According to Jacobi, the original emergence of nihilism in Fichte inhered in the fact that Fichte's assertion of the absolute I, as the source from which both the self and not-self emerge, effectively annihilated the existence of the world, others, God, and all that which and all those who have their ontological ground outside of the self. Relative to the aim of this dissertation, whether Jacobi's assessment of Fichte is valid matters less than the fact that Fichte's philosophy served as scaffold to the nihilism of certain of the German Romantic authors, including Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829). The claim made in this chapter is neither that all German Romantics were exponents of nihilism nor that nihilism is somehow native to the methodology of the *Frühromantiker* or Romanticism more generally (e.g., the respective works of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1829) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), for example, loom large as salient exceptions to such generalisations). Rather, the claim is that the appropriation of Fichte by Schlegel effectively radicalised nihilism from a consequence of an epistemological and ontological project to a doctrine with more definite and deleterious (even diabolical) ethical-religious implications. Yet even still, insofar as the nihilism of the German Romantics upheld a telos to existence (viz., the forum in which self- and world-knowledge are sought) and tenability of selfhood (even if demonic), it cannot be considered the most authentic form of nihilism. Chapter II therefore concludes by offering the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and, more specifically, his ethic of ascetic negation of the will-to-live which purports to ablate self, world, and God *in toto*, more so than the respective philosophies and aesthetics of the *Frühromantiker* such as Schlegel, as the true apex of nihilism.

With the specific portrayal of nihilism in view, then, in order to begin uncovering the way in which Kierkegaardian love of God incorporates a dynamic sense of negation and

dying away whilst eschewing Schopenhauer's superlative nihilism, Chapter III examines Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer's thought coming principally in the former's late journals. The inclusion of this analysis in this dissertation is particularly significant as an original contribution to the Kierkegaard studies literature insofar as few studies to date, especially in English-speaking scholarship, have examined Kierkegaard in relation to Schopenhauer and none (at least none located) have explored Kierkegaard and the love of God as formulated in the Greatest Commandment with respect to Schopenhauer's particular expression of nihilism. The analysis of Chapter III argues that Schopenhauer's ethics of ascetic negation of the will-to-live, while presenting as the purest form of nihilism which affirms cosmic disorder and meaninglessness and denies any teleological structuring or goal-orientation to the cosmos, nevertheless requires a goal or *telos*. And, for this, Schopenhauer naturally nominates asceticism or witnessing to nothingness in a continual negation of the will-to-live. In Kierkegaard's assessment, the goal subserving Schopenhauerian nihilism is deficient because ascetic witness to nothingness in continual negation of the will-to-live does not and cannot aspire to eternity, conceived of in a religious sense, and this shortcoming expresses itself in an intractable conceptual difficulty. On the surface, Kierkegaard observes that this difficulty manifests as Schopenhauer's overt hypocrisy in at once advocating full rejection of the will-to-live while implicitly affirming the will-to-live in seeking after certain of its temporal fruits including, chiefly, intellectual and moral elitism. At a deeper level, this inconsistency betokens the more intractable problem such that the central precept of Schopenhauer's philosophical project—the will-to-live's free abolition of itself—remains inexplicable with Schopenhauer unable to account for how the will-to-live can even possibly not will. Indeed, as Kierkegaard observes, Schopenhauer ostensibly contravenes his own principle that philosophy uncovers truth and looks to theology only for allegories and metaphors with which to communicate said truth insofar as the *Weltschmerz* philosopher of

nihilism problematically appeals to either chance or grace (ostensibly removed from Christian doctrine) as attempted explanans for the explanandum of the will-to-live's self-elimination. In effect, Kierkegaard assesses Schopenhauer as questionably recruiting a Christian and therefore, to Schopenhauer, outmoded theological framework of which grace is part to buttress the credibility of the purportedly literal philosophical truth of how the nihilistic negation of the will-to-live is actualised. Hence, Chapter III concludes in noting the hollow reliance of Schopenhauerian nihilism upon Christian theology relative to Kierkegaard's more readily intelligible reliance on a Christian theological framework that indeed shapes his particular grasp of loving God.

Chapter IV, in turn, examines this Christian theological framework. More specifically, Chapter IV considers certain salient aspects of the Christian tradition in which Kierkegaard was raised—Kierkegaard's upbringing in Moravian Pietism, deriving therefrom a uniquely kenotic Christological (or at least Christocentric) orientation, appropriating certain of its mystical, apophatic, or negative theological tendencies, and expressing a distinctive doctrine of grace—and points to how each of these components ground Kierkegaard's conception of loving God. Drawing from authors influential to Moravian Pietism including Johannes Tauler (*c*. 1300–1361), Thomas à Kempis (*c*. 1380–1471), and Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Kierkegaard cultivates the view that to love at all and therefore to love God in the Christian sense is the task of a lifetime modelled after Christ and this imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) necessarily entails one's death to self and world. This fulsome negation, it would seem, places Kierkegaard close to Schopenhauer to the point of prospective elision of Kierkegaardian Christianity with Schopenhauerian nihilism and, indeed, multiple commentators have interpreted Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer in precisely this ultimately united manner. However, Chapter IV contends that, where Schopenhauer offers a one-sided and univocal nihilism, Kierkegaard offers not nihilism, not even an *empowering* nihilism, but

rather, more accurately in light of the model of nihilism established in the preceding chapters of this dissertation, a principal of love's dying away. Recalling Kierkegaard's criticism of Schopenhauer such that the latter does not aspire to religious eternity, what specifically makes love's dying away (viz., in *imitatio Christi*) a powerful principle within Kierkegaard's thought is that it sets in time an eternal task, indeed a task of becoming a Kierkegaardian self: God's existence examination of whether love (as modelled by Christ) truly resides within the self. Kierkegaard's texts give no illusion as to the profound difficulty of the task of love, selfhood, or God's "existence examination." In fact, continuing to draw from the writers and forerunners of his Moravian Pietist spirituality and more specifically their apophatic tendencies, Kierkegaard further sets his principle of love's dying away enfolded in *imitatio Christi* apart from Schopenhauerian nihilism by resolutely stopping at, in the language of negative theology, the *via negativa*. However arduous to implement and maintain, Kierkegaard stands for a kenosis or crucifixion of the understanding, most especially a self-emptying refusal to idolatrously believe in the human capacity to acquire knowledge of the Mind of God itself and therein comprehend the divine mysteries which transcend human understanding. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, veritably transitions from a *via negativa* to a *via mystica* and cataphatically affirms the nihilistic knowledge of the nothingness of self, world, and God—that is, the higher *gnōsis* or Gnostic knowledge that the mysteries of self, world, and God are entirely explicable as *nihil*. As significant as *imitatio Christi* and the related kenosis of Kierkegaard's *via negativa* are in themselves, Chapter IV further considers that the doctrine of grace as a third deliverance of Moravian Pietism crucially informs the inbuilt paradoxicality of Kierkegaard's conception of loving God. For Kierkegaard, not only are human beings not even capable of following the prototype of Christ to perfectly die to self and world and therein love as Christ loved, we also cannot understand the paradox of the Christ whom Christians are invited to imitate any more than we can acquire knowledge of the

nature and mysteries of God. We cannot, in sum, understand the workings of grace and, whereas there is literally nowhere within Schopenhauer's godless philosophical system from whence grace could issue, grace as that which "is not given to be understood" stays intelligibly at home within Kierkegaard's theological framework as a deliberate aporia and inexplicable paradox and, as such, entirely antithetical to a higher *gnōsis* such as that found in Schopenhauerian nihilism. Having detailed Kierkegaard's Pietism-inspired espousal of *imitatio Christi*, apophaticism, and grace, then, Chapter IV ends in noting the application of this tripartite inheritance as a theological grammar for expressing Kierkegaard's distinctive account of human conation which embodies the Kierkegaardian love of God.

Concluding this dissertation, Chapter V builds from Kierkegaard's account of human conation, and specifically the need for God forming the conative core of the love of God and asserts that Kierkegaard embraces loving God as the will to die to the psychogenic idols of the mind. The chapter then considers in detail the meaning of the Greatest Commandment, what idolatry consists in, the forms that idols of the mind may assume, as well as the nature of the process of psychogenesis from which the idols of the mind are said to derive. In each instance, it is contended that Kierkegaard leaves finite specification of idols and the psychogenic process from which idols derive as ambiguous, thereby (circumnavigating *de facto* idolisation of human epistemic and dialectical faculties) guiding a move away from the search for definite knowledge and to one's vigilant, metacognitive effort to effect love's dying away with one's idolatrous lower-order thoughts ceding to one's higher-order love of God. A willed act of concession that is not done unless one needs God, recognising that the "fundamental and primary basis for a person's love of God is to understand that one needs God." In this way, engaging the task or "existence examination" of whether love exists within the individual, one works to genuinely love God who is love and therein become a Kierkegaardian self. One works to hold fast above all else to God or give the self—one's

heart, soul, and mind—to God, offering a love to God that is thoroughly one's own. Chapter V then considers how willingly deploying love's dying away to enact one's death to psychogenic idols of the mind reflects a genuine expression of loving God *per se*. Finally, Chapter V ends with consideration of the profound, if disturbing, depths (fuelling the need for God) to which Kierkegaardian love of God leads insofar as it entails the renunciation of knowledge including the Schopenhauerian nihilistic knowledge of the nothingness of self, world, and God and points to the corresponding significance of Christ and the wider passion of Kierkegaardian faith in Christ, of which loving God is the precursory step.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements **xiv**

Sigla **xv**

Chapter I: Introduction **1**

The Aim of this Dissertation and Direction of Argumentation 11

Methodological Provisos 17
Ricoeurian Literary Hermeneutics 23
Ricoeurian Literary Hermeneutics in this Dissertation on Kierkegaard 34

A Brief Literature Review 38
Kierkegaardian Selfhood 46
Love 50
Kierkegaard and Dying Away 54
Dying Away and the Love of God 57

The Contributions of this Study 59
Faith and Loving God 60
Dying Away as the Bridge Between Nihilism and the Love of God 65

Chapter Outline 68

Chapter II: Nihilism: From Kant's Noumenon to Schopenhauer's Negation of the *Wille zum Leben* **71**

Kant's Noumenon 77

J. G. Fichte and the Emergence of Nihilism Through the Imperialistic Conquest of the I Over the Not-I 88

Nihilism Made Manifest: Jacobi's Letters to Fichte During the Atheism Controversy 98

Romanticism: Nihilism Oriented to a Telos 101
Schlegel's Julius 106
The Religion of Romantic Nihilism 117

Schopenhauer's Nihilism: Salvation Through Asceticism 120

Chapter III: Kierkegaard's Encounter with Schopenhaurian Nihilism **137**

Kierkegaard and His Opposite 141

Kierkegaard's Ethical-Religious Objection to Schopenhauer 151

Chapter IV: Kierkegaard's Greatest Commandment **173**

Kierkegaard's Moravian Pietist Upbringing 178

Imitatio Christi 187
The God-Man and the Ordinal Problem of the Greatest Commandment 189

Erbauungsliteratur and Kierkegaard's *Imitatio Christi* 195

Nihil and Negative Theology 218
Mysticism 224
The Threat of Nihilism and Speculative Mysticism Turned Idealism 229
Nihilism and Negative Theology 235
Kierkegaardian Loving God Contra Schopenhauerian Nihilism 238

Grace 245
Dual Threats of the Monastery and Worldliness: Meritoriousness and Asceticism, Hidden Inwardness and Outwardness 247
The Paradox of Grace: "My Grace Is Sufficient For You, For My Strength Is Made Perfect In Weakness" 251
Stepping Towards the Love of God in the Greatest Commandment 255

Chapter V: Kiekegaard and the Love of God 258

Forming Heart Out of Which One Loves God By Dying to the Idols of the Mind 262
The Meaning of the Greatest Commandment 264
The Forms of the Idols of the Mind and Psychogenesis 267
Death to Idols of the Mind as the Love of God 281

When All Is Known That Can Be Known 284

Bibliography 300

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SIGLA

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BOA: *The Book on Adler, Kierkegaard's Writings XXIV*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

CD: Christian Discourses/The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress, Kierkegaard's Writings XVII. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

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Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, K. Brian Söderquist. 12 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007–20. References list volume number followed by page number and corresponding label and entry number for Kierkegaard's journals (AA–KK), notebooks (Not1–Not15), bound notebooks (NB–NB36), and "loose papers" chosen by the editors of *SKS* (see below): e.g., *KJN* 4, 118/NB:199.

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SKS: *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, onlineudgave version 2.1. Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Karsten Kynde, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Steen Tullberg. København: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, 2022, https://tekster.kb.dk/sks. References list volume number followed by page number: e.g., *SKS* 9, 151. These Danish-language references always coincide with their corresponding translations in the English-translated published writings (e.g., the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series). Given Kierkegaard's original and common labelling scheme used in both *KJN* and *SKS* (e.g., journal AA:13), I only list the journal, notebook, or loose paper coordinates for *KJN* citations without *SKS* reference to reduce redundancy and conserve space.

SUD: *The Sickness unto Death, Kierkegaard's Writings XIX*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

SLW: *Stages on Life's Way, Kierkegaard's Writings XI*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

TA: *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review, Kierkegaard's Writings XIV*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

UDVS: *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits, Kierkegaard's Writings XV*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

WA: *Without Authority, Kierkegaard's Writings XVIII*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

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Chapter I

Introduction

> *Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*
>
> —*Matthew 22:36–38*

Within the plentiful and diverse writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), what does it mean for a human being to love God? In this dissertation, I investigate this question and present the thesis that loving God is Kierkegaard's conception of the *summum bonum* of selfhood that is at once formulated (1) negatively in terms of a complement of ideas, if at times sounding like, nevertheless cutting a clear and decisive conceptual line from modern philosophical nihilism including negation, annihilation, resignation, renunciation, and "dying away" and (2) positively in terms of religious upbringing and becoming spirit in a grace-given relationship with God.[1] Succinctly put, I argue that, for Kierkegaard, loving God amounts to a formation of the heart in which one willingly endeavours to effect a spiritual death—to die to the psychogenic idols of the mind and therein offer a love to God that is uniquely, subjectively, and individually one's own.[2] In the course of arguing the case for holding Kierkegaardian love of God as an act of will that in some respects resembles but

[1] *KJN* 9, 68/NB26:68.

[2] As will become clear in the course of this dissertation, the 'God' one is enjoined to love in the Greatest Commandment is, for Kierkegaard, neither thought of as an object 'out there' to be known nor ineffably sensed or intuited in, for example, an ecstatic moment of mystical apprehension of truth. Rather, as signaled by the title of one of Kierkegaard's journal entries from 1853, "The Infinite Change in the Concept of God Corresponding to Dying Away" (*KJN* 9, 193–5/NB27:78), loving God necessarily entails a dramatic renovation of and continual evolution in one's conception of God.

nevertheless decisively differs from modern philosophical nihilism, this dissertation makes plain that, for Kierkegaard, loving God is not simply synonymous with faith nor is it the grand sum total of a Christian ethic of loving one's neighbour. For, in the case of the former, faith is a broader phenomenon of which loving God is part and, in the case of the latter, while neighbour love is indeed necessary and the love of God implies the love of others, it does not exhaust what it means nor is it sufficient for loving God. To love God *per se*, as I endeavour to exposit, comprises the spiritual act of stripping oneself of all adherences to idols or idolatrous proxies for God. In this way, albeit reaching the point marked by aporia and unknowing, one loves God in the vein of giving, in the vernacular of the Greatest Commandment, all one's heart, soul, and mind to God, which is fundamentally incommunicable within the context of neighbour love alone and may be obscured by reference to faith *simpliciter*.[3]

As I develop my argument across this dissertation, it will be become manifest (I hope) as to why any comprehensive and coherent Kierkegaardian depiction of loving God *qua* fundamental act of conation or will (and need) requires *both* portrayal of the love of God as well as articulation and evaluation of (as well as demarcation from) modern philosophical nihilism. Of note, even setting aside full understanding as the goal of inquiry, while it may be true that Kierkegaard's remark in *Works of Love* that "[a] person should love God

[3] The two-part Greatest Commandment is first disclosed piecemeal within the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5, 10:12; cf. Exod. 20:6), and later united into a tandem comprising a double love command in the New Testament (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28; cf. Matt. 5:43, 19:19). One half of the Greatest Commandment—to love one's neighbour—is also employed by Paul (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14), by the writer James (2:8), in the Didache (1:2, 2:7), and in Barnabas (19:5). As my study is not one of biblical exegesis, however, I focus on the New Testament formulations of the Greatest Commandment and generally leave comparison of the scriptural portrayal of the Greatest Commandment as well as extensive hermeneutical considerations attending thereto to commentaries such as that of Reginald H. Fuller ("The Double Command of Love: A Test Case for the Criteria of Authenticity," in *Essays on the Love Command*, ed. and trans. Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 41–51) and Victor Paul Furnish (*The Love Command in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1973)).

unconditionally *in obedience* and love him *in adoration*" identifies two features of loving God—obedience and adoration—which are neatly explicable without reference to nihilism, I deduce that engaging the idolatries of disobedience and abhorrence or hatred better ventilates the consideration.[4] More acutely, and stepping apart from *Works of Love* alone to take stock of some of Kierkegaard's other, more trenchant remarks, it strikes me as entirely impossible to surmise what Kierkegaard could mean when he rhetorically queries his reader, "and you, who feel yourself at such a great remove from your God—when your contrition seeks God, what is it, after all, other than loving God[?]" *without* specifying (even in general terms) that for which one is contrite.[5] Equally, attempting to adjudge Kierkegaard's claim that "[Christianity] teaches that to love God is: to die, to die away, the most agonizing of all agonies," and in general that dying to oneself and the world just is loving God is fundamentally inscrutable *without* specifying an essential world and worldliness (or will and spirit underpinning such) to which one is to die.[6] And again, there appears to be little hope in making sense of Kierkegaard's repeated assessments that "if you want to love God in truth, this must be demonstrated by cheerfully, adoringly letting yourself be entirely annihilated by God in order that he might carry out his will unconditionally" and that "God creates everything out of nothing—and everything [read: including *everyone*] God is to use he first turns to nothing," *without* specifying how being annihilated and turned to nothing compares with nihilism.[7] So, too, it does not appear especially promising to interpret Kierkegaard's recurrent claim that it is "not possible to love God in a Christian way and be happy in this world," or, what is more, that "humanly speaking, God must make you unhappy if he is to love you and you are to love him," and "it cannot be otherwise—a [human] being cannot love

[4] *WL* 19/*SKS* 9, 27. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from this and other foreign language titles and text passages are my own and I am solely responsible for any errors.
[5] *KJN* 3, 213/NB7:49.
[6] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 384/Paper 578; *KJN 9*, 68–71/NB26:68; *KJN* 8, 483–4/NB25:58.
[7] *KJN* 10, 49/NB31:68; *KJN* 10, 111/NB31:155.

God in any other way. He must be in a state of agony so that, were he a pagan, he would not for an instant hesitate to commit suicide…[this] is the condition for being able to love God" *without* at least attempting to disentangle the crestfallen unhappiness of nihilism from the pathos of loving God.[8] Finally, indeed, Kierkegaard's plumbing meditations of what it is to love and the need of love appear to necessitate explicit consideration of what it is to *not* love. In one of his *Christian Discourses* to which I return in the penultimate chapter of this dissertation, Kierkegaard notes that "need brings its nourishment along with it; what is sought is in the seeking that seeks it; faith is in the concern over not having faith; love is in the self-concern over not loving."[9] Accordingly, then, and taken together, attentive, contextualised, and rich consideration of the theme of loving God within Kierkegaard demands contemplation of nihilism. To this end, though I make no attempt to hide the fact that there exists a yawning aporia within Kierkegaard's discussion of loving God and that this is integral to Kierkegaard's renowned grasp of subjectivity or inwardness, in this dissertation, nihilism is taken as a reference point which, by means of contrast, serves the heuristic function of better illuminating the nature of loving God within Kierkegaard's writings.

To be sure, there is a sense in which relating the theme of loving God and nihilism is encumbered by greater difficulties than is straightforward illumination of the love of God in Kierkegaard.[10] Of note, though no less multivalent than 'love,' and, for that matter, 'God,'

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[8] *KJN* 9, 471/NB30:96; *KJN* 10, 183/NB32:93; *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 378/Paper 573.
[9] *CD* 244/*SKS* 10, 251.
[10] This dissertation is by no means the first or only effort in which nihilism meshes with the theological ideas of a Christian thinker. Helmut Thielicke, for example, recruits Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)—who, George Pattison and Kate Kirkpatrick comment, "saw human existence as cast adrift in a limitless space of nothingness" (see fragment 201 (using the Lafuma numbering scheme) of *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), 66; *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought: Being, Nothingness, Love* (London: Routledge, 2019), 16)—and more specifically a Pascalian relationship with God as integral to a Christian treatment of nihilism: "the only legitimate way I can pose the question of how to overcome nihilism…is to ask myself: How can *I* become a man again? How can *I* regain the only relationship in which existence is possible?...I cannot regain the world unless I regain my *self*. And I cannot regain my self unless I regain God…[Here] we must strictly observe the order

'nihilism' is a uniquely opaque term and, as such, at first blush, not especially well-suited to illuminating Kierkegaard's writings vis-à-vis the love of God. For example, speaking to a miscellany of nihilism*s* in his study, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, Michael Gillespie is not wrong to observe that, historically and genealogically, the concept of nihilism has "taken on a number of various and often contradictory meanings largely because it has been used as an ideological bludgeon to denigrate nearly every intellectual or political movement that someone or other has found objectionable."[11] With Kierkegaard specifically, when not comprising an entire treatise on such, his literature is replete with mentions and full-length discussions of proxy concepts and meanings including irony, nothingness, boredom, and despair, whereas, significantly, the Danish *Nihilisme* or its linguistic cousins are seldom or never seen in the pages of the Danish theologian and philosopher's texts.[12]

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of precedence. But the very fact that we are capable of asking this ultimate question at all is in itself a tremendous comfort. For it means that we are not *alone* in our search for order, that we are not *alone* in a buried cellar, trying to dig our way out; we can hear a hammering…on the other side, and this is a sign that we are not forlorn, but somebody is seeking us. Our whole situation, in the midst of our seeking, however lost and hopeless, cannot be expressed in terms more profound and beautiful…than are found in that comforting saying of Pascal: "We should not be able to seek thee, O God, if thou hadst not already found us" [see fragment 929 of the *Pensées* (p. 296)] (*Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature—with a Christian Answer*, trans. John W. Doberstein (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 103–4).

[11] Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), vii. Interestingly, the central thesis of Gillespie's study—a *tour de force*, be it noted, from which this dissertation has greatly benefitted—is that, *pace* those who regard Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) as having provided an insuperable analysis of the various forms of nihilism and, thereupon, their consummate solution (i.e., worship of Dionysus and cultivation of the will of self-creation), Nietzsche, Gillespie argues, misunderstood nihilism (i.e., as the diminution of man) and consequently proposed a solution to it (i.e., magnification of man's spirit) which was in itself nihilistic. In treating nihilism in my study, then, I likewise do not regard Nietzsche as the foremost authority on nihilism and seek to carefully construct the concept and, correspondingly, the love of God, by attending to Kierkegaard and thinkers who generally wrote *before* Nietzsche (see also 20n).

[12] Whether *Nihilisme* appears in Kierkegaard's writings depends on whether one counts the *Nachlass* as part of said writings. That is, *Nihilisme* does not occur in the pages of Kierkegaard's original published books and, within the larger *corpus kierkegaardianum*, appears in only two single journal entries—one from 1837 (*KJN* 3, 148/Not4:22) and one from 1842 (*KJN* 3, 361–4/Not11:38). Alternately, an example of a full treatise on a proxy concept of nihilism is Kierkegaard's own *Magister Artium* dissertation, *On The Concept of Irony: With Continual Reference to Socrates* (hereafter *The Concept of Irony*). For partial

The dearth and obscurity of nihilism within Kierkegaard's texts is not, however, immediately perceived as problematic. In fact, many appear content to simply meld nihilism with irony, nothingness, boredom, despair, or some combination thereof.[13] Though I agree that nihilism undeniably does overlap with such concepts, in this dissertation, I hold that a refined treatment of nihilism, expressly relating Kierkegaard's thought to that of select thinkers implicated in the aesthetic and intellectual movement of modern philosophical nihilism and expressing the distinctive notion of will that lies at the heart of nihilism, is required to more clearly see what Kierkegaard has to say about loving God. In other words, a heavy-handed fusion of nihilism with, for example, irony and despair, without coherently linking Kierkegaard to a concrete literary, philosophical, and theological heritage of nihilism, risks obscuring important subtleties which I think shed invaluable light upon what I hold to be a foundational message of loving God within Kierkegaard's writings.

And this raises a point worth elaborating vis-à-vis Kierkegaard and nihilism. Where studies such as those undertaken by Thomas Miles and Roe Fremstedal explicitly avoid conflating nihilism and Kierkegaardian despair, I, too, seek to relate and demarcate Kierkegaard's conception of loving God and nihilism without simply treating nihilism as synonymous with despair and substituting all of Kierkegaard's expansive commentary on despair as a commentary on nihilism.[14] There are good reasons to avoid simply coalescing

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discussion of the absence of nihilism from Kierkegaard's authorship, see my "'Let Not the Heart in Sorrow Sin': Considering Kierkegaard's Relation to Nihilistic Humanism as a Matter of Christian versus Pagan Truth,'" *Modern Theology* 38, no. 4 (2022): 734–6.

[13] For sample statements equating nihilism with despair and irony, see Simon D. Podmore's, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), xii, 31, 56; as well as Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 133.

[14] Thomas P. Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche: Rival Visions of the Best Way of Life," in *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 263–98; "Kierkegaard on Internal Collapse as Despair" and "Nietzsche on Internal Collapse as Nihilism" in *Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the Best Way of Life: A New Method of Ethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 104–67; and Roe Fremstedal, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: Despair and Nihilism Converge," in *Modernity—Unity in Diversity? Essays in*

nihilism and despair. First, though it is unclear why exactly Kierkegaard was almost certainly conversant with the thought of Friedrich Heinrich (F. H.) Jacobi (1743–1819) however opted to eschew the Jacobian term, nihilism (German: *Nihilismus*), as noted, the Danish cognate *Nihilisme* is indeed almost entirely absent from Kierkegaard's literature whereas his writings abound with invocations of despair (*Fortvivelse*). This lexical difference suggests a semantic difference between *Fortvivelse* and *Nihilisme*. And second, even settling on the point that a surrogate is needed, there is no consensus as to whether despair is the most apposite stand-in for nihilism. Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, for example, prefer to equate nihilism with Kierkegaard's notion of levelling whereas George Stack prefers Kierkegaard's important concept of irony and, yet different, William McDonald elects the generic concept of boredom.[15] Importantly, then, as a way through this tangle of terms, I seek to relate and distinguish nihilism and Kierkegaard regarding loving God by expressly tying Kierkegaard's thought to a specific literary, philosophical, and theological heritage of nihilism which, unlike Fremstedal and Miles, predates Nietzsche. That is, a heritage which begins with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), tracks through Johann Gottlieb (J. G.) Fichte (1762–1814), Jacobi, Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and culminates in Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).

This adherence to a precise heritage is not to say that the nihilism depicted in this dissertation is entirely dissociated from Kierkegaard's pivotal concepts. Plainly put, I concur that nihilism overlaps (at least to a degree) with such concepts as Kierkegaardian irony and despair. Of note, the defiant despair of willing to be oneself to which Anti-Climacus applies protracted criticism within *The Sickness unto Death* conspicuously applies to the Romantic

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Honour of Helge Høibraaten, ed. Audun Øfsti, Erling Skjei, and Kjartan Koch Mikalsen (Oslo: Novus Press, 2016), 455–77.

[15] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "You Can't Get Something for Nothing: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on How Not to Overcome Nihilism," *Inquiry* 30, no. 1–2 (1987): 33–75; George Stack, "Kierkegaard and Nihilism," *Philosophy Today* 14, no. 4 (1970): 274–92; William McDonald, "Kierkegaard's Demonic Boredom," in *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*, eds. Carlo Salzani and Barbara Dalle Pezze (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 61–84.

brand of nihilism shown in Chapter II and indeed my discussion in general is informed by Kierkegaard's Christian pseudonym at multiple junctures. Nonetheless, Alastair Hannay puts it well in writing that "[m]uch of Kierkegaard, particularly Anti-Climacus, reads as though all that goes before is to be grasped from the point of view of what comes last, namely religiousness."[16] Here, Hannay raises the prospect that failing to disclose a nihilistic alternative to Anti-Climacus's spiritual therapeutics and religiousness represents Kierkegaard's failure to account for a deeper, more inclusive kind of despair or, worse, *pace* all that which he says about despair, irony, nothingness, boredom, *et cetera*, that there is a truth left entirely unaddressed by Kierkegaard.[17] As Anti-Climacus does not make explicit, that there *is* Anti-Climacus's saving option of the task of transparently relating to one's eternal Creator is, in Hannay's words, "not given unless we adopt the religious framework, and before doing that we will have to grant that nihilism might equally be true."[18] And, if we are to envision what it is like for nihilism to be true and how it relates to differs from the Kierkegaardian love of God, then we have to envision what nihilism is, and hence specifying a precise heritage of nihilism and seeing how Kierkegaard relates to it is key.

It is on this basis, then, that I assert that sweeping amalgamation of nihilism with associated concepts like irony and despair obscures the focal topic of this study, the love of God in Kierkegaard, especially given (as I enlarge upon below) ostensive negative theological and apophatic parallels between nihilism *qua* act of will and the love of God *qua* need for God. In turn, I strive for precise relation of Kierkegaard's thought regarding the love

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[16] Alastair Hannay, "Spirit and the Idea of the Self as a Reflexive Relation," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to 'The Sickness unto Death'*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 38.
[17] On Anti-Climacus's and Kierkegaard's spiritual therapeutics, see, David Possen, "Anti-Climacus, the 'Physician of Souls'," in *Kierkegaard and the Word(s): Essays on Hermeneutics and Communication*, ed. Poul Houe and Gordon Marino (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2003), 105–15; and Simon D. Podmore, "Kierkegaard as Physician of the Soul: On Self-Forgiveness & Despair," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 37, no. 3 (2009): 174–85.
[18] Hannay, "Spirit," 38.

of God to those who express the distinctive notion of will that lies at the heart of nihilism in hopes of rendering a clearer picture of Kierkegaardian loving God (and the will and need residing therein) than has heretofore been attained.

Still, all of this said, it is worth acknowledging that, weaving together the strands of my argument must be done judiciously. Fortuitously, whatever challenges do lie ahead, if ever there was one on whom to rely in building a nuanced argument in which loving God and nihilism interface, Kierkegaard is it. As Simon Podmore observes in his insightful book, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, it is because he "intimately knew the bitter waters of religious melancholy that Kierkegaard is so adept at evoking the unconditional love of God without subsequently undermining the human pathos of despair. What he endured spiritually…would have consigned many to the nihilism of a final despair. But Kierkegaard was able to derive hope by showing in his writings how despair (*Fortvivelse*) is born of doubt (*tvivl*), and therefore how its spell can be broken by faith [*tro*] in forgiveness and the love of God."[19] Save Podmore's imprecise union of nihilism and despair, as well as a principal ambiguity as to whether Podmore's indication of the love of God denotes God's graceful love for humans or, the other way round, human love for God, I otherwise concur with his assessment and, for this reason, seek to do justice in this dissertation to Kierkegaard's challenging yet penetrating writings in asserting loving God as Kierkegaard's complement of ideas that relate to, but are nevertheless distinguishable from, nihilism (just as such) while venturing out on the premise that Kierkegaard's texts possess the internal resources for me to intelligibly do so.

Succinctly put, then, the nihilism that illuminates Kierkegaard's conception of loving God in this dissertation is specifically construed as a negating will culminating in a complete and total negation of the self and world housed in knowledge that God's being is pure nothing

[19] Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, xii.

or *nihil*.[20] As Gillespie has persuasively argued, nihilism "worships a dark god of negation" and has its most immediate origins in the foundations of modern thought as a spiritual movement undertaken in an ill-fated effort to cultivate the self by obtaining unbridled freedom and knowledge via the negation of every authority over oneself including the authority of one's own heart or conscience and the ethical-religious foundation thereto.[21] Accordingly, while I agree that nihilism starts as a cultivation of freedom and knowledge yet eventuates in complete dissolution of the self, world, and God, unlike Gillespie, I take the most acute expression of nihilism to manifest in Schopenhauer, and correspondingly, in discussing the pinnacle of nihilism from which the Kierkegaardian love of God eminently departs, recurrently refer to Schopenhauer's philosophical project and Schopenhauerian nihilism.

[20] Attesting further to a plethora of nihilism*s* over a singular and monolithic Nihilism, and therefore to the importance of linking Kierkegaard and a particular literary, philosophical, and theological heritage, Conor Cunningham characterises nihilism as a logic wherein a given something is reduced to nothing and, paradoxically, this nothing is claimed to be, after all, something. See §*The Nothing as Something* within Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), xiii–xviii. Cunningham enlists numerous examples of nihilism, notably those common within contemporary philosophy of mind which endeavour to reduce consciousness to a vacuity of mechanical nothingness. Namely, consciousness is presented as *nothing but* the burps and squirts of neuronal functioning, which is itself comprised of, to use the critical words of George Ellis, electrons and protons "algorithmically following the imperatives of Maxwell's equations and quantum physics" ("Physics, Complexity, and the Science-Religion Debate" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 758). Rather than engage contemporary discussions of nihilistic reductionism within scientific discourse, and to curtail the scope of my inquiry to manageability, as indicated above (11n), I aim throughout my study to hew closer to Kierkegaard and his own historical milieu and discuss nihilism in the parlance of those thinkers who, with certain exceptions, predominately wrote before or contemporaneous with Kierkegaard and, at any rate, within the so-called long nineteenth century (*c.* 1789–1914) and for whom nihilism was more or less explicitly grounded on a spirit of negation in search of freedom and knowledge.

[21] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, xxiii.

THE AIM OF THIS DISSERTATION AND DIRECTION OF ARGUMENTATION

Against this conception of nihilism, and whatever promises nihilism (so conceived) does offer, it warrants explicit statement here that the primary aim of this dissertation is to illuminate the love of God in Kierkegaard as the death to the psychogenic idols of the mind. Every sub-argument and apparent digression, each discussion, excursus, and consideration of topics and thinkers outside of Kierkegaard *per se* is ultimately intended to shed light upon this focal aim. Though it is unquestionably the case that, in pursuing this primary aim, this dissertation includes a number of subsidiary concerns—of note, expressing a coherent sense of modern philosophical nihilism, marking a difference between Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaardian love of God, tracing the sources from which that difference originates within the philosophical and theological ancestry of nihilism on the one hand and the love of God on the other (viz., Moravian Pietism and Christian mysticisms), differentiating Kierkegaardian faith *writ large* from loving God just as such—it must be noted that each of these topics remain of secondary or ancillary importance and are intended to service the primary aim of articulating the love of God in Kierkegaard. This is not to deny the significance of these issues in and of themselves, which I have already noted and will continue to do so. However, holding the aim of elucidating the love of God in Kierkegaard as primary and the remainder as subsidiary concerns is done principally because, for a dissertation on Kierkegaard that seeks to posit Kierkegaard's contextualised and situated conception of loving God, there is inordinate risk in obscuring the foundational message of loving God in the writings of Kierkegaard. There is inordinate risk in having one's investigative gaze swerve to fixate matters related to but not identical with the love of God in Kierkegaard if one attempts to, for example, intensively consider all facets of Kierkegaard's relation to Schopenhauer to document the definite similarities/differences between the two thinkers or, alternately, the complex ways in which Moravian Pietism and the various strains

of Christian mysticism did and did not influence Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaardian love of God, respectively. In other words, then, this dissertation remains a concerted investigation of Kierkegaard and his conception of loving God rather than intensive investigation of Schopenhauer, nihilism, or the deep and diverse ancestries of nihilism and the love of God, even if this dissertation does have application to such areas of inquiry.

Having noted the primary aim of this dissertation, the general trajectory of my argument is that, after defining what I take nihilism to be, the one-sided negating will of nihilism culminating in knowledge of self, world, and God as *nihil* eminently embraced by Schopenhauer contains a potentially fatal flaw or hamartia at its core and this is diagnosed by none other than Kierkegaard himself. Specifically, Kierkegaard assesses Schopenhauerian nihilism as lacking an intelligible sense of religious eternity and corresponding eternal *teloi* or goals. Digging into this criticism prompts consideration of Moravian Pietism and its theological predecessors, which, I contend, and routing back to the primary aim of this dissertation, gives form to Kierkegaard's theological conception of loving God as the willed death to the psychogenic idols of the mind. A theological conception of loving God that, if aporetically, *may* circumnavigate the fault lines of Schopenhauerian nihilism.

Despite serving as the conclusive direction of the argument of this dissertation, the overall validity of which will be born and become assessable in the course of the ensuing chapters, it may be observed here from the outset that—cognizant of Johannes Climacus's remarks in *Philosophical Fragments* that "the faith that celebrates triumphantly is the most ludicrous of all"—I couch the merit of loving God relative to nihilism in inconclusive diction without pretence of theological triumphalism.[22] This, apart from Climacus, I have specifically done not out of religious indifference or dispassionate agnosticism but rather out of consideration of three principal and interrelated reasons. First, I do not conceive my project

[22] *PF* 108/*SKS* 4, 304.

as one of Christian apologetics and therefore do not envisage loving God which I express in this dissertation as one which will at all convince dyed-in-the-wool nihilists of an atheistic or, *a fortiori*, misotheistic (i.e., God-hating) bent.[23] In this way, what Timothy Houston Polk says of his argument pertaining to reading Kierkegaard by the rule of biblical faith applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to my own project: "So as an argument of orthodox apologetics meant to compel unbelievers by dint of logic and evidence, i.e., directly…proves singularly ineffective, since it is not adducible from anything to which the uncommitted has immanent access."[24] To me, this is just as it should be given that I do not see an apologetic intention—even an ancillary one—of proselytization as a desirable end towards which I should strive with my study. Indeed, I am not especially interested in defending Christianity and therein becoming a "Judas No. 2," who, like the original Judas, betrays with a kiss except that this treason "is the treason of stupidity."[25] At least in my mind, and recruiting here the senses of the terms in which the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:18–23) invokes, and Kierkegaard emulates, them, to evangelically aim at argumentation tantamount to religious conversion at once risks ablating the *skandalon*, stumbling block, or offensiveness of Christianity as well as runs counter to the inwardness of Christian religious existence as I think of such. In any event, as will become apparent in my discussion, I hold that overly rigid demarcations between classical atheism and theism often implicit in apologetics collapses in incoherence if one loves God in the Kierkegaardian sense, in dying to or struggling with "one's fears and desires, with the idols

[23] For delineation of misotheism from atheism and related nomenclature, see Bernard Schweizer, *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6–23.
[24] Timothy Houston Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 72.
[25] *SUD* 87/*SKS* 11, 200.

of the mind"—that is, if one strives to "free the self from its own delusions and attachments to its own God-images."[26]

Further to this, second, I am convinced that maintaining inconclusive diction is best suited to embracing the love of God in Kierkegaard's sense insofar as it deliberately aims to obviate idolatry. Here, again, Podmore's words resonate when he writes that theologies, such as that in which Kierkegaard's love of God is documented, are at their worst when they attempt to normatively formulate a prescriptive *via dolorosa* or processional way of sorrow and suffering through which one perforce *must* pass: "No theology of spiritual struggle should be asserted that in any sense excludes or denigrates those who do not or cannot achieve this via. Any theology of spiritual trial must, as any theology must, be wary of

[26] Simon D. Podmore, *Struggling with God: Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2013), 24. It is not unfair to cite Don Cupitt's use of Kierkegaard's discussion of love (see *WL* 345–58/*SKS* 9, 339–52; "The New World," in *Sea of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 193–232) to get a sense of the calibre of struggle with the mind's idols at issue in my construal of Kierkegaardian loving God. Succinctly, Cupitt observes that Kierkegaard considers the love of one dead as being (precisely by virtue of the dead *ipso facto* being unable to give anything to the lover in return) the purest, most unselfish, and most genuine form of love. In turn, Cupitt suggests that Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God may be interpreted in light Kierkegaard's depiction of selfless love. Nietzsche describes churches as tombs of a dead God, writing in *The Gay Science* that, "[a]fter the Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries…God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow" (*The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109). Nietzsche's comment has commonly been taken to refer to persons of Christian faith. Or, as David Bentley Hart puts it, to "those poor souls who continue to make their placid, bovine trek to church every week to worship a God who passed away long ago" ("Believe It or Not," *First Things*, 1 May 2010, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/05/believe-it-or-not). However, contends Cupitt, selfless love in Kierkegaard's sense does not stop at atheistic triumphalism but rather takes seriously the question as to whether it is a genuine work of love to, following the death of God, still go to church and worship God just as we visit graves to speak with our lost beloveds, dead though they be. In other words that embody struggle, then, might not attendance at the liturgy or a graveside prayer expecting no response from the dead God be less self-concerned and thus more loving than one that is offered up out of a hope of reward or result? Or, entirely different, is this thinking simply indicative of the psychogenic idols of the mind (e.g., moral self-aggrandisement) that stand in the way of genuine love of God in Kierkegaard's sense?

idolatry—even an idolatry of the cross, even the temptation to form an idol of the *passio Christi*, the worship of the suffering Christ, which falls toward morbid *Christolatry*."[27] Incisive insights of Christian theologies which valorise suffering aside, then, I strive to maintain the inconclusive diction in asserting the Kierkegaardian love of God relative to nihilism so as to not undermine the former and lapse into idolatry, whether that idolatry manifests in fetishized suffering or otherwise.[28]

Finally, third, inconclusive diction is warranted in that, as does David Law, I read Kierkegaard as an apophatic theologian displaying considerable epistemological modesty and reverence for God's hiddenness and otherness.[29] In fact, as will become clear, this epistemological apophaticism critically demarcates Kierkegaardian love of God from nihilism. Thus, I do not read Kierkegaard as a dogmatic theologian concerned with articulating the nature and form of Christian love in relationship with an existent *deus* in terms of apodictic argument and propositional certainty. On the one hand, I do think that it is rather difficult to dispute Kierkegaard's resolutely and repeatedly stated position regarding the changelessness of God's love *for* each and every human being as the certain "Archimedean point" of his authorship and life-view in general.[30] On the other hand, however, as I discuss more extensively below, for Kierkegaard the astute biblical exegete (e.g., 1 John 4:19) espousing an essential Augustinian-Lutheran commitment, God's love for human beings is the source of the love that resides in a human being but God does not, as an

[27] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 39.
[28] For efforts which critique Christian, especially Catholic, theologies (e.g., Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1973), 117–36) that are said to overly venerate suffering, see Karen Kilby, "Julian of Norwich, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Status of Suffering in Christian Theology," *New Blackfriars* 99, no. 1081 (2018): 298–311; and "The Seductions of Kenosis," in *Suffering and the Christian Life*, ed. Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 163–74.
[29] David Law, "Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian," in *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 206–17.
[30] e.g., *KJN* 3, 196/Not6:24; *sic passim TM* 263–81/*SKS* 13, 319–39.

exponent of occasionalism might contend, extinguish human free will and God's love for human beings is not necessarily identical with human love for God and this dissertation fixates the *aporiae* of the latter.[31] Accordingly, though I as author conclusively hope that what I see as the angelic qualities of loving God will triumph (eschatologically and otherwise) over the more demonic tenor of nihilism, I am resigned to expressing my argument in open-ended and indeterminate rather than conclusive language.[32]

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[31] As an example of Kierkegaard's Augustinian-Lutheran theological commitment, *Works of Love* contains recurrent reference to the theological tenet—affirmed by Saint Augustine (354–430 AD; e.g., "The root of our love is with Christ, it's in God" ("Sermon 350A: On Charity and On Loving God Alone," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Sermons (341–400) on Various Subjects*, Pt. III, vol. 10, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1995), 112)) as much as Martin Luther (1483–1546; e.g., see "Treatise on Good Works," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 106–9)—that God loved human beings first and is, therefore, the originary source of love within human being (*WL* 101, 126, 336/*SKS* 9, 106, 129, 332; Cf. M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11, 135).

[32] To unequivocally state the personal vantage from which I as author write this dissertation, if faith is confessional, I am confessionally one of a struggling faith after the spirit of one of Pascal's *Pensées* wherein he describes "those who sincerely lament their doubt, who regard it as the ultimate misfortune, and who, sparing no effort to escape from it, make their search their principal and most serious business" (p. 129). So, too, quoting from a preferred translation, though I do not regard Kierkegaard as having personally eventuated in despairing doubt, one of his journal entries from 1841 resonates with what has been my most enduring and is, at the time of writing, still my most intellectually honest assessment of my own efforts to escape doubts as to the veracity of Christianity and avoid the nihilistic knowledge that God is not love, God is *nihil*: "My doubt is terrible.—Nothing can stop me—it is a hunger of damnation—I can devour every argument, every consolation, and reassurance—I rush past every obstacle at a speed of 50,000 miles a second" (*Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 138 (see also *Pap.* III A 103)). That said, in the spirit of intellectual honesty, I am not convinced that I as one writing a dissertation on the love of God and its dying away in Kierkegaard am not anything more than one who Kierkegaard derides as one who does not actually live their theology but is "a contemplation that relates contemplatively" (*KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95) to loving God and dying away. Perhaps, however, I am not unique in this tepid and tenuous Christian faith if, for example, Johann Arndt (1555–1621) is correct and a struggling faith "is a true faith; for there is a continual struggle…between faith and unbelief…perpetually assaulted by temptations to unbelief…life is one continued combat" (*True Christianity: A Treatise on Sincere Repentance, True Faith, The Holy Walk of the True Christian, etc.*, trans. A. W. Boehm [1712] (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Book Store, 1872), Book II:347).

Characterising loving God as angelic and nihilism as demonic expresses a traditional theological valuation of becoming/being over non-being (see Conor Cunningham, "Nihilism and Theology: Who Stands at the Door?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern*

These conditions aside, there are several formal methodological considerations germane to my study which now warrant commentary.

METHODOLOGICAL PROVISOS

> *The religious literature makes clear…that Kierkegaard believes that actions manifest the heart or the "inner being." In other words, the condition of our heart determines our fundamental presuppositions about ourselves, God, and what is meaningful, significant, and good.*[33]
>
> —*Matthew Frawley*

To start, it is important to point out that the reading of Kierkegaard vis-à-vis loving God offered in this dissertation is a theological construction more than a clear study in history or historiographical effort to definitively understand how Søren Aabye Kierkegaard personally conceived loving God and, by extension, his own relationship with God and his own self. That is not to say that the reading of Kierkegaard developed herein entirely eschews historical considerations—indeed, I recurrently make ample use of historical literature of Kierkegaard (and that which pertains to other thinkers) and seek to avoid both anachronism

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European Thought, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 326–7). This means that the optative tenor of this dissertation is presuppositionally at odds with that of efforts such as James Tartaglia and Tracy Llanera that seek to posit nihilism as a deeply misunderstood concept and one that is not only innocuous but a good spiritual development (see "Revaluating Nihilism," in *A Defence of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2021), 53–9). In general, Tartaglia and Llanera's work is a generally poor source to engage in my consideration of nihilism. It is certainly not a propitious source with which to converse in an effort to overcome a topsy-turvy valuation of values so as to discern whether nihilism is or can be assessed as angelic or demonic. This is conspicuously because, from the perspective of this dissertation as one which comprises a concerted study of Kierkegaard and, as noted, an avowed study of Kierkegaard's relation to thinkers writing *before* Nietzsche (see 11n), efforts such as Tartaglia and Llanera premised on espousal of nihilism with scant attention to Kierkegaard (and negligible attention to the other thinkers with which I engage) would make for a poor choice of interlocutor indeed.

[33] Matthew J. Frawley, "The Essential Role of the Holy Spirit in Kierkegaard's Biblical Hermeneutic," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, 95.

and historical revisionism. It is also not to say that the reading of Kierkegaard developed herein must needs conflict with what the real Kierkegaard, in his heart of hearts, would have intended. In fact, though ascertaining the extent to which such is achieved is, I believe, and for reasons that will be made even more explicit below when I discuss the specific hermeneutical approach of this study, not possible, it is not undesirable nor is it impossible that this dissertation produces an understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of loving God which overlaps with Kierkegaard's own veridical thoughts on the subject. That is, as Kierkegaard's thoughts veritably existed, evolved, and revolved in his mind throughout and culminated at this end of his short life. It is a project unto itself, and one beyond the scope of this dissertation, to track ideas across a lifespan and to validate the realistic position that every nuance of Kierkegaard's reflections on loving God (and the same may be said of those of any of the other thinkers discussed) was *not* intransigently fixed or static across his life. In exploring Kierkegaard's considerations of loving God, I have indeed found remarkable consistency in Kierkegaard's thoughts and I therefore correspondingly depict a stable image however I leave definitive efforts to document the extent to which Kierkegaard changed his mind or revised his reflections on these topics across his life to targeted thought histories and biographies.

Further to my own efforts, ideally, this dissertation develops, to use a metaphor employed by Hannay, a reading of Kierkegaard in the photographer's rather than the stonemason's sense such that my reading brings to light a stable image of loving God which was put there over time by Kierkegaard whereas it does not mason together from the stones of Kierkegaard's texts a freestanding composite structure which Kierkegaard would not recognise as his own.[34] Of course, *qua* metaphor, this prospect shall remain aspirational as

[34] Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.

undertaking an attempt to move beyond aspiration, remove all doubt, and recapture the real Kierkegaard is invariably perturbed by, *inter alia*, Kierkegaard's byzantine authorial method. By the indirect communication of his ambidextrous authorship (Kierkegaard having published aesthetic and philosophical treatises with his "left hand" and religious discourses with his "right"), by his hiding the secret heart of Søren behind sundry Socratic masks, literary foils, and pseudonymous personae of his own making, as well as by his enacting a daunting blend of 'redoubling' and 'reduplication' which serve to dissociate Kierkegaard's—as with others'—thoughts (e.g., intentions) and actions (e.g., writing).[35] Yes, as prodigious and rich as his work as an author indisputably was, Kierkegaard's efforts thoroughly problematise any straightforward attempts to identify his intention as the author, *intentio auctoris*, and/or Kierkegaard's own self in the process of becoming as the author standing behind the texts.[36]

As regards the formidable hermeneutical challenges with which any study of Kierkegaard must contend, then, while I avoid exclusive reliance on targeting *intentio auctoris* (as delineated further below), I do generally seek throughout my study to honour Kierkegaard's stated wish and prayer from the addendum to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in which he entreats his readers to cite the respective pseudonymous authors under whose names given works were published rather than blanketly attribute all the writings to S.

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[35] *KJN* 6, 32/NB11:53. The matter of indirect communication stretches further than Kierkegaard's oscillating pseudonymous and signed authorial method alone. For, as Paul Muench observes, "while we might want to call Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms itself an indirect device, we should also expect that there are other elements of indirectness, many of which his pseudonyms themselves may use" ("The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of 'Taking Away'" in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, 141).

[36] For concerted discussion of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity/polynymity, see Stephen Crites, "Pseudonymous Authorship as Art and as Act," in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Josiah Thompson (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1972), 183–229, and Edward F. Mooney, "Pseudonyms and 'Style,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 191–210.

Kierkegaard.[37] That said, it is not without contrition that I give up major reliance on *intentio auctoris* as a locus of textual meaning within this dissertation. In fact, some consider the demotion of *intentio auctoris* as not merely a dereliction of sound methodology but equivalent to absconding from a moral imperative. Werner Schmidt, for example, writes that "a text is the assertion of a human person, transmitted in writing—a person who can no longer defend himself against misunderstanding…[textual criticism] tries, as well as it is able, to preserve the rights of the text, and in its name to counter misinterpretations. Indeed, there is no other possible way of allowing the text, as the word of another person, the freedom to

[37] *CUP 1*, 626/*SKS* 7, 571. Though not addressing every hermeneutical difficulty, I surmise that my careful effort to avoid conflating the writings of the pseudonyms with the writings of Kierkegaard himself nevertheless profits my study. I therefore resist a totalising hermeneutic of suspicion in favour of a hermeneutic of trust in deploying this effort. That is, by hermeneutic of suspicion in contrast with one of trust, I specifically mean that I resist the out of hand acceptance of Søren's brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard's (1805–1888), suggestion (perhaps reflecting the brothers' sadly estranged relationship that unfolded during their lifetimes)—which is echoed by some scholars (e.g., Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 176)—to regard the texts bearing Søren's name as merely those of yet another pseudonym (for the verbatim statement made by Peter Christian on this point, see Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 146–50). In a journal entry from 1849, Kierkegaard reflects on the prospect of viewing his non-pseudonymous works as those of yet another pseudonym. Such commentary, Kierkegaard says, on his activity as an author could ideally be carried out by an author "who would be a synthesis of [Kierkegaard] and the pseudonym, and [the ideal author] could speak directly about [the authorship]" (*KJN* 6, 6/NB11:6). Kierkegaard further specifies that the ideal author would confirm that "the whole authorship is a unit" or unified whole. At the very least, then, at risk of being the dull-minded pedant, dolt, egregious disseminator of what Roger Poole condescendingly decries as "blunt reading," ("The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60) or, in my case, less than privatdocent of Kierkegaard studies, I propose the following: If one insists upon regarding my references to Kierkegaard as referring to that of one who is at least in part a pseudonym, hermeneutically trusting this Kierkegaard-*cum*-pseudonym synthesis entails (1) attributing to it a more direct mode of communication (e.g., as the author of the upbuilding and religious discourses not designed to ironically mock the reader). As well, (2) relating to the signed writings as qualitatively distinct from the other pseudonymous works as this 'pseudo-pseudonym' has a more enduring presence than any of the other pseudonyms appearing throughout the authorship(s). For further discussion of a hermeneutic of trust within Kierkegaard studies, see Mark A. Tietjen, "Trusting *The Point of View*," in *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue: Authorship as Edification* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 75–88.

speak for itself."[38] For what it is worth, largely concurring with Kierkegaard's contemporary, Christian Frederik Molbech (1821–1888), my own assessment of the empirical person, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, is that he was an individual of brilliant and gifted intellect who, like his close friend and mentor, Poul Martin (P. M.) Møller (1794–1838), valiantly inveighed against nihilism; even, as I contend and as crucially noted in Chapter IV, if he significantly did not directly refer to such and never used the term to describe his own work.[39] As well, even though, for example, Kierkegaard's mercilessly unrelenting perfectionism, his virtuosic grasp of scripture and of the human condition, his dour and self-effacing will to honesty, and his unsurpassed proclivity for rooting out ethical and spiritual double-mindedness with surgical precision likely did not permit him to believe as much of himself, he was, and is, in my estimation, one of the most faithful disciples of Jesus. Moreover, I take this assessment to hold probabilistically in the face of Kierkegaard's and his pseudonyms' declaration that one human being cannot ethically, religiously, or otherwise judge another human being because the one can only understand the other as possibility.[40] I further take this assessment to hold even if, though I have endeavoured to supplement my primary reading of the English language translations of Kierkegaard with the Danish texts as much as my developing

[38] Werner Schmidt, "Grenzen und Vorzüge historisch-kritischer Exegese," in *Evangelische Theologie* 45, no. 6 (1985): 476–7, quoted in John Barton, "Intentio Operis," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Theory and Practice*, ed. Roland Enmarch and Verena M. Lepper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

[39] For presentation of Christian Frederik Molbech's viewpoint of Kierkegaard, see Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, 248–52.

[40] For example, Johannes Climacus highlights the epistemological difficulties attending any effort of one (e.g., a reader) to appraise another (e.g., an author) such that "[o]ne person cannot…judge another, because the one can understand the other only as a possibility," and, "[one] can grasp the other person's actuality only by thinking it, consequently by translating it into possibility, where the possibility of deception is just as thinkable" (*CUP 1*, 322–3/*SKS* 7, 294–5).

linguistic competence allows, my Kierkegaard is largely a construction of twentieth and twenty-first century English-language scholarship.[41]

Having made all these methodologically pertinent disclosures, I now offer a brief description of three interrelated theoretical considerations of hermeneutics and the treatment of such within what Tomasz Kalaga denominates as Ricoeurian literary hermeneutics, after his analysis of Paul Ricoeur's seminal hermeneutic phenomenology, in order to justify my use of this framework to interpret the writings of interest in this dissertation.[42] That said, I preface this description in noting that, while I do articulate the hermeneutical approach I undertake herein, this dissertation is fundamentally not about reading Kierkegaard (the author or the texts), nor is it a prescriptive work about how Kierkegaard *should* be read. It is, in other words, expressly not an effort in how to read Kierkegaard.[43] It is rather a study wherein I propose a particular reading of Kierkegaard and seek to construct Kierkegaard's (or, at least,

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[41] I specifically have in mind here the words of Hannay, translator and interpreter of Kierkegaard, when he writes, "the truth is probably that however word perfect in the translated language Kierkegaard's texts can be made to appear, translation, even good translation, even the best, if some measure of optimality were at all available, will only give us something we might call another Kierkegaard, a substitute for the original rather than a repeat" ("Translating Kierkegaard," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 387).

[42] Tomasz Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics: From Methodology to Ontology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015); Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

To be clear, I summarily trace the concepts underlying textual meaning, interpretation, and validity within Ricoeur to justify my use of the latter's hermeneutical framework to interpret Kierkegaard's writings and the other textual sources of this study and disclose the rationales underpinning my hermeneutical presuppositions. I do not, for example, aim to present a reception history, systematic exposition, or exhaustive account of Kierkegaard in relation to or in conversation with Ricoeur (e.g., see Joel D. S. Rasmussen, "Paul Ricoeur: On Kierkegaard, the Limits of Philosophy, and the Consolation of Hope," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy, Tome II: Francophone Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2012), 233–55). To this end, apart from this methodological section in which I associate Kierkegaard and Ricoeur vis-à-vis the topic of hermeneutics, I generally do not otherwise expend effort to link the thought worlds of these two thinkers in the remainder of this dissertation.

[43] Cf. John D. Caputo, *How to Read Kierkegaard* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

a Kierkegaardian) theological vision of loving God, and of course deploy a methodological approach to do so.

RICOEURIAN LITERARY HERMENEUTICS

And so, in constructing my argument, I deploy a literary hermeneutics approach, however this requires explanation. For, against the backdrop of postmodern textual criticism and reader-response theory, hermeneutics is often regarded as an outmoded branch of the study of texts. As a mere precursor to deconstructionism, hermeneutics, both within and without its ancestral discipline of biblical studies, is commonly thought to entail an 'art of understanding' that commonly denotes, for example, antediluvian and unpalatable ideas of hegemonic uniformity of readings and fundamentalist beliefs as to the existence of single, true, essential interpretations of a texts.[44] Though not without incisive merit, it is, I think, an overgeneralisation to blanketly attribute such unfavourable qualities to each and every approach to which the rubric of 'hermeneutics' applies. In this dissertation, as said, I frame the selected content of Kierkegaard and other authors by way of a style of literary hermeneutics articulated by Kalaga and Ricoeur that, in my estimation, and as I attempt to demonstrate in this section, does not succumb to rendering hegemonic, essentialist textual interpretations nor wantonly relativistic readings. In addition, by virtue of its unique relation to three theoretical considerations that are definitive for delineating between different species of hermeneutics as diverse forms of literary study, the style of hermeneutics which I undertake metamorphizes the art of understanding from methodological discipline to "ontological instrument for…redescription of the self."[45] In this way, this style of hermeneutics felicitously dovetails with the effort of this dissertation, noting Kierkegaardian

[44] e.g., Hans Frei, "Introduction," in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), 1–16.
[45] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 2.

selfhood in its title as it does, to reading the selected writings as formative to what it is to be a self in Kierkegaard's sense (see *§Kierkegaardian Selfhood* below).

The three interrelated theoretical considerations are as follows. First, it is important to ascertain the extent to which a given text's meaning is considered stable and definite versus variable and indefinite. The greater a text's meaning is regarded as stable and definite, the greater hermeneutics is conceived of as an act of recovering autonomous textual meaning. From the reader's perspective oriented thus, textual meaning is of autochthonous origin and otherwise exists independent of the particular reader's relation to it. Conversely, the greater a text's meaning is regarded as variable and indefinite, the greater hermeneutics is conceived of as an act of *ad hoc* and *de novo* meaning creation. From the reader's perspective oriented in this manner, meaning exists in inextricable relation to the reader. As a corollary of this first theoretical consideration, it is important to highlight that what textual meaning (i.e., the veritable object of the hermeneutic process) is itself, what the texts represent, and, therefore, what is disclosed, uncovered, or created during the act of exegesis/eisegesis, varies as a function of the differing conceptions of literary hermeneutics. To wit, whether the process of literary hermeneutics yields *intentio auctoris* (i.e., the author's intention), *intentio operis* (i.e., the intention of the work(s) or text(s)), *intentio lectoris* (i.e., the intention of the reader), or else depends on how this first consideration is resolved.

Continuing to the second theoretical consideration, it is important to isolate what the process of hermeneutics consists in. Literary hermeneutics is universally regarded as a means of interpreting texts however further clarification is required to specify the nature and scope of the process(es) involved in interpretation. For example, beyond the routine, if uninformative, allusion to the hermeneutic circle, it is important to delineate the extent to

which, in performing hermeneutics, one understands, explains, and/or appropriates the text.[46] Finally, third, it is important to discern under which conditions, if any, and in what sense it can be said that a particular textual interpretation is 'correct' or 'valid.'

With these three theoretical considerations of hermeneutics in mind, the innovative appeal of Ricoeur's distinctive literary hermeneutics turns on the fact that within this scheme the process of textual interpretation means *both* understanding and explanation. Historically, understanding has been construed as part of *Geisteswissenschaften* wherein the focus of inquiry is upon empathically grasping human life and individuals in terms fully explicable to human minds. By contrast, explanation has been construed as part of *Naturwissenschaften* wherein the focus of inquiry is upon observing nature and disclosing natural laws and the mechanics of the world.[47] The former domain connotes subjectivity in that it fixates the study of human subjects whereas the latter domain connotes objectivity in that the world is to be explained as a realm populated by objects independent of the human mind's subjective surveillance. For Ricoeur, interpretation is comprised of understanding *and* explanation in two interlocking—that is, concurrent and, emphatically, not consecutive—stages: (1) from 'naïve' or *a priori* understanding to explanation and (2) from explanation to appropriation. The process of interpretation begins with the reader reading the text and taking what appears initially to be an *a priori* guess as to the text's meaning. Importantly, the *a priori* is necessitated by the fact that Ricoeur may be seen to eschew *intentio auctoris* as the sole source of textual meaning. That is, decoupling meaning from the author is seen by Ricoeur as a necessary, if unfortunate (see pp. 19–21 above), consequence of his view of linguistics

[46] See Anthony Thiselton, "Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95–113, for a fuller discussion of the hermeneutical circle and the diverse processes connoted thereby.

[47] Emilio Betti, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 159–97.

which holds a disjunction between spoken and written discourses such that, unlike spoken discourse, the moment that a text begins to exist in its written form is the same moment that it loses the ability to refer back to its author.[48]

At this point, with the demotion of *intentio auctoris*, it may seem as though Ricoeur's hermeneutics ineluctably dissolves into a thoroughgoing subjectivist model of exegesis, or, perhaps more pointedly, eisegesis, and thus inherits the difficulties attending to *intentio lectoris* being the guiding principle to textual meaning (e.g., in the most extreme case, that a text can mean anything a reader so desires).[49] However, between the extremes of the intention

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[48] Gary Aylesworth helpfully writes, "For Ricoeur, [spoken] dialogue is an exchange of speech acts between interlocutors, where meaning is determined by ostensive reference to things present 'here' and 'now'" ("Dialogue, Text, Narrative: Confronting Gadamer and Ricoeur," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London: Routledge, 1991), 70). But written discourse does not have ostensive reference, it lacks the immediate and unambiguous referents (e.g., persons, places, events, dynamics) afforded verbal speech acts. Among other theoretical and practical reasons, the simple passage of time between the writing and reading of texts assures the dissociation of written discourse and ostensive reference. Accordingly, written discourse has decisive significance in that, as Ricoeur says, "inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means" (*Interpretation Theory*, 29). This point has wide-ranging implications for writing (viz., of this dissertation), including complicating the use of rhetoric and idiomatic expressions when reporting on texts such as, for example, "this means that, for Kierkegaard, *X*…" or "according to Kierkegaard, *Y*…" Throughout this dissertation, while perhaps highlighting the use of *intentio operis*, I have nevertheless found the use of expressions like "according to [insert the title(s) of a given text or texts] written by Kierkegaard, *Y*…" grotesquely cumbersome and, indeed, positively counterproductive to composing a coherent narrative. Accordingly, as I believe Ricoeurian hermeneutics and the application of it in this dissertation should overall generate an intelligible narrative, I have elected to maintain the more straightforward expressions that read as commentary on Kierkegaard the person even while opening acknowledging that such statements may only amount to rhetoric and more fluent, readable prose.

[49] It should not be understood that *intentio lectoris* is necessarily synonymous with an 'anything goes' approach to textual interpretation. For example, the articulation of interpretive communities converging on communally accepted interpretative standards is one model of how subjective interpretative constraints may be imposed upon the process of ascertaining textual meaning. Nonetheless, the common denominator of such approaches is that they endorse a vision of exegesis or communal eisegesis in which *intentio lectoris* is the superordinate guide to textual meaning and generally remain wary of appeals to meaning that place the locus of such outside of individual readers. See Stanley Fish, "What Makes an

of the author on one hand and the intention of the reader on the other, the intention of the work, *intentio operis*, is a tenable vehicle for textual meaning within Ricoeur's hermeneutics.[50] Indeed, the very reason for Ricoeur postulating explanation as a mediating function between understanding and appropriation in the process of interpretation derives from the desire to tightrope the tension between the competing impulses of objectivity and subjectivity. For Ricoeur, interpretation is neither objective nor subjective, it does not fit neatly into such general categories. Ricoeur writes, "the conflict [appears] at the very heart of the concept of interpretation between, on the one hand, the intuitive and unverifiable character of the psychologizing concept of understanding to which interpretation is subordinated and, on the other hand, the demand for objectivity which belongs to the very notion of human science."[51] By identifying meaning with *intentio operis*, Ricoeur establishes the explanatory function of interpretation in such a way that it is not based, as Kalaga puts it, on the "quasi-mystical projection into another's [viz., the author's] consciousness," as absolute identification of textual meaning with *intentio auctoris* would entail.[52] Instead, the reader resorts to explanation based on independent meanings rendered by or by way of the text itself. In comparison to other approaches, then, Ricoeur's hermeneutics distances the

Interpretation Acceptable?" in *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 338–55.

[50] First noted by Umberto Eco, the notion of *intentio operis* is, of course, a metaphor: Texts are not persons or other intelligence and therefore cannot genuinely possess or emote an intention in the same sense that the latter can. Still, the notion alights on the idea that texts have inherent properties that cannot simply signify absolutely anything. See "Between Author and Text," in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation: Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67–88.

[51] Paul Ricoeur, *Reflection and Imagination: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 49.

[52] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 109.

emergence of textual meaning out of the text from that which emits from both the author (i.e., *intentio auctoris*) as well as the reader (i.e., *intentio lectoris*).[53]

But what is the independent meaning that Ricoeurian hermeneutics posits as being rendered by or by way of the text itself? Kalaga, speaking on behalf of Ricoeur, identifies *intentio operis* as corresponding with the signifying "structures" or "relations" of the text.[54] Here, it is significant that Ricoeurian theory does not place explicit constraints on the form(s) these signifying structures or relations may take, nor does it specify any single approach (algorithmic or otherwise) that, properly executed, inexorably yields such structures or relations. Instead, the description of *intentio operis* within Ricoeurian hermeneutics coincides with what John Barton refers to as an "interpretative hypothesis," which may exhibit diverse anatomy and derive from equally diverse sources though generally denotes those properties which enable the text under study to cohere into an intelligible whole.[55] Taken in this light, it

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[53] Aylesworth is again helpful here in clarifying that, "the most immediate difference between [for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer] and Ricoeur is their diverging positions in regard to the text. Where Gadamer develops a dialogical model of interpretation in which the text is a 'thou' with whom we are engaged in a conversation, Ricoeur insists on the reflective distance of the text as a linguistic object" (*Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, 63).

[54] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 111.

[55] Barton, "Intentio Operis," 22. It is worth stating explicitly both that Kierkegaard considered his authorship as a unified whole (see 37n) and that, as a presupposition of this dissertation, an interpretative hypothesis is ineluctable and is already in effect with a reader's selection of texts. Momentarily ignoring the other authors I consider in this dissertation, with Kierkegaard in particular, in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, the Danish writer characterised his extraordinary literary output, his entire work as an author as "the prompting of an irresistible inner need, the only possibility for a depressed person, an honest indemnifying attempt by one deeply humbled, a penitent, to make up, if possible, for something by means of every sacrifice and effort in the service of the truth" (*PV* 24/*SKS* 16, 12). The challenge of managing the sheer immensity of literary content born of this need is considerable and made all the more salient when paired with the fact that, as Steen Tullberg contends, Kierkegaard "seems to have been unable to leave a text alone…[a] work was never really completely finished, it was in quite a modern sense always a work-in-progress…[o]ne almost has the impression that the compositor and printer at times had to pull the manuscript out of Kierkegaard's hands in order to be able to finish the job of producing his books" ("The Textual Inheritance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 24). Hence, pragmatically speaking, though with Kierkegaard the '*operis*' in *intentio operis* almost certainly denotes more than one printed work in light of the intertextual idea that Kierkegaard developed concepts across his many published and unpublished writings, the attending untenable

is clear why Ricoeur posits *a priori* understanding as interlocking concurrently, and not consecutively, with explanation within the process of interpretation. As is perhaps banal, reading *qua* the process of interpretation does not proceed stepwise such that the reader first reads a text (or texts) to generate a hypothesis as to its meaning and then, later, re-reads the text(s) in depth to evaluate that hypothesis which was gleaned from the first reading, all the while resisting the impulse to formulate modify hypotheses in between readings. Beyond the empirically false suggestion that all reading is a duplicative endeavour, such a mechanical caricature neglects the simultaneous emphasis of Ricoeur's description of interpretation, which is, after all, a restatement of the venerable concept of the hermeneutic circle. Rather than specify any single means of ascertaining the generation and verification of interpretative hypotheses, then, Ricoeur affirms the fact that reading necessarily proceeds *ex hypothesi* and asserts a principled presupposition that the signifying contents of interpretative hypotheses (e.g., practically, quotations and passages adduced in support of an interpretative hypothesis) reside in texts before any reading occurs. That is, however one *a priori* understands the text, *intentio operis* is believed to reside 'in' the text, or, more accurately, for the text to 'have' *intentio operis* (for Ricoeur's theory does not require that signifying structures appear verbatim 'in' texts themselves, hence they are 'signifying'), in a way that is independent of the act of discovery by the reader.

The issue of essentialist readings here prominently surges to the fore as captured by Kalaga's question: "what is, or perhaps is there at all, an objective criterion which would help us distinguish between genuine [interpretative hypotheses/signifying structures of the text]…and 'false' [structures] constituted by the impressions of the reader?"[56] An extreme

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prospect of tracking across everything Kierkegaard ever wrote renders the interpretative hypothesis of *intentio operis* a tenable and methodologically necessary option for engaging Kierkegaard's immense literary corpus and contextualising it in relation to select other thinkers of Kierkegaard's time.

[56] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 112.

relativist position will negate this question by postulating *intentio lectoris* as the only true criterion of meaning and citing the presupposed existence of signifying structures as already nothing more than a subjective, if unwitting, injection of meaning into texts rather than veritable discovery of extant, signifying content. Accordingly, it would seem that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is at an impasse of, at once, hypothetically advancing some *intentio operis* and then, *per impossibile*, stepping into a view from nowhere or "land of objective principles" from which to validate the presence of said content.[57] The crux of the matter is that text once used to confirm the presence of *intentio operis,* especially if taken to signifying a structure not directly (e.g., verbatim) 'in' the text itself, can be used to do so again and any hermeneutic which postulates the discovery of the essential truth of textual meaning is caught in an endless, tautological cycle of self-referentiality without an indubitable means of establishing an objective criterion of verification. In order to address this apparent impasse, it is important to discuss the final component of the process of interpretation—i.e., appropriation—and the attendant conception of validity in Ricoeur's scheme.

