

Jyrki Kivelä

**On the Affinities Between
Hume and Kierkegaard**

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in auditorium XII (Main Building, Unioninkatu 34), on the 16th of March, 2013 at 10 o'clock.

Filosofisia tutkimuksia Helsingin yliopistosta
Filosofiska studier från Helsingfors universitet
Philosophical Studies from the University of Helsinki

Publishers:

Theoretical Philosophy and Philosophy (in Swedish)
Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies

Social and Moral Philosophy
Department of Political and Economic Studies

P.O. box 24 (Unioninkatu 40 A)
00014 University of Helsinki
Finland

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ISBN 978-952-10-8613-7 (paperback)
ISBN 978-952-10-8614-4 (PDF)
ISSN 1458-8331
Kopio Niini Oy
Helsinki 2013

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Acknowledgements

This work has been many years in the making. It was Professor Esa Saarinen who suggested that I might write my master's thesis on Kierkegaard. That was in the 1980s. After finishing my master's thesis I started reading Hume and soon begun to think that a comparison between Hume and Kierkegaard could yield interesting results. These ideas took form in my licentiate thesis in the late 1990s. Professor Saarinen supervised both of these works. I thank him for his support and confidence in my work and for his inspiring presence at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Helsinki in the 1980s and 1990s. For many years after those student years I worked on and (mostly ...) off on my thesis along with my day job at Alko. I thank Docent Heidi Liehu for her supervision of my dissertation in the late 1990s.

Finally, in the 2000s, Professor Sami Pihlström became my thesis supervisor. His quick feedback and encouragement especially during the final phases of my work, no doubt even beyond the call of duty, were important and inspiring for me and I am very grateful to him for these.

I thank Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation for partially funding my stay at the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College during the first three months of the 2000s when I was accepted as a scholar in the Library's visiting scholars program. Gordon Marino and Cynthia Wales Lund made me feel very welcome to the Library and to Northfield. Unfortunately, my thanks do not reach the late Howard and Edna Hong. I was happy to stay at their house ("Kierkegaard House") during my visit to St. Olaf. During those winter months, among other studies, I wrote an article on Kierkegaard and miracles. The revised version of that article partly forms chapter three of this thesis. I also thank University of Helsinki for funding the last writing weeks of my thesis. The text was proofread by Doctor Mark Shackleton. All remaining mistakes are mine.

I thank my parents for their support throughout my life. Unfortunately, my thanks do not reach my late mother. Finally and most importantly, I thank my daughter Anni for helping me to ground my thinking in concrete existence.

List of Abbreviations and Methods of Citation

Hume's writings

All references to *A Treatise of Human Nature* follow this form: *T* Book number. Part number. Section number. Paragraph number; *SBN* Page number. *SBN* refers to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (see below).

All references to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* follow this form: *EHU* Section number. Paragraph number; *SBN* Page number. *SBN* refers to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (see below).

E *Essays, moral, political, and literary*, rev. ed., ed. by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.

EHU *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

EHUopt *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford Philosophical Texts), ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

SBN *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd rev. ed. by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

EPM *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

NHR *The Natural History of Religion in A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion*: a critical edition, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. (Reference: *NHR* Section.Paragraph)

T Vol. 1 (Texts) of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vols. 1-2, ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Tv2 Vol. 2 (Editorial Material) of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vols. 1-2, ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Topt *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford Philosophical Texts), ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

SBN *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd rev. ed. by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

Kierkegaard's writings

With few exceptions that become evident in the text, all references to Kierkegaard's writings follow this form: *SKS* volume number, page number / *Abbreviation of the English title*, page number.

- CA The Concept of Anxiety (Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 8)*, trans. By R. Thomte in collaboration with A. B. Anderson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- CUP1 Concluding Unscientific Postscript, vol. 1 (Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 12.1)*, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- CUP2 Concluding Unscientific Postscript, vol. 2 (Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 12.2)*, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- CUPH Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. and trans. by Alastair Hannay. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- E/O Either/Or*, vols. 1-2 (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vols. 3-4), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- EUD Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses (Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 5)*, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- FT Fear and Trembling in Fear and Trembling and Repetition (Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 6)*, trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

- JC* *Johannes Climacus in Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 7), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- JP* *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1-6, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (vol. 7, Index and Composite Collation), Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978. (References to this are by volume and paragraph entry number.)
- KJN* *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1-11, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble & K. Brian Söderquist, in cooperation with the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, Copenhagen. Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007-.
- LD* *Letters and Documents* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 25), trans. by Henrik Rosenmeier. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- PC* *Practice in Christianity* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 20), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

- PF* *Philosophical Fragments in Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*
(*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 7), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton NJ:
Princeton University Press, 1985.
- PF1962* *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by David F. Swenson and Howard V. Hong.
Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- P/WS* *Prefaces and Writing Sampler* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 9), trans. by Todd W.
Nichol. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- R* *Repetition in Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 6),
trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- SBL* *Schelling's Berlin Lectures in The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*
and *Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 2), trans. by H. V.
Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- SKS* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1-28, K1-K28, ed. by N. J. Cappelørn, J. Garff, J.
Knudsen, J. Kondrup, A. MacKinnon, and F. H. Mortensen. Copenhagen: Gad, 1997-.
- SKS K* Refers to the commentary volumes of *SKS*.

SLW *Stages on Life's Way* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 11), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

SUD *The Sickness Unto Death* (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. 19), trans. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Other abbreviations and conventions are explained in the text.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In this study I discuss the historical and philosophical connections between David Hume (1711-1776) and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). It may indeed seem, in Popkin's words, "rather strange to compare Hume and Kierkegaard. Merely putting their names together seems to assume that a basis for comparison exists. But, of all philosophers, perhaps no two appear as far apart as the Scottish sceptic and the Danish Socrates."¹ This first impression is, of course, understandable. Hume presents perhaps the most severe criticisms of religion ever and, on the other hand, Kierkegaard is well known for emphasising the importance of believing without objective justification.² Further, to bring forth a specific issue, Hume objects to the use of a miracle as the foundation of a system of religion in a way that seems to contradict Kierkegaard's idea, as communicated through his "most philosophical" pseudonym Johannes Climacus, of the absolute paradox (the "miracle" of the incarnated god) as the object of faith. It is my overall aim to question this seemingly obvious confrontation between Hume and Kierkegaard. However, this study is not an apologia for Kierkegaard's thought in the sense that I would try to make Kierkegaard more respectable among modern academic (analytic) philosophers by trying to find Humean elements in his thought.

1 Popkin 1951, 274.

2 E.g. according to Gaskin 2009, 480 "Hume's critique of religion and religious belief is, as a whole, subtle, profound, and damaging to religion in ways which have no philosophical antecedents and few successors." Popkin 1972, 342 calls Hume "the extremely irreligious sceptic".

Hume lived in a world of Scottish empiricism, a world which embraced the recent success of Newtonian physics and the ideals of the Enlightenment.³ During his lifetime Hume was mainly known as a historian and an author of essays. *The History of Great Britain* (1754-1762) became a classic after Hume's death passing through numerous editions.⁴ Hume is still in fact listed as "the historian" in British Library and Cambridge University Library catalogues and "Philosopher and historian" in the November 2010 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* online. Kierkegaard's time was that of the culturally blooming "Golden Age Denmark" and the dominance of the followers of Hegel in Danish philosophy.⁵ Like so many seminal philosophers, both Hume and Kierkegaard were strongly opposed to the main philosophical movements of their times. In

3 The most important British empiricists—John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753), and David Hume—never used the term "empiricism". According to the *Encyclopedia of Empiricism*, "in its most general sense, the term 'empiricism' designates a philosophical emphasis on the relative importance of experience and processes grounded in experience, in contrast to reasoning and theorizing a priori" (Garrett and Barbanell, eds., 1997, ix). However, despite his empiricism, it seems that Hume was not that interested in the sciences. This finds an explanation in Hume's, as Jones 1982, 42 puts it, "deep commitment to Ciceronian humanism". The writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) were widely known in Hume's time. According to Jones 1982, 29, "every educated reader could discern at the time of its posthumous publication, that Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* was modelled on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*." (For a reading and commentary of Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779), see Sessions 2002). However, Sessions 2002, 30-31 points out that "Hume is no slavish imitator" and how "Hume departs from Cicero's model in a number of ways, and even when he follows Cicero, it is for his own purposes." Not surprisingly, the term "empiricism" is far from being univocal; e.g. K. Westphal 1989, 48 characterises four different formulations of "empiricism" in the modern sense of the term.

