Contents

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

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ARTICLES

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Self-Realization, or, An Image of the Imagination?
Kierkegaard's Self between the Ghost in the Machine and a Cognitive Spin[i]

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I

Context is key to current discussions of literary history.[ii] Recently, Lasse Horne Kjældgaard titled some musings on the issue: "The context out of the text, not the text into the context." I subscribe to his notion, for it endows otherwise abstract contexts with the specific dynamics of texts; and as contexts are never givens but always to be determined, they become inexhaustible conduits for new impulses to interpret texts. One circular effect lies in reclaiming the history of being and becoming a self in light of questions (im)posed by texts of Kierkegaard (SK) and in answers engendered contextually (as when a context-producing text becomes the context of its own product). Predictably, being and becoming a self in the age of SK intersects with *not* being and becoming a self in the present age. But are we at least on the same page and turning pages between the same covers? Or have new media replaced such paper-bound imagery entirely?

Let's begin by digging where we stand. Or where Salman Rushdie stands in Anne-Marie Steen Petersen's illustration to his *Politiken* essay "Well, then I contradict myself." In Petersen's graphic rendition of this headline, Rushdie stands in front of a mirror saying "yes," while his mirror image looks back at him saying "no." The message has been heard in Rushdie's work for decades: we have no unified selves, but are paradoxical beings; "self-contradiction is our life blood." All we can say is, "this is how it was, yet this is how it wasn't," and the only place we can say it is in fiction, which is both a place and a no-place. One week later, a young blogger, Ida Jeng, wrote to the same paper from New York, saying that, regrettably, it's time to drop "private life" as a category; for your private self has become your premier public value.

This doesn't square immediately with self and selfhood in SK. To be sure, the Judge in *Either/Or* speaks of one's identity with oneself as a "relation to other individuals in the race and to the whole race" and of the "courage to choose oneself, for at the same time as he seems to be isolating himself most radically he is most radically sinking himself into the root by which he is bound up with the whole" (KW, IV, 216). But neither race, rootedness nor wholeness is a site of self-dissolution or public cancellation of self-hood. Rather, these are stations on the way to self-realization in God: "He repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God" (ibid.). Similarly, while Rushdie's self-contradictory being may resonate with Kierkegaardian mixtures—of good and evil, say—the resemblance only puts the difference between the two authors in perspective. Where *being* is Rushdie's *end* station, it's a *transit* station—to *becoming*—in SK. As we read in *Postscript*, "A person can *be both* good and evil, just as it is quite simply said that a human being has a disposition to both good and evil, but one cannot *simultaneously become* both good and evil" (KW, XII.1, 420).

When Ida, the blogger, reports that "your private life is just so *passée*," it sounds like despair to a Kierkegaardian ear. "His self is, so to speak outside him, and it has to be acquired," continues Judge William (KW, IV, 217). But in failing to do so by way of repentance, and by not choosing "it absolutely from the hand of God," not only is despair in evidence; so is the "significance of" not "willing one's despair," which might otherwise have been the person's "true salvation" (221). Ida Jeng may be despairing at the state of Facebook affairs, but her despair is tellingly half-hearted. Though she may abstain from appearing on the net on a rare

occasion, she largely succumbs to its unstoppable flow of privacy in public. Gone is the Judge's sense of the ethical, "and this absolute choice of myself is my freedom, and only when I have absolutely chosen myself have I posited an absolute difference: namely, the difference between good and evil" (224).[iii]

Moreover, the missing links between the present age of web sites and SK's anthropology, if not cosmology, seem not restricted to any particular sphere or stage of life. From whichever angle the requirement for self-realization is sounded in SK's oeuvre, its sounding-board in present-day culture appears conspicuous by its absence. Be it the Rushdies or the bloggers of our climes, when they do reflect on their so-called self-images, they may not eye themselves, but neither do they see what Anti-Climacus saw in *Practice in Christianity*: "Therefore Christ also first and foremost wants to help every human being to become a self, requires this of him first and foremost, requires that he, by repenting, become a self, in order then to draw him to himself. He wants to draw the human being to himself, but in order truly to draw him to himself he wants to draw him only as a free being to himself, that is, through a choice" (KW, XX, 160).

But as removed from this ontological and religious vocabulary as our present-day backdrop may be, it is indeed a conspicuous absence, a silence that can be decoded, and from which decoding today's muted self-reflections *and* SK's overtly contrasting views are dual beneficiaries. So let me leave our contemporary backdrop aside for now and turn instead to some of the most canonical versions of SK's take on self and self-realization, i.e., formulations which are particularly pregnant with and susceptible to a contextual impetus—with consequences for text and context alike.

II

SK's pronouncements on (being and becoming) a self are most prevalent in *Either/Or, II*; *Upbuilding Discourses*; *The Concept of Anxiety*; *Fragments*; *Postscript*; and *Sickness Unto Death*. Here's a quote from the first:

> Through the individual's intercourse with himself the individual is made
> pregnant by himself and gives birth to himself. The self the individual knows is simultaneously the actual self and the ideal self, which the individual has outside himself as the image in whose likeness he is to form himself, and which on the other hand he has within himself, since it is he himself. Only within himself does the individual have the objective toward which he is to strive, and yet he has this objective outside himself as he strives toward it. That is, if the individual believes that the universal human being lies outside him, so that it will come to him from the outside, then he is disoriented, then he has an abstract conception, and his method will always be an abstract annihilating of the original self. Only within himself can the individual become enlightened about himself. That is why the ethical life has this duplexity, in which the individual has himself outside himself inside himself. Meanwhile the exemplary self is an imperfect self, for it is only a prophecy and thus is not the actual self. But it escorts him at all times; yet the more he actualizes it, the more it vanishes within him, until at last, instead of appearing before him, it is behind him as a faded possibility. ... When the individual has known himself and has chosen himself, he is in the process of actualizing himself, but since he is supposed to do that freely, he must know what it is he wants to actualize. What he wants to actualize is certainly himself, but it is his ideal self, which he cannot acquire anywhere but within himself. If he does not hold firmly to the truth that the individual has the ideal self within himself, all of his aspiring and striving becomes abstract. (KW, IV, 259)

The self, while strictly speaking undefined, is here divided between actual and ideal, inside and outside, and faces a dilemma of becoming itself that would lend itself to a comparison with Rushdie's conflicted mirror image—were it not for the fact that the promise of resolution embedded in the Judge's quote both separates the two authors and qualifies them to partake in a mutually beneficial contextualization:

> By now you have easily seen that in this life the ethical individual goes through the stages we previously set forth as separate stages. He is going to develop in his life the personal, the civic, the religious virtues,

and his life advances through his continually translating himself from one stage to another. As soon as a person
thinks that one of these stages is adequate and that he dares to concentrate on it one-sidedly, he has not chosen himself ethically but has failed to see the significance of either isolation or continuity and above all has not grasped that the truth lies in the identity of these two. … Here the objective for his activity is himself ... But although he himself is his objective, this objective is nevertheless something else also, for the self that is the objective is not an abstract self that fits everywhere and therefore nowhere but is a concrete self in living interaction with these specific surroundings, these life conditions, this order of things.—The self that is the objective is not only a personal self but a social, a civic self. (KW, IV, 262)

Departing from the ethical, the subject is invited to transcend its own confines and consider the continuity of its moves across stages and spheres inseparable from ethical choice and commitment. The dynamics of emergent selfhood come to increasingly concrete fruition as abstractions ranging from everywhere to nowhere are being grounded "in living interaction with these specific surroundings, these life conditions, this order of things." We are no longer in the sphere of a free-wheeling imagination, but of a "concrete self" (spanning both personal and social selfhood); and if this becoming of selfhood is viewed as a text, we are in the sphere of a context.