Having interpretation mean both understanding and explanation, Ricoeurian hermeneutics is not ultimately trained at producing interpretations of texts wholly beholden to objective validation standards. Instead, the aim of Ricoeurian hermeneutics is for the reader to acquire meaning through the oscillating movement of understanding and explanation which relates to the reader's individual situation—that is, enables the reader the possibility of *appropriating* the textual interpretation into their own self. In this way, Ricoeur's approach transitions hermeneutics from methodology to ontology and therefore interpretation as the culmination of appropriation of meaning allows the text to present its reader with a definite proposal for selfhood. Ricoeur eloquently phrases it thus:

> what is 'made our own' is not something mental, not the intention of another subject; rather, it is the projection of world, the proposal of a mode of being-

[57] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 114.

> in-the-world, which the text discloses in front of itself by means of its non-ostensive references. Far from saying that a subject, who already masters his own being-in-the-world, projects the *a priori* of his own understanding and interpolates this *a priori* in the text, I shall say that appropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of being…*gives* the subject new capacities for knowing himself. If the reference of the text is the projection of a world, then it is not, in the first instance, the reader who projects himself. The reader is rather broadened in his capacity to project himself by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself.[58]

Here, with "the text itself" as the byword of *intentio operis*, Ricoeur distinctively indicates that the text's primary function is not that of a mirror in which, or conversational partner in whom, one sees one's own condition reflected. On the contrary, the "projection of world" runs from or by means of the text to the reader and not vice versa. Commenting on Ricoeur's theory, William Rogers writes, "to understand the world of the text is to understand or temporarily become a new self that stands in a reciprocal relation with that world. And this self, as much as the projected world, is a creation of the text, not of the reader."[59] I do not think, however, that there is any reason to suppose that the effect of the text does not extend beyond the empirical instance of reading. It stands to reason that interpretation can integrate with memory and become instantiated in the reader in a more enduring way. In fact, viewing the effect of the text as ephemeral seems to degrade the ontological significance of the text to a triviality. Moreover, Ricoeur's view seems to imply that the vista of selfhood endowed in the act of reading does not encourage capriciousness: "Only the interpretation which satisfies the injunction of the text, which follows the 'arrow' of meaning and endeavours to 'think in accordance with' it, engenders a new *self*-understanding."[60]

Returning now to the apparent impasse of how to procure verification of *intentio operis*, on Ricoeur's hermeneutics, a valid interpretation is one in which the text is

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[58] Ricoeur, *Reflection and Imagination*, 96–7 (emphasis original).
[59] William Elford Rogers, *Interpreting Interpretation: Textual Hermeneutics as an Ascetic Discipline* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 144–5.
[60] Ricoeur, *Reflection and Imagination*, 97 (emphasis original).

appropriated by gifting the reader with the definite possibility for a new understanding of self. This conception of validity may be split into two facets: ontological and interpretative validity. As may be expected, the former receives primacy in Ricoeur's theory. To appropriate with ontological validity is to accept the world of the text in relation to one's own world and see this projected world as an intelligible proposal for one's self. Resonating with, for example, Climacus, for whom projecting into another's consciousness is impossible, ontological validity cannot be adjudged by another human (i.e., not divine) self as, to use Climacus's vernacular, the validating criterion of intelligibility and appropriation is only found within one's inwardness.[61] Interpretative validity, however, assesses the merits of interpretation through evaluation of the interpretative hypothesis or the process by which one uncovers the signifying structures responsible for the production of textual meaning. As noted, in targeting *intentio operis* over strict *intentio auctoris*, the validity of asserting signifying structures and resulting conclusions drawn from Ricoeurian hermeneutics may be critiqued as unfalsifiable on account of the inability of this approach to non-self-referentially appeal to an objective point of reference. Nevertheless, Ricoeurian hermeneutics is grounded on the text itself in the following way. Though 'objectively uncertain' and perhaps not furnishing an unassailable Archimedean standpoint from which a committed objectivist would feel comfortable, Ricoeurian hermeneutics is grounded on the text such that it views the text as the positive ground from which existential change of the self is possible. Indeed, this grounding on the text is precisely what rescues Ricoeur's approach from overly relative approaches to hermeneutics such as extreme forms of reader-response criticism. More explicitly, while adverting the potential of existential change (e.g., self-improvement) as the foremost benefit of reading, unlike Ricoeur's model which also endorses such, reader-response theory and other forms of literary criticism which hold *intentio lectoris* as the sole

[61] e.g., 40n.

principle of textual meaning appear unable to reconcile how such change for a reader originates. As Kalaga rhetorically queries, "whence comes the ground for the improvement of the self, if what the text conveys is merely the reflection of the cognitive processes of the reader?"[62] It may be said that to reject the possibility that the text precipitates or offers the reader something of its own is to reject a notion of interpretation whose essence lay in the potential for, to reiterate Ricoeur's description, "receiving a new mode of being from the text itself." Thus, insofar as Ricoeurian hermeneutics via the notion of signifying structures and prompted by interpretative hypotheses explicates how existential change consequent to reading is at least possible (that is, does so without ratiocinatively explaining away "appropriation [as] the process by which the revelation of new modes" of selfhood are given to readers by way of the text) whereas reader-response theory and others do not, or at least not straightforwardly, it may be concluded that interpretations undertaken in the former practice may achieve, if only by comparison, appreciable interpretative validity. Furthermore, once the autonomy or integrity of texts is acceded, Ricoeurian hermeneutics proceeds to evaluate interpretative hypotheses in the manner already alluded to. That is, in contemplating how to prove a presupposition about a particular *intentio operis*, Eco notes that "the only way is to check it upon the text as a coherent whole."[63] In other words, if the texts under study fail to cohere when read in light of a particular interpretative hypothesis, then the hypothesis stands in need of revision or rejection. Interpretation may be said, as Barton notes, to seek a level at which it can find coherence and only then may the given hypothesis be judged to have succeeded in obtaining interpretative validity.[64] To be sure, it is possible that texts may ultimately be without meaning, however, on Ricoeurian hermeneutics, the interpretative

[62] Kalaga, *Literary Hermeneutics*, 134.
[63] Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 65.
[64] Barton, "Intentio Operis," 22.

hypothesis which enables texts to have coherent meaning is taken to be the stronger—that is, more interpretatively valid—hypothesis.[65]

RICOEURIAN LITERARY HERMENEUTICS IN THIS DISSERTATION ON KIERKEGAARD

This synoptic description of the concepts underlying textual meaning, interpretation, and validity in Ricoeurian hermeneutics hopefully articulates how the coupling of ontological and interpretative validity together permits evasion of essentialist reading of texts on the one hand as well as unduly relative interpretations of textual meaning on the other. For Ricoeur, the text is not merely a mirror of the self but retains its autonomous integrity apart from the reader's psychology and, as such, is a revelatory window towards the possibility of selfhood, yet a possibility that is depicted as potentiality, even an ideality. Thus conceived, when Ricoeur asserts that he "should like to contrast the *self* which emerges from the understanding of the text to the *ego* which claims to precede this understanding," and that "it is the text, with its universal power of unveiling, which gives a *self* to the *ego*," it may be discerned that the reader as the 'ego' has the potential to either appropriate or reject the understanding of self gifted by the text.[66] Essentialism is avoided because what is offered to the reader by way of the text does not entail mandatory capitulation to the particular interpretation (e.g., on pain of

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[65] As may be apparent given the stated aim of this investigation, in the vernacular of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, the interpretative hypothesis of this dissertation with which I read and quote from the texts under study is that loving God is Kierkegaard's conception of the *summum bonum* of selfhood that is formulated both negatively (e.g., in terms of such concepts as annihilation and dying away) and positively (e.g., becoming spirit) and can be more integratively grasped as the will to die to the psychogenic idols of the mind. Moreover, in deploying this interpretative hypothesis in the *ex hypothesi* readings of the texts consulted for this dissertation, I held as grounding presuppositions that the individual texts of Kierkegaard cohere into an intelligible whole, that the texts of those thinkers apart from Kierkegaard meaningfully relate to that whole, that the resulting dissertation consequently reads as an intelligible narrative or Ricoeurian "projection of world" regarding Kierkegaard's "whole authorship" as "a unit," and that the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship does not posit an inert vision of selfhood but rather a "proposal of a mode of being-in-the-world" or, better, a "proposal of a mode of *becoming*-in-the-world" (a self understood in task terms; see pp. 46ff. below) that actively encourages appropriation (Ricoeur, *Reflection and Imagination*, 96; *KJN* 6, 6/NB11:6).

[66] Ricoeur, *Reflection and Imagination*, 97 (emphasis original).

violating some inalienable principle of sense-making). In other words, the role of volition in appropriation is not annulled in the process of Ricoeurian hermeneutics. At the same time, relativism is avoided in that the text autonomously offers a definite (i.e., rather than amorphous and ever abeyant) possible, if ideal, understanding of self to the reader.

As mentioned above, this dissertation is not a prescriptive study on how to read Kierkegaard as much as one in which I propose a reading of Kierkegaard and construct Kierkegaard's (or, at least, a Kierkegaardian) theological vision of loving God, and deploy Ricoeurian hermeneutics to that end. In painting this theological portrait, it is worth reiterating that this dissertation is based upon Kierkegaard's entire (even immense) literary output, including his published books comprising his authorship(s) and his originally unpublished journals, notebooks, and papers. However, engaging with the theme of loving God, my interpretative hypothesis disposed me inevitably pay greater attention to those writings in which relationship with God, love, need, and nihilism-proximate ideas (including the aforementioned proxies of irony, nothingness, boredom, and despair) are more explicit, notably including selections of Kierkegaard journals in which I found generous content appertaining to the love of God. Supplementing this recruitment of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed writings proper, the interpretive hypothesis of course disposed me to also draw upon a selection of interlocutors and other texts to illumine the theme of loving God. Though, as should be clear from the foregoing discussion of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, I do not go so far as to class the theological construction resulting from my selection and treatment of texts as a veritable exercise in deconstructionism, reader-response theory, or other postmodern study of texts and ideas, I do concede that the interpretative hypothesis driving the reading factoring into this dissertation evinces an individualistic element in my choice of texts used to paint the theological portrait. In other words, other texts and figures—many of which and whom have important things to say about loving God—may

well have been chosen, with the theological portraiture structured differently thereby. Overtly and inevitably, my treatment of texts reflects my own perspectives, situation, and experiences as the author of this dissertation. However, apart from the Ricoeurian hermeneutical rejoinders to *intentio lectoris* adumbrated in the preceding, on this point I further do not feel alone for, as George Pattison keenly remarks, "it is perhaps true of all religious writing that the story it tells about the history of religious ideas will be profoundly influenced by the writer's own story."[67] At end, then, whatever shortcomings my deployment of Ricoeurian hermeneutics does possess, I estimate that the depiction of Kierkegaard regarding the love of God afforded by it is a theologically generative as well as methodologically transparent and sound one.

Finally, as a dissertation on Kierkegaard, while conducting a thorough juxtaposition of Kierkegaard and Ricoeur falls outside the scope of this study, the last thing to note with respect to methodology is that I do not think that it is too much to say that Kierkegaard indeed offers insights into the value of reading and that these insights principally harmonise with the *intentio operis* of Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Above all, even recognising the validity of Paul Minear's and Paul Morimoto's assessment that "[t]rue to his own principles, Kierkegaard never outlined any system of hermeneutical principles," I think that Kierkegaard's hermeneutical framework, insofar as he had one, converges with that of Ricoeur on the primacy afforded appropriation as the indispensable criterion of textual interpretation and the interrelationship between *intentio operis* as marker of textual meaning and the existential change or action denoted by appropriation.[68] Pattison, for example, rhetorically asks, "[d]oesn't there come a point—precisely the point at which we have truly understood Kierkegaard—when we have to leave off all this concern for texts and

[67] George Pattison, *Agnosis: Theology in the Void* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 4.
[68] Paul S. Minear and Paul S. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible: An Index* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1953), 12.

interpretations and act?"[69] And Hannay advances, textual meaning "is not something that can be…expressed in a text at all," rather, "what expresses truth is the acting person. The actions expressing truth may be those of a person writing, as Kierkegaard perhaps hoped for his own case, but that will not be visible in the writer's texts themselves—whether they express human truth will be evident only from the results, the perlocutionary effects, of the presentation of the texts."[70] These seem to be robust endorsements of the primacy of appropriation indicative of Ricoeur's *and* Kierkegaard's hermeneutics. For Kierkegaard as much as Ricoeur, then, once texts have been written and released into the world, the responsibility of apprehending textual meaning by way of appropriation keyed by the text shifts to the reader. This autonomy of the text coupled with shifting the responsibility of appropriation to the reader restates in a Kierkegaardian-*cum*-Ricoeurian fashion, the value of *intentio operis*. That is, the intention of the work was, as far as I am aware, never promulgated as such by Kierkegaard as a *passe-patout* for what he wrote, how to read what he wrote, nor how to read anything else. Nevertheless, I think, *intentio operis* conceptually picks out a fulcrum of Kierkegaard's enduring contribution to hermeneutics. "Kierkegaard did not care about his readers taking *him* seriously," to quote Kyle Roberts on the matter, "but he did seem to care very much about readers earnestly and seriously considering the *content* of his communication—with the underlying hope that the communicative event would result

[69] George Pattison, "If Kierkegaard is Right About Reading, Why Read Kierkegaard?" in *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference "Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It*," ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 301.

[70] Alastair Hannay, "Something on Hermeneutics and Communication in Kierkegaard After All" Opening address presented at the Fourth International Kierkegaard Conference, Northfield, Minnesota, United States of America, 9 June 2001. http://www.sorenkierkegaard.nl/artikelen/Engels/042.%20Something%20on%20Hermeneutics%20and%Communication%20in%20Kierkegaard%20After%20All.pdf.

in appropriation."[71] And, as I have contended, the content of Kierkegaard's communication, the meaning of Kierkegaard's texts, that which the texts themselves signify, is chiefly identified in this dissertation with *intentio operis*.

A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Moving now from method to a review of the literature, in general, it is not possible in this introduction to review and assess the enormous body of literature on Kierkegaard that has accumulated on any given subject. Still, in my consideration of the theme of loving God, I would be remiss to not consider the more and less well-tread paths examining Kierkegaard with respect to those topics that lay close to the heart of this dissertation. To be sure, identifying said paths can itself be thorny inasmuch as many studies with *prima facie* relevance explicitly or implicitly sidestep the focal matter of loving God by obviating consideration of relationship with God. Michael Theunissen's in-depth study of Kierkegaard's concept of despair, for instance, explicitly acknowledges (in end note form) that the theological self in relationship with God "here remains necessarily under-determined," that is, unexamined.[72] Nevertheless, studies veritably exploring Kierkegaard in the context of the self's multifaceted, developmental, and difficult relationship with God are legion.[73] So, too, many prior analyses point to, but do not elaborate, the significance of loving

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[71] Kyle Roberts, "Kierkegaard on Communication: Refusing to 'Piddle,'" in *T & T Clark Companion to the Theology of Kierkegaard*, ed. Aaron P. Edwards and David J. Gouwens (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 28 (first emphasis original, second added).
[72] Michael Theunissen, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Helmut Illbruck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 122–3n6.
[73] Studies targeting Kierkegaard and the God relationship include, e.g., George Pattison, "'Before God' as a Regulative Concept," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (1997): 70–84; Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*; Podmore, *Struggling with God*; Andrew B. Torrance, *The Freedom to Become a Christian: A Kierkegaardian Account of Human Transformation in Relationship with God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard: Beyond Onto-theology to the Love of God" in *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 201–26.

God for the theological ethics underpinning the development of the Kierkegaardian self.[74] Cutting across these bodies of scholarship, however, and eminently signalling the importance of this dissertation, there is a distinct lack of harmony over what loving God actually consists in and a sampling of prior investigations will help demonstrate the rather expansive diversity of ways in which loving God has been portrayed in the literature.

In *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, with clear parallels to the virtue ethics tradition, C. Stephen Evans construes loving God as an aspect of a divine command ethic wherein fulfilling God-given obligations to love enables human beings to flourish and actualise themselves as beings created for relationship with God.[75] In doing so, and seeking to articulate the love of God, Evans raises the issue of whether love of God may simply and straightforwardly be collapsed into love of one's neighbour. Foreshadowing an 'ordinal' issue to which I return in Chapter IV, Evans writes:

> For Kierkegaard there are two passions that are specially crucial in the formation of the self God intends one to be: faith and love. The two are so

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[74] Studies exploring Kierkegaard's theological ethics, without regard to loving God in particular, include, for example, Martin Andic, "Is Love of Neighbour the Love of an Individual?" in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 112–24; Clare Carlisle, "Kierkegaard's Despair in an Age of Reflection," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 32, no. 2 (2011): 251–79; Stephen Crites, "*The Sickness unto Death*: A Social Interpretation," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, eds. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1992), 144–60; John Elrod, "The Social Dimension of Despair," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to 'The Sickness unto Death'*, 107–19; C. Stephen Evans, "Accountability to God in *The Sickness unto Death*: Kierkegaard's Relational Understanding of the Human Self," in *Kierkegaard's The Sickness unto Death: A Critical Guide*, eds. Jeffrey Hanson and Sharon Krishek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 219–36; "Who is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self," in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 263–75; Sharon Krishek, "The Moral Implications of Kierkegaard's Analysis of Despair," *Religious Studies* 52, no. 1 (2016): 25–43; and Graham M. Smith, "Kierkegaard from the Point of View of the Political," *History of European Ideas* 31, no. 1 (2005): 35–60.

[75] For studies linking Kierkegaard to the virtue ethics tradition, see Robert C. Roberts, "Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 177–206; and Mark A. Tietjen, "Kierkegaard and the Classical Virtue Tradition," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2010): 153–73.

> closely connected that it is perhaps a mistake to separate them. Nevertheless, to the degree that we can distinguish them, it is interesting to ask which of the two is primary. Faith is the passion that lies at the centre of the God-relationship…[t]here is a sense then in which faith is the highest passion. Certainly, Kierkegaard does not believe that it is possible to love other people rightly apart from a God-relationship, and thus faith would seem to be crucial if love is to become actualized in a person's life.[76]

And, further contending that Kierkegaard recognizes loving God as primary to loving one's neighbour, within Evans' understanding, "it is because we have a fundamental duty to love God that we are obligated to obey his command to love the neighbour," moreover, "[l]ove for the neighbour is not merely what God requires; it is something that presupposes love for God."[77] Sylvia Walsh, too, echoes Evans in stating that the most fundamental obligation is to love God and what this means is that one follows what God intends for each human being and, be it noted, what God intends for each human being is for us to become like God in loving our neighbour.[78] Walsh elucidates, "[t]he Christian commandment is first and foremost to love God, who is to be loved above all, and then the neighbour…[t]o love God is to be like God, who is love itself…[w]e can only be like God, therefore, by loving like God, who loves all human beings without preference or distinction."[79] Thus, in striving to love, ostensibly in the vein of the Greatest Commandment, one properly exercises an equality in loving all persons as one's neighbour without exception.

Momentarily looking past the indelicacy of equating faith and love with love of God and neighbour, respectively, Evans and Walsh do not ultimately erect a simple two-tier hierarchy with love of God atop love of neighbour. Indeed, Evans, for one, conjoins love of

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[76] C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.
[77] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 112–3.
[78] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 29.
[79] Sylvia Walsh, "The Dear Self: Self-Love, Redoubling, and Self-Denial," in *Love, Reason, and Will: Kierkegaard After Frankfurt*, ed. Anthony Rudd and John Davenport (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 122. See also Walsh, "Kierkegaard's Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 304–5.

God and neighbour as an ethical precept in stating that one cannot love God unless one loves one's neighbour and one cannot adequately love one's neighbour without loving God.[80] This interpretation is certainly not without textual warrant. In what may be considered the *locus classicus* of his grasp and exposition of Christian love, *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard repeatedly narrates that "[i]n the Christian sense, to love people is to love God, and to love God is to love people."[81] It is very difficult indeed to dispute (if it is not indisputable) that, for Kierkegaard, loving God aright necessarily requires loving one's neighbour. However subtle, though, as I enlarge upon in Chapter IV after some careful conceptual work, it is a mistake to construe Kierkegaard as fully merging loving God and loving neighbour. Though necessary, love of neighbour is not a sufficient condition for loving God such that the former does not exhaust the conceptual space of the latter. As illuminating as the contributions of Evans, Walsh, and others to Kierkegaardian ethical discourse are, then, in noting that the love of God subserves the ethics of loving one's neighbour, but then attending almost exclusively to the normative ethics of neighbour love, or, if you like, the horizontal dimension of the God-relationship, such studies do not generally explore the question of what it means to love God *per se*, how one's love manifests when the 'object' of one's love or the one to be loved is God and not simply a human other. For many, and, as I contend, principally Kierkegaard, focusing on the ethical applications of loving God is lacking, for, perhaps *res ipsa loquitur*, God is not merely another occupant within one's social milieu. There appear to be aspects of relationship with God—chief among them prayer, suffering, sacrifice, self-discipline and self-struggle—to which, as a premise of this dissertation, Kierkegaard devotes much attention and which, residing in the vertical dimension of relationship with God, properly connote love

[80] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 30.
[81] *WL* 384/*SKS* 9, 376; see also e.g., *WL* 58/*SKS* 9, 60.

of God that cannot be translated without loss into the ethics of neighbour love.[82] Or, there appear to be aspects which cannot be translated in such a way that loving God is fully explicable as, to use Evans' expression, "a social relationship with God."[83]

Seeking after these aspects, other investigations portray the love of God within Kierkegaard's writings with an emphasis quite apart from synonymy with the normative ethics of neighbour love, instead identifying loving God with repentance and, alternately, sundry expressions Kierkegaard adopts to describe the process of becoming spirit. As regards the former, reviewing the role of Kierkegaard's ethical pseudonym, Judge William, M. Jamie Ferreira, for example, quotes the judge to the effect that William repeatedly affirms the role of repentance: "the 'love with which I love God…has only one expression in language—it is 'repentance'…as soon as I love freely and love God, then I repent.'"[84] Pattison, too, extends the identification of loving God and repentance beyond Kierkegaard's pseudonymous literature to the religious discourses by considering "Every Good and Every Perfect Gift is From Above" from 1843 and deriving therefrom that one's repentance is the measure of one's love for God.[85]

As regards the portrayal of loving God as a religious act of becoming spirit, complicating the image of neighbour love as it is typically conceived, loving God in these studies is depicted as an act that an individual takes against or in opposition to others. To this

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[82] As but one example of Kierkegaard relating but, crucially, not collapsing love of God and neighbour, one may look, as Pattison does (*Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 63), to the 1843 discourse, "Strengthening in the Inner Being," wherein Kierkegaard writes, "[t]he person who loves God is strengthened in the inner being, and the person who loved people, and only through this love learned, as it were, to love God, has had only an imperfect upbringing; but the person who loved God and in this love learned to love people was strengthened in the inner being" (*EUD* 97/*SKS* 5, 102).

[83] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 14.

[84] M. Jamie Ferreira, "One's Own Pastor—Judging the Judge," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2008): 208; see *EO2* 216/*SKS* 3, 208.

[85] Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 185.

end, investigators exploring this facet of Kierkegaard's thought often draw upon Kierkegaard's late writings in his attack upon Danish Christendom wherein the Dane writes, for instance, that "[t]he Christianity of the New Testament is to love God in a relation of opposition to people, to suffer for one's faith at the hands of people, to suffer for the doctrine at the hands of people."[86] Evaluating this sentiment, Paul Martens and Tom Millay ask: "Why must a Christian love God in a relation of opposition to people?" and explicate, "[t]he answer is sharp and absolute. First, the truth must suffer in this world because the truth stands in opposition to the wretched and evil world. Second, a witness to the truth is tied to the truth in his or her existence, and thus will share the same fate as the truth itself, namely, opposition to the wretched and evil world."[87] Quite obviously, this portrayal of what it is to love God contains a wealth of content (e.g., cosmological and alethic considerations of wretchedness and evil) generally absent from commonplace normative ethical reflections on neighbour love and, moreover, is not immediately similar to construing loving God as an act of repentance wherein one reckons with one's own sinful nature.

Still other studies, seeking after aspects of relationship with God that properly connote love of God which cannot be fully translated into the ethics of neighbour love, perceive a need to uproot greater theological content and thus, by evaluating Kierkegaard's emphasis on loving relationship with God coupled with his articulation of the need for Christ as mediator in the God-relationship, construct Kierkegaardian Christologies. Andrew Torrance is representative in noting a Christology of Christ's person-as-mediator in light of

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[86] *TM* 332/*SKS* 13, 396. Likewise, as one especially acute and terse example of Kierkegaard's many vivid descriptions of what is entailed in becoming spirit, he journals: "One who has not suffered at the hands of human beastliness does not become spirit. This is indeed how a [human] being is constituted: this sort of suffering, as all suffering 'at the hands of [human] beings,' is part of becoming spirit" (*KJN* 10, 53/NB31:73).

[87] Paul Martens and Tom Millay, "'The Changelessness of God' as Kierkegaard's Final Theodicy: God and the Gift of Suffering," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 2 (2011): 174.

Kierkegaard's resistance to speaking of the mediation of Christ due to the prevailing zeitgeist of Hegelian theology in Golden Age Denmark in which God was pantheistically synthesised with humanity via speculative trinitarianism.[88] That is, given Kierkegaard's own words that, contra a pantheistic interpretation of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), "we cannot speak of society [i.e., fellowship] with God," Torrance writes that "[t]hrough the mediation of Christ, persons are delivered into a life of fellowship with God in whom the infinite qualitative difference [between God and human beings] no longer functions as an alienating difference. The *person of Christ* enables there to be correspondence between God and human beings across the divide."[89]

However, as observant as his attention to Kierkegaard's Christological musings are, it must be said that Torrance's reference to the mediating and redemptive work of Christ in and through the *person* of Jesus presents an opacity verging on obscurantism. That is, despite ostensibly articulating a way across the divine-human divide and diagnosing the scholarship of, for example, Podmore, as lacking "a more Christological focus," and thereby failing to recognise that, for Kierkegaard, the only means of traversing the divide or the only point of

[88] For Hegel's own treatment of the trinity, divine spirit (*Geist*), and the verbatim wording which has often been interpreted as pantheistically uniting God with human immanence, see especially, G. W. F. Hegel, "The Death of Christ and the Transition to Spiritual Presence," and "The Third Element: Community, Spirit" in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition of the Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with assistance of H. S. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 458–81. For one effort to distinguish between pantheism and panentheism and thereby retain in Hegel's thought the ontological distinction between the divine and the non-divine, see Peter C. Hodgson, "Trinity: God as Absolute Spirit," and "Spirit and Community," in *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127–41 and 177–204.

[89] *KJN* 8, 141/NB22:78. Andrew B. Torrance, "Kierkegaard's Paradoxical Christology," in *Søren Kierkegaard: Theologian of the Gospel*, ed. Todd Speidell, Greg Marcar, and Andrew Torrance (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 62 (emphasis mine). For an additional effort in marking the person of Christ as integral to Kierkegaardian Christology, see Joshua Cockayne, "Willing Closeness with God" and "Becoming an Imitator of Christ" in *Contemporary with Christ: Kierkegaard and Second-Personal Spirituality* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 61–88.

relationship between God and an individual human being "is found *in Christ*," echoing the self-same coarseness as Evans's aforementioned love of God *qua* "social relationship with God," Torrance's ultimate claim is to uninformatively assert an "interpersonal relationship with Jesus Christ."[90]

Offering a more promising direction in this vein by variously pursuing expositions of kenosis (self-emptying) and kenotic theism (the view that God, who "so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son," took upon Himself some limitation in the Incarnation and creating the cosmos) and linking Kierkegaard with, for example, the German vernacular strain of mysticism, David Law and Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal respectively seek to work out Christologies (or at least Christocentric thinking) which surmount in detail uninformative notions of interpersonal relationship with Christ.[91] This dissertation is indeed indebted to these investigations in highlighting and resourcing the vital role of Christ in Kierkegaard's conception of loving God such that I return to these authors in Chapter IV when I consider Kierkegaard's Moravian Pietist upbringing. At this stage, the significant point is that studies such as that of Law, Becker-Lindenthal, as well as others such as Merold Westphal which target the idea of kenosis, to varying extents, orient around Kierkegaard's notions of self-giving love, dying away, self-denial, renunciation, negation, annihilation, and resignation.[92]

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[90] Simon Podmore, "The Holy and the Wholly Other: Kierkegaard and the Alterity of God," *Heythrop Journal* 53, (2012): 9–23; Andrew Torrance, "Beyond Existentialism: Kierkegaard on the Human Relationship with the God Who is Wholly Other," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 3 (2014): 302; Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 14.
[91] John 3:16. David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal, "Kierkegaard on Imagination: Possibility, Hope, and the Imitation of Christ," *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 3 (2021): 484–99; "Kierkegaard's Reception of German Vernacular Mysticism: Johann Tauler's Sermon on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and *Practice in Christianity*," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 80, no. 4–5 (2019): 443–64; Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal and Ruby S. Guyatt, "Kierkegaard on Existential Kenosis and the Power of the Image: *Fear and Trembling* and *Practice in Christianity*," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 4 (2019): 706–27.
[92] Merold Westphal, "Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to 'Practice in Christianity'*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 19–46.

Given the significance of this orientation, an expository excursus into Kierkegaardian selfhood, love, dying away, and related terms, a targeted exposition of what Kierkegaard himself has to say on these, is warranted before I return to my select review of the secondary literature.

KIERKEGAARDIAN SELFHOOD

Insofar as selfhood appears in the title, and the notions of *self*-giving love, *self*-denial, and related existential-identity ideas bear significantly upon the focal topic, of this dissertation, I first depict the way in which the self/selfhood is defined and (by signposting where the constituent ideas are elaborated) deployed in this study. To that end, with what Stephen Crites accurately designates as "the densest and most crabbed passage in the entire Kierkegaardian corpus," Anti-Climacus opens said corpus's most explicit and concerted exploration of selfhood thus: "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis."[93] Flowing out of this passage, it may be understood that Anti-Climacus posits the self as relational, dynamic, and exhibiting the following features: (1) A distinction between an initial state of the self and a potentiality for development into a deeper self; (2) an ideal to be achieved; (3) structured by relations between (3a) infinity and finitude, (3b) temporality and eternity, and (3c) freedom and necessity; and (4) delineation of the self as predicated on God.

To sequentially expound each of these features as understood in this dissertation, first, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms define more deficient versus more profound forms of the self. Of note, Kierkegaard distinguishes between, on the one hand, a self that one is by default

[93] Crites, "*The Sickness unto Death*: A Social Interpretation," 149; *SUD* 13/*SKS* 11, 129.

(i.e., which Kierkegaard, writing under his own name and reminiscent of Pauline patois—viz., Eph. 4:22, informatively refers to in the 1844 discourse, "To Need God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection," as "the first self"), the lineaments of which can be discerned by any third party by way of either immediate perception or communicative disclosure, and, on the other hand, the potential to become a deeper self that one can become only by taking an inward direction.[94] That is, in *Either/Or*, Judge William describes the choice by which one inaugurates the trajectory from deficient to deeper self as inwardly choosing oneself "or more correctly, [receiving oneself]" in one's "eternal validity."[95] By this distinctive remark, one of Kierkegaard's earliest pseudonyms references the onset of the inward task of becoming one's true self, through which the one attempts to actualise the potentialities that inhere within oneself. It follows from this that, second, and eschewing notions of selfhood wherein the self is a given possession with, or substance as, which one enters the world, Kierkegaardian selfhood instead entails the positing of an ideal self as a telos or goal towards which one strives. Anti-Climacus specifies that this deeper, truer self is in a certain respect a vanishing point on the horizon in that there is a dissonance between the first self that one is by default and the ideality to which one strives. Thus, unlike views which countenance seeing the self *sub specie aeterni*, Kierkegaardian selfhood represents an ongoing task: "[E]very moment that a self exists, it is in the process of becoming, for the self κατά δύναμιν [in potentiality] does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence."[96]

This dovetails with the third feature of Kierkegaardian selfhood, that the self is structured by bipolar syntheses of infinity and finitude, temporality and eternity, and freedom and necessity, each of which relations require willed effort to maintain in homeostasis if the

[94] *EUD* 314/*SKS* 5, 306.
[95] *EO2*, 177, 211/*SKS* 3, p. 172, p. 183.
[96] *SUD* 30/*SKS* 11, 146.

aforementioned ideal or truer self is to be realised. The first of these relations denotes the self as, at once, a substantial entity in the natural order bounded by finite facts (e.g., born into a particular culture, socioeconomic strata, and historical epoch with certain passions, appearance, and so on) and comprised of yet-unrealised, and hence infinite, potentialities. The second relation, that which mediates temporality and eternity, denotes the self as situated in time (e.g., with an immutable past, immediate present, and prospective future) whereas eternity takes the form of continuity in the self across and indeed transcendent of temporal intervals. As we will see beginning in Chapter III, this feature of Kierkegaardian selfhood coupled with the first two (in which selfhood entails a trajectory from "first self" to ideal or goal self to which one strives to appropriate or become) plays a particularly significant role in Kierkegaard's critical reception of the nihilism of Schopenhauer. The third relation, that which mediates freedom and necessity, denotes the self as exercising some measure of autonomy over one's comportment but, equally, having this autonomy circumscribed by insuperable limitations. As we will see in Chapter IV, this feature of Kierkegaardian selfhood is notably significant with reference to Kierkegaard's grasp of a grace in Christian doctrine.

Taken together, the self continually comes into being from the repetitious effort to synthesise these pair-wise antitheses into a gestalt in time toward the ideal posited as the deeper self. Here, and illuminating Anti-Climacus's inaugural claim that, "[s]pirit is the self," spirit as a third factor is required for the antitheses (e.g., temporality and eternity) within each polarity to relate to each other and relate to their own relation (e.g., the relation between the temporal and the eternal) itself. For, as the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis, advises, "a synthesis that is a contradiction cannot be completed as a synthesis without [this] third factor."[97] More exactly, for Kierkegaard, the requirement of spirit stems from the fact that the role of the third factor is to willfully sustain the synthesis,

[97] *CA* 85/*SKS* 4, 388.

to cohere two antithetical elements together whilst not collapsing them into one another. Only then can both elements in a synthesis be truly preserved and not dissolved or, to use the Hegelian diction that Anti-Climacus satirises in *The Sickness unto Death*, form a genuine *Aufhebung*. In this way, paralleling the dynamism connoted by Hegel's concept of *Geist*, Kierkegaardian spirit (*Aand*) designates a perpetual and dynamic tension between antithetical factors in synthesis. Moreover, as may be expected based on the above description of Kierkegaardian selfhood entailing a continual task of becoming working toward a telos, as will be made apparent in the proceeding, Kierkegaard makes no mistake in articulating the exertion and suffering implied in holding antithetical elements in tension and therein becoming a deeper self, which he habitually identifies with "becoming spirit."[98] Indeed, as is taken up in Chapter IV, this arduous spiritual task—one which, in the language of the Greatest Commandment, requires all one's heart, soul, and mind—is rightly cast in terms of an "existence examination" as to whether love *qua* Christian love truly resides within an individual and thus the task of Kierkegaardian selfhood becomes synonymous with the task of loving God or, as elaborated below, love's dying away.[99]

Finally, befitting a view of selfhood that upholds the relational term of loving God as paramount, fourth, Anti-Climacus notes that the self must either have established itself or have been relationally established by another and that, on circumspection, only the latter is tenable in Kierkegaard's view as the self has not created itself *ex nihilo*. Accordingly, the self not only relates itself to itself, but also to that which/whom "established" the self, which Anti-Climacus identifies as God.[100] That is, spirit sustains the synthesis of the self by, as noted, continually relating itself to the factors of the synthesis (i.e., continually equilibrating the set of antitheses) but also by relating this synthesis to God, from whom the synthesis

[98] e.g., *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 189–90/Paper 409:1; *KJN* 10, 53/NB31:73; *KJN* 8, 486–7/NB25:63.
[99] *KJN* 10, 90/NB31:123.
[100] *SUD* 14/*SKS* 11, 130; *SUD* 142/*Pap.* VIII^2 B 170:2.

derived. It is this feature that renders Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood theological and not merely ontological and Kierkegaard does not prevaricate that the self's dependence on God is as much axiological and conative as it is ontological. God is not only the self's creator, but, I maintain in this dissertation, also the source of the ideal a deeper self towards which one strives in that, as Anti-Climacus writes, "only in Christ is it true that God is man's goal and criterion."[101] In other words, the deeper self towards which one continually strives is not a whim of individual fancy but an ideal set by *imitatio Christi,* the pursuit of loving God perfectly as only modelled by Jesus Christ. Again beginning notably in Chapter IV, Kierkegaard's grasp of what it means to imitate Christ, to love as Christ loved, the *imitatio Christi* motif, and its attending negative or apophatic theological and doctrinal grace inputs are more fully developed.

LOVE

Having operationally defined Kierkegaardian selfhood, I now undertake that which Kierkegaard could not, or would not, do: A succinct description of love for this dissertation. And if concise summary of Kierkegaardian love is possible—and the burgeoning literature on Kierkegaard and love suggests that it is by no means certain that it is—then it may be said that, from the *Symposium*-like pseudonymous discussion of the topic in *Stages On Life's Way* through the "veronymous" consideration of the same in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard sees love's manifold forms falling roughly into two categories: *eros* (erotic love, inclination, or passionate preference) and *agapē* (disinterested, impartial love).[102] Whether specifically

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[101] *SUD* 114/*SKS* 11, 226.

[102] Michael Strawser coined the term "veronymous," meaning published under Kierkegaard's own name, in *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard—From Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 85n28. For a representative sampling of concerted studies of Kierkegaard and love and the issues therein emanating from Kierkegaard's notion of impartiality, see, for example, Daphne Hampson, "Kierkegaard's Odyssey," in *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 249–84; Sharon Krishek, "In Defense of a Faith-Like Model of Love: A Reply to John Lippitt's 'Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships:

referencing the act of helping someone or something thrive, flourish, or grow; taking pleasure in that someone or something; feeling strong inner warmth, sensual and sexual attraction, and passionate joy for them; showing concern, compassion, care, and charity for them; highly revering and valuing them; being unwilling to part with and significantly attached or devoted to them; perceiving them as especially beautiful, good, or appealing; or simply the more general act of falling in and making love with said someone or something, erotic love, for all that it inspires the poet, is exclusive and exclusionary love of a delimited object (e.g., person, family or social unit) and tends towards monstrous selfishness. Indeed, for Kierkegaard, erotic love in itself is not love of another individual at all but rather love of self, one's infatuated love of self reflected, as Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, in the specular surface of one's beloved: "[E]rotic love and friendship are the very peak of self-esteem, the *I* intoxicated in the *other I*."[103] Kierkegaard identifies this kind of preferential love in which the other (and specifically, using the language of the Greatest Commandment, the neighbour) does not exist as 'pagan': "[N]o one in paganism loved the neighbour; no one suspected that he existed."[104] By contrast, Kierkegaard identifies the truly other-regarding agapic love that is the love of one spirit for another and fundamentally not rooted in self-interest as the invention of Christianity and therefore is rightly called Christian love. As drawn from the New Testament, such love "builds up," "believes all things," "hopes," "does

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Ferreira, Krishek, and the 'God filter'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 75, no. 2 (2014): 155–66; "Kierkegaard on Impartiality and Love," *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2016): 109–28; John Lippitt, "True Love and True Self-Sacrifice," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 66, no. 3 (2009): 125–38; "Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek and the 'God filter,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 72, no. 3 (2012): 125–38; Pia Søltoft, "The Transparency of Self-Love? Kierkegaard vs. Frankfurt," *MLN* 128, no. 5 (2013): 1115–31; Sylvia I. Walsh, "Forming the Heart: The Role of Love in Kierkegaard's Thought," in *The Grammar of the Heart: New Essays in Moral Philosophy & Theology*, ed. Richard H. Bell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 234–56.

[103] *WL* 56/*SKS* 9, 62.

[104] *WL* 53/*SKS* 9, 60.

not seek its own," "hides a multitude of sins," and, ultimately, "abides."[105] As much as these two general categories of love are contrasted, however, it is more rightly the case that Christian love, for Kierkegaard, is meant to be "concentric" with erotic, preferential love such that the latter is preserved in the former in a higher "new immediacy" and it is in this sense, then, that we may concur with Pia Søltoft that there is in fact only one and the same love in Kierkegaard.[106] That is, while it is undeniably difficult to trace the sundry ways in which the love that expresses itself in, for example, friendship, marriage, parental love, other familial love, love of God, the romance of falling in love, erotica and concupiscent desire, self-love, neighbourly love, and works of love can all be thought together under the same heading, there remains for Kierkegaard but one form of authentic love and that is Christian love that manifests itself differently according to the ways in which we love. "Christianity," Kierkegaard states, "knows only one kind of love, the spirit's love, but this can lie at the base of and be present in every expression of love."[107]

In turn, of the many things that may be said of Christian love, Kierkegaard is clear that its highest expression is to help another to stand alone as independent in such a way that the beloved does not become dependent upon the lover. "The highest one human being can do for another," is to make the other "free, independent, himself, his own master, and just by hiding his help [the lover] has helped him [the beloved] to stand by himself."[108] In other words, the highest work of love is to convey love to another in such a way that the other becomes autonomous, enters *coram Deo* into relationship with God and thereby acquires the ability to Christianly love. However, for Kierkegaard, this work of love is vanquished if the beloved thus helped grasps that their independence is dependent upon their lover. As such, if

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[105] *WL* 209, 225, 246, 264, 280, 300/*SKS* 9, 212, 227, 246, 263, 278, 298.
[106] *EO2*, 57/*SKS* 3, 61; *SLW* 162/*SKS* 6, 152; Pia Søltoft, "Indledning," in *Kierkegaard og Kærlighedens Skikkelser* (København: Akademisk Forlag, 2014), 1–19.
[107] *WL* 146/*SKS* 9, 147–8.
[108] *WL* 275/*SKS* 9, 273.

the Christian love act is to take root, the lover must become "invisible" as a "hidden benefactor," must willingly be "shoved aside" and become as nothing, a mere instrument of God.[109] Textually, Kierkegaard handles the dilemma of at once helping and, to all appearances, not helping by way of the author's dash—a punctuation mark under which the lover's identity and involvement is said to disappear. He explains, with the dash,

> the greatest contradiction is surmounted. He [the beloved] is standing by himself…more you do not see. You see no help or support, no awkward bungler's hand holding on to him, any more than it occurs to the person himself that someone has helped him. No, he is standing by himself—through another's help. But this other person's help is hidden from him—the one who was helped? No, from the eyes of the independent one (for if he knows that he has been helped, then in the deepest sense he of course is not the independent one who helps and has helped himself); it is hidden behind the dash.[110]

Significantly, contra an egregious *erratum* and omission from the standard English translation of the tract, the penultimate section of *Works of Love* concludes with a dash, thereby raising the intriguing prospect that Kierkegaard's authorship of *Works of Love* is itself a work of love, a love letter to its reader.[111] Under the semiosis of the dash, the author, S. Kierkegaard, may be seen to (ineffectually?) dissolve into nothingness and the reader is indirectly given over to God, the "source of all love in heaven and on earth," and the "Governance" whom Kierkegaard reports steered his authorship from start to finish, as the rightful author of all love.[112] Whether Kierkegaard's use of the dash is the stroke of genius, miscarried literary stratagem, or integral to exegesis of Kierkegaardian love at all matters less than the fact that the touchstone of the one and only love in Kierkegaard is that such Christian love is what it is by way of a fundamental and temporally unending transformation within the ongoing effort to become a self in Kierkegaard's sense. Namely, Christian love subverts the monstrous selfishness of self-love, raising every lower form of love to a higher immediacy, by virtue of

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[109] *WL* 274, 278/*SKS* 9, 273, 276.
[110] *WL* 275/*SKS* 9, 273–4.
[111] See *WL* 374. Cf. *SKS* 9, 367.
[112] *WL* 3/*SKS* 9, 12; *PV* 71–90/*SKS* 16, 50–69.

the sustained process of resignation, self-denial, or dying away such that only one who has died to or resigned all egoistic motives has become as nothing before God and can therein, and only therein, hiddenly enact the highest one human being can do for another, perseveringly loving the other "throughout the duration of time," whatever time may be.[113]

In this way, placing us squarely within the primary focus of this dissertation, the God relationship (that, I maintain, is not reducible to the normative ethics of neighbour love, however integral it is for it) sets the mark of whether one loves Christianly, writing, for example, that "the person who in love belongs to a woman shall first and foremost belong totally to God, shall not seek first to please his wife but shall first do his utmost so that his love may please God."[114] Notably, doing one's 'utmost' means nothing other than the dying away of becoming nothing before God, which is the essential basis of the God-relationship. Insofar as it is foundational for loving in the Christian sense and loving God in particular, then, I now turn to briefly expositing Kierkegaard's seminal notion of dying away.

KIERKEGAARD AND DYING AWAY

Setting aside its implausibility and likely hyperbolic nature of the statement, if Kierkegaard is correct that before and in "1848 I myself was not aware of all this about 'imitation,' about dying away, being born again, etc.," then, more certainly in the years thereafter and leading up to his death in 1855, dying away became essential for Kierkegaard's grasp of Christian life.[115] It became essential for Kierkegaard—as Adam Buben rightly observes, the writings from 1848 onwards pay greater attention to dying away—in the way that Christianity as such is "the doctrine of dying away" and through it one comes to relate to God, for "to die away is the condition for seeing God" and is thus integral to the "[p]rogress

[113] *WL* 132/*SKS* 9, 134.
[114] *WL* 112–3/*SKS* 9, 116.
[115] *KJN* 9, 12/NB26:7a.

of becoming or being [Christian]."[116] As Marie Mikulová Thulstrup comments, and I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter IV, the term 'to die away' (*at afdø*; *Afdøelse* or 'dying away') is commonly used in devotional literature known to Kierkegaard (hence the implausibility of his reported ignorance prior to 1848) and is just as commonly cited as essential to Christianity. Johann Arndt (1555–1621), for one, beseeches "that I may die from myself and the world. For without these two things it is impossible to become a true Christian."[117]

But, as central as the term is for Kierkegaard's pietism-inspired Christianity, even when 'dying away' does not appear in his texts, it is not the only lexical indicator and the concept is clearly not far from Kierkegaard's mind such that there are discernible inklings of it or neighbouring concepts present in his writings. One might think that Johannes de silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, for example, has something like dying away in mind when he says that "[i]nfinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity."[118] One could choose other examples, and there are many, wherein neither dying away nor infinite resignation are invoked but, say, self-denial, renunciation, negation, or annihilation are. However, the key convergence is the articulation of a *willingness* to resign, give up, or sacrifice even that which one otherwise loves most in the world. Now, it is true that the object to be sacrificed, denied, renounced, negated, or annihilated, the specific object from which an individual is to die away is not

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[116] Adam Buben, "Dying To/Renunciation," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm*, eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 215); *Pap.* XI 3 B 144 (Cf. *KJN* 8, 17–8/NB21:18); *KJN* 8, 475/NB25:47, *KJN* 9, 86/NB26:86; *KJN* 10, 287/NB33:38; *KJN* 9, 198–9/NB27:81 (Cf. *Pap*. XI 2 A 378).

[117] Johann Arndt, *Sex Bøger om den Sande Christendom*, 4th ed. (Copenhagen: C. Andersens, 1763), Book I, p. 75, cited in Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, "The Significance of Mortification and Dying Away (To)," in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1978), 161.

[118] *FT* 46/*SKS* 4, 120.

exactly pinpointed by Kierkegaard, save his advisement in *Christian Discourses* that "truth teaches that a person must die to finitude (to its pleasures, its preoccupations, its projects, its diversions), must go through this death to life…and realize how empty is that with which busyness fills up life, how trivial is that which is the lust of the eye and the craving of the carnal heart."[119] But, more fundamentally, beyond finitude, with dying away and correlated expressions, Kierkegaard embraces the view he identifies with the Christianity of the New Testament—indeed, dying away properly belongs to the fulfilment of the imitation of Christ—wherein an individual human being must die away not from this or that finite object but from their own will, "[t]his is the meaning of dying away."[120] Accordingly, for Kierkegaard, dying away and its cognates are conceived of as an ethical-religious task entailing the fundamental restructuring of the will to align with that of God's in the figurative martyrdom of serving Christ through imitation and it must be said that Kierkegaard is under no illusions as to the difficulty of this task. He is under no illusions as to the strenuous task (as identified above, the task of selfhood) of dying and the act of dying away which signifies an inward mental process that is spiritually superior to the simple death and dying of the physical body.[121] Of note, where Climacus exposits throughout *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that authentic Christian existence is that of suffering and specifically that of "dying to immediacy" and to "oneself," Kierkegaard writes that the Christian suffering involved in dying away is at once the truest "[m]ark of the God-relationship or of God's love" and a whole order of magnitude higher than to physically die "because to die is merely to suffer—to die away is freely to compel oneself into the same suffering. Furthermore, dying is, after all, a rather brief suffering—dying away lasts for an entire life."[122] Indeed, the

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[119] *CD* 172/*SKS* 10, 183.
[120] *KJN* 8, 21–3/NB21:29; *KJN* 10, 415/NB35:50, see also *KJN* 10, 308–9/NB33:54.
[121] See *KJN* 9, 187–9/NB27:72.
[122] *CUP 1*, 460–3/*SKS* 7, 418–21; *KJN* 9, 76/NB26:77; *KJN* 10, 156/NB32:54.

Christian suffering of dying away is not only everlasting but the implied torment is as horrifying as vivisection, in fact worse inasmuch as vivisection is "only a short-lived metaphor for the suffering of being a [Christian]: to be kept alive while in a state of death," even eliciting (inaudible, inward) screams from the metaphorical surgical theatre or "torture chamber."[123] That said, significantly, Kierkegaard is adamant that Christian dying away and the suffering attending the task is enacted voluntarily. It is unreservedly "an act of freedom" and not one in which, even though commanded by God, indeed (as this dissertation holds) is the Greatest Commandment of God, human volition is annulled but, to the contrary, is undertaken in order to become a self and attain the eternal bliss and goal of immortality.[124]

DYING AWAY AND THE LOVE OF GOD

At least as clear from the abovementioned Kierkegaardian sense of dying away as integral to becoming a Christian, Kierkegaard unmistakeably integrates dying away and loving God. Writing, for example, that "God, in infinite love, wants to help you so that you may be able to love him. See, that is why you must die away, and that is what he wills with suffering; for without dying away you can never love God; for you it will be sheer torment—and imagine, what infinite love, that God in love wants to help you to love him so that you can be properly blessed in this love, which is possible only when you die away."[125] Returning, then, to the secondary literature in which a diversity of ways of understanding Kierkegaardian loving God has been documented, now with a depiction of Kierkegaardian selfhood, love, dying away, and their association with loving God firmly in view, there are indeed a collection of studies attaching dying away, negation, annihilation, self-denial, resignation, and renunciation to loving God. In her close reading of *Works of Love*, Ferreira,

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[123] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 379/Paper 574; *KJN* 10, 241/NB32:144.
[124] *KJN* 9, 143/NB27:25; see also *KJN* 9, 135–6/NB27:19, *KJN* 9, 145–6/NB27:29; *KJN* 7, 452/NB20:92.
[125] *KJN 9*, 68/NB26:68 (see also, for example, *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 384/Paper 578 and *KJN* 8, 483–4/NB25:58).

for instance, notes that "[i]n self-denial, we hold fast to God. Holding fast to God is knowing Love. One can only praise what one knows or what one is, so the more one knows God, the more one can love and through love praise love."[126] Here, Ferreira uses an exposition of self-denial to interpret Kierkegaard's resounding claim made in the final pages of his treatise on Christian love that "only in self-denial can one effectually praise love, because God is love, and only in self-denial can one hold fast to God. What a human being knows by himself about love is very superficial; he must come to know the deeper love from God—that is, in self-denial he must become what every human being can become…an instrument for God."[127] As another example, revisiting *Fear and Trembling*, Clare Carlisle likewise consociates the dying away-proximate idea of resignation with loving God such that, quoting de silentio, "[t]he movement of resignation enables the individual to actualise his love for God: "what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness…[and] my eternal consciousness is my love for God."[128] Very clearly, then, there exists a strong connection between dying away and loving God. Kierkegaard himself says as much and the secondary literature on Kierkegaard generally attests to the same, which leads me to the contributions of this dissertation.[129]

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[126] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 234. This same point is reiterated as well by Julia T. Meszaros, "Grappling with a Tension: Love and Self in Søren Kierkegaard," in *Selfless Love and Human Flourishing in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 22–44.
[127] *WL* 364/*SKS* 9, 358.
[128] Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 103; *FT* 48/*SKS* 4, 142.
[129] Further instances of secondary studies in which dying away and related concepts are attached to loving God include Amy Laura Hall's discussion of resignation in love ("On the Way," in *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 172–99), Frederik Sontag's critical discussion of self-abnegation as Christianity's essential form of love ("Love," in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*, 121), and Per Lønning's discussion of Kierkegaard's metaphorical use of the concept of death ("The Christian Death," in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*, 175–6).

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

As may be gleaned from what has been summarily reviewed, an enormous amount of ink has been spilt over Kierkegaard's ethics and spirituality as it pertains to love and relationship with God.[130] So much so, it is sensible to query: What possible need is there for a concerted inquiry into the topic of loving God within Kierkegaard? What non-trivial, non-contrived lacunae exist in the Kierkegaard studies literature for the present study to fill? To answer this question and begin specifying prospective contributions of this dissertation, it is important to recognise that none of the studies mentioned in my review, nor indeed any that I have been able to locate, take the love of God as the focus of their inquiry. Studies which do acknowledge (if cursorily) the topic of loving God most commonly treat it as a stepping-stone towards illuminating some other purpose or concept in Kierkegaard—the articulation of a divine command ethics, the Lutheran notion of *coram Deo*, or the exposition of a metaphysics of motion, for instance.[131] Keeping in mind that the primary aim of this dissertation is to illuminate the love of God in Kierkegaard as the death to the psychogenic idols of the mind, apart from positing a reading of Kierkegaard that explicitly offers a scrutable conception of Kierkegaardian love of God, this dissertation may be seen to offer a further two salient contributions. To detail the first contribution of this dissertation, then, the treatment of dying away and resignation as actualising the love of God noted above raises a striking point of entry for my effort to concertedly explore the love of God in Kierkegaard's writings: The relationship between faith and loving God.

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[130] Other inclusive reviews of Kierkegaard's ethics and spirituality may be found in C. Stephen Evans and Robert C. Roberts, "Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 211–29; John Lippitt, "Kierkegaard and Moral Philosophy: Some Recent Themes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 505–27; Philip L. Quinn "Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 349–75; Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and "Kierkegaard's Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 292–308.

[131] See Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*; Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*; and Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, respectively.

FAITH AND LOVING GOD

From outside the domain of Kierkegaard studies *per se*, scholars such as Anders Nygren famously espouse the view that faith fully subsumes love of God and is therefore a proper substitute for loving God. In *Agape and Eros*, Nygren contends: "Faith includes in itself the whole devotion of love, while emphasising that it has the character of response, that it is reciprocated love. Faith is love towards God, but a love of which the keynote is receptivity, not spontaneity."[132] In general, Nygren's notion of faith expresses a suspicion of all claims about human meritoriousness and initiative with respect to loving God, seeing that through all such talk courses a dominant strain of human presumptuousness, as though human beings could possibly love apart from faithful relationship with God, apart from God who is the mysterious source and origin of all human love. Drawing no small measure of criticism, Nygren deflates any humanly-grounded manifestations of love and memorably presents the Christian as having "nothing of his own to give," as "merely the tube, the channel, through which God's love flows."[133]

Turning to the Kierkegaard studies literature proper, as is widely considered, the relationship between faith and love is personified in *Fear and Trembling* and this text offers a multitude of passages which, I think, help shed light on the relationship between faith and loving God and the model of the latter that I hold in this dissertation. I focus here on two such passages. First, marvelling at the faith of Abraham in the *Akedah* (Gen. 22), de silentio plainly dissociates faith and the love of God in indicating that one may love God with *and* without faith: "If it had been otherwise with Abraham, he perhaps would have loved God but would not have had faith, for he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God."[134] Second, in delineating the knight of infinite

[132] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1957), 127.
[133] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 735.
[134] *FT* 37/*SKS* 4, 132.

resignation from the knight of faith in his examination of the figure of Abraham, de silentio more elaboratively states the dissociation of faith and loving God:

> The act of resignation does not require faith, for what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness. This is purely a philosophical movement that I venture to make when it is demanded and can discipline myself to make, because every time some finitude will take power over me, I starve myself into submission until I make the movement, for [as aforementioned] my eternal consciousness is my love for God, and for me that is the highest of all. The act of resignation does not require faith, but to get the least little bit more than my eternal consciousness requires faith, for this is the paradox. The movements are often confused…Through resignation I renounce everything…This movement I make all by myself, and what I gain thereby is my eternal consciousness in blessed harmony with my love for the eternal being. By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith I receive everything…By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac.[135]

Following from de silentio's portrayal, the position I take in this dissertation—and one which as far as I am aware is seldom presented, or rarely presented explicitly, and therefore comprising a contribution of my study—is that loving God is not identical with faith. It is, however, a part of faith. Specifically, it is the precursory step of faith. Faith is a broader phenomenon (e.g., including believing and trusting in God) and specifically treating loving God as a particular facet of this phenomenon preserves the important sense of conation and willed-activity that is undertaken as part of and distinctively involved in the overall passion of faith. Indeed, a presupposition of my study is that, for Kierkegaard, loving God is a conative act of will whereas faith as a broader phenomenon is not in itself simply reducible to an act of volition.[136] As Climacus categorically stipulates in *Philosophical Fragments*, "faith

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[135] *FT* 48–9/*SKS* 4, 142–3.

[136] That many commentators see Kierkegaardian faith as primarily a matter of will is an especially salient point—Walter Lowrie regards it as a common exegetical mistake and a "very grave misunderstanding" in reading Kierkegaard (*A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 109)—resulting, I think, from the failure to differentiate between faith as a broader passion and loving God as a more circumscribed and thoroughly conative component of faith. In fact, beyond that which I recount in the main text, there is indeed a handsome literature reading Kierkegaard as a voluntarist who espouses the faith of theistic belief as only and always a matter of sheer personal will. Examples of those reading Kierkegaard in league with voluntarism include Louis P. Pojman, "Belief, Will and

is not an act of will, for it is always the case that all human willing is efficacious only within the [divinely given] condition [of faith]."[137] That being so, unpseudonymed Kierkegaard also remarks that "[f]aith in fact surely involves an expression of will…for how else can I explain…that it says in the [New Testament] that whoever does not believe is to be punished."[138] Moreover, "[w]hat does it mean to have faith? It means, with the fear of God and with unconditional obedience, to be willing (which you *shall* and because you *shall*) to defend yourself against the vain thought of wanting to comprehend, and against the vain delusion of being able to comprehend."[139] Multiple arguments have been offered as a means of reconciling Kierkegaard's apparently contradictory position vis-à-vis faith and the will.[140] George Henry Price, for example, maintains that, with these two contradictory views, Kierkegaard is "really denying…that faith is an act of 'willed understanding'," that faith is in any way a provisional form of knowledge with which we must make do until it is deposed by more steadfast knowledge.[141] Mark C. Taylor, alternately, ascribes Kierkegaard's ambiguity on faith and will to a tension between God's grace and human freedom such that Kierkegaard holds faith to be a function of both grace and human will.[142] Law is of the same general cast of mind as Taylor and explains that "Kierkegaard is against the understanding of grace that

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Justification of Religious Belief," in *Religious Belief and the Will* (London: Routledge, 1986), 141–92, as well as Terence Penelhum, "Evangelical Fideism—I and II," in *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983), 75–87. As rebuttal to voluntarist readings of Kierkegaard, see, for example, Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?" in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, 299–309.

[137] *PF* 62/*SKS* 4, 264.

[138] *KJN* 11 (Part 1), 99/Paper 58.

[139] *KJN* 6, 39/NB11:70.

[140] e.g., see George L. Stengren's effort wherein Kierkegaard's contradictory assessments of faith and will are interpreted as manifestations of his anti-Hegelianism, attacking different aspects of the Hegelian system ("Faith," *Kierkegaardiana* 12, (1982): 81–92).

[141] George Henry Price, *The Narrow Pass: A Study of Kierkegaard's Concept of Man* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), 129.

[142] Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 313–29.

eliminates will but at the same time, in view of his consciousness of human sinfulness and the significance this has for the will, it is necessary that he retain [the view of grace which continually addresses sinful human willing]."[143] That Kierkegaard's apparent contradiction vis-à-vis faith and will may be accounted for by reference to a Kierkegaardian tension abridging grace and human volition is indeed the position upheld in this dissertation. Explicitly, I sustain this position by premising loving God as part of the overall passion of faith but nevertheless separable from the broader construct as the uniquely conative component of faith whereas other components of faith including doxastic belief in God are not acts of will. Hence, Kierkegaard can jointly speak of faith as both act of will and not depending on whether the love of God is referenced.

To elaborate this point, it is an unfortunate characteristic of many prior investigations that faith and love of God are interchanged so seamlessly that one cannot be faulted for deriving the sense that it is erroneous to do anything other than establish the intimate connection between the two to the point of ignoring any distinctiveness whatever. John Davenport, for example, does not mark any nuances between faith and loving God in his analysis of de silentio's tract in asserting that the "duty to God is the duty to have faith in Him…[w]hen faith is defined existentially as absolute trust in God's eschatological promise to us as unique individuals, then our duty to love God must in turn mean more than simply obeying God as the metaethical Alpha or source of moral norms; it also means trusting in God as Omega, the actualizer of revealed eschatological possibilities."[144] Against such commonplace and broad-stroke interchanges of faith and loving God, however, I maintain in

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[143] Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 154–5n166.

[144] John J. Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 216. In addition, Sharon Krishek contends that love requires faith and often treats the two as interchangeable (see especially "The Double Movement of Love" and "Faith-Full Romantic Love," in *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 138–89).

this dissertation that justice must be done to the actively willed component of love in one's faith-based relationship with God.

Gene Outka articulates the relationship between faith and loving God and the requirement to consider the latter in isolation nicely when he writes that "[a] systematic substitution of faith," in place of loving God, "misleads more rather than less." He continues:

> For justice must be done to an active as well as a passive element in response, which the normal sense of "faith" is ill-prepared to include. The content of active response shares with neighbour-love the feature of self-giving to an extent that legitimates the use of the same word [i.e., "love" for God]. For while it may be true that the agent cannot give any*thing* to God, he can meaningfully withhold *himself*. And if he can be said to withhold himself, or if you like his final loyalty, his heart, soul, and mind, he can also plausibly be said to give them. In short, the keynote of faith is indeed receptivity [i.e., of God's love] but this does not exhaust the meaning of response. Love for God refers to the active element in this response, the placing of the self at God's disposal. Faith is being grasped by God and love is adhering to Him.[145]

In addition to deftly marking out the relationship between faith and loving God, Outka's description felicitously denotes the idiom of the Greatest Commandment. Whatever else loving God may be, it necessarily entails a giving of one's heart, soul, and mind to God (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30, 33; Luke 10:27). The appearance of the Greatest Commandment within the title of this dissertation, as said, then, denotes what I regard as the seminally important fact that loving God in the sense pointed to by the Greatest Commandment sets a task or goal of selfhood, something for which fulfilment is sought, which, for Kierkegaard, irreplaceably subserves what it is to become a self.[146] And this, in turn, leads to consideration of the next contribution of this dissertation.

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[145] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 51.
[146] The topic of selfhood is perhaps the most researched topic in the whole of Kierkegaard studies (see John J. Davenport's review in "Selfhood and 'Spirit'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 230–51). Oddly enough, though, as far as I am aware, even amongst expressly theological studies of Kierkegaard, this dissertation is the first to examine the topic of loving God—in a sense in which it is conveyed in scripture (and, more specifically, the New Testament)—as something more than merely that which may be recruited as an *en passant* remark made in description of Kierkegaard's theological ethics and account of selfhood or becoming a self.

More specifically, the idea of fulfilment inheres within it the notion of need and, correspondingly, obtaining a full picture of loving God as the active component of Kierkegaardian faith necessitates circumspect consideration of the need of, or need for, love/God. Suitably, Pattison and Kirkpatrick allude to the fact that Kierkegaard's account of love in general involves "what, in traditional language, would have been called affective as well as purely volitional elements" and point out that the title of Kierkegaard's 1844 discourse, "To Need [*Trang*] God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection," references the impulse to seek God as "a drive or need, that is not entirely the same as an act of deliberative volition."[147] More generally, when, for example, Kierkegaard speaks of the fundamental and primary basis for one's love of God residing in grasping "that one needs God, loves him simply because one needs him," that "[t]he person who most profoundly recognises his need of God loves him most truly," this love is not the expression of will in any sense purged of or divorced from affectivity but equally embraces a sense of need, even affective compulsion.[148] Consequently, in this dissertation, I do not draw a distinction between will and need other than a quantitative one. That is, I regard will as simply a more attenuated expression of need and associated motivation, as desire and longing are to requirement, as wishing and wanting are to necessity. This intermingling of will and need undoubtedly introduces complexity but this, I think, is precisely what one should expect when exploring a topic grounded on relationship as is Kierkegaard's conception of loving God. Even if one has qualms with likening Kierkegaard's authorial project to that of, say, Saint Augustine, I do not think that Frederik Sontag is altogether wrong when he asserts that Kierkegaard's "life and works would not be misunderstood if they were taken as the diary of his sometimes violent,

[147] Pattison and Kirkpatrick, *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought*, 35.
[148] *CD* 188/*SKS* 10, 198–9.

sometimes enlightening, love affair with God."[149] In any case, the structure of will and need in loving God couched in relational terms certainly creates a major challenge and stokes a palpable sense of aporia within Kierkegaard's writings.

However, while I seek to acknowledge and indeed affirm the aporia one encounters in contemplating the need for God as love for God, I do not believe that exploring such with Kierkegaard perforce calls for inviolate and absolute quietism in the sense that I should conclude the dissertation here and now and say no more on the matter. On the contrary, I think that meaningful exposition is gained by examining not only what Kierkegaard directly and indirectly says about the love of God but, as said, also by relating Kierkegaard's own thoughts to other thinkers who, in their own ways, and even if *nolens volens*, illumine the topic of loving God. Of note, this is done by placing Kierkegaard's thought in dialogue with the contributions to the topic of loving God from such relevant thinkers as Kant, J. G. Fichte, Jacobi, Schlegel, and, above all, Schopenhauer. As should be expected given the primary aim of this dissertation, my focus remains upon Kierkegaard throughout my study and, while I do consider Schopenhauer in relatively greater detail, I do not provide extended treatments of

[149] Sontag, "Love," in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*, 124. Examples of studies exploring Augustine and Kierkegaard and arguing for a perceptible Augustinianism in Kierkegaard include Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: William Eerdmans, 2013); George Pattison, "Inwardness in Augustine and Kierkegaard," *Estudios Kierkegaardianos: Revista de filosofia*, no. 5 (2019): 75–92; Robert B. Puchniak, "Existence as Pilgrimage: Echoes of Augustinian Thought in Kierkegaard," in *Augustine and Kierkegaard*, ed. John Doody, Kim Paffenroth, and Helene Tallon Russell (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 213–30; and "Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 11–22. Beyond explicit attempts to document the influence of the Early Church Father on Kierkegaard, other studies liken the theological projects of Kierkegaard to Augustine in more circumscribed respects. For example, on the topic of grace which, as will be discussed in Chapter IV, Kierkegaard calls necessary from the very start of any human initiative including dying away, *imitatio Christi*, and pursuing the Greatest Commandment to love God, John Hare writes that Augustine likewise does not deny "that we are able to do what God commands, only that we are able to do *so on our own*" (*God and Morality* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 83).

any of these figures and their respective thought on the same scale as I do Kierkegaard.[150] Still, in interfacing the thinkers of Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaard, I do hope to clarify and illuminate the Kierkegaardian landscape of loving God without, ideally (and as aforementioned), performing a procrustean fit of this reading into Kierkegaard's hand and rendering undue harm to the historical Kierkegaard or his texts, even whilst openly acknowledging my reading as targeting *intentio operis* as opposed to strict *intentio auctoris*.

More to the point of relating nihilism and loving God, building from the above description of dying away and related terms, I see the dying away complex of ideas as the pivotal conceptual bridge that informs, clarifies, but also distinguishes the relationship between nihilism and loving God. For nihilism, as I present it in this dissertation, in donning the vernacular of apophatic and negative theology, exhibits a distinct resemblance to the thinking that subserves love's dying away and therefore to Kierkegaardian love of God. And yet, as a point to be elaborated in this investigation, Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaardian loving God remain decisively different and delving into certain theological tenets—including those propounded by Johannes Tauler (*c*. 1300–1361), Thomas à Kempis (*c*. 1380–1471), and Johann Arndt—of the Moravian Pietist theological legacy in which Kierkegaard was raised uncovers more exactly wherein this crucial difference rests. As to the veritable contribution of this dissertation, then, prior studies, including those which I

[150] For studies examining these thinkers in relation to Kierkegaard, none of which consider loving God (or even reference the topic), see Ronald M. Green, "Kant: A Debt Both Obscure and Enormous," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I: Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 179–210; David J. Kangas, "J. G. Fichte: From Transcendental Ego to Existence," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I*, 67–96; Anders Moe Rasmussen, "Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: Two Theories of the Leap," in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions, Tome I: Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 33–50; K. Brian Söderquist, "Friedrich Schlegel: On Ironic Communication, Subjectivity and Selfhood," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome III*, 185–233; and Simonella Davini, "Schopenhauer: Kierkegaard's Late Encounter with His Opposite," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I*, 277–92.

reference in Chapter IV, have indeed examined Kierkegaard's pietist religious upbringing in detail. However, as far as I can tell, none have examined said upbringing in special relation to Schopenhauerian nihilism. I therefore offer Kierkegaard and his pietism-inspired conception of loving God in relation to (and distinction from) Schopenhauerian nihilism for the first time in predominately English-language scholarship of Kierkegaard.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Having introduced in this opening chapter the theme of loving God and love's dying away, posited several methodological and other considerations, surveyed the extant literature, and specified some key contributions of this dissertation, all that remains is to offer a roadmap for that which lay ahead. In the next chapter, Chapter II, I give concrete form to the sense of nihilism invoked in this dissertation that is informative to Kierkegaard's conception of loving God. I do this by tracing a philosophy of will stemming from Kant's transcendental idealism and continuing through J. G. Fichte's idealist doctrine of the absolute I or ego. Here, nihilism properly emerges in that the German *Nihilismus* is first used by Fichte's contemporary, Jacobi, as a diagnosis of Fichte's distinctive philosophy. Leaving the matter of the veracity of Jacobi's judgement of Fichtean idealism aside, I conclude Chapter II by recounting Schlegel's German Romantic appropriation and radicalisation of Fichte's philosophical ideas before assessing Schopenhauer, and, more exactly, his ethics of ascetic negation of the will-to-live, more so than the philosophies and aesthetics of Schlegel (or the *Frühromantiker* in general), as the apex of nihilism.

With this specific portrayal of nihilism on board, then, in Chapter III, I begin to disclose the way in which Kierkegaard erects a conception of loving God that in some respects resembles a species of nihilism but in actual fact decisively differs from it by examining Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer's thought. In the course of my analysis

in this chapter, I argue that Schopenhauer's philosophical project of nihilism requires a goal and, for this, Schopenhauer elects asceticism or witnessing to nothingness in a continual negation of the will-to-live. For Kierkegaard, the goal undergirding Schopenhauerian asceticism/nihilism is flawed precisely because the goal does not and cannot aspire to eternity, religiously conceived. Lacking religious eternity, Kierkegaard assesses that Schopenhauerian nihilism opts for temporal fruits such as intellectual and moral elitism and this belies the intractable difficulty for Schopenhauer's philosophical project. At once rejecting and accepting the temporal deliverances of the will-to-live *eo ipso* identifies the inability of the will-to-live to not will and, in an attempted explanation of how the will-to-live freely abolishes itself, Schopenhauer problematically appeals to happenstance or grace (excommunicated from Christian doctrine). Here, I observe, as does Kierkegaard, that Schopenhauer resorts to a theological notion of grace and relies on theology to explain a purportedly literal philosophical truth of how the nihilistic negation of the will-to-live is actualised. In so doing, as Kierkegaard diagnoses, Schopenhauer violates his own principle that philosophy uncovers truth and looks to theology only for allegories and metaphors with which to communicate such. I conclude this chapter such that, whereas Schopenhauer appeals to a Christian theological framework which is said to be jettisoned as obsolete, Kierkegaard openly leans on said framework to shape the particulars of loving God.