4 The 1778 edition is available online at <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/Intros/Hume.php#etexts>>.

5 For a discussion of Danish Hegelianism and its critics (including Kierkegaard) in the nineteenth century, see Koch 2004, 209-522. See also Kirmmse 1990, 100-197 and Stewart 2003, 50-82. Watkin 2001 is a convenient guide for concise information about important figures in Kierkegaard's life, both private and literary. I am also happy to refer to Sandelin 1927, the first Finnish doctoral thesis on Kierkegaard, for, among other things, the Danish history of ideas behind Kierkegaard's thought.

Kierkegaard's case this goes without saying; his polemical criticism of idealistic "systems" of philosophy and established Christianity is well known. Hume did not "attack" the *Aufklärer*, like Kierkegaard later attacked "Christendom", but the results of his philosophy profoundly undermined the optimism in the capabilities of human reason, which was perhaps the most basic doctrine of the ideology of the Enlightenment. Hume's philosophical writings were generally viewed as sceptical by his contemporaries. The popular view was that Hume was a "vicious and destructive" sceptic who opposed reason and truth. However, ever since Thomas Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764), there was another view which regarded Hume's scepticism as more virtuous than vicious. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) famously confessed (in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783)) that David Hume "awoke me from my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction."⁶ Not until the publication of the Selby-Bigge editions of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1888) and the two *Enquiries* (1893) did the exegesis of Humean texts become a problem in its own right. Kemp Smith's classic study *The Philosophy of David Hume* (1941)⁷ set the framework for the study of Hume for years to come, and the issue of the relations between the sceptical and the naturalistic or realistic elements in his philosophy is still lively debated. A good example of this is "The New Hume Debate" on Hume's alleged causal realism.⁸

Hume's formulations of certain epistemological problems are obvious classics in their field. This is not true of Kierkegaard. Probably no one would deny that he was a great religious *thinker* and a master writer of Danish, but whether he was a great *philosopher*, in the sense of being a

6 Kant 1950, 8. However, Kant continues, "I was far from following him in the conclusions at which he arrived." Kant's "answer" to Hume's allegedly sceptical view of causality is a notoriously complicated topic of scholarship (see, e.g. De Pierris and Friedman 2008).

7 My references from here on are to the 1949 edition of this work.

8 See Read and Richman, eds., 2007.

proper topic for academic philosophical papers, especially in the field of analytic philosophy, is still not that clear.⁹ Further, it is still common that Kierkegaard scholars feel “guilty” about writing studies about his thought because of Kierkegaard’s (or Johannes Climacus’s, to be more precise) famous and funny ridicule of “Professorer” and “Privat-Docenter” and his criticism of “systems” of philosophy.¹⁰ Of course, this is just the way Kierkegaard would have liked it.¹¹

Given the historical connection between Hume and Kierkegaard (see ch. 2) the comparison of their worlds of thought has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. The earliest reference to a Humean influence on Kierkegaard that I am aware of is in Lowrie’s *Kierkegaard* (1938).¹² Popkin’s “Hume and Kierkegaard” (1951) seems to be the first English paper on Hume and Kierkegaard, but Popkin was not the first to compare Hume and Kierkegaard more than just passingly. To my knowledge, Paresce’s “Hume, Hamann, Kierkegaard e la filosofia della credenze”

9 Jegstrup’s, ed., *The New Kierkegaard* (2004) is a collection of “deconstructive readings” of Kierkegaard.

10 Cf., for example, Climacus’s hilarious “calculations” regarding the paradoxical nature of Christianity in *CUP*:

When Christianity entered into the world, there were no professors or assistant professors whatever – then it was paradox for all. It can be assumed that in the present generation every tenth person is an assistant professor; consequently it is a paradox for only nine out of ten. And when the fullness of time finally comes, that matchless future, when a generation of assistant professors, male and female, will live on the earth – then Christianity will have ceased to be a paradox. (*SKS* 7, 201 / *CUP* I, 220-221)

11 See, for example, Climacus’s famous ironic musing in *CUP* regarding his “inability” to take part in what may be called a systematic philosophic enterprise of his age:

Out of love of humankind, out of despair over my awkward predicament of having achieved nothing and of being unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, out of genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I comprehend that it was my task: to make difficulties everywhere. (*SKS* 7, 171-2 / *CUP* I, 186-7)

12 I refer to 1962 edition of this work in this thesis.

[Hume, Hamann, Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Belief] (original in Italian) (1949) is the first survey of the Hume Kierkegaard connection.¹³ Rubov 1950 includes an early Danish reference to Hume's influence on Kierkegaard.¹⁴ Kivelä 1998, 2002, and 2006¹⁵ contain my early thoughts on several issues that I will discuss more thoroughly in this study. Miles 2009 is a recent survey and introduction to the topic.¹⁶ There seem to be no other papers or books in other languages which are explicitly dedicated to the Hume Kierkegaard connection. This thesis is then the first monograph-length study of the topic.¹⁷

In "Hume and Kierkegaard" (1951) Popkin contends that

a crucial portion of the central argument of the *Fragments* is amazingly like the central argument of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and how both Hume and Kierkegaard are reacting to the dogmatic metaphysicians of their times, and both react by employing the powerful method of casting doubts. They can be compared as antimetaphysicians or as questioners of the metaphysical traditions of their times. But, in so doing, one cannot forget the immense gulf that separates Hume's skepticism

13 Unfortunately, because I have not mastered the Italian language, I cannot consider Paresce's paper in this thesis. My unpublished Licentiate thesis "Uskon filosofit: Hume – Hamann – Kierkegaard" [Philosophers of Faith: Hume – Hamann – Kierkegaard] (original in Finnish, 1997) bears almost the same title as Paresce 1949. I was not aware of Paresce's paper at the time of writing my thesis. It seems that it has attracted mainly bibliographical attention.

14 Rubov 1950, 61-62.

15 1998 and 2006 are congress papers and 2002 is a newsletter article.

16 In addition, there is Ramos-Ramos's student journal article (2009).

17 For cursory observations regarding Hume's influence on Kierkegaard mainly through the writings of Hamann, see, e.g. Lowrie 1950, 4-5; 1962, 165-5 and 1974, 108-9; Pojman 1983 and Evans 1983, 236, 239, 258-9, 261-263 and 268. See also Miles 2009, 32 for a few other remarks. The Hongs (*CUP2*, xix) compare the reception of Hume's *Treatise* and Kierkegaard's *Postscript* when they were published in the sense that they were both "dead-born from the press".

from Kierkegaard's religious belief. They emerge from their critical attacks on metaphysics along totally different paths.¹⁸

Hannay also warns against the difficulties that may rise when latter-day commentators stage dialogues between philosophers long since dead and who never actually met:

The 'dialogues' are ostensibly designed to let the philosophers' thoughts rub off on each other in ways that accidents of history have prevented. [...] But if we begin to ask what can realistically be expected of these vicarious conversations between philosophers who never met, difficulties proliferate. Are the thoughts that linger with us really theirs or are they just what we find congenial when we selectively skim the textual surface? Do we share a philosophical language with them, or they with each other? By not penetrating the surface, and by failing to take account of the specific cultural contexts in which the texts arose, are whatever similarities we find, or whatever ways in which the thought of one thinker may seem to support or interestingly modify that of the other, merely specious, not in fact obscuring real and significant differences that then go unobserved?¹⁹

These are fair points and "warnings" and I intend to acknowledge their relevance in what follows. For obvious historical reasons Hume and Kierkegaard never interacted with each other but Kierkegaard had at least partial knowledge of Hume's thought and this knowledge was at least one ingredient in his views of Christian faith and philosophy. Having said this one can hardly

18 Popkin 1951, 274. Popkin 1951, 275 narrows his discussion down to the comparison of *T* and *PF* meaning to examine "a similarity between two great texts more than a similarity between two great thinkers".