Its godly dimension, to which I also alluded earlier, emerges in *Four Upbuilding Discourses*, 1844:
Should it mean nothing to him that he continually keeps his eyes on God, that he, although he himself is capable of nothing at all, with God is capable of ever more and more—that he is capable of overcoming himself … Wherever God is in truth, there he is always creating. He does not want a person to be spiritually soft and to bathe in the contemplation of his glory, but in becoming known by a person he wants to create in him a new human being. … to know God is crucial, and without this knowledge a human being would become nothing at all, … he himself is nothing at all, and … to need God is his highest perfection. (KW, V, 324-26)

What is said here about consciousness of God turns against contemplation, which in turn borders on self-consciousness. That its role is important but must be performed within limits is detailed in *The Concept of Anxiety*:
This self-consciousness is not contemplation, for he who believes this has not
understood himself, because he sees that meanwhile he himself is in the process of becoming and consequently cannot be something completed for contemplation. This self-consciousness, therefore, is action, and this action is in turn inwardness ... (KW, VIII, 143)
A crucial dynamic propels Kierkegaardian self-realization, and while selfhood is doubtless its most precious gain, its pinnacle of inwardness is barely reachable, as intimated in these lines from *Postscript*:
… but *to have faith* is specifically qualified differently from all other appropriation and inwardness. Faith in the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, which is the relation of inwardness intensified to its highest. This formula fits only the one who has faith, no one else, not even a lover, or an enthusiast, or a thinker …" (KW, XII.1, 611)

This quote in particular contrasts a paragon of faith and selfhood with claims to self-realization without an apparent faith-base. Only *Sickness Unto Death* is more complex in this respect; but as its train of thought undergirds many of the critical contexts I will be discussing shortly, I leave *Sickness* unquoted here. As the conspicuously absent text I alluded to earlier, it's an object lesson in the way contexts work—and my bridge to a record of such workings.

III

C. Stephen Evans's scholarship pivots on *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, the title of his collected essays (2006). In a piece from 1995 he repeatedly stresses that

4

it is the fact that God can be the other to whom I can relate, and must be that other if I am genuinely to be myself, that ultimately makes Kierkegaard's view anti-Hegelian. … Kierkegaard frequently intermixes ontological and ethical discourse in his descriptions of the self. He describes the self *both* as something I am *and* something I must become, *both* as a substance *and* as something to be achieved. This is not confusion on his part, because to understand the self it is imperative to see the self in both of these dimensions. (83)

Probing *Sickness Unto Death*, Evans construes SK's anti-Hegelian self as God-created, yet anchored in the human body and in relation to other humans,

with God as the ultimate and intended other, but other persons playing a role in shaping what I have termed the pre-self and (later) playing the role of God-substitutes in the formation and maintenance of one's sinful identity. This view implies, as we have seen, some remarkable claims: that everyone has an unconscious relation to God and that every person has to some degree obscured this relation and thus divided the self. (93)

The division of self obtains when others improperly usurp the place of God during the self's attempt to realize itself. The alternative to this despairing and inauthentic situation is formulated in Brian Soderquist's recent book about *The Isolated Self* in SK as the demand by the creator "that the creature willingly realize the potential self it was created to become" (31). Kresten Nordentoft's *Søren Kierkegaard* affirms that God as an Other posits the individual subject as a self. But he weighs the fact on a different scale, for such positing is done by other 'others,' too; and self and other, subject and object, are ideally each other's other. Hence, the self spells freedom and possibility, if not: despair. At all events, anxiety is an integral part of self-relation, though bourgeois society has witnessed its specific decline from the spiritual to the insipid, from Kierkegaardian despair to Freudian neurosis, from self-identification to self-absorption (87-133).

But Evans continues to strike his own balance by countering the predicament of selfhood, whether pre- or postmodern, with the hope of a cure: "that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God" (96). Fittingly, his formulations first appeared in Matustik & Westphal's anthology, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. So did Tamsin Lorraine's Kristevian reading of *Sickness Unto Death*, which despite its different theoretical design has a remarkably similar outcome. Here too "does Kierkegaard's God-relationship represent a passionate surrender to the collapse of meaning in the faith that meaning will be restored by God" (99). Loss of self is attributed to excessive finitude, whereas God remains the most important Other; and "becoming oneself through the relationship to God involves gaining the impression that one's self exists before a God," the bulwark against despair, "[who] will both note and acknowledge one's transgressions as well as somehow enable one's return to meaning and community" (105).

This move is crucial to Habermas's discussion of "Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology" in the same volume. Habermas addresses what he calls Michael Theunissen's understanding of "the intersubjective space, which is opened by the dialogical encounter and in turn enables the dialogical self-becoming of the self and the other … In this interrelation the one is not the barrier to the other's freedom but rather a condition for the other's self-realization. And the communicative freedom of the one cannot be complete without the realized freedom of all others" (185-86). As Theunissen "concentrates on working out Kierkegaard's argument for the identity of religious faith and selfhood," he recognizes, continues Habermas, that in SK "the conditions of not being in despair are at the same time those of successful selfhood" and criticizes "the peculiar worldless character of selfhood that Kierkegaard's negative procedure posited against despair: 'No doubt that SK, like Hegel, conceives selfhood or freedom as being-in-oneself-in-another, yet in his understanding the other is ultimately God and no longer the world'" (190). Habermas questions this reconstruction of SK (cited in Theunissen's own words) and doubts Theunissen's claim on its behalf that (in Habermas's words) "in order to be wholly oneself, one must presuppose the empowerment of one's own communicative freedom through the absolute freedom of God" (191). Moreover,

to the extent that Heidegger can be said to translate Kierkegaard's self-choice into a beyond of the rhetoric of fate and deliverance, Habermas considers Heidegger's discourse and any other 'postmodern' radicalization of this move not as philosophical but as quasi-theological. Against this rhetoric, Habermas translates radical self-choice, to be distinguished from Christian contents of choosing, into a performative-existential transcendence that speakers effect ontically towards one another about something on this side of the world. (198; tr. note)

Now, Habermas's critique of Theunissen and Heidegger is itself critiqued in Martin Matustik's contribution to *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity.* For as Habermas translates SK's "existential either/or, typical for radical self-choice … into public debates on our choices of the vital elements in our inherited traditions," so does he send the individual "back into the universal" in a way that "collapses a Kierkegaardian transgressive attitude into local narratives about the good life," or "deliberative democracy," and such "communitarian questions of the good [that] entail[s] a category mistake" (245-46; see also Knappe, 168-69 and Lübcke, 60-61).

Likewise, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* features "Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard Revisted" by Patricia Huntington, who considers *Being and Time* "not a development and extension of SK's thought but rather a significant transmutation" (44). The two philosophers are thus on contextual terms with each other: SK's renderings of attitudinal transformation and particular life over against Heidegger's abstract cognition and forms of life; SK's dialectical model of authentic life over against Heidegger's oppositional model. Specifically,

> Kierkegaard does not, as does Heidegger, single out the ethical (or ethico-religious) individual as an exception to public norms. … Unlike the notions individual and crowd, which qualify subjective and communal life, self and community proper are not antithetical terms … According to Kierkegaard, it is the 'herd' (crowd) which cannot be social. Genuine community obtains only 'dialectically' through indirect relations. … Ethical authenticity constitutes a pull away from the crowd only because it counteracts blind adherence to convention, not sociality and morality.—Kierkegaard's exceptional individual would best be depicted as an exile within community. (48-49)

With or without the God-factor, despair and self-division, and a smorgasbord of social remedies for these ills, have proliferated since SK went to his grave. George Connell in *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought* reminds us, with Hegel in the rearview mirror, that "the eternal lies before the self through decision rather than behind in immanence" (185), while Holmes Hartshorne in *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver* points emphatically to *Sickness Unto Death*, where "a *self* is a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. To become myself I must relate myself to the relation that is my humanity" (68). Thus the decisive difference between an ethical self "positing itself as a synthesis" and a self being posited "by a power beyond itself" (67).

A unified 'beyond' as the condition of possibility for the healing of divided selves runs as a de-sanctified leitmotif through decades of modernity and postmodernity. Peter Childs writes in his *Modernism* how "enlightenment was not to be found in Christianity or in society but in the self, in individual consciousness," and he traces the disunited self, "lost in language" (101-02), through Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, "a grotesque exploration of illusion and reality, masks and pretence, disguise and disorientation" (106-07); Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, whose hybrid and fragmented individuals recompose themselves (110); and artists like van Gogh who take to expression and projection as a means of modernist reconstruction rather than premodern restoration of the self (118). Childs has D.H. Lawrence testify that "the history of the cosmos/is the history of the struggle of becoming." It's in (SK's!) God's place, and it's worth noting that when Lawrence calls for the replacement of the Greek "Know Thyself" with "Be Thyself" (141), it's expressly not in the individualistic sense of being.

