

KIERKEGAARD AND THE
THEOLOGY OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'

GEORGE PATTISON



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INTRODUCTION

Kierkegaard as student and writer of theology

Kierkegaard is a writer of contradictions. He is a master of irony who urges earnestness, a dancing master whose partner of choice is death, he is a post-Romantic and proto-postmodern man of masks, a flâneur and dandy who piously dedicates his devotional writings to the memory of his deceased father – and so we could continue . . . But whatever else we know about Kierkegaard, we know that he was an opponent of the system and of objective knowledge, above all when it was a matter of human beings' deepest existential commitments. In setting out to present Kierkegaard as a student and writer of theology, then, I am fully aware of the potential scandal of my procedure. For theology has become the object of intense suspicion in the contemporary academy. To many, the very name 'theology' indicates a kind of dogmatic, authoritarian, and spuriously 'objective' approach to questions that, if not entirely meaningless, can only properly be addressed in the spirit of open philosophical enquiry. And even if this suspicion itself reflects an unreflective prejudice and even if, in many cases, those who have the word 'theology' in their job description are as likely to be open to alternative perspectives and methods as any philosopher, many will feel that bringing 'Kierkegaard' and 'theology' into such close proximity indicates an inappropriate narrowing of how we should be reading him.

This book attempts to locate Kierkegaard in the context of some of the key theological debates and movements of the early to mid-nineteenth century, including his relations to some lesser-known Danish contemporaries. Against this background I shall then set out to offer an outline of what we might call Kierkegaard's own 'theology', starting with the traditional theological prolegomena concerning human beings' capacity for knowing God and then looking at his treatment of the core doctrinal topics of creation, fall (or sin), and redemption. Finally I proceed to look at how this 'theology' is developed in relation to proclamation and the life of the Church before returning to a final reflection on the theme of

direct and indirect communication. For those predisposed to suspect all theology of inappropriate dogmatism, this programme will doubtless seem alarming. To such readers I straightaway concede that Kierkegaard did not present his theology in anything like a systematic or dogmatic manner. Still less did he present himself as an authoritative teacher of the faith. Nevertheless, I believe that his many writings on religion and on the Christian faith are informed by a coherent understanding of the nature of Christian doctrine and this is what I am hoping to demonstrate in this book.

Whatever else we know about Kierkegaard, we do know that for ten years he was a student of theology at Copenhagen University. Biographers have tended to be less interested in his theological studies per se than in other aspects of his student years, such as his taste for fine clothes, cigars, dining, debating, and his immersion in literary studies of many different kinds, from the troubadours to Faust. All of this is a part of the record. But, at the same time (though not always at *exactly* the same time!), he was a student of theology and his journals and notebooks offer a substantial body of notes relating to these studies. The earliest of these, from 1830–1, comprise notes on the German and Danish Reformations (see SKS27: Papir 1) and other topics (SKS27: Papir 2 and 3). These are followed by fairly extensive notes on H. N. Clausen's 1832–3 exegetical lectures on the gospels (SKS27: Papir 4), while further exegetical notes from 1833 relate to the book of Acts (SKS27: Papir 6) and the Letter to the Galatians (SKS27: Papir 7). From 1833–4 we have extensive notes on Clausen's lectures on dogmatics, covering the full spectrum of doctrinal topics in a historical perspective. From the same period we have the notes on Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* that will be the focus of [Chapter 1](#) below, together with other notes indicative of wide-ranging theological reading. Papers from 1834–5 offer further New Testament exegetical notes (SKS27: Papir 15–18), some quite thorough. If literary and other studies then came to the foreground, 1835–6 nevertheless saw the theology student Søren Kierkegaard translating large parts of the New Testament from Greek into Latin, namely Acts 1–4 and 24–7, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, and James 1–4; 15 (see SKS17/KJN1 CC). The years 1837–8 saw an intensive return to philosophy of religion and systematic theology, particularly in relation to the wave of interest in speculative theology associated with H. L. Martensen's innovative 'Hegelian' lectures (see [Chapter 2](#) below). Across this period Kierkegaard also made a range of loose notes to which he gave the title 'Theologica: Older Materials' (SKS27: Papir 48–51),

including, in 1839, notes on Confession and Communion (SKS27: Papir 260). In 1839–40 he returns to the more philological and exegetical aspect of theological work with notes on the Letter to the Romans, [Chapters 9–16](#), involving comparisons of Paul’s text with both Hebrew and Septuagint sources. His subsequent studies at the pastoral seminary in the academic year 1840–1 produced a number of sermon notes and the text of his first sermon (SKS27: Papir 270), of which the official report states that ‘The sermon had been very well memorized, the voice was clear, the tone dignified and thoughtful. – On the whole the sermon had been written with great thought and sharp logic. But it was somewhat difficult and certainly far too exalted in tone for the average person’ (LD: xiv, p. 19). Even when he had completed his theological studies and headed off to Berlin, Kierkegaard voluntarily sat through many hours of Marheineke’s lectures on Christian doctrine – which mostly covered the same main points of Christian doctrine that he had previously learned about from Clausen.

All of these notes add up to a considerable body of writing and leave us in no doubt that by the start of his self-styled ‘authorship’ he had a substantial knowledge of biblical, historical, and doctrinal theology, including extensive study of the most up-to-date scholarship in philosophy of religion and systematic theology. To ignore this background in interpreting an authorship that is constantly engaging points of Christian doctrine and biblical teaching would be foolishly self-denying. Naturally, it by no means follows that Kierkegaard’s mature views can simply be ‘explained’ by reference to his student notes but I believe that it is the case that the more we know of these the more we see the coherence of the theological issues addressed in both pseudonymous and upbuilding works and also, crucially, the more we see the coherence of Kierkegaard’s own approach to these issues.

My own task here is primarily expository and I shall, for the most part, be attempting to interpret Kierkegaard through his own words. For this reason I have only occasionally digressed into discussing the secondary literature. Kierkegaard scholars will doubtless identify many points at which they might think I should have engaged more with contemporary academic work on Kierkegaard, although I hope that what is said here is sufficiently clear for them also to see the line I might take in many current interpretative debates. At the same time I would not wish to conceal that I owe deep and manifold debts to many scholars – teachers, colleagues, and students – who have drawn my attention to key texts or opened my eyes to different possibilities of interpretation, even if only relatively few

of their names appear in direct references. Although this is my interpretation, it is not just 'my' interpretation, but an interpretation arising out of a series of invariably good-natured if also often passionate readings and conversations, formal and informal. And, of course, I hope that this study will help generate more of the same. That said, let us turn to Kierkegaard, the twenty-one-year-old student of theology who sets himself to study one of the founding texts of modern theology, F. D. E. Schleiermacher's dogmatic treatise, *The Christian Faith*.

CHAPTER I

Beginning with the beginning of modern theology

INTRODUCTION

In the period of Kierkegaard's university studies it was inevitable that he would have to reckon with the epochal figure of F. D. E. Schleiermacher. Through his great apologetic work *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*, his translations of Plato, his exposition of Christian doctrine, and his personal role in Church and University life, Schleiermacher had in his lifetime become what he has remained, a point of reference for all subsequent Protestant theology – 'the father of modern theology'. In 1833, during Kierkegaard's student years, he visited Copenhagen to huge acclaim, with processions and receptions not unlike those appropriate to visiting royalty, although Kierkegaard never mentions the occasion. A year later, however, in 1834, Kierkegaard engaged a junior faculty member, Hans Lassen Martensen (who would later become a more or less constant foil for his attacks on Hegelian theology and establishment Christianity),¹ to give him tutorials on Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith (Glaubenslehre)*. Martensen wrote of these tutorials that Kierkegaard 'did not follow any set syllabus, but only asked that I lecture to him and converse with him. I chose to lecture to him on the main points of Schleiermacher's dogmatics and then discuss them.'² Although this comment and other sources suggest that the choice of topic was Martensen's, not Kierkegaard's, it is clear that serious work was done. We shall shortly

¹ See Chapters 2 and 9 below. As far as Kierkegaard's previous awareness of Schleiermacher is concerned, Andreas Krichbaum points to the influence of Schleiermacher on Clausen, whose lectures he had attended in the winter semester of 1833–4 (see Introduction above) and in the dogmatic writings of J. P. Mynster. See A. Krichbaum, *Kierkegaard und Schleiermacher. Eine historisch-systematische Studie zum Religionsbegriff* (Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 18) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 19–29. Krichbaum's is the most detailed and systematic study of this relationship to date.