19 Hannay 2003, 207.

exaggerate the differences between the cultural and philosophical backgrounds of Hume and Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is a scholarly issue in itself. Some commentators have seen an elaborate plan behind the variety of Kierkegaard's point of views.²⁰ It is and has been common to see Kierkegaard's signed works and pseudonymous works as separate blocks that in a complicated way mirror each other. There are, for example, supposedly pairs of works of which one is signed by Kierkegaard himself and the other is a pseudonym.²¹ However, recently this "master plan interpretation" has been at least partly challenged by scholars working on the publication of *SKS*. According to Kondrup and Ravn one can argue that *PF*, *CUP*, *SUD* and *PC* are not "truly" pseudonymous like *E/O*, *FT* and *CA*.²² The previous four Kierkegaard signed as "editor" but not the latter three. There is evidence, for example, that Kierkegaard only decided to use a pseudonym at the last moment before printing. Also Stewart makes the same observation regarding *CA* and *PF*. Consequently, according to Stewart, "everything points to the fact that both of these pseudonyms [Vigilius Haufniensis and Johannes Climacus] are completely ad hoc inventions".²³ Kierkegaard also interchanged material between the signed and the pseudonymous works (Stewart gives *Forord* by "Nicolaus Notabene" as an example of this).²⁴ Further, Stewart points out, the use of pseudonyms was very common in Copenhagen during Kierkegaard's time. The intellectual

20 E.g. according to Popkin 1972, 362 "the strategy of Kierkegaard's crusade [against established Christianity] was to present his theme on a series of different fronts, through publishing a weird series of works, each of which had its place in a master plan, known to its author, but not the reader."

21 See, e.g. the Hongs's "Historical Introduction" in *EUD*.

22 See Kondrup 2004, 15-16 and Ravn 2005, 21-23 for their discussions of the pseudonymity of *PF* and *CUP*.

23 Stewart 2003, 41.

24 Stewart 2003, 41. For a discussion of older materials from Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks which Kierkegaard eventually incorporated into *PF* and *CUP*, see Kondrup 2004, 7-10 and Ravn 2005, 12-21.

community was small and everybody knew everybody. Therefore, to avoid unnecessary personal confrontations, it was customary to use pseudonyms. So, Stewart argues, “when the matter is seen from this perspective, it is clear that it would be a mistake to read much more into Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms than this simple function.”²⁵ Garff in his recent biography of Kierkegaard also shares Stewart’s view. For example, commenting on Kierkegaard’s original intention to publish *CA* under his own name with his academic title and his eventual inconsistent use of the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, Garff writes that “in its own dry, factual manner the manuscript [of *CA*] constitutes an ironic commentary on the often quite speculative reflections of later generations concerning the problem of pseudonymity in Kierkegaard.”²⁶ Garff also claims that Kierkegaard’s play with pseudonyms during the publication process of *E/O* (1843) was, in Garff’s words, “a part of the massive marketing campaign that Kierkegaard set in motion” preceding the publication of the two weighty volumes of *E/O*.²⁷ In the same spirit Kondrup writes how “the observations we have made with regard to the fair copies of the title pages of both *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Sickness unto Death* can vaccinate us somewhat against daring hypotheses about the strategy behind Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity. It seems rather improvised, maybe even accidental, that these two works were published under a pseudonym.”²⁸ However, Ravn points out that Kierkegaard’s last-minute decisions to use pseudonyms do not necessarily mean that they are just literary tricks or do not really mean anything. Ravn suggests that Kierkegaard wanted with the use of pseudonyms to call into question the “neutrality” of the reader’s meeting with the text and, in Ravn’s words, “to underscore that his thought begins already on the title page, and in the pseudonymity”.²⁹ Possibly

25 Stewart 2003, 42 and Garff 2005, 267-70. See also Garff 2005, 60-76 for the incident relating to Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonym *B* in *Flyveposten* in 1836.

26 Garff 2005, 268.

27 See Garff 2005, 214-18.

28 Kondrup 2004, 15-16.

29 Ravn 2005, 23. See also Evans’s 2004 discussion of the role of irony in *PF* based on which Evans argues

then, Kierkegaard with his various pseudonyms just wanted to alert his reader to consider that all authors have motifs for their work and that there is no neutral or “true” way to represent something in writing. As I shall show in this thesis, the general philosophical idea that there is no neutral vantage point from which to address reality is of great importance to Kierkegaard. Although I have chosen to refrain from drawing elaborate conclusions from Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity, I do respect, as is customary, Kierkegaard’s famous wish in *CUP* that those who quote his pseudonymous works should cite the respective pseudonym as the author.³⁰

My main focus in Hume’s writings in this thesis is on *T*, although I discuss some of Hume’s other writings as well, especially *EHU*. However, my aim in what follows is not to discuss which of these classic texts contain Hume’s “true” views on the many issues considered in them. Traditionally it has been thought that in *T* one can find Hume’s true philosophy and that *EHU* is somehow a “milk-and-water” version of *T*, intended perhaps for beginners.³¹ One exception to this view is Stephen Buckle’s *Hume’s Enlightenment Tract* (2001). Buckle thinks that *EHU* is in fact “the best short guide to Hume’s philosophy”.³² So, it may be that *EHU* is gaining more ground in Hume scholarship.

for the genuine pseudonymity of *PF* against, e.g. Thuslstrup in *PF1962*, lxxxv-lxxxvii.

30 *SKS* 7, 571 / *CUP1*, [627].

31 Selby-Bigge also addresses the relations between *T* and *EHU* in his 1893 “Editor’s Introduction” to *EHU* (*EHU SBN* vii-xxxi). He lists the differences between these works and gives credit to both. Yet his position is that the first book of *T* is “in some ways the most important work of philosophy in the English language” (x). However, Selby-Bigge muses, “the Treatise is hard, and many of us are weak, and it is better to read Hume in the Enquiries than not to read him at all” (xxxi).

32 Buckle 2001, 4. See the first chapter of his book (“Clearing the Ground”) for the relations between *T* and *EHU* and how they have been addressed.

1.2 Synopsis

After the introductory chapter at hand, I will discuss the direct evidence regarding Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hume's thought (chapter 2). Kierkegaard does not mention Hume at all in his published writings and only briefly in his voluminous journals and notebooks. So, Kierkegaard did not really write about Hume but he knew several important Humean ideas to which there are allusions especially in the writings of Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. Kierkegaard learnt about Hume through lectures he attended and through the writings of Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819). To put it briefly, both Hamann and Jacobi, inspired by Hume and evidently against Hume's intentions, merged two senses of "belief": the everyday sense and the religious sense. They argued that because, according to Hume, there is no way to avoid non-argumentative believing in everyday life then there cannot be anything "wrong" with believing in the Christian sense. Humean ideas about the limits of human reason and the importance of belief and faith in everyday life and religion had an important influence on Kierkegaard's thought. As such, Hamann's and Jacobi's interpretations of Hume are at least partly self-serving. However, it is plausible to argue that they were at least of some influence when Kierkegaard, mainly in the writings of Johannes Climacus, developed his idea of the paradoxical nature of Christianity and his criticism of "Speculation" or philosophy that has lost ground in concrete human existence.

In the third chapter I shall explicate the relation between Hume's concept of miracle and Kierkegaard's notion of the absolute paradox. Hume's discussion of miracles is a classic in the philosophy of religion and Kierkegaard is well-known for his idea of the absolute paradox or "the most improbable thing" as the object of faith. Bearing in mind Kierkegaard's familiarity with the

conclusion of Hume's "Of Miracles" (through Hamann), I believe it is worthwhile to compare Kierkegaard's notion of the absolute paradox with Hume's discussion of miracles. In fact, the idea of a miracle expressed explicitly in terms of violation of the laws or order of nature à la Hume is not important to Kierkegaard. I will claim that the idea of the unavoidable doubtfulness of all historical knowledge and the non-immediate meaning of personal experience are the most important philosophical reasons for Kierkegaard's tangential interest in the concept of miracle as a philosophical problem. I will further argue that Hume's "miracle" may be seen to refer to at least two things. Firstly, "a miracle" may refer to an allegedly extraordinary historical event caused by a deity. This is consonant with Hume's actual definition of a miracle. Secondly, originating from the conclusion of "Of Miracles", "a miracle" may refer to a radical personal experience during which a person is led to assent to the Christian religion against his normal principles of reasoning and against "custom and experience". In my judgement, the Kierkegaardian absolute paradox with the "condition" to understand it or existentially embrace it is more like Hume's second miracle, which makes a believer believe contrary to custom and experience than a possible supporting event (Hume's first miracle or miracle "proper") for the credibility of Christianity.