The philosopher Reuben Abel in his *Man Is the Measure* makes the point that "when Socrates said, Know thyself, he did not mean Discover thyself, but Create thyself" (195), which is about what Lawrence had in mind, as had modernism in general. And Charles Guignon poignantly describes how this self is the search for

the truth of the self itself, and how authenticity is the very act of self-making, the ultimate artistic creation. Be/come your-self by making your-self (Guignon, 69-70). But this is precisely what Judge William rejected—"But I do not create myself—I choose myself" (KW, IV, 215)—and what the author of *Four Upbuilding Discourses* considered God's prerogative (KW, V, 325).

Yet for all this self-fragmentation and tampering with self-unification, the links between SK and twentieth-century contexts in terms of social selves in both regimes are thought-provoking. Modernist acts of balancing deunified selves are especially compatible with self-requirements considered Kierkegaardian. Childs mentions Gertrude Stein calling the special composition of World War I cubistic, and adds: "The same could be said of much modernist prose writing in which an attempt was made not to describe one individual, a stable ego or Victorian realist character, but as many sides as possible to … 'life'" (175). A brief excursion into the interplay of SK and his contexts will reveal how such turning points of self-formation and self-disintegration emerge over time.

IV

John Jervis's book *Exploring the Modern* is a helpful tour guide. He follows the self from its roots in theatricality, role playing, and acting, as it was accepted by the time of Hobbes in the mid-seventeenth century; "the self," says Jervis (quoting J.-C. Agnew), "'was a contingent, arbitrary and instrumental affair, not a natural or supernatural calling,' and the new drama showed 'how precarious social identity was, how vulnerable to unexpected disruptions and disclosures it was, and therefore how deeply theatrical it was'"; and he continues:

> becoming a self could be said to involve a 'rehearsal' of identity, a taking-on and casting-off of roles, which are tried on, worn, almost like clothes: the self becomes a series of such identities, never really assimilated to them, yet clearly marked by them. These roles constitute the public, interpersonal structure of selfhood; indeed they constitute 'the public' as a set of interacting role-playing selves. … we can say the self is both actor, and audience or spectator; actor and spectator become part of the structure of self-identity. (21)

But then Rousseau and others ask: "how can the self be real in a world of others?" The answer, writes Jervis, is that social life is

> enshrining a separation between self and image, self and other, a separation that both permits, and rests on, the role of the imagination in constructing a grasp of both self and other through theatricality. The self becomes both a spectator at, and actor in, its own performance, and this constitutes the fantasy structure of interpersonal experience and communication in the world of modernity. ... Through theatricality, the representation of self could become the construction and content of self; whether it becomes the construction of *selfhood*, the integrated, narrative self of project, is another matter. For Rousseau, indeed, the theatrical self made the unified self forever impossible. (27)

By contrast, the later Victorians insisted on a "culture of the unified self [that] could convince itself of the integrity of life, the possibility of a life purposively fulfilled." For them, according to Jervis, "'Biography' becomes the cure for theatricality, as it were. Selfhood required sincerity, what [Nina] Auerbach calls 'communion with invisible forces,' and hence 'the hidden connection of the self to powers that authenticate it'; the artist is therefore in contact with a deep well, rather than a superficial mask" (17-18). Compare this to Oscar Wilde proclaiming: "'There is no "real" us, we can only ever have an unnatural identity, which is why we are all forgers. … We are all fakes, all inventions. We are making all this up us we go along. … Man is least himself when he talks in his own person.'" (Cf. Nietzsche's adage that "'every profound spirit needs a mask.'") (17) The post-Victorian bottom line is a dashed line, an utter duplicity:

> it is only the mask that can 'realize' selfhood; that without it, there may be
> nothing there. For the modern self has been constructed as resting on something fixed, *needing*
> something fixed, an identity, *the* identity, self-as-identity, even while this emphasis has to coexist with

the realities of change, the problems of appearance and recognition, that make theatricality possible in the first place, and engender the risk of misrecognition and inauthenticity. (17)

This was the situation faced by Rushdie in front of his mirror and by modernism when Rimbaud uttered "Je est un autre" and Virginia Woolf asked: "'Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?'" (quoted in Jervis, 74). De Certeau in his *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* puts the experience "into the formula, *I* am *that*" (De Certeau, 56), and Jervis envisions how this "self projects itself on to the other, attempts to grasp itself in the other, so both self and other threaten to fragment, to decompose into frightening death and destruction" (Jervis, 84); he even enlists the American literary critic Lionel Trilling's book *Sincerity and Authenticity* to frame the dilemma historically. Sincerity was the measure by which the roles of selves were faithfully enacted in the eighteenth-century public sense, whereas authenticity applies to the post-nineteenth-century period when the norm of self-expression is inwardness, an individual's inner realm of privacy. But the real turning point occurs when twenty-first-century bloggers post their *authentic* selves in public *(in)sincerity*.

The implications are countless—from Lacan's claim that "'splitting' … is constitutive of selfhood, the incorporation of otherness that means the self can never be self-identical: the object in the mirror is both self and other, and self-image is both reflection and creative appropriation" (Jervis, 133) to George Steiner's sense of a "'break of the covenant between word and world…' and this indeed serves to define modernism itself" (Jervis, 264) and on to the blurring of lines between self and self-representation in hyper-reality, "the dissolution of history in the now," the "allegory of a totality that is lost or impossible." This is a world apart from SK's concept of self, it seems; but because of its own contextual interdependence, perhaps it's an especially telling context for the Kierkegaardian Other. Says Jervis, "an important part of self-awareness is the understanding of its inevitable inconclusiveness, its limits in particular times and contexts, the way wisdom is not about knowledge but about an attitude and an ethos that take over where knowledge ends. … In the end, one exists in relationships; one's relation to oneself is a relationship, just as much as one's relation to others" (332-33).

The question is: which others? Mark C. Taylor answers succinctly in an essay titled "Self in/as Other." The Hegelian self is its own other, a matter of "identity of identity and difference." This is a pure self—in an absolute Other. But for selfhood the alterity of the other is indispensable, and SK's either/or meets this requirement. Taylor writes, "meeting the Other as other precipitates the self's encounter with itself *as* other" (68 f.). And further, for SK "the self must *become itself*" or "the *same*," which becoming, again, "necessarily involves *repetition*," which is an "interest upon which [Hegelian] metaphysics founders." Despair, which in *Sickness Unto Death* is the opposite of faith and in which the self is lost, is at the same time the road to finding the self in faith: "It drives the subject to the utmost extremity of human endurance in order to open the self to other—the Absolute Other in relation to which the self *can* become itself" (70).

As for SK in this context, it's Taylor's final claim that SK's sense of self *as* other (over against Hegel's self *in* other) prefigures recent notions of radical otherness and alterity, as when Heidegger, Adorno, Derrida, and Foucault "suggest the repressive implications of a specular/speculative philosophy which always discovers self *in* other" (71). In "Foucault's account of multiple forms of colonialism," e.g., "technologies of the self and associated discourses" signify "the succession of different power/knowledge complexes, different regimes of truth," targeting disembodied subjects as "the proper object for … deconstruction," as Isaac Balbus puts it (Balbus, 151).

Jana Sawicki points out how Foucault found "humanist discourses that placed the subject at the center of reality or history had failed to grasp the extent to which the subject is fragmented and decentered in the social field" (173-74). The stage is set for critiquing Foucault's critique of totalizing theory, a critique that both locates and dislocates the self. Sheldon Wolin explains:

It has called the self out of the self, beckoned it to a plane of generality which reminds the self in its locality that other beings and other life forms inhabit public space and are bent on establishing their own collective identities. This conception of theory also liberates action from being haunted by theory and absorbed into the notion of [established] practice. … A return to a critical conception of theory, one that can intimate but not prescribe practice … (Wolin, 199-200)

If combined with James Marsh's discussion in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* of inwardness and interiority in SK as sources of communicative praxis, Wolin's theoretical alternative to Foucault's deconstruction of theory appears to resonate with SK's positions on self and selfhood.

V

Yet this offshoot is but a token of what SK's being and becoming may have set in motion in several domains. First, autobiographical textuality; second, textuality in general; third, contexts beyond text, read: technology— less technology *of* the self, as Foucault saw it, than technology *and* the self, as he couldn't have imagined it; fourth and finally, recent cognitive mappings of self, which are so unlike earlier psychological and psychiatric models.