In Chapter IV, I consider the specific Christian theological framework in which Kierkegaard was raised—Kierkegaard's upbringing in Moravian Pietism, deriving therefrom a uniquely kenotic Christological orientation, appropriating certain of its mystical, apophatic, or negative theological tendencies, and expressing a distinctive doctrine of grace—to furnish his grasp of loving God in the sense of the Greatest Commandment. In the course of this chapter, I consider the key tenets of Kierkegaard's pietism toward the end of delineating Schopenhauerian nihilism from Kierkegaardian love of God, whatever ascetic language

resemblances they share regarding death and dying to self and world and partial conceptual overlap they hold vis-à-vis proclivities for apophatic knowledge and dependence on grace.

Finally, in Chapter V, I conclude that, for Kierkegaard, loving God amounts to a formation of the heart in which one willingly endeavours to die to the psychogenic idols of the mind, and this ineluctably entails not nihilism but dying to the Schopenhauerian nihilistic, idolatrous knowledge of the nothingness of self, world, and God, that each of these is *nihil*. By dying to the idols of the mind in this way, one holds fast to God or gives one's heart, soul, and mind to God, offering a love to God that is thoroughly one's own, therein becoming a self in Kierkegaard's sense. That is to say, by dying away from the psychogenic idols of the mind, one authentically loves God, the precursory step in the wider passion of faith.

Chapter II

Nihilism: From Kant's Noumenon to Schopenhauer's Negation of the *Wille zum Leben*

> *The* self posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it* exists*; and conversely, the self* exists *and* posits *its own existence by virtue of merely existing…Both self and not-self are posited, in and through the self* [i.e., the absolute self]*, as capable of* mutually *limiting* one another*, in such a fashion, that is, that the reality of the one destroys that of the other, and* vice versa.[151]
>
> —*J. G. Fichte*

> *Man has this choice and this choice alone: nothing or God. If he chooses nothing, he makes himself God; that means he makes God an apparition, for it is impossible, if there is no God, for man and all that surrounds him to be anything more than an apparition. I repeat: God is, and is outside of me, a living, self-subsisting essence and being, or I am God. There is no third possibility.*[152]
>
> —*F. H. Jacobi*

> [*W*]*e confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will*[*-to-live*]*, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing…for those in*

[151] J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 97, 122.
[152] A translated fragment of a letter written by F. H. Jacobi to J. G. Fichte dated 21 March 1799 as contained in J. G. Fichte, *Band III, 3: Briefe 1796–1799*, eds. Hans Gliwitzky, Reinhard Lauth, Peter K. Schneider, and Manfred Zahn (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog, 1972). See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Jacobi to Fichte," in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill*,' trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), 524.

whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is—nothing.[153]

—*Arthur Schopenhauer*

As the first step toward depicting Kierkegaard's conception of loving God, my aim in this chapter is to characterise nihilism. I do this by considering an aetiology of nihilism arising from strands of Kant's transcendental idealist thought that emerged in response to the intellectual currents of modernity. Apart from Kant, the influential father of transcendental idealism and progenitor of idealism more broadly, several individuals figure prominently in this story.[154] The first is J. G. Fichte, whose principle (which grew out of, or in reaction to, the work of Kant) of the absolute ego or I working in and through the empirical I to eradicate the not-I left an indelible mark upon the philosophical and theological environment into which Kierkegaard was born. The second subsequent figure is the German Romantic or member of the *Frühromantiker*, Friedrich Schlegel, whom Kierkegaard read and who individually appropriated and radicalised Fichte's thought to his own purposes. The third is the contemporary and sometime student of Fichte, Schopenhauer, whose ethic of sympathetic ascetism and its mortification of the will-to-live forms a paragon of nihilism resembling an

[153] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 439.

[154] As is typical of any narrative amounting to a targeted history of an idea, close scrutiny of specific thinkers and analysis of the baroque details of their thought is sacrificed in order to economically cover greater terrain geared toward elucidation of one idea (i.e., nihilism). In the same spirit as Emmet Kennedy, without superficiality, aims at a general description of the thinkers implicated in the history of secularism (*Secularism and Its Opponents: From Augustine to Solzhenitsyn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 9), then, the story told in this chapter does not include a granular account of any thinker in particular and simplifies (though, as far as possible, hopefully without denaturing) their individual contributions and relations to the specific end of elucidating the emergence and nature of nihilism.

apophatic and negative theology and, in this respect, stands in need of demarcation from Kierkegaard's conception of loving God.[155]

As overview to the defining story of nihilism in this chapter, regardless of Kant's avowed subscription to Christianity, the vision of self and will that emerge from his philosophical system is a thoroughly autonomous ego which is dependent first and foremost upon its own introspective powers. This sense of self-dependence is consequently catalysed in Fichte into a totalising and, indeed, imperialistic, vision of subjectivity. Of note, Fichte at once offers a strident rejection of a limited epistemological and ontological scope within Kant and an equivalently radical conception of subjectivity which renders everything (both the I and the not-I) as the mere derivative of the absolute I. In turn, this hypertrophied subjectivity,

[155] Contrary to the narrative I provide in this chapter, a case could be made that nihilism begins not in the Enlightenment-Kantian foundations of modernity but rather far earlier in that, not only did the twelfth century Roman Catholic Church condemn as heresy a doctrine called 'nihilianism,' but disputations of the Latin *nihil* abound throughout comparatively early Christian theology and philosophy (e.g., Jason Taliadoros, "The Lombard, Bandinus, and Vacarius: Christological Nihilianism and the Anglo-Norman Realm," in *Mind Matters: Studies of Mediaeval and Early Modern Intellectual History in Honour of Marcia Colish*, ed. Cary J. Nederman, Nancy Van Deusen, and E. Ann Matter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 133–56; Cf. Michael Gillespie, "Nihilism in the Nineteenth Century: From Absolute Subjectivity to Superhumanity," in *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Alison Stone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 278–80; Shane Weller, "From the French Revolution to Nietzsche," in *Modernism and Nihilism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17–19). Augustine, for example, recurrently considered and wrote on the continually sustaining activity of God as essential to preventing a reversion of *creatio ex nihilo* and the implosion of creation back into the vacuum of nothingness (Emilie Zum Brunn, "The Fall Towards Impossible Nothingness," in *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 49–68). Moreover, Augustine linked loving God and putative nihilism by describing one's refusal to cleave to God, falling away from God, and the willed, voluntary desertion of God as part and parcel of nothingness: "To abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness" (Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 574 (see also, pp. 471–3 and 571–4). Nevertheless, situating nihilism in the thick of the age of Kant and his immediate wake as I do is justified inasmuch as prior invocations do not unequivocally present a concept of nihilism as much as use the amorphous idea as deprecation. Developing nihilism as something more than contumely and, more exactly, as an epiphenomenon of the human will, I maintain, comes with the more incisive diagnostics of Jacobi in conversation with Fichte reacting to Kant and the inheritors of this discourse.

and irrespective of Fichte's own theological intentions, exposed potentialities latent within Kantian thought culminating in philosophical systems without a perceived need for the God of Christianity. Hence, Fichte's contemporary, Jacobi, was prompted to brand the former's philosophy in particular and idealism in general as 'nihilism.' To Jacobi's mind, the nihilism of Fichte's idealism turned on the fact that it heralded the death, the an*nihil*ation of God or establishment of the Godhead as nothing or *nihil*, and was commensurate with the deification of humankind and the human will as expressed in Fichte's adulation of the will's infinite freedom, longing, and striving.

If a Jacobian assessment of Fichte was the first nihilism, it was by no means the last or most authoritative version, however. Indeed, after Jacobi's neologism, *après la lettre*, myriad nihilisms proliferated. One such variant is seen in the appropriation of Fichtean subjectivity by one exponent of the school of German Romanticism, Schlegel, for whom nihilism was a poetic force guided in its *poiēsis* toward a specific goal or *telos*: Knowledge of self and world.[156] Schlegel exemplifies the subtle, though nevertheless palpable, demonic character of Romantic nihilism in the mode of a surreptitious replacement of the God-relationship as the *summum bonum* of human fulfilment with erotic extravaganza and the passionate heterosexual love of man and woman. In itself, and however ironic, Schlegel's romantic negation of God in favour of love is a model of self-interest and egotism. Engrossed

[156] Under the broad rubric of Romanticism, it would be natural to embrace a number of writers including the Jena Romantics such as, for example, Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), Novalis (1772–1801), Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), Friedrich W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), and August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), all of whom were at one time or other students of Fichte and, in any case, produced works with which Kierkegaard was familiar. I have chosen to focus on Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde* as it provides a representative sampling of the distinctive inner workings of Romantic nihilism. This selection is reinforced by the fact that, as Jon Stewart has argued ("Kierkegaard and Romantic Subjectivism," in *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, & the Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 87–110), Schlegel (alongside Tieck) was specially formative to Kierkegaard's grasp and critique of irony and subjectivity, as displayed in one of Kierkegaard's earliest writings, *The Concept of Irony*.

in total preoccupation with the poetic creation of one's romantic love, Schlegel draws from Fichte to establish a religion in which nihilism is indispensably used to valorise and realise the goal of acquired knowledge of self and world.

Surpassing Schlegel, however, the most robust (and, one might say, virulent) sense of nihilism unfolds in the work of Schopenhauer. Seeking to break with the perceived fault of the Romanticism's goal-oriented ambitions, Schopenhauer's own selective appropriation of Fichte results in an initial endorsement of aestheticism. Schopenhauer's aesthetic "religion of art," however, gives way to an encounter with the "old Indian religion" and a reconfiguration of the will of Fichte's absolute I not as a laudable manifestation of human longing and striving and cosmological generativity but rather as a pointless and despicable will-to-live (*Wille zum Leben*).[157] As a salvific palliative to this ostensibly reprehensible will-to-live, Schopenhauer's selective recruitment of Fichte results in a worshipful exaltation—indeed, a virtual deification—of nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*) in the form of an asceticism of resignation or nihilistic negation in which the "act of not-willing" is undertaken and the will-to-live, "the same thing that *willed* hitherto *wills* no more."[158] In this way, Schopenhauer propounds an ultimate nihilism such that total negation of the will-to-live is pursued in order to *de facto* obtain the nil-goal of the supreme and only redeeming knowledge of both (a) one's own true

[157] George Pattison, "Skeptics and Anti-Theologians," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 417. For Schopenhauer's own account of his study of Indian religion from which, *pace* its similarities to that of idealism, he avers his notion of will materialised, see, for example, Arthur Schopenhauer, *Der Handschriftliche Nachlaβ*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Frankfurt: Waldemar Kramer, 1966), 380. For full consideration of Schopenhauer's interpretation of Indian religion, including Buddhism, see Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's 'Indian' Ethics," in *Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy*, ed. Patrick Hassan (London: Routledge, 2021), 173–92, as well as Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

[158] Arthur Schopenhauer, "Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Affirmation and Negation of the Will to Life," in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Adrian Del Caro, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 281.

essence or self *as nothing* and (b) the world in all its heartless, evacuated, senseless, and meaningless depths also *as nothing*. This eternal nothingness or self-less and vacuous world-soul "finds its expression in the entire form of existence" and is, Schopenhauer thinks, equivalent to the Buddhist rejection of what the Vedas and Upanishads of Indian religion refer to as *ātman* and *brahman*, respectively.[159] At the same time, with his stress of *nihil*, Schopenhauer is clear that the nothingness targeted by the negation of the will-to-live "counter to certain silly objections…in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance."[160] In other words, Schopenhauer's rendering of the Buddhist principle of nirvana (*Nirwana*) is not the simple affirmation of the absolute inexistence of anything. Instead, establishing a negative path to salvation that in some respects resembles the apophasis of negative theology in the sense in which one speaks of such when accent is placed upon the ineffable, unspeakable, unimaginable, and unknowable nature of God, the nothingness of Schopenhauerian nihilism is to be understood as the sign of an ignorance. An ignorance that is impossible to take away and is an enduring sign of an insurmountable limit to human language and the stark realisation that human beings are fundamentally incapable, without falling into illusion, of saying anything about the will-to-live after it has negated itself and no longer wills. Nevertheless, though Schopenhauer's superlative expression of nihilism holds that human beings cannot fathom (much less articulate) an idea of absolute nothingness, crossing over from pure apophasis to cataphasis, Schopenhauer maintains that we *are* in a position to positively understand and affirm that nothing, supremely speaking, is the highest to which we may aspire. And, in this sense, just as the last word in *The World as Will and Representation* is "nothing," the last word to every self and world, the last word to every existence is, in the negating spirit of true nihilism, abolition and definite extinction.

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[159] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 439.
[160] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 281.

Closing out the story of this chapter, then, the stage is set to see Kierkegaard's encounter with the bleak nihilism of Schopenhauer. This is significant, for, as will be taken up in Chapter III, contrary to the enormous body of literature which details Kierkegaard's poetically brilliant and psychologically penetrating criticisms of Romanticism, aestheticism, sensuousness, and immediacy, the nihilistic negation of the will-to-live and its semblance to negative theology seen in Schopenhauerian but not Romantic nihilism, serves as a most informative point of illumination for Kierkegaard's theological presentation of loving God.

KANT'S NOUMENON

> *We have now not only travelled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end.*[161]
>
> —*Immanuel Kant*

To begin telling the (or, at least, a) story of nihilism, I would like to sketch a path through which nihilism emerges from the notion of the infinite human will that Fichte

[161] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 338–9/354. Kierkegaard owned a copy of the fourth edition of this work, Immanuel Kant, *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, 4th ed. (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1794), *ASKB* 595. Insofar as this is a dissertation on Kierkegaard and the love of God, hereafter in this chapter, I endeavour to stick close to the historical research on Kierkegaard's own scholarship by listing and succinctly commenting within the footnotes on the works, volumes, and texts that I cite which were themselves contained within Kierkegaard's own library, as the latter is enumerated in the current *Auction Catalogue of Kierkegaard's Library* (*ASKB*).

excavates from the pages of Kant. It must be said, however, that Fichte's appropriation of Kant is a radicalised variant of will and subjectivity that is quite at odds with what Kant would himself find acceptable insofar as Fichte metamorphoses the notion of a subjective I in the face of the world into a veritable world-creating will. For Fichte, absolutely everything is reduced to the activity of the I, including, as later interpreters would impute, God. Indeed, some interpretations of Fichte hold the philosopher as anticipating his Bavarian contemporary, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), such that God is reduced to a mere creation of the human imagination. Fichte himself resisted this conclusion, however, in any case, to better grasp the main thrust of Fichte's radicalisation of Kant to formulate his understanding of the self or I, it is first worth briefly contextualising Kant's thought against a constellation of Enlightenment-era contemplations of objectivity and subjectivity.

Alongside rationalism, empiricism—the position which may be gainfully generalised as the claim that all knowledge is *a posteriori*, dependent upon sense experience or that experiences are the ultimate ground out of which all concepts and knowledge materialise—was the other tradition of early modern thought that fed into the fruition of Fichtean idealism. Commonly contrasted with rationalism, and no less ideationally diverse, empiricism attracted manifold adherents. In general, however, for the English empiricist, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the eminent Scottish empiricist, David Hume (1711–1776), and other empiricists, the self as well as the entire realm of subjective experience are nothing more than the happenstance permutations of matter. Human selves, as with all other observable beings, are determined and governed by the objective laws of matter, *sub ratione materiae*, and, consequently, there runs a genuine risk of their being neither free will nor selfhood in the sense of human identity endowed with powers of intellectual and moral agency. Though it must be acknowledged that neither Hobbes nor Hume outright denied notions of human freedom given that both in their own ways, as Paul Russell has argued,

sought to reconcile free will with the laws of materialistic determinism as early proponents of compatibilism, nevertheless, on some variations of empiricism, free will is merely the last sensate impulse prior to motion.[162] Moreover, the self as a unified field of experience ontologically disintegrates into the vacillating and ever-in-flux movements of atomic matter registering as evanescent perceptions.[163] For his part, Hume expanded Hobbes's views to offer a full-fledged assault on rationalism. Of note, Hume famously averred that what seemed to (among others) René Descartes (1596–1650) to be causal connections interlacing and giving rationally discernible cause-effect form to natural phenomena was in actual fact only regularities of experience and therefore causation just as such could not be observed or experienced.[164] Hume's demonstration that causality could not be derived from experience or logically deduced to an appreciable level of epistemic warrant indeed dealt an especially deleterious blow to rationalism as well as to the prospect of human knowledge more broadly, causing many to react vehemently.

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[162] Paul Russell, "Causation, Compulsion, and Compatibilism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1988): 313–21. As none are included in the auction catalogue, there is no record of Kierkegaard having owned any of Hobbes' or Hume's works. Nonetheless, and though it is important to bear in mind the difficulty of determining whether and when he read specific segments of volumes within his library, and apart from the prospect of Kierkegaard's use of loaned works, Kierkegaard did own a number of texts in which Hobbes and Hume are discussed including, eminently, Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vols. 1–2, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1844), *ASKB* 773–773a, and F. H. Jacobi, "David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch," in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke*, vols. 1–6 (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1812–1815), *ASKB* 1722–1728.

[163] Memorable in voicing an ephemeral sense of self, Hume writes: "[W]hen I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred…I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are [removed] for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist" (Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (eds.), *David Hume: A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 253).

[164] David Hume, "Section VII: Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion," in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44–57.

And, of those that did react to Hume's strident blend of empiricism and scepticism, Kant was perhaps the most vocal or at least offered one of the most sustained critiques. Though it is difficult to (satisfactorily) summarily state the monumental contributions of Kant, of special relevance here is that Kant perceived the seductive power of Hume's scepticism vis-à-vis the inductive inference of causation from experiential regularity and foresaw the potential for this scepticism to be extended to other domains and concepts. Indeed, it is not an altogether unfair assessment that one of Kant's principal projects was to counter the main tenets of a Humean empiricism which vitiated the self as organising core of experience and problematised the human endeavour to master oneself and the world through knowledge. More specifically, Kant did not see Hume's empiricist argument as proving that certainty in knowledge was impossible. Rather, for Kant, Hume's argument merely pointed to the fact that knowledge held with any degree of certainty had to be confined to a specific sphere and this, consequently, forms the underlying precept of transcendental idealism. That is, that the categories of reason pertain only to the universe of sense perception and experience—or, in Kant's terms, the phenomenon—but the categories of reason do not pertain to the world as it is in itself—the *ding an sich* or noumenon—that is unmediated by sense perception or human efforts at conceptualisation. In other words, for Kant, and unlike the way of Hume, experience did not problematise the prospect of certainty in knowledge *in toto*. Instead, knowledge in Kant is circumscribed and subjective but not invalid or nil. Such a parcelling off of a phenomenal sphere in which certain knowledge was permitted was the essence of Kant's Copernican revolution and the essence of his rejoinder to Hume in epistemology and metaphysics. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes:

> Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial

> motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. Now in metaphysics we can try in a similar way regarding the intuition of objects.[165]

In general, where Hume begins and ends with experience but does not investigate the structures of experience itself, Kant, with his Copernican revolution, undertakes just such an investigation as a means of demonstrating that all experience occurs within the confines of consciousness. For Kant, in other words, human experience is fundamentally shaped by the forms of consciousness with which we perceive and understand and, to reiterate, human beings consequently can only have knowledge of how the world consciously appears to us in representational, phenomenological form but not of the world as it is in itself. This is because, following rationalism's desire to transcend itself to the point of infinite understanding, according to Kant, one invariably stumbles upon one of a series of inherent contradictions, which he terms antinomies. Along with time, space serves as a prime example of a Kantian antinomy. That is, a contradiction arising from use of a concept without which human beings cannot make sense of reality but which nevertheless *is not* a thing-in-itself derived, as empiricists maintain, from experience—a form of intuition built into the human cognitive and perceptual apparatus and as such imposed *a priori* onto and providing structure to experience. Again in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes:

> Space is not an empirical concept that has been drawn [*a posteriori*] from outer experiences. For in order for certain sensations to be related to something outside me (i.e., to something in another place in space from that in which I find myself), thus in order for me to represent them…as outside one another, thus not merely as different but as in different places, the representation…of space must already be their ground. Thus the representation of space cannot be obtained [known or learned] from relations of outer appearance through experience, but this outer experience is itself first possible only through this representation…[s]pace is a necessary representation, *a priori*, which is the ground of all outer intuitions.[166]

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[165] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 110.
[166] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 157–8/174–5.

Kant's recognition of the antinomies attending the failure of a rationality that does not or will not constrain itself within a subjective sphere of phenomena on the one hand and a Humean empiricism which chokes off entire scores of knowledge claims on the other hand leads to Kant's assertion and defence of *synthetic a priori* knowledge. That is, knowledge that is neither true in virtue of semantic meaning alone (in contrast to analytic knowledge) and is not derived from experience.[167] In other words, against the empiricist claim that experience impresses, imprints, or inscribes all knowledge upon the otherwise blank canvass or *tabula rasa* of human mental faculties, for Kant, experience cannot be the sole conduit through which knowledge is obtained because experience itself is only possible by virtue of knowledge structures already present or innate to such faculties. Hence, experience requires synthetic *a priori* knowledge. It would seem that knowledge is preserved as tenable within Kant's system however one important observation is that Kantian knowledge is qualified as knowledge of appearances, representations, or phenomena rather than knowledge of an objective sphere of things-in-themselves and their essential natures.[168] This palpable qualification has two entailments which are critical to the unfolding of Fichtean idealism.

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[167] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 130/141. See also Daniel N. Robinson, "Kant: Intuition and the Synthetic *A Priori*," in *Rational Intuition: Philosophical Roots, Scientific Investigations*, ed. Lisa M. Osbeck and Barbara S. Held (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 115–8.

[168] Collapsing across appearances, representations, and phenomena, my equation of noumena and things-in-themselves, and my omission of Kant's notion of the transcendental object are three examples of the selective and simplified treatment of Kant presented herein. Each of these areas have warranted, and continue to warrant, independent study. Indeed, forming the incandescent core of Kant studies, the meaning and significance of Kant's notion of 'transcendent' in transcendental idealism is the topic from which many controversies issue. Although it is fair to say that Kant's doctrines in general raise numerous exegetical challenges, debates namely cluster around questions as to the nature of appearances, representations, and phenomena (e.g., Henry E. Allison, "An Introduction to the Problem," in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 3–19); the nature of things-in-themselves (e.g., Robert Merrihew Adams, "Things in Themselves," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 4 (1997): 801–25); and the relation of things-in-themselves to appearances, representations, and phenomena (e.g., Paul Guyer, "Appearances and Things in Themselves," in *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 333–44); as well as to

First, in restricting knowledge to the realm of the phenomenon, space is opened for free will and morality. In short, decades before Pierre-Simon Laplace's (1749–1827) demon—a morally incapacitating and chilling vision of an omniscient intellect which necessitates causal determinism in a totally mechanical universe—Kant recognised that if knowledge is taken as concatenating into inexorable laws of nature applicable not merely to the phenomenon but rather the noumenon, to things-in-themselves, then human freedom would be impossible. And, if there was no human freedom, then there could be no moral law since individuals could not be responsible for their actions. As Peter van Inwagen nicely explicates, if knowledge tracked the world of things-in-themselves in the deterministic sense, "then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us."[169] But for Kant, while the laws of nature do indeed govern the phenomena, humans are not exclusively phenomenal beings. They instead have the capacity for freedom and morality, even whilst subject to the laws of nature. Kant lyrically marks this distinction, the phenomenal-noumenal tension implicit in human consciousness in his famous conclusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence…the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*."[170] Here, Kant's apposition of the starry

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transcendental objects (e.g., Dina Emundts, "The Refutation of Idealism and the Distinction between *Phenomena* and *Noumena*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–89).

[169] Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 16.

[170] Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 269. There is no indication that Kierkegaard owned a copy of either Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* or *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*. Nevertheless, there are ample indications that Kierkegaard was conversant with most or all of Kant's principal writings as well as his lesser-known essays (e.g., Kierkegaard owned a copy of Kant's minor treatises (*Immanuel Kant's vermischte Schriften*, vols. 1–3 (Halle: Rengersche Buchhandlung, 1799), vol. 4 (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1807),

heavens above and the moral law within and his overall circumscription of knowledge to the phenomenal realm importantly opens space for the existence of the moral law in that human beings are not wholly determined by the mechanics of nature. Human beings are crucially different from all other natural beings in not being mere means or links in the chain of natural causation but rather ends in and of themselves thus warranting unconditional regard befitting, as articulated most forcibly in the *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's central ethical doctrine of the categorical imperative.[171]

The second entailment of Kant's qualification of knowledge that, significant to the present discussion, carries great importance for Fichte's idealism is that Kant's transcendental idealism in practice gives subjectivity primacy over objective orientations to knowledge and being. Kant takes consciousness as his most basic starting point for determining, in the ontological sense, what is. The technical term that Kant denominates for subjective consciousness is *Bewusstsein*, which is a compound of the German *bewusst* ('aware,' 'know,' 'conscious') and *sein* ('to be,' or the noun, *Sein*, 'being'). In other words, Kant literally unites knowing and being, as in the self amounts to 'a being that knows.' In this way, for Kant, consciousness is more than an empirical I that becomes visible (as though being viewed through the mind's eye) to oneself in introspection. Such an empirical I would be an object of consciousness but not consciousness itself. Instead, Kantian consciousness *per se* represents the I that accompanies all of one's understanding of the phenomenal realm and, moreover, is indeed the condition for the very possibility of understanding the phenomena. In fact, and recalling that Hume begins and ends with experience but does not investigate the structures of

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ASKB 1731–1733). Consequently, perhaps Green's argument that Kierkegaard may be considered "one of Kant's best nineteenth-century students" (*Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I: Philosophy*, 195) is hyperbolic, but nonetheless Kierkegaard did have appreciable scholarly awareness of Kant and his practical philosophical ideas.

[171] See Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 37–108, for full expression of the categorical imperative as the principle whereby one "ought never to act except in such a way that [one] could also will that [the] maxim [i.e., a given viewpoint] should become a universal law," (p. 57).

experience itself, according to Kant, if Hume were correct and the self were to go in and out of existence with consciousness as when, to use Hume's example (see 163n), one sleeps, then experience would be impossible insofar as experience requires a unity as *one's* experience and therefore must be vested in a notion of self which perdures in accompanying all one's knowledge of the phenomenon. The primacy of Kantian subjectivity being stated, however, it is important to observe that, dovetailing with the abovementioned fact that Kant's philosophical anthropology does not regard human beings as wholly phenomenal beings, Kantian subjectivism upholds the infinity which transcends consciousness—viz., God, God's view of things-in-themselves—as a substantial reality. That is, Kant indeed denies that human beings can ever *know* such noumenal reality as God's existence and things-in-themselves in the same way that we can know the phenomena but, crucially, that is not the same thing as denying the existence of the noumena altogether, full stop.[172]

Taking these two entailments together, then, insofar as his partitioning of the phenomena and the noumena creates a space for morality and offers a forum in which epistemic certainty of some kind is obtainable, it is understandable that Kant, as one interested in preserving a sound footing for ethics and knowledge, would lean so heavily

[172] It is important to not lose sight of the fact that Kant and the epistemological and ontological shift wrought by his Copernican revolution was but one contributing factor to nihilism rather than the standalone root cause without which one can confidently say nihilism would have never developed as a genuine existential possibility. For example, as Merold Westphal has argued ("Christian Philosophers and the Copernican Revolution," in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1993), 161–79), it is not insubstantial that, however much some commentators treat Kantian analysis of the phenomenon as a more or less veiled atheistic fixation of immanent reality and the finite, the theistic character of Kantian idealism maintains the reality of the infinite which transcends finite consciousness and the thing-in-itself is the thing or world as apprehended by the God of classical theism (see also Merold Westphal, "In Defense of the Thing in Itself," *Kant-Studien* 59, no. 1 (1968): 118–41). Developing nihilism from Kantian idealism was therefore not an inexorable unfolding of Kant's theology by thinkers in the last half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries but, as I say, one factor, a selective appropriation of Kant which as such forms *part* of the landscape of modern philosophical nihilism.

upon this dichotomisation of consciousness. For those following in Kant's footsteps, however, the dichotomy of the phenomena and the noumena would prove to be acutely dissatisfying and ultimately unpalatable as a self-contradictory and seemingly artificial dualism held together by tenuous threads. Particularly problematic was that, in expressing his notion of the categorical imperative, Kant argues that the rational foundation that undergirds that very imperative issues from the noumenon. Or, as Kant says in the *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, the categorical imperative projects from the noumenon insofar as the noumenon comprises a so-called kingdom of ends and "every rational being *must* act as if he were…at all times a lawgiving member [or legislator] of the universal kingdom of ends."[173] One prominent source of discontent with the Kantian system, then, was that the very basis on which morality is founded and made credible—or incredible—is rooted in or derives from the noumenon however this realm is unknowable on Kant's own terms. Moreover, a further source of discontent with the Kantian system was that, in erecting two separate realms of reason, a phenomenal realm governed by the laws of nature and a noumenal realm governed by the moral law of freedom, a realm of practical reason and a realm of pure reason, Kant had illuminated the phenomenon but also made the unknowability of the noumenon deeply tempting. Metaphorically speaking, the bright day of the phenomena illumined by Kant's thought is encircled by an impenetrably dark night of the noumena. For his part, and to revisit the epigraph with which this section opened, Kant vigorously defended the lucid clarity of the phenomena relative to the caliginous opacity of the noumenon by invoking the imagery of an island surrounded by ocean. What can be known with certainty, Kant says, "is an island…enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth…surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands [or farther shores] and, ceaselessly

[173] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 87 (emphasis mine).

deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end."[174] However, despite Kant's asseverations as to the truth of the phenomenal island to which human beings are land-locked, to many of his readers, the turbulent ocean (or dark night) of the noumenon was presented by Kant as being immeasurably valuable as the truer, more real reality, even if at first a dark, unknowable abyss.[175]

In a real sense, then, Kant's recurrent cautions against entering out upon the night or sea of the noumenon only served to implicitly render it irresistibly attractive. As Gillespie narrates, "[Kant] suggests that the noumenal night may in fact be the true world and the day in which [human beings] dwell only a representation of this nocturnal reality."[176] Ultimately, therefore, the appetitive appeal of the noumenon coupled with the tenuous unity of holding the phenomenon and noumenon in tension within Kant's account of consciousness was too mysterious for his readers and beckoned for knowledge as an implement to sop up the Kantian *mysterium*.[177] Where Kant was contented with planting his feet in the littoral sand of his circumscribed island of truth and basking in the daylight of the phenomenon, others were not. They sought instead to embark a vessel to sail the dark seas to learn for themselves

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[174] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 339/354.

[175] The focal text often taken to comprise Kant's treatment of the noumenon as truer than the phenomenon is his distinction of the two realms in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 347–53. More specifically, using the pagination of the first ("A") edition of 1781 and the second ("B") edition of 1787 of Kant's text published by the Berlin Academy, the focal passages are found at A249–A253 (which was omitted in the "B" edition) and A253/B308–A260/B315.

[176] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 74.

[177] While I consider certain German Idealists and Romantics who, in their own ways, sought to explicate how, despite Kant, one could ascertain that one's phenomenal representations really do map onto and reveal the world as it is in itself, some scholars have preferred to look to the theological tradition(s) of mysticism as answering to Kant. Ernst Benz quoting Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–1887) explicitly connects German Idealism and mysticism, for example, in asking: "[h]ave you forgotten that the new philosophy [i.e., Idealism] came forth from the school of the old mystics, especially Jacob Boehme [(1575–1624)]?" (*The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair Reynolds and Eunice Paul (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 1983), 2). I return to mysticism in Chapter IV.

whether the distant shores really were, as Kant had counselled, the dancing illusions of fog banks or the delusory after-images of swiftly melting icebergs. One of the first to board such a vessel was Fichte.

J. G. FICHTE AND THE EMERGENCE OF NIHILISM THROUGH THE IMPERIALISTIC CONQUEST OF THE I OVER THE NOT-I

> *Since there is no way of reconciling the not-self with the self,* let there be *no not-self at all!*[178]
>
> —*J. G. Fichte*

Once considered a transitional figure connecting the twin pillars of Kant and Hegel, Fichte is now recognised as a contributor of standalone importance to idealism in general and is of independent importance for this study in particular inasmuch as his extremist views of subjectivity herald the arrival of nihilism.[179] Moreover, as David Kangas comments, "Fichte may well be the most overlooked resource for Kierkegaard's thought. Arguably, Fichte is as important as Hegel and more important than Kant in shaping the contours of Kierkegaard's

[178] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 137.

[179] Despite generally concurring with Dieter Henrich's assessment that "Fichte's philosophy has the reputation of being one of the most paradoxical and opaque undertakings in the history of Western thought," ("The Science of Knowledge (1794–1795)," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 202), I do my level best to fairly depict Fichte's thought leading to nihilism. In this regard, I am indebted to the orientation provided by Peter Heath and John Lachs in the preface to their translation of the *Science of Knowledge* (see *Science of Knowledge*, vii–xviii). That said, my presentation of Fichte is slanted towards his earlier work, the *Science of Knowledge* of 1794/1795, rather than Fichte's reworking of Kantian ethics in *The System of Ethics in Accordance with the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* of 1798. In Kierkegaardian terms, then, if Roe Fremstedal ("Kierkegaard's Use of German Philosophy: Leibniz to Fichte," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Jon Stewart (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 45) is correct and Fichte becomes the historical model for Kierkegaard's ethical standpoint with the publication of his late works, then my presentation accentuates the more aesthetic over the ethical qualities of Fichte.

thought."[180] To explore the singularly important Fichte's brand of idealism, then, in seeking to sail beyond the haven of Kant's island of the phenomenon, there are three fundamental principles at work in his philosophy. Together, these principles comprise the triumvirate dialectical structure, the thesis-antithesis-synthesis, of Fichte's thought.[181] The first principle, and the one that cuts to the heart of all reality for Fichte, is the simple statement of identity, A = A, or, better, I = I.[182] To be real in any ontologically meaningful sense is to be self-identical and, for Fichte, the absolutely unconditional first principle of philosophy is that the I is endowed with the capacity to assert identity however this capacity only results from the I's tautological recognition that 'I am,' 'I am I,' or I = I.[183] In Fichte's words, "[t]he I begins by an absolute positing of its own existence."[184] As will become apparent, it is difficult to

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[180] Kangas, *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I: Philosophy*, 68. Indeed, I concur with Kangas's assessment although, insofar as the Kierkegaard studies literature is handsomely populated with commentaries on the influences of Hegelianism on Kierkegaard (e.g., James Bogen, "Remarks on the Kierkegaard-Hegel Controversy," *Synthese* 13, no. 4 (1961): 372–89; Lore Hühn and Philipp Schwab, "Kierkegaard and German Idealism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 62–93; Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard's View of Hegel, His Followers and Critics," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, 50–65), I devote greater attention to Fichte than I do Hegel. As my focus at this point of the dissertation ultimately remains on articulating the development of nihilism and not a more comprehensive accounting of Fichte's idealism, though, I do not furnish that which Jon Stewart calls for: "an adequate extended study of Kierkegaard's relation to…Fichte" (*Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 27). Nevertheless, in disclosing Fichte's role in the evolution of nihilism, my selective attention to Fichte does, I hope, contribute to this comparatively sparse yet fertile area of inquiry (cf. Heinrich Schmidinger, "Kierkegaard und Fichte," *Gregorianum* 62, (1981): 499–541).

[181] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 113–5. Incidentally, from the first edition of Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus's (1796–1862) *Historical Survey of Speculative Philosophy from Kant to Hegel* in 1837 onwards, the dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is routinely and erroneously attributed to Hegel. Though the extent to which he himself subscribed to the misconception is unclear, Kierkegaard owned two editions of this work: (1) Heinrich Mortiz Chalybäus, *Historische Entwickelung der speculativen Philosophie von Kant bis Hegel* (Dresden: Ch. F. Grimmer'sche Buchhandlung, 1837), *ASKB* 461, and (2) Heinrich Moritz Chalybæus, *Historisk Udvikling af den speculative Philosophie fra Kant til Hegel. Til det videnskabelige Publicums nærmere Forbindelse med den nyeste Skole*, trans. Søren Kattrup (Copenhagen: P. G. Philipsen, 1841), *ASKB* 462.

[182] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 94.

[183] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 100–1.

[184] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 99.

overstate the significance of this first principle. In many respects, the radical nature of Fichte's thought and his specific conception of will is embodied in his general undertaking in the *Science of Knowledge* to demonstrate the dependence of his latter two principles on the first as well as to unpack the consequences of this doctrine.[185] Of note, a crucial corollary of Fichte's first principle is that, since I = I determines what is real, reality is merely the I's projection of its own essence and hence the I is the single criterion of the reality of objects. That is, reality is a by-product of the activity of the will of the self that seeks only itself.

From the depiction of Fichte's I that wills itself, and only itself, into existence and in so doing spawns all reality, and although Fichte expends a great deal of effort in the *Science of Knowledge* attempting to explain this idea, it is not difficult to see why many of Fichte's contemporaries would interpret his idealism as a species of solipsistic egotism or individualism in excess. Fichte, however, was both aware of the plurality of interpretations of his thought (e.g., expressing as much in a letter dated 21 March 1797 to Austrian philosopher, Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823): "My theory can be presented in infinitely varied ways. Everyone will think them differently") and expressly defended himself against such depreciating interpretations in the second of his introductions to the 1797 edition of the *Science of Knowledge*.[186] There, he plainly rejects accusations of vainglorious egotism as either innocent or deliberate misreadings. Fichte's rebuttals of his thought comprising a morally abhorrent theoretical development are not altogether clear. Nevertheless, even if

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[185] Though it is generally difficult to ascertain precisely which of Fichte's texts Kierkegaard actually read and the latter's references to "the elder Fichte" are, as Kangas remarks, "sparse and allusive" (*Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I: Philosophy*, 67), Kierkegaard nevertheless owned a complete collection of Fichte's works, including the *Science of Knowledge*: *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämmtliche Werke*, vols. 1–8, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: Veit, 1845–1846), as well as *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's nachgelassene Werke*, vols. 1–3, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1834–1835), *ASKB* 489–499.

[186] Fichte, "Fichte an Reinhold, 1797 März 21 Jena", *Band III*, 222 (translation mine); Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 84–5.

Fichtean idealism does not propound egotism, it remains unclear how, on the basis of Fichte's first principle, the self is at once capable of generating all reality *and* the differentiated world which is so commonly experienced as containing objects and agents *other than* or *ontologically distinct from* the self. Fichte's solution to this problem lay in his second principle. The principle is that A ≠ not-A or, again better formulated for the purposes of this dissertation, I ≠ not-I.[187] This is the principle of negation that serves as the counterpoint to Fichte's first principle. In other words, if Fichte's first principle is the thesis, then the second principle is the corresponding antithesis. Fichte argues that, as with his first principle, the second cannot be deduced (e.g., there is nothing in the proposition I = I that accounts for the experience of that which is self *and* that which is not-self) but rather must be posited absolutely by the I. And, for Fichte, the capacity of the I to posit such an opposition or difference as the existence of a not-I rests entirely upon the I's recognition of a not-I and the axiomatic fact that I ≠ not-I.[188]

In view of Fichte's first two principles, the origin of the not-I apart from the I is inexplicable, although Fichte is unambiguous that self-conscious experience would be impossible without this distinction. That is, for the I to recognise itself as I, drawing on his notion of thesis-antithesis, Fichte contends that there must be some other, some not-I that impels the I to reflect upon itself as different from this other. In this way, though, the existence of the not-I poses an inevitable problem for the I. On the one hand, the not-I is the opposite of the I and *in esse* annihilates it because, where the not-I is, the I is not (and vice versa). On the other hand, Fichte maintains that the not-I is necessarily posited by the I and the not-I both presupposes and is presupposed by the I. As Fichte writes, this mutual necessity and contradiction of the I and the not-I is no less than "the ground of the *antinomies*

[187] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 102.
[188] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 104.

[already] expounded by Kant."[189] However, where Kant resolved the antinomies by holding the phenomenon and noumenon in tension, Fichte as one dissatisfied with Kant's solution and wanting to set sail away from Kant's island sought to establish a reconciliation or synthesis of the I and not-I. Completing the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad, this synthesis comprises Fichte's third principle, the principle of mutual limitation: Neither the I nor the not-I are posited as infinite and absolute and both are instead dependent upon one another inasmuch as they are limited or determined by one another.[190]

In a sense, while continuing to resist any semblance of a Kantian *mysterium* and Kant's refusal to speak of the not-I or noumenon apart from simply acknowledging that it exists, the remaining balance of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* is his attempt to answer the question of how the not-I emerging from the activity or will of the I is in any way explicable. To this end, "Part II: Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge" of the text comprises an examination of the prospect that the I is limited by the not-I, that the objective world determines every structure and function of subjectivity. In turn, "Part III: Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical" goes the other way around to examine the various ways in which the not-I is determined by the I, the ways in which the objective world is shaped by subjectivity. What I think becomes reasonably clear in the course of Fichte's painfully convoluted progression through these parts of his treatise is that there is not, nor can there be, a synthesis of the I and the not-I. Perhaps this conclusion should have been foreseen by Fichte. It is, after all, what Kant had indicated insofar as any aggravation at having reached an impasse in synthesising the I and the not-I is precisely what Kant predicted would befall all those who set sail upon the dark seas seeking knowledge of the noumenon. Still, Fichte was undaunted by the difficulties attending the ill-fated synthesis of the I and the not-I and,

[189] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 217.
[190] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 106.

rather than emulate another transcendental unity of consciousness, instead undertook a radical manoeuvre. In Fichte's words, "[s]ince there is no way of reconciling the not-self with the self," since the synthesis of the I and the not-I proves continually elusive, ever abeyant, and the effort at theoretical reconciliation "would go on forever," one should not merely loosen the tension of the I/not-I synthesis but cut the Gordian knot altogether.[191] This, Fichte continues, can only be done by way of "an absolute decree of reason" in which one loudly proclaims, "*let there be* no not-self at all!"

Anticipating a motif of the practical preceding the theoretical that is found in Kierkegaard and indeed, as we will see, manifests in Kierkegaard's conception of loving God wherein action is promoted over knowledge, the specific way in which Fichte moves beyond a decree and establishes the abolition of the not-I is by introducing notions of an "intelligent self," an "absolute self," and the latter's activity *qua* freedom in contending that the absolute self is the ground and source of the not-I and therefore the metaphysics of freedom (which govern the absolute self) supplants any academic fixation of theorical knowledge.[192] Of note, having already introduced his principle of I = I, Fichte endeavours to nuance his ambiguous conception of the self by marking a distinction between a finite, embodied, individuated, and "intelligent" self, which (though Fichte does not himself use this diction) is profitably named in the vein of Kant as the 'empirical I,' and a more transcendent and infinite view of self characterised by sheer activity, which Fichte in his own terms calls the absolute I. Analogous to Kant's aforementioned conception of *Bewusstsein*, which represents the self that accompanies all a human being's singular experience and understanding of phenomena, Fichte's empirical I is the self that experiences and, as such, perdures across space and time. Conversely, Fichte explicates the absolute I exclusively in terms of activity that is for its own

[191] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 137.
[192] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 220.

sake and has no telos apart from itself. In turn, having differentiated the empirical I as an entity and the absolute I as pure act, Fichte proceeds to articulate his pivotal metaphysics of freedom. For this, Fichte endeavours to show that the realm of objectivity, the not-I, in fact emerges out of subjectivity. In particular, in the third and concluding portion of the *Science of Knowledge*, Fichte identifies the not-I, the objective world, or, in Kantian idiom, the noumenon, with the subconscious realm of the will which, writing over a century before Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), is characterised by innate and often inchoate instincts, emotions, and psychological drives.[193]

But how, one might reasonably ask, does the objective not-I, the felt presence of others that are not oneself, veritably amount to no more than a thoroughly subjective and entirely subliminal seething cauldron of instincts, emotions, and drives? The answer, according to Fichte, is that the common conception of instincts, emotions, and drives as reactions to actions issuing from or having their source outside the individual (viz., as internal responses to stimuli which themselves reside not in the self but in one's external environment or in other selves) is not altogether inaccurate. It is, however, only partial in that it is only the perspective of the empirical I.[194] Against this common conception, Fichte avers that the true fount of all instincts, emotions, and drives is not some reality without but the I, the absolute I itself, the subjective reality of the infinite and subconscious activity of pure will.[195] In other words, for Fichte, instincts, emotions, and drives are not *reactions* but primordial *actions* and, more specifically, they are the empirical I's experience of its own essence and the free acts of the absolute I operating on and through the empirical I. Indeed, in Fichte's view, the empirical I and the apparently objective not-I are only moments of the primordial activity or will that constitutes the absolute self or I. They are, summarily stated, mere expressions of the

[193] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 155.
[194] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 221.
[195] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 239.

infinite will's act of self-grounding and the absolute I itself is therefore the source of the objective world. It is the source of the objective world along with, *per definitionem*, the subjective one, which, coming full-circle, Fichte had already declared early in the *Science of Knowledge* and is a restatement of his first principle of philosophy: "The source of all reality is the self, for this is what is immediately and absolutely posited. The concept of reality is first given with and by way of the self."[196]

Capping his endeavour to demonstrate that the objective world of the not-I, just as much as the empirical I, is only an expression of the absolute I that manifests in and through the empirical I's instincts, emotions, and drives is Fichte's discussion of longing. For Fichte, the reconciliation of the I and the not-I is, as noted, unachievable such that the former ablates the latter. Another way of looking at the matter—and one more attuned to disclosing the heart of Fichte's philosophical anthropology—is to view the synthesis of the I and not-I as an ideal or goal ever-beyond the reach of the self but nevertheless serving as the incitement to, the longing which undergirds, the endless pursuit of synthesis. In Fichte's own words, "the idea of an infinity to be thus completed floats as a vision before us, and is rooted in our innermost nature. We are obliged, as it enjoins us, to resolve the contradiction [between the I and the not-I]."[197] This state of unattainability speaks to the fundamental character of the will as longing and so it is unsurprising that Fichte's more general discussion of the empirical I's instincts, emotions, and drives is commonly couched in commensurate terms of longing, striving, and desire. For example, in discussing the creative activity of the will of the absolute self that seeks only itself and craves freedom above all else, Fichte specifies that "such a determination in the self is called a *longing*; a drive towards something totally unknown, which reveals itself only through a *need*, a *discomfort*, a *void*, which seeks satisfaction, but

[196] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 129.
[197] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 238.

does not say from whence.—The self feels a longing in itself; it feels itself in want."[198] Fichte's understanding of longing, then, may be taken to more succinctly account for the way in which both the not-I and the empirical I (and all constituent instincts, emotions, and drives) emerge, if subconsciously, out of the will of the absolute I. For, as Fichte contends, it is only through longing that the I, shrouded in feelings of emptiness and separation, emits from itself and posits something apart from itself in search of that which it lacks. The not-I which is posited by the I does not, however, satisfy the emptiness and separation felt by the self and therefore the feeling of longing perpetuates itself. In this sense, longing within Fichte's philosophy is the continual activity of the will of the absolute I through which the external world or not-I is incessantly revealed within the internal world of the I. "This longing is of importance," Fichte writes, "[o]nly thereby is the self *in itself*—driven *out of itself*; only thereby is an *external world* revealed *within it*."[199] In fact, longing, the endless and never-satisfying streaming forth of the not-I from the I, is the most succinct statement of Fichte's anthropology in that, as he states later, "longing is…the *original*, *wholly independent manifestation* of the striving that lies in [or at the core of] the self."[200]

To summarise Fichte, then, the philosopher of idealism brings light into the darkness of Kant's noumenon, for Fichte's thought, so to speak, ignites a radical conception of subjectivity and in so doing more and more discloses the apparent fact that the nocturnal abyss of the Kantian noumenon is only the interior of a human being's own self. In Fichte's view, the I and the not-I no longer coexist and instead one is prompted to observe the self-assertion of freedom and longing as the absolute I's activity of will which annihilates the objective nature of the not-I. To wit, the not-I is not simply opposed to, but fundamentally derived from or born out of, the I in that the not-I is the result of the subconscious activity of

[198] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 265.
[199] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 266.
[200] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 267.

the absolute I manifesting in one's instincts, emotions, and drives. In direct contradistinction to Kant, who sought to strike a balance between subjective freedom and objective nature, Fichte recruits the former to obliterate the latter. Gillespie nicely states Fichte's overall effort to shine the floodlight on Kant's dark sea of the noumenon thus: "[f]reedom and freedom alone must rule, a pure will or activity that shapes only itself and abides by no laws, that knows in its heart of hearts that *it* is the source of all laws, of all logic…all ontology."[201]

Having followed the sinuous path of Fichte's idealism to this peak, it is important to highlight that the elimination of the not-I, that is, of the objective world, concomitantly entails the elimination of the empirical I insofar as the empirical I arises only in conjunction with the not-I. Theologically, this has profound ramifications in that the proclamation that the not-I is eliminated by the I is thus also the proclamation that the empirical I must be absolutized if the will of the absolute I is to be realised. That human beings, in other words, must become absolutely unconstrained and thus totally free beings. An individual human being must become, quite literally, God. Fichte's espousal of the freedom of the absolute I and the dissolution of the not-I by the I is tantamount to dissolving the otherness of others and all else that is ordinarily considered other than the self. Within the countenance of the Fichtean self, the human being replaces God as the master and creator of the universe and, *eo ipso*, of the self. Indeed, years after his seminal *Science of Knowledge*, as he moved toward his more expressly theological work, Fichte declares in *The Vocation of Man*: "I am thoroughly my own creation."[202] Although, as Peter Heath and John Lachs point out, Fichte consistently defended himself against the charge of hubristic egotism by reminding his

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[201] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 86 (emphasis mine).
[202] J. G. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 73. Kierkegaard owned a copy of the 1838 edition of this work, J. G. Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Berlin: Voss, 1838), *ASKB* 500. However, speaking to the fact that it is broadly difficult to determine which of Fichte's writings Kierkegaard read and when, Kierkegaard cites the work in one of his earliest journals from Gilleleje dated 29 July 1835 (*KJN* 1, 11/AA:6).

readers that his doctrine of the absolute self does not denote a member of a world of finite persons and altogether lacks the individuated subjectivity essential to the very concept of egotism, if selfishness and egotism were not meant, then Fichte had at the very least made an extremely poor choice in vocabulary with his use of 'self' (*selbst*) and many of his contemporaries remained unconvinced by his *post hoc* apologia.[203] On this front, it was his early admirer, Jacobi, who, whilst still convinced of Fichte's genius as well as of the robustness of Fichte's own moral and religious convictions, nevertheless recognised and pointedly denounced the (if unintentional) theological ramifications of Fichtean idealism.

NIHILISM MADE MANIFEST: JACOBI'S LETTERS TO FICHTE DURING THE ATHEISM CONTROVERSY

> *Thus the human spirit, since its philosophical understanding will simply not reach beyond its own production, must, in order to penetrate into the realm of beings and conquer it with its thought, become world*-creator*, indeed, its own creator.*[204]
>
> —*F. H. Jacobi*

In a chapter in German intellectual history between 1798 and 1800 known as *Atheismusstreit*, or, the Atheism Controversy, which ultimately saw Fichte removed as the chair of Critical Philosophy at the University of Jena for allegedly promulgating atheism, Jacobi sent and later published a series of letters to Fichte in which he diagnosed the latter's idealism as reducing everything to the activity of the I. In so doing, in Jacobi's view, Fichtean idealism reduced God to a mere creation of the human imagination subserved by an absolutized sense of human freedom and the creative will. In the collection of letters which were, on the whole, genial to Fichte—indeed, Jacobi goes so far as to laud Fichte as "the true

[203] Peter Heath and John Lachs, Preface to *Science of Knowledge*, xv.
[204] Jacobi, "Jacobi to Fichte," 508.

Messiah of speculative reason"—Jacobi writes, "[t]ruly, my dear Fichte, I would not be vexed if you…were to call *Chimerism* the view I oppose to the Idealism that I chide for [or as] *Nihilism*."[205] Here, for the first time in print, nihilism is employed to characterise a distinctive philosophical, literary, and theological ancestry. What explicitly makes Fichtean idealism nihilistic, per Jacobi, is that, in asserting the absolute I as the source from which both the self and not-self emerge, it does not permit the existence of anything outside of the self at all, hence the emergence of 'nihilism' from the dominance of the I over the not-I.

Though the impassioned prose of Jacobi's correspondences with Fichte at times belabour the point, above all, Jacobi expresses what is in his mind the disturbing fact that under Fichtean idealism the primary objects of theology and classical metaphysics—the soul, God, and all that which flows therefrom—are swept aside into abyssal oblivion. Fichtean idealism "has thrown light upon God discreetly and on the sly…God *has* not *disappeared*, for He never *was*. [And] Psyche," Jacobi remarks, lyrically recruiting the symbolism of the Greek goddess and totem of the human soul, "now knows the mystery that so long and so unbearably tortured her curiosity. Now she knows it, and is *blessed*! Everything outside her is nothing, and she is itself a *phantom*—not just a phantom of something, but a *phantom in itself,* a real nothingness, a nothingness of reality."[206]

Overall, according to Jacobi, as with Kierkegaard, human beings in their capacities for selfhood are fundamentally incapable of being their own ground. Human beings depend in

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[205] Jacobi, "Jacobi to Fichte," 501, 519. Interestingly, Kierkegaard indeed owned a copy of Jacobi's collection of letters to Fichte as they are contained in Jacobi's collected works (*Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke*, vols. 1–6, *ASKB* 1722–1728). See, in particular, p. 44 of the third volume (*ASKB* 1724) from 1816. As a clarifying aside, 'Chimerism' was a term of derision applied by proponents of idealism to Jacobi's philosophy of not-knowing—i.e., his *Unphilosophie*—in deference to revelation because, by their lights, every decision made under Jacobi's system was equivalent to chimerical caprice entirely devoid of logical deliberation or reason.

[206] Jacobi, "Jacobi to Fichte," 512.

their very selfhood on something outside of themselves to, in some ontologically compelling sense, ground their own existence as well as the existence of everything else. In Jacobi's eyes, however, the Fichtean attempt to become one's own ground indiscriminately undercuts all of this and is therefore the root cause which precipitates the dissolution of God and all creation. Fichtean idealism is not simply atheist but *nihil*istic, for the free and roving activity of the absolute self an*nihil*ates everything.[207] Fichte's nihilism, for Jacobi, was, in Gillespie's words, "not merely atheistic in denying the existence or importance of God," it was also hubristic "in attributing to man superhuman or, indeed, divine powers."[208] Moreover, Fichte's absolute self replaced "God as the transrational source of nature and natural law. The traditional God of Christianity in this sense [became] superfluous."[209] In other, more dramatic, words, before Hegel and Nietzsche, in making subjective consciousness the arbiter of everything and God superfluous, God was pronounced dead.[210] It is fair to say, then, that,

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[207] A plausible etymology to Jacobi's choice of nihilism (German: *Nihilismus*) derives from the cognate relationship between nihilism and annihilation coupled with the fact that, as Theobald Süss ("Der Nihilismus bei F. H. Jacobi," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 76, no. 1 (1951): 193–200) demonstrates, other critics of Fichte apart from Jacobi during the Atheism Controversy spoke of Fichtean idealism as heralding annihilation.

[208] Gillespie, "Nihilism in the Nineteenth Century," 280.

[209] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, xvii.

[210] There is significant disagreement as to the aetiology of the well-known apothegm that 'God is dead' however its circulation certainly antedates the popularisation of Nietzsche given its presence in, for example, Hegel's 1802 essay, "Faith and Knowledge" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), 190) and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (e.g., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 455) of 1807, the latter of which Kierkegaard owned (G. W. F. Hegel, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Schulze (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1832), *ASKB* 550) and, of course, with which he was intimately familiar (e.g., see the study of Hegel indicated by Kierkegaard's reference to the consciousness chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, entitled "Sense-Certainty," in the footnote of *PF* 169/*SKS* 15, 57). In any case, though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to document the development of the 'God is dead' maxim, it is interesting to observe that the specific thought, if not coming as Hegel says with Pascal when the latter writes, "la nature est telle qu'elle *marque* partout un Dieu *perdu* et dans l'homme et hors de l'homme [Nature is such that it *signifies* everywhere a *lost* God both within and outside man]" (Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, 190), may have evolved in the nineteenth century from the writings of one of Jacobi's scholarly admirers, Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), better known by his pseudonym, Jean Paul. Of note, the

according to Jacobi, Fichte may well have illuminated Kant's darkness of the noumenon but he only did so by, in deicidal fashion, liquidating it and everything else into subjectivity of an infinite human will.

Beyond his appellative and diagnostic efforts, however, Jacobi cannot be said to have further elaborated the notion of will that lay at the heart of nihilism. Instead, such an undertaking came about in multiple camps but chiefly as a result of the efforts of a cadre of academics working in the intellectually vibrant city of Jena at the turn of the nineteenth century. Through the efforts of some of these intellectuals—the representatives of Early Romanticism or the *Frühromantik*—Fichte's absolute I takes on a debauched and iniquitous persona rather than merely an epistemologically and ontologically explanatory one. That is, if in Fichte the absolute I expresses enlightened human reason and the capacity for knowledge and yearning for freedom, then with certain of the German Romantics the absolutizing and infinitizing of the human will becomes more definitely selfish and deleterious.

ROMANTICISM: NIHILISM ORIENTED TO A TELOS

> *To know the world in all its depths, [one] must shatter its most sacrosanct barriers…It is not God who rules here but the self-creating I. [Lord Byron's libertine] Manfred claims to stand above the demons and above God himself, to be an immortal mind that makes itself and its world, that lives within itself and enjoys and suffers from itself…If [Manfred] is his own world, then his crime lies not in the injury he does to another but in his destruction of the*

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second volume of Jean Paul's triumvirate novel, *Siebenkäs*, from 1796–1797 includes a chapter in which the author recounts a dream wherein the crucified Christ, in disturbing prose, declares the death of God (*Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces: or, the Married Life, Death, and Wedding of The Advocate of the Poor, Firmian Stanislaus Siebenkäs*, vol. 1, trans. Edward Henry Noel (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1871), 278–85). Moreover, in his 1804 *School of Aesthetics*, Jean Paul overtly remarks that, "in an age when God has set like the sun, soon afterwards the world too passes into darkness" (*Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter's School for Aesthetics*, trans. Margaret Hale (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 15).

other within himself. His rape of his sister is the rape of himself and her death the death of his gentler and more tender self…His great freedom and knowledge were attained only by brutalising himself.[211]

—Michael Gillespie

Let me reveal a secret to you that lies almost hidden in one of the oldest sources of poetry and religion. As long as the first man was alone with himself and Nature, the Deity ruled over him and addressed him in various ways, but he did not understand and answered nothing…Then the Deity recognised that the world would be nothing as long as man was alone. He created a helpmate for him and the world fashioned itself before his eyes. In flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone he discovered humanity. In this first love he had a foretaste of all love's forms and tendencies—in humanity he found the world. From this moment he was capable of seeing and hearing the voice of the Deity.[212]

—Friedrich Schleiermacher

The intellectual debt that Romanticism owed to Fichte and his doctrine of the absolute I and its infinite will and longing should not be underestimated. It was certainly, as observed *sic passim* throughout his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, and especially in the chapter entitled "Irony after Fichte," a considerable debt which Kierkegaard himself recognised. Where Fichte following the *Science of Knowledge* would explicitly refer to the willed activity of the absolute self as 'God,' the nihilism of many of the Romantics (at least the one whom I explicitly consider in this dissertation), by contrast, eschewed any Godhead resembling that conceived in monotheism and especially Christianity and instead found only a sinister underworld of selfish will, a shadowy conative dynamism at work behind all phenomena. A dynamism, moreover, which cannot be comprehended by reason and may only be perceived through one's feelings. As with Fichte, in the eyes of those intellectuals who Jean Paul

[211] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 122–4.
[212] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torch, 1958), 71–2.

branded "poetic nihilists," one's feelings, one's particular constellation of instincts, emotions, and drives, was the expression of an absolute will coursing in and through the individual.[213] Unlike Fichte, however, in the hands of these Romantic nihilists, the noumenal dynamism of a will working behind all phenomena does not simply fulfil the epistemological function of explication. It is not, in other words, simply the noumenal explanans to the phenomenal explananda. Instead, the dynamism giving rise to all phenomena becomes properly demonic with the Romantic nihilists, for 'the demonic' is the negation of God. More than ethical-religious bombast, however, the demonic *per se* or that which takes hold of and possesses the personality in this Fichtean-*cum*-Romantic sense is properly conceived of as a dramatic inversion of Hebrews 12:29, an all-consuming spiritual fire, passion, and power.[214] In his

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[213] Jean Paul, *Horn of Oberon*, 17.

[214] It is precisely the quality of imputing an evil force to the cosmos and the express inversion of scripture that has led scholars such as Laura Quinney ("Romanticism, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism," in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 412–24) to characterise the demonology of much Romanticism as a form of Gnosticism and Epicureanism. Most saliently, though cosmogonies vary greatly between sects, Gnosticism generally held that the world was created by a demonic power, the demiurge known as Yaldabaoth (a serpent with a lion's head and the miscarried progeny of Sophia, the goddess of wisdom) who surrounded himself with seven other demons, the archons, to create the cosmos. The particulars of this cosmogonic mythology aside, the supreme deity of the Gnostics, sometimes referred to as the 'the Invisible Spirit,' was demonic in its capacity to imbue the created order with hard-hearted callousness by way of its apathy in the face of abject human pain and suffering. In this respect, the deity of Gnosticism as an aloof and disinterested divinity closely resembled the hidden and morally indifferent god of Epicurus (341–270 BC), from whom the Romantics drew inspiration (e.g., Anthony Curtis Adler, "Sensual Idealism: The Spirit of Epicurus and the Politics of Finitude in Kant and Hölderlin," in *Dynamic Reading: Studies in the Reception of Epicureanism*, ed. Brooke Holmes and W. H. Shearin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 233–4). Though not himself a Gnostic, Epicurus famously posed a series of dilemmas (Mark Joseph Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil: Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), xix–xx) on which Gnostic resistance to the biblical vision of an eternally loving *pater mundi* and imputation of cosmogonic evil and demonology nevertheless hangs: "God…either wants to eliminate bad things and cannot, or can but does not want to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wants to and can. If he wants to and cannot, then he is weak…If he can but does not want to, then he is spiteful…If he neither wants to nor can, he is both weak and spiteful and so not a god. If he wants to and can, which is the only thing fitting for a god, where then do bad things come from?" (Lactantius, "On the Anger of God 13.20–22," in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, 2nd ed., trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 94). To the extent that the Romantics evince either a direct demonology à la

autobiography, *From My Own Life: Poetry and Truth*, the giant of German literature, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), for example, helpfully elucidates that the demonic

> can manifest itself in all corporeal and incorporeal things…yet, with man, especially does it stand in a most wonderful connexion, forming in him a power which, if it be not opposed to the moral order of the world, nevertheless does often so cross it that one may be regarded as the warp, and the other as the woof…a tremendous energy seems to be seated in [demonic persons], and they exercise a wonderful power over all creatures, and even over the elements…All the moral powers combined are of no avail against them…and they are to be overcome by nothing but the universe itself; and it is from…this fact that the…most striking, proverb must have risen: *Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse* [No one against God except God himself].[215]

As the cosmological struggle of the divine v. demonic indicated in Goethe's description suggests, and what was especially true of the literature of many of the Romantic nihilists, the demonic was a spiritual dynamism that, in order to compete with the idea of God, achieved superhuman potency. For these Romantic nihilists, the demonic did not merely coexist with the divine but rather access to the demonic came only by way of, in a manner of speaking, storming the citadel of God in an attempted Promethean seizure of God's divine power, and a violation, nay, shattering of the most sacrosanct ethical-religious barriers. Put differently, the Romantic nihilists saw the obliterative, transgressive, and deliberate act of laying waste to the divinely-sanctioned moral order and prohibitions against, for example, incest, seduction, adultery, rape, murder, and, in general, all that which is subsumed under the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2–7; Deut. 5:6–21) as necessary in order for one to acquire true

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Yaldabaoth or indirect one à la latent Epicureanism, then, the suggestion is that Romanticism is a resurgent expression of Gnosticism and Epicureanism. As we will see in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, some have accused Kierkegaard of espousing Gnosticism.

[215] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *The Autobiography of Goethe—Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life*, trans. A. J. W. Morrison (London: George Bell & Sons, 1874), 158–9. Kierkegaard owned all of Goethe's collected works, including his autobiography contained in Volume 26 of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vols. 1–40 (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1828–1830); vols. 41–55 (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1832–1833); vols. 56–60 (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1842), *ASKB* 1641–1668. Indeed, Kierkegaard explicitly mentions Goethe's autobiography in the context of his meditations on the Wandering Jew within *KJN* 1, 100/BB:18.

knowledge of self and the hidden dynamics that govern the world. In the poetry and literature which they composed, the Romantic nihilists pejoratively related to once-thought sacred and inalienable moral laws—the self-same laws which Kant had sought to uphold—as the heteronomous constraints imposed upon the individual from without and, just as, if not more, significantly, from within (for the former just is the latter). Indeed, for these Romantics, all traditional ethical and religious laws, whatever their origin, amounted to no more than forms of oppression that categorically denied individuals the prospect of uncovering the affective and spiritual roots of themselves in the world. Hence, the sensualists, voluptuaries, seducers, libertines, rapists, malefactors, and murderers populating the pages of Romantic nihilist literature were portrayed not so much as devils after the heart of Satan, the Prince of Darkness, or a Mephistopheles as much as ennobled as tragic heroes and paladins of liberty. Correspondingly, their *modi vivendi* of immorality were romanticised as the vanguards of striving against the oppressive yoke of outmoded ethical-religious strictures and the movement toward the *telos* of authentic selfhood.

Despite the dangers of nihilism thus romanticised, it and its adherents took full advantage of the fact that works of fiction could not simply be censored, condemned, and thereby nullified. In fact, through the medium of literature, it was precisely the danger of nihilism, the piquant threat of nihilism's selfish joy in the destruction of sacrosanct laws and mores as a means of obtaining knowledge and freedom that was presented as so consummately attractive and this kept the all-consuming spiritual fire aflame within the hearts and minds of Romantic nihilists and their readers. And, to be sure, the readers of said authors had much material to consume. Within the capacious body of Romantic literature, one may find a veritable compendium of characters that are indisputable archetypes of the nihilists' tragic hero including, for example, Lord Byron's (1788–1824) Don Juan and the abovementioned Manfred, Samuel Richardson's (1689–1761) Lovelace, Tieck's William

Lovell, Ernst August Friedrich Klingemann's (1777–1831) Bonaventura, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792–1822) Prometheus. Even Jean Paul, who recurrently alternated pouring his dazzling satirical witticisms with strong and searing criticism upon the Romantics, evinced an ambivalent attraction to the destructive beauty embodied by the nihilistic hero with his character, Roquairol, in his multi-volume novel, *Titan*. Out of this expansive portfolio of characters, however, one emerges as a paradigmatic expression of the nature of Romantic nihilism: Friedrich Schlegel's Julius from the 1799 risqué (at least by the standards of its time) novella, *Lucinde*.[216]

SCHLEGEL'S JULIUS

Whereas other characters of Romantic literature such as Tieck's William Lovell personify the malignancy of Romantic nihilism in expressing a character's straightforward diabolical evil and villainy, Schlegel's Julius in *Lucinde* presents a more subtle and sophisticated expression of the demonic in nihilism quite apart from nefarious malevolence. Accordingly, I consider Julius to explore the fictional character emblematic of Romantic nihilism's pursuit of Fichtean freedom and the more subtle replacement of God with amorous romance, the idea that human fulfilment and ultimate knowledge of self and world lay not in relationship with God but in passionate heterosexual love relations between man and woman.

To that end, though unfinished, Schlegel's novella itself was a kind of manifesto of German Romanticism and the emboldened lust-of-the-flesh-lifestyle *in scripto* of the *Frühromantiker*. In fact, as Kierkegaard assessed it, *Lucinde* was "the gospel of Young Germany and the system for its *Rehabilitation des Fleisches* [rehabilitation of the flesh]."[217]

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[216] Given the featured and extended discussion of *Lucinde* in his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (e.g., *COI* 286ff/*SKS* 1, 321ff), it cannot reasonably be denied that Kierkegaard read and was conversant with this text. In any event, Kierkegaard's personal library contains a copy of the novella in Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's sämmtliche Werke*, vols. 1–10 (Vienna: Jakob Mayer and Compagnie, 1822–1825), *ASKB* 1816–1825.
[217] *COI* 286/*SKS* 1, 321.

The unfinished state of the work coupled with its deliberately fragmented form dovetails nicely with a defining feature of Romanticism in that the literary and philosophical movement characteristically lionised the inner life of sensate impulses and a *Weltanschauung* of emotion and feelings over conscious thought, reason, and logical progression.[218] If one is to distil a précis of Julius, the focal character of *Lucinde* and Schlegel's thinly-veiled persona for himself (just as Lucinde is the fictive stand-in for Dorothea Veit, 1764–1839), he most basically comprises a young man with a markedly poetic cast of mind whose meandering narrative paints the portrait of a man moving through numerous love affairs before a final captivation and conjugal union with his female lover: The novella's namesake, Lucinde. In a certain respect, rather than document a slow characterological descent, Julius begins in depravity such that, in his younger years, Schlegel's protagonist is an uncreative aspiring artist who, on the whole, is rather callow with an instrumental approach toward others and is profoundly depressed and frustrated as he dissipates in a somnambulant life of aesthetic enjoyment. Schlegel writes, Julius in his early days "degenerate[s] more and more" and becomes "sensual from spiritual despair, [commits] imprudent acts out of spite against fate, and [is] genuinely immoral."[219]

[218] The reliance on feeling and emotional introspection was integral to Romanticism as a reaction to the Enlightenment principles of cold reason, technology, and science. However, a near total dependence upon fictitious tales emphasising sentimentality, chivalry, and unrealism meant that Romanticism held a poor reputation amongst many intellectuals of the late eighteenth century. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy report, this reputation was rehabilitated to respectability by the German Romantics in general and Friedrich Schlegel in particular (who coined the term 'romantic' in reference to poetry as the most eminent expression for man's journey towards self-knowledge) such that these writers opened "an entire [new] era" and were, without exaggeration "the first 'avant-garde' group in history" (*The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 8).

[219] Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 78.

From this basic portrait, there are of course manifold ways in which to read Julius. For example, quite at odds with the intelligible (corrupt) sense of heroism of the Romantic nihilists, Clancy Martin has gone so far as to depict Schlegel's Julius as a simple-minded, dogmatic, boring, doctrinaire fellow who, as *Lucinde*'s desultory narrative unfolds, follows his aestheticizing impulses through to settle into a life of placid contentment with his quaint marriage to Lucinde filled with landscape painting, love-making, idling vegetation, social entertaining, and blasé expectancy of parenthood.[220] Such a reading, however, misses, I think, the radical nature of Schlegel's overarching attempt with his unfinished novel—an attempt which discloses a will of demonic nihilism that gives rise to all phenomena.