In the fourth chapter I discuss Hume's and Kierkegaard's views of the unavoidability of non-rational believing. Hume explains the formation of everyday factual beliefs by appealing to his theory of the perceptions of the mind. Custom-based natural relations guide the mind from impressions to lively ideas or conceptions, i.e. beliefs, which are more instinctive than rational in nature. On the other hand, Kierkegaard (or Johannes Climacus) writes about belief in its ordinary and eminent senses. Ordinary belief is similar to Hume's notion of belief at least in the sense that they both create order and continuance in the immediate experience and prevent the doubting of conclusions drawn from the immediate experience. Eminent belief is reserved for the absolute

paradox, i.e. the fact that god existed in the human form. This belief is possible only through the divine “condition”. This condition is a kind of transformative framework of non-human origin which makes a person responsive to something that cannot be grasped by his or her mental faculties. When this condition is provided, wilful believing becomes possible. The wilfulness of the faith in the eminent sense is then in this crucial sense limited.

In my view, Climacus’s ordinary belief as the opposite of doubt is at least partly analogous to Hume’s belief as a lively conception. Both do the job of structuring our experience into a view of a coherent reality. Immediate experience is out of reach of doubt and is raw material for human nature when it forms a picture of the world where there are relations like causation between objects and their properties. Climacus’s belief is a terminator of doubt and in a sense Hume’s belief acts in the same role in the sense that it disregards the uncertainty inherent in the conclusions drawn from our immediate experience. The custom behind belief is such a powerful factor that it prevents human beings, and maybe also other animals, from noticing that their beliefs about what and how it is going on may not have rational grounds.

My fifth chapter is by far the largest. It starts with a discussion of Hume’s distinction between true and false philosophy. Roughly, the biggest flaw of false philosophy is that it is out of bounds, and the setting of these bounds is probably the most important thing in Hume’s philosophising. Hume’s true philosophy is about the workings of the human mind or nature, not how things really are. One important feature of false philosophising is then a kind of philosophical blindness to the epistemological “divide” between mind and external objects. Bearing in mind the importance of Hume’s theory of the perceptions of the mind it is not surprising that it is also behind Hume’s distinction between true and false philosophy. The unfortunate results of false philosophising are, according to Hume, problematic philosophical notions like the traditional concept of substance and the idea of the double existence of perceptions and objects. The problems

that the use of these notions create illustrate the misguided nature of false philosophy, i.e. how its practitioners fail to recognise the limitations of human knowledge.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard (or Climacus) writes how “a logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning is just like pure being, a pure chimera [Chimære]”.³³ Climacus is here in fact using the same word, and in the original Danish as well, as Hume does to describe the notion of substance.³⁴ Climacus, when criticising the Hegelian notion of pure being separated from concrete existence, concurs here with the Humean idea that existence is not an idea that can be separated from other ideas we have of a certain thing. Climacus and Hume argue that the notion of “pure being” (Climacus) or existence as “different from the idea of any object” (Hume) is in fact illusory and fictional. Like the ancient fiction of substance for Hume, the notions of pure being and an absolute beginning in a logical system for Climacus are only fantastical conceptual structures. Moreover, like the double existence of perceptions and objects is a monstrous offspring of two conflicting principles for Hume, so the idea of movement in logic for Climacus is a confusion of two logically distinct domains, i.e. that of atemporal logic and that of temporal concrete existence. Kierkegaard argues that there can be no system of life and Hume argues that the philosophical system solving the important problem of the perception yields a fictitious and “monstrous” solution—including the notions of substance and primary and secondary qualities—which only appears to be plausible. Both of these critiques are based on the idea that a human thinker is essentially confined to his spatio-temporal existence and that the concepts developed in his or her work do not mirror the reality as such but in fact inhere in this concrete existence.

33 *SKS* 7, 108 / *CUP1*, 112.

34 *T* 1.4.3.7; *SBN* 222. See *T* 1.3.7.2; *SBN* 94-5 and *SKS* K7, 169. According to Thulstrup 1984, 225, a pure chimera is “the same as nothing because when the concept of being is thought in its purity by abstracting from all concrete existence it passes over into its opposite—nothing.”

The thesis concludes with “Conclusion and Revocation” (chapter 6). It is a general discussion of the ideas of the work including a suggestion for at least a partial affinity with Climacus’s baffling “revocation” of his *CUP* and Hume’s conclusion of the first book of the *T*. I will finally argue that Hume’s and Kierkegaard’s idea of rationality was not that of human thought mirroring the alleged abstract rational order of reality. These thinkers wanted to draw a clear line between what is in fact only in the mind and what can be known to be in the world. A Humean/Kierkegaardian true philosopher does not look for a “Punctum Archimedis” from which to survey reality. He or she understands that existing in the concrete world makes his or her rationality just a certain kind of human rationality. Human nature including its rational faculty is part of the world and one human faculty among others and it is in this understanding that the troubled breach between thought and being is mended.³⁵

In my view, both Hume and Kierkegaard reject the idea that one can adopt an absolute or unrestricted philosophical attitude to reality. Human reasoning or philosophising is done by concrete human beings. This perhaps “tautological” fact should not be ignored. It has happened too often in philosophy that philosophers, without observing it themselves, have given too grand a status to their conceptual systems and have begun to think that there really exist such objects as they have been led to construct when trying to solve philosophical problems.

35 Interestingly, as Griffith-Dickson 1995, 34 sees it, to Hamann Hume’s philosophy represented a kind of self-destruction of reason if separated from religion and historical tradition. (I sometimes refer to Griffith-Dickson 1995 as “GD” in this thesis.)

2. Kierkegaard's Acquaintance with Hume's Philosophy

It seems that Kierkegaard did not know Hume's writings first-hand.³⁶ Kierkegaard did not know English so he could not have read Hume's original texts. He also did not have anything by Hume in his library, including translations.³⁷ However, Kierkegaard owned one longer writing explicitly about Hume, i.e. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's (1743-1819) *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* (*David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue*) as a part of Jacobi's *Werke*.³⁸ Kierkegaard read his Shakespeare in German (which Kierkegaard mastered well) because, in his own words, "I myself don't read English."³⁹ There were German translations of *EHU* and *T* available already in the late 18th century, but there is no evidence Kierkegaard ever read these. The same goes for the French translations of Hume's writings. There are a few translations of Hume's writings into Danish but not until 1906 (of *NHR*).⁴⁰ In a letter to his brother from 1829 the young Kierkegaard complains how "it would be extremely unpleasant for

36 To be precise, Kierkegaard did read a German translation of a small part of Hume's actual text.

37 See Thulstrup 1957, 12.

38 J. F. Köppen and C. J. F. Roth, eds., *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis Werke* (6 vols.; Leipzig: Fleischer, 1812-1825). There were other books, too, in Kierkegaard's personal library with discussions of Hume's philosophy (see Miles 2009, 30-32).

39 Quoted by Garff 2005, 22. Kierkegaard was not so fluent in spoken German, though: see Garff 2005, 206-8, 229-30 for Kierkegaard's practical problems and incidents in Berlin. Kierkegaard's brother, Peter Christian, at least had "Hume and Spinoza on the agenda" in 1826 (see Garff 2005, 24). In what language, I do not know. For German translations of English literature in Kierkegaard's personal library, see Thulstrup 1957, 91-2.

40 *Religionens naturlige Oprindelse og Udvikling* (Copenhagen, 1906). However, as early as 1771 Hume's essay "Of Liberty of the Press" was translated into Danish and was put to work in the Danish debate about the freedom of the press. Denmark was in fact the first country officially to declare the freedom of the press (see Laursen 1998).

me to have to tackle the English language in my last year of school.”⁴¹ Kierkegaard is referring to the possibly upcoming new requirements including translations into English in order to graduate from secondary school.⁴² Kierkegaard did not learn English later in his life either.