The outcome is well predicted in the discussion between Marsh, Westphal and Caputo, co-authors of *Modernity and Its Discontents*. By the late twentieth century, the centered and unified self has basically fallen out of academic discourse. But while postmodernists like Caputo "minimize or deny the reality and value of the self" (97)—"it's not that we don't have a self, but that we have too many selves" (155)—opponents like Marsh find the stance "approaching a Kierkegaardian dialectic of the comical" and argue instead "for a de-centered self, rooted in the body, the social life, tradition, history, the psychological and sociological unconscious" (97). Meanwhile, Westphal, defending a middle ground, asserts that if someone claims "my name is legion," that claim is in itself "a unifying act" (156). As the said volume runs the gamut from SK to 'po-mo,' Westphal is convinced that a really radical hermeneutics is one that introduces trust to suspicion.

It certainly is one that aligns being and becoming a self with some form of social or communicative praxis. In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, the literary critic Wayne Booth speaks in of social self in terms of "sharing roles" instead of "finding a unique one" the way modernists like Joyce found it (414-15); and in *The Vocation of the Teacher*, Booth is all for selves taking in other selves and for remaking "our selves and our circumstances by exercising habits of freedom" (203-05). Lionel Trilling grappled constantly with sincere social vs. authentic private self-realization (cf. Krupnick, 138-39, 152), as did American psychologists like Sullivan and Stolorow, as discussed in Mitchell & Black's *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (62-63, 167-68); quite recently V.S. Ramachandran tackles the dilemma in his *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*. But what about biography, the unified self's Victorian stronghold?

Logically, *auto*biography ought to be the last line of defense for this conception; but not so, is the verdict of the genre's foremost scholars. Philippe Lejeune writes in *On Autobiography* that "telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy." Still, "in spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing" (xiv). The ambivalence of an autobiographical self that is theoretically split but practically unified also burdens Roland Barthes' autobiography. It's the old story about the bumblebee that theoretically is too heavy to fly; or as Paul Eakin, the genre's other super-student, puts it in his "Foreword" to Lejeune's book: the self and its autobiographical aspect are great myths, but as such: real, experiential facts (162). Eakin centers his own *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* on a related paradox. Memory is crucial to self, yet self is in flux, while memory is in order. But again, an experiential solution offers itself up as the impurity and contingency of memory permitting "(at least) the literary assertion of identity" (66-67). Since self, no matter how it is exactly defined, has been viewed as "historically and culturally conditioned" (quote of Brewster Smith in Eakin, 76), it has come

to pass that "'Westerners have inevitably *enacted* self in the process of *explaining* self'" (quote of F. Johnson in Eakin, 77). "The self who writes" and "the self who is written" are interrelated (Eakin, 99).

How this modern self—becoming what it is—recognized itself in the confluence of modern history and the modern novel, and was later embraced by psychoanalysis, is discussed in Wallace Martin's *Recent Theories of the Narrative*. Martin shows how novel hybrids and autobiographies fictionalize facts yet are facts themselves, intersecting self, story, and event … splitting the 'I' in actor vs. reflector and judge (78). Consciousness and self are cut loose from the 'I,' and "subjectivity [is] freed from its connection with our own bodies and voices" (141). Cyberspace seems waiting around the corner, while it sounds almost Kierkegaardian to hear *The Divided Self*'s R.D. Laing dream aloud about substituting "a genuinely *embodied* self" (175) for schizoid cleavages and self-disruptions. Might it be SK rather than Laing who is up to postmodern snuff?

According to an article by Erslev Andersen about self and self-(re-)presentation, the answer is yes. Through his pseudonyms, SK stages his work and self as a rhetorical reading of reading, defying a metaphysics of presence that makes the self an authority; both veiling and unveiling the self issue rhetorically from self-repetitions, while an indirect communication undermines the authority of the authorial self. Andersen writes,

> Thus Kierkegaard reveals that the self, regardless of how subtle it proceeds, never controls its own writing, that writing is not simply the result of the self exercising its productivity, but that writing prescribes the self. … The border between self and writing is thus not the border between the self and its work. 'This borderline … is neither active, nor passive, neither outside, nor inside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible and *indivisible* trait, lying between the enclosure of philosophemes … and the life of [the] author …' (50-51)[iv]

The point being that as 'the father of subjectivity' SK may have been the lead deconstructor of the subject! Still, like Westphal in America, Andersen, another Dane (quoting Derrida), counsels against the "drastic conclusion that the subject is dead."

VI

New media technology is the site where this textual problematic eventually plays itself out. MIT's Sherry Turkle has chronicled the transition. She pictured French postmodernists like Foucault and Lacan on location when they "taught that the self is constituted by and through language … and that each of us is a multiplicity of parts, fragments, and desiring connections" (14-15); and twenty years later they resurfaced "in my new life on the screen," where "the development of [multiple] windows for computer interfaces" means as many opportunities for constructing multiple selves (14). And so,

> in the story of constructing identity in the culture of simulation, experiences on the Internet figure prominently, but these experiences can only be understood as part of a larger cultural context. That context is the story of the eroding boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self … in the real time communities of cyberspace, we are dwellers on the threshold between the real and the virtual … (10)

Initially people reacted romantically against computational aesthetics, then based on the modernist notion of linear, logical calculating (18), which Turkle documents in *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (1984); but with a new generation of computers "grounding the radically nonmechanical philosophy of postmodernism" (17), "human beings become increasingly intertwined with the technology and with each other via the technology … Are we living life *on* the screen or life *in* the screen?" (21) she asks in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, which I have been citing above.

David Lyon holds a slightly alternative view in his essay "Cyberspace Sociality," in which "opportunities abound for such self-construction. … At the same time, the process of self-construction cannot be seen in an asocial or an a-technological vacuum" (35 f.). We may be beyond instrumental rationality's stable, fixed selves (30, 34), yet a 'techno-social self,' embedded socially and in narrative may be needed "to locate

and critique cyberspace sociality" (37). The same note is struck by Simon Baddeley in *The Governance of Cyberspace*. He evokes Edmund Leach's "overall inter-connectedness of things" as a safeguard against "self-destruction"; and with due respect to inwardness, "it needs to develop a governmentality acknowledging the permeability of external-internal" (Baddeley, 87-88).

In Lorenzo Simpson's book *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, this new self-understanding involves SK directly. In the *external* history of *techne*, process or means differs from end and outcome. Time can be contracted, means taken out of time without loss. Conversely, the action of *internal* history or *praxis* is inherently meaningful, means and ends are indistinguishable, and both are indistinguishable from action itself (51). Praxis time, not techne time, is "constitutive of the self." And self-realization is brought about by repetition, which "can be understood as a mediated self-relation. The implicit or latent self is brought forward in action and experience which render it explicit or manifest" (58).

Simpson correlates his image with Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian ethical dimensions, but realizes that "understanding the self to be resolutely brought forward in repetition suggests two starkly contrasting ways of making the future present" (59). Relating his vision to MacIntyre's notion of self-unification through narrative, Simpson finds linear progression through technological security, on the one hand, and a circular and morally binding internal history of action, doing, life, on the other (59-60). On balance, "we might say then that, though technical action can be meaningful, practical action *embodies* meaning" (68). On Simpson's view, techno-aesthetical postmodernity is informed by SK, but so is its ethical alternative attributable to him: "Much as our acknowledging that we are always in the wrong before God would not, for the minister [sic!] of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, be a reason for inaction, but would, on the contrary, free us to act, [so] the acknowledgment of our irreparable finitude should not be cause for despair and paralysis" (112). Simpson is a bit confused about the Judge in *Either/Or*, and also about the mediated self-relation he ascribes to him. But the interlacing of SK with conversations and contexts of virtual reality's techne vs. praxis is not unwarranted.