More explicitly, *Lucinde* is a novel in which heterosexual love is consecrated as salvific as Schlegel attempts to reveal how, through human love, and human love alone, an individual can develop into an artist and, in particular, a poet endowed with the capacity for fashioning their own selfhood. As he remarks in one of his *Fragments*, it is "[o]nly through love and the consciousness of love [that] man become[s] man."[221] *A fortiori*, with *Lucinde*, Schlegel sought to lay the foundation for a full-scale religious revolution in the conception and practice of love and, in this way, the work is Schlegel's proselytising effort to convert individuals from what he appraised as puritanical religion and "bourgeois morality" into his own "religion of love."[222] Schlegel was specifically concerned with showing that the solution to sundry forms of unhappiness, listlessness, anomie, and spiritual despair is to be found not in relationship with a deceased or superfluous deity of the Christian religion but in the right sort of relationship with another human being. Namely, in quixotic heterosexual romance, titillating sex, and avid consociation with one's preferred lover. In other words, Schlegel was

[220] Clancy W. Martin, "A Common Mistake about Kierkegaard's 'The Seducer's Diary'" in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, 198.
[221] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 248.
[222] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 79, 49.

intent on undermining conventional morality and religion and erecting in its place an unapologetically religious idolatry of human love. To this end, in a sonorous stroke of irony, Schlegel's *Lucinde* unabashedly commandeers myriad terms, titles, and sentiments as well as requisitions entire registers of religious imagery to colonise space for his own religion of love that had, he thought, previously been occupied by Christian theological discourse and liturgical practice. In one of his early letters to Lucinde, Julius writes:

> Let me confess it: I don't love you only, I love womanhood itself. And I don't merely love it, I worship it; because I worship humanity…The religion I have returned to is the oldest…I worship fire as being the best symbol of the Godhead. And where is there lovelier fire than the one nature has locked deeply into the soft breast of woman? Ordain me priest, not so that I may idly gaze at the fire, but so that I may liberate it, awaken it, and purify it: wherever it is pure, it sustains itself, without surveillance and without vestals.[223]

One remarkable implication of this passage is that, for Schlegel, and consonant with the ambition of supplanting relationship with God with romance, woman (i.e., and not God) has the fundamental task of educating men into the mysteries of love. To this end, Schlegel's Julius philosophises that man is in veritable need of this edification, "for by nature man feels a need for love, but has no notion what it is like."[224] As Schlegel presents Julius, love without woman is love without an object and is therefore a blind passion that gnaws out the core of a man's heart. Without the orienting presence of his female lover, for example, Schlegel narrates, "there burned in [Julius] a love without an object which shattered his inner being."[225] In worshipping love and holding woman to be, at once, love's object and its inimitable source, one may be tempted to attribute to the author of *Lucinde* an unusually progressive approach to sexual and gender politics. Indeed, in a further one of his *Fragments*, Schlegel expressed the belief that his work would liberate women living under repressive patriarchal society, the conditions of which he thought enslaved and governed their

[223] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 61–2.
[224] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 59.
[225] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 77.

sexuality.[226] It is important to qualify this appraisal, however, with the fact that Schlegel's methodology of liberating women from the "unnaturalness" of "prudery" imposed upon them by society, his project of unleashing the innate feminine "fire" of love in order that it may burst forth in the most florid flurry of passion is, at bottom, a liberation ultimately effected by men.[227] That is, well short of establishing any sort of proto-feminist or even egalitarian political and axiological agenda, the sexual ethos of *Lucinde* is principally bound to Schlegel's normative conception of heterosexual love in which woman is free, yes, but free namely to respond to *man's* romantic idealisation of her and free to sustain the sexual interest of *her male lover* in order to unlock "the most beautiful chaos of sublime harmonies and fascinating pleasures."[228]

More generally, the religious thematization embedded within Schlegel's *Lucinde* predominates over any recognisable effort to overturn patriarchy and establish inviolate distaff rights and social equality. It is, in fact, not too much to say that the religious thematization of erotic love and erogenous romance saturates Schlegel's piece. So much so, despite it representing an early stage of his writing career, it would be wrong to think that Schlegel's aesthetic and thoroughly ironic annexation of theological space in *Lucinde* is restricted to passing generalities or is only of tangential interest. Indeed, while Schlegel and his inamorata, Dorothea, would convert to Catholicism by 1808 and this conversion indelibly marked a correspondingly Christian inflection upon Schlegel's later work, in *Lucinde*, Schlegel's Julius specifically divinises the sexual to such a degree that definite religious ideas—e.g., eternity, the holy, immortality, spirit, belief, and soul—regularly acquire their meaning exclusively in virtue of the sensual and bodily. "Love is not merely the quiet longing for eternity," we hear Julius croon, "it is also the holy enjoyment of a lovely presence. It is

[226] Fragment 115 of *Ideas*, Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 251–2.
[227] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 61–2.
[228] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 45.

not merely a mixture, a transition from mortal to immortal: rather it is the total union of both."[229] And, again, "[t]his is marriage," Julius gushes to his Lucinde, "the timeless union and conjunction of our spirits, not simply for what we call this world or the world beyond death, but for the one, true, indivisible, nameless, unending world, for our whole eternal life and being."[230] Elsewhere, Schlegel deploys Julius's third-person perspectival voice to equivalent effect: "[The couple's] belief in each other grew with their feeling for each other; and with their belief, their courage and their strength."[231] And, finally, "[s]o [Julius's] spirit was made whole and enriched in a variety of ways and circumstances. But here too he found full harmony only in Lucinde's soul—the soul in which the germs of everything magnificent and everything holy awaited only the sunlight of his spirit in order to unfold themselves into the most beautiful religion."[232]

At this point, with Schlegel's superlative effort to establish a religion of love, one may be struck by an arresting discord between any purported common nature of Romantic nihilism Schlegel's Julius and, for example, Lord Byron's Manfred. Most notably, how can Romantic nihilism at one and the same time advocate the seemingly incongruous paths to self- and world-knowledge of Manfred's psychopathic selfishness and calloused disregard for others *and* Julius's affectionate infatuation with his lovers and his praise of marriage? The answer resides in the essential Fichtean substratum of these characters, evidenced by the fact that Schlegel (as with many of the *Frühromantiker*) recruited Fichte's philosophical framework in the service of crafting their respective heroes.[233] That is, for example,

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[229] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 106.
[230] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 48.
[231] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 101.
[232] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 103.
[233] Schlegel was a diligent student of Fichte, attending many of his lectures and claiming that "the French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age" and that, insofar as philosophy and poetry must be put in dialogue with one another, Fichte's philosophy was the "fittest for the poet" as it "originates in freedom…and shows how the human spirit impresses its laws on all things and how,"

Manfred's destruction of intrinsic ethical limitations en route to freedom and knowledge is simply an overt expression of the same Fichtean egotism exhibited by Julius. Of note, Julius is the personification, the ordained priest, of Schlegel's religion of love and its foremost expression, romantic poetry, and, as Sharin Elkholy has averred, Julius's *modus vivendi* of romantic poetry, no less than Manfred's psychopathy, cannot be understood apart from the structure of Fichtean subjectivity.[234]

To elaborate, it is helpful to start with Schlegel's definition of romantic poetry, which is found in Schlegel's most famous *Fragment* from the Romantic journal, *Athenaeum*:

> Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical…Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analysed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected…It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognises as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself.[235]

Here, there is much in Schlegel's definition of romantic poetry that accords with Fichte's distinctive brand of idealism. Schlegel's mention of romantic poetry as 'infinite' and 'free' as well as the poet's will that cannot tolerate any law above it and is therefore absolute, to cite just three examples. But the Fichtean undergirding of Schlegel's conception of romantic poetry and love is more than superficial lexical coincidence, although a brief revisitation of several key tenets of Fichte's thought should bring this convergence into greater focus.

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metaphysically speaking, "the world is its work of art" (Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 183). Interestingly, apart from the undergirding of Julius by the Fichtean system which I discuss here, as Peter Firchow reports, Fichte may be seen to further underwrite Schlegel's character by declaring, in a correspondence from September 1799, that Schlegel's novella "was one of the greatest productions of genius he knew, and that he was about to embark on his third reading of it" (*Lucinde*, 4).

[234] Sharin N. Elkholy, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?: A Phenomenology of Romantic Love," in *Athenäum* 9, (1999): 121–60.

[235] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 175.

To that end, recall that Fichte grounds all consciousness and, indeed, the generation of the world and reality *in toto* in the absolute self which he describes as pure activity: "The *pure activity* of the self alone, and the *pure self alone*, are infinite."[236] Recall further that Fichte's implementation of his three axiomatic philosophical principles depicted the activity of the absolute self in terms of a tripartite logic of thesis confronting antithesis and a striving to resolve the confrontation of opposites by way of synthesis. Moreover, if the absolute self is to strive toward freedom, there must be something within the self that drives it to continually transcend itself, that drives it to reconcile the thesis of the I and the antithesis of the not-I in synthesis, and that something is, as we have seen, what Fichte refers to as 'longing,' which conditions the self's activity and turns it into a striving for something totally unknown. Significantly, the essence of Fichte's dialectic is that the synthesis remains totally unknown because the synthesis of the I and not-I is an ultimately unrealisable ideal ever-beyond the reach of the self. Nevertheless, it serves as the incitement to the endless pursuit of synthesis. To reiterate Fichte's explication, "the idea of an infinity to be thus completed floats as a vision [or horizon] before us, and is rooted in our innermost nature. We are obliged, as it enjoins us, to resolve the contradiction [between the I and the not-I]."[237] And, holding this chimerical synthesis of the I and not-I in mind, "…such a determination in the self is called a *longing*; a drive towards something totally unknown, which reveals itself only through a *need*, a *discomfort*, a *void*, which seeks satisfaction, but does not say from whence."[238]

In view of this dialectic, then, the infinite striving of the absolute self may be seen as not only the driving force behind Fichte's theory of subjectivity but also the driving force behind Schlegel's theory of romantic poetry and love encapsulated within Julius. That is, Schlegel may be seen to model his character of Julius and his theory of romantic poetry and

[236] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 226.
[237] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 238.
[238] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 265.

love upon the dialectical structure of Fichte's idealism. The one salient qualification to Schlegel's otherwise wholesale appropriation of Fichtean idealism, however, is that, whereas Fichte sought to illumine the Kantian noumenon and account for *all* of reality through the self's productive activity, Schlegel is perhaps more circumspect in limiting his express commentary on 'reality' to the inner nature of the self. Schlegel, in other words, at least in *Lucinde*, is more interested in self-knowledge than he is in arguing the point that world-knowledge just is self-knowledge.

This proviso aside, Schlegel tells us that, in effect, Julius's acquisition of self-knowledge is identical with the development of his romantic relations and therefore his advance in love is identical to his developing self. To convey this, and continuing the ironic invasion of theological space with the language of his religion of love, Schlegel plays on the biblical vernacular of Christ as the Word in the First Epistle of John (Cf. vv. 1:1, 14):

> Just as [Julius's] artistic ability developed and he was able to achieve with ease what he had been unable to accomplish with all his powers of exertion and hard work before, so too his life [when in love] now came to be a work of art for him…A light entered his soul: he saw and surveyed all the parts of his life and the structure of the whole clearly and truly because he stood at its centre. He felt that he would never lose this unity; the mystery of his life had been resolved and he had found the Word. It seemed to him that everything in his life had been predestined and created since the beginning of time so that he would find the answer in love.[239]

This excerpt prominently brings to the fore the question of Julius's development. Namely, how did this development happen? How did Julius gradually evolve into an artist and acquire self-knowledge—going from shattered inner being to integrated self, confidently at home at the centre of life, full of unity and apparently without niggling mystery? Schlegel indeed tells us that Julius's advancement is wrought through his passionate love with multiple women and, eventually, Lucinde and, overall, the existential watershed came when Julius found the

[239] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 102.

"answer in love." But let us now look more deeply into what this means and the way in which Schlegel transparently implements the dialectic of Fichtean idealism within the character of Julius and, more accurately, the Julius-lover (and, principally, Julius-Lucinde) dyad.

As noted, Schlegel indicates that woman, or love—for Schlegel equates the two—is the source and soul of romantic poetry, not simply because she is the source of love, but because she serves as both the antithetical limit to Julius as well as the infinite ideal, the constantly idealised object that renders Julius's development possible. But how, specifically, does woman come to symbolise the ideal, and how does the thoroughgoing Fichtean dialectic of romantic love operate? Julius, taken as a Fichtean thesis, infinitises woman, herself correspondingly taken as a Fichtean antithesis, making of her an 'infinite ideal' by continually raising her limits to the infinite. By continuing to discover anew in her (in search of synthesis) something previously unknown, and this is how her boundless "holy fire" of love unfolds itself into an endless poem of "harmonious variety and change" and an "inexhaustible variety of…sensuality."[240] This conception of woman as the ideal concurs with Schlegel's conception of woman in the *Fragments* wherein he states that "the very essence of [woman] is poetry."[241] And, as noted above in his definition of romantic poetry from *Athenaeum*, for Schlegel, the essence of poetry is infinite, or is always becoming. To further explicate the dialectic of romantic poetry and love, then, Schlegel communicates that woman is infinitised by Julius through his words and actions: "A stream of entreaties, flatteries, and sophisms flew from his lips."[242] Indeed, the main implement in Julius seductive arsenal is that he besieges his female lovers with "earnest attentions," that is, he whispers sweet nothings and "single, disconnected words…words full of meaning but not very clear,"

[240] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 62, 103, 84.
[241] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 253.
[242] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 80.

creating a mutually-reinforcing longing for infinity between Julius, the poet, and woman/Lucinde, the object of his poetry.[243]

Significantly, this dialectic of romantic infinitisation/idealisation—and it is not inaccurate to call it idolisation—is a clear manifestation of Fichte's longing for "something totally unknown."[244] And so, by Julius's romancing words and actions intent on emancipating woman's love, words and actions which are the Fichtean manifestation of the longing and drive for something unknown, Julius infinitises woman. Here, it should be observed that woman is believed to inspire Julius's romantic actions, which is why woman is considered the source of love. However, in a certain sense, and in accordance with Schlegel's normative conception of heterosexual love and generalised indifference toward disputing the sexual and gender politics prevailing in the epoch in which he wrote, it is in fact Julius and not Lucinde (or any other woman) who is the source of romantic love. Explicitly, it is Julius that liberates love from woman and this liberation occurs only when woman feels, by way of the infinitisation precipitated by Julius, that she is the "mistress of his heart."[245] In addition, Julius does not idly recognise the power of his seductive words and actions in the creation of his love. Instead, by projecting his boundless romantic passion onto woman, again in a thoroughly Fichtean fashion, so as to veritably become Fichte's absolute I, Julius posits for himself an ideal, an unknown horizon which "floats as a vision" before him and toward which he strives to make known in order to continually acquire self-knowledge.[246]

In summary, as the aim of Julius is to realise his subjectivity, his poetry as infinite, to never stop acquiring knowledge of his self, and as love is the means by which he strives toward such knowledge, Julius perforce must transcend his own limitations. He does this by

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[243] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 98.
[244] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 265.
[245] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 95.
[246] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 238.

perpetually extending woman's limits further and further out to the infinite, by continuing to discover in her, as already noted, something previously unknown. By continually overcoming the limits of woman, the dialectic of romantic love is sustained as Julius simultaneously rises above his own limits set by his reflexive relationship to woman. Self-knowledge, and the unending accretion of it, is occasioned in relationship to woman who reveals to Julius various dimensions of himself by way of forcing him to synthesise this ever-changing object of love. Through the dialectic of romantic love, Julius acquires self-knowledge that serves as the material for his poetry and his self is thereby absolutized, for, to revisit Schlegel's definition of romantic poetry, "the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself."[247] In these ways, then, Schlegel's Julius is a character whose essence is a token of romantic love and poetry that is above all else constructed out of the fundaments of Fichtean idealism.

THE RELIGION OF ROMANTIC NIHILISM

Returning, now, to definitively address the apparent discordance in the expressions of the demonic nature of romantic nihilism between Schlegel's Julius and other Romantic nihilist heroes such as Manfred, though Schlegel intended to erect his evangelical religion of love, it is more accurate to say that both Schlegel and the other *Frühromantiker* were catechumen and congregants of the ecumenical church of romantic nihilism. And, as the catechism of this religion, whereas a transcendent sense of religion has an individual human being base their life on the experience of an infinite reality which is *given* vertically or from above, both Manfred's psychopathic egotism and Julius's/Schlegel's romantic poetry and the other protagonists who embody the same are predicated on Fichte's horizontal infinity of the will of the absolute I's own creative powers. For Schlegel's Julius as much as the other Romantic nihilist heroes, there is no substantive reality that is given to the individual other than that which the individual *qua* absolute self gives to themselves, hence, of note, Julius's

[247] Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 176.

ironic vitiation of established religion and his total engrossment in the romantic poetry of his own self-knowledge. Julius, it may be said, is the sole author, the Alpha and the Omega, of the love that he creates with his lovers.

Having followed this line of argument, though, one may still object that Julius is fundamentally out of step with the typical self-seeking spirit of the poetic nihilists' valorisation of their tragic heroes insofar as the cosmology presented in *Lucinde* is thoroughly intersubjective and not subjective (or solipsistic). That Julius is dialectically dependent upon others (viz., his lovers), just as any thesis is dependent upon its countervailing antithesis. Importantly, however, as Martin has rightly observed, as with Cordelia in "The Seducer's Diary" of *Either/Or*, and true to the Fichtean precept that it is the self through its own cognitive faculties that creates the objects which comprise reality and thus reality exists exclusively in and for *self*-consciousness, *pace* her importance as the ostensive source of love, woman in Schlegel's drama is virtually absent.[248] At most, woman's perspective is an ethereal presence whereas the emotional ruminations and experimentations of Julius dominate centre stage in a narcissistic way such that one is hermeneutically warranted in resisting any pluralisation and regarding Julius as the properly singular 'Alpha and Omega' of Schlegel's narrative. Moreover, and more pertinent to filing Julius within the inventory of representatives of Romantic nihilism, I had noted previously that the liberation of woman's love ultimately stems from Julius's romantic activity and that this speaks against a proto-feminist reading of *Lucinde*. However, it is just as significant that the apparent dialectical dependence upon the female antithesis in *Lucinde* crucially issues from and orbits around the thesis of Julius. This may be seen to clearly articulate Romanticism's

[248] Martin, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, 198. Of course, it is worth noting that similar criticisms have been levied at Kierkegaard's literature as well (e.g., Céline Léon, "The No Woman's Land of Kierkegaardian Exceptions," in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Céline Léon and Sylvia Walsh (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 147–73).

objectification of woman bordering on an implicit misogyny. It certainly provides a philosophical scaffold that renders as intelligible the selfishness—cue Kierkegaard's scathing assessment of erotic love—inhering within Julius's amorous love and, more specifically, Julius's tacit obliteration of woman's otherness and independence in a way that unmistakeably mirrors the destruction of the other within oneself enacted by Lord Byron's Manfred noted in the opening epigraph of this section. True, perhaps Julius does not 'use' Lucinde and his other lovers in an obtusely exploitative sense. Nevertheless, he pursues his project of romantic poetry and love in order to acquire self-knowledge irrespective of the consequences for his lovers. Seen in this light, then, even Julius's love, the preeminent source of reconciliation, becomes an engine of self- and world-knowledge when it is taken up in the absolute service of the self-willing I of Julius and Schlegel's hero is therefore securely at home with his characterological cousins.

In concluding the explicit consideration of Romantic nihilism, I have depicted Schlegel's Julius as a model of a religious, philosophical, and literary movement that enlists Fichtean idealism to valorise and realise the goal of acquired knowledge of self and world. For this class of characters, and in the minds of the authors who shaped them, the heroic pursuit of freedom and knowledge entails that the personality invariably becomes one with a self-will beating at the heart of the world and giving rise to all phenomena. Indeed, the tragic heroes of the poetic nihilists are heroes precisely because they are read as courageously believing in and pursuing their epistemological and ontological projects, whatever the cost. It likely has not escaped the astute reader's notice, however, that this expression of nihilism is somewhat of a misnomer, an equivocal if not altogether false formulation of nihilism insofar as it espouses the *teloi* of self- and world-knowledge (especially as the latter is conceived in terms of nature) whereas nihilism just as such is more commonly thought to indicate a spirit of negation of absolutely everything culminating in unbridled chaos and recognition of the

untenability of any teleology to existence, however psychologically unendurable. As Gillespie expresses the perspective of nihilism, "[t]he chaos of existence…is a tremendous psychological burden that few can bear…[l]ife can be sustained only by a greater or lesser denial of this chaos, by establishing horizons within which human beings can survive and thrive…[o]nly the strongest form of life can face the terrifying truth [of nihilism] that existence is chaotic and meaningless."[249] On these terms, the purported nihilism of Schlegel and the other Romantics ostensibly falters. This failure, this implicit teleological structuring of self and world, did not go unnoticed and chief amongst those to have noticed the failing in Romantic nihilism and set off in an attempt to differentially deploy Fichtean idealism toward another, and ultimately darker, expression of nihilism was one of Fichte's other students, Schopenhauer.[250]

SCHOPENHAUER'S NIHILISM: SALVATION THROUGH ASCETICISM

> *For the world is Hell, and men are on the one hand the tormented souls and on the other the devils in it.*[251]
>
> —*Arthur Schopenhauer*

[249] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 221.
[250] It is worth pointing out that, whatever harmonies do exist between the Romantics and Schopenhauer (e.g., Elizabeth Millán, "Aesthetic Humanism: Poetry's Role in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel and Schopenhauer," in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. Sandra Shapshay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 179–96), Schopenhauer was familiar with the thought of the Jena Romantics in general and Schlegel in particular and was thus well positioned to develop a different and ultimately clearer expression of nihilism. For example, while in Dresden, Schopenhauer was personally acquainted with Schlegel insofar as he often visited Tieck's (Schlegel's childhood friend) home—an epicentre of academic philosophy, literature, and culture for the early Romantic philosophers, theologians, literary critics, writers, and poets providing a forum to debate their varying attempts to undercut the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment. That is, Schopenhauer visited Tieck's home up until a time when he voiced some severe criticisms of Schlegel (Wilhelm Gwinner, *Schopenhauer's Leben* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1878), 157, cf. Arthur Hübscher (ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer Gespräche* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1971), 53 and 443n), which alienated the relationships and put an end to any fraternity.
[251] Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World," in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 48.

Schopenhauer spent most of his career on the outer fringes of academia, all the while remaining highly critical of practicing academes. Although his disdain for academic philosophers was generalised, he regarded the German Idealists with an especial measure of odium. For example, sardonically commenting on what he considered the unnecessarily abstruse nature of Kant, Fichte, Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), and Hegel, in *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer writes:

> The public had been compelled to realise that what is obscure is not always senseless: so senseless things immediately took refuge behind obscure modes of presentation. *Fichte* was the first to seize upon this new privilege and make vigorous use of it; *Schelling* was at least his equal in this, and soon they both were overtaken by a host of hungry scribblers devoid of both spirit and honesty. Still, it was *Hegel* who ultimately showed the greatest audacity in dishing out pure nonsense, slapping together senseless, raving tangles of verbiage such as had only ever been heard in lunatic asylums; he became the instrument of the most ponderous, universal mystification that the world has ever seen, and this with a degree of success that will seem utterly incredible to posterity and will remain a lasting monument to German stupidity.[252]

Still, regarding Fichte, despite his often caustic assessment of him, Schopenhauer was indebted to his sometime lecturer insofar as the German philosopher's central notion of the will-to-live is decisively informed by Fichte's notion of the absolute I. There are, more generally, numerous convergences in the thought of Fichte and Schopenhauer. Of note, both the Fichtean absolute I and the Schopenhauerian will-to-live are explicitly conceived of as wills and, as such, denote senses of pure activity rather than expressions of passive mental faculties such as, for example, eidetic perception. In addition, for both Fichte and Schopenhauer, there is a palpable sense in which the activities of the absolute I and will-to-live operate unconsciously—behind the back of the subject—such that the empirical I or individual cannot fully comprehend this supreme conative activity, though neither Fichte nor

[252] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 456 (translation modified). Kierkegaard owned and, as I note in the following chapter, read the entirety of both volumes of Schopenhauer's *magnum opus*, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vols. 1–2, 2nd revised and enlarged edition (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1844), *ASKB* 773–773a.

Schopenhauer were sceptics and knowledge remained a viable prospect. As well, both the Fichtean and Schopenhauerian conceptions of will entail that all reality derives from an act of absolute will or that the will produces all reality, including all empirical subjects and objects. Finally, both the Fichtean absolute I and the Schopenhauerian will-to-live manifest in striving that can never be fulfilled and therefore both terminate in longing.

These conjunctions aside, though, there are, of course, disjunctions between Fichte and Schopenhauer. A principal one to be expounded is that, as alluded to above, Schopenhauer was pessimistically convinced of the utter illogicality of goals or *teloi*. True, like the Romantics, Schopenhauer, interpreted the infinite will housed in the will-to-live as a (demonically) selfish will underlying all phenomena. However, unlike Fichte, for whom the longing of the absolute will was indispensable to selfhood as "the *original*, *wholly independent manifestation* of the striving that lies in the self," and unlike the poetic nihilists who appropriated Fichtean striving to fashion their heroes as the epitomes of the absolute self, for Schopenhauer, the enticement of progress inhering within the will-to-live was only a deception that impels an individual toward ever greater suffering.[253] What was for Fichte and the Romantics a recurring task of self-development calling out for completion is, for Schopenhauer, nothing more than a delusive machination set in motion by the impersonal will-to-live that serves only to enslave individuals in a hopelessly futile effort to bring order to the painful and ultimately meaningless maelstrom of existence.

With these similarities and differences in view, grasping how Schopenhauer can at once appropriate and dispense with Fichte's thought requires a closer exploration of the aimless essence of the Schopenhauerian will against the mise-en-scène of Fichte's idealism. To this end, as with Fichte, Schopenhauer envisioned himself as building upon Kant and, also like Fichte, Schopenhauer was not content to stay within the luminous island of Kant's

[253] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 267.

phenomena and sought instead to account for the noumenon. Where Fichte attributed all reality as emitting from the absolute I and thereby established a substantive sense of subjectivity (indeed, subjectivity equipped with cosmological powers of creation), Schopenhauer conversely saw Fichte's principal error as deducing the noumenon from the subject. It may be argued, as Ivan Soll has, that Schopenhauer's original innovation came with the introspection that the noumenon just is the will, that Kant's unknowable noumenon is nothing other than the will that is experienced within one's own body.[254] As Schopenhauer states in his 1813 dissertation, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, "[i]f we introspect, we find ourselves always as willing," and this will, he expands, is nothing more than the absolute and universal will-to-live.[255] Moreover, the phenomena that comprise the world, for Schopenhauer, are objectifications of this will:

> Just as a magic lantern exhibits many different images while one and the same flame makes them all visible, so too in all the diversity of appearances that fill the world alongside each other, or (as events) follow each other and push each other out of the way, there is just *the one* will that appears; everything is its manifestation, its objecthood, and it remains unmoved in the midst of that change: it alone is the thing in itself, while all objects are appearance, phenomenon as Kant puts it.[256]

On first pass, this may seem to be yet another (if more explicitly despiritualised, embodied, and corporeal) iteration of Fichtean subjectivity whereby the infinite will of Fichte's absolute I is simply supplanted by a Schopenhauerian semantic equivalent. This appraisal appears especially tenable when one considers that both Fichte and Schopenhauer regard the will as incapable of being grasped by consciousness inasmuch as the will is the ground of

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[254] Ivan Soll, "Schopenhauer on the Will as the Window to the World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 127–46.
[255] Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. David E. Cartwright, Edward E. Erdmann, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136. There is no evidence that Kierkegaard read a copy of Schopenhauer's dissertation in either its original 1813 or 1847 revised and republished forms.
[256] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 178.

consciousness and that, contra Kant, the noumenon is not altogether inaccessible but can, for both Fichte and Schopenhauer, be known via the experience of our feelings, passions, and drives. Despite this host of similarities that suggest a Schopenhauerian recapitulation of Fichte, however, unlike Fichte, the Schopenhauerian will experienced through the passions and drives of the body is absolute yet there is nothing sensical that stands behind this absolute power. In the hard words of Iulii Isarvich Eichenwal, for Schopenhauer, "[s]omething meaningless and lawless lurks in the world's foundation."[257] Recalling that the Romantic appropriation of Fichte articulated a notion of world-spirit underlying phenomena and this selfish spirit, alive in Schlegel's Julius, had goals and purposes (viz., self- and world-knowledge), Schopenhauer's will, by contrast, ostensibly has no goals and operates entirely untethered to any principle as little more than an amaurotic drive, groping about blindly in the dark. This orientation resolutely decouples Schopenhauer from Fichte and the other German Idealists. As Eichenwal again puts it, Schopenhauer's vision that at the heart of creation beats an aimless will

> distinguishes Schopenhauer not only from the panlogician Hegel…but also from Fichte, whose absolute ego really constitutes will, but a radiant will identical in its inner essence with reason. Hegel's world arises from silence and clarity, from measure and logical order; life is born in the quiet bosom of the idea, and all that is actual is rational. For Schopenhauer all existence in its mindless urge to struggle comes out of some gloomy abyss of wild and indomitable forces. In this manner the philosophy of Cosmic Disorder regards the primal essence of being as the seed of tragedy. The world is not an idyll of spontaneously developing rationality, but is rather an eternal tragedy, and suffering is not a chance occurrence, but an inescapable element.[258]

On the basis of this melancholic depiction of Schopenhauer's philosophical orientation, we are now well-situated to appreciate the full scope and nature of Schopenhauer's conception of

[257] Iulii Isarvich Eichenwal, "A Note on Schopenhauer (1910)," trans. Nina J. Katz, in *Schopenhauer: New Essays in Honor of His Two Hundredth Birthday*, ed. Eric von der Luft (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 146.
[258] Eichenwal, "A Note on Schopenhauer (1910)," in *Schopenhauer*, 145.

will. Summarily stated, the world in Schopenhauer's view has a senseless heart of darkness at fundamental and implacable odds with both human happiness and, perforce, the Christian notion of loving Providence—or, to use Kierkegaard's preferred diction, Governance—which or who governs the world according to some (if inscrutable) *raison d'être*, purpose, or logic.

The aetiology of this, Schopenhauer's venomously depressive conviction and his subsequent attraction to myriad religious ideas of Indian extraction is not altogether clear. However, it is not an altogether insignificant biographical datum that, at the impressionable age of seventeen, following the presumptive suicide of his father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer (1747–1805), the young Arthur queried himself as to whether God created the world and concluded that the world was in fact the work of the devil "who had brought creatures into existence in order to gloat over the sight of their anguish."[259] To elongate Eichenwal's earlier cited assessment, from at least the age of 17 onward, Schopenhauer saw that "[s]omething meaningless and lawless lurk[ed] in the world's foundation—hence, the world [could not] but lie in evil."[260] And, as a result, what is truly monstruous about Schopenhauer's conception of will, in Gillespie's words, was that the "will constantly tortures itself without rhyme or reason" making this world into a hell.[261] Here we have Schopenhauer's distinctive formulation of the will-to-live blindly acting through the body, which inevitably psychologically registers as emptiness at fundamental odds with human thriving and flourishing.

But what does Schopenhauer mean for such a will to act through the body? Just as Fichte and Schlegel disclosed a dialectic in order to render their notion of an absolute will as intelligible, Schopenhauer similarly articulated a logic—or what may be called a logic—by

[259] For the translated entry drawn from one of Schopenhauer's notebooks of 1832, see Urs App, "Schopenhauer and the Orient," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, 98.
[260] Eichenwal, *Schopenhauer*, 146.
[261] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 189–90.

which his notion of will was made sensible, even if the world resulting from the Schopenhauerian will-to-live was itself senseless. For this, Schopenhauer was explicit in stressing his insight that the noumenon just is the will and the will, in turn, just is that which one experiences within the body. That is, the will acts through the corporeality of the body. It is one's experience of their embodiment and the material composition of innate feeling, drives, and passions. Schopenhauer writes, the body is nothing more than the "will to cognise objectified" or nothing but the act of will objectified.[262] On this point, and yet again, Schopenhauer tacitly emulates Fichte in the sense that, like Fichte's axiomatic threefold philosophical principles, Schopenhauer had a philosophical axiom of his own—namely, the Schopenhauerian identity of the will and the body is a fundamental principle that *eo ipso* cannot be deduced.

Building from this precept, then, Schopenhauer's logic functions as follows. Insofar as individuals experience the will under the auspices of being individuated bodies in a world of bodies, one's experience of reality is only ever fragmented and in painful tension or conflict. Most notably, individuals instinctually pursue sundry interests at the expense of, or in conflict with, the interests of others. In Schopenhauer's view, however, this model of life ever in contest does not survive circumspection. As Pattison summarises, individuals can never genuinely fulfil their own interests because "doing so involves suppressing or thwarting [the interests] of the other beings to whom we imagine ourselves opposed—but these 'other beings' are in reality also manifestations of the one will that we ourselves are. My healthy meal is the death of the animals or plants that end up on my plate, but I myself, animals, and plants are all expressions of the one, universal will divided against itself."[263] This essential nature of the will-to-live: *bellum omnium contra omnes*, a war of all against all, a phrase

[262] Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, 340.
[263] Pattison, "Skeptics and Anti-Theologians," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, 417.

which Schopenhauer pulls from Hobbes to describe the state of the will manifesting in human existence, is the bedrock of Schopenhauer's outlook. Individuals yearn to gratify their interests however inexorably experience the anguish of being thwarted in such pursuits and, in due course, come to the realisation that they themselves are collapsed—their very selfhood nullified—in the unfolding of the one absolute will-to-live that underlies all. Accordingly, Schopenhauer's logic presents the world as nothing but the aimless teeming forth of mutually destructive life forms, each of which cannibalise one another in an endless struggle to affirm their illusory existence as ontologically discrete beings. As Schopenhauer himself elegiacally appraises the endless churning that comprises the will-to-live:

> [W]henever someone is begotten and born, the clock of human life is wound again so it can play the same hurdy-gurdy that has already been played countless times, movement by movement, beat by beat, with insignificant variants.—Every individual, every human face and its life history is just one more short dream of the infinite spirit of nature, the persistent will to life; it is just one more fleeting image jotted playfully on its infinite page, space and time, and is allowed an infinitesimal existence…before it is erased to free up room. Nonetheless, and here is the troubling side of life, each of these fleeting images, these stale conceptions, must be paid for by the whole will to life in all of its vehemence, with many profound sufferings and ultimately with the long-feared arrival of a bitter death.[264]

Having presented Schopenhauer's doctrine of bodily existence and the senseless warring of the will-to-live, Schopenhauer offered two prime solaces approaching secularised soteriologies to those facing the nihilistic endpoint of his philosophy. Initially, Schopenhauer contended that the arts attractively offered a means of escapism insofar as the artist—men of aesthetic genius including poets, painters, and, most especially, composers of musical scores—may engross themselves in their art, thereby forgetting and losing themselves in the objectification of the will-to-live of the world. Whatever its merits, Schopenhauer did not, however, rest on endorsement of aesthetic escapism manifest in a religion of art where artists

[264] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 348.

are enabled to exist not as selves but as mirrors or reflections of the will-to-live. Rather, coming in the form of asceticism, the religion of art gives way to Schopenhauer's advocacy of an unblinking negation of one's own suffering and the concomitant engagement with and negation of the suffering of others. This was to be accomplished in an ethic of *Mitleid*, pity, compassion, sympathy, mercy, or 'suffering-with.' In a way considerably less sophomoric than, say, Manfred or Julius, in their self-seeking rejection of every authority within and without himself, such an ethic of Schopenhauer's ascetism calls for one to renounce everything including oneself and one's own heart and bear the suffering of oneself and their neighbour in order to see through to the futility and basically selfish immorality of willing and the will-to-live. As he develops his ethic in his essay, "On the Basis of Morality," what motivates this asceticism is compassion insofar as the altruistic ascetic feels a deep commune and holistic interconnectivity with all beings including not only human others but non-human animals and even entire biosystems.[265] Therefore, anathema to the will-to-live which cannot help but express a war of all against all (as it is the will's fundamental nature), the ascetic is soteriologically saved through experiencing the suffering of others as their own suffering and refusing the will-to-live that gives birth to such suffering by willing no longer. In this sense, Schopenhauer's formulation of self-denial eventuates in a rejection of all willing and an austere or draconian life of altruistic asceticism that is "the final goal, indeed the innermost essence of all virtue and holiness and is redemption from the world."[266]

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[265] Kierkegaard owned a copy of Schopenhauer's essay within Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik, behandelt in zwei akademischen Preisschriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Joh. Christ. Hermannsche Buchhandlung, 1841), *ASKB* 772, and specifically alludes to the work in a journal entry from 1854 (*KJN* 9, 359/NB29:95).

[266] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 177. In Chapter III, I return to the manifest self-contradiction, seized upon by Kierkegaard, in Schopenhauer's recurrent denouncement of all *teloi* on the one hand (e.g., "every particular act has a goal; but the whole of willing has none," and again, "[e]verything that [my] remarks should clarify, the unattainable nature of lasting satisfaction and the negativity of all happiness, is explained by what we showed at the end of the Second Book [of *The World as Will and Representation*]: namely that the will, which is objectified in human life as it is every appearance, is a striving

For all the resemblances of his idea of the will-to-live to that of Fichtean idealism and Fichte's own professed theism, Schopenhauer consistently maintained that his view of the will and his ascetic pacification of its pernicious functioning came not by way of his encounter with Fichte but rather through his study of ancient Indian religion, and specifically the *Oupnek'hat*, the (Latinised) Persian form of the Upanishads, which became his favourite religious text.[267] In fact, Schopenhauer believed that his thought was basically in line with that of Indian philosophy and religion and, more specifically, that of atheistic, Theravāda Buddhism. In Schopenhauer's understanding, Buddhism was a species of acosmism and "taught that the wretched life we experience in the world is ultimately an illusion brought about by the self-deceptions of unfulfilled desires and that our best aim is therefore to liberate ourselves by relinquishing our individuated ego-consciousness."[268] This relinquishment of ego-consciousness may be considered another face of the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, which, as Keith Yandell indicates, holds that there is no *ātman*, *jiva*, or enduring self, as well as the refutation of the Hindu doctrine of an unchanging and ultimate *brahman* (i.e., the eternal foundation, source, and goal of all existence).[269] Thus, though one still finds traces of Indic religious critique in his works, one may nevertheless read Schopenhauer as being on the

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without aim and without end" (*The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 189, 347)) and endorsement of a 'final goal' of ethically-motivated asceticism on the other hand.

[267] Yolanda Estes, "Fichte and Schopenhauer on Knowledge, Ethics, Right, and Religion," and App, "Schopenhauer and the Orient," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, 67–87 and 88–107, respectively.

[268] Pattison, "Skeptics and Anti-Theologians," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, 417.

[269] Keith E. Yandell, "What Sorts of Religion Are There?" in *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 31–2. It is worth noting that, despite the common conception of *anātman* or *anattā* as the denial of the existence of self, some maintain that the doctrine more conservatively specifies a practice of attaining non-attachment via the recognition of all reality as transient whilst itself remaining silent on the issue of the ultimate existence of an unchanging, permanent essence or self (e.g., Alexander Wynne, "The *Ātman* and Its Negation: A Conceptual and Chronological Analysis of Early Buddhist Thought," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, no. 1–2 (2011): 103–71).

same side as, for example, the fifth century Theravāda Buddhist commentator, Buddhaghosa, when the latter writes in *The Path of Purification*: "Misery only doth exist, none miserable. No doer is there; naught save the deed is found. Nirvana is, but not the man who seeks it. The Path exists, but not the traveller on it."[270]

It is important to point out that, though offering little to dispel confusion and thereby continually generating debates within the exegesis of his thought, the relinquishment of individuated ego-consciousness or, in Schopenhauer's own terms, the negation of the will-to-live does not stand for "the annihilation of a substance" or the absolute inexistence of anything in simple terms.[271] It is not the annihilation of some substance or being that once was but now is no more. Instead, the negation of the will-to-live stands for the "act of not-willing."[272] Significantly, rooting his nihilistic nothingness in the negation of the will-to-live, Schopenhauer's explication erects a *via negativa* that, as discussed more comprehensively in Chapter IV, places him close to the vernacular of negative theologians when the latter apophatically discuss the spiritual path by which one achieves knowledge of God. In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer writes, "[s]ince we know this being, the *will[-to-live]*, as thing in itself merely in and through the act of *willing*, we are incapable of saying or grasping what else it is or does after it has given up this act; this is why negation [of the will-to-live] *for us*, who are the appearance of the will[-to-live], is a transition to nothingness."[273] In turn,

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[270] Henry Clarke Warren, "There is No Ego," in *Buddhism in Translations: Passages Selected from the Buddhist Sacred Books and Translated from the Original Pali into English* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), 146.
[271] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 281. For examples of varying positions with regard to Schopenhauer's view of nothingness and Buddhist nirvana, see Stephan Atzert, "*Maja* and *Nieban* in *The World as Will and Representation*," in *Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation': A Critical Guide*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 160–78, as well as Roger-Pol Droit, "Frankfurt and Tibet," in *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*, trans. David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 91–103.
[272] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 281.
[273] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 281.

following from this ineffable nature of nothingness, the German philosopher further writes, "[t]his nothingness finds its expression in the entire form of existence; in the infinity of time and space, as opposed to the finitude of the individual in both; in the fleeting present as the sole mode of reality's existence…in constant becoming without being; in constant desire without satisfaction; in the constant obstruction of dying, of which life consists until the obstruction is overcome."[274] Thus, the annihilation denoted by Schopenhauer is total. The annihilation is not of a substance or being that, to reiterate, once was but now is no more but rather coincides with the insight that said substance or being never was to begin with.[275] Ultimately, then, however much he avowed the unspeakable scope and form of nothingness, crossing over from apophasis to cataphasis, Schopenhauer turned the otherwise totally negative concept of 'nothing' to having at least one positive or affirmative expression. Namely, though human beings are indeed incapable of cogitating and, all the more so, speaking a word about the nothingness which results from the negation of the will-to-live, we *are* capable of positively affirming that, at end, nothingness is the highest of which any human being can achieve and think, or, to requisition the well-known words of Saint Anselm's ontological argument to divinise nothingness, for Schopenhauer, nothingness is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

In general, then, the negation of the will-to-live embodied by Schopenhauer's asceticism was the absolute in Schopenhauer's philosophy and this was taken as the crowning revelation of Indian wisdom. Schopenhauer's generalised veneration of this Indic revelation endured in his writings and naturally coloured his relation to Christianity. In particular, Schopenhauer remained generally dismissive of Christianity, save two aspects. First,

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[274] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 255.
[275] This is why Schopenhauer can speak of nothingness as the true essence of human being that is indestructible by death and says with confidence that "[a]fter [one's] death [one] will be what [one was] before [one's] birth" ("On the Doctrine of the Indestructability of Our True Essence by Death," in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 242).

Schopenhauer lauded Jesus as personifying the denial of the will-to-live. And, relatedly, second, Schopenhauer observed "[t]he doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will[-to-live]) and redemption (negation of the will[-to-live])" as "the really great truth that makes up the core of Christianity."[276] Schopenhauer thus held Christian asceticism in relative esteem insofar as it emulated Indian religion and maintained that the true spirit of the New Testament fundamentally aligned with his own ethics, arguing that it preaches

> the kingdom of grace achieved by faith, love of one's neighbour and the complete renunciation of oneself; this is the way to redemption from evil and from the world. For, contrary to all Protestant-rationalistic distortions, the ascetic spirit is indeed quite properly the soul of the New Testament; but this spirit is the very same negation of life…My ethics…has grounds, purpose and goal: it first theoretically demonstrates the metaphysical ground of justice and loving kindness, and then also shows the goal to which they must lead in the end if perfectly executed. At the same time it frankly acknowledges the reprehensibility of the world and points to the negation of the will as the way to redemption from it…In this sense one could call my doctrine the genuine Christian philosophy.[277]

Likewise, as if channelling his inner Qohelet to echo the harshest authorial voice within Ecclesiastes, Schopenhauer further writes, "the true spirit and inner core of Christianity, as with Brahmanism and Buddhism, is an understanding of the nothingness of earthly happiness, in complete disdain for such happiness and a turn in the direction of a completely different, even opposite existence."[278] Nevertheless, apart from these overtures and characterisations, Schopenhauer regarded the remainder of Christianity, that which emanated from Jesus' "mythological history in the Gospels" and the "presumably true history that grounds it" to have, at best, "degenerated into trite optimism," to be nothing more than allegorically true

[276] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 433.
[277] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 283.
[278] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 461.

that points to the literal truth uncovered in his philosophy, and, at any rate, to hold negligible value as anything more than a maudlin and jejune instance of monotheism.[279]

To be sure, in tow with his degradation of Christianity (apart from its ascetic aspects) and esteem of Indic thought, Schopenhauer was adamant that the attendant denial of the will-to-live in ascetic self-renunciation cannot be completed whilst one lives in the body. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, on pain of evident contradiction, the path of ascetic resignation or nihilistic negation cannot be chosen by any individual *per se* insofar as to choose is to will and the individual cannot, as it were, will not to will. This paradox, and Schopenhauer's problematic appeal to a doctrine of grace to resolve it, will indeed prove pivotal to Kierkegaard's assessment of Schopenhauerian nihilism and therefore I return to it in the consequent chapters of this dissertation. For now, it suffices to note that Schopenhauer maintained his principle of negation of the will-to-live such that even suicide is not an instance of countering the will-to-live, for suicide (with the possible exception of suicide by means of starvation) is at bottom a self-interested flight from suffering and therefore an implicit affirmation of the will-to-live (i.e., albeit the will to live under different circumstances).[280] Nevertheless, despite this difficulty, Schopenhauer held to and

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[279] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 433. Indeed, decades before Nietzsche, whom he (for a time) influenced greatly, as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906–1945) in some ways similar assessment culminating in religionless Christianity (e.g., see the 16 July 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge in *Letters & Papers from Prison* (trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1953), 119–22), Schopenhauer prognosticated post-Christendom and regarded Christianity as laying on its deathbed. For example, writing in *Parerga and Paralipomena* that belief in Christianity's fables "disappears further every day; thus people will have to turn to my philosophy" (vol. 1, ed. and trans. Sabine Roehr, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 121), "Christianity is gradually approaching its end, undermined constantly by the sciences" (vol. 2, 353), and that "[m]ankind is outgrowing [the Christian] religion like a child's dress, and there's no stopping it—it will burst" whereas "the Brahmanic and Buddhist religions continue to exist and flourish; they are the oldest of all and have detailed records" (vol. 2, 352–3).

[280] For Schopenhauer's consideration of the possible exception of suicide by starvation as a genuine case of humanly ending the will-to-live, see §69 of the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 425–9. Interestingly, in what is perhaps Kierkegaard's first exposure to Schopenhauerian nihilism, in a lengthy 1837 essay entitled, "Thoughts on the

promulgated the nihilistic nothingness which he saw as the sum and substance of Indic religion such that he concluded that the will-to-live itself cannot be abolished by anything other than knowledge and, more specifically, negative knowledge or knowledge of nullity. Writing again in *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer advises:

> But we who are firmly entrenched in the standpoint of philosophy must content ourselves here with negative cognition [or knowledge], satisfied in having reached the final boundary stone of the positive. Thus, if we have recognised the intrinsic essence of the world as will, and have seen in all its appearances only the will's objecthood, and have followed this from the impulses of the dark forces of nature (impulses that are devoid of cognition) up to the most conscious of human actions,—if we have recognised all this, we will certainly not evade the consequence that along with the free negation…of the will, all those appearances are also abolished, those constant urges and drives that have no goal or pause, that operate on all the levels of objecthood in which and through which the world exists, the manifold forms that follow each other in succession, the will's whole appearance and

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Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality with Regard to the Latest Literature on the Subject," Kierkegaard's close friend, mentor, and professor, P. M. Møller, averred that nihilism invariably brings one to abort the project of selfhood. Møller writes: "A life-view that leads to practical nihilism easily passes over to a positive striving for self-annihilation. History gives numerous examples of this. A striking example is found in the pre-Christian era when a consistent dialectical development of the Cyrenaic and Cynic philosophy led to a practical nihilism that was not the product of the whims of particular individuals but was deeply rooted in the development of the age. This brought about such a universal *ennui* that the government of Alexandria prohibited *Hegesias*, with the epithet *Peisithanatos*, to teach his doctrines, since they resulted in an unusual number of suicides. The same phenomenon is repeated in our time when the increasing nihilistic life-view continually gives birth to suicides" (*Poul Martin Møller's "Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality" and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. Finn Gredal Jensen and Jon Stewart (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 108). Møller references here Hegesias of Cyrene (*c*. 300 BC), a rhetor and Cyrenaic philosopher with the surname Peisithanatos (i.e., "death persuader" or "the deadly persuader"). The epithetical surname was indeed apropos because, after listening to his orations, individuals would often commit suicide, thus leading Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Alexandria to banish him from Egypt. Of further interest, resembling Schopenhauer's clear views on the impossibility of human happiness and his more ambiguous views on suicide by starvation, the biographer of Greek philosophers, Diogenes Laertius (180–240 AD), indicates that Hegesias' hedonism led him to deny the possibility of happiness given that lasting pleasure was not attainable and argued that life and death are each desirable in their turn (see *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: An Edited Translation*, ed. and trans. Stephen White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 113). As well, in the account of the Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero (106–43 BC), Hegesias wrote a book entitled Ἀποκαρτερῶν ("the one who starves himself to death") in which there "appears a man who was passing away from life by starvation and is called back by his friends, and in answer to their remonstrances, details the discomforts of human life" (see *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 99).

> ultimately its universal forms as well, time and space, and also its final fundamental form, subject and object [all these are abolished with the will-to-live]. No will: no representation, no world.[281]

Moreover, so as to openly situate his nihilism amongst the various sects of Hindu-Buddhist thought, Schopenhauer ends with the exaltation of ascetic resignation and, specifically, the outright adulation of Theravāda Buddhistic negation. He does this most overtly by demarcating the zenith (or nadir) of his nihilism in the negation of the will-to-live as not a mere generic token of the philosophical and religious impulses of "the Indians" but rather as a conclusion fundamentally identical with the centrepiece of the Prajna-Paramita—literally, the 'Perfection of Wisdom' or 'Transcendental Knowledge'—of Theravāda Buddhism:

> Only nothing remains before us. But our nature, which resists this melting away into nothing, is really only the will to life which we ourselves are, as it is our world. The fact that we hate nothing so much is nothing more than another expression of the fact that we will life so much, and we are nothing other than this will and know nothing other than it…[But we] must not evade it through myths and meaningless words as the Indians do, words such as 're-absorption into *Brahman*', or the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists. Instead we confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is—nothing.*This is precisely the Pradschna[or Prajna]-Paramita of the Buddhists, the 'beyond of all knowledge,' i.e., the point where subject and object are no more.[282]

As this chapter (in which I have set out to detail, amongst various species of nihilism, the apex of nihilism deployed in this dissertation) comes to a close, whether Schopenhauer's equation of his philosophy with Buddhist thought and, in particular, Theravāda Buddhist teachings, is accurate is, relative to the aim of this dissertation, immaterial.[283] Far more

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[281] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 438.
[282] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 438–9.
[283] The research of Urs App, for one, suggests that there is good reason to suspect that Schopenhauer often and sometimes gravely misunderstood and misconstrued Buddhist teachings (*The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Wil, Switzerland: UniversityMedia, 2014), 1–2). In this respect, however, Schopenhauer is typical of most Europeans' early encounters with perhaps Asia's largest religion and fount of philosophies. As Roger-Pol Droit remarks, what such

important is that Schopenhauer's philosophy serves as the apex of modern philosophical nihilism, which, in explicitly seeking to obviate the teleology of Romantic nihilism, invaluably helps to illuminate the conceptual similarities and differences factoring into Kierkegaard's at times nihilistic-sounding conception of loving God. Turning to the next chapter, then, the foremost place to orient the discussion is to examine Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer and his nihilistic thought.

diverse thinkers as Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche all had in common was that, "to a greater or lesser extent, they equate[d] nirvana with annihilation; they consider[ed] Buddhism to be like a nihilism that needs to be feared, or that it is all the more attractive because it is frightening…To their mind, Buddhism's primary goal was the annihilation of any thinking principle. That it was presented in a number of manners as a daze where consciousness is dissolved, as a negation of the will, as a desire for death without return, Buddhism's distinctive characteristic was considered to be that it was an impossible doctrine where the human's only aim is to be no longer anything" (*The Cult of Nothingness,* 5–9). As Droit's main thesis, this European scholarship was erroneous on a grotesque scale for, "[t]hinking they were talking about the Buddha, Westerners were talking about themselves. They attributed their own preoccupations to Asia; they projected upon Asia their own fears, their own confusion" (p. 21; for Droit's argument against Schopenhauer's Buddhism or Schopenhauer's belated and sometimes even abusive annexation of Buddhist doctrine, see pp. 95–7). Droit's thesis notwithstanding, to reiterate the standing of this dissertation, whether Buddhism is veritably centred on the negation of the will-to-live is irrelevant, what matters is that Schopenhauer as paragon nihilist regarded it as such and it is a remarkable fact that many in the last half of the nineteenth century agreed in believing that Schopenhauer and the Buddha were fundamentally saying the same thing.

Chapter III

Kierkegaard's Encounter with Schopenhauerian Nihilism

> *Johannes does what we are told to do—he actually doubts everything—he suffers through all the pain of doing that, becomes cunning, almost a bad conscience. When he has gone as far in that direction as he can go and wants to come back, he cannot do so. He perceives that in order to hold on to this extreme position of doubting everything, he has engaged all his mental and spiritual powers…Now he despairs. His life is wasted, his youth spent in these deliberations. Life has not acquired any meaning for him, and all this is the fault of philosophy.*[284]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

Kierkegaard penned these words as part of his (unfinished) philosophical novelette and polemic on Cartesian doubt as the prime methodology of modern philosophy. However, outside of doxastic doubt and despair, the sentiments narratively attributed to Kierkegaard's forlorn and woebegone protagonist may well map onto our consideration of modern philosophical nihilism as a matter of will. In the previous chapter, moving from Kant to Fichte and then on to Jacobi before then analysing Schlegel's *Lucinde* and finally reaching Schopenhauer, modern philosophical nihilism was characterised as a negating will that climaxes in the complete negation of self and world. What this means is that the final endpoint of any human striving and entelechy is, per Schopenhauerian nihilism, the negative knowledge that there is, *tout court*, no entelechy. That the self and the world—indeed every

[284] A draft of *Johannes Climacus*/*De omnibus dubitandum est*, as listed in *Pap.* IV B 16 (see also *PF* 234–5).

cosmos and life therein—are irredeemable nothings, true nullities, at least "*for us*, who are the appearance of the will."[285]

Generally speaking, insofar as they are explicitly discussed in *The Concept of Irony*, previous investigations of Kierkegaard vis-à-vis 'nihilism' have typically drawn heavily not on the thought of Schopenhauer but rather on that of the German Romantics such as Tieck and Schlegel to formulate the nihilism with which Kierkegaard is said to contend.[286] This reliance is textually and historically warranted. After all, as noted, the *Frühromantiker* were dubbed poetic *nihilists* by critics such as Jean Paul whereas Schopenhauer, although largely mired in professional obsolescence and obscurity until the early 1850s, when he did become a philosophical household name, was commonly designated as a *pessimist* more so than a nihilist.[287] Moreover, whereas there is no indication that he was acquainted with Hegel's assessment of Schopenhauer—that is to say, if there was one—Kierkegaard, the student of Hegel (himself the philosopher of his own species of negation *par excellence*), was indeed familiar with Hegel's disdain for the uniquely negative, ironic *Stimmung* or intellectual mood or atmosphere of the Romantics.[288] "As soon as Hegel mentions the word 'irony,'"

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[285] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 281.

[286] e.g., Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), especially "Introduction" (pp. 1–11) and "The Rotation of Crops" (pp. 89–98); and Stack, "Kierkegaard and Nihilism," 274–92.

[287] Kierkegaard indeed owned a copy of Jean Paul's works in which the latter designates Tieck, Schlegel, and Jean Paul's other Romantic compatriots as poetic nihilists: *Vorschule der Aesthetik nebst einigen Vorlesungen in Leipzig über die Parteien der Zeit*, vols. 1–3, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1813), *ASKB* 1381–1383. For elaboration of Schopenhauer's reception and eventual reputation as a pessimist, see Frederick C. Beiser, "The Schopenhauer Legacy," in *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13–24.

[288] Schopenhauer's apoplectic disdain for Hegel is well documented. For example, apart from his vitriol in *The World as Will and Representation* (see p. 121 above), see Schopenhauer, "On the Will in Nature," in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*, 328, wherein the author excoriates Hegelianism as "absolute nonsense" passing for "unfathomably deep wisdom." The antipathy seems to be largely one-sided, however. Apart from a dispute between Hegel and Schopenhauer in the latter's test lecture for a position in the philosophy faculty at the University of Berlin (see Hübscher (ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer Gespräche*, 47–8), I have been unable to locate any evidence that Hegel read

Kierkegaard comments in his dissertation, "he promptly thinks of Schlegel and Tieck, and his style is immediately marked by a certain resentment."[289] Nevertheless, despite the saliency of the Romantics versus the invisibility of Schopenhauer, one should think that the nihilism of Schlegel *et al.* does not exhaust or even epitomise the nihilism from which Kierkegaard has to distance his conception of loving God and that, on this front, his reception of Schopenhauer is significant. Most notably, as indicated in the previous chapter's discussion of the nihilism characteristic of the Romantics, their collective rendering of nihilism still inhered genuine epistemological and ontological goals in the form of self- and world-knowledge. Accordingly, on this score, Romantic nihilism cannot genuinely be classed as nihilism. Or, at least, it is an existentially attenuated variant of nihilism relative to Schopenhauerian nihilism, which robustly and deliberately reduces every aspect of self and world to nothingness and regards all striving as nothing more than the monstrously aimless functioning of the will-to-live that is, apparently, without any epistemological and ontological goals. With Schopenhauer's consummate nihilism in our sights, then, the aim of this chapter is to examine Kierkegaard's appreciative yet critical reception of Schopenhauer as a step toward isolating elements that mark out Kierkegaardian loving God and nihilism and eminently illuminate the former.

As overview, examining Kierkegaard's explicit appraisal of Schopenhauer in his late journals indicates Kierkegaard's criticism that Schopenhauer's ethic of annulling aestheticism and slaying or mortifying the will-to-live is, in one sense, dubious inasmuch as Schopenhauer is not himself ascetic and it is dubious to propound an ethic which, Kierkegaard points out, "does not exercise such power over the teacher that he himself expresses it."[290] In

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or was otherwise familiar and concerned with Schopenhauer, including the fact that Schopenhauer is absent from Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

[289] *COI* 265–6/*SKS* 1, 303.

[290] *KJN* 9, 358/NB29:95.

Kierkegaard's eyes, Schopenhauer does not and cannot exist by the tenebrous light of nihilism, even if he proudly donned nihilism as a badge of honour or, to use one of Nietzsche's rhetorical flourishes, proffered "a nihilistic philosophy that inscribed the *negation of life* on its shield."[291] Rather than simplistic, puerile, and inappurtenant *ad hominem*, however, Kierkegaard's criticism of Schopenhauer accentuates an inconsistency (or inconsistencies) nestled at the core of Schopenhauer's professed nihilism and the precept of negation of the will-to-live which he himself advocated.[292] Specifically, in Kierkegaard's assessment, though Schopenhauer indisputably comprised a significant and affecting writer, his philosophy purports to endorse the complete metaphysical negation of life, the total renunciation of the will-to-live that governs and generates the world and the self situated within it and holds out asceticism in the form of witnessing to nihilistic nothingness as the only genuine goal of existence. However, Schopenhauer's philosophy, whilst decrying such a will as patently illogical, aimless, blind, and engendering only suffering, nevertheless persists in willing alongside precisely this will-to-live and enjoying certain of its fruits (i.e., in

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[291] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7.

[292] As Joakim Garff observes, Kierkegaard was not the first to object to Schopenhauer's preached but not practiced nihilistic asceticism, "[a]nd to this accusation Schopenhauer replied quite appropriately that it would be quite peculiar that a moral philosopher not recommend that others adhere to a higher standard of virtue than what he himself has attained" (*Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 711). Indeed, we may read Kierkegaard himself exploiting this self-same tactic when, in his vociferous assault on Danish Christendom and elsewhere, he recurrently expresses the honest assessment of himself to the effect that "[i]n relation to being the ideal Christian, I am the unhappy lover; that is why I am its poet. I shall never forget this humiliating situation and I will be different from a commonplace speaker, who thoughtlessly confuses talking about something with living it" (*KJN* 5, 378/NB10:200). And that "[f]rom the very beginning I have enjoined and repeated unchanged that I was 'without authority.' I regard myself as a *reader* of the books, not as the *author*. 'Before God,' religiously, when I speak with myself, I call my whole work as an author my own upbringing and development, but not in the sense as if I were now complete or completely finished with regard to needing upbringing and development" (*PV* 12/*SKS* 13, 20). Turnabout being fair play, then, Kierkegaard's criticism of Schopenhauer properly rests on something more than bombardment of the German philosopher's person.

Schopenhauer's case, intellectual recognition, renown, and public esteem and status). Far from characterological idiosyncrasy, this problematic movement of at once explicitly advocating rejection but implicitly enacting adherence to the will-to-live, the ineluctable inability of the will to not will, is not specific to Schopenhauer the person but is in fact an inbuilt feature of his philosophy. Indeed, this movement compels Schopenhauer to obscurantism—to formulate an ambiguously de-Christianised and conceptually specious doctrine of grace as attempted explanans. For Kierkegaard, without being driven by "a concern about eternity, defined religiously," nihilistic negation founders and this discloses an essential difference marking Kierkegaard apart from nihilism and pointing to the authentic form of Kierkegaard's conception of loving God.[293] Setting up the expository work of Chapters IV and V, then, despite some commentators diagnosing the late Kierkegaard as emulating Schopenhauer's pessimism and misanthropy, whatever negative theological and linguistic resemblance exists between Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaardian loving God, where Schopenhauer ultimately appeals to a Christian framework which he rejects, Kierkegaard as "a religious author from the very beginning" openly leans on said framework to shape the particulars of loving God as ordained in the Greatest Commandment.[294]

KIERKEGAARD AND HIS OPPOSITE

> *As a reliable compass for orientating yourself in life nothing is more useful than to accustom yourself to regarding this world as a place of atonement, a sort of penal colony. When you have done this you will order your expectations of life according to the nature of things and no longer regard the calamities, sufferings, torments and miseries of life as something irregular…well knowing that each of us is here being punished for his existence…This outlook will enable us to view the so-called imperfections of*

[293] *KJN* 9, 358/NB29:95.
[294] *PV* 31/*SKS* 16, 17.

the majority of men, i.e., their moral and intellectual shortcomings…without surprise and certainly without indignation: for we shall always bear in mind where we are and consequently regard every man first and foremost as a being who exists only as a consequence of his culpability and whose life is an expiation of the crime of being born…However strange this may sound it corresponds to the nature of the case, makes us see other men in a true light and reminds us of what are the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which each of us therefore owes.[295]

—Arthur Schopenhauer

This is Christianity's understanding. The [human being] is a fallen spirit. And just as, e.g., in Russia, a nobleman guilty of misconduct would be punished by being conscripted into the army as a common soldier; in the same way, a fallen spirit is punished for its sins by being clothed in the slave vestments that are the body and is sent to this penal institution that is the world. But just as the common men among whom the nobleman was placed as punishment do not themselves regard their lives as a punishment, but are well satisfied, so too are these countless battalions of spiritless animals among whom the [Christian] is placed quite happy and satisfied and find it to be a very fine world; they regard their slave vestments as finery in which to parade about; they find it marvellous to eat, drink, shit, propagate, and—imagine that!—Mama even had triplets, which the state rewards with a financial incentive, which is just as improper as awarding prizes for other bodily functions. From a Christian standpoint, what I write here is true, so true; and from a Christian standpoint it is necessary to speak like this—for to a frightful degree, under the name of [Christianity] all respect for [Christianity] has been lost, and [Christianity] has been degraded into the meanest paganism. And yet I must tell you that what I write here is written under torture and not of my own will, which is opposed to it. Alas, I have loved [people], sympathised with them.[296]

—Søren Kierkegaard

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[295] Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World," in *Essays and Aphorisms*, 49–50.
[296] *KJN* 9, 415–6/NB30:37.

To begin the analysis of Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer, the latter's nihilism, manifesting as it does in his recurrent and consistent celebration of the total negation of all that which may be subsumed under the rubric of the will-to-live in an ethic of ascetic resignation, if not immediately, eventually made an impression upon his readers. As I have alluded to, included amongst those readers was none other than Kierkegaard and, while remaining generally critical of his elder contemporary, the Danish religious poet nevertheless was appreciative of Schopenhauerian thought. All of Kierkegaard's express commentary on Schopenhauer date from his journals of 1854.[297] In one such journal, Kierkegaard writes, Schopenhauer "is undeniably an important writer; he has interested me a great deal, and despite total disagreement [i.e., a marginal note with reference to Schopenhauer's initials (A. S.) reads: Curiously enough, I am called S[øren] A[abye]. So we have an inverse relation to one another], I have been surprised to find an author who affects me so much."[298] Kierkegaard's reserved appreciation of Schopenhauer in which he both concurs with and

[297] Niels Jørgen Cappelørn notes that available evidence indicates there is a strong probability that Schopenhauer did not play a role in Danish philosophical and theological debates during Kierkegaard's evanescent life ("Historical Introduction: When and Why Did Kierkegaard Begin Reading Schopenhauer?" in *Schopenhauer – Kierkegaard: From the Metaphysics of Will to Existential Philosophy*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Lore Hühn, Søren R. Fauth, and Philipp Schwab (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 20). Cappelørn further offers the forensic hypothesis that Kierkegaard began reading the first volume of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (see 252n) in May 1854 and continued reading the second volume of this work along with *The Two Basic Problems of Ethics: On the Freedom of the Will, On the Basis of Morality* (see 265n) through until mid-June. This, Cappelørn hypothesises, was followed by Kierkegaard reading Schopenhauer's two-volume *Parerga and Paralipomena* (*Parerga und Paralipomena: kleine philosophische Schriften*, vols. 1–2 (Berlin: A. W. Hayn, 1851), *ASKB* 774–775) and returning for a selective re-reading of *The World as Will and Representation* in July of that year. Following this, and although there is no evidence of his reading Schopenhauer at the time, Kierkegaard explicitly references Schopenhauer four times in October (*KJN* 10, 140–1/NB32:35; *KJN* 10, 180–1/NB32:92; *KJN* 10, 191–2/NB32:103; *KJN* 10, 236–7/NB32:137) and once more in December of 1854 (*KJN* 10, 385/NB35:14). Lastly, and again without evidence of Kierkegaard reading him at the time, in a valedictory reference, Kierkegaard indirectly alludes to Schopenhauer in an article dated 23 April 1855 appearing in *Fædrelandet*, No. 107 (see *TM* 61/*SKS* 14, 202).

[298] *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95.

distances himself from the German philosopher, unsurprisingly, carries over into the assessment of Christianity. In another entry, Kierkegaard writes, "Schopenhauer despises [Christianity] and belittles it in comparison with the wisdom of India. This is of course his business. I regard Schopenhauer as an author of considerable significance and as one who will be of significance precisely in relation to [Christianity]."[299] What Kierkegaard specifically has in mind vis-à-vis the significance of Schopenhauer for Christianity is that the misanthropic view of life which Schopenhauer expresses so competently (and about which I say more below) is important for Christianity in that Schopenhauer, in Kierkegaard's assessment, rightly "rages energetically against [a] 'vile optimism' at which Protestantism in particular excels" and Kierkegaard is very pleased that Schopenhauer (no less acerbically than Voltaire's (1694–1778) merciless lampooning of optimistic theodicy in *Candide: or, All for the Best/The Optimist*) masterfully debunks the view that facile, moronic, or "trite optimism" is in anyway Christianity.[300] More pedagogically, and poetically, Kierkegaard regards Schopenhauer as significant for Christianity inasmuch as, just as one protects oneself from airborne infection and disease-ridden air during pandemics, "one could recommend to students of theology who must," so to speak, breathe the air of "Denmark amid this nonsensical (*Christian*) optimism, that they ingest a little dose of [Schopenhauer's] *Ethics* every day to protect themselves against infection from…eudaemonistic Protestantism, especially Danish Epicureanism."[301] Beyond his tempered appreciation, though, a significant aspect of Kierkegaard's appraisal of Schopenhauer and the latter's enduring admiration of a

[299] *KJN* 9, 393/NB30:12.
[300] *KJN* 9, 393/NB30:12. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 433. For Schopenhauer's applause of Voltaire and generalised disdain for Leibnizian and other optimist attempts to paper over the problem(s) of evil and suffering, see *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 598–600.
[301] *KJN* 9, 380/NB29:114 (translation slightly modified).

Buddhist ethic of resignation over and against Christianity (save its ascetic elements) is that it discloses Kierkegaard's most incisive criticism of Schopenhauerian nihilism.

To explore the essential nature of this criticism, then, Kierkegaard synopsises Schopenhauer's ethic of resignation in a way that accurately captures a Buddhist doctrine of 'no self' or *anātman* dressed in Schopenhauer's philosophical patois.[302] As accurately, it accentuates the fact that, for Schopenhauer, this apparent derivative of Indic philosophy is held up as intellectually and morally superior to Christianity. Kierkegaard writes:

> [Schopenhauer's] ethical view is this: either through the intellect…or through suffering (δευτερος πλους), the individual comes to see through the entire wretchedness of this existence and then decides either to kill or mortify the lust for life; here is asceticism; and then contemplation, quietism, is attained through thoroughgoing asceticism.—And this is something the individual does out of sympathy (here is [Schopenhauer's] moral principle), because he sympathises with the whole misery that is existence—hence he sympathises with the misery of others, which is: to exist."[303]

Further summarising, in Kierkegaard's account of Schopenhauer's view, "through mortification of the will to life, the ascetic aims to reach a state that, despite the fact that one exists as though one does not—to this extent the ascetic is dead in relation to everything."[304] Against this morose ethic of resignation, which I have detailed above and asserted as a thoroughgoing nihilism and which in some respects bears resemblance to Kierkegaard's recurrent considerations of dying away, becoming nothing, and resignation recounted in

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[302] Recalling Schopenhauer's appropriation of Indic philosophy and religion, the non-self may be understood as a recapitulation of the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* (cf. 269n) and takes the form of the promise that the ascetic self perfectly enacting the negation of the will-to-live will not be born again: "The highest reward that can be expected from the noblest deeds and the fullest resignation…is something that the myth [of reincarnation] can express only negatively in the language of this world, through the frequent promise of never being reborn again: 'you will not assume existence in appearance again': or as it is expressed by the Buddhists who do not themselves believe in either the *Vedas* or the caste system: 'You will achieve nirvana'" (*The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 383).
[303] *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95.
[304] *KJN* 9, 394/NB30:12.

Chapter I, Kierkegaard raises two objections, however he marks the second as major and I therefore quote it *in extenso*.

> When one has read through [Schopenhauer's] ethics, one experiences that—honest as he of course is—he himself is not an ascetic of this sort. Thus he himself is not a contemplation attained via asceticism, but is a contemplation that relates contemplatively to that asceticism. This is extremely dubious. Indeed, here the most frightful things can conceal themselves—a corrupt species of melancholic carnality, item a profound misanthropy, etc.[305] It is also dubious in the sense that it is always dubious to teach an ethic that does not exercise such power over the teacher that he himself expresses it. [Schopenhauer], after all, turns ethics into a matter of genius—but this is precisely an unethical view of ethics. He makes the ethical into genius, and, incidentally, despite the fact that he certainly prides himself on being a genius, it has not pleased him (or nature) to have him become a genius in the area of asceticism and mortification. Here, I touch upon a point that [Schopenhauer] disdainfully dismisses, namely: ["]You shall["], item eternal punishment, etc. The question is whether this sort of asceticism and mortification is [really] possible for a [person] if he does not respect ["]You shall["] and is not motivated by something eternal, not as a genius, but ethically. [Schopenhauer], who [really] abandons [Christianity], is always praising India, Brahmanism. But these ascetics—he himself must of course admit this—are of course defined by a concern about eternity, defined religiously, defined not by reference to genius, but by what presents itself to them as a religious duty.[306]

Ignoring (for the time being) Kierkegaard's unmistakeable invocation of eternity and allusion to the injunctive "You shall" phraseology of the Greatest Commandment, an analysis of Kierkegaard's criticism of Schopenhauer and his ethic here yields the idea that Schopenhauer—the teacher and preacher of nihilism—does not "carry through the ascetic conduct of life that he recommends but 'relates contemplatively to that ascetism' and thereby himself adopts the sophistic life-attitude of other philosophers and professors that he ironizes over so sharply."[307] In various ways, Kierkegaard iterates this criticism across several journal

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[305] An alternate translation reads: "This is extremely dubious; even the most dreadful kind, a corrupting kind, of melancholic voluptuousness may be concealed here, also a profound hatred of man and the like" (*JP* 4:3877, p. 27).
[306] *KJN* 9, 356–8/NB29:95.
[307] *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975), 632.

entries. What is problematic for Kierkegaard is that, while preaching the negation of the will-to-live, Schopenhauer openly lusts after certain bounties of such a will in, most notably, seeking out and hankering after professional recognition and esteem. Schopenhauer is "after all, a German thinker, keen on gaining recognition…[r]epresenting as he does—and with such talent—a view of life that is so misanthropic, he is [hypocritically] so extremely delighted, so seriously delighted, that the Scientific Society in Trondheim (Good Lord, in Trondheim!) has crowned his prize essay" and this "is the way things are, and it is lamentable. [Schopenhauer] relates to recognition in straightforward fashion; it is something he has wanted, sought," or, more pointedly, willed.[308] The ascertainment of this manifestation of the will-to-live, alive and well within the beating heart and the respiring breast of Schopenhauer, is not merely a bias of Kierkegaard's as it is indeed recognised by many commentators, both past and present. As far back as 1876, for instance, Helen Zimmern remarks in her biography of the German philosopher that "Schopenhauer has been accused of vanity, of presumption, and of the pride of intellect. In a measure these accusations are just," and "[i]n his later years Schopenhauer undoubtedly became vain in the worst sense of the word."[309] As well, more recently, Frederick Beiser adds that above all, "Schopenhauer craved nothing more than literary fame."[310] But, beyond arrogance, Kierkegaard's critique notes that Schopenhauer's implicit willing alongside the will-to-live betokens a deeper problem with his nihilism *qua* purportedly total negation of the will-to-live.