Hume or “Humean” [Humeske] are not mentioned in Kierkegaard’s published writings at all⁴³ and on only five occasions in his journals, notebooks and “løse papirer”.⁴⁴ Kierkegaard’s main sources for his knowledge of Hume’s thought were lectures he attended and the writings of Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819). In late 1837 Kierkegaard may have learnt about Hume when he attended Hans Lassen Martensen’s (1808-1884) “Lectures on the Introduction to Speculative Dogmatics”,⁴⁵ where Martensen discusses, among other things, Hume’s scepticism with respect to causality and Christianity. In Notebook 4:7-8 Kierkegaard summarises what Martensen, whose main subject here is Kant, said about Hume. Kierkegaard observes how Locke “denied all a priori intuitions and traced everything back to experience” and how

41 *LD*, 40.

42 For school requirements Kierkegaard had to meet, see Garff 2005, 21-2.

43 However, there is an allusion to Hamann’s response to Hume’s view on religion in *SLW* (*SKS* 6, 101 / *SLW*, 106) and in journal *NB* 17 (*SKS* 23, 177) and possible allusions to Hume in *PF* (I will return to *PF* on several occasions later in my work.)

44 *SKS* 17, 32, *AA*:14.1 / *KJN* 1, 26; *SKS* 19, 132-3, *Not*4:7 / *KJN* 3, 132; *SKS* 19, 133, *Not*4:8 / *KJN* 3, 132-3; *SKS* 19, 325, *Not*11:17 / *KJN* 3, 323 and *SKS* 27, 149, *Papir* 185. This list is based on the person register and the word concordance of *sks.dk* (the online edition of *SKS*). In addition to “Hume”, “Humeske” or “Humean” appears in *Not*4:8. At the time of this writing, the *sks.dk* excludes volumes 15, 16 and 28, but to my knowledge, these do not include references to Hume. The missing volumes of *sks.dk* include Kierkegaard’s unpublished writings (other than his journals and notebooks), e.g. (with their English titles) *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, *Book on Adler* and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, and “Breve og dokumenter”.

45 “Forelæsninger over Indledning til speculativ Dogmatik.” For some reason Miles 2009, 24 translates “speculativ Dogmatik” as “Theological Dogmatics”.

Hume developed this with greater acuity and answered the question of how it was possible to have representations that were generally valid and necessary by saying that this was [the result of] habit and imagination. If one says, e.g., that the sun will rise tomorrow or that human beings are mortal, it may well be probable that the sun will rise and that hum. beings will die, yet one still cannot by any means say this with certainty. If a bullet is fired and an animal falls, one could indeed know both facts, the shot and the fall, and one could also say that it was reasonable that this would happen; one could not, however, say that it was necessary. (The connection is of course inaccessible to experience); yet by denying universal validity and necessity, reason's actual categories, he basically abolished all thinking.⁴⁶

In his next lecture Martensen claims that, as Kierkegaard summarises it,

Hume developed a complete skepticism; the most one could achieve with respect to all things was probability; and [he] also carried through this conception of life with respect to morals, which thereby collapsed into convention, and in religion, where Xnty was thus especially to be rejected both because its history, which lay in the past, was improbable (as with all history, the further back one goes, the more difficult it is to verify it and thus the more improbable it is) [and] in part because its reports of miracles, etc. contradicted everyone's experience to the highest degree. Hence he denied the reality of universal validity and necessity, and thus launched an assault upon all truth. It is to this Humean denial of causality that Kant is historically tied; and in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* he raises the question of the extent to which there are synthetic judgments a priori.⁴⁷

46 SKS 19, 132-3, Not4:7 / KJN 3, 132.

47 SKS 19, 133, Not4:8 / KJN 3, 132-3.

Four years later (1841) Kierkegaard travelled to Berlin to attend Friedrich von Schelling's (1775-1854) much anticipated lectures where Schelling mentions Hume, too.⁴⁸ In his notes on these lectures Kierkegaard writes how the scholastic idea of a God "who was beginning and principle", "was shaken metaphysically" by René Descartes (1596–1650), Locke and Hume and how the "last-named"

extended empiricism to the point that all concepts became merely the results of experience, as when he taught that cause and effect are acquired through long practice, something, incidentally, that the simplest observation contradicts, because, for example, when a child in his cradle hears a noise, he turns his head toward the point of origin (certainly without any practise), and this is obviously an expression of cause and effect. All dogmatic rationalism was thereby destroyed.⁴⁹

Actually, though, Kierkegaard knew about Hume before attending these lectures. In the late 1830s Kierkegaard was influenced by Hamann's writings and through them by Hume's views of religion. These formative years were important in Kierkegaard's life because by the mid 1830s he had not yet abandoned Hegelianism for his own more subjective approach to philosophy and Christianity.⁵⁰

48 Jakob Burkhardt, Ludwig Feuerbach, Michael Bakunin, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, among others, also attended Schelling's lectures on "Philosophie der Offenbarung". (See, for example, Garff 2005, 209-11, the Hongs in *CI*, xx, Lowrie 1962, 233-35, and Pinkard 2002, 317-18, 345-55.)

49 *SKS* 19, 325, Not11:17 / *SBL*, 360. It seems that if Kierkegaard's notes are to be trusted, Schelling misrepresents Hume's view of how the idea of cause and effect is acquired. In the example of a child hearing a noise the issue should be, as I see it, how an observer of a child behaving in a certain way forms an opinion of the causes of a child's behaviour. An observer probably has experienced several times how humans react to sudden noises and "concludes" that children react to noises according to this human trait. Of course, a baby child himself or herself does not use concepts like cause and effect.

50 See Pojman 1983, 131-3.

As Pojman puts it, “‘speculation’ was not the bad word it was to become”.⁵¹ There even seems to be reason to believe that Kierkegaard’s eventual turn to the anti-speculative view of Christianity followed this reading of Hamann.⁵² As early as 1938 Lowrie was “inclined to say that he [Hamann] is the only author by whom S. K. [Kierkegaard] was profoundly influenced”.⁵³ Steffensen leaves little doubt about the importance of Hamann’s influence on young Kierkegaard and states that “offenbar stand eine Periode der Jugendzeit ganz im Zeichen Hamanns.”⁵⁴ Round half of the references to Hamann in Kierkegaard’s journals and papers date from a period of just one year between September 1836 and September 1837 during which Kierkegaard reached the age of 24. Hamann seems to interest Kierkegaard again in the early 1850s, just a few years before his death. Steffensen’s speculates on this: “Vielleicht suchte er etwas Bestimmtes?”⁵⁵ Steffensen also observes that most of Kierkegaard’s references to Hamann are to his letters and suggests that this may be because Hamann’s letters are easier to read than his published writings.⁵⁶ I find this a comforting thought. Kierkegaard read Hamann volume by volume and in order and referred to the period between September 1836 and May 1839 as his “Hamann-reading time”.⁵⁷

Hamann was a cryptic German religious thinker and a philosophical adversary of his neighbour Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and, in fact, the first critic of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781).⁵⁸ In Hamann Kierkegaard found a personal interpretation

51 Pojman 1983, 133.

52 Pojman 1983, 134.

53 Lowrie 1962, 164.

54 Steffensen 1967, 399.

55 Steffensen 1967, 399.

56 Steffensen 1967, 399-400.

57 See Kosch 2008, 72-3.

58 See Hamann’s *Metakritik über den Purismus der reinen Vernunft* (1784, published posthumously in 1800). For the English translation, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*, see Griffith-Dickson 1995,

of Hume's views on Christianity and Hume's concept of belief and this interpretation had an important influence on the young Kierkegaard. However, Kierkegaard's mature opinion of "the Magus of the North", as Hamann was called for his obscure style, can be found in the words of Johannes Climacus in *CUP*:

I will not conceal the fact that I admire Hamann, although I readily admit that, if he is supposed to have worked coherently, the elasticity of his thoughts lacks evenness and his preternatural resilience lacks self-control. But the originality of genius is there in his brief statements, and the pithiness of form corresponds completely to the desultory hurling forth of a thought. With heart and soul, down to his last drop of blood, he is concentrated in a single word, a highly gifted genius's protest against a system of existence.⁵⁹

To a modern reader Climacus's complaints about Hamann's lacks of "evenness" and "self-control" seem like understatements when he or she tries to make sense of Hamann's writings. Cryptic titles, dedications, pseudonyms and numerous allusions to the Bible and classical texts frustrate and ridicule readers' efforts to understand his lines of thought.⁶⁰ But, perhaps comfortingly, this is

517-25. Hamann, in fact, helped Kant to arrange a publisher for his *Kritik* and, without Kant's consent, managed to obtain the proof sheets of the *Kritik* and so became the first person to read it (see Beiser 1987, 38). Interestingly, regarding Hume's German reception, it seems that it was Hamann who introduced Kant to Hume's thought (Beiser 1987, 24). For Hume's German reception, see also Kuehn 1987 and 2005.