Gwyneth Jones pursues these connections into "The neuroscience of cyberspace," her contribution to *The Governance of Cyberspace*, which displays "constantly disrupted and recovered boundaries of self and not-self" (61). The idea of controlling this network is an illusion; before the Internet becomes outdated, "we will be different people: our sense of self subtly altered by the existence of this other, the multitudinous immaterial presence, perhaps the nearest thing to an alien intelligence we'll ever meet." (62)

These words are from 1997. In 1993 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, offered this view of the self: "… the image of a traffic cop is … misleading … Instead, consciousness is more like a magnetic field, an aura, or a harmonic tone resulting from the myriad separate sensations collecting in the brain." Earlier in human evolution we may have "experienced the totality of these impulses as forming a distinct self" (22-23), but more recently Csikszentmihaliy, too, reads the neuroscientific record as evidence that "the self is more in the nature of a figment of the imagination" (216), and that "we end up being ruled" by this figment.

It's the old image of the ghost in the machine. But is it real or not? And what if it *is* real, but in an unreal way? That's what Steven Pinker argues in his book *The Blank Slate* from 2002. The ghost in the machine is a fallacious notion, for "the brain does not even have a part that does what the ghost is supposed to do: review all the facts and make a decision for the rest of the brain to carry out. Each of us *feels* that there is a single 'I' in control. But that is an illusion that the brain works hard to produce … The conscious mind—the self or soul—is a spin doctor, not the commander in chief" (42-43).

SK would likely not have disagreed. If the self is not posited as a challenge and an opportunity by its Creator—and it isn't in Pinker's book—its function even in SK would be limited to self-centered spin-doctoring and self-rationalization, or to making the best out of *being* a self, rather than whole-heartedly seeking to become

the self it *is*. So, in capping today's multitude of self-analyses vis-à-vis SKs, Pinker has validated, I submit, the relevance of these *contexts*—to *all* parties involved.

i This article is a slightly revised version of my keynote address at the August 18-20, 2010 international conference on "Kierkegaard: Being and Becoming a Self " at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, Faculty of Theology, Copenhagen University; translations of titles and quotes are mine throughout unless otherwise noted.

ii A timely primer is *Bloch, butch, Bertel—Kontekstuella litteraturstudier*, eds. Michel Ekman & Kristina Malmio, a Finland-Swedish anthology of critical essays from 2009.

iii Reflecting on Mark Zuckerberg, both the "real" person behind Facebook and the protagonist in *The Social Network* movie, Zadie Smith recently noted that in his world of networking, "Connection is the goal. The quality of that connection, the quality of the information that passes through it, the quality of the relationship that connection permits—none of this is important. … He [Zuckerberg] is, to say the least, dispassionate about the philosophical questions concerning privacy—and sociality itself—raised by his ingenious program" (58). That said, the movie "is not a cruel portrait of any particular real-world person called 'Mark Zuckerberg.' It's a cruel portrait of us: 500 million sentient people entrapped in the recent careless thoughts of a Harvard sophomore" (60). For a striking contrast, see George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, especially chapter 3, "Conveying Other Cultural Experience: The Person, Self, and Emotions," and most especially its meticulous outline of "differences in concepts of personhood between Euro-Americans and Samoans" as both groups experience and comment upon them (65).

iv For the quote—from Derrida—within this quote, Andersen refers to Derrida's *The Ear of the Other*, Montreal, 1982, p. 5 f. I'm using Peggy Kamuf's Eng. tr. of the equivalent passage in the equivalent volume, ed. by Christie McDonald for U of Nebraska P, Lincoln & London, 1988.

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Two Whales

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In Herman Melville's *Mardi*, South Seas philosopher Babbalanja notes that "the truest poets are but mouth-pieces; and some men are duplicates of each other." Not ignoring substantive differences between Herman Melville (1819-1891) and his Danish counterpart Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a virtually endless procession of comparisons, two and two, begin to surface, including not dissimilar familial relations, chronologies, and concepts of travel; their forging of national literatures, their placing themselves in western literary history, and how they contend with the politics of truth; and their comparable writing styles, senses of humor, philosophies, treatments of religious themes, and overall authorships. What Ishmael says after the heads of two whales have been hoisted, one on the ship's starboard side and the other on the larboard, applies: "Here, now, are two great whales, laying their heads together; let us join them, and lay together our own.… [For] as the external difference between them is mainly observable…; and as [the] head of each is this moment hanging from the Pequod's side; and as we may freely go from one to the other, by merely stepping across the deck: where, I should like to know, will you obtain a better chance to study practical cetology than here?"

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Melville correctly forecasts to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne the negative critical reception and poor financial remuneration he would receive from his nearly completed new novel, *Moby-Dick*: "Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter." After *Moby-Dick*'s publication, Melville writes to Hawthorne again: "I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as a lamb." (In reference to this last passage, Melville biographer Hershel Parker notes that Melville called his book "wicked" in part because *Moby-Dick* "challenged conventional American piety.") Side-by-side, Melville's two comments go far to suggest *Moby-Dick*'s and, by extension, the whole of his authorship's, greatness—especially if the New Testament's Gospels are considered books that challenge conventional pre-Christian piety and morality with the revelatory news of Christ. As 19th century "Gospels" (Old English *gōdspel*, from *gōd* [good] + *spel* [news, a story]), *Moby-Dick* and Melville's other works, in a certainly more irreverent but no less earnest way, offer revelatory good news and good stories of the essential nature of goodness and evil, of fate and free will, of innocence and sin, of great joy and terrific despair, of wise knowledge and haughty ignorance, of life and death, of heaven and earth, of sinking loss and buoyant redemption, and of what it means to be a human being living alone together with other humans, separated from God, east of Eden.

Kierkegaard was not so bold as Melville as to assert that he had written the *Gospels* in his century. Four years before his death and in a preface to some of the last of his published writings before his attack upon Christendom begins in earnest three years later, he instead claims to have written *a guide to* or *a way to read* the "old familiar text" of the Bible in general and the Gospels in particular: "An authorship that began with *Either/Or* and advanced step by step seeks here its decisive place of rest, at the foot of the altar, where the author, personally most aware of his own imperfections and guilt, certainly does not call himself a truth-witness but only a singular kind of poet and thinker who, *without authority*, has had nothing new to bring but 'has wanted once again to read through, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships, the old familiar text handed down from the fathers.'"

What both Kierkegaard and Melville recognized in their own leviathanic, prophetic voices were tones at once esthetic and poetic, literary and philosophical, ethical and religious—tones that could frame and articulate the effusive and sorrowful beatings of the human heart. "Preaching," writes Kierkegaard (who often wrote in his

journals of becoming a rural pastor, but never did), "should not be done in churches but on the street, right in the middle of life, the actuality of ordinary, weekday life." Melville's narrator in *Redburn* agrees: "And as from every corner, in Catholic towns, the shrines of Holy Mary and the Child Jesus perpetually remind the commonest wayfarer of his heaven; even so should Protestant pulpits be founded in the market-places, and at street corners, where the men of God might be heard by all of His children." Both Kierkegaard and Redburn would thus praise Ishmael's many sermonizing discourses delivered in the New Bedford and Nantucket streets and on the Pequod's deck, most notably on the subjects of Lazarus and Dives at the end of chapter 2, death and faith at the end of chapter 7, despair and joy in chapter 9 (Father Mapple's sermon), the democratic God absolute at the end of chapter 26, evil in chapter 64 (the cook's sermon to the sharks), and Solomon's wisdom at the end of chapter 96. With the arguable exception of Father Mapple's message, all of these "sermons" and all of Kierkegaard's "sermons" would best be identified under Kierkegaard's rubric, *religious* or *upbuilding* discourses. Such "sermons," in other words, are without official ecclesiastical authority—something that the esthetic and democratic poet in Melville and Kierkegaard never cared enough to secure (both authors knew that binding themselves to such authority would have its limitations). Kierkegaard notes that "the decisive difference between the poet and the upbuilding speaker remains, namely, that the poet has no *telos* [goal] other than psychological truth and the art of presentation, whereas the speaker in addition has *principally* the aim of transposing everything into the upbuilding." In going "as far as [he] in fact could go in [his] attempt to introduce Christianity into Christendom," Kierkegaard claims to write "'poetically, without authority,' for I am no apostle or the like; I am a poetic-dialectical genius, personally and religiously, a penitent."

Although exceptions to the comparability between the total authorships of both Melville and Kierkegaard exist, it is not unreasonable to suggest that what Kierkegaard says of his authorship, Melville could say (albeit a bit more loosely) of his: "The authorship, regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see, if he wants to see, must also see. Just as one versed in natural science promptly knows from the crisscrossing threads in a web the ingenious little creature whose web it is, so an insightful person will also know that to this authorship there corresponds as the source someone *qua* author who 'has willed only one thing.'"