² Quoted in J. Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard. A Biography*, trans. B. H. Kirmmse (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 30.

return to the notes that are the only documentary record of these tutorials, but before doing so it may prove helpful to make some more general remarks about the relationship between these two pivotal figures of modern theology and especially its potential significance for understanding Kierkegaard.

At the most general level, very divergent views have been held as to whether or how far Kierkegaard was influenced by his German predecessor. Emmanuel Hirsch, an important if politically controversial historian of theology and Kierkegaard-commentator, is often quoted to the effect that ‘Kierkegaard was the only true disciple of Schleiermacher in his generation.’ However, Ingolf Dalferth, referring back to Hirsch, has suggested that Kierkegaard was the only person in his generation who was *not* a disciple of Schleiermacher.³ What makes such divergent interpretations possible?

On the one hand it is clear that Schleiermacher found the source and power of religious life in first-hand individual experience, thus opening a line of thinking that points towards Kierkegaard’s own emphasis on subjectivity. This seems also to harmonize with the tendency of Kierkegaard’s few published comments on Schleiermacher, such as the remark in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety* that he was a thinker ‘in the beautiful Greek sense . . . who only spoke about what he knew’ (CA, 20/SKS4, 327). On the other hand, it is equally clear that where Schleiermacher’s theology led him to affirm the mutual benefits not only of Christian faith and science (in the sense of *Wissenschaft*), but also of faith and family life, faith and community, faith and nationality, and to endorse the legitimacy of an established Church, Kierkegaard would pursue a more negative dialectic that, in the end, led him to declare that the whole phenomenon of established Christendom was a monstrous error. This difference is also marked at the individual level, so that whereas Schleiermacher discerns an element of God-consciousness indwelling each and every person, Kierkegaard is more alert to the possible alienation of the self from its grounding in God. If Schleiermacher sees faith as a universal possibility, Kierkegaard sees despair – which for him is the essential opposite of faith – as a universal sickness unto death. Perhaps more fundamentally, a late journal entry from 1850 points to what we might call a metaphysical difference between the two thinkers. Here Kierkegaard

³ Ingolf Dalferth, ‘“Die Sache ist viel entsetzlicher”: Religiosität bei Kierkegaard und Schleiermacher’, in N.-J. Cappelørn et al. (eds.), *Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard: Subjektivität und Wahrheit*. Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 21 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 217–64.

says of Schleiermacher that he conceived the concept of absolute dependence as a state, a form of being, whereas he himself has a more 'ethical' understanding in the specific sense of seeing religion as a kind of striving, a process of appropriation. He further connects this with Schleiermacher's sense of religion as a kind of being-in-love, whereas for Kierkegaard it is marked by 'fear and trembling . . . You "Shall" . . . [and] the possibility of offence' (SKS23: NB15:83, 83^[a], 83^[b]). It is in the light of such differences that Joakim Garff surmises the Schleiermacher tutorials to have been broken off as a result of Kierkegaard's increasingly 'radical' view of Christianity.⁴ Both may be representative thinkers of the modern 'turn to the subject', but for Kierkegaard it is at least as true to say 'subjectivity is untruth' as to say that 'subjectivity is truth'.⁵ To put the point as briefly as possible: if Schleiermacher is the representative par excellence of the synthesis of theology and culture, Kierkegaard is the representative par excellence of their entire opposition.

Naturally, such headline claims can never tell the whole story. What I shall argue here and shall, I hope, confirm in subsequent chapters, is that whilst there are indeed many differences between Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard with regard to the ecclesiastical, social, psychological, and even metaphysical situation of religion in the modern world, the basic contours of Kierkegaard's thinking about the relationship between God and the world and, especially, between God and human beings bear an essentially Schleiermacherian shape. This is not immediately to say that this is the result of Kierkegaard deliberately applying what he had learned with Martensen to a series of theological problems. Much that Kierkegaard found in Schleiermacher could also be found in other representatives of the Christian tradition and, by Kierkegaard's time, an entire theological generation had internalized and then transmitted large parts of Schleiermacher's teaching, so that there are many possibilities of indirect as well as direct lines of influence. Even some of the Hegelians whom Kierkegaard studied had absorbed certain elements of Schleiermacherian thought, as we shall see.⁶ The issue, then, is not which propositions found in Kierkegaard can be correlated with propositions distinctive to Schleiermacher. Rather, it is a matter of a few fundamental principles that are influential for the overall shape of a theological development. Key

⁴ Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 31.

⁵ See A. Grøn, 'Subjektivität und Un-wahrheit', in Cappelørn et al. (eds.), *Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard*, pp. 13–28.

⁶ See Chapter 2 below.

amongst these, I shall suggest, are the claims that the basic structure of the religious life is determined by a sense or feeling of absolute dependence on God; that every human life has the possibility of entering into a God-relationship; and that this possibility is realized in an experienced need of God – what Schleiermacher calls ‘redemption’ – that is both a manifestation of the individual’s intimate self-consciousness and, at the same time, a divine gift; finally this need and this gift are focused on the person of the redeemer, the Christ. Furthermore – although this does not emerge directly from the sources we shall examine in this chapter – both are agreed in seeing the decisiveness of understanding God as love and, consequently, of seeing Christ not as effecting the salvation of human beings by mitigating or absorbing the Father’s wrath against human sinfulness (as in some Lutheran dogmatic systems) but rather as expressing and enacting the love of the Father.

These theological commitments may seem to be too general really to define a distinctive theological orientation. In what follows, however, I hope to be able to show that in the context of Kierkegaard’s own time they provided some of the resources that enabled him to develop a theological vision that was non-speculative (against Hegelian and other forms of speculative theology), that did not fall back into an older supernaturalism, and yet, at the same time, opened the way for the actual practices of piety (or, in Kierkegaard’s vocabulary, edification or upbuilding) and ‘works of love’ to play a central role in defining the character of Christian faith. However, the foundation for any interpretation of this relationship has to be found in the texts themselves, which, in this case, means in the first instance the notes from Kierkegaard’s 1834 tutorials on *The Christian Faith*. These show that Kierkegaard had at the very least a rather full knowledge of the Introduction and First Part of *The Christian Faith*. Probably his reading went beyond this – Martensen himself specifically mentions Kierkegaard’s getting worked up over the treatment of the doctrine of Election, which comes much later on in the text.⁷ Similarly, there are passages elsewhere in the journals and in the published works that suggest a wider familiarity with Schleiermacher’s thought as a whole, although, as has already been stated, this may in some cases be a result of secondary or other sources.⁸ Nevertheless, it is these notes that establish a primary fixed point without which anything else we might say about this crucial relationship will lack a secure textual basis.

⁷ Garff, *Soren Kierkegaard*, p. 30.

⁸ For a complete discussion see Krichbaum, *Kierkegaard und Schleiermacher*.