59 *SKS* 7, 227 / *CUP* 1, 250.

60 See, e.g., with their English titles, "**Socratic Memorabilia**-For the leisure of the public put together by a lover of leisure-With a double dedication to NOBODY and to TWO" (1759) and "**The LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT** of the Knight of the Rose-Cross on the divine and human Origin of Language. **Speedily translated** from the original hieroglyphic manuscript by The Hierophant's Handyman" (1772).

nothing new because, in Griffith-Dickson's words, "his writings were notorious even in his own time for the challenges they threw down to the reader. These challenges to interpretation and understanding are only heightened today."⁶¹

Hamann regarded Hume's philosophy very highly. In Hume Hamann found an ally in his criticism of the religious-philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment. Hume's idea, that all beliefs regarding concrete existence or causal relations are not and cannot be based on rational arguments, was like a revelation to Hamann. Hamann saw Hume as "[a] spirit for tearing down, not for building, in this consists the **glory** of a Hume", as he wrote in a letter in the same year (1759) as his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* or *Socratic Memorabilia* (=SM) was published.⁶² Hamann's concept of faith is based on Hume's naturalistic vision of humans as creatures who live their lives guided by rationally unwarranted beliefs of which some are more fundamental than others.⁶³ For example, according to Hume "*reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*"⁶⁴ and "we speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and

Both translations by Griffith-Dickson 1995, 375, 461 (bold in the original). Griffith-Dickson 1995 includes the complete translations of Hamann's *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759), *Aesthetica in Nuce* (1762), *Zwo Recensionen nebst einer Beylage, betreffend den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), *Abfertigung* (ca. 1772), *Philologische Einfälle und Zweifel über eine akademische Preisschrift* (1772), *Versuch einer Sibylle über die Ehe* (1775) and *Metakritik über den Purismus der reinen Vernunft* (1784). Hamann 2007 is a more recent English translation of several short writings by Hamann. Regarding Kierkegaard and Hamann's "many voices," see SKS 4, 26 / R, 149.

61 Griffith-Dickson 2002. O'Flaherty 1979, 167 ponders that Hamann appeals to the taste of much smaller circles than Kierkegaard and even writes that, compared to Hamann's way of writing, Kierkegaard's famous "indirect communication" is "crystal clear"!

62 As quoted by Griffith-Dickson 1995, 34.

63 See ch. 4.1 of this study.

64 T 1.4.1.8; SBN, 183 (italics in the original). Cf. also this sentence from the previous paragraph of

T: "Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe

of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”⁶⁵

Hamann was inspired by Hume’s view of the limits of human reasoning, including Hume’s view of the importance of belief both in everyday life and in religious life. In fact, Hamann made his philosophy all about believing in opposition to reason-oriented ideals of the Enlightenment. In his letter Hamann says “Hume is always my man because he has at least ennobled the principle of faith (*das Principium des Glaubens*) and accepted it into his system” and, in letters to Jacobi, “I was full of Hume when I wrote *SM*, and p. 49 of my little book refers to this” and “I studied him before I wrote *SM*, and am indebted for my doctrine of faith to the same source.”⁶⁶ On “p. 49” of *SM* Hamann argues as follows:

Our own being [Dasein] and the existence [Existenz] of all things outside us must be believed and can be made out in no other way. [...] What one believes has therefore no need of proof; and a proposition can be irrefutably proven without being believed.

There are proofs of truths which are as worthless as the use to which these truths can be put; indeed, one can believe the proof of a proposition without applauding the proposition itself. The

and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine.” *T* 1.4.1.7; *SBN* 183

⁶⁵ *T* 2.3.3.4; *SBN* 414. Hume uses “passion” in a much wider sense than we are used to. Hume employs “passion”, according to Kemp Smith 1949, 162, “as covering all the various instincts, impulses, propensities, affections, emotions and sentiments of the animal and human mind. It does not, however, include pleasure and pain.”

⁶⁶ Hamann, *Briefwechsel* 4, 294 and, the last two, *Briefwechsel* 7, 167. (English translations from Cloeren 1988, 54 and Griffith-Dickson 1995, 50.)

reasonings of a **Hume** may be convincing and their refutations clear postulates and doubts; but faith both wins and loses greatly by this most skilful pettifogger and most honourable attorney. Faith is no work of reason, and cannot therefore be subject to any attack of the same; because **faith** arises as little from reason as **tasting** and **seeing**.⁶⁷

Despite its name, Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* is not really biographical in nature. Hamann's Socrates is a metaphorical literary figure in the service of Hamann's critique of the Enlightenment and the philosophy of Kant.⁶⁸ Hamann writes how his "intention is not to be a historiograph of Socrates; I merely write his memoirs like those of Duclos on the history of the eighteenth century, published for the leisure of the fine public."⁶⁹ In fact Hamann had read neither Plato nor Xenophon at the time he wrote his *SM*!⁷⁰ In *SM* Socratic ignorance is very important to Hamann and he draws a parallel between the sophists of Socrates's time and the spokesmen of the Enlightenment of his own time:

In these rough tones we can interpret Socrates' meaning, when he said to the sophists, the scholars of his time: I know nothing. Therefore, these words were a thorn in their eyes and a scourge on their

67 *N II*, 73-4 / *GD*, 391-2. [*N*=Hamanns *Sämtliche Werken* (6 volumes, ed. by Josef Nadler. Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1949-1957.) (Bold in *GD*.)

68 According to Beiser 1987, 24-25, "the *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* is a seminal work in the history of modern philosophy. It is the first manifesto of the *Sturm und Drang*, the first influential attack upon the *Aufklärung*'s principle of the sovereignty of reason. It is of the greatest interest, then, that Hamann's work was conceived as a response to 'the little Socrates' of Königsberg, Immanuel Kant himself. This goes to show that Kant was anything but a mere spectator of the *Sturm und Drang*. Rather, he was its direct catalyst, a true Socratic gadfly."

69 *N II*, 65 / *GD*, 383.

70 See Griffith-Dickson 1995, 31.

backs. All Socrates' **ideas**, that were nothing but the **expectorations** and **secretions** of his **ignorance**, seemed as fearful to them as the hair on the head of the Medusa, the navel of the Aegis.⁷¹

Hamann strongly opposed the Enlightenment idea of Socrates as Christ's "rational alternative" and presents his Socrates as Christ's precursor, or, in Beiser's words, "the pagan apostle of faith against the tyranny of reason".⁷² For Hamann, the point of Socratic ignorance was that it shows the insufficiency of rational argumentation and that something else, i.e. faith is needed instead. Also Socrates's appreciation of his demon represented to Hamann the importance of a non-rational approach to life.⁷³ Interestingly, *SM*, for several reasons, in Steffensen's words, "muss man als diejenige Schrift Hamanns bezeichnen, welche allem Anschein nach die grösste Bedeutung für Kierkegaard erhielt."⁷⁴ Steffensen claims that Hamann's ideas in *SM* on the independence of reason and faith, of Hamann seeing himself in opposition to the main ideology of his time (the Enlightenment) and his maieutic method, all found their way into Kierkegaard's writings.⁷⁵

It has been observed that Hamann translates Hume's "belief" by the German "Glaube", which includes both the philosophical and more religious meanings of "belief",⁷⁶ Hamann seems to adopt Hume's idea of the non-cogitative nature of belief and then uses it in his religious thought. According to Griffith-Dickson, "Hamann was perhaps the first to perceive the theological

71 *N II*, 73 / *GD*, 391. (Emphasis in the original.)