Both Melville and Kierkegaard begin their authorships with esthetic writings, but in the direction of the religious—and for good reason. Kierkegaard explains: "The maieutic [or indirect, socratic form of communication] lies in the relation between the esthetic writing as the beginning and the religious as the *telos* [goal]. It begins with the esthetic, in which possibly most people live their lives, and now the religious is introduced so quickly that those who, moved by the esthetic, decide to follow along are suddenly standing right in the middle of the decisive qualifications of the essentially Christian, are at least prompted to become *aware*."

Just as Kierkegaard begins with the esthetic volume I of *Either/Or*, Melville begins with the esthetic work, *Typee*—a romantic piece of travel writing that nonetheless goes far to critique corrupt missionary practices in the South Seas and other aspects of Christendom. Near the middle of both of their writing careers, but on the heels of their seminal mid-career texts *Moby-Dick* and *Postscript,* Melville's *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man* share the primary themes of deception and self-deception in ethical and religious contexts with Kierkegaard's "An Occasional Discourse" ("Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing"). In the latter years of their authorships, Melville's condemnation of Christendom in *Clarel* is a fit companion text to Kierkegaard's attack against Christendom in his late writings.

Then there is the notion of both authors owning dual authorships—each authorship making use of pseudonyms, each authorship transforming and redefining itself in mid-career, each authorship always moving closer to the ethical and the religious yet never abandoning the force of the esthetic to help deliver the message. Such duality in each authorship is reflected even in the two authors' daily lives. "Like most great artists, Melville could operate on two planes simultaneously," Melville biographer Laurie Robertson-Lorant notes. "While outwardly he was enjoying madcap summer days filled with parties, picnics, dinners, rambles, hikes, and even a fancy-dress ball, inwardly he was ruminating over the book he was writing, taking in every

conversation and every experience and reflection on experience." Meanwhile, Kierkegaard often deliberately made himself publicly visible, not only to observe the culture around him but to maintain, as best he could, a sort of incognito to protect himself from the public. They were both, in effect, socially attuned to the culture around them, which was necessary not only for their own integrated selves but also for their writings of the human condition as observed and lived in actuality. At the same time, however, they were protective of the *personal* in *personal*ity and, as such, were isolatoes of the soul whose mutually "deep, earnest thinking [was] but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore." In this context, Melville biographer Andrew Delbanco notes that the publisher of Melville's epic poem *Clarel* prevailed over Melville's desire to publish it anonymously and that, "probably in the early 1870s, while midway through [*Clarel*, Melville] had marked in his copy of Matthew Arnold's *Essay* a passage dismissing the value of a public literary career in favor of the 'well-kept secret of one's self and one's thoughts.'" Kierkegaard couldn't agree more: "An author certainly must have his private personality as everyone has, but this must be his inner sanctum…as the entrance to a house is barred by stationing two soldiers with crossed bayonets."

Melville's authorship may be divided into an emphasis on prose between 1845 and 1857, and an emphasis on poetry between 1858 and 1891; meanwhile, Kierkegaard's authorship emphasizes pseudonyms and esthetic writings between 1838 and 1846, and religious discourses and religious pamphlet writing between 1847 and his death in 1855. The beginnings of both men's writing careers shot out of cannons, with their first two books well-received (Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* in two volumes and Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo*). Their audiences, however, quickly cooled to the structural, cultural, philosophical, and religious underpinnings of the remainder of their works.

The books Kierkegaard and Melville wrote after their first two books were *Stages on Life's Way* and *Mardi*, respectively. *Mardi*, Robertson-Lorant notes, "is an ambitious, exasperating, marvelous book, full of topical references, literary allusions, comic interludes, metaphysical speculations, satire, allegory, Platonic dialogues and symposia, and some of the most poetic and exquisite descriptions of the sea and sea creatures in the English language. It also contains some of Melville's worst writing: a kind of self-indulgent, melodramatic rant that made readers dizzy, angry, and, finally, disgusted with Melville's incomprehensible lack of control." By subtracting the bit about the sea and sea creatures and replacing Kierkegaard's name for Melville's, Robertson-Lorant's critique reads like a perfectly understandable critique of Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*. Similarly, another review of *Mardi*, this time by early 20th century Melville biographer Lewis Mumford and much more laudatory, could also be a review (given name changes) of Kierkegaard's *Stages*: "In the guise of king, poet, philosopher, Melville became a philosophic commentator, retelling the story of Europe and Christianity and faith and doubt and religion and science, exploring time, delivering himself through his dreams, disclosing…his own ultimate perceptions.… A brave, vigorous spirit presides over *Mardi*, appraising all the evil and injustice and superstition and ugliness in the world—as they masquerade under the guise of religion and patriotism and economic prudence and political necessity."

Amid the applause and the derision of these two works, perhaps the greatness of both *Mardi* and *Stages* was that they ushered their respective authors into career-defining and career-transforming opuses, *Moby-Dick* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The additional fact that both authors struggled deeply with the compositions of *Mardi* and *Stages* suggests that they were already mapping out uncharted territories that would be revealed in *Moby-Dick* and *Postscript* (Robertson-Lorant notes that "*Mardi* started out as a continuation of his first two novels, but Melville changed course twice in the process of writing it." Kierkegaard's *Stages* also bears the markings of his first two works, volumes I and II of *Either/Or*, but then undergoes much change before it emerges later as *Stages.*)

Building on earlier voices and images that foreshadow a wealth of ideas to come, the time of composition for *Moby-Dick* and *Postscript* was approximately two years: *Postscript* in 21 months, between June 1844 and February 1846, and *Moby-Dick* in 1850 and 1851. Although Kierkegaard intended to end his writing career with

Postscript, the big book eventually ended up marking the mid-point of his career. Kierkegaard also considered *Postscript* "*the turning point* in the whole work as an author, which poses 'the issue' and then itself in turn, by means of indirect fencing and Socratic dialectic, mortally wounds 'the system'—from behind, fighting against the system and speculative thought"—which is like *Moby-Dick*, whose author wrote, according to Delbanco, "in a messianic fervor because he wanted to save his country from itself."

Further: *Moby-Dick's* Ishmael and *Postscript*'s Johannes Climacus are Melville and Kierkegaard's most celebrated narrators, dialecticians, poet-philosophers, and religious humorists. It's as if they were twin brothers separated from birth, one to sail the seven seas in search of God, the other to remain at home in search of God. And, despite the moot issue of geographic positioning, both make remarkably similar conclusions about the physical and psychical landscape between heaven and hell called Earth. Not only do they cut similar profiles, they also share their makers' profiles.

The two authors whose brain-children include Ishmael and Climacus were borne of upper middle class patrician families, yet they both championed egalitarianism in all its social-political forms while simultaneously defending the religious spirit of the single individual and forging respective national literatures. They both sought truth instead of money. They both structured their thought upon rigorous dialectics that, above all, maintain a healthy and necessary tension between the ideal and the actual in the human psyche and human history. They both constructed highly imaginative narrators who became asystematic stylists, religious humorists and satirists *par excellence*, attacking not religion *per se,* but the foibles, errors, and false pieties of provincial behavior within communities that considered themselves religious. They both authored enormous canons in remarkably short periods of time. They both displayed simultaneously the actual and the poetic-metaphoric with an extraordinary fountain of concrete images pouring out of their pens. They were both masters of indirect communication and seekers of balanced, unbiased visions through precise observation and sensitivity to contradiction, inversion, and balance. They both meditated upon esthetic, philosophical, ethical, and religious tones of the modern personality. They both were tragic optimists of the inward self in a time of great but shallow optimism applauding external achievements in science and technology. They both sought to expose the flaws of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism by mapping out trajectories of cultural decadence and dehumanization. They both put mirrors up to human nature to show the doubleness of appearances, the threat that an all-consuming pursuit of security has to faith, and the tragedy of impatience and becoming too comfortable. They both championed the role of ethics as the only form of restraint to natural inclinations and biological impulses. They both attended to the single self in all the self's divisiveness within itself and among others. They also attended to the reintegration of the self within itself despite living in cultures that conspire against it. They both were staunch advocates for the process of a dynamic *becoming*, of *being* as continual *becoming*. Their shared primary theme was the individual, and they treated this theme with all the humor, irony, and an admixture of incredulity and improbable belief that befits the subject matter. They both treated truth as more subjectively-oriented than objectively-oriented without, however, abandoning a certain earnestness toward objectivity that is required to spread the news of subjectivity. They both were endlessly focused upon humans' relations to themselves, to others, and to God.