Before starting on Kierkegaard's notes, however, it should be mentioned that there were also other aspects of Schleiermacher's work that were in different ways important for Kierkegaard's authorship. I have suggested elsewhere that Schleiermacher's *Confidential Letters on Schlegel's Lucinde* possibly played a role in inspiring Kierkegaard's ideas about indirect communication. This was a fictional work, originally published anonymously, in which Schleiermacher presents a series of letters reflecting the different views of a circle of friends to Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*. Schlegel was a personal friend of Schleiermacher and, like him, a central figure in Early Romanticism in Germany, but his novel, which celebrated an adulterous love-affair, caused considerable scandal. Schleiermacher's work was a rather clever fictional means of both defending his friend (which he also did under his own name in a published review) whilst re-imagining the issues in a non-controversial (because fictional) manner. Whilst it would go beyond the evidence to see this as the sole cause of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonymity, it probably played its part. Kierkegaard's comments are nothing short of fulsome:

It is probably a model review and also an example of how such a thing can be most productive, in that he constructs a host of personalities out of the book itself and through them illuminates the work and also illuminates their individuality, so that instead of being faced by the reviewers with various points of view, we get instead many personalities who represent these various points of view. But they are complete beings, so that it is possible to get a glance into the individuality of the single individual and through numerous relatively true judgements to draw up our own final judgement. Thus it is a true masterpiece. (SKS19/KJN3: Notebook 3:2)

If Kierkegaard was thus influenced by the Romantic Schleiermacher, he also learned from Schleiermacher the Plato scholar. This is especially clear in his Master's thesis *On the Concept of Irony with constant Reference to Socrates*. As the title indicates, Socrates plays a central role in this work and it is therefore unsurprising that much of it is taken up with interpreting the figure of Socrates as found in Plato – even though Kierkegaard also argues that the truest historical portrayal of Socrates is that found in Aristophanes! With regard to the relationship between Plato and Socrates, Kierkegaard does not conceal that he is guided at many points by Schleiermacher's prefaces to his translations of Plato's works and that the overall thrust of his own position rests on a sharp distinction between the dialogues that end without a conclusion (which Schleiermacher sees as earlier) and those which move on to a 'speculative' finale in which, via myth, Plato reveals the divine truth towards which the dialogue tends but

which is not itself discoverable solely through argument (SKS₁, 113f./CI, 54f.). In this connection Kierkegaard shows himself familiar with the Schleiermacherian position regarding the *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Apology*, and *Republic*. Taking account of alternative readings, such as those offered by Friedrich Ast, he broadly holds to Schleiermacher's textual solutions. This is strategically important, since Kierkegaard himself wants to hold on to a sharp distinction between Socrates (whose position he identifies as thoroughly ironic and, as such, infinitely and absolutely negative) and Plato, whom he sees as guilty of sliding into speculation and, in doing so, anticipating the errors of contemporary speculation. These references in *On the Concept of Irony* also contain a mention of Schleiermacher's remarks on the unity of God in *The Christian Faith*, remarks covered also by the 1834 notes.

Finally, and as we have seen with regard to Kierkegaard's praise of Schleiermacher as a thinker 'in the beautiful Greek sense', it is worth emphasizing that whatever theological differences separate the German and the Danish thinker, the latter would never subject the former to the kind of mockery he unleashed against Hegelianism. Even if, in the end, Schleiermacher is said not to have engaged the decisive features of Christianity (SKS₂₃: NB15^[b]) he is, from first to last, accorded a fundamental respect that, if not unique, is certainly rare in Kierkegaard's writings, especially in the case of one who was both a university professor (and a *German* professor at that) and an upholder of established bourgeois Christendom.

THE 1834 NOTES

Kierkegaard's notes on *The Christian Faith* take up about ten pages in the latest edition of his works. A few have been translated into English, although these do not give a clear impression of the scope of Kierkegaard's work on this text.⁹ That being said, they are not in any way exhaustive. The majority consist of little more than Danish renderings of short passages from Schleiermacher's work, sometimes citing just the section or paragraph headings and no more. There are a few that comment or raise questions, but there is no sustained discussion of the points at issue (although in some cases other notes elsewhere indicate something of Kierkegaard's further reflections on the relevant subject). What the notes do offer, however, is a reasonably firm basis

⁹ See JP 4:3843–4.

for asserting that Kierkegaard was acquiring a good basic knowledge of the Introduction and First Part of *The Christian Faith* (250 pages in the standard English translation), which includes discussions of the nature of the Church, of doctrine, the role of the redeemer, the concept of God, and the relationship between God and the world. Reading further into *The Christian Faith*, we might find other passages that suggest a certain influence and I shall discuss one example later in this chapter. However, since we are without a firm textual basis for talking about a direct relationship in such cases and since there were many routes by which a more or less faithfully Schleiermacherian view might have been indirectly mediated to Kierkegaard, I shall not attempt a point-by-point comparison between Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher on each of the loci of Christian doctrine.¹⁰ At several points later in this book I shall draw attention to relevant convergences and divergences between the two but here we are concerned merely to establish some of the basic parameters that are determinative for what we know of Kierkegaard's relation to the founder of modern theology. To do so, I shall proceed through Kierkegaard's notes and comment on the passages to which they relate as well as looking at where and how the themes they raise might be reflected in Kierkegaard's later theology. I shall not discuss every note, however, but hope to do enough to show the main lines of Kierkegaard's reading and what he might have learned from it.

Although Martensen's memoirs suggest that Kierkegaard's approach to the text was highly argumentative,¹¹ there is little evidence of this in the written record. One notable exception is the very first entry, which deals with the nature of the Church. Paragraph §2 of Schleiermacher's work states that 'Since Dogmatics is a theological discipline, and thus pertains solely to the Christian Church, we can only explain what it is when we

¹⁰ Many theological writers of the generation of Kierkegaard's teachers were influenced by Schleiermacher in significant degrees so that there are many possibilities of indirect influence. This also included several of those who adopted a more Hegelian perspective, including Martensen. See P. Widmann, 'Zur Rezeption von Schleiermachers Grundlegung der Dogmatik in der Skandinavischen Theologie. H. L. Martensen – F. C. Krarup – A. Nygren', *Text und Kontext* (1986) Sonderreihe, Bd. 22, Copenhagen/Munich, 163–89. For comment on Widmann's article and the relationship between Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, and Martensen with regard to the question of speculation, see my 'Hans Lassen Martensen and the Question of Speculation', in E.-M. Wiberg, B. K. Holm, and A.-C. Jacobsen (eds.), *Gudtankens aktualitet. Bidrag om teologiens opgave og indhold og protestantismens indre spændinger* (Copenhagen: Anis, 2010), pp. 77–96. See also n. 1 above.