> To my way of thinking, [Schopenhauer] is a sign of something disquieting. For, strictly speaking, he is not what he believes himself to be…He is neither a thoroughgoing pessimist, nor is he himself entirely free from being a Sophist…So far is [Schopenhauer] from really being a pessimist, that he *höchstens* [i.e., at most]…makes asceticism interesting—which is the most dangerous thing for a hedonistic age that would be most seriously damaged by distilling pleasure even out of—asceticism, namely observing asceticism in a

[308] *KJN* 9, 359–60/NB29:95.
[309] Helen Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer: His Life and His Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876), 80–1.
[310] Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900*, 14.

> way utterly devoid of character, by assigning it a place in the system…Nor is [Schopenhauer] entirely free from being a Sophist…sophistry is to be found in the distance between what one understands and what one is: The person who is not in the character of what he understands is a Sophist. But this is the case with Schopenhauer.[311]

From this sustained attack on Schopenhauer's preached but not practiced nihilism, it should not be discerned that Kierkegaard merely mounted an *argumentum ad hominem* assault in having taken exception to Schopenhauer's failure to reduplicate his theory in practice, his personal philosophical inconsistency, or the fact that Schopenhauer's fame-seeking manifestly undercut the totality of his negation of self, world, and the will-to-live *writ large*. After all, to revisit Zimmern's original (if aged) biography, many views held by Schopenhauer were plainly contradictory and he knew this well and prided himself upon it.[312] As such, the more fundamental point underwriting Kierkegaard's reproach of Schopenhauer is that, with a doctrine of totalising negation and likewise the denial of all *teloi*, Schopenhauerian nihilism cannot, by the fact of what it is as sheer destructive power, provide a constructive goal yet Schopenhauer surreptitiously does so nevertheless.[313] As noted above, even in the extreme face of suicidality, Schopenhauer (theoretically) held to the ascetic

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[311] *KJN* 10, 140–1/NB32:35. Given Schopenhauer's disdain for Hegel, it may strike one as odd that Kierkegaard may be seen here to consider Schopenhauer to be a systematic thinker after the spirit of Hegelianism. This apposition, however, may be rightly said to be one example of a perception Kierkegaard grafted from his mentor, P. M. Møller. As Jon Stewart observes, Møller "characterizes the Hegelian system as pantheism, which, he argues, ultimately leads to nihilism…Møller cites Schopenhauer as the culmination of this nihilistic pantheism. Schopenhauer, who himself spared no invective against Hegel, would presumably have been startled by Møller's belief that their respective philosophies served a common end" ("Poul Martin Møller and the Danish Debate About Immortality in the Wake of Hegel's Philosophy," *Estudios Kierkegaardianos: Revista De Filosofía* 1, (2015): 133).
[312] Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 92.
[313] Perhaps it is out of consideration of this inconsistency that some have appealed to Schopenhauer's Kantian distinction between the thing-in-itself and appearance and thereby sought to circumscribe the metaphysically totalising scope of Schopenhauer's conception of will in an effort to have Schopenhauer's ethical theory better conform with an asceticism which permits constructive qualities such as moral goodness and redemption. For one effort in this vein, see Christopher Janaway, "Different Kinds of Willing in Schopenhauer," in *Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation': A Critical Guide*, 11–25.

negation of the will-to-live. However, it is telling, and it was telling to Kierkegaard, that Schopenhauer smuggled in a constructive element—or, "grounds, purpose and goal"—of nihilism if for no other reason, it would seem, than to prevent his philosophy from imploding in incoherence.[314] Hence, nihilistic negation or ascetic resignation was itself, despite the aimlessness of existence, *aimed* at a pursuit, the pursuit oriented to the task of negative knowledge. Indeed, negation of the will-to-live was, for Schopenhauer, "the final *goal*," which, as the truest form of salvation, saved one in "redemption from the world."[315]

How does Schopenhauer reconcile this apparent incongruence in his philosophy? In light of Schopenhauer's reportedly proud willingness to stand upon manifest contradictions, it cannot be definitively ruled out that this contradiction does not, although never espousing a paradoxical nature to his philosophy (as will be made more absolutely problematic below), nevertheless fall into the category of unresolved Schopenhauerian *aenigmata*. However, insofar as it can be reconciled, part and parcel of Schopenhauer's two-fold (1) rejection of all goals and affirmation of existence as chaotic and meaningless with (2) his implicit positing of the goal of ascetic-nihilistic negation is his central thesis that life is nothing other than suffering. That to exist or to be human is to suffer. There is indeed no greater suffering than the irredeemable meaninglessness of the trials and travails of existence, the tasklessness of human existence, and, for Schopenhauer, life and existence at the behest of the will-to-live just is this meaningless slog of suffering. It is in this sense, then, that Schopenhauer may be seen to offer a reconciliation to the *aenigma* by attempting to at once reject all goals and affirm the goal of asceticism. For, in doing so, Schopenhauer embraces the view that life as such is meaningless suffering and striving after the goal of asceticism is only to ennoble the

[314] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 283.
[315] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 177 (emphasis mine). See also Schopenhauer's extended consideration of negation of the will-to-live as the truest salvation and redemption from life and from suffering, viz., vol. 1, 424–5.

single potential release from suffering: ineffable and absolute nothingness. That is, a goal of nothingness or nil-goal of unflinchingly witnessing the nothingness of self and world that categorically refuses to abscond into any sort of meaning whatever (insofar as such meaning is always illusory and only eventuates in yet more suffering) in a continual denial of the will-to-live. Buttressing this resolution, Schopenhauer sees historical precedent for his view of life as suffering and his paradoxical unification of a goal—even a goal of nothingness—amidst aimless chaos. Quoting Heraclitus of Ephesus (*c.* 6th century–5th century BC) in a passage which Kierkegaard contemplates in his own journal, Schopenhauer writes in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*: τω ουν βιω ονομα μεν βιος, εργον δε θανατος [The name of life is indeed life, but its work is death].[316] This quotation comes as part of a broader adumbration of philosophies ranging from folk-wisdom to the words of Greek tragedians (Theognis of Megara, Sophocles, Euripides, Homer) as well as more recent figures such as Shakespeare and Lord Byron, all of which omit Christ's own prophetic words (Luke 23:28–29) and are attuned to the knowledge famously attributed to Silenus the satyr of Greek mythology as the antinatalist wisdom that life is unmitigable suffering and one is better off dead or, yet better, to have never been born at all.[317] In addition, Schopenhauer, of course, regards this central thesis of life *qua* suffering and the ascetic solution thereto as coinciding with the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism. Concurring with Schopenhauer's equation of his philosophy and Buddhist creed on this point, a Theravāda text reads, "[w]hat then is the Holy Truth of Ill? Birth is ill, decay is ill, sickness is ill, death is ill. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants also means suffering. In short, all grasping at any of the five Skandas [i.e., elements of personality] involves suffering."[318]

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[316] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 602. See also *KJN* 9, 318/NB29:29.
[317] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 601–3.
[318] Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhist Scriptures* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959), 186.

KIERKEGAARD'S ETHICAL-RELIGIOUS OBJECTION TO SCHOPENHAUER

> *Believe it, be assured…that when everything goes against you and there is constant suffering and new suffering, this is God's love, and that it is because God is love. And why is this, and how? Because God, in infinite love, wants to help you so that you may be able to love him. See, that is why you must die away, and that is what he wills with suffering; for without dying away you can never love God…*[319]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

As indicated from the above passage extracted from one of Kierkegaard's journals from 1852 (roughly two years prior to reading Schopenhauer's works first-hand), in uniting suffering and the love of God, the 'Gloomy Dane' (incidentally, whose surname, translates as the funereal and sepulchral "church-yard") held a different, un-Schopenhauerian understanding of human suffering.[320] That is, returning to Kierkegaard's formal critique of his German contemporary, against Schopenhauer's historical justification, and the apparent reconciliation of placing a goal within goalless creation, it is the use of suffering to motivate the drive to nothingness that Kierkegaard finds objectionable.

> I object to the proposition that to exist is to suffer because, with this, [Christianity] vanishes, and in a manner that [Schopenhauer] perhaps does not consider. For it is precisely [Christianity] that proclaims itself to be suffering, that to be Christian is to suffer; but if existing, to be a [human] being, are simply to be understood as suffering, then [Christianity] is indeed robbed of its dialectic, its basis, robbed of that which it makes itself negatively recognisable. [Christianity] then becomes…nonsense. For if being [human] is to suffer, then it is of course ridiculous that a teaching arises that defines itself in this manner: to be a [Christian] is to suffer. No, Christianity does not say

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[319] *KJN* 9, 68/NB26:68.

[320] By the time of his reading Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard was intimately acquainted with human suffering in the form of not only unrelenting melancholy but also death, finitude, and sorrowful bereavement on a sadly extreme scale. *Inter alia*, Kierkegaard grieved the loss of his brother, Søren Michael (1807–1819); his sister, Maren Kirstine (1797–1822); his sister, Nicoline Christine (1799–1832); his brother, Niels Andreas (1809–1833); both his mother, Ane Sørensdatter Lund (1768–1834), and sister, Petrea Severine (1801–1834), as well as his father, Michael Pedersen (1756–1838). For the etymology of the Kierkegaard surname, see, for example, Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, 16–20.

> that to exist is to suffer…Christian asceticism has as its point of departure the thought that, in and of itself, existence is not suffering—asceticism thus has meaning. But if existence is suffering, then asceticism becomes a form of eudaemonism, a point [Schopenhauer] himself makes against the Stoics.[321]

Above all, Kierkegaard objects to the fact that Schopenhauer's emphasis of suffering attends exclusively to one moment of his dialectical grasp of Christianity and brands it as what it is to be human. For Schopenhauer, to be human is to suffer, full stop. But, for Kierkegaard, without callously dismissing the significance of human suffering, simply equating human life with suffering and nullity is objectionable on two fronts. First, it exhibits a kind of self-contradiction: "Undeniably, there is something false in his [Schopenhauer's] Indian melancholia: to live is to suffer."[322] One cannot regard something as nothing and then repeatedly attack it "on the grandest possible scale" because, if it really were "a nullity, then it is laughable that these extreme measures are used to destroy a nothing."[323] Accordingly, Schopenhauer cannot—whilst stifling laughter to preserve the image of the grim, sulking, and embittered visage immortalised in daguerreotype for readers forevermore to behold as the anhedonic essence of the *Weltschmerz* philosopher—constantly draw upon the pain of suffering to continually stage metaphysical assaults on self and world, on life in general, if they are already true nullities and nothing besides. Perhaps Don Quixote tilting with windmills mistaken for giants does not have a more legitimate claim to reality than one who does battle with illusory somethingness but, still, the onus is on Schopenhauer, according to Kierkegaard, to answer why nothingness must continually be affirmed.

Second, simply equating human life with suffering is a non sequitur and suffering does not necessarily point a prophetic finger towards a goal—of, notably, *nirvanic* nothingness—as Schopenhauer thinks. At least as (if not more) often, asceticism becomes a

[321] *KJN* 9, 393–4/NB30:12.
[322] *KJN* 9, 393/NB30:12.
[323] *KJN* 9, 394/NB30:12.

form of eudaemonism, a fetish is aesthetically and contemplatively made of suffering, or an obsession with "distilling pleasure" out of suffering and asceticism is observed (i.e., not practiced but observed) "in a way utterly devoid of character, by assigning it a place in the system."[324] Indeed, Kierkegaard bemoans Schopenhauer's boast when "[h]e says, not without great self-satisfaction, that he is the first person to have assigned ascetism a place in the system."[325] From the lachrymose, maudlin, and histrionic verging on demonic reflections on suffering love of A's "The Unhappiest One" in *Either/Or* to the young man suffering anguish at lost love in *Repetition* and Quidam's likewise suffering in *Stages on Life's Way* (as well as many other points besides), Kierkegaard's literature is rife with precisely such characters who ingeniously and reflectively sap aesthetic pleasure from the tree of suffering.[326]

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[324] *KJN* 10, 141/NB32:35.
[325] *KJN* 10, 140/NB32:35.
[326] If not coming before this, mention of aesthetics invariably calls to mind the theory of existence stages or spheres. In one form or other, the theory makes its appearance in virtually every investigation of Kierkegaard. That said, the diversity and complexity of interpretive models is staggering, the navigation of which far outstrips the scope of this dissertation (e.g., Stephen N. Dunning, "Chart 8" in *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 251; Louis P. Pojman, "Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of the Stages of Existence," in *Faith, Knowledge, and Action*, ed. George L. Stengren (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1984), 116–45; Reidar Thomte, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), especially "The Aesthetic Stage" to "The Interrelationship of the Stages," 16–109). It is worth noting that the diversity of interpretations is attributable, at least in part, to Kierkegaard. For example, one observes Climacus's prevarication wherein, after having announced, following Frater Taciturnus (*SLW* 476/*SKS* 6, 439), that there are three existence spheres (*CUP 1*, 294/*SKS* 7, 268), the aesthetic, ethical, and religious, with the *confinium* of irony partitioning the aesthetic and the ethical and, in turn, humour (another *confinium*) interspersing the ethical and the religious, he then goes on to discuss *more than* three spheres (*CUP 1*, 501–25/*SKS* 7, 455–77). Beyond the count and assembly of elements within Kierkegaard's theory, there is also contention regarding movement between spheres. Hierarchical or tiered readings wherein one is seen to move through the spheres by accretion of learning from lower aesthetics to higher religiousness (i.e., absorbing the lessons of lower existence spheres and *confinia* as they go) are implemented by many studies. Indeed, Carla Wiggs regards tiered readings as the norm within the secondary literature ("The Presentation of Kierkegaard's Existence Spheres in the Secondary Literature" in "The Three Existence Spheres as Portrayed by Kierkegaard: A Challenge to the Tiered Interpretation," PhD diss., (University of Southampton, 2020), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Dissertation No. 29104809), 1–6). Beyond Wiggs, critiques of tiered readings may be found in Genia Schönbaumsfeld (*A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy*

Here, with the pivotal issue of suffering, the sharp end of Kierkegaard's criticism of Schopenhauer begins to take shape in that the latter offers a sort of ascetic mortification that "does not respect ["]You shall["] and is not motivated by something eternal…a concern about eternity, defined religiously."[327] Relative to the appraisal of suffering motivating the goal of *nirvanic* nothingness in Schopenhauer, for Kierkegaard, Christianity *does* provide a goal. To simplify the matter slightly, to be a Christian is to suffer, "including the necessity of suffering

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and Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 156–96) and Ferguson ("Revolution of the Spheres: A Topological Fantasy," in *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 67–92). As regards the reading offered in this dissertation, I am sensitive to the point that, as indicated in the Historical Introduction to the Hongs' translation of *Stage's on Life's Way*, although an initial stage is not annihilated but rather transfigured and preserved in later stages, the term 'stages' predisposes one to the idea of a continuous, inevitable, and unbroken trajectory of development "from level to level, like childhood, adolescence, and adulthood" (*SLW* p. x). Conversely, 'sphere' more readily denotes qualitatively and dialectically distinct, reversable, and non-linear possibilities and regressions involving the movement of free choice or will. Accordingly, when needed, I maintain a preference for spheres over stages of existence. I am further sensitive to the point such that, as Ferreira puts it, the question of "how to think of a 'deepening' of human subjectivity that is not an 'evolution.' The difficulty is to think such a sharpening (intensification, deepening) of pathos—one in which pathos is preserved and transfigured—without eliminating the qualitativeness of the transition. The difficulty is to think of a qualitative transition that does not imply radical discontinuity…It is a difficulty that Kierkegaard is repeatedly addressing in the authorship—how to imagine an existential 'both–and' that is not a reductive mediation" ("The 'Socratic Secret': The Postscript to the *Philosophical Crumbs*," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23). Those things said, while I am not concerned to defend a tiered reading in this dissertation, inasmuch as I *am* concerned with the God-relationship and love therein, I consider Kierkegaard's proper grasp of loving God as residing in the religious sphere of existence and consider this to be the pinnacle of Kierkegaard's existence spheres. In lieu of formal defence, I simply observe that it seems more than incidental that Kierkegaard would don the pseudonym of Johannes *Climacus* (climax, ladder, climbing) and preserve it in his arch-Christian pseudonym, Anti-Climacus (e.g., *KJN* 6, 133/NB11:222; *LD* 299/*SKS* 28, 442), to author the most comprehensive accounts of the theory of the existence spheres and ideal Christianity, respectively, thereby encouraging the tiered interpretation of the spheres with religiousness (B) at the apex. For Kierkegaard doubly appropriated the name of the Christian monk, John Climacus (Latin: Ioannes Climacus, or John of the Ladder; *c*. 570–649), who famously wrote *Scala Paradisi*/*The Ladder of Divine Ascent* depicting the process of climbing the rungs of the ladder in becoming a Christian. Moreover, becoming a Christian openly dovetails with Kierkegaard's conception of loving God: "God wants to be loved," he writes in a late journal, "[t]his is why he wants Christians. To love God is to be a Christian" (*JP* 3:2453, p. 58/*Pap.* XI^2 A 390).

[327] *KJN* 9, 356–8/NB29:95.

for the teaching."[328] However, on Kierkegaard's view, the suffering that leads to eternity "has been chosen voluntarily."[329] The Christian voluntarily suffers and renounces claims to joy in this life *in order to* prepare for eternal life and, indeed, voluntary suffering issuing from the collision of temporality and eternity, one of the pairwise syntheses of selfhood noted in Chapter I, is the truest and most ineluctable marker of one's love relationship with God. I return to the matter of eternity in the religious sense below, just as I develop Kierkegaard's suffering–eternity connexion and contextualise the issue of voluntary suffering marking one's religious love relationship with God further in the consequent chapters of this dissertation. For now, it suffices to observe that, if Schopenhauer may be said to have influenced Kierkegaard upon the Dane's late formal encounter with his opposite, it is in the direction of intensification of that which was already laid down in Kierkegaard's prior years of prodigious authorial activity. That is, coalescing around suffering, as Cappelørn observes, Schopenhauer helped Kierkegaard to more profound, deep, clear, sharp, and severe conceptions of (1) contemporary hedonistic and suffering-avoiding Protestantism as unchristian optimism and eudaemonism and thus fraudulent Christianity; (2) misanthropic pessimism as a new, perverse, and sophistic form of eudaemonism (e.g., pleasure in suffering and melancholy); (3) true ethical-religious character entailing the willingness to suffer to reduplicate faith in deeds; (4) "true asceticism as a religious duty reduplicated in practice in existence, which presupposes a desire of the joyful life—instead of asceticism as abstract ideas in contemplative thinking, which presupposes a cognition or experience of the wretchedness of life;" and (5) Christian suffering as voluntary as opposed to a necessity.[330]

This voluntariness—an essential expression of will calling out for clarification as to how it relates to Schopenhauer's notion of the will-to-live—signals a difference between the

[328] *KJN* 9, 394/NB30:12.
[329] *KJN* 9, 360/NB29:95.
[330] Cappelørn, "Historical Introduction," 32.

theological ethics of Kierkegaard and the philosophy uniting ethics and metaphysics of Schopenhauer. In some respects, such as jointly considering Schopenhauer's and Kierkegaard's remarkably similar thoughts on temporal existence as one of imprisonment in a penal institution mentioned above, and regardless of Kierkegaard's avowed "inverse relation" to Schopenhauer, there is some indication that differences between Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer may be collapsed.[331] Indeed, apart from lexical similarities between

[331] *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95. I return to this point in Chapter IV. However, it is worth stating now that the equation of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer generally turns on the un/willingness to impute to Kierkegaard a sort of Gnosticism in the sense of Kierkegaard (like Schopenhauer and certain Romantics, see 214n) reverting to an ancient cosmology wherein "[t]he universe…is like a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life" (Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 43). Pattison is correct to point out that in Kierkegaard "we do not find anything corresponding to the complex and arcane hierarchies and theogonies of Gnostic speculation, but we do seem to find a reversion to a kind of denial of the body and an apparent urge to flee the life of this world" ("Kirkestormen, Neo-Gnosticism and Secular Christianity," *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 73, no. 4 (2010): 288–9). As well, seeking to align the late Kierkegaard with the personal spiritual knowledge (γνῶσις or *gnōsis*) from which Gnosticism derives, commentators such as Per Jepsen are willing to disregard Kierkegaard's earlier denouncement of Gnosticism (*KJN* 2, 311/KK:3) and instead read the Dane as possessing special intuited knowledge thereby exhibiting "obviously 'Gnostic' traits [in Kierkegaard's] understanding of Christianity in the late work" ("Kierkegaard's Pessimism," *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 56, no. 1 (2023): 46). As one example recruited in the service of diagnosing Kierkegaard's Gnosticism, a marginal note of one of Kierkegaard's journals from 1854 reads: "Oh, in earlier times I felt only altogether too deeply the pain of its having been made impossible for me to enjoy life, this beautiful [human] life. In Richard III, this triggered his resolution to embitter the lives of others. Not so with me. I intended to hide my sufferings and thus to beautify the lives of others…And then, as thanks, [people] embittered my life and in so doing brought me increasingly within the scope of [Christianity]. And finally comes a moment when *it is as though* [Christianity] said to me: ['']My little friend, it was out of love for you that it was made impossible for you to enjoy life, but this had to be hidden from your eyes until you could endure [Christianity], which has a wholly other view of this life['']" (*KJN* 9, 416/NB30:37a (emphasis mine)). Quite obviously, a lot hangs on whether one interprets the italicised words of this marginalium as indicating Kierkegaard's literal or metaphorical diction. Favouring a metaphorical interpretation, outside of his denials of apostolic authority (e.g., *BOA* 180/*SKS* 11, 104), Kierkegaard commonly writes of his being providentially guided by Governance (e.g., *PV* 71–90/*SKS* 16, 50–69). However, in such discussions, Kierkegaard does not refer to simple theophany or hearing the autochthonous voice of God and never endorses the infallibility of human noetic powers and self-knowledge conveyed by special spiritual sapience. Instead, Kierkegaard's contemplations of Governance are, as Markus Kleinert observes, "not the presumption of some unconditional way of seeing himself but rather makes clear the conditionality of human ways of seeing things" and, for Kierkegaard, "[e]very self-interpretation comes with a note of

Kierkegaardian dying away noted in Chapter I and Schopenhauerian nihilism, many scholars consider Kierkegaard in his late journals to have converged with Schopenhauer. Evans, for example, writes, "[a]nother reason for care in the use of the last writings is one that I advance with some sadness, but I nonetheless feel compelled to state it. There are elements in the attack on Christendom that strike me as misogynistic and some that seem misanthropic."[332] In addition, Eduard Geismar contends that the Kierkegaard of the late journals "is not the same Kierkegaard we know before 1854," such that, with the late Kierkegaard, an inordinate "desire has arisen to accentuate the pessimistic tones and to deny that in general there is anything good and fine in life."[333] Finally, both Simonella Davini and Joakim Garff similarly regard the late Kierkegaard as an increasingly world-hating and "ever more misogynous Kierkegaard" with his journals from these years resounding "with the monotonous hammerings of misanthropy."[334] As I present in Chapter IV, there *is* a palpable sense in which Kierkegaard endorses something that, taken out of context, *sounds like* nihilism, prompting Curtis Thompson to class Kierkegaard as offering an "empowering nihilism."[335] Nevertheless, as I contend, to class Kierkegaard as endorsing an empowering nihilism is a misnomer and to simply annul differences between the two thinkers is an enormous mistake, even if the differences between Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer keyed in the above

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reserve, lest divine [G]overnance is anticipated and subjected to human calculations" ("Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 409–10). And, with respect to God's verbal communication with Kierkegaard as an individual, such remarks are always prefaced with careful locutions similar to the above italics—e.g., "Yes, to me *it seemed as though* God said to me…" (*KJN* 9, 111/NB26:120; emphasis mine).

[332] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 43

[333] Eduard Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard, hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed*, vol. 2, (København: Gads Forlag, 1926), 36 (translation mine).

[334] Davini, "Schopenhauer," in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries, Tome I*, 279; Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, 714.

[335] Curtis L. Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One: Why Martensen Mattered to Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008), 162.

consideration of suffering may in fact be more byzantine than initial appearances and Kierkegaard's own attestation might suggest.

Toward further illuminating this distinction, then, it is instructive to consider the paragons of Schopenhauer's nihilistic ethic of asceticism versus Kierkegaard's own critical thoughts on the limits of human love and sympathy. That is, Schopenhauer lauds ascetic saints as geniuses of pity or his ethic of *Mitleid* by praising their miraculous love of human beings witnessed in their gracious capacity for sympathetically bearing with the suffering of their fellow human beings. And, in response to such suffering, Schopenhauer's ascetic saints offer up only full and repeated rejection of all willing so to thwart the selfish immorality of the will-to-live. But, lacking any telos beyond asceticism itself, perhaps with Schopenhauer's ascetic saints in mind, Kierkegaard contrastingly asks: "Might not sympathy be precisely what would hinder [the ascetic saint]…from going to the extreme—sympathy for those thousands upon thousands who live in the happy delusion that life is joy and whom he thus would only disturb, make unhappy, without being able to help them out to where he is?"[336] In other words, without a telos beyond asceticism, what is there, Kierkegaard ponders, to motivate a would-be ascetic saint to *not* capitulate to the will-to-live, to *not* glory in all that which subserves the preservation and propagation of life out of sympathy for the throng of individuals who do not find it within themselves to uphold the negative knowledge of supreme nothingness and forever live as though dead to absolutely every expression of the will-to-live? Of course, Kierkegaard is critical of the fact that Schopenhauer both does not answer this question and does not strive for himself to become such a sainted ascetic. In place of this presentation of Schopenhauer's ethics, then, in a further entry (*nota bene*: also from 1854) entitled 'To Love God Is to Hate What is Human,' Kierkegaard offers a different ethic that is, felicitously hinting at Kierkegaard's Greatest Commandment, tied to loving God.

[336] *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95.

> The human is the relative, is mediocrity; only in mediocrity does a [human] being feel good; God is the unconditioned. Loving God is thus impossible without hating what is human. But truly, this hatred of the human to which [Christianity] refers is not something original in a [person]—no, [human] villainy and wretchedness tortures it out of the person who originally loved [people], and in a certain sense continues to love them, that is, in the idea, in accordance with the eternal, but not in the sense of permitting oneself to be conquered by mediocrity. True, we occasionally see that a person who feels very happy is inclined to something we call love of humanity. What is very rare…is when a [person] who feels unhappy and who understands that he must indeed come to terms with this unhappiness: that he then believes that he ought to do good for others. This was my case. But the wretchedness and meanness of [people], which repaid in villainous fashion the good that I, in my sympathetic melancholia, had intended to do for them: that taught me, compelled me to seek to come closer and closer to God, made it impossible for me to hold out without embracing the Christian principle of loving God rather than [human] beings…But this Christian hatred of what is human is anything but what is usually understood by hatred of humanity, wishing people ill, and the like; no, it is to love them in the idea, infinitely to wish them well.[337]

Relative to this passage it may be said, then, that love of human beings drives Schopenhauer to nihilism, which, as Kierkegaard remarks elsewhere, may be no more than a concealed resentment, a "profound hatred of mankind."[338] By contrast, love of human beings or love of one's neighbour drives Kierkegaard closer and closer to God in the love of God and a galvanised and transfigured love of human beings "in the idea…in accordance with eternity." This would seem to be a chasmic divide between the ethics uniting with metaphysics subserving the nihilism of Schopenhauer and the love of God subserving the theological ethics of Kierkegaard.

But, having traced Kierkegaard's critique of Schopenhauer to an inconsistency nestled at the core of Schopenhauer's professed nihilism and consequently having viewed Schopenhauer's pessimistic doctrine of life-as-suffering disposing an ascetic solution thereto, is this implicitly or explicitly asocial, if not antisocial, depiction of Schopenhauer and his pessimistic, misanthropic philosophy of total negation of the will-to-live relative to the deep

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[337] *KJN* 10, 79/NB31:109.
[338] *JP* 4:3877, p. 27.

for-otherness or prosociality of Kierkegaard a fair assessment? The matter deserves closer examination. To this point, apart from nihilism, I have characterised Schopenhauer's philosophy as pessimistic and misanthropic however it is worth pointing out that, though much scholarship of Schopenhauer uses the terms interchangeably, a precise characterisation of Schopenhauer's thought deserves more explicit delineation in relation to each of these traits.[339] As would be very difficult to hermeneutically discern otherwise, Beiser observes that Schopenhauer's philosophy demonstrates "a decidedly negative attitude toward life" for which there is "no other word…than 'pessimism.'"[340] Ian James Kidd disagrees, however, in that, in his view, there is another word and that is that Schopenhauer's philosophy may be accurately classed as a model of 'misanthropy,' evincing a sophisticated though nevertheless exemplary hatred of humankind.[341] Weighing into the debate, David Cooper helpfully elucidates a difference between the two concepts in stating that pessimism and misanthropy both agree on "a negative assessment of the human condition, but their respective emphases are different. The pessimist's focus is on aspects of this condition—suffering, frustration, absurdity—that are destructive of the possibilities of happiness. The misanthrope's concern, by contrast, is with human failings, ingredients of life for which humankind is answerable and rightly held to account."[342] In light of Cooper's demarcation, it is indeed fair to say that Schopenhauer's philosophy is both pessimistic and misanthropic. It is pessimistic because, as has been articulated thus far, and as most analyses of Schopenhauer attest, Schopenhauer's

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[339] Examples of studies of Schopenhauer in which pessimism and misanthropy are intermixed include Joshua Goa Dienstag, "'The Evils of the World Honestly Admitted': Metaphysical Pessimism in Schopenhauer and Freud," in *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 84, and Charles Taylor, "Visions of the Post-Romantic Age," in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 442.
[340] Beiser, *Weltschmerz*, 46.
[341] Ian James Kidd, "Misanthropy and the Hatred of Humanity," in *The Moral Psychology of Hate*, ed. Noell Birondo (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 83.
[342] David E. Cooper, "Misanthropy," in *Animals and Misanthropy* (London: Routledge, 2018), 4–5.

philosophy repeatedly and consistently accentuates the suffering concomitant with the will-to-live stemming from the inevitable frustration of thwarted desires. Moreover, Schopenhauer's philosophy is pessimistic insofar as it recurrently stresses the monstrously absurd and meaningless nature of the will-to-live that gives rise to all reality. In turn, Schopenhauer's thought is misanthropic in that his view regards human moral and intellectual failings as not merely coincidental to, but rather constitutive of, human existence. Indeed, Schopenhauer's misanthropy pays especial attention to the fact that human moral and intellectual vices and failings are not only frequent, relentless, and universal but are also, more often than not, self-servingly deployed in the art of denying, distorting, concealing, and occluding reality. The truth about us is too awful to confront, as is, according to Schopenhauer, the dark, deeper truth of our world and therefore disturbing and unpalatable reality is deviously manipulated by humans as a matter of convention. In this sense, Schopenhauerian thought is misanthropic in its fixation of the culpability of human beings for their condition and in lamenting said condition.

And yet still the status of Schopenhauer's misanthropy remains unsettled. Much of the discord, it would seem, emanates from Schopenhauer's own equivocations on the description. Zimmern ambiguously remarks, Schopenhauer "was not a misanthrope, he merely despised men; καταφρονάνθρωπος [i.e., scornful person], not μισάνθρωπος [i.e., misanthrope], was the distinction he himself drew…[h]e was penetrated with the conviction that he has been placed in a world peopled with beings morally and intellectually contemptible, from whom he must keep apart, seeking out the few better ones to honour and value, and making it his duty to instruct the others and raise them from their debased condition."[343] On his own behalf,

[343] Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 83. Zimmern's remark is amusingly, if not comically, unhelpful when her declaration that Schopenhauer "merely despised men" is placed alongside English lexicographer, Thomas Blount's, well-known definition of the term from 1707: "*Misanthropie*, an hating of men" (*Glossographia Anglicana Nova; or, A Dictionary Interpreting All Such Hard Words of Whatever Language* (London: D. Brown, 1707), §MI).

Schopenhauer did not go very far in once and for all disambiguating the misanthropic status of his philosophy. For example, as David Cartwright reports, following a panoptic review of Schopenhauer's oeuvre in the English periodical, *The Westminster Review*, with which Schopenhauer himself was generally thrilled, the German philosopher nevertheless bemoaned the reference to himself as the "misanthropic sage of Frankfort."[344] Schopenhauer, Cartwright notes, "could accept the designation 'sage' but not 'misanthropic.' His philosophy was 'philanthropic': an act of abstract love for humankind. By solving the ever-disquieting problem of existence, and by explaining the significance and meaning of living in a world in which suffering and death follows from the very essence of the world, he was trying to provide metaphysical comfort for humankind—even if he found it difficult to concretely love particular human bipeds."[345] Still, when Schopenhauer later reviewed a German translation of the piece, he first asked the German translator to omit the reference to himself as 'misanthropic' but then later himself restored the omitted word, stating in a letter: "I have even myself wrote in [misanthropic] again…one must translate faithfully and honestly."[346]

A charitable understanding of Schopenhauer's misanthropy, then, is that, corresponding with the Greek lexis he once used, Schopenhauer conceived of different strains of misanthropy and endorses one but not the other. Indeed, Schopenhauer may be seen to mark a distinction between such misanthropy as that which springs from a noble nature and that which is innately corrupt and loathsome. "The misanthropy of a Timon of Athens is

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[344] John Oxenford, "Iconoclasm in German Philosophy," 388–407, cited in David E. Cartwright, "The Dawn of Fame and the End of Life," in *Schopenhauer: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 528. Oxenford's review is reprinted in *Zwölftes Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft für die Jahre 1923–1925*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Schopenhauer Society, 1925), pp. 117–407 and this quotation can be found on p. 134.

[345] Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, 528.

[346] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Arthur Schopenhauer Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Herausgegeben von Arthur Hübscher (Bonn: Bouvier, 1987), 313, Schopenhauer to Linder, 9 June 1853, cited in Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, 529.

something quite different from the malevolence of the wicked…[the former] is even a certain noble displeasure that only arises out of the consciousness of a better nature that has revolted against unexpected wickedness."[347] More specifically, in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer may be seen to better illuminate 'noble misanthropy' in that he remarks that a genius (such as, he is careful to point out, himself) invariably faces "the choice to recognise truth, but to please no one with it," or, instead, "together with the others…teach the false, with followers and applause."[348] Choosing the former, the ardent affirmation of truth, the dark truth about humanity and the world that is too awful to confront in polite company, and the adamant refusal to look away from wretchedness for the sake of achieving a pleasant though fanciful falsehood, incurs grievous social costs. Just as he himself was prior to the dawn of his much sought after celebrity in the early 1850s, the genius choosing truth will be "barred from air and light" and "suppressed or [killed] by…silence," however, in Schopenhauer's assessment, nevertheless, such a one will have thereby achieved a distinct existential nobility.[349] In turn, thereupon this noble existence, one may then misanthropically despise humankind in the way of coming to regard human beings as legitimate objects of hate and deserving such as they are instinctual miscreants who habitually tolerate depravity and awfulness and all too commonly turn from truth in order to enjoy social and societal rewards and are altogether in need of elevation that a noble nature can provide. It is in this sense, then, that Schopenhauer's thought, even if a sort of paternalistic "act of abstract love for humankind" is aptly deemed misanthropic.[350]

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[347] Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 90–1.
[348] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 1, 124.
[349] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 1, 124.
[350] Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, 528. I have been unable to find any reference with regard to Schopenhauer explicitly relating a noble form of misanthropy to his much-lauded ascetic geniuses of compassion.

Returning, then, to the Kierkegaardian critique of Schopenhauer, if one takes on board the more generous reading of Schopenhauer's misanthropy, then Kierkegaard's aforementioned assessment of Schopenhauer's philosophy harbouring a "profound misanthropy" or a "profound hatred of man" must be qualified to adequately distinguish Schopenhauer from proffering a crude hatred of one's neighbour.[351] Nevertheless, if we grant to Schopenhauer what Kierkegaard does not (i.e., that suffering leads to asceticism as goal) and that Schopenhauer's pessimism and noble misanthropy are indeed critical in addressing the inconsistency at the heart of his nihilism (i.e., in a honourable fashion of affirming that life just is suffering and ascetically striving after the goal of nothingness or the nil-goal of witnessing to the nothingness of self and world ennobles the only possible amnesty from suffering), then it would still seem too much, from Kierkegaard's perspective, to say in unison with Cartwright that Schopenhauer, in an act of abstract love for humankind, solved "the ever-disquieting problem of existence."[352] Problems would seem to persist from Kierkegaard's vantage without unduly short-changing Schopenhauer's ethics-*cum*-metaphysics. For one, when it comes to ascertaining the existential nobility on which honourable misanthropy sits, it seems as though Schopenhauer is elusive on where this nobility resides apart from intellectual and moral elitism. In terms already familiar, this is precisely what Kierkegaard identified when he earlier remarked that Schopenhauer "turns ethics into a matter of genius," which is "precisely an unethical view of ethics."[353]

So, Schopenhauerian nihilism requires a goal or *telos* and, for this, Schopenhauer implicitly elects asceticism or the minimal goal of witnessing to nothingness in a continual denial or negation of the will-to-live. At the same time, Schopenhauer pessimistically envisions this nil-goal as realisable only by those capable of ascending the heights of genius.

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[351] *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95; *JP* 4:3877, p. 27.
[352] Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, 528.
[353] *KJN* 9, 358/NB29:95.

For Kierkegaard, this position vis-à-vis ethics is unethical. Why, specifically, is Schopenhauer's vision unethical according to Kierkegaard? As diverse as the accountings of Kierkegaard's ethics are, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Kierkegaardian ethics is always already theological ethics.[354] In other words, Kierkegaard's ethical sphere of existence is inescapably linked with the religious existence sphere. That is, it is characterised by the conscious rejection of self-stultifying, passionless, purportedly objective thought in the form of arrant speculation, abstraction, logical system-building, and self-sufficient reason in favour of subjective engagement and passionate striving to actualise ethical ideality (viz., embodied by Christ) housed within the religious by participation in the actual existence of concrete

[354] There is an argument to be made for >1 ethics in Kierkegaard and that the ethical is not conceptualised in an entirely uniform manner across Kierkegaard's writings whereas it is (almost) uniformly bound with the religious existence sphere. For example, *Fear and Trembling* is perhaps the only instance of a clear separation of the ethical and the religious. Here, de silentio establishes a sharp distinction between the ethical and the religious such that the knight of faith, Abraham, is capable of teleologically suspending the former on the strength of the 'absurdity' of the latter evidenced in his faithful following of God's command with the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac. The ethical in *Fear and Trembling* as "the universal" (*FT* 54/*SKS* 4, 148) is cast strongly in terms of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*—that is, adherence to ethical norms applicable to everyone in being rooted in the judiciary laws, precepts, customary morality, public reason, and civic virtue of one's society in a particular historical epoch. By comparison, Climacus's presentation of the ethical in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* expresses that ethical existence entails the pursuit of the self as an ideal that is quite apart from, and even antithetical to, societal mores and customs (e.g., *CUP 1*, 244/*SKS* 7, 222). Though the latter portion of the two-part *Either/Or* written by Judge William demonstrates a preference for depicting the ethical in hybrid deontological-virtue ethic terms of commitment, responsibility, and fulfilment of one's duties (e.g., marriage and conjugal fidelity), Judge William as apparent archetype of the ethical clearly thinks of himself as religious and there is no effort made to express a sharp divide between ethical and religious existence. From all of this it may be said that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms do not define the ethical with any precision and they rather link the ethical and the religious together so closely and regularly that they commonly speak of the ethical and the religious as though they are one. For example, that "[t]he ethical is and remains the highest task assigned to every human being" (*CUP1* 151/*SKS* 7, 141) and that "[o]nly in the ethical is there immortality and eternal life" (*CUP 1*, 154/*SKS* 7, 143). Kierkegaard indeed notes in *The Book on Adler* that "[t]he religious sphere includes or ought to include the ethical" (*BOA* 21/*SKS* 15, 106) and, of course, offers a full-fledged account of ethics tightly bound to religiousness in *Works of Love*. Hence, the aforementioned (see 326n) difficulty of trying to "think of a qualitative transition that does not imply radical discontinuity" (Ferreira, "The 'Socratic Secret'," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 23) is especially acute vis-à-vis delineation of ethical/religious existence spheres.

human life.[355] Returning to an earlier cited journal entry, based on a necessarily tight binding of ethics and religiousness, then, Kierkegaard answers, "[t]he question is whether this sort of asceticism and mortification," that is, of the sort Schopenhauer envisions, "is [really or *actually*] possible for a [person] if he does not respect "You shall" and is not motivated by something eternal, not as a genius, but ethically. [Schopenhauer], who really abandons Christianity, is always praising India, Brahmanism. But these ascetics—he himself must of course admit this—are of course defined by a concern about eternity, defined religiously, defined not by reference to genius, but by what presents itself to them as a religious duty."[356] With this rhetorical question and consideration of the irreplaceable importance of eternity in view, we are now in position to more fully see how Kierkegaard's critique of Schopenhauer, on the surface, appears to be an *ad hominem* fusillade of Schopenhauer's person but actually encapsulates an ethical-religious objection.

Notably, Schopenhauer openly considered himself to be a genius. Schopenhauer, "weighed his duties towards the world in the balance with the weight and intensity of his natural gifts; and he came to the conclusion, that 'a man gifted with genius, by merely being and working, sacrifices himself to all mankind; therefore he is free from the obligation of sacrificing himself in particular to individuals.'…Schopenhauer knew he was different to the mass, and constantly repeated to himself that he was a stranger. 'It must be lonely on the heights.' The higher a man stood mentally, the lower must his fellow-men appear."[357] And, as

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[355] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is a prime locus for extracting such a characterization of Kierkegaard's ethical sphere tied to the religious. As but two examples of otherwise dissimilar accounts of Kierkegaardian ethics, both of which nevertheless heavily source from the *Postscript* to express Kierkegaard's position of subjective engagement with existence over objective speculation and thought, see Evans, "The Ethical Task as the Human Task," in *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 85–111, and Tom P. S. Angier, "From Aesthetics to Ethics," "From Ethics to Religion," and "Truth," in *Either Kierkegaard/Or Nietzsche: Moral Philosophy in a New Key* (London: Routledge, 2016), 35–102.
[356] *KJN* 9, 358/NB29:95.
[357] Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 80–3.

such a genius towering above the rank and file of humanity, it was at least possible for Schopenhauer personally to become an ethical genius on the scale of, in his terms, an ascetic saint. However, to Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer fails to do so and he fails to do so precisely because the drive to his brand of nihilism inheres an inconsistency. Schopenhauerian nihilism cannot provide a goal or, if it does afford a goal in the way Schopenhauer prescribes the nil-goal of ascetic witnessing to nothingness, then what Schopenhauerian nihilism does not and cannot do—and this is the sharpest aspect of Kierkegaard's critique—is provide an *eternal* goal. For Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer's obsession with temporal, worldly, intellectual renown belies this limitation and he unfolds his assessment in an expanded journal entry, the significance of which warrants my quoting it here in its expanded form:

> …this is the way things are, and it is lamentable. [Schopenhauer] relates to recognition in straightforward fashion; it is something he has wanted, sought. He has been treated meanly—this has not broken him, no, it has developed him into a very significant author. But to be a person of ethical and religious character—this absolutely does not exist for him. Things are indeed different for a person of ethical and religious character. In the beginning, recognition on the greatest possible scale is offered to him—but he will not have it; and then here comes the collision. This is demonstrated, above all, by 'the Exemplar,' the only one, the Saviour of the world. When he begins, they want to make him king, but he does not want it, he wants—to be crucified. And yet, he must have this first stage included, precisely in order to be able to manifest the religious decisively and in order to be able to wound his times decisively in religious fashion. If he did not have the former in his power, it would indeed always be doubtful whether he was not, after all, a [human being] who would in fact have preferred to have been king, perhaps even someone who in his quest for that been unlucky enough to get crucified instead of becoming king. In matters of ethical and religious character, the foreground is of enormous importance…[and] one thing cannot be denied: A worldly quest at which one fails is one thing—to refuse worldly triumph that has been offered, and then to be sacrificed: this is something else. Only the latter constitutes being sacrificed. Therefore, [Schopenhauer] can be said to have been mean-spiritedly made a sacrifice by all this professorial villainy, but [Schopenhauer] is not an ethical, religious sacrifice—for he would have much preferred to be celebrated.[358]

[358] *KJN* 9, 360/NB29:95.

Coupling this passage with his prior reflections on ethical-religious characters being invariably defined by a concern for eternity makes Kierkegaard's critique clear. Lacking eternity, nihilism, with Schopenhauer himself as exemplar, opts for temporal fruits, such as intellectual and moral elitism and the esteem of one's contemporaries. This movement of at once rejecting and accepting (the temporal deliverances of) the will-to-live and *eo ipso* clearly identifying the fundamental inability of the will to not will, is not specific to Schopenhauer the person but is inbuilt to his philosophy. Even if Schopenhauer's act of adverting to suffering as motivating asceticism addresses the inconsistency of striving toward a goal within goalless creation (although Kierkegaard does not even grant that to Schopenhauer), the fundamental inability of the will to not will is a yet more intractable difficulty. Indeed, it is an absolute difficulty tantamount to a paradox for which, in effort at resolution, Schopenhauer problematically appeals to happenstance or grace (excommunicated from Christian doctrine) as explanation.[359] Specifically, Schopenhauer construes grace on his own atheistic terms as "that mode of cognition that renders all motives ineffective, that serves as a universal tranquillizer [*Quietiv*] to quell all willing, providing the most profound peacefulness [e.g., final respite from suffering]" and wields this definition as the nihilistic mechanism that elucidates the negation of the will-to-live.[360] Here, Schopenhauer has conceptually backed himself into a corner or, in Rudolf Malter's words, has himself created "a situation that should not happen:" Schopenhauer resorts to a richer theological notion of grace and relies on theology to explain a purportedly literal philosophical truth of how the negation of the will-to-live is actualised.[361] In doing so, Schopenhauer violates his own principle that philosophy uncovers truth of its own accord and looks to theology only for

[359] See §70 of Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 429–36.
[360] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 418.
[361] Rudolf Malter, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik des Willens* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991), 424 (translation mine).

allegories and metaphors with which to communicate such truth. "The will's freely abolishing itself is notoriously difficult for Schopenhauer to explain," Christopher Janaway comments in a manner reverberating Kierkegaard's criticism, "[p]lacing this occurrence in a 'kingdom of grace' either provides just an arbitrary name for the mystery, or hopes to gain credence from the sense this has in established," yet discarded, "Christian doctrine."[362] Incisively, having discarded Christianity apart from its asceticism, "whence, literally, could something analogous to God's grace emanate?"[363] The answer, Janaway spells out, is that there is literally nowhere within Schopenhauer's system from whence grace could issue. It is worth stating unequivocally that Schopenhauer did not, as Kierkegaard by way of a number of his pseudonyms would, indisputably put forth a formal conception of paradox as integral to human existence (as discussed in the next chapter).[364] It would be very difficult, indeed, to see how scholars such as Julian Young and David Cartwright could possibly arrive at the conclusion that Schopenhauer ironed out all wrinkles and veritably solved the problem of human existence if the *Weltschmerz* philosopher overtly promulgated a doctrine of irresolvable paradox as part of his philosophy.[365] *A fortiori*, if Schopenhauer did see his philosophy as perched upon a paradox, it would be entirely nonsensical to attempt to understand his own definite claim that his identity was none other than "[h]e who wrote *The World as Will and Representation* and provided a solution to the great problem of existence."[366] Hence, Schopenhauer's tacit reliance on a Christian theological notion of grace,

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[362] Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in *Essays on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: Values and the Will of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 171.
[363] Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in *Essays on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, 169.
[364] e.g. *FT* 47/*SKS* 4, 141; *PF* 37–48/*SKS* 4, 242–52; *CUP 1*, 230–300/*SKS* 7, 210–73; and *WA* 94–6/*SKS* 11, 98–100.
[365] Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge, 2005), 12, 144; Cartwright ("The Dawn of Fame and the End of Life," in *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, 528.
[366] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, trans. E. F. J. Payne, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 488. It is worth highlighting that not all scholars

the attending intimation that Schopenhauer's nihilism possesses more conceptual content and explanatory power than it in fact does, stands as a point worthy of objection.

Closing this chapter by returning to Kierkegaard's critique of Schopenhauer on this point, now in unmistakeable view of its ethical-religious nature, it is important to reiterate that the eternity Kierkegaard diagnoses Schopenhauer as lacking, and which compels Schopenhauer to opaquely and spuriously appeal to grace unmoored from its Christian framework, is eternity specifically "defined religiously."[367] Schopenhauer in fact conveyed

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regard Schopenhauer's appeal to grace as deeply problematic or problematic in the same way. Gillespie, for one, entirely glosses over this difficulty in Schopenhauer (cf. *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 192). Janaway, on the other hand, does view Schopenhauer's appeal to grace as problematic however asserts that the problem only arises on Schopenhauer's culturally-conditioned captivity to Christianity. To negate the will-to-live, "to become will-less subjects of cognition does not require grace to emanate from anywhere" and Schopenhauer is both erroneous and guilty of implicitly espousing Christian doctrine to promote "his case through notions whose intelligibility depends on a concept of God that he eschews" ("Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in *Essays on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, 172). Of course, for the contention that the will's self-negation does not require grace to emanate from anywhere to hold, Janaway either owes an explanation as to why, in Schopenhauer and inestimable others, the will-to-live does not negate itself merely as a matter of course or he must assert that the will-to-live in fact always does so (e.g., along the lines that all life ends in death, the release back to non-individuated, timeless existence (e.g., Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 241–54) from whence 'oneself' came). In this respect, Janaway suggests that opting (as Schopenhauer should have) for a truly non-Christian framework that sanctions the latter rightly avoids the grace problematic. According to Janaway, a different sort of atheist—say, one embracing the teachings of Nietzsche, the "godless anti-metaphysician" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 201) or one more thoroughly steeped in a metaphysics of atheistic Buddhism (that takes suffering as truly constitutive of human existence) than Schopenhauer was—"would have no place at all for metaphysics in Schopenhauer's sense" (p. 173). That is, no place for a nil-goal of ascetic escape from suffering of the kind that Schopenhauer pursues and which puts him in the indefensible position of asserting de-Christianised grace to account for how the will-to-live can, *per impossibile*, not will. Despite Janaway's recommendation of atheistic Buddhism, however, there persists the question of the presumption of this assertion. That is, the question as to whether, just as Janaway derides the fact that Schopenhauer regrettably "simply *assumes* that it is a fundamental and perverse error to think that the world has no moral significance and indicates no higher purpose beyond itself" (p. 173) which places Schopenhauer and his nomination of the nil-goal of asceticism "within the ambit of Christianity from start to finish" (p. 173), Janaway appears to equally *assume* that the world has no moral significance or higher purpose. Without defending this assumption, Janaway's recommendation of atheistic Buddhism is at least as uncertain as Schopenhauer's position.

[367] *KJN* 9, 358/NB29:95.

his own notion of eternity and juxtaposed it with mere temporality. Of course, holding that human beings somehow timelessly exist as the universal, undifferentiated will-to-live, Schopenhauer maintained that eternal non-individuated existence is the nothingness to which all selves, for lack of a better word, 'return,' upon death (see 275n). But apart from atemporality bookending either side of life, in *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer recruits Hobbes's *Leviathan* quoting the scholastic doctrine of *nunc stans* to present eternity as something to be conceived not as a timeless "succession without end or beginning, but rather an *enduring Now*," such that "we possess the same *Now* that was the *Now* for Adam…there is no difference between the *Now* and the *Then*."[368] As well, in his journals, as may be expected, Schopenhauer may be seen to *eternalise* and thereby value his concepts of misanthropy and asceticism over and against temporality: "[noble] misanthropy and resignation stand firm and are moved by nothing temporal."[369] The religious eternity lacking in Schopenhauer according to Kierkegaard, then, is something different and more than a perduring, atemporal, ahistorical, and axiologically inert '*Now*.' That is, it is a religiousness anchored in something deeper and more comprehensive than the metaphysics of chronometric time.[370] That Kierkegaard levies his criticism of Schopenhauer not directly but

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[368] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 306.

[369] Zimmern, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 91. Despite efforts to imbue Schopenhauerian eternity with value (i.e., as to make eternity *more valuable* than temporality), there is abundant textual evidence to render Schopenhauerian eternity as basic presentism without any axiological connotations. For example, in his essay, "On the Vanity of Existence," Schopenhauer offers up the thought that finite human beings might "grow frantic at the sight of this ebbing away of our short span of time were we not secretly conscious in the profoundest depths of our being that we share in the inexhaustible well of eternity, out of which we can forever draw new life and renewed time" only to then demolish this valued appraisal of eternity and resolutely settle closer to the presentism depicted in *The World as Will and Representation*: "Our existence has no foundation on which to rest except the transient present" (*Essays and Aphorisms*, 52; see also *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 255–6).

[370] In this regard, I think that Pattison and Kirkpatrick are driving at a similar point when they contend that, for Kierkegaard, eternity is not "the timeless eternity of the *nunc stans* but the active eternity of the eschatological future…Kierkegaard's eschatology is a kind of eschatology-in-the-process-of-realization. That is to say, it is not a matter of offering consolation for the sufferings of life by looking away from this world toward an imagined

by reference to Jesus Christ as the ethical-religious 'exemplar' or 'prototype,' thereby enlisting the religious motif of *imitatio Christi*, suggests just what this deeper, more comprehensive, and distinctive 'something' is. In the next chapter, I consider this anchoring 'something.' I consider the key tenets—Kierkegaard's upbringing in Moravian Pietism, deriving therefrom a uniquely kenotic Christological orientation, appropriating certain of its mystical, apophatic, or negative theological tendencies, and expressing a distinctive doctrine of grace—that both (a) pries Kierkegaard apart Schopenhauerian pessimism and misanthropy as well as nihilism's negative theological similitude stemming from divinised and incommunicable nothingness and (b) shapes, for Kierkegaard, what it means to pursue the Greatest Commandment, what it is to love God.

future happiness (which we might call apocalypticism) but of making the promised future an active element in the now" (*The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought*, 34).

Chapter IV

Kierkegaard's Greatest Commandment

> *The relationship to God is like a relationship to superiority…a moment comes when it seems as though God's love were a delusion with which he deceives the pious. This is the moment when it really becomes clear that the God-fearing person is to be torn from his entire range of ideas and world concepts and initiated into God's ideas and concepts in order to learn from him what love is. A [person] initially lives in relation to God with the tempo of childhood and the religious impressions from that time, thinking he loves God, understands that God is love…But you see, God then sends constant adversity; [Christianity], which is proclaimed as a consolation, metamorphoses into a monstrous burden laid on the believer, so that instead of being consoled, he must even suffer for [Christianity]…It begins with God, who loves man, and then it appears that God is the one who wants to be loved; he has not the slightest intention of altering his conception of what love is, and his conception of what love is makes you, humanly speaking, unhappy in this life. This is spiritual trial… And yet God is infinite love; but he has only a spirit's concept of your happiness and blessedness—alas, and you are flesh and blood. So if you are to be blessed in your relationship to him, your concept must be transformed, and this transformation, this rebirth, is an immensely painful operation…Forget everything, forget yourself absolutely, in the thought of God, in the thought that he is love: yes, then you are blessed in your relationship to him—but then you have also become spirit.*[371]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

In Chapter II, I developed a trajectory of thought leading from Kant through Fichte, Jacobi, certain of the German Romantics, and culminating in Schopenhauer to characterise

[371] *KJN* 7, 454/NB20:99.

the latter as the apex of modern philosophical nihilism. In Chapter III, I surveyed Kierkegaard's appreciative yet critical reception of Schopenhauer and demonstrated that, principally in his late journals, the self-same journals that serve as the foundation upon which multiple commentators have come to regard Kierkegaard as having merged with Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard offered an ethical-religious objection to Schopenhauerian nihilism. Insofar as Kierkegaard's first-hand encounter with Schopenhauer was a late one, even whilst eliciting Kierkegaard's opposition, Schopenhauer cannot be said to have influenced his younger Danish contemporary in the way of stimulating new ideas, effecting a sea-change, or other qualitative modification in Kierkegaard's previously stated views. Rather, Schopenhauer the nihilist served as a catalyst for Kierkegaard, intensifying or further entrenching that which was already expressed in his prior writings. "Contrasts illuminate each other, don't they?" Kierkegaard once mused, and Kierkegaard's late encounter with his contrastive "opposite" certainly intensified and shed invaluable light on Kierkegaard's previously stated positions.[372] These intensifications and the core ideas present in Kierkegaard's writings before and after 1854 comprise the bedrock of his conception of loving God. They collectively revolve around a religious sense of eternity anchored in a distinctive Christian framework, Moravian Pietism. My aim in this chapter, accordingly, is to canvass key tenets of Moravian Pietism—beginning with the *imitatio Christi* motif and working through its discernible negative theological tendencies to a doctrine of grace—as a means of lucidly contextualising and disclosing the full surface form and subterranean depths of Kierkegaard's conception of loving God.

To be sure, in emphasising Kierkegaard's grounding in Moravian Pietism, my aim is *not* to present the Danish religious poet as a Pietist theologian-*redux* or exponent of a revived Protestant reformation. In his translated volume of Kierkegaard's late journals, Ronald

[372] *KJN* 4, 278/NB3:72; *KJN* 9, 356/NB29:95.

Gregor Smith avers that, with Kierkegaard, we face "a challenge to all traditional forms of 'Christianity', Protestant and Catholic and even sectarian. For however strong the Pietist influence upon Kierkegaard…it is neither here nor in any other specific form of the Christian tradition that we can finally classify Kierkegaard. Rather, we have to regard his challenge as directed against *all* traditional forms."[373] Hence, we might say, Smith points to Kierkegaard's contribution to the emergence of secular or 'religionless' Christianity in the twentieth century.[374] My aim in this chapter, instead, then, is to render as more intelligible, via ressourcement or selective return to the theological sources, the theological grammar of that which is concluded in Chapter V—Kierkegaard's conception of loving God. This theological grammar sets Kierkegaard apart from Schopenhauer, not to mention Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Karl Marx (1818–1883), and myriad other nineteenth century critics of Christianity. Attention to this grammar and its ability to demarcate, in the present effort to exposit Kierkegaard's conception of loving God, is necessary. For, often featuring in the equation of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer given the former's late journals, the heartrending tone of Kierkegaard's actual last written word on any matter is often perceived as more Schopenhauerian, more nihilistic, than Christian. That is, the moving journal entry (dated 25 September 1855, just before the 42-year-old Kierkegaard collapsed in the streets of Copenhagen 28 September and was taken to hospital 2 October where he departed this life 11 November) reads:

> This life's destiny is to be brought to the highest degree of weariness with life. The person who, brought to this point, is able to maintain—or is helped by God to be able to maintain—that it is God who, out of love, has brought him to this point: he, from a Christian point of view, has passed life's examination, is ripe for eternity…"You shall surely come to pay for this, because the destiny of this life—though by my grace, for it is only to those who are saved that I show this grace—is to lead you to the highest degree of weariness with

[373] Ronald Gregor Smith, "Introduction," in *Søren Kierkegaard, The Last Years: Journals 1853–55* (London: Collins, 1965), 15.
[374] e.g., 279n and Eberhard Bethge, "Religionless Christianity—A Mistake?", *Studies in Religion* 12, no. 1 (1983): 19–26.

> life."…Only those [people] who, having been brought to the point of weariness with life, are able, with the assistance of grace, to maintain that God does this out of love, so that there is no doubt in the inner-most reach of their souls that God is love: only they are ripened for eternity. God indeed receives them in eternity…When, a [human] being, during the last lap of his life—when it seems as if God transforms himself into sheer cruelty and, with the most cruelly devised cruelty, does everything to deprive him of all lust for life—when a [human] being nonetheless continues to believe that God is love and that it is out of love that God does this. Such a [human] being becomes an angel…God sits in heaven and listens. And every time he hears praise from a [human] being whom he has brought to the most extreme point of weariness with life, God says to himself…["]Here it is,["]…as if it were a discovery he made, but he was in fact prepared for it, for he himself was there with this [person] and helped him to the extent that God can help a person to do what only freedom can do; only freedom can do it; but the surprise at being able to express oneself by thanking God for it, as if it were God who had done it; and in his joy at being able to do so, he is so happy that he will hear nothing, nothing about having done it himself, but gratefully refers everything to God and prays God that it might continue to be this way: that it is God who does it; for he does not believe in himself, but he does believe in God.[375]

This passage elaborates the same sense of transformation entailed in loving God noted in the epigraph of this chapter. For Smith, Kierkegaard's crushing life leading up to this entry comprises "a tragic story" with a "profoundly disturbing" envoi.[376] Regardless of whether one agrees with this hagiography of Kierkegaard (and I indeed end this dissertation with a conclusion of my own), it would seem very difficult to avoid reading "the highest degree of weariness with life" and the like as not tantamount to nihilism. Yet Kierkegaard's dying declaration is clearly not without careful reference to the grace of God, religious eternity, and other distinctly Christian theological extractions. Still, even efforts to theologically distance Kierkegaard from nihilism are beset by complications. Of note, reflecting on Kierkegaard's final words, Pattison writes

> Kierkegaard—as opposed to Schopenhauer—still, as that poignant final journal entry makes clear, does believe that *faith* can nevertheless see that God is love and that all the suffering which the soul endures in this life is itself a trial of love. However, in believing this, the sufferer has no evidence to back up his claim. The world looks, as Schopenhauer said it was, like a giant torture chamber in which we can choose only to be tortured or torturers (or

[375] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 405–6/Paper 591.
[376] Smith, *Søren Kierkegaard, The Last Years*, 19.

> presumably, in the case of Kierkegaardian self-tormentors, both)…Yet…even in the extremity of the final journal entry, Kierkegaard sees this world and how we are in this world as decisive with regard to our God-relationship. The suffering we endure, the disgust we experience in the face of life, is not to be subdued or overcome but lived to the full in the *faith* that it is an expression of God's love. This is not, contra the charge of neo-Gnosticism, a matter of fleeing the world but a matter of how we are in it. Kierkegaard is both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and neither…Kierkegaard's 'world' is essentially the same world that a Feuerbach, a Marx, or a Nietzsche would have recognised as their own…[But] whether we see good in all things or are disgusted by all things, that means receiving our lives…direct from God's hand as a good and perfect gift, a gift of love.[377]

Pattison's interpretation of Kierkegaard's final writing is not wrong *per se*. It does, however, while nicely attempting to circumnavigate conflation with Schopenhauer, reference faith that, in its brevity, risks elision with a Nygren-esque human passivity to the love of God that was noted in Chapter I and is entirely at odds with Kierkegaard's complex though definite discussion of human freedom in his final journal entry, *et alibi*. Specifically, it does not, or at least does not clearly, develop how faith sets Kierkegaard and his love of God apart from Schopenhauer and his nihilism (nor Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Marx). Accordingly, in this chapter, I continue following Outka's analysis in avoiding a systematic substitution of 'faith' for 'love of God,' preferring the vocabulary of the 'love of God' to 'faith' in order to stress the active, passionate element in one's relationship with God that legitimates the use of the word 'love.'[378] Moreover, I situate Kierkegaardian loving God against its Pietist (and earlier mystical) backcloth because it gives precise form to the clustered ideas of loving God that mark Kierkegaard well apart from the nihilism I have developed in the foregoing chapters of this dissertation. That being said, equally, my effort in this chapter is to classify Kierkegaard vis-à-vis loving God, as it has been throughout this dissertation, without otherwise laying claim to how best to "finally classify Kierkegaard," Kierkegaard and every one of his

[377] Pattison, "Kirkestormen, Neo-Gnosticism and Secular Christianity," 291–4 (emphasis mine).
[378] Outka, *Agape*, 51.

writings *in toto*, beyond dissociation from nihilism. In other words, if asked to classify Kierkegaard overall, consistent with the apophaticism of Kierkegaard adumbrated below, my effort in this chapter does not classify his thought beyond a negative 'not-nihilist' description.

KIERKEGAARD'S MORAVIAN PIETIST UPBRINGING

On God's Love.

"But," the troubled person says, "I do not in fact see God, so I cannot know that he is love; nor do I hear him say to me that he is love. At the same time, things happen to me that I am not the least able to comprehend as being good and profitable for me: how, then, am I to believe that he is love?" Here it is very apparent that everything really depends absolutely on a religious upbringing, on the apriority that is gained thereby, so that from the earliest age it is absolutely settled for a person that God is love. This proof that God is love, based on an inexplicable impression, an impression that has coalesced with one's entire being from the earliest age: this is [really] the main thing.[379]

—Søren Kierkegaard, NB (1847)

There was some truth in Peter's words when he once remarked that there was a religious difference between him and myself: that he regarded the relationship to God as one of being loved, I regarded it as one of loving. This remark was not exactly something new to me; I have often considered whether God was not altogether too infinitely lofty for a [human] being to dare to love him—but of course it is written: You shall love the Lord your God. Furthermore, I myself have in fact always said that it is God who does everything for me. But nonetheless, this is not a bad way of describing the difference between the two of us.[380]

—Søren Kierkegaard, NB13 (1849)

[379] *KJN* 4, 96/NB:139.
[380] *KJN* 6, 315/NB13:65.

If one interprets these two extracts from his journals to be frank disclosures of Kierkegaard's psychology of loving God, then the effort to delineate loving God is necessarily directed to consider the "religious upbringing" of the Danish religious poet. The effort is directed to the upbringing that "absolutely" determines, or is the "main" determinant in, how the "troubled person"—and Kierkegaard can safely be classed as that—responds to and interprets suffering.[381] The effort is directed to the upbringing that, though one shared with his elder brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard (1805–1888), nevertheless distinctively set the elder Kierkegaard down the path of regarding the relationship to God as one of being loved and the younger Kierkegaard down the alternate path of regarding the God relationship as, not without qualification, but fundamentally, one of loving. Though the investigation is so directed, the general rubric of religious upbringing prospectively draws focus to any number of areas. For example, it could direct one to examine the acute religious influences involved with Kierkegaard being raised in a Christian home under the auspices of his "dark, gloomy, and profoundly melancholy" father, Michael Pedersen (M. P.) Kierkegaard (1756–1838), "whose sombre temper made itself deeply felt in the family" and who, perhaps, conceived the entire family in sin and "once, as a small boy…stood up on a hill and cursed God," thereby casting an ineradicable shadow of God's wrath and damnation over the family.[382] It could direct one to consider Kierkegaard's assiduous and extensive, if often tendentious, biblical

[381] In addition to his sad familiarity with death (see 320n), Kierkegaard's routinised mention of his melancholic depression in his journals (e.g., *KJN* 4, 33–6/NB:34; *KJN* 7, 196–7/NB17:45), and especially the more lonely and complex aspects of his melancholia, indicates that he shared (e.g., *KJN* 5, 139/NB7:105; *KJN* 7, 196–7/NB17:45) at least this trouble with Quidam in *Stages On Life's Way* when the latter says that "[d]epression is my nature," and that "[m]y cunning is that I am able to hide my depression; my deception is just as cunning as my depression is deep" (*SLW* 195–6/*SKS* 6, 184).

[382] Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Søren Kierkegaard: Life and Literary Career to February 1846," in *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 260; *KJN* 2, 257/JJ:416. See also, for example, Stephen Backhouse, "Family Life," in *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 35–42, as well as Lowrie, "Childhood" and "Early Youth: 1830 to 1834" in *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, 31–66.

hermeneutics and scholarship.[383] It could, alternately, direct one to examine the ecclesial milieu of the Lutheran Church of Denmark of which Kierkegaard was not only a congregant but, *a fortiori*, for most of his life, devoted as "one of the most regular churchgoers in Copenhagen."[384] All these overlapping avenues and more rightly figure into Kierkegaard's religious upbringing.[385] But as an inquest into Kierkegaard's theological conception of loving God, I selectively examine Kierkegaard's upbringing and immersion in a particularly dour form of Christianity intensely influenced by the theological heritage of Herrnhutism or Moravian Pietism, largely (or at least initially) at the hands of the Congregation of Brothers or *Brødresocietet*.

To grossly, albeit necessarily, truncate a fascinating history of the complex post-Reformation religious movement of Pietism, then, in 1739, King Christian VI of Denmark (1699–1746) permitted adherents to form societies throughout Denmark, including adherents of the import from the Christian community of Herrnhut in German Saxony known as the 'Moravian Brethren' founded by Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760).[386] On 14

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[383] e.g., Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*; "Kierkegaard's Use of the New Testament: Intratextuality, Indirect Communication, and Appropriation," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible, Tome II: The New Testament*, ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 237–48; Lori Unger Brandt, "Kierkegaard's Use of the Old Testament: From Literary Resource to the Word of God," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible, Tome I: The Old Testament*, ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 231–51; and Joel D. S. Rasmussen, "Kierkegaard's Biblical Hermeneutics: Imitation, Imaginative Freedom, and Paradoxical Fixation," in *Kierkegaard and the Bible, Tome II: The New Testament*, 249–84.

[384] Anders Holm, "Kierkegaard and the Church," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 113. See also Matthew D. Kirkpatrick, "Kierkegaard on the Church: Between Rejection and Redemption" in *T&T Clark Companion to the Theology of Kierkegaard*, 67–86.

[385] The possibilities do not, of course, end here. In fact, one could panoptically orient the investigative lens outward to take seriously Kierkegaard's repeated (e.g., *PV* 12/*SKS* 13, 20) comment that "the whole authorship, even though it is my production, is also my religious upbringing and development" (*PV* 236/*Pap.* X^5 B 145) and therefore inclusively consider the entire act of writing the corpus and that which factored into it as Kierkegaard's religious upbringing. None of the presented possibilities are mutually exclusive however, perhaps it goes without saying, in-depth coverage of any one of them requires study well beyond the scope of this single dissertation.

[386] Andrew Burgess, "Kierkegaard, Brorson, and Moravian Music," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to 'Practice in Christianity'*, 220.

September 1739, the *Brødresocietet* of Copenhagen was established in the Danish capital, intent on convening meetings modelled after German Pietist *collegia pietatis*, 'coventicles,' or *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (Latin for 'little churches within the church') for religious upbuilding.[387] The society expanded across the eighteenth century and, in 1784, opened a private hall on Copenhagen's Storm Street (*Stormgade*) at which their meetings were held, before moving, with aid of Kierkegaard's father, into a larger hall on Stormgade in 1816 to accommodate larger assemblies. As a pietist association, meetings of *Brødresocietet* placed emphasis on inner renewal and the practice of Christian life with especial stress placed on fostering emotional responses to gospel texts and the themes of "repentance, regeneration, sanctification, [and] biblical devotion."[388] To these ends, the Moravian Brethren drew heavily upon not only biblical texts but Pietist edifying, upbuilding, and devotional literature known in the German idiom indicative of its provenance as *Erbauungsliteratur*. Hence, writings of the *Erbauungsautoren* or devotional authors including, for example, Johann Arndt, Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), Hans Adolph Brorson (1694–1764), and Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769), as well as their German mystic and other mediaeval theological progenitors such as Meister Eckhart (*c*. 1260–1328), Johannes Tauler and Thomas à Kempis figured prominently in the meetings of the Moravian Society of Brothers. The meetings themselves were concretely intended to augment religious formation in daily life and not to destabilise the authority of the established Church. They, consequently, did not approximate political rallies but instead included a time of prayer and period of edificatory reading centring on a passage of the Bible or *Erbauungsliteratur* along with discussion and meditative contemplation.

[387] Christopher Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (London: Routledge, 2011), 43.
[388] Jonathan Strom, "Pietism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian McFarland, David Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 389.

Kierkegaard's own attachment to the Moravian Brethren came by way of his father's relation with the tradition. M. P. Kierkegaard hailed from the pietistic region of Sædding in the West Jutland and, enacting a lifelong inclination to pietism, carried this spiritual disposition with him when he moved from the Danish hinterland to Copenhagen. In Jørgen Bukdahl's words, pater Kierkegaard maintained "an unbroken connection with the religious awakening movement of the faraway West Jutland village of [his] childhood" and passed this affinity onto his own children.[389] In practical terms, decades after its foundation, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, along with the other members of the Kierkegaard household, would follow the family patriarch to regularly attend meetings of the Moravian Brethren. A typical Sunday throughout Kierkegaard's childhood and youth would see the family Kierkegaard attend state church services in the morning at the Church of the Holy Spirit (*Helliggeistes Kirke*) or Church of Our Lady (*Vor Frue Kirke*) and meetings of the Moravian Brethren at Stormgade in the evenings, all of which were, as they still are, within a 10-minute perambulation in the heart of the Danish capital.