In effect, the processes and results of their parallel studies of the human condition coincide with and inform each other's works in scores of remarkable ways. "At first glance," critic Betty Anderson notes in a 1968 article on Melville and Kierkegaard, "the coincidences are so numerous that it would seem they must have been caused by one man studying the writings of the other, *ergo* Melville must have read the writings of Kierkegaard." Neither men, however, knew each other nor each other's writings.

Call them Ishmaels. Call them single individuals. Call them humans attempting to reclaim the human in dehumanizing times. Call them prophets asserting the radical difficulty of becoming a Christian in self-professed Christian cultures. Or call them two whales breaching before diving deep into the depths of the human heart, mind, and imagination's seascapes—each in hot pursuit to catch his own evasive self that

inexorably swims along the floor of this world's foundations. "I like all men who *dive.…* the whole corps of thought-divers, that have been diving & coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began," Melville writes. "Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down five miles or more; & if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plummet that will. " "It is a perennial lie that the apostles were sent out to catch herring," Kierkegaard writes. "They were sent out to catch whales."

Suffering and Enchantment:
Placing Kierkegaard in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*

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Charles Taylor's A Secular Age undertakes the monumental task of retracing the spiritual itinerary of the West from 1500, when belief in God was communal and uncontested, to the present, when belief and unbelief are individually chosen and mutually "fragilizing." The scope of Taylor's narrative is imposing, and one is challenged to find significant figures from modern Western intellectual life who are not included in the book's 21 pages of index. But one name is conspicuous in its absence: Søren Kierkegaard's. Given Taylor's aspiration and Kierkegaard's stature, this absence seems odd and prompts two questions: 1) Where should Kierkegaard figure in Taylor's narrative? and 2) What, if any, significance can we discern in this omission? After noting some broad parallels between Taylor and Kierkegaard, I will identify Kierkegaard with a particular position mapped out by Taylor: a believing critique of exclusive humanism parallel to Nietzsche's unbelieving critique. Taylor's treatment of this position is doubly unusual: he is succinct, and he never associates it with a particular name. To these indirect signs of evasion, Taylor adds direct expressions of ambivalence about the view of suffering at the heart of this unacknowledged Kierkegaardian viewpoint. By exploring Taylor's ambivalence about Kierkegaard's "gospel of suffering," I will identify key differences in their respective understandings of religious belief in the midst of a disenchanted world.

1. Placing Kierkegaard in Taylor

First, to the question, Where should Kierkegaard figure in *A Secular Age*? There are two distinct ways to approach this question: 1) by noting parallels between broad themes in Taylor and Kierkegaard, and 2) by placing Kierkegaard specifically in Taylor's history.

a. Parallel broad themes

I see at least four dynamics central to Taylor's history of spiritual consciousness that parallel themes in Kierkegaard. They are:

Enchantment → Disenchantment

- Taylor broadly structures *A Secular Age* in terms of Weber's categories of enchantment and disenchantment. After evoking the spirit-filled, enchanted cosmos of our premodern forebearers, Taylor chronicles our passage to a disenchanted world where we live as buffered selves employing instrumental rationality to manage a law-

governed but meaningless physical realm. Kierkegaard broadly shares this sense of an enchanted past giving way to a disenchanted present, and Taylor's Weberian categories suggest fresh readings of Kierkegaard's stages. For example, immediacy, especially first love, is a mode of enchanted experience. Kierkegaard's reflective aesthetes can be read as seeking reenchantment either through art (A listening to Mozart's Don Giovanni) or eros (Johannes seducing Cordelia). Judge William, in contrast, seeks to fend off disenchantment by preserving the enchantment of first love through marriage. Later, I will suggest that these categories offer useful ways to look at Kierkegaard's discussions of religious existence.

Communal → Individual

-Taylor notes that, "In early religion, we primarily relate to God as a society" (148). Before the Reformation, to be French was to be Catholic; there was no gap between cult and culture. But with disenchantment, religion comes to be "disembedded" from society, leading us toward a "post-Durkheimian" situation in which religious belief is entirely a matter of personal choice. Given that he declared the individual his decisive category and given his attack on Christendom, Kierkegaard fits easily into Taylor's narrative of the rising significance of the individual within religious life.

Personal/Particular Relations → Impersonal/Universal Principles

-Key to Taylor's narrative is the rise of impersonal forms of order. The development of natural science, the codification of morality as rules of right conduct, and the development of "stranger sociability" in urban contexts all involve a movement toward general, impersonal principles. Taylor writes, "All these forms of impersonal order: the natural, the political and the ethical can be made to speak together against orthodox Christianity, and its understanding of God as personal agent" (283). Taylor invokes Gerald Manley Hopkins against a "slide towards a religion of impersonal order" (764), but he could as well have cited Kierkegaard. Specifically, *Fear and Trembling* focuses on God's shocking command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac in order to recover a sense of faith as a direct, individual relation to God unmediated by general moral principles. Similarly, *Works of Love* presents ethics as response to the particular other rather than as rule following.

Certainty→ Uncertainty

Taylor's account of the modern religious context highlights ambiguity. Though our disenchanted world is "inhospitable" to belief in a variety of ways, it does not foreclose openness to transcendence. Taylor writes, "[M]y understanding of the immanent frame is that, properly understood, it allows of both readings [belief and unbelief], without compelling us to either" (550). While Taylor refers to this condition as "Jamesian open space," he also notes that "going one way or another requires what is often called a 'leap of faith'" (550). Taylor's use of a Kiergegaardian phrase here speaks to a parallelism between their views of our epistemic condition.

b. Kierkegaard's Specific Place in Taylor's Narrative

Having looked at several shared themes, I turn now to the question, Where specifically would/should Kierkegaard have figured in Taylor's narrative? I propose that we can use Nietzsche as a proxy for locating Kierkegaard in *A Secular Age*. Though he never directly mentions Kierkegaard, Taylor gives Nietzsche a central role in his account and describes, without naming, a believing analog to Nietzsche's critique of humanism. This believing counterpart to Nietzsche bears more than a passing resemblance to Kierkegaard, and, so, looking at Nietzsche's place in Taylor's account shows where Kierkegaard belongs. Since both Nietzsche and his unnamed believing counterpart figure principally as critics of "exclusive humanism," I turn next to Taylor's account of that viewpoint and its historical development.

In the first instance, exclusive humanism is defined in terms of what it excludes: reference to God. As such, it represents a form of unbelief. For Taylor, however, exclusive humanism is not just a synonym for atheism. "Humanism" here implies an affirmation of human flourishing. Thus, for Taylor, "exclusive humanism" connotes the belief that the best human life is one based on purely immanent goods and attendant this-worldly flourishing without reference to any transcendent order or higher goals (16).

According to Taylor, this specific mode of unbelief could not and did not arise directly out of the enchanted world of pre-modernity but rather out of the "halfway house" of deism. Briefly retracing this development will help us grasp more fully what Taylor has in mind by "exclusive humanism."

For a variety of reasons that Taylor describes at length, early modern Europe moved toward a much sharper divide between immanent and transcendent, between natural and supernatural. While this sharp division often arose from profound religious impulses, it ironically undercut those very impulses by changing the ways Europeans imagined nature, society and religion. Conceived as self-enclosed, nature becomes the focus of the emerging natural sciences. When imagined as an autonomous domain, society is justified exclusively by reference to human flourishing understood in strictly immanent terms. Taylor labels this new way of imagining society "the Modern Moral Order." It is a voluntary association of rational, social agents who collaborate for mutual benefit (159).

While this new "social imaginary" arises within a context of continuing belief in God, its God is a much diminished version of the traditional God of Christian faith. To the "Modern Moral Order" corresponds the God of providential deism, a God whose "goals for us shrink to the single end of mutual benefit" (221). In taking this anthropocentric turn, Taylor tells us, deism loses all sense of mystery, sin, grace, Christology, and higher divine purpose for humans beyond ordinary flourishing.