¹¹ Martensen wrote '... he also had an irresistible urge to sophistry, to hair-splitting games, which showed itself at every opportunity and was often tiresome ...' (quoted in Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 30).

have become clear as to the conception of the Christian Church.¹² How are we to do this? Schleiermacher is keenly aware of the risks of any *a priori* definition failing to do justice to the actual reality of Church life, whilst at the same time recognizing that a purely empirical approach would need to have some criteria for distinguishing between the essential and the accidental. Nevertheless, he appears to believe that this can be done in two stages. The first is by locating the question in the domain of ethics, which he here takes to relate to what ‘originates through free human action and which can only through such continue to exist’.¹³ The second is the task of distinguishing ‘the permanently identical from the changeable elements’ and exhibiting the results ‘in a conceptually exhaustive way, according to their affinities and gradations’, which is the task of the philosophy of religion.¹⁴

However, Kierkegaard seems not to have been convinced that this provided a satisfactory basis. He writes, ‘If ethics is to establish this concept of Ch[urch] *a priori*, I cannot see how it will be able to define the positions in which the individual forms are found in their historical emergence, for it could be the case that history didn’t correspond to our ideas. If it is to define it *a posteriori*, then in what way are its labours different from the philosophy of religion?’ (SKS27: Papir 9:1). As he goes on to make clear, his concern is that there must be a clear idea of the Church against which the historical forms of ecclesiastical life are to be measured. Schleiermacher had himself drawn attention to the limitations of both *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches, but it is clear that Kierkegaard is not satisfied with Schleiermacher’s solution and needs a clearer principle for deciding what does and what doesn’t belong to an authentic Church. Knowing as we do that Kierkegaard’s authorship ended with a passionate attack on the Christian Church,¹⁵ it is tempting to see the seeds of that attack as already latent in this early journal entry. Certainly it is evidence that the question as to how one might identify the true Church was in some way, shape, or form on Kierkegaard’s agenda from the beginning.

Similarly, and closely related to the question of the Church, we also find a potential anticipation of later themes when Kierkegaard next picks up on Schleiermacher’s use of the phrase ‘scientific (*Wissenschaftlich*)

¹² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1989), p. 3.

¹³ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 4.

¹⁵ See Chapter 9 below.

disciplines' and comments 'But these too must surely have to be permeated by the Christian spirit, for otherwise we might be starting to build with alien materials' (SKS27: Papir 9:1). Not only the idea of the Christian Church but also the idea of a Christian theology that might claim to be 'scientific' is now coming under scrutiny. Nevertheless, although these are real and substantial questions (and not mere 'hair-splitting'), they are posed here simply as questions – leading questions, maybe – but not, as yet, as a decisive rejection of the argument being developed in *The Christian Faith*.

In paragraphs §3–§6 Schleiermacher proceeds to identify his own conception of the Church in terms of 'propositions borrowed from Ethics' and it is in these sections that he offers his epochal definition of the common element of piety as the feeling of absolute dependence. Kierkegaard seems to have read carefully through this section, beginning by picking up on the way in which Schleiermacher links 'Feeling' and 'Self-consciousness' at the beginning of paragraph §3. Kierkegaard's note suggests that Schleiermacher may be confusing the two, although in fact the latter sets out fairly clear reasons for why he puts them 'side by side as equivalent'. These are, firstly, in order to free 'feeling' from some of its popular, non-*wissenschaftlich* connotations and secondly, to emphasize that the kind of self-consciousness at issue is what he calls 'immediate self-consciousness', of which he says that this is not itself manifest in any representation, but is 'in the proper sense feeling'. This, and neither willing nor knowing, is the locus of authentic piety. Schleiermacher goes on to argue that such feeling can take one of two forms, the feeling of 'spontaneous movement and activity' or freedom and the feeling of receptivity or dependence. In human life in the world we never find either one or the other in a pure form. Even when we feel ourselves most free, our freedom is always related to some object outside ourselves, whilst even in relation to the great phenomena of nature ('even, we may say, towards the heavenly bodies') we always 'exercise a counter-influence, however minute'.¹⁶ At this level, the human condition has to be described in terms of a network of essentially reciprocal relationships. However, this is not the case with regard to existence *as a whole*. Whilst each particular feeling of activity is always related to some other particular feeling of passivity, the total ensemble of our feelings, active and passive, is given to us as derived from a source that is never itself present either as an active or passive feeling. It is this that Schleiermacher calls 'the feeling of absolute

¹⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 15.

dependence' and which he identifies with our relation to God. 'This,' he explains, 'is to be understood in the sense that the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word "God" and that this is for us the original signification of that word.'¹⁷ Moreover, as Schleiermacher says and Kierkegaard notes, this means that it is not as if we have any idea of God apart from or prior to this feeling: 'God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state.'¹⁸

This leads Schleiermacher to consider the distinctively human character of such a feeling. For it to be an event in self-consciousness, even in the case of a purely immediate self-consciousness, it presupposes the development of a matrix of perceptions articulated in language, i.e., it is not a purely animal consciousness. However, this matrix itself remains at the previously identified level of reciprocity. Therefore the feeling of absolute dependence is a third level, that Schleiermacher himself insists is 'the highest grade of human self-consciousness'.¹⁹ At this level, the difference between activity and passivity in the normal sense disappears. This, however, does not entirely satisfy Kierkegaard, who queries whether, if the feeling of absolute dependence is the source of our feelings of both activity and passivity, these can be said to disappear in it. Surely, he suggests, 'nature' must belong in here somehow and therefore, by implication, there must be both activity and passivity. This may well seem to be heading in the direction of 'hair-splitting', but we shall see that it also contains the seeds of an important thread in Kierkegaard's response to Schleiermacher's text. This emerges in the following question: 'But if the feeling of absolute dependence is the highest, how does this relate to prayer? Wouldn't prayer then have to be regarded as a fiction?' (SKS27: Papir: 9:6). The point is further specified in the following entry, where, again, Kierkegaard poses a question to Schleiermacher's text, asking 'But how can Schleiermacher at the same time assert that Christianity tends to the type of teleological piety and at the same time accept predestination?' (SKS27: Papir 9:7).

Kierkegaard has at this point bypassed – or, at least, not taken notes on – about twenty pages discussing the relationships between monotheism and polytheism and between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Although it has been argued that the question of Judaism would come

¹⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 17; SKS27: Papir 9:5.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 18.

to play a crucial part in his later thought,²⁰ Kierkegaard seems not to have been especially interested in mapping Christianity in the context of a history of religions at this point but is more concerned with its systematic and theoretical groundwork. Consequently, he has fast-forwarded to Schleiermacher's paragraph §9, where the question at issue is the relationship between those kinds of religion in which morality is subordinated to nature and those in which nature is subordinated to morality. The former results in the kind of religiosity seen, according to Schleiermacher, in ancient Greece, that is, a religion in which nature, beauty, and aesthetic values come to predominate. The latter is seen in Judaism and Christianity. Here, the point is not that absolute dependence results in the individual or the community simply blending into the cosmic life, that is, as a whole dependent on God. Rather, 'In the realm of Christianity the consciousness of God is always related to the totality of active states in the idea of a Kingdom of God . . . [And] that figure of a Kingdom of God, which is so important and indeed all-inclusive for Christianity, is simply the general expression for the fact that in Christianity all pain and all joy are religious only in so far as they are related to activity in the Kingdom of God, and that every religious emotion which proceeds from a passive state ends in the consciousness of a transition to activity.'²¹

Kierkegaard, clearly, wishes to make a place for prayer as a valid phenomenon of the Christian life and sees this as involving an activity on the part of the one who prays. Yet, he thinks, Schleiermacher's position somehow undercuts this. Martensen noted that the topic of Election was one that especially engaged Kierkegaard and, leaving aside biographers' interest in the apparent sense of fate experienced by members of the Kierkegaard family, we can see that this too bears on the issue as to whether and how far there can be a genuine free initiative on the part of the believer.²² A succession of other entries in the journals from 1834 also shows Kierkegaard worrying away at the question of predestination, and the topic continues to perturb him for some time after that. In 1837 he will connect it to Schleiermacher and to what he regards as Schleiermacher's inability to move beyond the principle of reciprocity, resulting in a situation in which 'The sole object of intuition, and as such the sole truth, is the infinite unity moving through the infinite

²⁰ See P. Tudvad, *Stadier på Antisemitismens Vej. Søren Kierkegaard og Jøderne* (Copenhagen: Rosinante, 2010), esp. pp. 573–81.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 43.