72 Beiser 1987, 26.

73 See, e.g. Griffith-Dickson 1995, 32-3 and Beiser 1987, 26-7.

74 Steffensen 1967, 408.

75 See Steffensen 1967, 408-10.

76 See Sparling 2011, 43 and Swain 1967, 348, as well as Griffith-Dickson's 1995, 73-4 comments on Swain's view.

fruitfulness, the positive aspect to the understanding of reason and faith that arises from Hume's thought. He certainly preceded Kant in this.”⁷⁷

Hume's appeal to faith and miracles at the expense of reason in the *EHU* 10.41 and his other apparently fideistic⁷⁸ views in the *EHU* have traditionally been interpreted as ironic, as Hume is usually seen as a severe critic of religion. However, Harris has recently challenged or supplemented this view. In Harris's view, the question what Hume's own private views about religious matters really were cannot be settled by appealing to independent textual evidence. Instead, in Harris's words, “the right question to ask is not what Hume privately thought, but why he chose to express himself as he did”.⁷⁹ In Harris's historically contextual view, Hume used fideistic and Calvinistic language because he shared with the Calvinists a common opponent, i.e. the modernizers of religion in Scotland (e.g. Francis Hutcheson and William Leechman), according to whom philosophy could provide a basis for religious belief and who also ensured that Hume did not get the Edinburgh chair in moral philosophy in 1745. Hume opposed philosophical rationalization of religion and in this project, Harris suggests, his appeal to revelation provided “a way to make out that it was the

77 Griffith-Dickson 1995, 50. Brose 2006 (especially vol. II) is the most thorough investigation of Hume's influence on Hamann, including detailed discussions of Hamann's acquaintance with different writings by Hume (see, e.g. Brose 2006, vol. II, 347-351).

78 Fideism, according to Amesbury 2009, “is the name given to that school of thought [...] which answers that faith is in some sense independent of, if not outright adversarial toward, reason.” Amesbury lists Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Kierkegaard, William James (1842–1910) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) as the “usual suspects” of fideism. According to Vainio 2010, 2 in philosophy “fideism usually means a mode of thought or teaching according to which reason is more-or-less irrelevant to (religious) belief, or even that faith is strengthened, not undermined, if one judges that reason is unable to give it support.” The term acquired a pejorative tone in the nineteenth century and carries it still; a classic modern discussion on “Wittgensteinian fideism” is provided by Nielsen 1967. See also Penelhum 2010 for a concise survey of fideism. See also Penelhum 1983 for Hume's place in the Sceptic tradition with an emphasis on the philosophy of religion and a discussion of Kierkegaard's fideism, too.

79 Harris 2005, 156.

modernizers, and not himself, who threatened the cause of traditional religion”.⁸⁰ However, Harris is not saying “that Hume sincerely and earnestly sought to vindicate his philosophy by highlighting its affinities with Calvinism. Hume’s use of the language of Calvinism is to be understood, rather, as a means of casting aspersions on the pretensions to religious wholesomeness frequently made by those who had frustrated his academic ambitions.”⁸¹ It seems then, in my judgement, that Hume’s conclusion in “Of Miracles” can be interpreted as a kind of “corrective” against attempts to naturalise religion and Hume’s irony can be found in his suggestion that those who try to build a philosophical basis for religion do in fact abandon its true nature.⁸² (See also ch. 3.2 for a point on this issue.)

Obviously, the relation of Hamann’s “faith” to Hume’s “belief” is far from straightforward. It seems, though, that Hamann is trying to make a clear distinction between faith and reason and also that Hamann tries to make his idea of sensual faith as something like a Humean impression of the mind.⁸³ Hamann seems to think that, in Hume’s thought, there is no essential difference between the “everyday believing” which, though rationally unfounded, is what makes human living possible

80 Harris 2005, 147.

81 Harris 2005, 147.

82 In my view, it is also worthwhile to note that shedding light on the historical background of philosophical texts may provide important clues to the intentions of their authors, especially in the case of old texts.

This may sound like a platitude but commentators seldom touch upon the historical situation of the texts they comment on. (On this, cf. Hannay 2003, 207 as already referred to in the introduction.)

83 Kemp Smith 1949, 43-44 calls Hume’s idea (inspired, according to Kemp Smith, by Francis Hutcheson’s (1694-1746) discussion of morality and aesthetics) that “[m]ay not our so-called judgments of knowledge in regard to matters of fact and existence be really acts of belief, not of knowledge-belief being a passion and not a form of insight, and therefore, like all passions, fixed and predetermined by the *de facto* frame and constitution of our human nature? [...] the positive teaching of Book I of the *Treatise*.” Kemp Smith 1949, 44 calls its negative teaching the idea “that judgments of causal connexion express not insight but only belief, resting not on the apprehension of any relation (other than mere sequence), but on a feeling or sentiment in the mind.”

and the “religious believing” of Christianity, which defies the very principles of “everyday believing”. But surely human religious experience is not at all “given” in the sense that empirical experience is. Our everyday beliefs of how things behave in the world, e.g. the pain caused by the prick of a needle, need much less interpretation than the religious ones, e.g. human endurance through difficult illness as a sign of love and care of the Christian God. For one thing, the latter religious belief is evidently culturally bound in a way the former is not.⁸⁴

It is easy to see Hamann as a religious irrationalist when he celebrates the independence of faith from reason. Isaiah Berlin, for example, thinks that “their [Hamann’s and Jacobi’s] use of some of Hume’s writings, if he had conceived its possibility, would almost certainly have astonished and, indeed, horrified their author; the moral and intellectual distance between him and these German irrationalists could scarcely have been greater. The history of ideas is not without its ironies.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, Beiser does not think Hamann is an irrationalist. Beiser argues that Hamann’s use of Hume’s belief

is strangely, and perhaps intentionally, ironic. Hume argues that there are no rational grounds for the belief in the existence of God in order to attack faith; but Hamann reverses his argument and uses it to defend faith. The argument is the same; but its uses conflict. To Hamann, the merits of Hume’s skepticism is not that it challenges faith, but that it secures it from the criticism of reason.⁸⁶

84 It seems that Kant challenged Hamann and Jacobi on these kinds of lines (see Beiser 1987, 29).

85 Berlin 1977, 93.

86 Beiser 1987, 24. Regarding Hamann’s alleged “irrationalism” or “antirationalism”, see, e.g. Berlin 1977 and Lütke 1984.

According to Beiser, to be an irrationalist or antirationalist means that one holds the view which states that faith contradicts reason which Hamann does not because, Beiser continues, “[t]he whole point of Hamann’s argument is indeed that faith is neither rational nor irrational since reason cannot either prove or disprove it. The stumbling block of all irrationalist interpretations of Hamann is therefore nothing less than the central thesis of the *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* itself.”⁸⁷ In my judgement, though, the idea that religious belief is some kind of primitive experience on a par with simple “disprovable” sensory qualities does not seem to be tenable. I cannot prove or disprove what someone experiences when he or she sees a bright yellow light, but I can evaluate how rational his or her beliefs are when we talk about the experience. In like manner I cannot prove or disprove someone’s religious experience but I can consider the rationality of his or her views when we discuss the experience. Further, in my view, faith often refers to some, at least implicit, doctrines of how things are and it should be differentiated from “mere” religious experience which may eventually lead to faith. Granting this difference between an experience and its interpretation seems now to challenge the idea that the terms rational or irrational cannot be applied to religious faith and the view that there is a “stumbling block” in front of all irrationalist interpretations of Hamann. Faith can contradict reason even though religious experience cannot. Incidentally, the status of religious experience has recently been discussed also in the pragmatist tradition in connection with the centennial of William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). For example, according to Rorty, James’s classic work is “riddled with inconsistencies” like “the clashing definitions he offers of the term ‘religious’ and the differing meanings of the term ‘experience’ he tacitly invokes”.⁸⁸ In Rorty’s view, sometimes James uses “experience” in the modern Sellarsian sense and does not subscribe to what Sellars called “the myth of the Given”, but most of the time

87 Beiser 1987, 29.

88 Rorty 2004, 86.

James uses “experience” in the “bad old Lockean way—as a name for entities strutting their stuff on the stage of the Cartesian inner theater, entities that can be studied closely in order to determine what description fits them best”.⁸⁹ Rorty thinks, to put it very briefly, that there is this tension in James’s thought between pragmatism and empiricism and it leads to confusions when James tries to determine whether to be a supernaturalist by appealing to emotions and “pure experience”.⁹⁰ Not surprisingly then, the question of the status of “experience” including the view that there is some kind of neutral experience, which waits to be interpreted, is loaded with philosophical problems.