Whatever else may be said of the meetings of *Brødresocietet*, the spirituality inculcated therein contained a serious and suffering and not joyous and triumphant inflection. It emphasised the lowly, poor, tortured, powerless, and finally crucified Christ rather than the Holy Spirit or Resurrection. As Barnett, Bukdahl, and Garff each express, Kierkegaard in particular and his family in general became acquainted with, above all, "sombre images" of Jesus Christ, *Smertensmand* ('the Man of Pain' or 'the Man of Sorrows'), while worshipping with the Moravians.[390] Here, one easily imagines how such solemn meditation intrinsic to the structure of the meetings of *Brødresocietet* alloyed with the ruminative temperament of the

[389] Jørgen Bukdahl, "The Home on Nytorv and the Religious Awakening Movement," in *Soren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, ed. and trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 35.
[390] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 54; Bukdahl, *Soren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, 33; Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, 12.

impressionable young Kierkegaard. Severe as the religious nourishment the Kierkegaards fed on was, however, the spirituality propounded at Stormgade was perhaps only a silhouette of the eccentric excesses of the contentious 1743–1750 period in the Moravian Church when its liturgical and devotional life, under the influence of its founder, Zinzendorf, exhibited "a morbid concentration and wordplay upon the blood and wounds of the crucified Christ."[391] Disagreement persists as to whether the period of Moravian graphic fixation of Christ's physical suffering comprised a vehement reaction to Enlightenment rationalism (not unlike the florid emotionality characteristic of Romanticism's response to the same), an effusive, overwrought, baroque, and ultimately "heterodox move from Christianity to 'Jesuanity,'" or, yet different, simply an indication of Zinzendorf's labile intellectual makeup and psychological fragility.[392] In any event, the Pietism to which M. P. Kierkegaard was most disposed and that the family beheld at Stormgade explicitly sought to puncture, with sufficient force, hypnagogic Christianity and to starkly bring the crucified Christ before "the eyes of the heart," whereby the heart, in "inward vision," might come to love him.[393]

An extract from Brorson, one of the *Erbauungsautoren*, and an especially meaningful one for Søren Kierkegaard at that, helps to illustrate this spiritual milieu. In his hymn "I See Jesus Before My Eyes," Brorson portrays the scene of the crucifixion such that one "will look, as far as [one] can, into Jesus' state of torment."[394] Here, with prose stoking searing

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[391] John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf: The Story of His Life and Leadership in the Renewed Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, 2001), 198.
[392] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 26n151.
[393] Peter Vogt, "Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760)," in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 212.
[394] Hans Adolph Brorson, "Jesum seer jeg for mit Øye," in *Troens rare Klenodie med Svane-Sang: Psalmer og aandelige Sange* (Copenhagen: H. H. J. Lynges, 1879), 48, quoted in Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 87.

images of the bloody wounds and agony of Christ, Brorson instils that "it is the heart of Christ that melts the heart of the believer, resulting, finally, in his or her surrender to God."[395]

While Moravianism may well be correct in the analysis that Christian love and every good and true fruit for which Christ stands invariably elicits offense and is therefore violently rejected, indeed, spat upon, by the debauched world which values, *inter alia*, wealth, status, power, and upsmanship, for the youngest Kierkegaard in particular, the spartan engraining of a Christianity that places the voluntary suffering of the innocent Christ in the foreground had a profound, if devastating, effect. Indeed, Kierkegaard ostensibly severed all direct links to *Brødresocietet* following his father's death in 1838 however, still, his early and sustained experiences with the Moravians indelibly scored the Dane. "Already as a child," Kierkegaard records in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, "I was rigorously and earnestly brought up in Christianity, insanely brought up, humanly speaking." He continues: "I had overstrained myself under the impression that the depressed old man [M. P. Kierkegaard], who had laid it upon me, was himself sinking under—a child attired, how insane, as a depressed old man. Frightful! No wonder, then, that there were times when Christianity seemed to me the most inhuman cruelty, although I never, even when I was furthest from it, gave up my veneration for it."[396] The sense of cruelty and ambivalence of which Kierkegaard speaks continued throughout his life. It reached its peak, if not before, toward the end of his life when Kierkegaard, perhaps bleary-eyed from his efforts to unmask Christendom as bourgeois culture masquerading *en masse* as New Testament Christianity, writes in this late journals that "[a] view of Christianity that to my knowledge has never been put forward is: [Christianity] is an invention of Satan, calculated, with the help of the imagination, to make [human] beings unhappy."[397] Beyond his late journals and the attack on Christendom

[395] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 87.
[396] *PV* 79–80/*SKS* 16, 58–9.
[397] *KJN* 10, 201/NB32:112.

writings, in different contexts, the hard stamp of Moravian Pietism's emphasis on suffering is everywhere present as a recurring leitmotif in Kierkegaard's writings, indicating the enduring effect of the Moravians and M. P. Kierkegaard's piety upon the writer. Two examples will suffice. First, as though emulating a didactic lesson that the stern Michael Pedersen may have conveyed to young Søren, in *Works of Love*, so manifestly written by the hand of one who had suffered dearly in life, Kierkegaard writes: "A young person should not be promised anything other than what Christianity can keep, but Christianity cannot keep anything other than what it has promised from the beginning: the world's ingratitude, opposition, and derision, and continually to a higher degree the more earnest a Christian one becomes."[398] As well, second, in *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus meditates on a child's encounter with the suffering Christ (conspicuously not unlike Kierkegaard's own at the meetings of the Moravians) and, in a fundamentally different manner than Voltaire and Schopenhauer, excoriates crass optimism and espouses imitative suffering:

> Then, when the child had become older and mature, he would not have forgotten his childhood impression, but he understood it differently. He no longer wished to strike, because, he said, then I am not like him, the abased one, who did not strike, not even when he was struck. No, now he wished only one thing, to suffer approximately as he suffered in this world, which the philosophers have always called the best but which nevertheless—yes, it must really be so that something is true in philosophy that is not in theology—crucifies love and shouts, "Long live Barabbas!" Indeed, the world has shown this again and again in minor situations, that not only the person who, humanly speaking, wills the good must suffer, but that…there usually is living at the same time the despicable, the contemptible, the dastardly, who in contrast are applauded and cheered.[399]

Taken together, as these examples (and one need look neither long nor hard to find others) illustrate, the Moravians left a lasting mark on Kierkegaard. It should not be inferred from this, however, that it was entirely M. P. Kierkegaard's spiritual inclinations that lodged Moravianism in his youngest son's inmost religious recesses. Nor should it be inferred that

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[398] *WL* 194/*SKS* 9, 193.
[399] *PC* 178/*SKS* 12, 180.

exposure to, say, simple authoritarianism at the meetings of *Brødresocietet* was the driving force behind setting Pietism as the framework on which Kierkegaard could draw to develop his theological ideas. Rather, as several authors note, Kierkegaard intensified his *own* investment in Moravian spirituality through his independent reading of *Erbauungsliteratur*.[400] In other words, even before studying academic theology and philosophy and embarking upon his authorship, Kierkegaard's upbringing in Moravian Pietism was anything but the passive, osmotic, internal accretion of the religious furniture of his environment. It was, conversely, an active engagement with the theological heritage of Pietism, an engagement that continued throughout his life and appreciating this point helps to give more precise form to Kierkegaard's appropriation of the theological emphasis on Christ's lowly yet voluntary suffering and its essential relation to loving God.

And so, specifically, what did Kierkegaard acquire from his life-long affinity for the *Erbauungsliteratur*? Three interrelated things. First, though it is important to observe, as Matthew Held and Joel Rasmussen have, that Kierkegaard neither penned a treatise on Christology nor did he formalise his view of Christ into a Christology at all (at least not in the sense that that term has for systematic theology), the *Erbauungsautoren* and their predecessors provided invaluable resources for the vital role of Christ—particularly regarding the theme of voluntary suffering in the imitation of Christ or *imitatio Christi*—in

[400] For more comprehensive considerations of Kierkegaard's grasp and use of *Erbauungsliteratur* than that which is offered here, see, for example, Barnett, "Kierkegaard's Reading of Pietist Literature: An Investigation of Themes Christian and Socratic," in *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 63–110; Simon Podmore, "The Old Devotional Books: *Anfechtung* in Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch*," "*Melancholia Coram Deo*: Luther's Theology of *Anfechtung*," and "God's Fire in the Soul: *Anfechtung* in Arndt and Boehme," in *Struggling with God*, 71–153; and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, "Kierkegaard's Acquaintance with Various Interpretations of Christianity: Studies of Pietists, Mystics, and Church Fathers," in *Kierkegaard's View of Christianity*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1978), 60–88.

Kierkegaard's understanding of loving God.[401] Second, this treatment of *imitatio Christi* has its basis in the negative theological tendencies typical of Moravian Pietism.[402] Finally, third, where Schopenhauer, backed into a corner from which the philosopher of nihilism sought to avail himself via problematic allusion to de-Christianised grace, Kierkegaard excavated from the *Erbauungsliteratur* a paradoxical notion of grace issuing from the Christian Godhead and befitting his grasp of *imitatio Christi* and negative theology.

IMITATIO CHRISTI

> *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" is…freedom's most extreme spiritual trial. Unimposed, freely appropriated suffering contains…the painful idea that God allows [human] beings to sense that [God] himself has freely appropriated it. But one cannot grasp these words of Christ, for the [divine] is indeed present in Christ. It is the purely [human] side that I emphasise. It would indeed be blasphemy if I were to pretend to have grasped [Christ] after saying a few words about the matter. Nothing less [than blasphemy].*[403]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

The theme of the imitation of Christ—and not only the compassionate Christ of Capernaum or the anguished Christ of Gethsemane but also the God-forsaken Christ of Golgotha—finds generous deliberation in "the older, weightier edifying literature" of the *Erbauungsautoren* and their forerunners with whom Kierkegaard was conversant.[404] Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), a spiritual forefather of Pietism rather than Pietist theologian

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[401] Matthew Held, "The Historical Kierkegaard: Faith or Gnosis," *The Journal of Religion* 37, no. 4 (1957): 260–6; Joel D. S. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard's Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 3.
[402] e.g., Albert Outler, "Protestant Spirituality: Orthodoxy and Piety in Modernity: Pietism and Enlightenment: Alternatives to Tradition," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (London: SCM, 1990), 240–56.
[403] *KJN* 4, 334/NB4:95.
[404] *KJN* 10, 308/NB33:54.

himself, was one germane thinker vis-à-vis Kierkegaard's theological debt to the tradition. Of note, anticipating Kierkegaard's notion of the "absolute difference between God and man," "the deep gulf of qualitative difference…between God and man" that is expressed most extensively by Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and by his faithful counterpart, Anti-Climacus, in the *Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* (but importantly endures throughout Kierkegaard's writings in his continual emphasis on the human side of the God-relationship), Bernard maintained a careful ontological division between God and humanity.[405] Moreover, Bernard leveraged this distinction toward the humble suffering of Christian love in the *imitatio Christi* motif.[406] "God and man have not the same substance or nature," Bernard writes, "if they are attached to each other by the tie of love, they may, with perfect truth, be said to be *one spirit*. But that unity is brought about by the concurrence of wills [rather] than by the union of essences."[407] And again, as Rowan Williams translates Bernard, "let no one ever presume that man's conformity to God is a likeness to the glory of his majesty rather than a lowly conforming to His will."[408] For Bernard, then, the relation of man to God is a union of wills and this union is perfectly modelled by Christ in, for example, the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42) but it explicitly is not to be mistaken as a fusion of ontological substance. The important point of this picture is that the distinction upheld by Bernard and later Kierkegaard motivates a turn to Christ in *imitatio Christi*. Insofar as a human being fundamentally cannot, to use Podmore's term,

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[405] *CUP 1*, 412ff./*SKS* 7, 375ff.; *SUD* 99/*SKS* 11, 211 (see also *SUD* 117/*SKS* 11, 229; *SUD* 121/*SKS* 11, 233; *SUD* 126–7/*SKS* 11, 237; *PC* 63ff./*SKS* 12, 75ff.; *PC* 140/*SKS* 12, 143).
[406] For more comprehensive examination of the similarities and dissimilarities between Bernard of Clairvaux and Kierkegaard, see Jack Mulder Jr., "Bernard of Clairvaux: Kierkegaard's Reception of the Last of the Fathers," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 23–45.
[407] Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon LXXI" in *Cantica Canticorum: Eighty-six Sermons on the Song of Solomon*, trans. and ed. Samuel J. Eales (London: Elliot Stock, 1895), 437.
[408] Rowan Williams, "Acrobats and Jugglers," in *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, 2nd rev. ed., (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2014), 119.

epistemologically and ontologically cross the abyss or unbridgeable chasm separating God and man, cannot simply relate to God as a being on the same ontological level, one is directed to Christ as both the mediator in the God-relationship and the prototype for human existence.[409] Indeed, with respect to the former, for Bernard and Kierkegaard alike, it is by entering into a relationship with Christ that it is even possible for one to enter into relationship with the transcendent (wholly and holy other) God. With respect to the latter, Bernard explains in his aptly titled meditation "On Loving God" that Christ is the prototype for human existence *qua* relating to God in that Christ personified the "holy and chaste love" that had precisely "no mixture of self-will in it."[410] Therefore, Bernard elaborates, in learning self-sacrificial, suffering love "[w]e have an example in our Saviour."[411] As we will see, the Pietist devotional authors will seize on and elaborate this idea and, by way of their efforts, come to influence Kierkegaard.

THE GOD-MAN AND THE ORDINAL PROBLEM OF THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Before elaborating this influence, however, it is worth addressing that the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity leading to the turn to Christ in *imitatio Christi* eminently informs Kierkegaard's stance on what is often seen as an insoluble ordinal problem in the theological ethics deriving from the Greatest Commandment. That is, as first introduced in Chapter I, whether loving God is primary to loving one's neighbour, vice versa, or whether the two can be decoupled at all. The debate is reflected in biblical studies outside of Kierkegaard scholarship specifically. For example, noting that Matthew's and Mark's gospels expressly enumerate the double love command such that love of God comes before love of neighbour, Roger Mohrlang contends that love of God is first and "the second great

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[409] Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 1.
[410] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 196.
[411] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 107.

commandment [i.e., love of neighbour] is properly understood only when viewed within the context of the more fundamental demand of the first."[412] Conversely, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison aver that the δεύτερος (i.e., 'second') used to rank love of neighbour after love of God in scriptural Matthew and Mark is "purely numerical" and Jesus sees the two commands as a package that together make up one great commandment.[413] In fact, they argue, if pressed, love of neighbour may actually outrank love of God. Defending this alternate serialisation against the charge of heresy, Davies and Allison note that citing the first commandment without the second leaves the demand of love insufficiently specified, hence why Luke's gospel does not serialise the double-love command at all. Moreover, the command to 'love the Lord thy God' is seldom referenced in the New Testament. Indeed, there is only one other passage within the gospels that references the love of God (v. Luke 11:42) and the command appears only sparingly elsewhere throughout the New Testament (John 5:42, 14:31; Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 2:9, 8:3, 16:22; Jas. 1:12, 2:5; 1 John 2:5, 2:15, 4:20-21, 5:2-3; Jude 21; Rev. 2:4), with John 14:15, 14:24, 21:15-17; 1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 6:24; and 1 Pet. 1:8 referring to loving Christ. Far more commonly, relationship to God is described in other terms, such as obeying God, and, in general, the New Testament expresses not human love for God but God's love for human beings (e.g., 1 John 4:10, 4:19). In contrast to the infrequency of the love of God, the command to love one's neighbour appears in one formulation or other *identidem* throughout the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 5:43, 19:19; John 13:34, 15:12; Rom. 12:10, 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 1 Thess. 3:12; Jas. 2:8; 1 Pet. 4:8; 1 John 4:7, 4:11). On the overall basis of these data, then, Davies and Allison contend that love of neighbour is in a certain sense prior to love of God. Finally, some scholars maintain that the double-love command is

[412] Roger Mohrlang, "Love," in *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 99.
[413] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 243.

simply an unrankable concurrence. Transitioning back to Kierkegaard studies proper, John Lippitt, for example, comments that anyone attempting to hierarchically decouple and arrange love of God and neighbour as a way of developing an ontology of loving God invariably reaches an impasse: "the inescapable point seems to be that love of God, neighbour and self are all inextricably linked. It is simply not possible to offer a *temporal* priority between loving God and loving the neighbour: both arise holistically."[414]

Now, if we attend exclusively to Kierkegaard on the ordinal issue, on the one hand, there is little doubt as to the inseparable concurrence of loving God and loving neighbour in his thought. Citing 1 John 3:17, and with palpable allusion to 1 John 4:20, Kierkegaard writes that "[h]e who sees his brother 'suffer need and closes his heart,'—yes, at that very moment he closes himself off from God. With love of God and love of one's neighbour it is the same as with double doors that open up at the same time, so that it is impossible to open the one without also opening the other, and impossible to close the one without also closing the other."[415] Moreover, Kierkegaard routinely observes the synonymy of loving God and neighbour in *Works of Love*: "The essentially Christian is this: truly to love oneself is to love God; truly to love another person is with every sacrifice (also the sacrifice of becoming hated oneself) to help the other person to love God or in loving God."[416] On the other hand, much is made of Kierkegaard's intrepid assertion in *Works of Love* that "God is the middle term" in all one's relationships.[417] This would seem to suggest an unambiguous apriority of loving God over or before loving neighbour. Indeed, it is not altogether difficult to adduce instances

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[414] John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 57. For hermeneutical discussion of the deserialised command to love God and neighbour in a single, two-pronged injunction, see Fuller, "The Double Command of Love," 44.
[415] *KJN* 8, 163/NB22:117.
[416] *WL* 114/*SKS* 9, 118. So decisive is this formulation that Kierkegaard reiterates it twice more in his ethical treatise almost verbatim and with equal lucidity (*WL* 107/*SKS* 9, 111; *WL* 130/*SKS* 9, 133).
[417] *WL* 107/*SKS* 9, 111.

ranging from the subtle to the explicit whereby Kierkegaard holds the love of God as the zenith of love and that loving God, as such, rightly takes precedence over all other love. In an 1849 journal entry, for example, Kierkegaard asserts: "the relationship is not to be reversed…one does not have the right to make romantic love and friendship [i.e., love between neighbours] into the truest form of love…[i]n brief, what Christianity fights for is, quite [simply], that God has first priority in a person's life at every single point in a person's existence, in every relationship of a person's life."[418]

Given the unbridgeable gulf between God and man and Christ's role as intermediary in the God-relationship, however, when Kierkegaard writes in his *tour de force* of Christian love that "*Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person—God—a person, that is, that God is the middle term*," it is perhaps most accurate to say that Christ is the *first* middle term and Christianity in fact teaches that love is a relationship between: a person—Christ—God—a person or, better yet, a person—God in Christ—a person.[419] The latter phraseology has the benefit of circumnavigating heretical dissociation of two thirds of the Trinity. In any case, expressly stressing the figure of Christ, the paradoxical God-man, in the love relationship schematic heuristically underscores the point that Kierkegaard (as with Bernard before him) conceives relationship to Christ in *imitatio Christi* as the only means by which finite human beings can relate to the infinite God and therefore, in turn, genuinely, Christianly, love their neighbour. Christ, in this way, resolves the ordinal impasse of answering which comes first, love of God or love of neighbour?

Then again, perhaps 'resolves' here is too strong. For, unlike Schopenhauer's philosophy, Kierkegaard explicitly equates the figure of Christ variously but consistently with the notion of absolute paradox—the incarnation of the eternal in time, God's revealing

[418] *KJN* 6, 265/NB12:193.
[419] *WL* 107/*SKS* 9, 111.

himself in "this definite particular [person], who looked like other people, spoke like them," and yet was God, Christ being that "something that thought itself cannot think," and so on.[420] Hence, paradox being contradictory to knowledge and understanding, Christ as the absolute paradox transcends the limits of human rationality and compels the choice of either faith in, or offense at, Him, neither of which, to be sure, offer conclusive 'resolution.' That said, the figure of Christ calling for imitation *does* resolve the ordinal problem in the following way. He does so in that, mindful of the fact that the infinite deferral of semantic meaning all too easily hedges toward inaction as one dithers over whether to rule something in or out of the relevant taxon, Christ (who concretely loved in mercifully responding to others' material and spiritual conditions and needs) stands as the concrete example directing followers away from the bottomless vortex of conceptual quibbling over the referent(s) of 'love,' 'God,' and 'neighbour' and therewith the casuistic evasion of practicing love. Again, in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard tellingly appeals to the activating words of Christ and states that one should begin with loving God while at the same time remarking on the invariable coincidence of loving God and neighbour:

> The matter is quite simple. A person should begin with loving the unseen, God, because then he himself will learn what it is to love. But that he actually loves the unseen will be known by his loving the brother he sees; the more he loves the unseen, the more he will love the people he sees…[God] continually [points] away from himself…saying, 'If you want to love me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me.' [cf. Matt. 25:40] God is too exalted to be able to receive a person's love directly."[421]

So, Christ resolves the ordinal issue by asserting the imperative to action. The Christian is called to act out the love modelled by Christ, not perseverate in analysing and dissecting its conceptual lineaments. Love *qua* action is thus paramount and, as Polk states the matter, for Kierkegaard, "[i]t is as if we cannot love the neighbour rightly without loving God first, that

[420] *KJN* 2, 147/JJ:58; *PF* 37/*SKS* 4, 243.
[421] *WL* 160/*SKS* 9, 161.

is to say, without loving Love—who after all 'first loved us' [1 John 4:19] and then told us to 'go and do likewise' [Luke 10:37]. That is why Christian love has constant reference to God" and, even more exactly, God in Christ.[422]

Giving further power to the notion that love of God modelled by Christ conditions the love of neighbour, then, attending to the central figure of Christ, the God in Christ term in the Christian love schematic, specifies that which sets Jesus' love ethic apart from all other love ethics commonly found in Judaism and antiquity.[423] In other words, it is not incidental that God in Christ picks out the most contested, most offensive aspect of Kierkegaard's Christian ethics: The radically extreme and explosively offensive love modelled by Christ—a suffering, truly other-regarding, and self-sacrificial love that subverts worldly notions of love by the call to unconditionality and non-preferentiality. That is, the call to unconditionally and non-preferentially love one's neighbour even when that neighbour is one's enemy, and to endure in one's love even whilst being hated. This kind of love intimates the kind of love commanded when the love of God in the Greatest Commandment is coalesced, as it is in Luke's gospel, with the love of neighbour. For loving God, in Kierkegaard's ethics, does not only mean being obedient to God's command—although it certainly does mean that, as Kierkegaard and a range of his pseudonyms unambiguously state—but equally to strive to be *like God* in the specific sense of loving even those who despise the lover. Just as God loves those who mock, scorn, and otherwise rebel and turn against Him. Just as Christ loved those who mercilessly tormented, rejoiced "insanely at the thought that [his] blood would be upon them and upon their children," and finally hatefully crucified him upon the Roman gallows of Calvary.[424] Turning again to Kierkegaard's ethical tract, then, *Works of Love* opens with a

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[422] Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard*, 40.
[423] For comparison of Jesus' love command in the New Testament relative to other love ethics found in antiquity, see Furnish, "The Settings in the Synoptic Gospels," in *The Love Command in the New Testament*, 60–87.
[424] *WL* 169/*SKS* 9, 169.

prefatory prayer, the below fragment of which reads as Kierkegaard asserting this point by setting the centrality of loving God perfectly modelled by Christ as the condition *for* loving one's neighbour. At the same time, though imitating Christ in one's love of God is primary to and enables one's love of neighbour, the love of neighbour is the truest sign that one in fact loves God:

> How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of all love in heaven and on earth; you who spared nothing but in love gave everything, you who are love, so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you! How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you who revealed what love is, you our Saviour and Redeemer, who gave yourself in order to save all. How could one speak properly of love if you were forgotten, you Spirit of love, who take nothing of your own but remind us of that love-sacrifice, remind the believer to love as he is loved and his neighbour as himself![425]

ERBAUUNGSLITERATUR AND KIERKEGAARD'S IMITATIO CHRISTI

With the view in hand of God in Christ as the term standing between each particular human being, I now turn to Kierkegaard's formulation of the *imitatio Christi* motif and the background from which it materialises. Of course, consonant with the meetings of the Moravian Brethren stressing the study of scripture, the New Testament itself is undoubtedly one of Kierkegaard's primary sources of *imitatio Christi*. Of the many verses describing what it means to follow Christ, the 'kenotic hymn' of Philippians 2:5–8 is especially illustrative: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in the fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."[426] In fact, harmonising with the Moravian message of Christ's lowly suffering from

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[425] *WL* 3–4/*SKS* 9, 12.

[426] Other notable verses portraying the imitation motif include Matt. 8:19, 8:21, 11:29, 16:24–25, 19:28; Mark 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21; Luke 9:23, 9:57, 9:61; John 1:43, 10:4, 10:27, 12:26, 13:36, 21:19, 21:22; Rom. 6:4, 8:4; 1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:10, 5:2; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 2:12, 4:1; 1 John 2:6.

his youth, to the extent that he had one, Kierkegaard may be said to hold a kenotic Christology after the spirit of this passage of the Epistle to the Philippians. Law's extensive study, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, as one eminent example, argues that Kierkegaard is a very special sort of "Chalcedonian kenoticist."[427] That is, while Kierkegaard scarcely mentions the Chalcedonian definition, his and certain of his pseudonyms' frequent references to the hypostatic union of Christ's simultaneously full humanity and full divinity (e.g., Anti-Climacus's *sic passim* references to the God-man) evinces tacit acceptance of the two-natures doctrine established at the Council of Chalcedon. Moreover, working from the general notion of kenosis and kenotic theism, Law argues that Kierkegaard subscribes to a triumvirate sense of kenosis such that (1) God debases His divine self to become man in Jesus Christ, (2) Jesus the God-man empties himself to become the lowliest of all human beings, and (3) further empties himself of even the most vestigial amount of self-assertion to undergo the humanly incomprehensible suffering of being rejected by those he came to save.[428]

Regardless of whether one agrees with all, some, or none of Law's analysis, however, it is virtually indisputable or at least requires a considerable amount of hermeneutical imagination to *not* discern in Kierkegaard's contemplations of *imitatio Christi* the deliverance of the Pietist and proto-Pietist upbuilding literature and the New Testament upon which it was founded: That the task of this life is to die to self and world inasmuch as the interior life of self-negation in dying away is prerequisite to love in the Christian sense. In the same year in which Kierkegaard read Schopenhauer in earnest, he writes:

> The question that [really] constitutes existence's examination of a [human] being is: Is there love in you[?]…This is something we will now get to see, says [Christianity], and it arranges everything to that end. If a [human] being can continue to love the one who makes him unhappy, and continue to believe that he, precisely he, is love, and that he is doing this out of love: Yes, then there is love in you. This is precisely God's relation to us [human] beings in

[427] Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 268.
[428] e.g., Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 269–74, but "Kierkegaard's Existential Kenoticism" more generally (pp. 267–88).

> [Christianity]. Humanly speaking, he makes a [person] unhappy; he knows this very well, and indeed the New Testament says this clearly enough. ["]But believe nonetheless, oh believe, that I, precisely I, am love and that it is precisely out of love that I am making you, humanly speaking, unhappy—Then there is love in you.["] After all, the love with which a [person] loves the one who makes him happy—well, this love cannot be called having love in one-self, because that love is of course constantly being replenished from without, and thus could also be self-love. But when the object becomes the one who is making you unhappy, then the love within you is of course denied any replenishment from without, and thus we will get to see whether there is love in you, which will be known by whether you continue to believe that the object is love and that it is precisely out of love for you that it is treating you this way. Granted, this is a frightful examination for a poor [human] being.[429]

And, from the same year and with equal loquacity, Kierkegaard again journals:

> The law of loving is quite simply the well-known: To love is to be transformed into likeness with the beloved…that God is love of course means that he will do everything to help you to love him, i.e., to be changed into likeness with him. As I have often said, he knows well enough how infinitely painful this transformation is for a [human] being; he is willing to suffer along with you—indeed, in love he suffers more than you do, suffers from all the heartache of misunderstanding—but he is not changed…For this is the point at which the transition to loving God, or to reformation into likeness with God, must take place. And thus begins what I describe in this way: humanly speaking, God must make you unhappy if he is to love you and you are to love him.[430]

These two entries reverberate the entry from one of Kierkegaard's earlier journals serving as the epigraph with which this chapter opened (*KJN* 7, 454/NB20:99). Taken together, and in view of Kierkegaard's affinity for Pietist literature, the *Erbauungsliteratur* is similarly awash in graphically portraying exactly this Christian love and its painful spiritual operation of rebirth or transformative surgery enacted in the task of selfhood as an "examination by existence," synonymising it with the Christian task of imitating Christ. In his foreword to what may well be considered a set text of Moravian Pietism, the anonymous fourteenth century *German Theology* (*Theologia Deutsch* or *Theologia Germanica*), Arndt, for example,

[429] *KJN* 10, 90–1/NB31:123.
[430] *KJN* 10, 181–3/NB32:93.

intimates palpable Pauline overtones (e.g., Gal. 2:20) and foreshadows Kierkegaard's understanding of the Christian task of life to write that in his work one finds

> pure love, desire for the highest, eternal good, disdain for the world, sacrifice of the individual human will, the crucifixion of your flesh, and conformity with Christ in patience, gentleness, humility, cross and affliction. In sum, how you are to die to yourself and to the world, and to live in Christ.[431]

As momentous as dying to (first) self and world is for Kierkegaard and the *Erbauungsautoren* before him, the idea cuts semantically close to the recurring consideration of the negation of self and world housed within nihilism, as discussed in the previous two chapters. We are, therefore, in perilously close proximity to eliding Kierkegaardian Christianity with Schopenhauerian nihilism, and as we have seen, multiple authors have done so. Crucially, however, whereas nihilism propounds one-sided negativity in the unreserved negation of self, world, all that which emanates, in Schopenhauer's parlance, from the will-to-live, for Kierkegaard, love's dying away in *imitatio Christi* sourced from the *Erbauungsautoren* may be taken to subserve what Thompson has termed an "empowering nihilism."[432]

That said, while mapping this nuanced notion onto the spiritual ancestry of the *Erbauungsliteratur*-inspired imitation of Christ theme inherited by Kierkegaard indeed requires some elaboration, I would first like to explicate and interrogate Thompson's account of Kierkegaard as endorsing nihilism, even if qualified as an "empowering" species of such. In this respect, Thompson's diagnosis of Kierkegaard's work as an empowering nihilism arises as part of his more general effort to document points of unity between Kierkegaard and

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[431] This is a translation extracted from *German Theology* housed within Kierkegaard's personal library: *Die Deutsche Theologie, eine sehr alte, für jeden Christen äußerst wichtige Schrift, mit einer Vorrede von Dr. Martin Luther und dem gewesenen Generalsuperintendenten Johann Arnd*, ed. Friedrich Conrad Krüger (Lemgo: Meyersche Hof-Buchhandlung, 1822), *ASKB* 634, p. 7. Interestingly, some of Schopenhauer's letters (Arthur Hübscher (ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer Gesammelte Briefe* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), 277, 425) indicate that he read a copy of '*Deutsche Theologie*' in 1852 with great enthusiasm and, as explored below, it may therefore be considered one late source in Schopenhauer's affinity for an atheistic interpretation of German mysticism.

[432] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 162.

Kierkegaard's former tutor, Hegelian theologian turned *persona non grata*, and intellectual nemesis, Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884). One such unity, Thompson contends, is that of a shared appreciation for the irreplaceable role of nihilism in the formation of the self. He writes, "[b]oth Martensen and Kierkegaard recognise that nihilism plays a role in the development of the self. Without nihilism or a nihilistic moment, the self lacks the appropriate consciousness of its shortcomings and it not likely to move beyond its prideful self-absorption. But nihilism can become disabling and enervating of it is not transcended. Both Martensen and Kierkegaard endorse an empowering sort of nihilism."[433] Here, with reference to Kierkegaard's well-known theory of the spheres of existence (see 326n), Thompson specifically avers that, for Kierkegaard, in the trajectory of selfhood from aesthetics to the ethical by means of irony and therefrom to religiousness by means of humour, "in both irony and humour," in particular, "nihilism plays a role."[434] Identifying the purported empowering nihilism of Kierkegaard as operative within irony and humour—the two *confinia* abridging dissociable existential spheres within Kierkegaard's scheme—as he does, it is important to understand the notion of a *confinium* in order to more fully understand Thompson's assessment of nihilism holding an important place in Kierkegaard's thought.

So, what is a *confinium*? If we use a spatial heuristic to think of Kierkegaard's theory of existence sphere as forming a topographical landscape, then a *confinium* is a liminal zone which forms the connecting link between spheres and enables an eventual qualitative transition in the dialectic housed within each to be possible. That is, a *confinium* is a transitional region which serves as the space allowing for a qualitative change in one's capacity to reflectively, psychologically, and existentially reason with and relate to oneself to transpire. The primary role of irony and so, too, humour as *confinia* pertains, then, to relating

[433] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 163.
[434] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 165.

oneself to a higher existential position than one has not, as yet, embraced but with which one is nevertheless imaginatively attempting to identify. More concretely, as Lippitt helpfully notes, the ironist is at the *confinium*, on the boundary of the aesthetic and the ethical inasmuch as "[t]he ironist has seen the limitations of the aesthetic life—a life which involves an endless evasive toying with existential possibilities—but has not yet made the movement to the ethical, in which ethically serious choices and commitments for one's own life are made. The ironist possesses a partial insight into the [ethical] stage 'beyond,' and thus occupies a transitional position in between the two [aesthetic and ethical] spheres of existence: aware of the limitations of the former, but unable or unwilling to make the move to the latter."[435] Likewise, with humour as the *confinium* partitioning ethics and religiousness, Thomas Oden aptly writes, "[l]ike Moses glimpsing the Promised Land from a distance, humour glimpses the arena of faith [religiousness] from afar but does not enter it."[436]

With this understanding of *confinia* on board, Thompson's suggestion is that Kierkegaard's nihilism is the relativising engine operating at the transitional points in the trajectory of self development by which a prior or lower-order existential sphere is relativised and one is prospectively propelled onward or upward to a more advanced or higher sphere. An aesthete may become ethical as a result of irony's relativisation of the aesthetic, irony's revealing the "*nihil* quality of the aesthetic" that disposes one to higher ethics.[437] In turn, the ethicist may become religious as a result of humour, as indicated when one sees "the humour in the serious rigour of the ethical mode" in the face of the manifest, if unflattering, human inability to live up to ethical ideals and thus continually standing in need of deliverances of

[435] John Lippitt, "Humor and Irony in the Postscript," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 151–2.
[436] Thomas C. Oden, "Introduction," in *The Humor of Kierkegaard: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 24.
[437] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 164.

religious existence (e.g., God's grace and forgiveness).[438] One may so progress and at each *confinium*, Thompson advises, "[w]hen this happens, the nihilistic experience involved in relativising the former stage of life has played its part in the existential advance."[439]

It is in this way, then, that, for Thompson, Kierkegaardian nihilism is "an important part of [Kierkegaard's] understanding of the God-human relation," and, as one might expect of a scholar seeking to uphold Kierkegaard's view of the plenitude of the God-relationship as the *summum bonum* of Kierkegaardian selfhood as Thompson is, carefully comments that "Kierkegaard's nihilism, to be sure, is not an enervating or disempowering nihilism but an empowering nihilism. It is a form of nihilism that ends not in nothing but in something."[440]

Taking stock of the assessment of Kierkegaard as offering an empowering nihilism, there is much in Thompson's account that is commendable. Specifically, I appreciate Thompson's felicitous phrasing of Kierkegaardian negation and confrontation of "life's *nihil*" that eventuates not in nothing but in something.[441] As well, I appreciate Thompson's more general effort to highlight, as I elaborate below, the ubiquitous tension coursing through Kierkegaard's thought whereby seeming "incongruities, ambiguities, and contradictions of existence" such as upbuilding/negation are held together.[442] The question is whether Thompson's designation of an "empowering nihilism" or "religious nihilism" is a tenable description with which to label such, especially in light of the model of nihilism developed in this dissertation.[443] On this, I do concur with Thompson that an enduring sense of negation needs to be accounted for in Kierkegaard's thought. For example, contrary to studies which simply equate irony with nihilism, I empathise with Thompson's effort in seeking to use a

[438] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 165.
[439] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 165.
[440] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 166.
[441] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 168.
[442] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 168.
[443] Thompson, *Following the Cultured Public's Chosen One*, 167.

phrase apart from irony to communicate the depth of Kierkegaardian negativity.[444] Considering irony and nihilism as one and the same concept such that one should opt to use the former (which Kierkegaard does employ) to entirely stand for the latter (which, as said, Kierkegaard does not generally employ), it seems to me (and putatively also Thompson), would obscure more than clarify, at least if one wants to avoid collapsing the theory of existence spheres into one indistinct imbroglio and uphold Climacus's notion of irony as a delimited *confinium* standing between the aesthetic and the ethical. The explicit thought here being that nihilism, and not irony, is more useful with regards to cohering the continuing sense of negation that Kierkegaard appears to be driving at and is first noted in *The Concept of Irony* but occurs beyond the first *confinium*, including, for example, in the second and last *confinium*, humour. As Kierkegaard remarks in his journals, "[h]umour is irony taken to its maximum vibration."[445] Indeed, regarding nihilism as *not* identical to irony seems to be a sound conceptualisation for differentiating the emptiness of the aesthetic existence from the "highest degree of weariness with life" that inevitably comes in the religious existence sphere with "Life's Destiny, Understood from a Christian Point of View" noted in Kierkegaard's final journal entry.[446]

Nevertheless, the strengths of Thompson's argument noted, it is not a trivial point that Kierkegaard was conversant with the Jacobian term nihilism (e.g., *KJN* 3, 148/Not4:22; *KJN* 3, 361–4/Not11:38) however never, not even once used the term in description of his own work. The term does not occur in his works and therefore is always something of an imputation, perhaps even, to revisit a phrase used in Chapter I, an artifact of *intentio lectoris*. On this score, then, I submit that referring to Kierkegaard as endorsing nihilism, even Thompsonian empowering nihilism, is a misleading misnomer and instead conserving a

[444] See, for example, Stack, "Kierkegaard and Nihilism," 274–92.
[445] *KJN* 1, 225/DD:36.
[446] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 405–6/Paper 591.

properly Kierkegaardian lexicon offers greater precision. Eminently, rather than empowering nihilism, I submit that the foremost strengths of Thompson's efforts to express the perduring sense of negation and ubiquitous tension coursing through Kierkegaard's thought can be maintained if we speak of Kierkegaard endorsing *love's dying away*—seemingly oxymoronic locution carrying lexical articles which Kierkegaard himself used, securely preserving those aspects of Kierkegaard's thought Thompson ostensibly hopes to highlight, and more readily mapped onto and recognisably derived from the theological ancestry of Moravian Pietism.

Forgoing Kierkegaard's endorsement of an empowering nihilism in favour of the Danish religious poet's endorsement of love's dying away, then, we may now proceed to consideration of the specific manner in which love's dying away in *imitatio Christi* is sourced from the *Erbauungsautoren*. As already noted, the Moravianism in which Kierkegaard was raised placed the suffering of Christ in the foreground. In his seminal tome for which he is best known, *True Christianity*, the Pietist theologian Arndt advises that suffering inevitably ensues, not from merely existing as a human being, as in Schopenhauer's philosophy, but from following Christ. More specifically, from loving as Christ loved. Christians, therefore, following the one whose love and being was heterogenous with the fallen world should expect to suffer, to bear with poverty, loneliness, derision, slander, pain, and persecution:

> For we know that the Son of God himself travelled this way before us, and by his holy example sanctified it, not having 'entered into his glory but by sufferings.' Luke 24:26…the Lord did not spare himself, but devoted himself entirely to the service of others, undergoing all from no other impulse than fervent love and charity; so this love of our Redeemer should awaken love in our souls, and never should we grow faint and weary under any affliction.[447]

[447] Arndt, *True Christianity*, Book II:232. Hereafter, as the translation of Peter C. Erb condenses Books II–VI of Arndt's work but is otherwise, I think, linguistically preferable the 1872 edition of Boehm's 1712 translation, unless otherwise stipulated, I cite Johann Arndt, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). Therein, the thematics of suffering in the imitation of Christ are present throughout *True Christianity* but are especially prominent in Book 2, Chapters 13–21 (pp. 205–8).

Echoing Arndt and the other *Erbauungsautoren*, early and, all the more so, late (even enduring, if radicalised, through his 1854 encounter with Schopenhauer), Kierkegaard regularly stressed suffering as integral to becoming a Christian. He stressed the abject cruelty of what happens to the Christian in the sinful world in which the Christian must live and that, painful as it is to witness, unfolding from the existence examination of whether there is love within the individual, Christianity "requires that he [the Christian] love [people] with all his heart, it is not its fault that this is rewarded with persecution."[448] Indeed, Kierkegaard enduringly presents suffering, and distinctively voluntary suffering, "at the hands of human beastliness," and not merely suffering of the incidental sort, as requisite to "becoming spirit" and the truest marker of the God relationship.[449] For Kierkegaard, being a Christian "is bound up with suffering…and yet the suffering comes from God. Nor does [suffering] stand in an accidental relation to being a [Christian]. No, it is inseparable from it…" such that, recalling both the synthesis of temporality-eternity comprising one dimension of the task of selfhood noted in Chapter I as well as the ontological vision of the absolute difference between divine and human being Kierkegaard shared with Bernard of Clairvaux, "[t]he suffering is connected to the fact that God and the [human] being are qualitatively different, and that the collision, within temporality, of temporality and eternity must give rise to suffering."[450] In other words, the eternity Kierkegaard diagnoses Schopenhauer as lacking is found here in the suffering attending relationship with God and the task of Kierkegaardian selfhood.

Kierkegaard, in summation, unequivocally acknowledged the undiminishable significance of human suffering and saw such suffering as leading, when like seeks like in spiritual propinquity, to the suffering Christ, the absolute paradox, mediator in the God-

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[448] *KJN* 5, 117/NB7:72.
[449] *KJN* 10, 53/NB31:73.
[450] *KJN* 10, 306-7/NB33:53. Further positing the Christian suffering–eternity connexion, Kierkegaard journals in 1854 that "[Christianity] is: this life, sheer suffering—eternity" (*KJN* 10, 167/NB32:67).

relationship, and only "goal and criterion" of the Kierkegaardian self.[451] Suffering, therefore, does not problematise the God-man's divinity. As Law describes, "[f]or Kierkegaard the lowliness and suffering of Christ are not difficulties that threaten to undermine Christ's divinity. Lowliness and suffering are essential features of Christ's divinity. Indeed, Kierkegaard arguably exaggerates the lowliness of Christ beyond the Gospel witness. Whereas kenotic theologians [such as Gottfried Thomasius (1802–1875)] attempt to alleviate the problem of Christ's lowliness, Kierkegaard accentuates it."[452] For Kierkegaard, imitating Christ, one mired in the suffering paradoxically (and hence possibly offensively) issuing from God wills, when not offended, "to suffer approximately as he [Christ] suffered in this world."[453] Suffice it to say that a lot hangs on this 'approximately' and the human (in)ability to understand and truly imitate Christ's suffering signals the essential need to clarify Kierkegaard's particular grasp of Christian grace. I therefore revisit this point below. For now, it is enough that, stemming from Pietism's emphasis on the suffering Christ and the deep depression this left within Kierkegaard from the earliest childhood, and mirrored to him in the devotional authors he read, the melancholy Dane was entirely transfixed with the idea that "[i]n this temporal, sensual, and—as [Christianity] teaches us—sinful world, the idea [i.e., truth] can only exist in suffering. Only once has the idea been unconditional—in [Christ]; his life was therefore…unconditional, absolute suffering."[454] And, whereas God is love, "[t]he fact is, Christ is not love, least of all in the [human] sense; he was *the truth*, the truth absolutely," "he was *the Truth*."[455] For Kierkegaard, the fact that Christ is truth means that he must suffer, for the world violently rejects *the Truth* and resists having its untruth cast into the light by the presence of *the Truth* and, therefore, the same rejection holds for all who

[451] *SUD* 114/*SKS* 11, 226.
[452] Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 277.
[453] *PC* 178/*SKS* 12, 180.
[454] *KJN* 9, 471/NB30:97.
[455] *KJN* 4, 276/NB3:65; *WA* 73/*SKS* 11, 77.

follow Christ en route to becoming a self.[456] With Christ as truth, then, emulating his lowliness and suffering or, to use Arndt's words, imitating his "patience, gentleness, humility, cross and affliction," is a concrete means of relating to truth—that is, a concrete instantiation of that which Climacus describes with his "subjectivity is truth" dictum.[457] As Barnett notes, imitating Christ is the concrete means of pursuing truth and, for Kierkegaard, involves lovingly "suffering with and on behalf of the neighbour. In this form of suffering love, which is a self-emptying, Christ…stands as humanity's *Vorbild* [i.e., prototype]."[458]

Suffering with and on behalf of others should remind one of Schopenhauer's ethic of *Mitleid*, or 'suffering-with.' Kierkegaard's turn to the prototype of the suffering Christ, however, signals a distinction between nihilism as articulated in the earlier chapters of this dissertation on the one hand and love's dying away on the other. That is, breaking from a nihilism that interprets suffering—even Christ's suffering or countenancing the suffering Christ as personifying the denial of the will-to-live—to the end of unqualified negation of self and world, Kierkegaard erects a dialectical posture toward suffering and thereby puts negation in the service of the Christian religious. Here, in a sense that will become even more clear upon the consideration of negative theology below, we do not find Kierkegaard

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[456] Kierkegaard writes in his late journals, for example, "[a]s a Christian, you will of course refer everything to God; it is truly your desire to be loved by God and to love God. Now, take the [New Testament], especially the gospels, what do they teach? They teach that the more you devote yourself to God, the more certain it is that you will come to suffer in this world; that was how things went with his beloved Son, with the apostles, and that is how it is predicted they will go with all true [Christians]" (*KJN* 9, 196/NB27:80).

[457] *CUP 1*, 203/*SKS* 7, 186. See also *CUP 1*, 189–251/*SKS* 7, 173–228 as well as Ferreira's work ("The 'Socratic Secret,'" 6–24) for discussion of 'subjectivity is truth' in the context of Religiousness A and B. In brief, Climacus views the path of subjectivity as evolving from Religiousness A to B. Religiousness A consists in a "dialectical inward deepening" (*CUP 1*, 556/*SKS* 7, 505) in one's relation to the three-fold pathos of resignation, suffering, and guilt, each of which is conducive to the "break with immanence" (*CUP 1*, 571/*SKS* 7, 519) characterising Religiousness B wherein one "relates himself to something outside himself" (*CUP 1*, 561/*SKS* 7, 510), namely, Jesus Christ, the paradoxical "God in time as an individual human being" (*CUP 1*, 561/*SKS* 7, 510).

[458] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 67.

performing a sort of Hegelian logical circumnavigation of nihilism in the way of a negation that negates itself. Rather, under different guises including his dissertation-long treatment of irony, Kierkegaard recognised that ardent negation and the suffering attending thereto is not to be subdued or overcome but enacted to the full as it plays an indispensable role in the religious—distinctively the religious—formation of the self. Of note, negation (including irony as its initial, incipient, or embryonic form) is motivationally indispensable to the self in that one bitten by the suffering attending negation is "like someone bitten by a snake—indeed, he is bitten by something more painful and in the most painful place, namely in the heart."[459] Suffering in negation thus provides an imperative catalyst, an indelibly engrained impetus without which the self lacks the appropriate consciousness of its own shortcomings and is therefore unlikely to move and continue moving beyond all stunted forms of the self including, for example, not just aesthetic enjoyment and, as Thompson says, prideful self-absorption, but also ethical legalism and pharisaic hypocrisy. As Kierkegaard records in a journal with reference to the yawning aporia opened up by Socratic irony and negation, "[t]he fact that several of Plato's [aporetic] dialogues end without result has a far deeper reason than I had earlier thought. For this is a reproduction of Socrates' maieutic skills, which make the reader or listener self-active, and therefore end not in a result but with a sting."[460] Not empowering nihilism but rather the perduring sense of negation encompassed in love's dying away, then, has its uses indeed.

But to save Kierkegaardian dying away from being identical with nihilism, a negating will or movement tending toward asceticism and culminating in the negation of the self and world and countenancing everything as *nihil*, there must be something that makes Kierkegaard's turn to the prototype of the suffering Christ constructive, ending not in nothing

[459] *CI* 48/*SKS* 1, 109.
[460] *KJN* 2, 276/JJ:482.

or total *nihil* but something. To recall an entry cited in the previous chapter enfolded in Kierkegaard's critique of Schopenhauerian nihilism, "Christian asceticism has as its point of departure in the thought that, in and of itself, existence is not suffering."[461] Christian asceticism, in other words, has meaning in granting self, world, all of temporal creation to stand for something more than that which needs negation. It is, rather, the arena, even if an austere one, in which the examination by existence is conducted—and Kierkegaard distinctively recognises that negation can and will debilitate if it is not put in the service of a higher, that is, eternal aim. Herein rests all of Kierkegaard's objection to Schopenhauer's nihilism lacking religious eternity and the latter's effort to erect a goal within goalless creation that was described in the previous chapter and which ultimately leads Schopenhauer to problematically appeal to de-Christianised grace. Descriptively, herein also rests all of that which was adumbrated in Chapter I as Kierkegaard's conception of dying away which he repeatedly invokes in describing the love of God. What makes Kierkegaardian negation constructive is that it sets in time an eternal, Christ-imitative task: The existence examination in the medium of love's dying away or imitating Christ in time and this is God's test of whether love truly resides within an individual—an examination which is itself rooted in love because "God's tests are grounded in love."[462]

Acutely in his religious discourses, Kierkegaard holds that believing that God's tests are rooted in love or that those "God tests he loves" and, more generally, that God is love is integral to loving God.[463] For, as he writes in one of his *Christian Discourses* in particular, "if you believe that God is love, then you also love him."[464] Staying with the present consideration of the constructive aspect of Kierkegaard's at-times nihilistic-sounding *imitatio*

[461] *KJN* 9, 394/NB30:12.
[462] *KJN* 2, 123/HH:12.
[463] *EUD* 98/*SKS* 5, 104.
[464] *CD* 193/*SKS* 10, 203.

Christi, though, where Schopenhauer seeks to break from Christianity but tacitly reverts to a Christian theological heritage to suggest the intelligibility of his salvific notion of the will-to-live's self-negation, the salvific (indeed, soteriological) aspect of Kierkegaard's dying away in *imitatio Christi* is sensibly drawn from the theological edifice of the *Erbauungsautoren* and their progenitors. On this theological bedrock, what otherwise may sound like nihilism is not one-sided negativity but a restless struggle in the existence examination of selfhood toward the empowering prospect of salvation. In other words, love's dying away comprises a process ending not in nothing or total *nihil* but a genuine, indeed salvific, something. More specifically, though definitely entailing the continual death throes of the "first self" or, in Pauline vernacular, the struggling of the "old self" in a lowering or humbling of the human in relation to God, this restless struggle in the existence examination is constitutive of the truer or deeper self's salvation in Christ.[465] Kierkegaard and the proto-Pietist Tauler, for one, shared and continually expressed the inward struggling of the self and the need to die to "all earthly and created realities:"[466] As Peter Šadja comments, "[i]nwardly this requires the constant process of dying to one's own will. The death of one's own will is…both a synonym for the union of human and Divine will by means of [as with Bernard of Clairvaux] the transformation of the human will…[and] the key to the highest possible similarity to Christ and the peak of earnest discipleship," and, noting a topic to which I return below, "[i]t is obvious from Kierkegaard's journals and papers that he studied how the transformation of will was conceived of in mediaeval asceticism [e.g., *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 398–400/Paper 588] and in 'old devotional literature' [*KJN* 10, 308/NB33:54]."[467]

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[465] *EUD* 314ff/*SKS* 5, 306ff.; Col. 3:3.
[466] Johannes Tauler, *Johann Tauler's Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, ed. Nikolaus Casseder (Frankfurt am Main: Hermannschen Buchhandlung, 1821), *ASKB* 282, p. 7, cited in Peter Šajda, "Tauler: A Teacher in Spiritual Dietethics: Kierkegaard's Reception of Johannes Tauler," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, 282n143).
[467] Šajda, "Tauler," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, 282–3.

Tauler himself, follower of arch-German mystic Eckhart and one of the foremost contributors to the mediaeval ascetic and devotional literature, consistently wrote on the spiritual empowerment and human perfection lying on the other side of the struggle to die to all created realities, especially in his *The Imitation of the Poor Life of Jesus*: "We have seen…that the highest perfection of the human being consists in true, complete poverty of spirit…Now, then, we want to show also to which endpoint its inner eyes must be directed in order to achieve it. The endpoint is, first, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, since he himself not only taught poverty, but also lived it. Now, this life and this teaching you should follow, O man, if you would be perfect!"[468] Likewise, in what is almost certainly the most well-known discourse on the *imitatio Christi* motif, Thomas à Kempis's naturally titled *The Imitation of Christ*, the author writes:

> Remember that you must live a dying life. The more completely we die to self, the more we begin to live to God. No one is fit to understand heavenly things unless we are willing to endure hardships for Christ's sake. Nothing is more acceptable to God and nothing is more salutary for you than to suffer gladly for Christ's sake. And if you have the choice, choose to suffer hardships for Christ's sake rather than be fortified by much compassion. For, in this way, you will resemble Christ and all His Saints.[469]

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[468] Tauler, *Johann Tauler's Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, 107, cited in Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 70. It should be acknowledged that, insofar as the apocryphal nature of "Tauler's" *The Imitation of the Poor Life of Jesus* was not demonstrated until 22 years after Kierkegaard's death, 1877, for all intents and purposes, for Kierkegaard, this text just was the work of Tauler. At least, neither Kierkegaard nor any of his sources differentiated between Tauler's writings and those merely attributed to him but of disputed authorship (see Šajda, "Tauler," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, §II. The Issue of Tauleriana, Pseudo-Tauleriana, and Theologia Deutsch, 266–8).

[469] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Robert Jeffrey (London: Penguin, 2013), 67. Kierkegaard owned two copies of Thomas's tractate: a Latin typograph, *De imitatione Christi* (Paris: apud Fredericum Leonard, 1702), *ASKB* 272; and *Om Christi Efterfølgelse, fire Bøger*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. J. A. L. Holm (Copenhagen: Wahlske Boghandels, 1848), *ASKB* 273. Famously, Thomas was an adherent to the *devotio moderna* movement to address the dangers hit upon by, as elaborated below, the Rhineland mystics. For more comprehensive study of Kierkegaard's reception of Thomas, see Joel D. S. Rasmussen, "Thomas à Kempis: *Devotio Moderna* and Kierkegaard's Critique of 'Bourgeois-Philistinism'," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Mediaeval Traditions*, 289–298.

For his part, if nowhere else, one unmistakeably sees the echoes of Tauler, Thomas, and the theological legacy to which they both belong in Kierkegaard such as when the latter writes:

> You talk of wanting to seek comfort in [Christ]. All right, but then watch out that there is nothing egotistical here. Yes, you are supposed to be like [Christ]. All right, then try it just when you yourself are suffering most, then think only of comforting others; for this is what he did. The task is thus not to seek comfort—but to be of comfort.[470]

As this brief ancestry of love's dying away tracking to Kierkegaard shows, the negation of self and world embraced by Kierkegaard is not a one-sided nihilistic bludgeon but a dual-edged carving knife. As such, on Kierkegaard's view, the God-relationship encompassing *imitatio Christi* is, on the one hand, "a boundlessly absolute depth of salvation," true happiness and blessedness.[471] In fact, "[l]oving God is the only happy love," but "on the other hand it is also terrifying," something terrible, inasmuch as before God one becomes nothing.[472] As we saw in the Introduction of this dissertation, Kierkegaard observes that loving God in truth is to "adoringly [let] yourself be entirely annihilated by God."[473] "Therefore in every [human] being," Kierkegaard analyses, "there is quite certainly a prudent fear of [really] getting involved with God, because involving himself with God he becomes nothing."[474] Here one encounters the full force of Kierkegaard's idea that relation to God produces a cavernous spiritual wound within the self and that relating to "the unconditioned" is identical with the particularly Christian religious form of suffering, which, contra aesthetic panegyrics of suffering, "ought to be a secret and be before God in secret."[475] In turn, elaborating Kierkegaard's idea, most individuals prefer secular drunkenness to the suffering of Christian sobriety—the latter defined in *Judge for Yourself!* as coming "to oneself in self-

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[470] *KJN* 4, 260/NB3:30.
[471] *KJN* 4, 95/NB:138.
[472] *KJN* 4, 109/NB:174.
[473] *KJN* 10, 49/NB31:68.
[474] *KJN* 4, 109/NB:174.
[475] e.g., *KJN* 10, 79/NB31:109; *CUP 1*, 489/*SKS* 7, 443.

knowledge and before God as nothing before him, yet infinitely, unconditionally engaged"—and most individuals *qua* secular drunkards deploy worldly wisdom to abscond from the existence examination, therein failing the task of Kierkegaardian selfhood.[476] They never allow themselves to appear naked before God for the divine examination of whether there is love in them, preferring instead to hide "in the crowd, to want, as it were, to avoid God's inspection of oneself as a single individual, [to] avoid hearing God's voice as a single individual, as Adam once did when his bad conscience fooled him into thinking that he could hide among the trees."[477] As Kierkegaard sarcastically comments, "in relation to God one must always be sure of having something to hold on to, so that he does not entirely obliterate the person."[478]

This 'something to hold on to' is the self-same sin that Haufniensis says stabilises oneself against God in the anxiety of metanoia when Haufniensis metaphorically discusses anxiety as dizziness in *The Concept of Anxiety*. "[A]nxiety is the dizziness of freedom," Kierkegaard's watchful pseudonym writes, "which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis [of selfhood] and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself."[479] So, too, having something to hold on to evinces the despair that Anti-Climacus, the "the physician of souls," dissects in *The Sickness unto Death*.[480] Within Anti-Climacus's anthropology, recalling the crabbed conception of selfhood observed in Chapter I, despair *qua* failure of selfhood is a "misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another [i.e., God]…so that the misrelation in that relation which is for itself also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the [divine] power that

[476] *FSE* 104/*SKS* 16, 160.
[477] *UDVS* 128/*SKS* 8, 228.
[478] *KJN* 4, 114/NB:187.
[479] *CA* 61/*SKS* 4, 365.
[480] *SUD* 26/*SKS* 11, 142.

established it."[481] Having something (else) to hold on to (apart from God) in relation to God comprises a despairing misrelation to oneself in one's interior life of dying away and, religiously understood, the misrelation is reflected in an absent or ruptured relationship to God. One holds on to some finitude against God and thus misrelates to God in order that God does not obliterate the self that one has apparently manufactured of their own accord. The misrelation of despair, as one recent commentator explains, "is manifested psychologically above all in a split will," a holding onto something against God, "a will that wills two things and tortures itself in an ongoing battle of these two wills and reveals the possibility, on the part of those who wish to bring it to conclusion, of achieving a purity of heart that wills one thing."[482] In this way, the something to hold on to as the despair of *The Sickness unto Death* is lucidly equated with Kierkegaard's comprehensive examination of the deep and nearly inexhaustible split-willed duplicity in the human heart and conscience known as "doublemindedness" in "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing."[483] Again, now exploring the difficult notion of love's dying away, if we look to the *Erbauungsautoren* and their forebears, we see the roots from which Kierkegaard's thought sprung. In a sermon on "Union with God," for example, Tauler writes of the need "[t]o die to self" as the need "to totally give up all self-seeking, all multiplicity," and, portending the sentiment shared by Kierkegaard in the "Purity of Heart" discourse, Tauler proclaims that "[t]he less thou art multiplied, the more shalt thou be single-minded and single-hearted."[484] Stabilising sin in the face of metanoiaic anxiety, despair as a misrelation in the self- and hence God-relationship, doublemindedness,

[481] *SUD* 14/*SKS* 11, 130; *SUD* 142/*Pap.* VIII^2 B 170:2.
[482] Vincent A. McCarthy, *Kierkegaard as Psychologist* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 138.
[483] *UDVS* 63/*SKS* 8, 171.
[484] Johannes Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, trans. Walter Elliott (Washington, D.C.: Apostolic Mission House, 1910), 243.

all of these stand for the same something to which one holds so that God does not entirely annihilate the person in their relation to Christian divinity.

As the above descriptions attest, then, Kierkegaard was, as Bruce Kirmmse puts it, "a tough-minded theologian who never gives his reader a free ride."[485] Indeed, as one "like a spy in a higher service" to God, Kierkegaard infiltrates and exposes the labyrinthine psychology of evasion and repeatedly stresses that relating to God properly via *imitatio Christi* demands "an unconditional break with everything in order to follow him."[486] In doing so, Kierkegaard recites Arndt's warning in *True Christianity* against making exceptions to dying away whilst at the same time cautioning against the spiritual pride that surreptitiously looms as one successfully dies away but eschews grace and arrogates to themselves "the greatest possible self-satisfaction" of aseity and being "pure spirit."[487] So penetrating is Kierkegaard's recurring contemplation of the convoluted psychology and torturous path of love's dying away and the incalculable resistances thereto that it is not unfair to say that Kierkegaard stands for, to adopt a Ricoeurian phrase, the rigorous application of a hermeneutic of suspicion directed towards oneself coupled with a hermeneutic of charity directed toward others.[488] As he writes in a journal, "[m]ost people are subjective toward themselves and objective toward all others, sometimes horribly objective—ah, the task is precisely to be objective in relation to oneself and subjective in relation to others."[489] Alongside his analysis of dying away in relating to God, Kierkegaard also staunchly recognises that if one really

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[485] Bruce H. Kirmmse, "Introduction: Letting Nature Point Beyond Nature," to *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses*, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xiii.
[486] *PV* 87/*SKS* 16, 66; *KJN* 8, 17/NB21:18.
[487] *KJN* 9, 165/NB27:52.
[488] For full-length discussions of the hermeneutics of suspicion and charity, see Paul Ricoeur, "The Conflict of Interpretation," in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 20–36, as well as Merold Westphal, *Suspicion & Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998).
[489] *KJN* 4, 162/NB2:57.

does take the God relationship seriously then being reduced to nothing is an unavoidable consequence. "[I]t is *always* the same," he writes, "the closer you come to God, the more rigorous he becomes," the more rigorous the suffering becomes.[490] But Kierkegaard's reception and reworking of the *imitatio Christi* theme from the older devotional literature is as complex as it is psychologically piercing. And, as should now be clear, it is deliberately fraught with tensions. Love's dying away in Kierkegaard, to reiterate, is not one-sided negation but, on the strength of the struggle to love God and therein believe that God is love, a constructive, indeed salvific undertaking. In it we find the pathos of tension, psychomachia and not tranquil extinction of the will, ardour of spiritual trial and not placid resignation, duality and not one-sided negativity.[491] This irreducibly complex struggle, revisiting Thompson's apt words, ends not in nothing but in something. Consonant with Kierkegaard's own rote identification as one who was "a genius in a market town" but not an apostle and thus fundamentally "without authority," Kierkegaard writes that "[e]very step toward the ideal is a step backward; for the progress…consists precisely in my further discovering the ideal's perfection—and accordingly my greater distance from it."[492] Exemplifying the paradoxical nature of the process of love's dying away, as one comes closer in relation to God in *imitatio Christi*, one is increasingly annihilated or reduced to nothing, but in and through the annihilation one arrives at an even more profound relating: "Yet we have come closer to God; but, as in relation to the ideal, where every step forward is a step backward, so in relation to God: Approach, remove, and yet actual approach."[493] It is because of this dialectical process, this circumscribed yet determinate negation directed toward an eternal

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[490] *KJN* 8, 268/NB23:128.
[491] For a concerted study of Kierkegaard's notion of spiritual trial (*Anfægtelse*) and the German mystical, Lutheran, and Pietist background thereto, see Podmore's *Struggling with God* as well as David Lawrence Coe, "Anfechtung/Anfægtelse" in *Kierkegaard and Luther* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 195–238.
[492] *KJN* 5, 228/NB9:41; *PV* 12/*SKS* 13, 20; *KJN* 8, 43/NB21:67.
[493] *KJN* 8, 329/NB24:13a.

goal in time that is entirely absent in the all-embracing, unrestrained, one-sided negativity of Schopenhauerian nihilism, that Kierkegaardian selfhood, in a distinctive synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, inverts the worldly relation of temporality and eternity to declare that "[i]n a noble sense, to become nothing in this world [i.e., temporality] is the condition for becoming something in the other world [i.e., eternity]."[494]

At this point, as any reading of an apparently oxymoronic concept like love's (e.g., upbuilding, constructive) dying away (e.g., negation, destruction) would suggest, it is difficult to avoid detecting the fact that manifold senses of paradox saturate Kierkegaard's thought. Love's dying away as a process of becoming nothing in time works towards something in eternity, every step forward is always one step backward in relation to God, salvific relation to God via Christ is an infinitely escalating suffering. In one of his most concerted meditations on suffering, *The Gospel of Sufferings*, Kierkegaard asserts that "[w]hen a person suffers and wills to learn from what he suffers, *he continually comes to know only something about himself and about his relationship to God; this is the sign that he is being educated for eternity*."[495] Set in the context of his broader thought, this statement is yet another expression of paradox. For Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms recurrently contend that relating to God in *imitatio Christi* eventuates in the dissolution of human ratiocinative capacities to "know" and, therewith, solve the absolute paradox of Christ. In fact, as much as the existence examination of love's dying away and imitating Christ by loving in time is set as an eternal task, the entire treatise of *The Gospel of Sufferings* may be read as an argument that, human suffering notwithstanding, the task tends towards the incomprehensible. Namely, Christ underwent suffering that goes far beyond what human beings are even potentially capable of experiencing, knowing, or understanding, never mind imitating. In other words,

[494] *KJN* 10, 294/NB33:48.
[495] *UDVS* 257/*SKS* 8, 355.

for Kierkegaard, earnestly relating to God in *imitatio Christi* and therein being eternally edified in the school of suffering en route to becoming a self does not result in Gnostic knowledge but rather an evacuation, kenosis, or self-emptying of human knowledge and understanding of Christ. Alongside the passage of the Epistle to the Philippians noted above, the kenotic passage most prominent in Kierkegaard's authorship is Christ's cry of dereliction (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) insofar as it forcefully expresses, as Law comments, "the intensity of the suffering Christ was prepared to undergo on behalf of human beings, even to the extent of experiencing God-forsakenness, and Christ's assumption of the form of a lowly, abased, humiliated, and suffering servant so that he could minister to all human beings regardless of rank or status."[496] Indeed, it is fair to say that this iteration of Kierkegaard's paradox is a reworking of the idea of kenosis in such a way as to emphasise that the love that motivates Christ's self-abasement transcends all human attempts to understand it and therefore the dissolution of human rational capacities is total. Again Law writes, "[t]he would-be follower is called upon to undergo what we might call a 'kenosis of understanding.' If we are truly to become followers of Christ, we must abandon our pretensions to be able to know and understand Christ. We must put such pretensions aside and 'crucify' the understanding in order to accept Christ as our Saviour."[497]

The kenosis or crucifixion of the understanding puts us at the doorstep of negative theology and, specifically, the *via negativa*. That is, standing for "the negative way" or "by way of denial," the theological orientation deriving from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*c*. 5th–6th century AD) comprising the negation of all positive terms predicated of God in light of the incapacity of human thought, knowledge, and language to grasp the hidden and

[496] Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 283.
[497] Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 286.

incomprehensible reality of God and the mystery of the Incarnation.[498] As I now consider, no less than the *imitatio Christi* motif proper, the *via negativa* or *via negationis* is found in the *Erbauungsautoren* and thereby nurtured Kierkegaard's own theological development.[499]

NIHIL AND NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

> *Loving God is the only happy love, but on the other hand it is also terrifying. A [human] being has no standard of measure…in relation to God; he cannot compare himself with God; in that case he becomes nothing…Therefore in every [human] being there is quite certainly a prudent fear of [really] getting involved with God, because by involving himself with God he becomes nothing. And even if a [human] being, [humanly] speaking, makes an honest effort to will what God wants, in relation to God it is as if he can never get under way; the little bit of progress he can make disappears as nothing before God's holiness.*[500]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard, NB (1847)*

> *God creates everything out of nothing—and everything God is to use he first turns into nothing.*[501]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard, NB31 (1854)*

Jointly denoting the nothingness of individuals in relation to God as these entries do, one may readily, and once again, observe the influence of the proto-Pietist and German mystic, Tauler, upon Kierkegaard. In particular, for Tauler, *imitatio Christi* is grounded in the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Ontologically speaking, that God creates *ex nihilo*

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[498] Denys Turner, "Apophaticism, Idolatry and the Claims of Reason," in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.
[499] On the negative theology of Kierkegaard, see Law's *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* and Richard McCombs, "Reverse Theology," in *The Paradoxical Rationality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 83–99.
[500] *KJN* 4, 109/NB:174.
[501] *KJN* 10, 111/NB31:155.

means that all creatures are "truly *nothing*."[502] Accordingly, on Tauler's account, the aim of the Christian life is for one to return "into God" and, more specifically, to "give up the nothingness of [their] created self" by letting go of all worldliness and world-mindedness in 'releasement' (*Gelassenheit*) so that they may ultimately pass into the eminent "nothingness of God."[503] By this latter designation, Tauler means the achievement of a state of detachment and "poverty of spirit" that "clings to nothing, and nothing to it" and, hence, the realisation of a spiritual state in which one is totally dependent upon "that which is beyond all things."[504] Whereas the writings of his intellectual predecessor, Eckhart, may be considered the expression of a more thoroughgoing metaphysical project, Tauler as one of the masters of living (*lebmeistern*) was concerned to root his ontological musings in practical guidance in an ethic of striving after "an unfathomable depth of humility."[505] Largely correspondent with love's dying away, this ethic is naturally purifying such that, routinely recruiting the metaphors of interiority, ascent, lightness and darkness, and oneness with God typical of the mediaeval Christian mysticism of which he was part, for Tauler the Dominican friar, the individual is to relinquish or turn from the nothingness of their created self in order to walk in the divine light in a mystical union with the "divine abyss" that is "inaccessible to our reason" and involves a "boundless lowliness of spirit."[506] Being "inaccessible to our reason,"

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[502] Johannes Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Predigten, Vollständige Ausg*, ed. Georg Hofmann (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 420, cited in Oliver Davies, "Johannes Tauler," in *God Within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe*, rev. ed. (New York: New City Press, 2006), 86.
[503] Josef Schmidt, "Introduction," in *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, trans. Maria Shady (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 29–31.
[504] Tauler, *Johann Tauler's Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, 1–2, cited in Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 70.
[505] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 608.
[506] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 608. Two studies of which I am aware, far more comprehensively than I do here, detail the complex metaphorics of what Saint Bonaventure engagingly called the journey of the soul into God ("The Soul's Journey into God," in *The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 51–116), which forms the spiritual foundation of Christian mysticism(s). First, intriguingly foreshadowing Kierkegaard's own considerations of inwardness and the aetiology and thought behind his deliberate choice of

Tauler expressly invokes a stance of apophaticism which says that, insofar as God is entirely transcendent of all earthly things, the conceptual tools such as reason and language that human beings deploy in order to know or acquire knowledge break down. As Denys Turner elucidates, *apophasis* (ἀπόφασις), from *apóphemi* (ἀπόφημι; 'to say 'no''), from which apophaticism jointly derives, is a Greek neologism standing for the breakdown of speech, "which, in the face of the unknowability of God, falls infinitely short of the mark" and, therefore, apophatic theology means something like: "that speech about God which is the failure of speech."[507] Here, then, Tauler effects a theological posture flowing out of ineradicable human ignorance of the nature of God and corresponding with what Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), in the century before Tauler, described when he wrote in his *Summa Theologiae* that "we do not know what kind of being God is."[508] It is the same posture that the anonymous English mystic author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, appearing at the end of Tauler's century, described when they depicted the deconstructive mode of theology as a deliberative spiritual practice of unknowing.[509] Tauler, drawing on this theological pedigree, hence writes that individuals walking the unknowing path of apophasis, the *via negativa*, and

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the Johannes Climacus/Anti-Climacus pseudonyms (see 326n), Denys Turner notes that it was commonly agreed amongst the writers of the mediaeval mystical and Latin Christian traditions "that the journey of 'inwardness' also could be described as an 'ascent,' whether of a ladder or of a mountain. And it was commonly agreed that as the soul ascended to God it would approach a source of light which, being too bright for its powers of reception, would cause in it profound darkness" (*The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3). As well, quoting Tauler with respect to what appears, *prima facie*, to be an incompatibility in the attending metaphors of *imitatio Christi* by entailing both an inward deepening or descent and a spiritual escalation or ascent, Bernard McGinn eloquently notes that the deeper we as imitators of Christ "penetrate into the depths of humility, the higher we climb—'deep and high mean the same thing'…This passage is typical of Tauler's attempts to describe the supreme form of union [with God]" ("John Tauler the Lebmeister," in *The Harvest of Mysticism in Mediaeval Germany (1300–1500)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 289).