²² See the discussion in Chapter 7, 'Antigone and the Mysterious Family', in my *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

multiplicity – the simultaneous infinite becoming and infinite completeness.’ This in turn means that ‘the system would have to be Calvinist or at least see it, with Schleiermacher’s modification, as the infinite sinning and infinite satisfaction. Just as any individual is predestined, so too in a way is the system – omniscience and omnipotence thus become the same, except seen from 2 sides. God’s consciousness of things is their coming into being. God is the actuality of the possible’ (SKS17/KJN1: AA:22). Again, looking ahead, we may see this as a position that Kierkegaard will come to contest at a fundamental level, as when in *The Sickness unto Death* he redefines God by asserting that ‘God is: that all things are possible’ (SKS11, 154–5/SUD, 38–9).²³ Yet, whatever the differences between Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard on this point, the tension is one that reflects an antinomy in two fundamental points of Christian belief, namely, that God is omnipotent and that human beings have responsibility. We may also add that if Kierkegaard seems to be arguing for a kind of Christian voluntarism against what he sees as Schleiermacher’s emphasis on predestination, it is not a tension he himself entirely escapes. Thus in the discourse ‘Human Beings’ need of God is their Highest Perfection’ he will stress human beings’ inability to will or achieve anything without God: ‘God in heaven can do everything, and human beings can do nothing at all’ (SKS5, 302/EUD, 310) – and that, he says, is how they ‘correspond’ to each other, i.e., inversely. Similarly, in discourses on the lilies and the birds, in which (as I shall argue below) the idea of the ‘absolute dependence’ of creation on God provides a unifying thread, Kierkegaard insists that even the person who resolves not to act in obedience to God will end up nevertheless doing the will of God (SKS10, 91/CD, 84). At the same time, and as we shall see in more detail below, these discourses also argue for the indispensable role of human willing and of prayer. The ‘solution’ he will come to is therefore to re-envision the question in terms of the gift, both the original gift of creation and the renewal of that gift in forgiveness.²⁴ That, however, is some way off, and what we see here is only the beginning of a process. This beginning seems to be being set up in opposition to Schleiermacher – and yet the problem is precisely the same problem that Schleiermacher himself is wrestling with, namely, how to combine the basic principle of absolute dependence with a conception of Christianity as a ‘teleological’ religion in which the freely chosen goals of human subjects must play a central part.

²³ See also the discussion in my *God and Being* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 285–94.

²⁴ See below, pp. 117–19.

Kierkegaard has two notes relating to the discussion in §10 of ‘Revelation’. Both are citations translated into Danish. The first relates to how the divine activity aimed at human salvation is communicated to human beings. Here Schleiermacher states ‘But I am unwilling to accept the further definition that [the divine activity] operates upon man as a cognitive being.’ On this point – and as we shall see with reference to Kierkegaard’s study of speculative theology several years later²⁵ – we may suppose a significant agreement, since Kierkegaard too will resist making the content of the religious relationship primarily cognitive. The second occurs in the context of distinguishing between revelation and natural inspiration which, Schleiermacher says, requires the assumption ‘that revelation is only to be assumed when not a single moment but a whole existence is determined by such a divine communication, and that what is then proclaimed by such an existence is to be regarded as revealed’ (SKS27: Papir 9:9).²⁶ Again, looking forward to Kierkegaard’s invocation of subjective, existential truth (in, e.g., *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*), or to the demand that those who will the good in truth must do so by focusing their entire being into willing one thing (as in the discourse known as ‘Purity of Heart’: SKS8, 119–250/UDVS, 7–154), we might presume that these assertions struck a chord with the twenty-one-year-old student. Looking ahead to the following year, we find one of his earliest efforts at literary work in a semi-fictional journal of a holiday in northern Sjælland where the question that is tormenting him is precisely how to see ‘the whole in its totality’ and to find the ‘Archimedean point’ from which to grasp the unity of his life (SKS17/KJN1: AA:6).²⁷ Of course, such a quest for the unification of the self and of a vision of the unity of life as a whole is a recurrent theme in the literature and philosophy of Romanticism and by no means exclusive to Schleiermacher.²⁸

The next group of notes relate to what Schleiermacher has to say about what is specific to Christianity and, in particular, the role of the redeemer, Jesus Christ. Again, Kierkegaard’s notes are predominantly translated excerpts from the text being studied. Schleiermacher’s opening definition states that ‘Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption

²⁵ See Chapter 2 below. ²⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 50, 51.

²⁷ See also my *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, Chapter 1, ‘From Gilleleie to Østergade’.

²⁸ Krichbaum suggests Fichte’s *Bestimmung des Menschen* as a proximate inspiration for Kierkegaard’s position at this point. See *Kierkegaard und Schleiermacher*, pp. 2–3.

accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.²⁹ He goes on to distinguish two elements in this definition, of which the first is the religious emotion in which the individual experiences ‘an obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher self-consciousness’;³⁰ yet because those who experience this retain the possibility of ‘kindling the God-consciousness’ anew whilst being unable of themselves to bring it to effect, there is an experienced need of redemption. This is the first element. The second is that this experienced need of redemption is brought into specific relation to Jesus Christ. Therefore, for Schleiermacher, a purely general longing for redemption is not yet Christian – but nor is a relation to Jesus Christ that is not characterized by the need for redemption, as, for example, a relation that was merely cognitive might be. Kierkegaard focuses in on the following citation: ‘The reference to redemption is in every [Kierkegaard adds: ‘pious’] Christian consciousness simply because the originator of the Christian communion is the Redeemer; and Jesus is the Founder of a religious communion simply in the sense that its members become conscious of redemption through him.’³¹ In contrast to Judaism and Islam, the founders of which (according to Schleiermacher) sought to found their communion ‘upon definite doctrine and in definite form’, Christianity offers something more: a redeemer. Kierkegaard’s note offers Schleiermacher’s accompanying comment, which distinguishes what is specific to redemption from religious example: ‘If, however, there are in the communion considerable differences in the free development of the God-consciousness, then some people, in whom it is most cramped, are more in need of redemption, and others, in whom it works more freely [Kierkegaard: ‘higher’], are more capable of redemption; and thus through the influence of the latter there arises in the former an approximation to redemption; but only up to the point at which the difference between the two is more or less balanced, simply owing to the fact that there exists a communion or fellowship.’³²

Kierkegaard’s own later religious writings will, at least according to his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, draw a strong distinction between religion that is merely ‘upbuilding’ and the faith that looks to Jesus Christ as the God-man. In those discourses that Climacus calls merely upbuilding there is certainly a powerful expression of the religious individual’s experienced need of God – not least in the discourse entitled ‘Human Beings’

²⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 52. ³⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 54.

³¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 56, SKS27: Papir:10.

³² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 57, SKS27: Papir:10.

Need of God is their Highest Perfection'. There, however, there is no explicit reference to Jesus Christ, but solely to God. For Schleiermacher such a purely theocentric religious consciousness is not yet Christian. Kierkegaard would agree and, if we turn to later discourses, he will use the 'sinful woman' of Luke 7 to portray just such a need of redemption focused on the person of Jesus Christ – and, as we shall see, she plays a decisive role in his mature characterization of Christian faith.³³ If the demand that we should become imitators of Christ is also a dominant theme of the later works, this does not exclude the no less basic demand that we first recognize our need of God and bring it quite specifically to the feet of Jesus Christ. Neither for Schleiermacher nor Kierkegaard is the need of redemption ever finally understood when it is not thus Christocentrically inflected.