The minimalist God of deism is a God people can do without, but providential deism's focus on human flourishing is central to the Modern Moral Order that legitimizes modern society and remains an effective ideal. By detaching this concern for human flourishing from belief in God, a fundamentally new option, exclusive humanism, is born, and Taylor's secular age begins.

While a concern for flourishing is an unavoidable aspect of being human, such flourishing changes its meaning and character when cut loose from any reference to transcendent realities and goals. As Taylor notes in *Sources of the Self*, Aristotle regarded the goods of life (*zen*), production and reproduction, as infrastructural to the good life (*euzen*), the life of contemplation and civic involvement (211). Catholic Christianity affirmed the goodness of created things and the flourishing they allow, but also affirmed ascetic renunciations of such goods in the name of higher spiritual goods. And Protestant Christianity, which Taylor sees as a major force behind "the affirmation of ordinary life," hallowed the mundane activities of producing and reproducing, of commerce and family, by viewing them as vocation, as ways of living out faith. But with exclusive humanism, mundane, "creaturely" goods stand forth as ends in themselves, as goods that play no role, whether instrumental or sacramental, in some higher good. For Taylor, this condition defines secularity. He writes, "a secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond flourishing becomes conceivable" (19).

Though he appreciates the "homecomings to the ordinary" of this profoundly bourgeois ethical vision, Taylor argues that quotidian goods of production, reproduction, and consumption, sundered from anything higher, fail to satisfy us for long. He notes ironically that, "Human happiness can only inspire us when we have to fight against the forces which are destroying it; but once realized it will inspire nothing but ennui, a cosmic yawn" (717). As soon as exclusive humanism emerged on the European scene, critics also emerged to decry its paltry vision of the good. Taylor writes, "From the beginning, there were protests about the flatness, insipidity, lack of inspiration about the goal of progress, ordinary human happiness" (717).

Taylor describes a range of such protests, but he focuses particularly on Nietzsche, "who denounced the modern order of mutual benefit root and branch (259). Nietzsche offers what Taylor calls a "devastating critique" of humanism's "idea that our highest goal is to preserve and increase life, to prevent suffering" (373). For Nietzsche, this ideal "excises the heroic dimension from human life" (231). Taylor gives this perspective, which he labels "the immanent counter-Enlightenment," a key role in *A Secular Age,* setting it over against traditional theism and exclusive humanism in a three-cornered argument. The shifting alignments and oppositions of these three perspectives explain for Taylor the unstable and uncertain character of contemporary religious consciousness.

Alongside Taylor's extensive discussions of Nietzsche and co., we find a few brief, vague, and enticing comments about a fourth perspective, a believing counterpart to Nietzsche's critique of humanism as lacking tragic depth. Where Nietzsche's critique springs from "the older aristocratic ethos," the believing critique comes from "the continuing spiritual concern for the transcendent, which could never accept that flourishing human life was all there is" (371-2). Despite their stark disagreement on the question of God, this believing perspective and the immanent counter-Enlightenment share an understanding of suffering as a locus of depth and meaning. Where the immanent counter-Enlightenment invokes the values of an aristocratic warrior code in raising painful struggle over complacent comfort, the "external counter-Enlightenment" (372), as Taylor dubs it, challenges the flat and shallow utilitarian consciousness of exclusive humanism by seeking "a recovery of the mystery of the Crucifixion, of world-healing through the suffering of the God-man" (319). In recovering that focus, this perspective sets itself over against "liberal, sanitized Christianity that doesn't quite know what to do with suffering" (318).

Taylor isn't typically shy about naming names, but he leaves this "external counter-Enlightenment" or "religious anti-humanism" floating without reference points. So, who is it that Taylor is talking about here? Let's see: a Christian believer who denounced his age for its complacency and limited aspirations, for its unheroic love of comfort and security, who explored and even lionized suffering in a variety of forms and who lifted up God's suffering in Christ as greatest in terms of both anguish and significance, who denounced the church of his day for losing sight of Christ's suffering because of its accommodation to the prevailing society's utilitarian mindset. I can't know whom Taylor has it mind when he describes this fourth position, but no one better fits his description than Kierkegaard. And so, I submit, Kierkegaard isn't actually missing from *A Secular Age*. He is an unnamed presence in the few, brief passages in which Taylor touches on a fourth major spiritual perspective.[v]

So, what is the import of naming this presence? What does placing Kierkegaard in *A Secular Age* show us? I will close with two suggestions:

1) Taylor offers a compelling way to understand Kierkegaard's persistent focus on suffering, a focus that seems pathological to many contemporary readers. Faced with a disenchanted world and surrounded by contemporaries absorbed in trivial satisfactions, Kierkegaard faces a crisis of meaning, a sense that "our actions, goals, achievements, and the like, have a lack of weight, gravity, thickness, substance" (307). He vividly captures this sense of emptiness in the Diapsalmata at the beginning of *Either/Or I*. But Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms don't stop with descriptions of such ennui. Rather, they go looking for experiences that can fill the void left by disenchantment, that possess depth, weight, intensity and significance. And, consistently, they find these qualities in instances of profound suffering. Kierkegaard's aesthete, A, and his strange fraternity, "the Society of the Already Dead," meet to exchange celebrations of human suffering at its worst, and Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings pluck from the Bible and from literature one excruciating episode after another: Abraham, Job, Faust, Ahasversus, Lear, the list could go on. As Kierkegaard moves from his pseudonymous authorship to his second, directly religious authorship, suffering remains the key theme, now as Christ's suffering and the suffering of all who follow him. With this transition, a new theme emerges: joy. Not a joy that comes after and repays a prior suffering but a joy inherent in the suffering itself. In *The Gospel of*

Sufferings (1847), Kierkegaard plays variation after variation on this theme, but the title of the first section of this text speaks eloquently: "What meaning and what joy are in the thought of following Christ" (217). Joy lies in the experienced surplus of meaning. But where Taylor's premoderns encounter this surplus in the objects and places around them, Kierkegaard encounters this surplus within, in profound suffering where "profound" means both "severe" and "significant." Just as Luther insists that we could only encounter God in the crucified Christ, Kierkegaard locates authentic enchantment in the wonder of transfigured suffering.[vi]

That brings me to my second point: Taylor avoids discussing Kierkegaard's version of Christianity because Taylor sees it as running counter to the version of Christianity he wants to offer. Kierkegaard privileges suffering as the place of encounter with God, while Taylor endorses liberal Christianity's humanism, its fundamental commitment to the promotion of human flourishing and the reduction of suffering. Here is the way Taylor puts it: "A fourth party can be introduced to this field if we take account of the fact that the acknowledgers of transcendence are divided. Some think the whole move to secular humanism was just a mistake, which needs to be undone. We need to return to an earlier view of things. Others, in which I place myself, think that the practical primacy of life has been a great gain for human kind" (637). As he puts it a few pages later, "Perhaps there is something deeply wrong with all hermeneutics of suffering as divine. Perhaps we are wrong to see a meaning here" (653). He then proposes an alternative understanding of Christ's redeeming activity that emphasizes "non-power, limitless self-giving, full action and infinite openness" (654) rather than suffering. As Taylor sees it, we can only grasp this new, humanistically-informed sense of God's saving action if we free ourselves from "the deforming encrustations of religious anti-humanism" (656). If I'm correct and Taylor sees Kierkegaard as a representative of religious anti-humanism, then his reluctance to discuss Kierkegaard makes sense. Whether his purported assessment of Kierkegaard as an antihumanist is correct will have to be the subject of another paper. Suffice it to say there are more than a few readers of Kierkegaard, some in this room, who will want to challenge that label.

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[v] Interestingly, Taylor makes this Kierkegaard-Nietzsche comparison explicit in *The Ethics of Authenticity* in a way he does not in *A Secular Age*, writing, "Kierkegaard saw the "present age" in the terms [a loss of heroic dimension, a lack of passion, a preference for *'petits et vulgaires plaisirs'*]. And Nietzsche's 'last men' are at the final nadir of this decline; they have no aspiration left in life but to a pitiable comfort" (EA 4).

[vi] In Part III of *The Gospel of Sufferings*, Kierkegaard compares "faith's transformation from the heavy burden into the light burden" to Christ's first miracle, the changing of water into wine at the Wedding at Cana (233, 235). Lee Barrett vividly describes such a transformation as "christomorphic suffering" (IKC 15, 271).

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