[507] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 20.

[508] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 136.

[509] e.g., chapters 4–7 (pp. 62–70) and 70 (pp. 144–6) of *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. Clifton Wolters (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

thereby leaving the darkness of the first self, turning away from all self-seeking and selfishness for the divine light

> are immersed in their origin—God; they are melted into Him amid the deep stillness of all their mental faculties. It is by the holy darkness of the divine solitude that they have sought and found, transcending all intelligence. They are cast away so far from self, that in their union with God they have lost self and all things else, and are conscious now of nothing at all but only God, in whom they are wholly absorbed.[510]

Of course, expressly linking with Tauler's appraisal of the *imitatio* motif, the central figure of the Rhineland mystics viewed the suffering Christ as the template modelling just how one is to follow the *via negativa* to enact this salvific process of union with God. That is, in his "Sermon for the Feast of a Holy Martyr," Tauler reminds his congregation that, just as Christ kenotically emptied himself of all self-will and every emotional anodyne, so, too, are followers of Christ to renounce the will to knowledge of the divine even to the point of expecting and indeed embracing the painfully dark moments of God's apparent absence. Such forms part of the *via negativa* conducive to union with God:

> [Christ] gave up all heavenly riches and took a life of the greatest earthly destitution, and was finally abandoned by all creatures, and even cast helplessly back on Himself by His divine father—as He complained from His cross: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'…Now all this was for our instruction; He would teach us to cherish spiritual destitution of all things.[511]

But recalling Kierkegaard's position as to the infinite difference between God and human beings along with the contemplation that Christ's cry of dereliction—"the terrifying verse that made even Luther anxious when he preached on it 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,'"—all too easily culminates in blasphemy—"[one] cannot grasp these words of Christ, for the [divine] is indeed present in Christ…[i]t would indeed be blasphemy if I were to pretend to have grasped [Christ] after saying a few words about the matter"—however

[510] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 573.
[511] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 746.

much he was influenced by the Pietists and their mystical forebears, Kierkegaard was leery as to the prospect of mystical union with God, especially an epistemological one.[512] This, indeed, is the basis of Kierkegaard's "anti-mysticism" or, better put, his ambivalence toward the movement, as explored further below.[513] Clarifying that love's dying away does not, for him, entail ontological collapse of the individual into God, Kierkegaard writes: "According to the teaching of [Christianity] man is not to merge into God through a pantheistic fading away…into the divine ocean through the blotting out of all individual characteristics…the union with God still takes place in the personality."[514] For his part, Tauler did not espouse uncritical merger with God either. Mystic though he was, Tauler was keenly aware of the spiritual pride and threat of the cunning and malignantly demonic self-*apotheosis* that disposes one to believe that melting into God just means to become God—the omniscient One—and expressly warned against it. In other words, more than 400 years before Jacobi's landmark assessment of nihilism in Fichte, Tauler presciently counselled against the sentiment at root in Jacobi's vein of thought that we encountered in Chapter II—"Man has this choice and this choice alone: nothing or God…I repeat: God is, and is outside of me, a living, self-subsisting essence and being, or I am God. There is no third possibility."[515] "Among other evil thoughts," Tauler writes presaging Jacobi's concern, mystical immersion in God may "suggest to [the individual] that they are actually God Himself: for to yield to this illusion [is] the deadliest calamity of all…Now let the soul raise the shield of holy faith and hold it firmly, exclaiming: there is but one God; there can be but one God: who is like

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[512] *CA* 155/*SKS* 4, 454; *KJN* 4, 334/NB4:95. For discussion of the mystical desire to know God's mind and become nothing in being annihilated or swallowed up in the abyss of God, see, Simon D. Podmore, "*Mysterium Horrendum*: Mystical Theology and the Negative Numinous," in *Exploring Lost Dimensions in Christian Mysticism: Opening to the Mystical*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Simon Podmore (London: Routledge, 2013), 93–116.
[513] David R. Law, "Kierkegaard's Anti-Mysticism," *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 2 (1993): 102–11.
[514] *KJN* 1, 250/DD:131.
[515] Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 524

unto God?"[516] Here, with Tauler's own diagnosis of the deadliest calamity of taking union with God to equating oneself with God, it is possible that the Dominican friar was expressing cognizance of the controversies growing out of readings of his Strasbourg contemporary, Eckhart, and the charges of heresy levied against the latter.[517] In any case, consequent interpreters of Tauler would express their debt to Tauler and the German mystic tradition by side-stepping self-*apotheosis* and instead emphasising Christ's humility and meekness when touching on the *via negativa* and the salvific process of love's dying away. In his *True Christianity*, for example, Arndt writes that the Christian is to resign or die to self and world such that "[m]an is not to be God but the image…[t]hus, nothing other is to live, shine, act, will, love, think, speak, or rejoice in man except God himself…Out of this resignation arises that which Tauler defines as a pure simple suffering of the divine will; man allows God to work all things in him and does not hinder God with his own will or strive against God."[518] In this way, just as Christ prayed in Gethsemane "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42) and was "the perfect image of God," and "completely sacrificed his will to his heavenly Father's will in highest obedience, humility, and meekness without any self-honour, self-love, self-gain, or possessiveness…but allowed God to work everything in and through him in whatever he thought, spoke, or did," the Christian is to do likewise.[519] The Christian is to "divest himself of all love of himself and the world" and "follow not his own will, but the

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[516] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 573. Tauler additionally preaches in another sermon that "while the soul is in a state of contemplation of God and has grown into this yet closer union with Him, and after He is yet more deeply poured into the soul's depths and has drawn it wholly to Himself, then it happens that there remains no power in the soul to know what sort of a being it is now to consider itself to be; *yet meanwhile God holds it in its place as a creature* [i.e., and not the Creator]" (p. 285; emphasis mine).
[517] McGinn, "Mysticism and Heresy: The Problem of the Free Spirit," in *The Harvest of Mysticism*, 48–79 (see also Walter Senner's "Meister Eckhart's Life, Training, Career, and Trial" (especially §3. The Trial, 44–84) and Fiorella Retucci's "On a Dangerous Trail: Henry Suso and the Condemnations of Meister Eckhart," (587–606) of *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013)).
[518] Arndt, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, 30–1.
[519] Arndt, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, 31.

will of God…love not himself but God" and become "a simple, pure, clean, holy instrument of God and of God's holy will and of all the divine acts."[520] As Peter Erb summarises, Tauler's emphasis on detachment from all worldliness and worldly values easily worked itself into Arndt's and other Pietist theologians' soteriological order "and Tauler's statements on ecstatic mystical experience [and mystical union with God] could be reinterpreted in terms of a developing progression in a believer's love for God."[521]

MYSTICISM

Nevertheless, returning to Kierkegaard, though the Pietists' emphasis on the *via negativa* leading to the imitation of Christ and the interior life of dying away brought Kierkegaard to the writings of the mediaeval mystics from which these concepts commonly derived and therefore, as has been tendered, Pietism-*cum*-mysticism may rightly be said to play a role in Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity and his intensified grasp of Christian discipleship and suffering, it cannot be said that Kierkegaard was altogether without compunction on receiving this literature. Specifically, Kierkegaard was not without his suspicions. Suspicions regarding the prospect and final result of rarefied forms of religious experience or *ekstasis* and commensurately esoterically immediate and privileged knowledge of God—"secrets of the [divine] essence…(theosophy, mysticism, speculative mysticism), which gives itself a scientific form while…staking a claim to objective knowledge."[522] In his journal, Kierkegaard dismissively quips "[m]ysticism lacks the patience to wait for God's revelation." Or, as Podmore elaborates, "rather than awaiting the descent of God to the human," the paradoxical entry of eternity in time in Christ, "and the divine's gracious crossing of the infinite qualitative abyss, mysticism…storms the heavens through its

[520] Arndt, *True Christianity*, Book I:2–3, Arndt, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, 31.
[521] Erb, "Introduction," in *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, 13.
[522] *KJN* 3, 324/Notebook 11:17.

exertions toward attainment of knowledge of the Mind of God itself."[523] In the more Lutheran vernacular of Kierkegaard's criticism, mysticism merges with God by arrogating to itself knowledge of the hidden ways of God and God-as-God-is-in-Himself, the human acquisition of divine omniscience.

Perhaps the clearest expression of the adverse horn of Kierkegaard's ambivalence to mystical union with God comes in Judge William's extended discussion of mysticism and the associated consideration of the story of little Ludvig Blackfeldt in *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard's ethical pseudonym notes that "[f]or the mystic the whole world is dead; he has fallen in love with God. Now the development of his life is the unfolding of this love" but then observes that "the mystic cannot be absolved of a certain obtrusiveness in his relationship to God" and, as explication, offers three criticisms.[524] First, enlisting the Greatest Commandment, the Judge concedes that it is undeniable "that a person is supposed to love God with all his soul and all his mind—indeed, not only that he is supposed to do it but that doing it is bliss itself" but, rejecting nihilism, "it by no means follows that the mystic is supposed to reject the existence, the actuality, in which God has placed him, because he thereby actually rejects God's love or demands another expression for it than that which God wills to give."[525] Second, Judge William concedes the undeniable "beauty and truth" in the mystic wishing "to be convinced in his innermost heart that he loves God in truth and honesty" but doubts "that [the mystic] will repeat this attempt every moment, test his love at every moment."[526] Here, employing what Kierkegaard's later pseudonym, Constantin Constantius, refers to as "the courage to understand that life is a repetition" in the sense of endeavouring to iteratively repeat one's experience from a higher existential perspective, recurrently giving it a new, and

[523] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 78.
[524] *EO2*, 242–3/*SKS* 3, 231–2.
[525] *EO2*, 243–4/*SKS* 3, 232–3.
[526] *EO2*, 244/*SKS* 3, 233.

deeper, and ultimately religious expression, Judge William refuses to absolve the mystic of "softness and weakness" and doubts the mystic's capacity to *not* disingenuously serve as one's own assessor of the veracity of their love.[527] A journal entry critiquing the notion of self-sufficiency and autarky—precisely what Nietzsche claims when he says that our existential tests "can be witnessed by no judge other than ourselves"—helps illuminate the criticism.[528] Kierkegaard explains, "Kant held that the [human] being was his own law (autonomy), i.e., bound himself under the law he gave himself. In the deeper sense, what this really postulates is lawlessness or experimentation. Its earnestness will be no more rigorous than were the blows that Sancho Panza inflicted on his own backside."[529] If tests are only ever witnessed by oneself, what is there to ensure that one does not cheat on the test? Finally, third, Judge William contends that the mystic devoting themselves to their relationship with God "eventually becomes so alienated from all people that every relationship…becomes a matter of indifference."[530] Yet, recalling the above discussion of the ordinal problem attending the Greatest Commandment wherein, for Kierkegaard, imitating Christ in one's love of God is primary to and enables one's love of neighbour whereas the love of neighbour is the truest sign that one indeed loves God, Judge William may be harmonised with Kierkegaard: "It is not…that one is to love God more than father and mother…if there actually were a conflict between love of God and love of human beings, the love of whom he himself has implanted in our hearts, it would be hard to imagine anything more horrible."[531] Nevertheless, admittedly, placing Judge William's anti-mysticism alongside Kierkegaard's

[527] *R* 132/*SKS* 4, 10; *EO2*, 244/*SKS* 3, 233.
[528] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39. For concerted comparison of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on this point, see Angier, "Truth" in *Either Kierkegaard/Or Nietzsche*, 75–102.
[529] *KJN* 7, 42/NB15:66.
[530] *EO2*, 245/*SKS* 3, 234.
[531] *EO2*, 245/*SKS* 3, 234.

own, in a certain respect, more mystical grasp of the ordinal problem (in the sense that Kierkegaard upholds the importance of the God-relationship) presents a definite tension. After all, Judge William laments the mystic's acceptance that God may "torment people with the most horrible conflicts" in pitting the love of God against the love of neighbour whereas, in *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard endorses the "unparalleled abomination" and abhorrent "suffering of the soul" whereby one's love of God antecedes and may in fact turn one's love of neighbour into hate, "even if this [hate] means only becoming indifferent," whereby one hates yet loves another human being.[532]

As with so much of Kierkegaard, the key, I think, is a dialectical orientation to the issue. Strongly connoting the above consideration of the oxymoronic nature of love's dying away, the Judge writes, "that which as an element [viz., love of God] can be sound and healthy becomes a very grave sickness if it is developed one-sidedly [viz., to the exclusion of the indicator of one's love of God: love of neighbour]."[533] Judge William personalises this terrifying spiritual lop-sidedness with little Ludvig Blackfeldt whose "misfortune was that to the exclusion of everything else he lost himself one-sidedly in a mysticism not so much Christian as Indian" and "ended with suicide."[534] As the Judge sees it, "[t]he distinctiveness of the mystical is not the religious but the isolation in which the individual, without regard for any relation to the given actuality, wants to place himself in immediate rapport with the eternal…the individual feels his God-relationship so powerfully in all its inwardness that beside it his earthly relationships lose their significance."[535] Just as Kierkegaard may be said to stand for a constructive as opposed to one-sidedly debilitating and enervating negation, Judge William inveighs against the grave sickness of the asymmetrical mystical attempt to

[532] *EO2*, 245/*SKS* 3, 234; *CD* 183–4/*SKS* 10, 194.
[533] *EO2*, 247/*SKS* 3, 236.
[534] *EO2*, 245/*SKS* 3, 234.
[535] *EO2*, 246–7/*SKS* 3, 236.

place oneself in direct, immediate relationship with God. So, too, Kierkegaard: "Shouldn't Mt. 11:12 [really] be interpreted as referring to mystics…who indeed believe that they have an [immediate] relationship to God and thus are unwilling to acknowledge that all [human] beings have only a mediate [i.e., Christ-based] relationship."[536]

On mysticism and Kierkegaard, then, it may be that, on the one hand, Kierkegaard was more receptive, more affirmative when he encountered mystical ideas from the Pietist theologians and their progenitors, especially when the *Erbauungsautoren* and their sources stressed the central and indispensable mediating role of Christ in relating to God. Recalling Tauler's invocation of apophaticism or the *via negativa* as part and parcel of *imitatio Christi*, Kierkegaard favourably associates the "divine nothing" of the mystics with Socratic ignorance, writing: "The system *begins* with 'nothing'; mysticism always ends with 'nothing.' The latter is the divine nothing, just as Socrates' ignorance was fear of God."[537] As the barb at 'the system' in this entry suggests, on the other hand, Kierkegaard was more suspicious, more incredulous with respect to mysticism issuing from idealist and speculative philosophers. As Thulstrup avers, it was precisely such philosophers who were responsible for Kierkegaard's unwillingness to embrace "the *unio mystica*, the soul's union with God" or related "descriptions of ecstasies and visions."[538] This suspicion was not Kierkegaard's altogether unfounded theological paranoia or phobic protestation. For, consistent with Judge William's mention of little Ludvig's mysticism that was "not so much Christian as Indian," in more or less veiled efforts of syncretism, certain thinkers of Kierkegaard's century with whom he was familiar imported hostile elements branded as Indian into their theological

[536] *KJN* 11 (Part 1), 110/Paper 76.
[537] *KJN* 7, 12/NB15:12.
[538] Thulstrup, "Kierkegaard's Acquaintance with Various Interpretations of Christianity," in *Kierkegaard's View of Christianity*, 66.

projects and either, like Hegel, purported to harmonise nihilism with Christianity or, like Schopenhauer, deprecate Christianity in favour of a nihilism of professedly Indic origin.[539]

THE THREAT OF NIHILISM AND SPECULATIVE MYSTICISM TURNED IDEALISM

Both Podmore and Šadja observe that, in Kierkegaard's time, mystical theology was being claimed by some as part of the heritage of speculative idealism, with figures like Schelling and Hegel being read as heirs of the luminous visions of Eckhart, Tauler, and the motely assembly of Rhineland mystics.[540] At the same time, the advent of 'Oriental' studies and Eastern religious contemplations of nothingness quickly intermixed with Christian mystical meditations on the same and earned the former the reputation of the worship of *nihil*. Specifically, throughout the last years of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, and, as both Urs App and Roger-Pol Droit contend, for complex reasons predicated on a preponderance of problematic scholarship (which space does not permit exploration of here), both Hinduism and Buddhism as immense Eastern religions were widely regarded as cults of nothingness.[541] Victor Cousin (1792–1867) is often considered the first to have branded Buddhism as a cult of nothingness (*culte du néant*).[542] However, apart from Cousin, the repugnant stigma carried by Cousin's cultic expression issues largely from a source well-known to Kierkegaard: Hegel. Specifically, Hegel was attentive to the emergence of

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[539] *EO2*, 245/*SKS* 3, 234.

[540] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 77; Peter Šadja, "Does Hegelian Philosophy of Religion Distort Christian Dogmatics and Ethics? (The Debate on Speculative Mysticism)," in *Acta Kierkegaardiana Volume 4: Kierkegaard and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis in Europe*, ed. Roman Králik et al. (Toronto: Kierkegaard Circle, 2008), 64–83. For discussion of the influence of Pietist theosophy on German idealism, see Walter Sparn, "Philosophie," in *Geschichte des Pietismus: Glaubenswelt und Lebenswelten*, vol. 4, ed. Martin Brecht, Klaus Deppermann, Ulrich Gäbler, and Hartmut Lehmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 255–6.

[541] See App, "Buddha's Deathbed Confession," in *The Cult of Emptiness*, 129–44 and Droit's "The Faceless Idol" through "The End of the Human Race," in *The Cult of Nothingness*, 27–130.

[542] See Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, 179n38 for discussion of issues emanating from the translation of Cousin's French expression into English.

Orientalism and imputed to Buddhism a spirituality falling toward "the systematic destruction of the self, toward the obliteration of consciousness, toward the annihilation of thought itself."[543] As Hegel notes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, for Buddhism, "everything emerges from nothing, everything returns into nothing" and, hence, humans

> must strive, through ceaseless internal mindfulness, to will nothing, to want [nothing], and to do nothing. When one attains this, there is no longer any question of something higher, of virtue and immortality. Human holiness consists in uniting oneself, by this negation, with nothingness, and so with God, with the Absolute. A human being who has reached this holiness, this highest level, is indistinguishable from God, is eternally identical with God…this pure nothing, this stillness and emptiness, is the absolutely highest state…which the Buddhists call nirvana.[544]

As to why Hegel adopted the view of Buddhism as a religion whose sole object of worship was nothingness, at least on Droit's account, this stemmed from Hegel's curious preference for eschewing more recent scholarship with which he *was* conversant in favour of a legend of the Buddha's deathbed confession promulgated by Jesuits and Christian missionaries as summative to the Buddha's life and mission. This narrative established the Buddha as a master deceiver—worse, Satan himself hiding behind a serene mask—who in his last act on earth revealed to his followers that all was nothingness, that that and not his veil of metaphors and fables was the only truth, and that he had been defrauding his followers all along. In this brazen act of impiety that was formative to Hegel's grasp of Buddhism, Antoine Banier (1673–1741) writes:

> [S]eeing that [the Buddha] was close to death, he wanted to inspire atheism in his followers. He declared that until that time he had spoken to them in enigmas: but do not be mistaken, he told them, by seeking the first principle of things outside of Nothingness. Everything has come from nothingness and everything must return to it. It is the abyss of our hopes…by this retraction, he divided his followers into two branches; one followed what [the Buddha] had taught during his life to the letter, that is to say [i]dolatry, the others received

[543] Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, 61.
[544] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 253–5.

> the last words of their master as an article of faith [and] declared themselves for [a]theism.[545]

With this legend in mind, Hegel *qua* confessed Lutheran was motivated to mollify the threat of atheism and undergirding nihilism, to incorporate into and annul in his philosophical system the ideas of the Buddha as he conceived the latter as not only an ascetic religious teacher but, apparently, atheistic, nihilistic, and subversive prophet.[546] Hegel therefore dealt with nihilism by sublating (*aufheben*) it within his system and presenting it as ultimately rebounding upon and reconstituting itself as a matter of course in the Spirit's inexorable movement toward the Absolute. By way of Hegel including it as a necessity within a logical dialectic, he offered a circumnavigation of nihilism which sees annihilation annihilate itself or negation negate itself, writing:

> *Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same.* The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being…But the truth is…that they are not without distinction; it is rather that *they are not the same*, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that *each* immediately *vanishes in its opposite*.[547]

To be sure, though Hegel shared neither their convictions nor their enthusiasms, Hegel as much as the Romantics encountered in Chapter II (who, we recall, relative to Schopenhauer, promulgated an attenuated variant of nihilism) dispensed with the threat of nihilism by

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[545] Louis Moreri, *Grand Dictionnaire historique ou Mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1725), 360–1, cited in Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, 64.
[546] In a letter he wrote to Karl von Stein zum Altenstein (1770–1840) from Berlin on 3 April 1826, toward the end of his life, Hegel described himself as "a professor who prides himself on having been baptised and raised a Lutheran, which he still is and shall remain" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler, ed. Clark Butler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 532).
[547] G. W. F. Hegel, "Book One: The Doctrine of Being," in *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59–60. For wider discussion of Hegel's dialectical avoidance of nihilism, see, Keiji Nishitani, "Hegel's Absolute Idealism and Radical Realism," in *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 9–12, and Henk Oosterling, "Avoiding Nihilism by Affirming Nothing: Hegel on Buddhism," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 51–77.

reinventing it. Reinventing it, ostensibly, in a manner reminiscent of the mysticisms of, for example, Eckhart and Tauler. That is, by reinventing nihilism in a manner reminiscent of the mystical and depersonalising absorption of the self into the divine. For example, in a way that was influential to Hegel's accounting of the history of philosophy, Friedrich Schlegel—whose brother and fellow German Romantic, August Wilhelm Schlegel, was a pioneering Indologist—narrated a fantastic chronicle of how the German people, being descendants of the Brahmins who migrated to Germania from the Indian subcontinent, were the true Indians of Europe and, as such, the nihilism that originated amongst the peoples of the Ganges was rightly at home amidst the percolating societies, polity, and polis of, say, the Rhine, Danube, and Main.[548] Hegel, on this narrative, whether he wanted to or not, was ancestrally destined to inherit Indian mysticism. And, as Droit ably comments with respect to the convergence of Hegel and mysticism, as Hegel reinvented nihilism, "the religion of nothingness became an ascetic practice of negative theology, a moment in the voyage of the Spirit toward free interiority…[t]his religion of nothingness, …[t]his reduction of self to nothing in order to melt into the Absolute seem[ed] closer…to the approach of the Rhineland mystics than to the destructive forms of nihilism of modern times [viz., of Schopenhauer]."[549]

One can easily see how Hegel's commentary on Indic religion and specifically Buddhism asserting human holiness consisting in uniting oneself, by negation, with nothingness such that a "human being who has reached this holiness…is indistinguishable from God, is eternally identical with God" lends itself to conceptual amalgamation with speculative mysticism's human-divine union.[550] Moreover, if one overlays mysticism with

[548] e.g., Robert Bruce Cowan, "Fear of Infinity: Friedrich Schlegel's Indictment of Indian Philosophy in "Über die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indier," *The German Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 322–38, and Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, "India and the Identity of Europe: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 713–34.
[549] Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, 67–8.
[550] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 254.

the mythos of the Buddha's deathbed confession, it is even easier to see why one with a passionate theistic interest such as Kierkegaard might have suspicions as to the aims and *telos* of a mystical union with God. As noted above, however, Tauler, for one, explicitly warned against the "deadliest calamity" of succumbing to the illusion that mystical absorption in God *makes* one God.[551] Still, whatever is to be made of its repeated claims to the nothingness of the soul, speculative mysticism may be suspected of paving the way for an implicit self-*apotheosis* of a human being epistemologically absorbing the Mind of God itself, of bridging Kierkegaard's unbridgeable chasm between God and humanity and coming to know the divine *nous* and the hidden ways of God. As Podmore observes, "Eckhart seems to desire to know the Godhead as *wüste* (desert), in its nakedness, before the enrobing of all names."[552] Whether Hegel can properly be considered heir to *this* sense of mysticism is a contested question. As commented, Hegel as self-identified Lutheran (see 546n above) sought to address the threat of nihilism and so branding his thought as that which, *contra voluntatem suam*, unchristianly engenders nihilistic merger with the Mind of God, *sub specie aeternitatis*, may plausibly offend the author of said thought. Relative to the aim of this dissertation, though, what matters is Kierkegaard's assessment of mysticism relating to the love of God and, on this point, it is difficult to avoid reiterating Thulstrup's conclusion of Kierkegaard's distrustful appreciation of mysticism when it issues from the speculative idealists and, specifically, Hegelians.[553] But, more unambiguously than the pluriform

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[551] Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, 573.
[552] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 78. Podmore alludes here to a pair of Eckhart's sermons in Eckhart: "Sermon Sixty" and "Sermon Sixty-Three," in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O'C Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 309–11, 318–21.
[553] Thulstrup, "Kierkegaard's Acquaintance with Various Interpretations of Christianity," in *Kierkegaard's View of Christianity*, 66. See also Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, "Kierkegaard's Encounter with Mysticism through Speculative Idealism," *Liber Academiæ Kierkegaardiensis, Tomus V 1983*, ed. Niels Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels, 1984), 31–91 as well as M. G. Piety, "The Stillness of History: Kierkegaard and German Mysticism," in *Konturen* 7, (2015): 42–63. On Kierkegaard's reception of Hegel, Westphal contends that, at least for Climacus, the problem with Hegelianism, which Fichte thought of

interpretations of Hegel, the negative theological similitude and ineffable nothingness of Schopenhauer *can* be classed as inheriting the nihilistic sense of mysticism and thereupon committing what is, in Tauler's eyes, the "deadliest calamity" of merging self with God. Namely, Schopenhauer's philosophy can be so classed by its negating self, world, and God (as that which/who sustains the former two) in nothingness. Kierkegaard's close friend and mentor, Møller, is apropos in this regard. For, in his essay on immortality (see 280n above), Møller explicitly sets Schopenhauer apart from "the many philosophers who bring [nihilism] into a disappointing harmony with the ideas of civic life and religion," and, rightly or wrongly, almost certainly does so holding Hegel in his crosshairs.[554] In this way, openly denouncing Hegelian efforts to underhandedly accommodate nihilism to traditional civil society, ethics, and religion, Møller's treatise unambiguously classifies Schopenhauer apart from Hegel as a standalone, more astringent, and more unpacifying exponent of nihilism

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as a kind of pantheistic mysticism, is theological "[f]or Climacus the gap between the human and divine is fundamental, while the [Hegelian] system requires that it be compromised or even collapsed," or, in the vernacular of mysticism, the Hegelian system requires that the human merge with the divine ("Kierkegaard and Hegel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 102). Stewart, conversely, doubts that the true theological objections Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms offer to Hegel rightly lay at the German philosopher's feet. Rather, they are properly directed at certain Danish Hegelians including, chiefly, Hans Lassen Martensen (see Stewart, "Kierkegaard's Polemic with Martensen in *Johannes Climacus*, or *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*," in *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 238–81). Building on Stewart's point, and further accounting for Kierkegaard's 'anti-mysticism,' it probably did not endear Kierkegaard to mysticism or, at any rate, help Kierkegaard's suspiciousness vis-à-vis the branch of thought that Martensen had published a treatise on Eckhart in 1840, *Meister Eckhart: A Contribution to the Elucidation of Mysticism in the Middle Ages* (*Mester Eckart: Et Bidrag til at oplyse Middelalderens Mytik* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1840), *ASKB* 649).

[554] Møller, *Poul Martin Møller's "Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality" and Other Texts*, 121. This condemnation of improper accommodation of a heretical idea is keeping with the spirit of Møller's treatise overall. For, the main point of Møller's essay was not, of course, to single Schopenhauer out as the personification of nihilism but to expose a perceived sleight of hand of idealism. Namely, the efforts of some Right Hegelians to import a doctrine of immortality into Hegel's philosophy, which would seem prerequisite if Hegel's description of himself as "a professor who prides himself on having been baptised and raised a Lutheran, which he still is and shall remain" was to be believed and his philosophy counted as authentically Christian (*Hegel: The Letters*, 532).

deriving from mysticism. What Schopenhauer considered to be the Indian inspiration of his nihilism is well documented but of special concern, now, is that, in drawing differential interpretations of the nothingness specifically contemplated in Pietist and Christian mystical theology, there is a decisive partition distancing Schopenhauerian nihilism from Kierkegaardian loving God.

NIHILISM AND NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

As the foregoing discussion has indicated, Kierkegaard was intimately familiar with, and his conception of loving God correspondingly shaped by, Moravian Pietism, the movement's *Erbauungsliteratur*, and its Christian mystical precursors. Whatever surface-level linguistic and negative theological similarities exist between the nothingness of Schopenhauerian nihilism on the one hand and Kierkegaardian loving God on the other, that Schopenhauer and the nihilism he propounded differs from Kierkegaard is not only pointed to by Kierkegaard's reception of Schopenhauer in his late journals (as canvassed in Chapter III). It is also pointed to by Schopenhauer himself. Speaking as a citizen in Christian Europe, Schopenhauer writes:

> There has never been and will never be a myth that is bound up so strongly with a philosophical truth…as this ancient doctrine [i.e., *anātman* and nirvana] of the noblest and oldest of peoples…We…send English clergymen and Moravian [*Herrnhuterische*] linen-weavers out to the Brahmans…out of compassion and want them to know better and to understand that they are made of nothing and should be grateful and pleased about it. But the same thing happens to us that happens to someone who fires a bullet at a rock. Our religions will absolutely never take root in India: the ancient wisdom of the human race will not be displaced by the events in Galilee. On the contrary, Indian wisdom flows back to Europe and will change the very foundations of our knowledge and thought.[555]

Schopenhauer here, in his contemplation of Buddhist *anātman* and nirvana, observes a distinction between ancient Indic religious philosophy and Moravian Pietism and characteristically values the Indian position over that of Pietism. Unlike Schopenhauerian

[555] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 383–4.

nihilism, Kierkegaard's conception of loving God springs from the deep roots and fertile soil of Pietism and those who came before it, from a hermeneutical grasp of loving God in the Greatest Commandment sharpened not by an ushering forth of concepts from the religious world of the Orient to the world of the Occident (as Schopenhauer conceived of his own project) but rather by precisely that which stems from "the events in Galilee." But "German thinker" that he was, it is entirely unsurprising that Schopenhauer would formulate his own project of nihilism without overlooking the theological heritage of his fatherland, seeing Indian wisdom as intermingling with German mystical theology, overturning what he took as mysticism's facile theism, and in the course ultimately subverting the very foundations of knowledge and thought.[556] Whatever merits German mysticism had, according to Schopenhauer, they derive from or in any case are invariably aligned with what is more clearly stated by Indian wisdom. This reception of mysticism offers the clearest separation of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, even allowing for Kierkegaard's reported "Gnosticism."[557]

Of note, among others, Schopenhauer appeals to Eckhart, Tauler, the anonymous fourteenth century *German Theology*, and stretches even further back to Pseudo-Dionysius to validate the position that 'God,' no less than self and world, is nothing, a mere negative linguistic placeholder for a thing that is, however ineffectual language is to communicate such, actually a non-thing, a word whose referent is entirely empty, evacuated of all content. If "we wish to call 'God' that which is opposed to the world [i.e., that which negates the will-to-live]" Schopenhauer opines in his notes, "then this could be done for the benefit of those who do not want to drop the expression. Yet it would stand merely for an unknown *x* of which only the negation is known to us."[558] Expressly subscribing to the apophatic tradition,

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[556] *KJN* 9, 359/NB29:95.
[557] Jepsen, "Kierkegaard's Pessimism," 45.
[558] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 3, trans. E. F. J. Payne, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 376.

Schopenhauer continues, "[o]f such a God we should have no other theology than precisely the one which [Pseudo-]Dionysius…furnishes in his *Theologia mystica*; this consists merely in the explanation that all the predicates of God can be denied, but not one can be affirmed, because he resides above and beyond all being and all knowledge…and [is] entirely inaccessible to our knowledge. This theology is the only true one; but it has no substance [i.e., content, *Inhalt*] at all."[559]

For Schopenhauer, while the New Testament inheres the kernel of truth in Christian ascetism, and this was the basis on which he could to his mind call his nihilist doctrine of the negation of the will-to-live "the genuine Christian philosophy," it was not until later that "we see the *ascetic* seed coming into full blossom through the writings of the Christian saints and mystics."[560] In particular, the *via negativa* in all its mystical and pietist iterations unites the 'self' and 'God' in literal nothingness and the mystical form of Christianity, on Schopenhauer's grasp of it, rightly recognises such. Hermeneutically blowing past Tauler's cautions and Jacobi's suspicions (and, we might also add, Fichte's protestations against charges of atheism), Schopenhauer interprets Eckhart, for example, such that the Eckhartian principle that the Christian is to unite with God and "not look for God outside himself" means that the foundation of existence does not issue from without but rather is drawn "back into us, as the subject. And the adept ultimately recognises…that he himself is this source."[561] Christian mysticism is to be commended, then, according to Schopenhauer, for "[i]f there are some among the *theists* who mean *Nirvana* by the name God, then we do not want to argue with them over the name. It is the *mystics* who seem to [correctly] understand it in this way."[562] Conversely, inasmuch as Christian mysticism is to be faulted, according to

[559] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 3, 377.
[560] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 283; *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 413.
[561] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 627.
[562] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, 94.

Schopenhauer, it is in its unwillingness to openly label its metaphorical language of 'God' and 'self' as metaphorical. Sticking with the Father of German mysticism, for Schopenhauer, although Eckhart sought pre-linguistic God "before the enrobing of all names," before the Godhead is desecrated with profane human verbiage and nomenclature, and although Eckhart uses the language of "unity with God," the German mystic has "already reached a point where any separately existing entity as the referent of the word 'God' is dispensable."[563] Theism can and should be jettisoned and, failing to do so, Eckhart is forced to enrobe his ideas "in the garb of Christian mythology and adapt his expressions to this mythology," which has become "little more than a metaphorical language."[564] Understandably, Schopenhauer ultimately offers intermixed admiration and criticism of Eckhart in his notebooks: "Buddha, Eckhart and I teach essentially the same thing: Eckhart is shackled by his Christian mythology" and his identification of God and self "border[s] on the ludicrous."[565]

KIERKEGAARDIAN LOVING GOD CONTRA SCHOPENHAUERIAN NIHILISM

Now, given the suggestive continuities of Schopenhauer vis-à-vis apophasis regarding nothingness and the *via negativa* of negative theology, outside of the generally uninformative dichotomisation of a/theism (e.g., for Schopenhauer effectively collapses this distinction in accusing mystical theists of *de facto* atheism), wherein, specifically, lay the *discrimen* between Schopenhauerian nihilism and Kierkegaardian loving God? This question is all the more pertinent if one holds, as Law does, that (a) Kierkegaard may be considered first rank amongst the stock negative theologians such as Clement of Alexandria (*c*. 150–215 AD),

[563] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 78; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 438; Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in *Essays on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, 161.
[564] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 629.
[565] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, 386 (see also *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 629).

Pseudo-Dionysius, or Eckhart alongside (b) Schopenhauerian nihilism's outward affinity with negative theology.[566] The answer is apparent if we take Schopenhauer at his word in regarding the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius to be "the only true one" and place it with Turner's careful reconstruction of this theology in which the twin pressures of the apophatic (negating) and cataphatic (affirming) modes are not mutually exclusive but rather inseparably intertwined operations. In the linguistic medium of Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology, Turner exposits, "[w]e must both affirm and deny all things of God; and then we must negate the contradiction between the affirmed and the denied. That is why we must say affirmatively that God is 'light,' and then say, denying this, that God is 'darkness,' and finally, we must 'negate the negation' between darkness and light, which we do by saying: 'God is a brilliant darkness.'"[567] For,

> the negation of the negation is not…some intelligible synthesis of affirmation and negation; it is rather the collapse of our affirmation and denials into disorder, which we can only express, *a fortiori*, in bits of collapsed, disordered language, like the babble of a Jeremiah. And this is what the 'self-subverting' utterance is, a bit of disordered language. Since that is also, for [Pseudo-Dionysius], what theological language is when stretched to its fullest extent.[568]

As this description of his theological methodology might suggest, Pseudo-Dionysius was open to interpretation. Allowing for the enduring uncertainty in the exegesis of Schopenhauer's thought with respect to nothingness (e.g., 271n), the philosopher of nihilism may be said to interpretatively engineer the apophatic and cataphatic in Pseudo-Dionysius toward the affirmation of at least one positive proposition. That is, ultimately, that nothingness—countenancing self, world, and God all as *nihil*—is the highest insight of which anyone is capable and that which heralds the blissful release from all strivings and sufferings of the will-to-live. In this way, Schopenhauer falls into the fold of Pseudo-Dionysius in

[566] Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 206–17.
[567] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 22.
[568] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 22.

substituting a higher form of knowledge for a lower one, for not rendering knowledge of the divine impossible altogether but rather enabling one to transcend the borders of basic human knowledge and really know God (Pseudo-Dionysius) or divine *nihil* (Schopenhauer) non-conceptually and non-linguistically. Although understanding the subject of the sentence to refer to a concept utterly devoid of content, Schopenhauer may well have concurred with Pseudo-Dionysius when the latter writes on the relationship to God that "[t]his quite positively complete unknowing is knowledge of him who is above everything that is known."[569] Similarly, Schopenhauer may well have concurred with Clement of Alexandria when the latter contends that at the summit of relationship with God is a profound knowing or higher *gnōsis*.[570] For Schopenhauer, knowledge of divine *nihil* is above everything that is known and knowledge of divine *nihil* alone is the higher *gnōsis*.

Following from the classification of Schopenhauer as inheriting the nihilistic sense of mysticism, a foreseeable objection to equating Schopenhauer's Gnostic path to the higher knowledge of *nihil* as the atheistic equivalent of a *unio mystica* is to object to the cataphatic in Schopenhauer altogether. True, Schopenhauer continually speaks of his philosophy as expressible "only negatively, as the negation of the will" and harmonious with that which can only be expressed "negatively in the language of this world."[571] Nevertheless, imputing the cataphatic affirmation of ultimate nothingness to Schopenhauer and thus casting Schopenhauerian nihilism as a mysticism is justified when one considers that Schopenhauer defers to mysticism to carry through what, in his view, the negativity of his philosophy (narrowly defined) cannot. Schopenhauer writes,

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[569] Pseudo-Dionysius, "Letter One: To the Monk Gauis," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 262–3.
[570] For discussion of Clement of Alexandria's notion of *gnōsis* as spiritual and mystical knowledge as posited in his *Stromata* or *Stromateis*, see Eric Osborn, "God beyond God and God within God: The Known Centre of the Unknown God," in *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111–31.
[571] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 383, 438.

> at its very highest point my philosophy assumes a *negative character*; it speaks only what is to be denied and given up, but what is gained and grasped instead of this must be described by it as a nothing…whereas here the mystic proceeds quite positively. Mysticism is therefore an excellent supplement to my philosophy, and whoever has read me will do well to read what is mystical in the Upanishad, then *Les Torrens* of Madame de Guyon, and finally the mysticism of the Sufis. For they all give the positive aspect where I as a philosopher could give only the negative.[572]

What is mysticism as a "supplement" to Schopenhauerian nihilism if not something compatible with and added to complete the project, to reinforce or extend Schopenhauer's whole enterprise? More chronologically, what is Schopenhauerian nihilism if not an outgrowth of a particular species and complement of mysticism? As Janaway rightly considers, Schopenhauer's ultimate relation to the Christian mystics is that they are more overtly, positively, and cataphatically propounding what is essentially his own atheistic, nihilistic, and godless view of the world and salvation.[573] Christian mysticism has merely, having misunderstood the properly higher Gnostic knowledge of divine *nihil*, substituted 'God' for divine nothingness.

And here resolutely marks the difference with Kierkegaard. Even when he sounds his most mystical, Kierkegaard never aspires to a higher *gnōsis* and arcane, mystical knowledge of God, the divine mysteries which transcend human understanding, and there is no enduring suggestion in Kierkegaard's works of the individual being absorbed into the Godhead. Anti-Climacus indeed paints the mystical portrait of the self being free from despair only when resting "transparently in God."[574] As the Pietism of his youth iterated, Kierkegaard also describes the same relation to divinity as becoming nothing before God and notes that "God

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[572] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, 378. In *The World as Will and Representation*, alongside the *Oupnek'hat*, Madame de Guyon, and the Sufis, "the Gnostics of Islam," Schopenhauer further prescribes certain writings of the Christian mystics Jakob Böhme (Jacob Boehme) and Angelus Silesius (1624–1677) as positive supplements to his negative philosophy (vol. 1, 627).
[573] Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in *Essays on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, 168.
[574] *SUD* 30/*SKS* 11, 146.

can imprint himself in [one's self] only when he himself [i.e., the self] has become nothing…when the ocean [of selfhood]…becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness."[575] So, too, Kierkegaard describes in myriad painful journal entries the Christian suffering at the hands of human beings which drew him "closer and closer to God," teaching him to embrace "the Christian principle of loving God rather than [human] beings," forming a consummate intimacy with the divine (see 331n).[576] Still, however much such instances or others may seem to parallel, for example, Eckhart's principle that "[t]o the extent that I am close to God, so to that extent God utters himself into me," Kierkegaard rejects this sense of mystical union.[577] As well, nowhere does Kierkegaard approach, continuing with the father of mysticism, the mystical epistemology of Eckhart whereby the human self is brought to participate in the thinking of God's thoughts and being, as in, when Eckhart famously writes "[t]he eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love."[578] As Law rightly asserts, for Kierkegaard, "it is not knowledge—not even 'transcendent knowledge'—that leads the human being to God. Only epistemological uncertainty and the passion it evokes can prompt the individual to…sustain a relationship to God."[579]

Summarily put, then, Schopenhauer refuses the dressings of "Christian mythology" but nevertheless transitions from a *via negativa* to a *via mystica* (or points to an atheistic interpretation of mystical writers to supplementally do it for him) and cataphatically affirms the nihilistic knowledge or "negative cognition" of the nothingness of self, world, and God.[580]

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[575] *EUD* 399/*SKS* 5, 380.
[576] *KJN* 10, 79/NB31:109.
[577] Meister Eckhart, "Sermon 53" in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Bernard McGinn (London: SPCK, 1981), 204.
[578] Meister Eckhart, "Sermon Fifty Seven," in *Meister Eckhart: Sermons & Treatises*, vol. II, trans. and ed. M. O'C Walshe (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element, 1987), 87.
[579] Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 214.
[580] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, 386; *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 438.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, stops at the *via negativa*. To be sure, Kierkegaard does offer what may be taken as a cataphatic description of God—namely, as a prime example, that God is love. But just as the *via negativa* for Kierkegaard does not lead to knowledge *of God* but rather *self*-knowledge and a more profound understanding of the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and human beings, the sin dividing humans from God and the mediatorial requirement of Christ, Kierkegaard's stress always remains on the human side of the matter.[581] As important, for Kierkegaard, Christ, despite being a revelation of God and the one whom individuals are called to voluntarily follow in suffering, remains shrouded in hiddenness and fundamentally incomprehensible as the God-man. In discourses such as 'The Expectancy of Faith' and *Christian Discourses* such as 'All Things Must Serve Us for Good—*When* We Love God,' Kierkegaard emphasises the human side of knowledge or self-knowledge and its relation to believing that God is love rather than use the positive proposition that God is love as the platform from which to conduct an inquiry into and procurement of a higher knowledge of the nature of God and the God-man.[582] In respect of human knowledge, Kierkegaard certainly resists the *gnōsis* of knowing God's quiddity or essential nature as nothingness or *nihil*, even when such is prefaced, as it is by Schopenhauer, as ineffable or unspeakable by the human tongue. God-as-God-is-in-Himself remains the unknown—"[t]here is only one who completely knows himself, who in himself knows what he himself is—that is God"—and Kierkegaard can claim this on the basis of his endorsement

[581] *PC* 28–9/*SKS* 12, 43.

[582] For example, Kierkegaard writes in *Christian Discourses* that "knowledge that God is love is still not a consciousness of it. Consciousness, personal consciousness, requires that in my knowledge I also have knowledge of myself and my relation to my knowledge. This is to believe, here to believe that God is love, and to believe that God is love is to love him" (*CD* 194/*SKS* 10, 204). As may be drawn from this description, believing that God is love is not anything like a Gnostic knowledge of God's factual nature which disperses all uncertainty akin to omnisciently being situated within the Divine Mind and thinking God's thoughts.

of divine paradox, even when, as Climacus writes in *Philosophical Fragments*, human knowledge, the understanding "risks a sortie through *via negationis* [the way of negation]."[583]

Having definitively separated Kierkegaard from Schopenhauerian nihilism, we now meet the confluence of Kierkegaard's consideration of *imitatio Christi* and his negative theology. As influenced by Pietism and the mystical as well as apophatic undercurrents of the movement as he was, said undercurrents did not carry Kierkegaard into knowledge of the divine *mysteria*. Anti-Climacus, for one, does not equivocate in asserting the need for the *via negativa* insofar as knowledge is antithetical to the God-man: "Jesus Christ is the object of faith; one must either believe in him or be offended; for to 'know' simply means that it is not about him…knowledge annihilates Jesus Christ."[584] And, "[t]he God-man is the paradox, absolutely the paradox. Therefore, it is altogether certain that the understanding must come to a standstill on it."[585] The Pietist influence upon Kierkegaard further expresses itself in the view that the suffering Christ is the template—or, in the idiom of which Kierkegaard is fond, "the prototype" (*Forbilledet*)—modelling just how one is to follow the *via negativa*.[586] Not, however, in the Eckhartian or Taulerian language, following to a unification with God but rather to a humble, self-emptying kenosis of the understanding. But, setting aside the prospect that human beings are even capable of following the prototype of Christ, recalling the pitfalls of undialectical one-sidedness or spiritual lop-sidedness noted above, taken to the extreme, the total self-emptying of the individual in *imitatio Christi* runs the risk of an "ascetic fanaticism" or "self-important, misunderstood, fantasy-laden asceticism" and monastic flight from creation in overwrought and histrionically performative "scourging oneself, crawling on one's knees, standing on one leg, etc." betraying, according to Climacus, "an attempt at

[583] *CD* 40/*SKS* 10, 51; *PF* 44/*SKS* 4, 249.
[584] *PC* 33/*SKS* 12, 47.
[585] *PC* 82/*SKS* 12, 93.
[586] *FSE* 147/*SKS* 16, 198.

wanting to be more than a human being, an enthusiastic, perhaps pious attempt to be like God."[587] At the confluence of *imitatio Christi* and the *via negativa*, then, it becomes critical to consider a third deliverance of Kierkegaard's Moravian upbringing which enables him to set forth an account that takes grace into consideration.

GRACE

> *Christianity is so high that what it understands by grace is what all the profane…will of all things most decline with "Thanks for nothing." The pastors of lie-pastors get grace changed into indulgence. Grace consists, quite plainly, of a person's having benefits from God, and the pastor has benefits from the people whom he makes believe this, inviting them with Christ's words "Come here, all of you,"…but when it comes down to brass tacks and it must be certain what it is that Christ invites them to…and this is not turned into something that pleases everybody—then it will be manifest…that all will most decidedly decline this with "Thanks for nothing" and that only exceptionally does a very rare individual follow the invitation, and of these individuals in turn only a rare individual follows the invitation in such a way that he holds firm that it is an infinite, an indescribable grace that is shown him: to be sacrificed. An indescribable grace, for it is the only way in which God can love a human being and be loved by a human being, but it is indeed an indescribable grace that God wills to do this and wills to allow it…It would indeed be almost nauseating, stifling, oppressive, embarrassing that to be loved by God and to dare to love him should spiritlessly and idiotically be saddled with the idea that one would have profit from it!*[588]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

As was indicated in the above discussion of Schopenhauer, nihilism holds that the self finds itself existing as an individuated entity which is a manifestation of the "wild and

[587] *KJN* 6, 389/NB14:67; *KJN* 7, 154/NB16:86; *FSE* 192/*SKS* 16, 239; *CUP 1*, 492/*SKS* 7, 446.
[588] *TM* 345–6/*SKS* 13, 409–10.

indomitable forces" of nature, the mindless striving of the will-to-live.[589] As such, the individuated self naturally regards itself as the epicentre of the cosmos and strives for its own selfish well-being only to encounter suffering. The intensification and inevitability of suffering, and the consequently edified identification with the suffering of all things, facilitates a negation of the will-to-live and, therewith, the acosmic dissolution of world and sense of the self *qua* individual as well as the divinity which sustains them. Said to correspond with the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, the non-self, with the abolition of the will-to-live, is released from the sufferings that are constitutive of life into a tranquil peace of nullity or *Nirvana*. And, as was also noted above, in describing what may be likened to what Kierkegaard refers to in the above excerpt from *The Moment* as being sacrificed, Schopenhauer adverted to grace excommunicated from Christian doctrine to explain or at least intimate the mechanism by which the will-to-live negates itself, *pace* the fact that there is nowhere within Schopenhauer's godless system from whence grace could issue. In other words, without positing any notion of paradox, for Schopenhauer, the acquisition of the knowledge of *nihil* issuing from a (problematically) null source is the grace-given indicator that the will-to-live has negated itself or is in the process of negating itself and therefore this graceful knowledge is synonymous with the state of blissful peace or nihilistic salvation.

Corresponding with Kierkegaard's resolute stopping at the *via negativa* and refusal to establish a higher knowledge of the divine, however, unlike in Schopenhauer, the condition for salvation as one of the divine mysteries held within God's mind can never be known. For the individual, it can never be known and the concern for one's eternal salvation spans the juncture of a dialectical tension flowing out of Kierkegaard's continual contemplation of the absolute paradox. We have already considered love's dying away as a constructive process of, for example, becoming nothing in temporality working towards something in eternity,

[589] Eichenwal, *Schopenhauer*, 145.

every step forward always being one step backward in relation to God, the entry of the eternal God in time in Christ, and salvific relation to God via Christ in *imitatio Christi* as an infinitely escalating suffering. To these we may add the tension of countenancing relationship to God via Christ squeezed between a pair of antithetical problems.[590] On the one hand, the problem attending a Christ-like asceticism so oriented to externals—outwardly observable appearances, behaviours, and works—that it subserves a spiritual pride and smug self-righteousness at one's having monastically met the requirements for salvation. On the other hand, the problem attending a hidden inwardness so oriented to subjectivity that it is not merely invisible but is, in secular insouciance, veritably absent within the individual altogether. In works such as Climacus's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Anti-Climacus's *Practice in Christianity*, and Kierkegaard's *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms work toward establishing the paradoxical resolution of these twin problems of meritoriousness and hidden inwardness, respectively, which lead to Kierkegaard's distinctive notion of grace.

DUAL THREATS OF THE MONASTERY AND WORLDLINESS: MERITORIOUSNESS AND ASCETICISM, HIDDEN INWARDNESS AND OUTWARDNESS

On Climacus's assessment of unbridled asceticism culminating in monasticism, devotion to God concertedly developed by Pietism, laudable as it is in itself, commonly tends not to press one into the fold of society as a Christ-like suffering servant but rather compel to reclusive estrangement from the world. For example, driving one out of the world and into a separationist religious enclave or monastery. Worst of all, when not divinising the self, the

[590] Additional commentaries on these opposing problems addressed in Kierkegaard's oeuvre are found in Christopher Barnett, "'Should One Suffer Death for the Truth?': Kierkegaard, *Erbauungsliteratur*, and the Imitation of Christ," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 15, no. 2 (2008): 232–47; Pia Søltoft, "Is Love of God Hatred of the World?," trans. Bartholomew Ryan and James Weber, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2007): 65–79; and Sylvia Walsh, "Dying to the World and Self-Denial in Kierkegaard's Religious Thought," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to 'For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!'*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 169–98.

drive from worldliness is incomplete and such piety often engenders in the monastic a spiritual elitism and conceit at having one's asceticism externally recognisable thereby offering the monastic the opportunity to earn a sort of socio-political capital of, for example, the status of being a highly devote, wise, and righteous religious believer. In worldly perversion of the Beatitudes (viz., Matt. 5:10–12), the attainment of such status even cyclically reinforces the status-seeking of the monastic toward becoming a persecuted prophet and—making endless theatre of imitating the suffering Christ—eventuates in the melodrama of, to recruit a phrase from Kierkegaard's journals, the "overwrought and fantasy-laden meritoriousness of asceticism," which actually moves the monastic away from genuine relationship with God and the authentically passionate suffering that marks the God relationship.[591] As Barnett summarises Climacus on the fetishizing of suffering and refusal of what Karen Kilby refers to as "something like apophasis" before suffering, "at precisely the point where passion reaches its extreme, monasticism recoils, preferring the comfort of external recognition to the anguish of internal suffering."[592]

Given the ill-fated prospect of monastic meritoriousness, Climacus maintains that religious existence must be a matter of hidden inwardness or "interiority [*Indvorteshed*], that…can be there and not be there without being directly discernible outwardly" for only in outwardly resembling and therefore being indistinguishable from all other persons can one truly bear the suffering intrinsic to religious existence without escaping into the rewards of meritoriousness.[593] At the same time, however, an entirely hidden inwardness is not without its own flaws. Climacus remarks, "[l]et us never forget that interiority without outwardness is the most difficult interiority, in which self-deception is easiest."[594] That is, the easiest self-

[591] *KJN* 7, 154/NB16:86.
[592] Karen Kilby, "Negative Theology and Meaningless Suffering," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 1 (2020): 92; Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 134.
[593] *CUP 1*, 407/*SKS* 7, 370.
[594] *CUP 1*, 406/*SKS* 7, 369.

deception is to hold a hidden inwardness that is not so much hidden as absent. An interiority, in Anti-Climacus's words, "hidden in one's innermost being—perhaps so well concealed that it is not there at all."[595] This apostatic and deceitful deployment of hidden inwardness must be weighed against the perils of spiritual arrogance of monastic asceticism. In *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard contemplates the fact that seeking religiousness in imitating Christ amidst the secular City of Man almost certainly elicits the offense of an envious society and evokes the malice of society's gatekeepers or "protectors of 'reality,'" who, themselves seeking not the Kingdom of God but worldly kingdoms of wealth, pleasure, and power, commensurately hold all temporal, socio-political power and prestige.[596] Under such external pressures, there is little to prevent one from absconding from an entirely inward commitment and accommodating oneself to external powers while still, in self-delusion, considering oneself religiously committed in hidden inwardness.

Here we have the dual problems of meritoriousness and hidden inwardness. Kierkegaard, in a certain sense, resolves these problems with his consideration of what he calls "the unrecognisables," who "are obliged to keep on working," that is, imitating the suffering love of Christ amidst the secular polis, "and at the same time work to conceal their working."[597] They do this, Kierkegaard holds, by the genuine willingness to enact the love of Jesus and, notably, giving up the reins of history and, therewith, all claims to temporal power in society. In this way, the unrecognisables suffer inwardly *and* outwardly. They strive for inwardness informing their outwardness but their outward actions to conceal their inwardness are so successful, their religiousness so clandestine, that they result in no merit being given to the individual for their adherence precisely to that inward religiousness.

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[595] *PC* 197/*SKS* 12, 196. See also Anti-Climacus's extended discussion of the downside of hidden inwardness in *PC* 214–32/*SKS* 12, 210–26.
[596] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, 396.
[597] *TA* 109/*SKS* 8, 103.

That said, despite the severe suffering they inwardly and outwardly experience, for Kierkegaard's unrecognisables, following Jesus does not dispose to a flight from the world for which they may be exalted in the world of time as, say, ascetic saints. Instead, unrecognisables come to embody Christian love. That is, they come to embody a love of their neighbours who populate the world of time—a love, *nota bene*, defined "in accordance with the eternal" that is not "conquered by mediocrity" or "levelled" by society's temporal standards of love and thereby made "less than nothing" by conforming to the monstrous selfishness attending erotic "passionate preference."[598] Kierkegaard's unrecognisables hence come to embody a love that runs so deep, so subterranean and therefore unrecognisable amidst the world that has "completely forgotten what love is," that such love is willing to suffer worldly miscomprehension and evil for the sake of the good and, in any event, is not rewarded in time.[599] For, unlike the passionate preference of erotic love and friendship, which are themselves temporal goods, "love is self-denial, grounded in the relation to God."[600] A year after the publication of *Two Ages*, dropping the language of unrecognizability for human versus Christian conceptions of self-denial and love, Kierkegaard expresses the same point in *Works of Love*:

> *The merely human idea of self-denial* is this: give up your self-loving desires, cravings, plans—then you will be esteemed and honoured and loved as righteous and wise. It is easy to see that this self-denial does not attain to God…it remains worldly within the relationship among human beings. *The Christian idea of self-denial* is: give up your self-loving desires and cravings, give up your self-seeking plans and purposes so that you truly work unselfishly for the good—and then, for that very reason, put up with being abominated almost as a criminal, insulted and ridiculed. For that very reason…put up with being executed as a criminal or, more accurately, do not put up with it, since one can scarcely be forced into this but chooses it freely. Christian self-denial knows in advance that this will happen to it and freely chooses it. Christianity has eternity's idea about what it is to give up one's

[598] *KJN* 10, 79/NB31:109; *TA* 95/*SKS* 8, 90; *WL* 53/*SKS* 9, 60.
[599] *KJN* 4, 174/NB2:83.
[600] *KJN* 4, 174/NB2:83.

> self-seeking purposes…It is easy to see that Christian self-denial makes it way to God and has its only abode in God…a genuine relationship to God.[601]

Returning to the point expressed above in the context of *imitatio Christi*, as Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms present it, inward *and* outward suffering is essential to genuine relationship with God. Indeed, such voluntary suffering that is chosen freely is the truest marker of the God relationship. For this suffering "comes from the God-relationship itself."[602]

THE PARADOX OF GRACE: "MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS"[603]

Firmly situating the negotiation of the dual problems of meritoriousness and hidden inwardness within the God-relationship, then, naturally, leads back to the deliberations of *imitatio Christi* and negative theology. Yet, this time, even allowing for the mediatorial role of Christ, and recalling the fact noted in Chapter I that Kierkegaardian selfhood entails an ideal self as a telos or goal towards which one strives, that this deeper, truer self is in a certain respect a vanishing point on the horizon, we cannot ignore Kierkegaard's assessment of the fundamental impossibility of the human being to perfectly follow Christ in suffering love and therein relate to God, variously but recurrently couched in terms of love's dying away, becoming spirit, and the qualifications of unconditionality, ideality, infinity, and the absolute. In the same journal entry in which he asserts that voluntary suffering issues from the God-relationship itself, Kierkegaard refers to literature of the *Erbauungsautoren* and their forerunners and approvingly notes that if God is to love a human being and a human being is to love God, then

> this [human] being, *qua* selfish will, must be annihilated entirely. This is dying away, the most intensive torment. But even if, in accordance with the better will within him, the religious person is willing enough to do this, he

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[601] *WL* 194–5/*SKS* 9, 194. Anti-Climacus reflects the same: "There stands Christianity with its requirements for self-denial: Deny yourself—and then suffer because you deny yourself" (*PC* 213/*SKS* 12, 209).
[602] *KJN* 10, 307/NB33:53.
[603] See 2 Cor. 12:9 as well as *KJN* 9, 167/NB27:55.

> cannot…entirely subjugate his will, his subjectivity, to this better will; and so, after having put up the most desperate resistance, his subjectivity now constantly lies in wait for a chance to disrupt the entire revolution by which it was dethroned. No religious person, not even the purest, is such pristine, purified subjectivity or pure transparency in willing solely what God wills, so that there is no residue of his original subjectivity…in his soul's depths.[604]

In other, unmistakeable, words, grace, a continued act of prevenient grace on God's part, is ineluctable in Kierkegaardian selfhood, is needed to make up for the non-pristine, impure, and non-transparent subjectivity or the obstinate relic of the "first self" that one constantly battles in striving to equilibrate the pairwise syntheses of the self, is unable to independently will into inexistence, and is the lot of every human being.[605] As Barnett points out, for Kierkegaard, there is "a sense in which *imitatio Christi* is, finally, impossible"—recalling the absolute qualitative difference between humanity and God, "[b]etween the helpless and the helper has been set a chasm, which can be bridged only by the latter's graciousness."[606] That said, as the journal entry with which this section began makes clear, writing against the antinomian tendencies of a nineteenth century Lutheranism which flippantly interpreted Luther's *sola fide* to assert faith over any Christian works or ethical-religious striving altogether, thereby undergirding secular indifference, Kierkegaard intensely railed against any semblance of cheap, bourgeoise grace, "grace changed into indulgence" relative to the "indescribable grace" of imitatively becoming a sacrifice.[607] As Kierkegaard more clearly comments in *For Self-Examination*, "Christianity's requirement is this: your life should express works as strenuously as possible; then one thing more is required—that you humble yourself and confess: But my being saved is nevertheless grace."[608] But, again, with Kierkegaard, as before, on the matter of imitating Christ and its essential relation to selfhood

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[604] *KJN* 10, 308/NB33:54.
[605] *EUD* 314/*SKS* 5, 306.
[606] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism, and Holiness*, 180.
[607] *TM* 345–6/*SKS* 13, 409–10.
[608] *FSE* 17/*SKS* 13, 99.

and loving God, now in light of the imperative for grace, we find dialectical tension rather than one-sidedness. As a yet further expression of paradox in his theological vision fraught with tensions, Kierkegaard, as both Becker-Lindenthal and David Lawrence Coe assess, sought to (re-)establish "the tension between Law and Gospel, between being nothing and being loved by God."[609]

Chronologically speaking, for Kierkegaard, the soteriological process of love's dying away in *imitatio Christi* is, again following theologians such as Arndt and Tauler, unavoidably grace-filled and may be summarised as follows. First, the individual is invited to follow Christ and sufferingly die to all worldliness—in particular, dying to the incessant pursuits for power, prestige, security, and wealth—and repent in genuine inwardness. This means following the suffering Christ of Gethsemane and striving to enact all the above descriptions of dying away and becoming nothing to (as far as possible) align one's wayward will with God's perfectly good will and kenotically emptying oneself of selfishness: "death first, you must first die to every merely earthly hope, to every merely human confidence; you must die to your selfishness, or to the world, because it is only through your selfishness that the world has power over you; if you are dead to your selfishness, you are also dead to the world."[610] Additionally, given Kierkegaard's *via negativa*, the death to self and world is as much epistemological as it is conative, it also means epistemologically resigning all presumptive claims to knowledge of the divine. Second, only after this exhaustive conative and epistemic death is God's Holy Spirit poured into the individual and, in Arndt's words, "nothing other…lives, shines, acts, wills, loves, thinks, speaks, or rejoices" in the individual

[609] Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal, "Nothing but Unworthy Servants? Kierkegaard and Tauler on Grace, Striving and Cooperation," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35, no. 4 (2022): 744 (see also Coe, "Lauding Luther in Kierkegaard's Public Discourse" in *Kierkegaard and Luther*, 180 and 186–9).
[610] *FSE* 77/*SKS* 13, 99.

"except God himself."[611] Were Kierkegaard to stop here, it would seem as though he holds that grace is entirely contingent upon human agency. That is, that grace would be conditional upon the individual and their unaided human effort and autonomous free will to lovingly die away and prepare the self for God to work in and through the deeper, truer self that one is becoming. Certainly, Kierkegaard's final acknowledgement of that which "only freedom can do" and, more specifically, the ability to accept or refuse the invitation to follow Christ in suffering suggests Kierkegaard's recognition of inalienable human freedom and choice.[612] But, true to his recurring espousal of paradox, Kierkegaard does not go this route. He instead contends that even at the very first stage—which seems antecedent to grace—the human capacity to implement *imitatio Christi*, die away, and become spirit or one's deeper self is dependent upon God's enabling grace of the second stage. Recalling that Kierkegaard considers that the individual is to become nothing before God and the individual alone "is capable of nothing whatever," that, per Climacus, "the individual is capable of doing nothing himself but is nothing before God," and "the relationship with God is distinguishable by the negative…self-annihilation if the essential form for the relationship with God," all of which sits uneasily with the notion that one's salvation is predicated on the individual's standalone freedom, Kierkegaard leaves his reader with an insoluble paradox.[613] In Becker-Lindenthal's words, for Kierkegaard, without grace, we are unable to reach a state worthy of grace.[614]

The Christian doctrine of grace, which Kierkegaard poignantly describes in the discourse "The Expectancy of an Eternal Salvation" as that which "is not given to be understood," stays intelligibly at home within Kierkegaard's theological framework as a deliberate aporia and inexplicable paradox and, as such, is antithetical to a higher *gnōsis* or

[611] Arndt, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, 30.
[612] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 405–6/Paper 591.
[613] *KJN* 5, 244/NB9:59; *CUP 1*, 461/*SKS* 7, 418–9.
[614] Becker-Lindenthal, "Nothing but Unworthy Servants?," 736.

acquisition of Gnostic knowledge such as that found in Schopenhauerian nihilism.[615] Kierkegaard's articulation of the tension inbuilt to the relation between inwardness and outwardness, meritoriousness and ascetism, works and grace, all harmonise with his contemplation of the absolute paradox and his discussion of each of these recurrently bring one to experience their own epistemic limitations of comprehension as human beings. Human beings cannot, in other words, understand the paradox of Christ whom Christians are invited to imitate any more than we can acquire knowledge of the divine and the divine mysteries, nor can we understand the workings of grace—but, in each case, we are also not meant to. We are not meant to understand that the blessed end of earnest ethical-religious striving, *imitatio Christi*, love's dying away, becoming a Kierkegaardian self, is grace, yet grace is needed to enable such. On this precipice, deeply impregnated with the tension of paradox as it is, Lee C. Barrett helpfully likens the theological projects of Kierkegaard to that of the intellectual giant of the Christian tradition, Augustine, and observes that "[c]onceptual instruction was not an end in itself for either [Augustine or Kierkegaard]: both wanted [their] readers to struggle with their texts in order to grow spiritually. Consequently, both…often wrote in an…elliptical way so that readers had to examine their own hearts in order to make sense of the text."[616]

STEPPING TOWARDS THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Bringing this chapter to a close, then, having detailed three salient inheritances from Kierkegaard's Moravian Pietist upbringing—*imitatio Christi*, theological apophaticism, and grace—it does not require special powers of visual acuity to see how these inheritances provide Kierkegaard with a theological grammar with which to express his ideas of loving God and hence the salvific pursuit of selfhood/the Greatest Commandment. Of note,

[615] *EUD* 272/*SKS* 5, 267.
[616] Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying*, 17.

especially in light of the torturous difficulty and suffering entailed (tending toward recognition of the human incapacity to enact such), one endeavouring to imitate Christ in love's dying away ineluctably encounters the concern of where to begin. The concern of identifying where exactly God's gracious agency begins and where one's agency does. The concern of what is of God's enabling grace and what is of human freedom. Properly dealing with eternity, though ostensibly foundational to what it is love God, answers to this concern or question, it seems, always lay ahead of or before the individual and one is never afforded asseverational certainty in the form of expressible knowledge. In Kierkegaard's own words, in seeking to address the concern and answer the question of what it is to love God in order to then (at least possibly) do so, "an uncertainty will always remain in everything [one] finds out, and this uncertainty nourishes the concern, and the concern nourishes the uncertainty."[617] In place of knowledge of what loving God (who is love) is, then, the apophasis of Kierkegaard's ultimate epistemic aporia and attending uncertainty discloses Kierkegaard's distinctive account of human conation or need and it is, I submit, precisely this accounting that most embodies the Kierkegaardian love of God. That is, already suggested in his 1844 discourse, "To Need God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection," uncertainty nourishes or drives the need to love. In *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard expounds: "So it always is with need in a human being; out of the eater comes something to eat; where there is need, it itself produces, as it were, that which it needs."[618] And, in *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard clarifies, "the need brings its nourishment along with it; what is sought is in the seeking that seeks it; faith is in the concern over not having faith; love is in the self-concern over not loving…The need brings the nourishment along with it, not *by itself*, as if the need produced the nourishment, but by virtue of a divine determination that joins the two, the need and the

[617] *EUD* 268/*SKS* 5, 263–4.
[618] *FSE* 69/*SKS* 13, 91.

nourishment."[619] As these descriptions suggest, the need to love is not fulfilled in any ordinary way such that, upon meeting the object of need, one is sated, the need quelled, and one may then stop seeking its fulfillment. Rather, as a "deeply religious need" entailing "suffering in one's inner being…the suffering of the God-relationship," the need to love and specifically the salvific need for the Kierkegaardian self to love God is properly and paradoxically insatiable (just as knowledge of the love of God is uncertain) as it eternally nourishes the lover with an ever new and ever augmented need to love.[620] Turning to the next and final chapter, then, the theological grammar furnished in the present one allows Kierkegaard's distinctive account of human conation to enter centre stage and I am, at long last, in position to conclude this dissertation by stating, as far as a consistent apophasis allows, what it means or, more accurately, how a human being is to love God.

[619] *CD* 244–5/*SKS* 10, 251.
[620] *CUP 1*, 460/*SKS* 7, 418.

Chapter V

Kierkegaard and the Love of God

> *You begin your story with the beginning of love and end with the grave. But that eternal love-history is begun far earlier. It began with your beginning, when you came into being out of nothing, and just as you do not become nothing, so your history surely does not end at the grave. When the couch of death is prepared for you, when you have gone to bed never to get up again, and they are only waiting for you to turn on your side to die, and stillness grows about you, and then after a while the friends of the family go away and it becomes quieter, because only the closest ones remain while death comes ever closer, and then the closest ones go quietly away, and it becomes quieter because only the very closest of all remain, and then when the last one has bent over you for the last time and turns away to the other side, for you yourself turn now to the side of death, there is still one who remains by your side, the very last one at the death-bed, he who was the first, God, the living God—if, whatever else it was, your heart was pure, something it became only by loving him.*[621]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

In one form or other, loving the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind is decreed by Jesus as the greatest of God's commandments. As should now be clear, consistent with the "impossibility of direct communication" characteristic of all things essentially Christian, noting the love of God often though he does, nowhere in Kierkegaard's authorship(s) does he offer anything like a systematic exposition of what it means to become

[621] Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, with foreword by George Pattison (New York: Harper-Collins, 2009), 149/*SKS* 9, 151 (see also *KJN* 4, 118/NB:199).

a self in following the words of Christ and pursuing the Greatest Commandment.[622] Rather, interleaved within the pages of his many books and papers, Kierkegaard implants an ensemble of interrelated ideas, leaving it to his readers to "examine their own hearts" and exegetically piece together an understanding of what it is to love God *per se*.[623] This dissertation is and has been an effort to do so and, looking back on the terrain covered so far, it is fair to say that Kierkegaard's writings collectively display if not *what* it is, then, more definitely, *how* it is that one is to love God. Perhaps this should have been expected of Kierkegaard *qua* thinker of subjectivity *par excellence* from the outset. As Climacus memorably remarks, "[o]bjectively the emphasis is on *what* is said; subjectively the emphasis is on *how* it is said," and, by extrapolation, for Kierkegaard, stating the matter of loving God in the Christian sense is properly at home when stressing the latter.[624] As the discussion in the previous chapter indicated, notably growing out of his upbringing in Moravian Pietism and his enduring attraction to the tradition out of which Pietism itself developed, the theological vision to emerge in Kierkegaard with respect to *how* to subjectively enact the injunction to love the Lord thy God is a paradoxical portrait fraught with tensions and, fittingly, one cast in both negative and positive terms. Negatively, loving God is cast in terms of negation, annihilation, resignation, renunciation, the *via negativa* that refuses the *via mystica*, becoming nothing before God, and *imitatio Christi* in the mode of a Christ-like kenotic emptying of self-will. In short, and in Kierkegaard's preferred phraseology, it is cast in terms of love's "dying away."[625] Positively, it is cast in terms of upbringing or becoming spirit in a strenuous yet grace-filled relationship with God, concretely experienced in the existence examination or God's eternal examination of whether love truly resides within oneself in

[622] *PC* 133/*SKS* 12, 137.
[623] Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying*, 17.
[624] *CUP 1*, 202/*SKS* 7, 185.
[625] *KJN* 9, 68/NB26:68.

time. In view of the foregoing chapters, it is the charge of this final chapter to interweave this negativity and positivity together and conclude how, for Kierkegaard, one is to love God.