Once more Kierkegaard skips over pages dealing with the relationship between Christianity, Judaism, and Paganism, but also sections §13 (on supernatural revelation) and §14 (on miracle, prophecy, and inspiration). Sections §15–§19 deal with the relationship between Dogmatics and Christian piety. Here Kierkegaard pauses to note the opening definition of §16, that 'Dogmatic propositions are doctrine of the descriptively didactic type, in which the highest possible degree of definiteness is aimed at'³⁴ as well as some lines from §19, to the effect that 'all doctrines which are dogmatic expressions of that which, in the public proceedings of the Church (even if only in certain regions of it), can be put forward as a presentation of its common piety without provoking dissension and schism'.³⁵

Then, from paragraph §22 on 'The Natural Heresies' Kierkegaard makes a schematic summary of Schleiermacher's assertion that there are two basic ways in which heresy can arise. These relate back to the preceding discussion and definition of Christian faith as requiring faith in the person of Jesus Christ as redeemer. Either 'human nature will be so defined that a redemption in the strict sense cannot be accomplished, or the Redeemer will be defined in such a way that he cannot accomplish [Kierkegaard: it] . . . if men are to be redeemed, they must both be *in need of redemption* and [Kierkegaard: 'really'] *be capable of receiving it*'.³⁶ This last point is significant and indicates what will emerge as an important commonality of theological conception between Schleiermacher and

³³ See Chapter 7 below. ³⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 78/SKS27: 11:1.

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 89–90/SKS27: 11:2.

³⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 98/SKS27: 12.

Kierkegaard – and a point at which one of their most influential twentieth-century critics, Karl Barth, would see them as both in error. For, despite Kierkegaard's anxieties about Schleiermacher's tendency towards predestination, Schleiermacher is saying very clearly here – and it is a view Kierkegaard will endorse – that human beings' experienced need of God is not simply a matter of wailing and gnashing of teeth on the part of those who feel themselves to be lost: it is an integral moment in a whole developing God-relationship. This is far from the position of Luther and Calvin and from the Augsburg Confession, one of the normative symbols of the Danish Lutheran Church – although in the post-Enlightenment period there were many Danish theologians, including Kierkegaard's own teacher H. N. Clausen, who would affirm human beings' capacity for receiving redemption.³⁷ And, in the discourses on the sinful woman, Kierkegaard will make clear that as and when the need of redemption takes form as love of the Saviour, then it actively contributes to the event of salvation.³⁸ Here too there is a clear convergence of theological interest on one of the most perennially debated points of Christian doctrine.

Once more Kierkegaard shows himself to be rather uninterested in comparisons between religious communities, bypassing Schleiermacher's discussion of Protestantism and Catholicism, the differences between the Reformed and Lutheran positions, and a number of sections dealing with the sources and nature of Dogmatics. It is only forty pages later, at the beginning of the First Section of the First Part of *The Christian Faith* that Kierkegaard picks up the thread of Schleiermacher's discussion. In this and the following section, to which he seems to have paid special attention, it is particularly the relation between the world and God that is being discussed. As the definition at the head of paragraph §39 implies, a key issue throughout this discussion is ensuring that the doctrine is understood with sole reference to the interests of Christian piety, i.e., the feeling of absolute dependence, and, as Schleiermacher puts it, 'with a view to the exclusion of every alien element',³⁹ that is, without getting involved in the kind of discussions about the origins of the world and of human beings that are proper to natural science. As the heading of paragraph §41 (also excerpted by Kierkegaard) puts it, 'the origin of the world must, indeed, be traced entirely to the divine activity, but not in such a way that this activity is thought of as resembling human activity;

³⁷ See Introduction and, e.g., Clausen's critical comments on thoroughgoing Augustinianism at SKS19: Notesbog 1:8, p. 68/KJN3: Notebook 1:8, p. 64.

³⁸ See Chapter 7 below. ³⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 148/SKS27: Papir 13:2.

and the origin of the world must be represented as the event in time which conditions all change, but not so as to make the divine activity itself a temporal activity'.⁴⁰ In other words, 'creation' is not to be conceived anthropomorphically nor as an event in cosmological time, whether (to put it in terms not known as such to Schleiermacher or to Kierkegaard) that is envisaged as a Big Bang or some other kind of cosmic occurrence. But this also means that Schleiermacher is not willing to commit himself to the view that the world existed from eternity. The whole question of a temporal versus an eternal creation 'has no bearing on the content of the feeling of absolute dependence, and it is therefore a matter of indifference how it is decided'.⁴¹ Kierkegaard does not note this statement, but he does note Schleiermacher's summary of the theological thrust of the question, namely, 'whether it is possible . . . to conceive of God as existing apart from created things'.⁴²

Kierkegaard shows a certain interest in what Schleiermacher has to say about the Devil in a discussion that is directed towards minimizing and even eliminating the idea of the Devil from Christian doctrine. As Schleiermacher puts it in the definition at the start of paragraph §44 (noted by Kierkegaard), 'The idea of the Devil, as developed among us, is so unstable that we cannot expect anyone to be convinced of its truth; but, besides, our Church has never made doctrinal use of the idea.'⁴³ Schleiermacher's discussion of human sin does not come until a part of *The Christian Faith* for which we have no surviving notes by Kierkegaard, yet the question of the Devil prompts a brief consideration of the role of the Devil in bringing about the Fall of humankind. Here, Schleiermacher suggests that using Satan to explain the Fall actually explains nothing, since, the question is why or how 'man allowed himself to be tempted', thus presupposing 'aberration and evil, so that the explanation [i.e., that it was Satan who put evil thoughts into man's mind] is seen to be no explanation at all'.⁴⁴ Kierkegaard wonders whether this doesn't imply that human beings were created sinful (SKS27: 13:4^[a]). However, it is striking that ten years later he will himself effectively eliminate Satan from his own re-narration of the Fall (in *The Concept of Anxiety*) and focus on a psychological account of Adam's susceptibility to temptation, yet without implying that human beings were created sinful.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 152/SKS27: Papir 13:3.

⁴¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 155.

⁴² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 155/SKS27: Papir 13:3.

⁴³ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 161/SKS27: Papir 13:4.

⁴⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 163. ⁴⁵ For further discussion see [Chapter 6](#) below.

From paragraph §46, on the doctrine of Conservation, Schleiermacher again seeks to draw a clear line of distinction between a properly Christian approach and that of natural science. As the opening definition states ‘The religious self-consciousness by means of which we place all that affects or influences us in absolute dependence on God, coincides entirely with the view that all such things are conditioned and determined by the interdependence of Nature.’⁴⁶ In other words, and according to the principle of reciprocity, the scientific investigation of Nature and of the interdependence of natural phenomena is not in any way in conflict with the essential interest of religion, which is not (as we have seen) focused on any of these reciprocal relationships but on the inability of the whole to explain itself other than through the sense of its being absolutely dependent on a ‘Whence’ that transcends all intra-worldly causal relationships. As Schleiermacher says in a concluding note to the whole discussion, it was ‘supremely important . . . to show the harmony between the interests of piety and science on the one hand and morality on the other’.⁴⁷ That is to say, each has its own proper sphere and is, on the one hand, imperilled if it goes beyond its due boundaries and, on the other, immune from interference if it remains within them. Kierkegaard excerpts very little of this whole discussion, leaving to one side extensive discussions of, e.g., questions relating to miracles and causality, but the two passages he does write down both concern the relationship between individual or particular events and the divine influence operative at the level of the whole.⁴⁸ Of course, the upbuilding discourses he will later write are not themselves dogmatic treatises. They perform rather than expound a certain understanding of doctrine. Therefore when, especially in the discourses on the lilies and the birds, he emphasizes how God’s will is operative in absolutely every minute detail of the life of nature he is not necessarily to be taken as denying the role of intermediate causality or as breaching the partition between scientific and religious discourse carefully developed by Schleiermacher. On the contrary, and as we shall see at greater length, it is very clear that Kierkegaard is taking the lilies and the birds as parables of

⁴⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 170. ⁴⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 193.

⁴⁸ ‘But here it should be remarked that frequently, on the one hand, an undue value is placed on expressly tracing back the least detail to this relation; while on the other hand, with no greater justice, we often oppose such a relation’ (Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 172/SKS27: 13:6). And: ‘For in the totality of finite being only a particular and partial causality is given to each individual, since each is dependent not on one other but on all others; the universal causality attaches only to that on which the totality of this partial causality is itself dependent’ (Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 175/SKS27: 13:6).

human life. He is by no means attempting to contribute either to botany or to ornithology but is appealing to and seeking to arouse precisely the human capacity to become aware, through mutual communication, of our absolute dependence.⁴⁹

The final group of excerpts relates to the Second Section of the First Part of Schleiermacher's system, namely, the discussion of 'The Divine Attributes which are related to the Religious Self-consciousness so far as it expresses the General Relationship between God and the World'.⁵⁰ As Schleiermacher immediately glosses this: 'All attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to him.'⁵¹ Attributes to which Kierkegaard's notes relate are inalterability, simplicity, eternity, omnipresence, immensity, infinity, omnipotence, Spirit, and unity. As well as the attributes themselves, Kierkegaard flags the related topics of substance and existence, immediate and mediate agency, and necessity and freedom.

As the range of topics suggests this is an exceptionally important section for understanding Schleiermacher's concept of God. But what can it tell us of Kierkegaard and his appropriation of Schleiermacher's God? It would certainly be welcome to assume that, despite not recording it, Kierkegaard took careful note of Schleiermacher's distinction between three ways of talking about the divine attributes: 'the way of the removal of limits' (*via eminentiae*), the way of negation (*via negationis*), and 'the way of causality' (*via causalitatis* – more or less corresponding to the Thomist notion of the analogy of attribution). Importantly, Schleiermacher stresses the mutually corrective nature of these and especially the need to apply the first two to the last.⁵² In this way he protects 'God' or any of the divine attributes being treated as if they were in any normal sense objects of cognition. What we know of God is not knowledge, but the exposition of our own religious feelings. Yet, when we refer these feelings to God as their source or ground, we are not, according to Schleiermacher, merely engaging in empty gesturing. Instead, each specifies one or other aspect of what is given in the feeling of absolute dependence but which is nevertheless susceptible of being distinguished and conceptualized.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 5 below. ⁵⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 194.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 194/SKS27: 13:7.

⁵² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 197.

Schleiermacher identifies a particular set of confusions arising out of a tendency to distinguish between various kinds of attributes, such as between the metaphysical and the moral, or between those that belong to God's substance and those that belong to the divine existence, and, closely connected with this last, between active and inactive. He finds all of these to be question-begging and states that we cannot presume that they correspond to anything real in God. Kierkegaard does not take notes on this discussion, except for one example, which interestingly refers to what will become a powerful theme in his own conceptualization of God, namely, divine unchangeability.⁵³ Here, Kierkegaard schematically notes

Unchangeability
 Substance. - Existence.-
 (Einfachheit [Simplicity].) (Eternity.)- (SKS27: 13:8)

This note reflects Schleiermacher's argument that there is no religious requirement to distinguish between eternity and unchangeability. The latter is contained in the idea of the former and only gets separated out from it if we suppose that there is a real distinction between substance and existence in God. However, since God is timeless there can be no succession in Him and to insist on his unchangeability is only necessary when we attempt to interpret the divine eternity in its relation to the world. In other words, it is an attribute that only arises on the basis of distinguishing between how God is in Himself and how he is in relation to the world or to creatures. Even in this case, however, the assertion that God is unchangeable is best taken 'merely as a cautionary rule to ensure that no religious emotion shall be so interpreted, and no statement about God so understood, as to make it necessary to assume an alteration in God of any kind'.⁵⁴ A similar issue arises in the case of divine omnipresence if this is treated as an inactive attribute disconnected from the activity of divine causality and not seen as a way of speaking about the distinctive power of the divine causality to be effective in 'everywhere uniform self-identity' (Schleiermacher's gloss on the Greek *συνουσία*).⁵⁵ Once again, trying to distinguish active and inactive elements in divine omnipresence 'almost inevitably destroys the essential self-identity of the divine causality, and thus only produces confusion'.⁵⁶

⁵³ See especially the discourse 'The Unchangeability of God' (SKS13, 321–39/M, 263–81) but the theme runs through many of the discourses.

⁵⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 206.

⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 208/SKS27: 13:8.

⁵⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 209/SKS27:13:8.

The conceptualization of God as ‘the Eternal’ is a constant and salient feature of Kierkegaard’s upbuilding writings.⁵⁷ In the discourse ‘The Unchangeability of God’ (SKS13, pp. 319–39/M, 263–81) he will emphasize precisely the attribute of unchangeability, and do so using highly pictorial images, such as the unchanging nature of a mountain in comparison with a human life-span, to illustrate the doctrine. Here, we might say, Kierkegaard seems to have fallen into a trap that this early reading of Schleiermacher might have warned him against. Again, however, we must remember that these discourses are not dogmatic treatises but rather *perform* the meaning of Christian doctrine for a particular time and a particular audience. Whilst Kierkegaard’s ‘mountain’ imagery might indeed suggest that he is thinking of unchangeability as an ‘inactive’ attribute, it is equally the case that he uses the same idea with regard to, e.g., God’s unchangeability in maintaining an active attitude of love towards human beings.⁵⁸ I am, of course, not suggesting that Kierkegaard had his student notes to hand each time he sat down to write a discourse mentioning either the eternity or the unchangeability of God: merely that this early study drew his attention to the difficulties of applying human language directly to God. He would at one point say directly that all language about God and about spiritual existence is metaphorical or ‘transferred’ (SKS9 pp. 212f./WL, 209f.) and these notes therefore offer further caution against reading an unbroken naivety into his own sometimes vividly material and anthropomorphic image of God.

The definition given at the start of paragraph §54, excerpted by Kierkegaard, takes us back to questions of causality. ‘In the conception of the divine Omnipotence two ideas are contained: first, that the entire system of Nature, comprehending all times and spaces, is founded upon divine causality, which as eternal and omnipresent is in contrast to all finite causality; and second, that the divine causality, as affirmed in our feeling of absolute dependence, is completely presented in the totality of finite being, and consequently everything for which there is a causality in God happens or becomes real.’⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Indeed, it is precisely Kierkegaard’s use of ‘the eternal’ that led Heidegger to conclude that he (Kierkegaard) remained trapped in the ‘ordinary’ way of conception of time and had not thought his way through to thinking time in its appropriate temporality. See M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 497 (note iii to Division Two, Chapter Four).

⁵⁸ As in a late discourse on Luke 7:47. See SKS12, 291/WA, 175.

⁵⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 211/SKS27: 13:10.