To this end, following from considerations of the Moravian Pietism-conditioned ideas of *imitatio Christi*, apophaticism, and grace, the previous chapter ended with a summation of Kierkegaard's distinctive account of human conation in which the need of God and love's need is integral to the love of God. Elaborating that notion, if we look at one of his *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard says plainly enough that "[t]he simple and humble way is to love God because one needs him."[626] He continues,

> Admittedly it seems very natural that in order to love God one must soar high up into heaven where God dwells, but in loving God humbly it is most fitting and sure to remain on earth. Admittedly…it seems very selfish to love God because one needs him—yet [this] is the only way in which a person can truly love God. Woe to the presumptuous who would dare to love God without needing him!...[T]he fundamental and primary basis for a person's love of God is completely to understand that one needs God, loves him simply because one needs him. The person who most profoundly recognises his need of God loves him most truly. You are not to presume to love God for God's sake. You are humbly to understand that your own welfare eternally depends on this need, and therefore you are to love him.[627]

Here, then, Kierkegaard is resolute in coupling the love of God and the need of love. Moreover, although Ferreira is right to point out that the notion of love's need can be read in two ways—(1) the need of love to express itself and (2) the need of love indicative of a yearning absence that calls out for satisfaction—and Kierkegaard speaks of both, the latter is of greater bearing when it comes to the God-relationship and characterising the conative substratum embodying the love of God.[628] By attending to love's need interpreted in this latter sense, it is easy to see Kierkegaard's conceptual contact with the whole tract of thought passing through, as we saw in Chapter II, Fichte's understanding of longing, "a drive towards

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[626] *CD* 188/*SKS* 10, 198.
[627] *CD* 188/*SKS* 10, 198–9.
[628] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 21.

something totally unknown, which reveals itself only through a *need*, a *discomfort*, a *void*, which seeks satisfaction," and makes its way through to Schopenhauerian nihilism.[629] The latter sees the impossibility of satisfaction (save that which consummate knowledge of *nihil* bestows) via the simplistic pursuit of needs and thereupon advocates the full and repeated rejection of all willing so to thwart the selfish immorality of the will-to-live. Put in the vernacular of love's need, Schopenhauerian nihilism does not need and therefore does not love God, Schopenhauer (unlike Kierkegaard) naturally exhibits no interest in propounding a love of God. And, if one can speak intelligibly of need and love within nihilism, then what nihilism needs above all else and what it loves most of all is knowledge—specifically, the cataphatic knowledge that all is nothing, that God (as all else) is *nihil*. Where Fichte envisioned an insatiable "drive towards something totally unknown" nevertheless seeking satisfaction, nihilism holds positive knowledge that God is *nihil* as constitutive of such satisfaction. To recall Schopenhauer, de-Christianised grace, as a "universal tranquillizer [*Quietiv*] to quell all willing," heralds the reception of knowledge of *nihil* and sates one with "the most profound peacefulness."[630] As we saw in Chapters III and IV, Kierkegaard evaluates this project of nihilism as problematic and deficient. Moreover, given his grounding in Pietism, Kierkegaard differs from the track of thought culminating in nihilism on the score of resisting, despite its apparently quietive properties, a final and higher knowledge or *gnōsis* of total nothingness. On the basis of these developments, then, with his rejection of a knowledge of God—which would include knowledge of God as *nihil*—and redirection away from the unassailable knowing of divinised and incommunicable nothingness firmly in mind, it is now possible to assert an integrative and, I submit, conclusive statement as to the thoroughgoing willed activity of the Kierkegaardian love of God. Such a touchstone

[629] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 265.
[630] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 418.

statement of how, in Kierkegaard's eyes, one is to pursue the Greatest Commandment is this: *In the existence examination of whether there is love in an individual, Kierkegaard fundamentally embraces loving God as the will to die to the idols of the mind. By way of the strenuous process of dying to sundry idolatrous images of God, one forms a heart out of which they individually love God.* Here, to explicate this laden statement, reflecting the Pentateuchal origin of the Greatest Commandment itself (viz., Deut. 6:5, 10:12; cf. Exod. 20:6), the apologue of the Israelite worship of the golden calf beginning in the Book of Exodus stands as particularly apposite.

FORMING A HEART OUT OF WHICH ONE LOVES GOD BY DYING TO THE IDOLS OF THE MIND

> *And when the Israelites saw that Moses delayed to come down out of Mount Sinai, they gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us…And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool [cf. Exodus 20:3–4], after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods…And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people…have corrupted themselves: They have turned quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods…*
>
> —*Exodus 32:1–8*

One way of summarising this passage is that, in the place of God, the ancient Israelites expressly violated (at minimum) the first two commandments of the Decalogue and erected a graven external—a golden calf—for idolatrous adoration. But, apart from its Pentateuchal provenance and injunctive nature, how does the parable of the golden calf

specially relate to the Kierkegaardian love of God or illumine how one is to love God? The answer lay in the fact that it is possible, indeed, if we see the Greatest Commandment shining through the parable of the golden calf as I suggest Kierkegaard is wont to do, preferable, to interpret this passage in an infinitely more inward way. Commenting on the parable, the German theologian and younger contemporary of Kierkegaard, Friedrich Justus Knecht (1839–1921), instructively writes that "[w]henever a man loves anything more than he loves God, he is guilty of idolatry."[631] Directly enlisting the diction of the Greatest Commandment, then, we can say that, brazenly worshipping a molten juvenile bovine or something ensconced closer to the innerworkings of the self, the failure to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind comprises a *de facto* instance of idolatry. Kierkegaard, it should be acknowledged, does not expend an inordinate amount of effort across his writings cogitating the topic of idolatry. What he does do, and as we have seen, however, is continually mediate on following Christ *imitatio Christi* in love's dying away, the tensed need of grace to do so, alongside related expressions of upbringing and becoming a self/spirit, just as he recurrently develops his convoluted psychology of inwardness. Importantly, then, I contend that Kierkegaard's refusal to foreclose on a Gnostic knowledge of God's nature or final rejection of cataphatic knowledge of God as *nihil* and all other offshoots of a higher *gnōsis* are rightly interpreted as his renunciation of idolatry. That is, Kierkegaard's express advocacy of the self-denial of one's inwardly fabricated idols, chiefly including, as it were, the golden calf of divine knowledge wherein it is "absolutely settled for a person" that God's essence and being is pure nothing.[632] The Greatest Commandment enjoins one to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind, and Kierkegaard's grasp of the Greatest Commandment

[631] Frederick Justus Knecht, "Chapter XXXVII: The Golden Calf," in *A Practical Commentary on Holy Scripture*, vol. 1, trans. Michael F. Glancey (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1894), 183.
[632] *KJN* 4, 96/NB:139.

commensurately translates this to enjoin one to not idolatrously love anything, including knowledge of divinity, more than God but to instead need God above all else and therein love God above all else. Otherwise put, Kierkegaard's Greatest Commandment enjoins one to not abscond from the need for God or not endeavour to fill love's need with some stand-in for God but to instead undertake the strenuous death to precisely these psychogenic idols of the mind *in order to* express one's love of God.

However, within this definitive statement on loving God, that one is to die to the psychogenic idols of the mind to express one's love of God, there persists several points warranting clarification. Not least of which is: Does such a statement imply that, for Kierkegaard, the Greatest Commandment simply means "dying away" or is there more to loving God than the cluster of ideas encapsulated in that phrase? As well, granting dying away as entailing death to idols of the mind, what forms can the idols of the mind assume or, at least, what is the process of psychogenesis from which the idols of the mind are said to derive? So, too, what, in fine, makes one's strenuous death to such idols an expression of one's love of God? I address each of these clarificatory points in succession.

THE MEANING OF THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

On balance, where he may be seen to rhetorically recruit the language of the Greatest Commandment in a variety of ways across his writings, for Kierkegaard, the Greatest Commandment succinctly and foundationally posits the human need to love of God.[633] And, I contend, for Kierkegaard, putting to death the idols of the mind represents a *sine qua non* for this need-based human love of God. To be sure, as elaborated below, the idols of the mind are infinitely diverse and therefore, phenomenologically speaking, the human love of God keyed by the Greatest Commandment almost certainly manifests differently across individuals as a

[633] e.g., *EO1* 227, 229/*SKS* 2, p. 220, p. 222; *EO2* 147–8/*SKS* 3, 146; *WL* 19–29/*SKS* 9, 27; *CD* 183/*SKS* 10, 194; *EUD* 26/*SKS* 5, 34; *WA* 24–5/*SKS* 11, 29; *FSE* 22/*SKS* 13, 50–51.

function of the idiosyncratic idol(s) to which each individual dies. Nevertheless, in the same way that Kierkegaard maintains that Christianity "knows only one kind of love, the *spirit*'s love, but this can lie at the base of and be present in every expression of love," I hold that Kierkegaard regards the love command as signifying that the will- and need-based death to the idols of the mind, that which is entailed in becoming *spirit*, is found within all love of God, including human ways of loving that ostensibly stress other facets of relationship with God without typical reference to idolatry such as, for example, supplicative prayer.[634] In this instance, as Kierkegaard explicates, "prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays" and said change may I think rightly be interpreted as referencing, if indirectly, another expression of love's dying to the idols of the mind, the "immensely painful operation" of dying to the idols of the mind wherein one is "changed into likeness with [God]," who is love and "has not the slightest intention of altering his conception of what love is."[635] Hence, an act of love which initially seems one characterised by the human lover beseeching something from God and therefore effecting change of some sort in God (e.g., a novel willingness to offer that which is sought), in Kierkegaard's view, extends the dying away of the human individual to once again encompass change effected, the formation of the heart, within that individual. As diverse as the love of God may appear, then, the Greatest Commandment picks out, for Kierkegaard, love's dying away as the unifying thread that ties different instances of love together.

Adding to this train of thought, as previously noted, love's dying away in Kierkegaardian love of God signalled by the Greatest Commandment is rightly understood as a dynamic that fundamentally ends not, as with Schopenhauerian nihilism, in nothing but rather in something. In turn, this understanding further expresses how, for Kierkegaard, the

634 *WL* 146/*SKS* 9, 147–8 (emphasis mine).
635 *UDVS* 22/*SKS* 8, 137; *KJN* 10, 182/NB32:93; *KJN* 7, 454/NB20:99.

Pietism-inspired idea of dying away housed in the Greatest Commandment can "lie at the base of and be present in every expression of love" of God in the way that it connects the *essentia* of the Greatest Commandment to other passages of scripture that, once again, *prima facie* do not appear to reference loving God at all but, through love's dying away, may in fact do so.

A prominent example here is Matt. 10:39: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Kierkegaard, or rather, Kierkegaard and Judge William respectively, in fact reflect on this passage twice—once in *The Concept of Irony* and once in the second volume of *Either/Or*—and in both instances resonances can be found to love's dying away within the Greatest Commandment and that fact that Kierkegaardian death results not in nothing but in something. In the first case, coming as part of his critique of Fichtean subjectivity within his dissertation, Kierkegaard ties Matt. 10:39 to the thought of Tauler in specifying death, loss, or negation as paradoxically related to birth, finding, or somethingness. Kierkegaard writes, "in order for thought, subjectivity, to acquire fullness and truth, it must let itself be born…[b]ut this takes courage, and yet it is necessary, since everyone who wants to save his soul must lose it. But this is not the courage of despair, as Tauler so beautifully says in an even more concrete situation: *Doch dieses Verleiren, dies Entschwinden Ist eben das echte und rechte Finden* [Yet this loss, this vanishing, Is indeed the genuine and proper finding]."[636] In the second case, Judge William more clearly unites Matt. 10:39 with dying to the idols of the mind, the end result of which is not nothing but something. "[O]nly the person who has lost everything has gained everything," Kierkegaard's pseudonym paraphrases scriptural Matthew, "[h]ence I say with [François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, 1615–1715]: "Believe in love—it takes everything, it gives everything."[637]

[636] *COI* 274/*SKS* 1, 310.
[637] *EO2*, 111/*SKS* 3, 112.

In other words, Judge William propounds the view he attributes to the late Renaissance/early Enlightenment French Catholic theologian and poet that love, dying away, and therefore the love of God who is love, takes everything or, we might say in the idiom of the Greatest Commandment, it takes all one's heart, soul, and mind (as only death can) yet in doing so it gives everything—eminently, not nothing but a something, indeed (soteriologically-speaking), everything—in return.

THE FORMS OF THE IDOLS OF THE MIND AND PSYCHOGENESIS

Having considered the ways in which Kierkegaard may be seen to interpret the Greatest Commandment and certain other passages of scripture as bespeaking love's dying away, it is now worth considering the forms of those objects to which one is to die. In this regard, in seeking to state the forms of the psychogenic idols of the mind, bound up with cataphatic knowledge of God's nullity as I have presented them, it is useful to consider the different ways in which ubiquitous knowledge of God can fuel the formation of different idols. For example, it is worth distinguishing knowledge of that which (a) disposes to misotheism or God-hatred entailing idolatry from (b) cataphatic and idolatrous knowledge of God's nullity tantamount to atheism. The latter straightforwardly holds as absolute the knowledge of God's inexistence or non-being whereas the former more complexly covers the pluriform ways in which human beings construct images of God's nature and being and give themselves to hating and rebelling against said images, often on ethical grounds, and ending in idolatrous self-worship.

In his study of God-hatred, Bernard Schweizer identifies a host of misotheists who cultivate a blistering antipathy for God precisely because they are so profoundly ethical, compassionate, sensible, and traumatically scarred by first-hand experiences with tragedy: "they are artists and thinkers who are unorthodox, blasphemous, and irreverent; and yet they are also deeply humane and moral, concerned with the well-being of man in the here and now

rather than in the afterlife."[638] From ancient thinkers to contemporaries of Kierkegaard through to victims of the Holocaust and other twentieth- and twenty first-century figures, Schweizer delineates simple atheists whose idolatry consists in absolute knowledge of God as *nihil* from those who cling to belief in God and do not so much regard God as ontological nothing as, tormented, one blameworthy for the evil and ills that from time immemorial have befallen humankind. As James Crenshaw astutely remarks, for such thinkers, "'[t]here is no God," in their realm of discourse really means "'God does not care,'" and, because God is callously indifferent to the plights of humankind, God is morally repugnant.[639] Like the divinity of Descartes' more paranoid and despondent moments, the misotheistic images of God conjured—in Descartes' case, those disclosing a supremely powerful, intelligent, cunning, and malicious demon or evil genius (*genius malignus*) "who has employed all his energies in order to deceive"—evoke within the misotheist not devotion but indignation, not love but revulsion.[640] Moreover, concomitant with the moral condemnation of God, the crystallisation of misotheistic idolatry comes in with a commensurately self-righteous aggrandizement of one's own moral intuitions and achievements relative to the ostensible ethical depravity of God whereas atheism, consistently held, cannot impute such an ethically pejorative assessment to that which or whom does not, to the atheistic mind, exist.

Manifestly, such misotheistic imagery and incandescent moral fury at God, when not openly recognised as idolatrous, sits uneasily with a Kierkegaardian view on multiple fronts. For one, univocal hatred of God does not straightforwardly accommodate Kierkegaard's accounting of how Christ as prototype openly allows for anger and dejection at God and

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[638] Schweizer, *Hating God*, 169.
[639] James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26 (see also 214n).
[640] René Descartes, "§I. An Approach to the Method is Revealed," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 468.

consoles those experiencing such in their imitation of Christ amidst the suffering of perceived God-forsakenness. As Kierkegaard circumspectly observes in a contemplation of Christ's cry of dereliction, whether accompanied by paroxysmal anger or extended periods of crestfallen silence, "[y]ou see, this is why the Exemplar consoles, by demonstrating that this," one's own (even if comparatively paltry) *Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*, "is a necessary part of it," that this, even this, too, belongs.[641] Additionally, univocal hatred of God does not accommodate Kierkegaardian trust in a loving relationship that imputes to God the words: "Therefore I would like to stay with you so that you can vent your anger upon me if I am speaking [of suffering] untruthfully."[642] Such psychogenic imagery undergirding a univocal hatred of God on grounds of ethics and perceived injustice furthermore sits uneasily with a Kierkegaardian view wherein the self and one's constituent actions (if at times morally laudable) are always a matter of becoming in time, thus opening the prospect of abject evil that cannot be punished in temporality insofar as no crime can be punished before it comes into existence. As though writing to one formulating images of an absolutely merciless, unjust deity in the face of having been wronged, Kierkegaard advises: "when you see the success of something terrible that will rouse your indignation against God…tremble and say: God in heaven, so he [the evil-doer] is one of the capital criminals whose crime needs all of temporal life to come into existence and is not punished until eternity."[643] In all of these ways, the precise forms of the idols of the mind to which one is to die in love of God differs from the atheistic knowledge

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[641] *KJN* 9, 474/NB30:101. Notably, this point is decisive in saving Kierkegaardian loving God *qua* the death to the idols of the mind from amounting to, say, obtuse theodicy or the indelicate and heavy-handed labelling as idolatry all that which expresses deeply negative sentiments towards God. Those instances wherein, to use de silentio's words, "the ethical is the temptation" (*FT* 115/*SKS* 4, 202) and the religious *love* of God made all the more difficult such as is felt in response to the innocent suffering and death of one's child or, indeed, as Fyodor Dostoevsky's (1821–1881) Ivan argues, the suffering of the innocent in general ("Rebellion," in *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. Ignat Avsey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 296–309).
[642] *UDVS* 238–9/*SKS* 8, 338–9.
[643] *TM* 305/*SKS* 13, 364.

that God does not exist versus the misotheistic 'there is no God' really meaning 'God does not care' and hence belief that God does exist yet carries moral opprobrium deserving blame. Explicitly, the idol to die to within the atheistic mindset is the absolute knowledge of existence and that God does not exist whereas the idol to die to in the misotheistic mindset is the knowledge that God does not morally exist.

Having briefly examined two general ways in which knowledge can psychologically fuel the formation of different idols by way of distinguishing between misotheistic and atheistic idolatry, one might seek to specify the forms of the mind's idols more inclusively beyond generic denotation of knowledge of God's ontological or moral nullity by enumerating other objects prone to idolatry. In this respect, Barnett itemises a plethora of idols or, to use the phrase from Timothy Keller's popular book, a litany of counterfeit gods, including obsessive entanglements in "the selfish pursuits of power, prestige, security, and wealth," to which we might reasonably add the psychological and behavioural engrossments in pursuits of success, human relationships, career, sex, health, intellectual stimulation and achievement, food and other sensate, creaturely comforts, as well as narcissistic self-absorption and chasing countless other objects within the world's ever-changing landscape of hierarchical power structures and economies of desire.[644]

But, as concrete as itemising these objects is, they hardly exhaust the category of the mind's idols and it is not at all clear that enumerating a list of idolic forms, *anything* loved

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[644] Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, 195; Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: When the Empty Promises of Love, Money and Power Let You Down* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009). For his part, Keller pragmatically defines the mind's idols as "anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything that you seek to give you what only God can give" (p. xvii). And, in more axiological terms, Thomas Oden describes idols such that "[w]hen a finite value…[becomes] a *center of value* by which other values are judged…[and] has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen…a *god*…To be worshipped as a god, something must be sufficiently good to be plausibly regarded as the rightful center of one's valuing…" (*Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 95).

more than God, extending to infinity gets us any closer to grasping the forms of the idols of the mind in Kierkegaard's sense. This is especially true when it comes to considering less conspicuously worldly idols contained within Kierkegaard's analysis of the need to part with idols of the mind in the form of false images of self, love, God, and the way the self (in the process of becoming) is to imitate Christ in, for example, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*. Indeed, overall, I submit that, for Kierkegaard, attempting to specify the idols of the mind is ill-conceived from inception. Whether flowing out of, as covered in the previous chapter, the apophatic tendencies of the Pietism in which he was raised, or the herein unexplored topic of Kierkegaard's Lutheranism in the sense of the German reformer's enduring sentiment that "the condition of this life is not that of having God, but of seeking God," or even, as Westphal argues, Kierkegaard's project of lambasting the hubristic excesses of a Hegelian epistemology that purports to lead one to an Absolute Knowledge of reality *in toto*, effectively deifying and idolising human epistemological and dialectical faculties, Kierkegaard purposefully leaves the forms of the idols of the mind open-ended and unspecified.[645] For, apart from gross inefficiency, specifying all counterfeit gods indirectly specifies God and therefore one identifying surrogates of god/divinity itself, for example, does not seek but already possesses God or collapses into the self-same theological hubris of which Kierkegaard accuses Hegelianism.

In what is perhaps the most sustained attack on Hegelian epistemology, Climacus's narrative strongly resembles the unknowing "babble of a Jeremiah" of which Turner speaks when describing apophatic theology to intimate the ineluctable aporia attending the effort to circumnavigate idolatry and love God: "Dialectic in its truth is a kindly disposed, ministering power that discovers and helps to find where the absolute object of faith and worship is,

[645] Martin Luther, *Lectures in Romans*, vol. 25, *Works*, trans. Walter G. Tillmanns and Jacob A. O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 225; Westphal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 101–24.

where the absolute is—namely, there where in unknowing the difference between knowledge and nonknowledge collapses in absolute worship…Dialectic itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual to it and says: Here it must be, that I can vouch for; if you worship here, you worship God."[646] In other words, sensing the continually idolatrous pull to knowledge, Climacus offers the metaphorics of space as to where God is and where God is not in lieu of definite knowledge of either. Insofar as Climacus may be harmonised with Kierkegaard, then, both redirect the inquiry as to the specific forms of the idols of the mind and put the inquirer back on themselves. In answer to the question of the forms of the idols of the mind, Kierkegaard bids one to relinquish yet another, perhaps more surreptitious idol: The effort to establish dialectically-derived, declarative knowledge of idolic forms.

Recall from the previous chapter Kierkegaard's manoeuvre by which Christ resolves the ordinal issue (of whether love of God antecedes love of neighbour or vice versa) by asserting the imperative to action. There we saw Kierkegaard guide a move from casuistic conceptual analysis of love to the behavioural action of enacting or reduplicating in one's life the love modelled by Christ. Here, again, we see Kierkegaard guide a move away from speculative fine-grained and textured knowledge of the forms of the idols of the mind to action. Only, this time, the action involved is more conspicuously an inward act of metacognition. Characteristically emphasising the human side of the God-relationship, Kierkegaard calls for one's metacognitive death to the idols of the mind whereby one's higher-order thought—one's ineffable love for God, who is love—signals a death to or relinquishment of one's lower-order thoughts—e.g., pursuing declarative knowledge which carefully gives form to counterfeit gods on one hand and God on the other. Significantly, and to recall Kierkegaard's statement that the "fundamental and primary basis for a person's love of God is to understand that one needs God," such an inward act of metacognition

[646] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 22; *CUP 1*, 490–1/*SKS* 7, 444–5.

fundamentally comprises a willed or need-driven act of concession that is not done unless one possesses the genuine need of God.[647] Moreover, to refashion a well-known Augustinianism, such metacognitive action is impelled in that lure to idolatry competing with the need for God is continual, for example, the epistemic project of establishing knowledge of the forms of the idols of the mind that would seem implicated in one's ability to love God *never finds rest*.[648]

If we now attempt a different approach to the matter and seek to ascertain the process from which the idols of the mind, infinite though they may be, are said to derive, we arrive at a similar result. We find that the manoeuvre whereby knowledge is sacrificed for action is indeed a mainstay of Kierkegaard. Of note, in describing the process out of which the idols of the mind are said to materialise, I use the term 'psychogenesis' advisedly. The term first appeared in the eighteenth century, per Danish psychiatrist, Einar Geert Jørgensen, with maximal usage generally coinciding with Kierkegaard's active years of authorship in 1838 before dissipation to residual usage in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[649] As to its meaning, perhaps Karl Bonhoeffer (1868–1948), Dietrich Bonhoeffer's psychiatrist father, provides the most basic definition growing out of the root words 'psyche' and 'genesis' in establishing 'psychogenic' as all that which originates in psychical or mental events and is "regularly evoked by ideas (*Vorstellungen*) of an emotional sort" or can be caused, influenced, and maintained by ideas and "affective situations" including "experiences of a harmful kind."[650] But if one digs deeper into the semantics of such apparently explicative

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[647] *CD* 188/*SKS* 10, 199.

[648] Insofar as the metacognition by which one's lower-order thoughts cede to one's higher-order love involves God's grace, that which "is not given to be understood" (*EUD* 272/*SKS* 5, 267), and is "based on an inexplicable impression" (*KJN* 4, 96/NB:139), unlike Augustine's effort to graphically expound a phenomenology of loving God in the sixth chapter of Book X of his *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183–4), further description is not given without lapse into, for example, speculative mysticism.

[649] Einar Geert Jørgensen, "On the Concepts Psychogenesis and Psychosomatics," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 31 (1957): 135–49.

[650] Karl Bonhoeffer, "Wie weit kommen psychgene Krankheitzustände und krankheitprozesse vor, die nicht der Hysterie zuzurechnen sind?" *Allgemeine Zeitschrift Psychiatrie* 68 (1911):

words as ‘originates,’ ‘mental events,’ and ‘evoked’ or explores the language games in which psychogenesis is enlisted in the aetiologies of sundry categories of psychopathology, one finds, generally without reference to Fichte’s thought of the not-I being born out of the absolute I nor Schopenhauer’s insight that Kant’s noumenon just is the will-to-live (that one experiences in and through one’s body) which we first encountered in Chapter II, the self-same intermingling of subjectivity and objectivity, the inner and the outer, the phenomenon and the noumenon. Poul Faergeman’s summative definition of psychogenesis is emblematic of the term’s resemblance to Fichtean and Schopenhauerian thought and its fuzzy semantic boundaries teeming with strained clinical nosology:

> The word ‘psychogenic’ can…mean two entirely different things: (1) a condition is psychogenic when it is ‘born by the mind,’ that is, growing out of innate constitutional factors…(2) On the other hand, it can signify psychopathological conditions caused by environmental factors with which the organism cannot cope with the employment of the normal defence mechanisms and discharge channels. To put it differently…we can conclude that ‘psychogenic’ can refer equally well to ‘something’ caused or produced by the ‘psyche’ as to some alteration in this ‘psyche’ due to situational or environmental—particularly interpersonal—factors.[651]

Outside of Bonhoeffer and Faergeman, other attempts have been made to clarify the concept of psychogenesis however, such attempts have, likewise, been bedevilled by problems.[652] As Aubrey Lewis and, more recently, Yorgos Dimitriadis argue, the term ‘psychogenic’ has indeed had a chequered history, its description of mental causation even more so.[653] Lewis

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371, cited in Aubrey Lewis, “‘Psychogenic’: A Word and Its Mutations,” *Psychological Medicine* 2, no. 3 (1972): 210–11.

[651] Poul M. Faergerman, *Psychogenic Psychoses: A Description and Follow-Up of Psychoses Following Psychological Stress* (London: Butterworths, 1963), 4.

[652] e.g., German E. Berrios, “Historical Epistemology of the Body-Mind Interaction in Psychiatry,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 20, no. 1 (2018): 5–13; Aubrey Lewis, “‘Endogenous’ and ‘Exogenous’: A Useful Dichotomy?” *Psychological Medicine* 1, no. 3 (1971): 191–6; and Adolf Meyer, “The Role of the Mental Factors in Psychiatry,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 65, no. 1 (1908): 39–56.

[653] Lewis, “‘Psychogenic,” 209–15; Yorgos Dimitriadis, “History of the Opposition Between Psychogenesis and Organogenesis in Classic [*sic*] Psychiatry: Part 2,” *History of Psychiatry* 31, no. 3 (2020): 274–93.

undoubtedly expresses a now commonplace dismissive assessment of psychogenesis: "The role of this concept in the theoretical discussion of almost all forms of mental [phenomena] is so widespread, so loosely interpreted, and so intimately entangled with assumptions about causation…that concise review is impossible…this holds good particularly where phenomenological and existential points of view prevail. A vast amount has been written about the legitimacy of the concept—or, rather, of the various concepts—which are meant when the words 'psychogenesis' and 'psychogenic' are used. Hardly anything fresh has been said, however, for a good many years. Neither have the vagueness and laxity of usage been rectified."[654] Such terminological imprecision and conceptual incoherence, in Lewis's eyes, authorises the "decent burial" of the term forevermore.[655]

Yet, without disputing the term's manifest ambiguity, indeed, embracing it, where virtually an entire psychiatric discipline sees that there exists no universally valid definition of psychogenesis and thereupon wishes a quiet funeral to the "confused" and "speciously attractive" term with its foundational problems in causality and mind-body dualism, as with the specification of idolic forms, Kierkegaardian loving God makes different and more generative use of ambiguity, the ambiguity attending psychogenesis and the underlying principles of mental generation and causation.[656] We have already noted the way in which the paradoxicality of Kierkegaard's thought ensures that one cannot neatly, unambiguously parse where divine and human agency, where God's enabling grace and human free works, begin and end, respectively. But, as should now be clear, this is not a circumscribed instance in which Kierkegaard draws on ambiguity in the service of articulating an essential existential condition, chiefly that of God's "examination by existence," the task of Kierkegaardian

[654] Lewis, "Psychogenic," 213.
[655] Lewis, "Psychogenic," 214.
[656] Lewis, "Psychogenic," 214.

selfhood of whether there is love in the self.[657] Indeed, as a corollary of the inextricability of divine and human agency, Kierkegaard's problematisation of the aetiology of love such that one cannot discern the line demarcating (a) God's love for human beings from (b) human love for God reverberates the ambiguity of the psychogenesis concept(s). Substituting mystery for ambiguity, Kierkegaard significantly writes in *Works of Love*:

> Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person's love *originate* even more deeply in God's love. If there were no gushing spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being's love. Just as the quiet lake originates darkly in the deep spring, so a human being's love *originates mysteriously* in God's love. Just as the quiet lake invites you to contemplate it but by the reflected image of darkness prevents you from seeing through it, so also the mysterious origin of love in God's love prevents you from seeing its ground.[658]

Kierkegaard could not be clearer that love originates in—that is to say, is caused by—God's love and yet, at the same time, the mysterious origin of love in God prevents one from seeing love's causal ground. What, then, is this mysterious nature and consequent inability to countenance love's divine source if not equivalent to the ambiguity of mental causation or psychogenesis denoting that which is "born by the mind" so lamented by Lewis *et al.*? What is the issue of the mystery of God and thus the mysterious causal ground of love if not identical to or a specific instance of the issue of positing aetiologiae (viz., definitely tracing the true causes of autochthonous thoughts to that which issues from within and that which issues from without) of concern in adjudicating psychogenesis?

As said, amidst this ambiguity, where much thinking after Kierkegaard debases psychogenesis as conceptually obscure and therefore bankrupt, Kierkegaardian love of God makes different and more generative use of the uncertainty attending the concept(s), and it certainly does not go the way of either Fichte in declaring "[s]ince there is no way of

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[657] *KJN* 10, 90/NB31:123.
[658] *WL* 9–10/*SKS* 9, 17–8 (emphasis mine).

reconciling the not-self [that which is without] with the self [that which is within], *let there be* no not-self at all!" or Schopenhauer in accounting for all by reference to the one universal and absolute will-to-live in need of total nihilistic negation.[659] Namely, Kierkegaard, in upholding the uncertainty of the psychogenic origins of idols of the mind—and, as eminent examples, one's grasp of self, love, and God *qua* ground of love—generatively drives the impetus to metacognitive action. For it is love (*Kjærlighed*) Kierkegaard journals in 1839, that is "the *primus motor* [Latin: prime mover] in the Christian life."[660] Note well, Kierkegaard uses *Kjærlighed*, 'love' or 'charity' to characterise the active, motoric, or kinetic component of the Christian life rather than globally referring to such as faith. In other words, Kierkegaard affirms human subjectivity in love, the willed activity and work-nature of human love such that the human love for God, though part of the broader phenomenon of faith, is dissociable as the entirely kinetic or active step in the continuous passion of faith.

As noted in Chapter I, Nygren, the Swedish junior of Kierkegaard and author of the influential twentieth century multi-volume study, *Agape and Eros*, blanketly supplants 'love' with 'faith' in a human being's God-relationship and interprets God as the hidden ground of love to mean that the self is a mere "channel of God's down-pouring love" or channel "through which God's love flows."[661] Nygren asserts this unidirectional flow of love and humbling human passivity out of suspicion of the human proclivity to arrogate to its own autonomous powers of agency a meritorious capacity to love apart from faithful relationship with God. As we saw in Chapter IV, Kierkegaard's own concerns for meritoriousness stemming from his grasp of the asceticism common to mediaeval monasticism resonate with Nygren's suspicions to a degree. However, as both Daphne Hampson and Werner Jeanrond observe, it is only to a degree and Kierkegaard is ultimately and decidedly different from

[659] Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 137.
[660] *KJN* 2, 9/EE:25.
[661] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 733, 735.

Nygren such that, while suspicious of human presumptuousness, he does not go the way of prescribing a Nygren-esque passivity to human love.[662] The point for Kierkegaard, and the one which sets him well apart from Nygren, is that, though all love mysteriously begins in God, the human self is not merely an idle conduit through which God's love passes, else one could not intelligibly speak of Kierkegaardian selfhood involving any sort of task or striving.[663] "Kierkegaard says, of the human, that he must form a 'heart'…out of which he loves," Hampson records.[664] So, too, Podmore observes Kierkegaard such that all love begins in God, however such love, though mysteriously descending from on high, does not merely pass through the heart, "it transforms the heart, forming the heart itself, out of which one is enabled to love, to become Spirit, even an *I*, not merely to play passive, even entirely negated, host to Spirit."[665] Kierkegaard himself, in the first series of meditations in *Works of Love*, actually writes:

> It is said of certain plants that they must form a heart. In like manner one may also say of a person's love: If it is actually to bear fruit and thus be known by its fruit, it must first of all *form a heart*. It is true that love proceeds from the heart, but let us not be hasty about this and forget the eternal truth that love *forms* the heart. No doubt everyone has experienced the fleeting feelings of an indeterminate heart, but in this sense to have a heart by nature is infinitely different from forming the heart in the eternal sense. How rarely does the eternal get so much control over a person that love in that person begins to establish itself eternally or to form the heart.[666]

As this passage and the commentaries on it indicate, love's formation of a heart is not a passive process of creation, as, say, inert bedrock below a waterfall is passively, gradually contoured into shape by the erosive forces of pounding water. The formation of a heart,

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[662] Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 260; Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 133.
[663] It is worth recalling here Kierkegaard's comment (noted in Chapter IV) in his journals wherein he marks a religious difference between his brother, Peter, and him such that "he [Peter] regarded the relationship to God as one of being loved, I regarded it as one of loving," (*KJN* 6, 315/NB13:65).
[664] Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 260.
[665] Podmore, *Struggling with God*, 229.
[666] *WL* 12/*SKS* 9, 20.

unlike Romantic nihilism that seeks to vitiate one's own heart and Schopenhauerian nihilism that annuls it, however inexplicable in the context of the effort to ascertain the dynamics of psychogenesis, is instead bound with eternity, a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, and entails constructive action. Eminently, one's eternally-concerned action of metacognitively enacting the death to the idols of the mind whereby one's higher-order thought—one's love for God—signals a death one's lower-order thoughts including declarative knowledge of idolic forms *and* psychogenesis itself.

In answer to the nature of psychogenesis, then, entirely consistent with his emphasis in *Works of Love* that love is "sheer action," Kierkegaard again adverts to action over knowledge.[667] In fact, we may go so far as to say that it is only in this action of forming a heart by dying to the idols of the mind and their psychogenic production that one gives themselves to God, adhering to Him, *adhaesio dei*, offering a love to God that is uniquely, subjectively one's own. Saying this recognizes that, rather than dissolve the mystery of psychogenesis by considering it either explicable or debunked, Kierkegaard invites the tension inherent to the mysterious, ambiguous, and conceptually problematical nature of psychogenesis and, above all, as psychogenesis applies in the endeavour to love God.

In effect, within the inwardness of striving to love God and therein become a self, Kierkegaard invites one to struggle with the prospect that one's 'mental events' vis-à-vis self, love, God, and infinitely other forms may be false idols, without the aid of, for example, a *via mystica* and therefore knowing in any definite way from whence such idols originate, how such are maintained or reinforced, or how such falsity materialises within one's psychological makeup. Moreover, where he is short on conceptual minutiae, as perhaps may be expected as typical of the *Greatest* Commandment, Kierkegaard is abundant on articulating the internecine difficulty of actively forming a heart out of which one loves God.

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[667] *WL* 98–100/*SKS* 9, 103–4.

To adduce just three examples, first, adding to his routinised consideration of the suffering issuing from the God-relationship discussed previously, Kierkegaard writes in *The Gospel of Sufferings* that loving God is a formative act of adherence to God in the face of escalating suffering issuing from God Himself and this means that care must be taken to bulwark against "the mendacious fable that little by little the hard road [of loving God] becomes easier, that it is hard only at the beginning. It is just the opposite—it becomes harder and harder," such that, "most people fall away when it is apparent that the road becomes harder instead of easier."[668] Second, Kierkegaard echoes this sentiment in a journal entry in which he details that loving God is a formative act of adherence to God in the face of the world's unrelenting opposition: "As long as you live, [the world] will do everything in order to hinder you and to change you…If only you hold on to God, the attack and the belittling and the opposition of the storm will in fact help you discover things you would never have discovered otherwise…Every [person] is like an instrument; certainly the wretchedness and crudity of the world can disturb and damage it—but if you hold on to God [viz., as opposed to some idol], it can only help you to one new harmony after another."[669] Finally, Kierkegaard poignantly portrays the ease with which the conceptual problematics of psychogenesis and beguiling powers of idols can obstruct the formation of the heart out of which one loves God. "Be yourself watchful," he writes in the eighth instalment of *The Moment*, "because the earnestness of existence," that is, of the existence examination of whether love resides in the self, "is precisely this, that you are placed in a world where the voice that calls you to the right way speaks very softly, while the thousands of [idolatrous] voices outside and inside you speak ever so loudly about exactly the opposite—precisely this is the earnestness: that this voice speaks softly because it wants to test you to see if you will

[668] *UDVS* 297/*SKS* 8, 391.
[669] *KJN* 4, 121/NB:206.

obey even its faintest whisper."[670] Leaning heavily on the linkage of religious eternity and the previously adumbrated coupling of the love of God and the need of love, he continues "[c]onsider, it is not eternity that needs you and then for its own sake raises its voice when the other voices become strident; no, it is you who need eternity, and it wants to test—what earnestness!—your attentiveness, and therefore it becomes softer to the same degree that the others become louder."[671]

DEATH TO IDOLS OF THE MIND AS THE LOVE OF GOD

Turning now to the third clarificatory point, how one's death to the mind's idols veridically expresses one's love of God, the first thing to say is that, on Kierkegaard's own terms, the love of God *qua* death to the idols of the mind can rightly be called an expression of love as such as opposed to, for example, an expression of trust or faith in God. Recalling his unmistakable differentiation of preferential, erotic love and authentic Christian love noted in Chapter I, Kierkegaard recurrently identifies genuine love with self-denial, journaling, for instance, that "[l]ove is self-denial, grounded in the relation to God."[672] And, as we saw in the last chapter, Moravian Pietism's *imitatio Christi* motif and related negative theology specially inform Kierkegaard's contemplations of conative and epistemic self-denial. The question of the extent to which death to the mind's idols is a valid description of Kierkegaardian love (*qua* love) of God therefore hinges on the extent to which the former conforms with Kierkegaard's grasp of love inhering a sustained enactment of Christ-imitative kenotic self-denial. And the answer to this question, I believe, is an ample affirmation.

Specifically, while Kierkegaard affirms the position that one cannot give anything to God on account of, *inter alia*, the infinite qualitative difference between God and human beings, one *can* effect action on the human side of the relationship. As Kierkegaard makes

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[670] *TM* 299/*SKS* 8, 358.
[671] *TM* 299–300/*SKS* 8, 358–9.
[672] *KJN* 4, 174/NB2:83.

plain in *Works of Love*, and as recounted in the above discussion of the ordinal problem attending the Greatest Commandment, God is altogether "too exalted to be able to receive a person's love directly," hence Kierkegaard's appeal to *imitatio Christi* and more generalised circumlocution regarding loving God directly or loving Him in the same sense one loves, say, one's earthly father or other neighbour by responding to the latter's material and spiritual conditions and needs.[673] Loving one's neighbour certainly is, for Kierkegaard, the most robust indicator that one "actually loves the unseen" God but it surely goes without saying by now that one cannot give love to God (the divine other in want of nothing) in this or any other proximate sense.[674] But that is not to say that Kierkegaard does not countenance a *sui generis* kind of love in the God-relationship—he does. And such love, modelled as it is by Christ and predicated as it is on one's inward relation to him—who, Kierkegaard unequivocally states, "was *the truth*, the truth absolutely"—is particular in being unobservable and inexpressible in the context of neighbour love precisely on account of love's essentially self-denying nature.[675] In other words, such self-denying love is metacognitively housed entirely within the confines of one's inmost relationship with God/self. Siloed within, Kierkegaard calls for the self, paradoxically on the strength of God's grace, to inwardly strive to act on itself in self-denial, to continually die to the constellation of idols within one's psychological constitution or strip oneself of all that which occludes their relation to truth/Christ if one's love is to make its way to God. To adapt Anti-Climacus's

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673 *WL* 160/*SKS* 9, 161.
674 *WL* 160/*SKS* 9, 161.
675 *KJN* 4, 276/NB3:65. That metacognitive activity of self-denying love of God is not reducible to neighbour love and, indeed, in the strictest sense is invisible in the social context of neighbour love appears substantiated, I think, throughout Kierkegaard's writings. As just two illustrative examples, Kierkegaard speaks of all individuals having an "ἄδύτον [inner sanctum]" or private citadel of subjectivity which "prevents all access" (*TA* 99/*SKS* 8, 94) to third parties and has a further pseudonym, Petrus Minor, contend that "on the whole, one person can never understand another person altogether privately" (*BOA* 92/*SKS* 15, 249), hence one neighbour can never come to know another's self-denial, another's love of God, even if they do know their neighbour's love for them.

words, the self is to strip itself of its love of idols to the asymptotic point of transparency before God, *coram Deo*, for one's love to genuinely "reflect itself infinitely in the relation to the [divine] power that established it."[676]

In a succinct yet searing journal entry entitled, 'The Truth Is Naked,' Kierkegaard aptly advises just such a process: "To go swimming one takes off one's clothes; to pursue the truth one must take one's time in a much more inward sense, divesting oneself of a much more inward attire of thoughts, ideas, selfishness and the like, before one is naked enough."[677] In sum, the love action to be taken on the human side of the God-relationship is to pursue the truth and, what is the same, to enter into the paradoxical and grace-filled relationship of love's dying away in *imitatio Christi*, and this inward process of becoming a self fundamentally involves enacting a death to idolatrous "inward attire of thoughts, ideas, selfishness and the like" if one's love of God is to be truthful or one is to love God in truth.

Of course, ennobling as the idea of such authentic love of God is, Kierkegaard very clearly (and the dour nature of his Moravian Pietist religious upbringing would not let him forget) that human beings, even at our best, are fundamentally incapable of actually loving God in truth. One is incapable of loving God without any residue of one's idolatrous "selfish will" lying in wait in the "soul's depths" for an opportunity to stage a *coup d'état*, for one's love of some idol to resurge, ruling once again with one's "original subjectivity" and overthrowing the regime of the "better will" by which one otherwise loves God with *all* their heart, *all* their soul, and *all* their mind.[678] Hence, the need for God's grace, the third inheritance of Kierkegaard's religious upbringing noted in the previous chapter, endures. Be that as it may, I hasten to add that death to the mind's idols nevertheless legitimately expresses one's love of God *per se* insofar as, for Kierkegaard, the genuine love of God

[676] *SUD* 14/*SKS* 11, 130.
[677] Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, 633.
[678] *KJN* 10, 308/NB33:54.

resides not in the ability to perfectly die away from every real or imagined idol but in the earnest self-concern over loving some idol and not God, hence I have recurrently considered the thoroughgoing *will* within loving God. To revisit the passage of *Christian Discourses* coming at the conclusion of the last chapter and disclosing his distinctive account of human conation that embodies the love of God, Kierkegaard significantly observes that "love is in the self-concern over not loving."[679] Correspondingly, it can rightly be said that authentic love of God is in the self-concern over idolatrously not loving God—i.e., in coming to suspect one's love of some idol(s) and striving to die to it or them.[680]

WHEN ALL IS KNOWN THAT CAN BE KNOWN

> *When everything around you is solemn silence…and when there is silence within you, then you are aware…of the truth of this: You shall love the Lord your God and serve only him. And you are aware that it is* you*, you who shall love God in this way, you alone in the whole world, you who are indeed alone in the surroundings of solemn silence, alone in such a way that also every doubt, and every objection, and every excuse, and every evasion, and every question, in short, every voice, is silenced in your own inner being—every voice, that is, every voice other than that of God, who around you and within you speaks to you through the silence.*[681]
>
> —*Søren Kierkegaard*

To round out the summative description of how, for Kierkegaard, one is to love God, and thus the focus of this dissertation, having expounded Kierkegaard's assertion of metacognitive action over speculative knowledge and the way in which dying to the psychogenic idols of the mind and therein forming a heart may rightly be considered a

[679] *CD* 244/*SKS* 10, 251.
[680] See also 488n.
[681] *WA* 24–5/*SKS* 11, 29.

genuine expression of love for God, a final area warrants discussion. Namely, the status of knowledge in Kierkegaardian loving God. For it is one thing to implicate, as I have done, knowledge in idolatry and see Kierkegaard's final rejection of cataphatic knowledge of God as *nihil* and all other offshoots of a higher *gnōsis* as his renunciation of idolatry and therefore both that which definitively sets Kierkegaard apart from Schopenhauerian nihilism and his quintessential expression of loving God. It is quite another thing, however, to see Kierkegaard as categorically dismissing all knowledge of God as antithetical to love of God, even while maintaining that Kierkegaard in relation to God apophatically stops at the *via negativa* and well short of a *via mystica*.[682] As the above extract indicates, the solemn silence of obedience is an expression of love for God and, in "To Need God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection", which, as noted, expressly integrates the need for God and the love for God, Kierkegaard plainly asserts the need to come to know God such that "to know God is crucial, and without this knowledge a human being would become nothing at all."[683]

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[682] It is worth acknowledging that some scholars indeed read Kierkegaard as a mystic. Pattison and Kirkpatrick, for instance, examine several passages to present a "strong textual basis for seeing Kierkegaard as in some respects a mystical writer" (*The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought*, 28). I concur that Kierkegaard can, in *some* respects, be seen as a mystic. Namely, Kierkegaard mirrors a common theme in mystical writings in recruiting negation in the vein of dying to the idols of the mind thereby loving God (e.g., negating or annihilating the ego and, especially, self-will). As Pattison and Kirkpatrick themselves qualify, however, an important point to note is that "Kierkegaardian mysticism is not a matter of simple ontological identity (as when it is claimed that human being is directly participant in divine being)" (p. 31), when *unio mystica* is taken to mean a consciousness in which one has special/immediate knowledge of one's identity with God/Absolute reality itself. Rather, if one speaks of identity in Kierkegaardian mysticism, then it is identity "that subsists solely in and through love, the adoring love of creature for creator" (p. 31) and this identity inheres nothing like thinking God's thoughts or participation in God's omniscience. We may take Kierkegaard's own remark in *The Gospel of Sufferings* as demonstrative as to love without epistemological and ontological merger: "Alas, whereas many indefinitely put off the thought of whether God actually is love, it would truly be better if they made the love in them blaze just by the thought of the horror that God was not love, made the love blaze, because if God is love, then he is also love in everything, love in what you can understand *and love in what you cannot understand*, love in the dark riddle that lasts a day or in the riddle that lasts seventy years" (*UDVS* 268/*SKS* 8, 365; emphasis mine).

[683] *EUD* 326/*SKS* 5, 316.

Moreover, even in contexts in which knowledge is not openly invoked, including the germane reflections on belief that God is love, it is difficult to read Kierkegaard's discussion of "the eternal certainty…that God is love" as not approximating knowledge.[684] This is all the more significant given that Kierkegaard unequivocally maintains that, if not knowledge, then at any rate the doxastic certainty that God is love is indeed a necessary prophylactic to "the troubled question of doubt's anxiety about whether God is love" and, proceeding from my argument, the knowledge that God is *nihil*: "But if the slightest thing happened that…could even merely appear to demonstrate that God was not love—well, then all would be lost, then God would be lost, for if God is not love, and if he is not love in everything, then God does not exist at all."[685]

Although it is indeed difficult to reconcile each and every one of Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms' polysemous discussions of knowledge, understanding, sagacity, and related terms, in the vast majority of cases, when he and they refer to knowing God and certainty vis-à-vis God, it does not mean knowledge in the ordinary epistemic sense. Rather, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms are referring to the specific relation of faith, and, as Climacus crisply observes, "faith is not a knowledge."[686] Coming full circle, we are in fact back at a distinction first noted in Chapter I, identified as an express contribution of this research, and touched upon at several junctures since (viz., wherein I have referred to loving God as the first and entirely active step in the continuous passion of faith)—the relationship between loving God and faith—now in full view of Kierkegaard's nuanced conception of the love of God. First, the difference. Where faith and loving God differ is in the former being fundamentally irreducible to an act of volition, "no human being is capable of giving himself the condition [of faith]," to quote Climacus again, whereas Kierkegaardian loving God is the

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[684] *UDVS* 277/*SKS* 8, 373.
[685] *UDVS* 272/*SKS* 8, 369; *UDVS* 267/*SKS* 8, 364.
[686] *PF* 62/*SKS* 4, 263.

personification of will and need.[687] This difference noted, now the similarity: Both faith and loving God are alike in one salient respect such that neither faith, in Kierkegaard's sense, nor loving God can rightly be considered products of knowledge. The former is plainly differentially marked out as such and the dying away of the latter, as I have argued, departs from nihilism *à la* Schopenhauer precisely in respect of a willed refusal of knowledge of God (viz., by extension, including knowledge of God as *nihil*). Taken together, how faith and loving God relate in Kierkegaard's thought is with loving God serving as the propaedeutic to faith. "[F]aith is on the other side of death," Kierkegaard writes in *For Self-Examination*, "[a]nd when you [have] died or died to yourself, to the world, then you also died to all immediacy in yourself, also to your understanding [knowledge]."[688] In other words, as much as loving God is a dying to the psychogenic idols of the mind (including the golden calf of knowledge of God as *nihil*), loving God is equally grasped as making or preserving space for the non-knowledge yet "passionate certitude" of faith.[689]

To return to the metaphor of Kant's island surrounded by dark ocean first mentioned in Chapter II, where Fichte set sail from the luminous island of the phenomenon by positing knowledge to the effect that the encircling Kantian noumenon is revealed as merely the interior of a human being's own self and Schopenhauer accounted for Kant's noumenon as nothing more than the embodied will-to-live aimlessly groping about in the dark, Kierkegaard proffers loving God as preparing the way for faith bestowed by Jesus, who alone, Climacus says, opens "the eyes of faith."[690] Specifically, by loving God in dying to the psychogenic idols of the mind, even letting go of mental images that once seemed to be at the core of one's existence including one's images of self, love, and God, one comes *imitatio Christi* to

[687] *PF* 107/*SKS* 4, 303.
[688] *FSE* 82/*SKS* 13, 103.
[689] *CUP 1*, 491/*SKS* 7, 445.
[690] *PF* 65/*SKS* 4, 266–7.

share in (by God's grace, as much as humanly possible) the eyes and vision of Christ because a person shares in or "resembles what he loves with his whole soul" or, rather, what he loves with his whole heart, soul, and mind.[691] The faithful eyes bestowed by Jesus equip, as it were, the imitative follower of Christ with scotopic vision and thus the follower is supremely suited to the nocturnality, the dark night of the Kantian noumenon. As Kierkegaard memorably comments in *The Gospel of Sufferings*, "when in the dark night of suffering sagacity [knowledge] cannot see a handbreadth ahead of it, then faith can see God, since faith sees best in the dark."[692]

What this means, then, is that Kierkegaardian loving God proceeds without knowledge of its object, God, referenced in the Greatest Commandment and whether one calls it *agapē*, *caritas*, or a higher *eros* over a higher *gnōsis* matters far less than the idea that, when all is known that can be known, the responsible core of the will in an individual has still to yield, the heart out of which one needs and loves God has still to be formed.[693] To be quite sure, loving God as an act continuously proceeding without knowledge of God's essence can present what is, humanly speaking, a terrifying prospect. Namely, that resolutely eschewing the higher *gnōsis* of cataphatic knowledge of God as *nihil* and apophatically preserving the *via negativa*, while promising to obviate the bleakness of nihilism, *ipso facto* renders the impenetrability of God who is love so profound—love's need in the love of God prodigiously *de profundis*, "[o]ut of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord[!]"—that the door is opened

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691 *EUD* 219/*SKS* 5, 218.
692 *UDVS* 238/*SKS* 8, 338.
693 Hampson and Jeanrond generally use *agapē* to denote the love of God (e.g., Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 260; Jeanrond, "Søren Kierkegaard's Theology of Universal Neighbourly Love," in *A Theology of Love*, 106–13), Aquinas uses *caritas* to denote "the friendship of man for God" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: First Complete American Edition in Three Volumes*, vol. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1269) which, quoting Augustine, adheres or "unites us to God, for by it we love Him" (p. 1271), whereas Jack Mulder Jr. considers the love of God in Kierkegaard to be a higher or elevated form of *eros* (*Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 94–5).

for us to no longer have any idea as to what love might be or mean at all.[694] The terrifying prospect, functionally indistinguishable from the sinister dynamism at work behind all phenomena of the *Frühromantiker* encountered in Chapter II and, even more so, the wild and indomitable forces of Schopenhauer's will-to-live, that loving God in Kierkegaard's sense entails one's becoming spiritually unmoored from every *terra firma* as to what counts as love that it becomes yet another experience (if a more camouflaged iteration) of anxiety and despair, even evil. In his book, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love*, Michael Strawser appears to signal precisely this prospect when he questions whether love is even the correct word with which to describe the relation in the God-relationship and notes that, for Kierkegaard, love of God is conceptually linked with fear of God: "Wherever we find the mention of fear in Kierkegaard's writings, it seems to be connected with the love of God."[695] Diagnosing Kierkegaard's intermixture of fear and love in relationship with God as a "mistake of attributing the divergent experiences of joy and fear to the same thought," Strawser concludes that there can be no *love* of God just as such.[696] In other words, loving God and love's dying away's/becoming spirit's attending vivisection that elicits "screams from the torture chamber" is not merely disorienting but disfiguring such that it presses one to divine madness to even consider the love in loving God worthy of being called love.[697] For one must really be mad to insist on referring to that which is phenomenologically unlike and darkly incompatible with all other experiences of love as love.

But, here, I think that it is imperative to grasp loving God in the sense of dying to the idols of the mind, which I have endeavoured to articulate, and thereupon consider whether interpreting Kierkegaard's *via negativa* as nefariously ushering in the terrifying darkness of

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[694] Ps. 130:1.
[695] Michael Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 174–5.
[696] Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love*, 182.
[697] *KJN* 10, 241/NB32:144.

the unknowability and intractable mystery of God and divine love is yet another expression of idolatry. That is, whether the terrifying prospect that not knowing God means not knowing love at all may in fact, taken to the extreme, be an expression of seductive engrossment in one's fears and desires, engrossment in one's delusions and attachments to self-, love-, and God-images that are precisely those idols, frightening as they are alluring, to which loving God in the Greatest Commandment bids death. Indeed, in furtherance of this point, it is important to recall one of the foremost contributions of this dissertation noted in Chapter I. In particular, by considering Kierkegaard's thought regarding the love of God in relation to those who express the notion of will that lies at the heart of nihilism (and, more specifically, analysing Kierkegaard and his conception of loving God in relation to Schopenhauerian nihilism for the first time in predominately English-language scholarship of Kierkegaard), I ambitiously sought to render a clearer picture of Kierkegaardian loving God and the will and need residing therein than has heretofore been attained. Now, as we reach the end of our discourse, this ambition cashes out in permitting a reappraisal of Kierkegaard vis-à-vis the *de profundis* of loving God. For is it not possible to see the darkness of God and love, not being able to tell up from down in loving God, as liable to descent into the bowels of nihilism, which, per Schopenhauer, just is the terminus of human willing? Recalling Gillespie's description, "[t]he chaos of existence…is a tremendous psychological burden that few can bear…[l]ife can be sustained only by a greater or lesser denial of this chaos…[o]nly the strongest form of life can face the terrifying truth [of nihilism] that existence is chaotic and meaningless."[698] But to what extent might one's facing up to the truth of nihilism be a matter of facing up to one's idolisation of nihilism? A matter of facing up to one's idolisation of a nihilism which says to the idol-worshiper that the chaos of existence necessarily entails not having even the faintest idea as to what love might be at all? And, conversely, to what extent

[698] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, 221.

is an authentic love of God a resigning or negation of one's "inward attire of thoughts, ideas, selfishness," one's fears, desires, attachments, and delusions, including, even most especially, those specifically concerning God and love?[699]

As I have argued, contextualised and rich consideration of the theme of loving God within Kierkegaard—ascertaining what Kierkegaard means when he says, for example, that "if you want to love God in truth, this must be demonstrated by…letting yourself be entirely an*nihil*ated by God"—demands contemplation of *nihil*ism.[700] And, to this end, have further argued that Kierkegaard harnesses the powers of negation, renunciation, and related expressions, putting them in the service of the Christian religious with, not an 'empowering nihilism,' but rather love's dying away. In this sense, dying away serves as the conceptual bridge between nihilism and the love of God in such a way that dying away in love, that which effects the death to the idols of the mind, is recruited however nihilism is never used as the final idolatrous, knowledge-based conclusion of the existence examination of whether love resides within the Kierkegaardian self. To repurpose Gillespie's words, love's dying away entails negation however it absolutely cannot be said that, in dying away in the Kierkegaardian sense, one follows nihilism to idolatry and therein "worships a dark god of negation."[701] To be sure, love's dying away as the bridge between nihilism and loving God, as a border bridge over water both articulates and demarcates distinct nation states, is beset with *aporiae*; not least in how the at times nihilism-sounding aspects of love's dying away can comprise the love of God *qua* metacognitive act of dying to the idols of the mind and yet said aspects do not, in each instance, themselves become nihilistic idols which blacken the recognition of love. However, when it comes to the love of God in Kierkegaard, such pregnant incertitude attending, for example, a consistent apophaticism and demotion of

[699] Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, 633.
[700] *KJN* 10, 49/NB31:68.
[701] Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, xxiii.

knowledge, should be expected and, I think, it strains credibility in light of Kierkegaard's Moravian inheritance adumbrated previously to expect otherwise.

In much scholarship of Kierkegaard, a common method invoked to begin filling the void of silence left in the wake of *aporiae* is to speculate on Kierkegaard's personal development in order to extract a probabilistic or otherwise appreciably coherent (and often immanent) *explanans*.[702] If we return to Strawser's analysis of Kierkegaard's confounding intermixture of fear and love in relationship with God, for example, we find a similar instance of aporia and corresponding contemplation of Kierkegaard's person. Specifically, in answer to the question of why Kierkegaard connects fearful trembling and the love of God, Strawser notes, "I am afraid that I do not know," and, while observing that speculating upon Kierkegaard's childhood is "perhaps unfair," nevertheless does not hesitate to reference Kierkegaard's relationship with his stern, Moravian Pietist father and the "common practice in Lutheran homes in Scandinavia to subject children to weekly beatings to rid them of the devil."[703] Strawser, in turn, posits that it is "important to observe, as bell hooks has written in *All About Love,* 'there is nothing that creates more confusion about love in the minds and…hearts of children than unkind and/or cruel punishment meted out by the grownups they have been taught they should love and respect.'"[704] But if speculation of Kierkegaard's personal upbringing is invoked to signal Strawser's appraisal of Kierkegaard regarding fear and love in the God-relationship, then speculation can just as easily be used in appraising the relation between nihilism and Kierkegaardian love of God.

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[702] See, for example, studies on Kierkegaard and his one-time fiancée, Regine Schlegel née Olsen (1822–1904), e.g., Joakim Garff, "1855," in *Kierkegaard's Muse: The Mystery of Regine Olsen*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 13–50.
[703] Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love*, 177, 185n57.
[704] Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love*, 177. See bell hooks (*pseud.*), "Justice: Childhood Love Lessons," in *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 19.

For example, irrefragable documentation as to Kierkegaard's initial exposure to the thought world of Schopenhauer aside (see 297n), Kierkegaard's inaugural encounter with the flesh and bone virulence of Schopenhauerian nihilism may well have had an earlier point of origin and, true to a nihilism that is more than theoretical concern and is instead personally felt and experienced within the marrow of one's own life, a more indelibly personal aetiology than that which is recorded as a fleeting coda in his late journals. Of note, I concur with Cappelørn in being "convinced that Kierkegaard must have heard about Schopenhauer while he was a theology student at the University of Copenhagen in the 1830s," first and foremost from his two philosophy instructors, P. M. Møller and Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872).[705] Møller, for one, first read *The World as Will and Representation* in 1827 or the first month of 1828.[706] And, according to Uffe Andreasen, did so with outright disgust.[707] A decade later, Møller openly excoriated Schopenhauer in his essay on immortality (see 280n), which Kierkegaard read and commented on in a journal entry dated 4 February 1837.[708] As to the contents of Møller's essay, in what Gregor Malantschuk considers the first "well-founded explanation of the emergence of nihilism in the modern world," Møller writes:[709]

> According to the one-sided pantheism that is inherently inseparable from the doctrine of annihilation…[t]he world moves in a ceaseless cycle from one void to another, from nothing to nothing, in accordance with laws of strict necessity.—This nihilistic aspect of modern pantheism is hardly carried out more forcefully and consistently anywhere else than in a work by *Arthur Schopenhauer* [*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*] professor in Berlin, which, although the work was published in the year 1819, is still rarely and only cursorily mentioned by philosophers today. The author himself openly describes his philosophy as anti-Christian and nihilistic. Thus he regards several Indian myths as superior to the dogmas of Christianity and endorses

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[705] Cappelørn, "Historical Introduction," in *Schopenhauer – Kierkegaard*, 20.
[706] Poul Martin Møller, "Brev nr. 91," in *Poul Møller og hans Familie i Breve*, vol. 1, ed. Morten Borup (København: C. A. Reitzel, 1976), 177–9.
[707] Uffe Andreasen, *Poul Møller og romantismen—den filosofiske idealism i Poul Møllers senere forfatterskab* (København: Gyldendal, 1973), 60–1; see also Uff Andreasen, "Poul Martin Møller," in *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, 3rd ed., vol. 10, ed. Svend Cedergreen Bech (København: Gyldendal, 1982), 268.
[708] *KJN* 1, 127–8/BB:41.
[709] Gregor Malantschuk, "Søren Kierkegaard og Poul Møller," *Kierkegaardiana* 3 (1959): 7.

> greatly the Brahminic doctrine of the abode of the blessed after death because it is spoken of as '*Niban*,' which actually means 'nothing.' Were this work, which has certainly not by accident been relegated to literary obscurity, better known, it would unquestionably contribute a great deal to make nihilism…more understandable to people of this age.[710]

Just as Kierkegaard's relationship with his Moravian Pietist father suggests an aetiology to Kierkegaard's intermixture of fear and love in the God-relationship, so, too, speculation as to Kierkegaard's first encounter with Schopenhauerian nihilism may be adduced as germane to the relation of nihilism and Kierkegaardian love of God. But the point is that speculation is not needed. Especially if such speculation is used to stem the activating impetus of aporetic ambiguity. Accordingly, regardless of whether any speculation as to the aetiology of Kierkegaard's thoughts regarding love and the love of God is valid, appreciating Kierkegaard in relation to and distance from nihilism, as this research has done, is significant in light of the an*nihil*ation in love's dying away being integral to loving God, most especially as regards the *de profundis* of loving God. For it eminently informs the tension of struggling with the extent to which dying to the idols of the mind and, in this case, one's struggle to face the truth of nihilism is a matter of facing one's idolisation of nihilism.

Of course, facing up to nihilism may turn out to be a matter of granting that nihilism is true, the acceptance that Schopenhauer and not Kierkegaard is ultimately correct. That, contra Kierkegaard's criticism, Schopenhauer's lack of an intelligible sense of a goal set in religious eternity and problematic appeal to de-Christianised grace turns out to be of no material consequence. That, whatever alethic criteria one deploys to ascertain truth, Schopenhauerian nihilism satisfies them whereas Kierkegaard was and is wrong to assert that Christ "was *the Truth*."[711] However, still hearing the spectre of Kierkegaard, proper aporia

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[710] Møller, *Poul Martin Møller's "Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality" and Other Texts*, 118.
[711] *WA* 73/*SKS* 11, 77.

without conclusive result makes one "self-active."[712] Hence, aporia has its uses and woe be it to those "loose thinkers" who rest in conclusive knowledge of self, world, and God as *nihil* and peremptorily dismiss the prospect of lovingly refusing this Schopenhauerian conclusion, even without, bereft of knowledge, having another conclusion as to love and God to land on.[713] Such an act of refusal and loving adhesion to God could, it seems, be just as well executed in God's absence as in His presence. But the eternity-oriented and continued act of loving adhesion to God taken in the apparent absence of God is, perhaps, only a seeming. For here God could enact a presence-in-absence. God, the author of love and source of all love in heaven and on earth, is capable of doing the highest for a human being: By His grace enabling the individual to be "free, independent, himself," standing alone by himself before Himself offering a love to God that is uniquely, subjectively, and individually one's own, a love that is given out of one's own heart, soul, and mind.[714] God is capable of doing so without, note well, without undoing that love by flagrantly disclosing His graceful help and support, His "awkward bungler's hand" holding onto the beloved lover, effectively claiming the lover's human love for God as His own divine love of Himself.[715]

That said, from a Kierkegaardian point of view, none of this can be known, for to know it would be to participate in the Divine Mind, thinking God's thoughts. In place of knowledge we have need—we have the properly insatiable "deeply religious need" to love God, which eternally nourishes the lover with an ever new and ever augmented need to love.[716] In this way, a far better assessment is to, supplicating and needful of God, imitate the faith of Christ at Gethsemane, prayerfully asking that God's presence-in-absence that enables

[712] *KJN* 2, 276/JJ:482.
[713] *SUD* 117/*SKS* 11, 229.
[714] *WL* 275/*SKS* 9, 273.
[715] *WL* 275/*SKS* 9, 273.
[716] *CUP 1*, 460/*SKS* 7, 418.

one to love at all be true such that "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).[717] Indeed, recalling Torrance's criticism of Kierkegaard scholarship which lacks "a more Christological focus" noted in Chapter I, attention to Kierkegaard's Christocentric thinking and especially the motif of *imitatio Christi* principally recounted in Chapter IV both buttresses the Kierkegaardian perspective relative to that of Schopenhauer and once again saves the former from eliding into nihilism, even whilst upholding the *de profundis* of loving God and the *aporiae* entailed.[718] For example, while love of God who is love may be obscured by God's unknowability, the love of God in Christ is well-defined insofar as Christ perfectly and concretely modelled love in mercifully responding to others' material and spiritual conditions and needs. Moreover, revisiting a passage quoting Christ's words in Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 25:40) enlisted in Chapter IV, whereas the love of God just as such does not require nor does it furnish the human lover with pristine knowledge of their love, the human lover is nevertheless enjoined to recognise the invariable coincidence in loving God and neighbour: "the more [one] loves the unseen, the more he will love the people he sees…[God] continually [points] away from himself…saying, 'If you want to love me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me.' God is too exalted to be able to receive a person's love directly."[719] Hence, the imperative action and non-knowledge of God in Christ—remembering Anti-Climacus, "Jesus Christ is the object of faith; one must either believe in him or be offended; for to 'know' simply means that it is not about him…knowledge annihilates Jesus Christ —if not salient before is now seen as not siloed off

[717] In quite another context, Paul K. Moser identifies such love of God in *imitatio Christi* as a "Gethsemane union with Christ" without entailing any sort of absorption mysticism, *The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 180.
[718] Torrance, "Beyond Existentialism," 302.
[719] *WL* 160/*SKS* 9, 161.

or dissociated from but rather intimately related to the Kierkegaardian love of God.[720] And this leads us to a point on which to end.

As I have consistently maintained throughout this dissertation, the need and will embodying the love of God is not some standalone spiritual faculty wholly detached from faith but rather, though separable on account of its volitional nature, an initial part of the broader passion of faith. This need and will of the love of God permits faith and faith, in turn, permits one to see in the dark and believe in what knowledge otherwise sees as impossible, especially impossible on account of God's and divine love's impenetrability without the figure of Christ. De silentio, the same pseudonym who stated that dying away in the act of resignation was his love for God "does not require faith" but is a philosophical movement "made all by [himself]," indeed says resoundingly, if we forgive his bombast in light of God's prevenient grace, that faith believes in what knowledge and the understanding calls impossibility.[721] For Kierkegaard overall, loving God permits faith and faith permits one to believe in an unknowable but ultimately not impossible love because "God is love" and for God "all things are possible."[722] Read in this light, then, let us end this dissertation on the love of God in Kierkegaard where the Danish religious poet himself ended. Whilst observing the methodological provisos noted in Chapter I which limit how much can be concluded, I concur with Smith that Kierkegaard's final journal entry, written as it was when Kierkegaard is said to be at his most Schopenhauerian and most nihilistic, may be interpreted autobiographically.[723] It may be interpreted as a memoiric statement of Kierkegaard's own self and therefore a narration of Kierkegaardian selfhood in the intimate sense, most especially when Kierkegaard concludes that one crushed to nothing by life "nonetheless

[720] *PC* 33/*SKS* 12, 47.
[721] *FT* 48–9/*SKS* 4, 142–3.
[722] e.g., *EUD* 325/*SKS* 5, 315; *SUD* 71/*SKS* 11, 185.
[723] Smith, *Søren Kierkegaard, The Last Years*, 19.

continues to believe that God is love and that it is out of love that God does this," that such a one "does not believe in himself, but he does believe in God."[724] I further concur that, as the above discussion indicates, the *de profundis* of Kierkegaardian love of God may be taken as, humanly speaking, "profoundly disturbing," albeit this is especially so if one fallaciously ignores the central role of Christ in Kierkegaard's thinking.[725] That said, I do not concur with Smith's altogether tragic assessment of this ending to Kierkegaard's temporal life. For, as I have consistently argued throughout, though the Kierkegaardian love of God entails death, it is love's dying away, it is the death in time by which one dies to sundry psychogenic idols of the mind, and this death ends not in nothing but in something. Tragedy is the converse and would establish itself in the fact that the dying away in the love of God indeed ends in nothing, even the incommunicable, silence-inducing, and divinised nothingness of Schopenhauer's negative theological similitude. That the entire orchestration of becoming a self or spirit by the continuous, grace-given striving to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind ultimately comes to nought, one just is "annihilated by God" *simpliciter*, and Kierkegaard was wrong in his own case as much as anyone else's to believe that in loving God one, as Climacus says, "becomes nothing and yet is not annihilated" and one's existence, as Kierkegaard himself says, "does not end at a grave."[726] However, save clasping in one's palm the Schopenhauerian idol of knowledge of God as *nihil* necessary to diagnose Kierkegaard's belief in God as false and therefore the pinnacle of tragedy, I otherwise fail to see the tragedy in Kierkegaard's life. I fail to see the tragedy in Kierkegaard's life of putting a willed spirit of negation culminating in the loss of the "first self" and the temporal world in the service of the Christian religious and thereby, while not believing in himself, believing in

[724] *KJN* 11 (Part 2), 406/Paper 591.
[725] Smith, *Søren Kierkegaard, The Last Years*, 19.
[726] *KJN* 10, 49/NB31:68; *PF* 30–1/*SKS* 4, 237; *WL* 150/*SKS* 9, 151.

the Christian God who is love and the attending prospect of love's dying away resulting in an authentic, eternal, and infinite something beyond the nothingness of finitude.[727]

[727] *EUD* 314/*SKS* 5, 306.

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