Schleiermacher's discussion and Kierkegaard's notes also flag questions about categories such as actuality and possibility (SKS27: 13:10) and mediate and immediate agency. With regard to this last distinction, Kierkegaard makes what appears to be a critical point. 'It seems to me that one could in this way demonstrate how implausible it was to distinguish between immediate and mediated agency in God. The concept of mediated agency implies the use of some means, but the object I use as a means must *eo ipso* appear as something given over which I then deploy my power but it in turn exercises a certain power over me – but such a relationship cannot be thought to hold in the case of God's absolute freedom' (SKS27: 13:10). However, Schleiermacher himself says of this distinction that it is amongst the ideas inherited from scholasticism 'which can be ruled out without loss'.⁶⁰

The opening of paragraph §55 addresses the question of 'Spirit', stating that 'by the divine Omniscience is to be understood the absolute spirituality of the divine Omnipotence'.⁶¹ A particular problem that engages Schleiermacher and that Kierkegaard seems to have taken an interest in is whether we can speak of God having knowledge of what is only possible and never becomes real or whether, in the case of God, thinking and reality coincide. For Schleiermacher the separation of possibility and reality in God reflects an anthropomorphic prejudice. As he puts it in a sentence written down by Kierkegaard: 'However, even apart from this it would follow that if anywhere even for God anything is possible outside the real, then infinitely much is possible at every point, and as each point is co-determinant for all the rest, a different world arises for each case from every point.'⁶² The problem here is that we conceive of the divine creativity by analogy with a human artist who, as Schleiermacher says, may have many ideas or inspirations that never come to anything – but this is precisely a reflection of his imperfection *qua* human and artist. He adds:

Hence it would have been far safer, if one does start from what is human, to transfer to God, illimited and perfect, the certainty of the perfect artist, who in a state of inspired discovery thinks of nothing else, to whom nothing else offers itself, save what he actually produces. This also agrees very well with the story of the Creation, which knows nothing of any intervening deliberation and deciding

⁶⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 215. By 'scholasticism' here Schleiermacher probably means Protestant scholasticism.

⁶¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 219/SKS27: Papir 13:11.

⁶² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 225/SKS27: Papir 13:11.

choice, but keeps contemplation entirely to the end, where it appears simply as absolute approval . . .⁶³

Kierkegaard does not copy down this passage, but he does note a warning against defining the likeness between Spirit in God and spirit in human beings by reference to finite examples (SKS27: 13:11) and he also writes out the following, offered by Schleiermacher as a comment on the objects of divine knowledge excluding what is merely possible:

If one adds to this fact that unquestionably there exists at least a strong appearance as though, on the one side, a dual self-consciousness – an original and a reflected – were attributed to God, and as though, on the other, the piece-by-piece character of His knowledge were being assumed . . .⁶⁴

However, Kierkegaard doesn't complete the sentence, which continues: 'it follows that till now the theory of these divine attributes has transferred to the Supreme Being all the imperfections of our consciousness'.⁶⁵

Kierkegaard would, in his own distinctively radical way, give the nineteenth century's sharpest statement of the difference between the divine and the human, when he wrote of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and human beings (SKS11, 237/SUD, 125) – and this statement would, famously, be claimed by Karl Barth as a summary of what he ironically called his 'system'.⁶⁶ Yet whilst both Kierkegaard and Barth might be taken as opposing Schleiermacher in this regard – since the latter is often portrayed as thinking of God in immanent categories (and we have heard Kierkegaard say that, in his view, Schleiermacher never got beyond reciprocity) – it is clear that Kierkegaard could have learned much about this difference from the father of modern theology himself. Reinforced by his refusal to see the God-relationship in primarily cognitive terms, Schleiermacher's insistence on the *difference* between divine and human consciousness would have helped prepare Kierkegaard to resist the kinds of claims he would shortly encounter in the emergence of 'speculative theology' and its claims to have an unqualifiedly direct and true knowledge of God.

Finally, with regard to the divine attributes, Kierkegaard notes the discussion of the divine unity, infinity, and simplicity, in which Schleiermacher emphasizes that unity is not to be thought of in terms

⁶³ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 225–6.

⁶⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 226/SKS27: Papir 13:11.

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 226–7.

⁶⁶ See Karl Barth, *Commentary on Romans* (Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 10.

of number but as a way of stressing that ‘God has no equal’ and is therefore ‘unique’. Furthermore, this attribute underlines the point previously made that there can be no separation between essence and existence in God.⁶⁷

A couple of incomplete notes suggest that Kierkegaard read on to the Third Section that concludes the First Part of *The Christian Faith* and in which Schleiermacher discusses the nature and origin of human beings and the question of their original perfection, God-consciousness, and righteousness. Here we encounter themes that will prove central to Kierkegaard’s own discussion of the Fall in *The Concept of Anxiety* to which we shall return in [Chapter 6](#) below. However, the fragmentary notes we have here do not really enable us to gauge how seriously Kierkegaard was still reading at the point when he broke off.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, it is teasing that in this section he could well have encountered some remarks about what Schleiermacher calls ‘the fact that the “inner” is known and grasped along with and by means of the “outer”’.⁶⁹ This is, as readers of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works will know, precisely the proposition doubted by Victor Eremita at the beginning of *Either/Or* (SKS2, 11/EO1, 3). The reference is usually taken as applying to Hegel (SKSK2–3, 85–6). However, what is doubly striking about its occurrence in Schleiermacher in relation to *Either/Or* is that this identity of inner and outer is made in the context of human fellowship, so that what Schleiermacher is saying is that human beings naturally and spontaneously express their inner feelings in language and bodily communication. Human beings, he is saying, are naturally and spontaneously communicable and all social life rests on this communicability. Yet it is precisely this that is challenged by the manoeuvres of the aesthete ‘A’, a man of shifting and multiple masks and identities, and by a personality such as Johannes the Seducer, whose words say just the opposite of what he means. Schleiermacher’s view, then, seems to correspond closely to

⁶⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 229/SKS27: Papir 13:12.

⁶⁸ This is even more true of the three garbled notes recorded in Papir 14:1 and 14:2, relating to §§94, 96, and 97 of Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*. These deal specifically with questions of Christology. §94 addresses the question as to how God could be ‘in’ Christ, and Schleiermacher defends his formulation regarding the Redeemer’s God-consciousness as being adequate to the requirements of dogmatic teaching. This also raises the question as to the difference between the Redeemer and all other human beings (including Adam), with regard to sinlessness. §96 contains Schleiermacher’s criticism of the traditional ‘two natures’ formula on the grounds of its being inadequate to the character of a genuinely personal existence. §96 discusses the respective roles of divine and human activity/passivity in the Incarnation. It also includes a discussion of the Virgin Birth (which Schleiermacher regards as poorly attested historically and dogmatically irrelevant).

⁶⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 246.

that of Assessor Vilhelm, representative of the ethical point of view, who calls on 'A' to come out from behind his mask and to commit himself to being and speaking in his own person. The coincidence of this ethical point of view with that of Schleiermacher is further evidence if we turn to the latter's *Ethics*. Although this is not a text Kierkegaard would have known, it expresses principles that pervade the religiosity not only of Schleiermacher but of the entire Biedermeier era that they both reflected and helped shape. Schleiermacher treats the 'perfected ethical forms' under the headings 'Of the sexes and the family', 'Of national identity', 'Of the state', 'Of the national community of knowledge', 'the Church', and 'Friendship'. Whilst *Either/Or* says little directly about the State, it is clear that the Assessor not only looks to 'A' to marry, attend Church, and (against the advice of the essay on 'The Rotation of Crops') commit to friendships, but he also believes that useful public service and participation in civic life are integral to being ethical. Here, of course – and perhaps more than with regard to any of the purely theological points we have been considering in this chapter – it is the difference between Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard that comes most into view, not least since Assessor Vilhelm's own ethical point of view will be questioned by a more anxious and troubled kind of religiosity. Theologically, however, the 1834 study of *The Christian Faith*, together with the whole course of his theological studies and his own religious development, helped provide Kierkegaard with a significant point of reference for what, in 1837–8, would become a defining moment in the development of Danish theology: the phenomenon of speculative theology, spearheaded by none other than H. L. Martensen, the tutor who had led Kierkegaard through Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*. It is to this encounter with speculative theology that we now turn.