On both occasions when Kierkegaard mentions Hume in his unpublished writings it turns out they are connected to Kierkegaard’s quotations from Hamann. Kierkegaard writes on 10 September 1836:

With regard to a Christian’s views of paganism, see Hamann, I, pp. 406, 418, and 419, especially p. 419: “Nein—wenn Gott selbst mit ihm redete, so ist er genöthigt das **Machtwort** zum voraus zu senden und es in Erfüllung gehen zu lassen—: Wache auf, der Du schläfst.” From p. 406 one sees the complete misunderstanding of a Christian and a non-Christian, in that to an objection of Hume’s, Hamann answers: Yes, that’s just how it is.⁹¹

89 Rorty 2004, 92-93. Sellars presented his famous criticism of “the myth of the Given” in his essay *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (*Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. I, 253-329. Ed. by H. Feigl & M. Scriven. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). Sellars attacked the view that there are basic cognitive states (the Given), which serve as a foundation for human knowledge. See, e.g. deVries 2011 for a concise discussion of Sellars’s thought. Proudfoot, ed., 2004 is a collection of articles, including Rorty’s, on James’s *Varieties*.

90 Rorty 2004, 95.

91 *SKS* 17, 32, AA:14.1 / *KJN* 1, 26. (This is also found in *Pap.* I A 100 but, for some reason, is not indexed in *Papirer* under “Hume, David”). See also *SKS* 6, 101 / *SLW*, 106 where Kierkegaard uses the almost identical expression “[t]hat is just the way it is.” (*Pap.* and *Papirer* refer to *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (vols. 1-16, 2nd ed., ed. by N. Thulstrup, with an Index by N. J. Cappelørn. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-

The context of “the complete misunderstanding” is Hamann quoting and commenting on the famous last paragraph of Hume’s “Of Miracles” (*EHU* 10) in a letter (3.7.1759) to J. G. Lindner.⁹² Hume concludes famously

that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.⁹³

Hamann understands that Hume’s conclusion may be ironical and actually critical of Christianity, but he nevertheless thinks that Hume is actually right when he emphasises the miraculous nature of Christianity as something which can only be approached by faith and not by “mere reason”.⁹⁴ This understanding is evident in his remark after the quotation from Hume: “Regardless of whether

1978.)

92 Hamann read Hume’s *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (2nd ed., 1750) with the support of its German translation *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Erkenntnis* (Hamburg and Leibzig, 1755) by J. G. Sulzer (see *KJN* 1, 331n35).

93 *EHU* 10.41; *SBN* 131. Miles 2009, 25 mistakenly writes that this is from Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. His reference in the footnote is right, though.

94 I think Pojman 1983, 135-6 wrongly suggests that “apparently” Kierkegaard was under the impression that Hume’s conclusion of “Of Miracles” is from Hamann’s own writings. The paragraph from Hume is in quotation marks in Hamann’s letter and Hamann clearly comments on Hume after the quotation. Steffensen 1967, 404 also seems to share the view that Kierkegaard knew what he was reading. Further, bearing in mind Hamann’s literary skills, Lüthe’s 1984, 107 claim that Hamann does not understand the alleged irony of the conclusion of “Of Miracles” does not convince me.

Hume said this with a mocking or profound expression, in any case it is orthodoxy, and a witness of the truth in the mouth of its enemy and persecutor.—All his doubts are proofs of his proposition.”⁹⁵

Hamann suggests that there is in fact nothing wrong with the idea that the essential teachings of Christianity defy rational explanations. In fact, the more doubts one has about the rationality of Christianity, the more one begins to grasp its true nature. In Hamann’s view, this is just what happens in Hume’s “Of Miracles”. Hume ends up rejecting the idea that miracles could be used to support the veracity of a particular religion because, Hume argues, it is always more rational to believe in the falsehood of miracle reports than to believe in their truth.⁹⁶ For Kierkegaard then, at least partially through Hamann’s interpretation of Hume’s “Of Miracles”, the idea of the rational justification of Christianity begins to seem like a misunderstanding of what it involves to be a Christian. Further, it seems that the conclusion of Hume’s “Of Miracles” was the only text by Hume that Kierkegaard ever read.

Kierkegaard’s second entry on Hamann and Hume (published as a “loose paper” in the *SKS*), written two days after the 10th September note on paganism and inspired by the same letter of Hamann to Lindner, reads as follows:

Hamann draws a most interesting parallel between the law (Mosaic law) and reason. He goes after Hume’s statement: “The last fruit of all wisdom is the observation of human ignorance and weakness” ... “Our reason,” Hamann goes on to say, “is therefore just what Paul calls the law—and the command of reason is holy, righteous, and good; but is it given to make us wise? Just as little as the law of the

95 Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 1, 356 (the quoted English translation: *KJN* 1, 331n35).

96 This point is further developed in the following chapter.

Jews justified them, but is to bring us over from the opposite, how unreasonable our reason is, that our faults should increase through it, as sin increased through the law.”⁹⁷ (12 September 1836)

According to Miles, Hume’s statement “the last fruit ...” (quoted by Kierkegaard from Hamann) is from *EHU* 7 (Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion) and reads “[n]o conclusions can be more agreeable to scepticism than such as make discoveries concerning the weakness and narrow limits of human reason and capacity.”⁹⁸ I think this is disputable because Hamann himself does not give this reference and Hubach, in her online commentary on Hamann’s letters, points out that Hamann’s source in Hume’s writings has not been located.⁹⁹ In my view, in agreement with Kosch, one plausible source in *EHU* is Hume’s observation in *EHU* 4 (“Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding”): “Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy, and meets us, at every turn, in spite of our endeavours to elude or avoid it.”¹⁰⁰

Be Hamann’s source as it may, at least one important idea emerges from Kierkegaard’s notes. It seems that the practice of worldly wisdom, like philosophy, only results in the observation of human ignorance and weakness. Hamann suggests, apparently inspired by Hume’s discussion of the foundations of human knowledge, that just like law does not make us better persons but, instead, may make us appear morally compromised, philosophising may not increase our wisdom in the

⁹⁷ *SKS* 27, 149, Papir 185. The translation is from Hay 2008, 100.

⁹⁸ *EHU* 7.29; *SBN* 76. See Miles 2009, 26n17. On page 26 Miles seems to misquote Kierkegaard. The quotation from Hamann actually starts “die letzte Frucht aller Weltweisheit” while Miles leaves out the word “aller” (see Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 1, 355). Miles also translates “Weltweisheit” or, in its modern meaning, “world of wisdom” or “worldly wisdom” as “philosophy”.

⁹⁹ See Hubach’s commentary on letter no. 149 in Vol. 1 of Hamann’s letters in <http://www.hamann-briefe.de/>

¹⁰⁰ *EHU* 4.12; *SBN* 31. See Kosch 2008, 72n27. See also *SKS* K27, 345.

sense that we know more but, instead, may make us understand how little we really know about the world out there.

Kierkegaard's loose paper entry quoted above ends in another quotation from Hamann's letter: "Haven't you often heard me say: incredibile sed verum [incredible but true]? Lies and novels, hypotheses and fables must be plausible, but not the truths and fundamental doctrines of our faith."¹⁰¹ The idea that the truths and doctrines of faith need not be plausible is interesting because later in *PF* (1844) Climacus has the paradox "say" that "[c]omedies and novels and lies must be probable, but how could I be probable?" and that "the truth in the mouth of a hypocrite is dearer to me than to hear it from an angel and an apostle" and "admits" that these ideas are from Hamann.¹⁰² Further, the latter actually refers to Hume in Hamann's letter. Hamann means that he is even happier to hear "the truth" from someone who has perhaps an ambivalent or downright negative attitude to religious faith than to hear it from an obvious "supporter" of faith.¹⁰³ We may note, regarding these references to Hamann (inspired by Hume), that one important theme of *PF* is precisely the limits of human reason and reason's attempt to find these limits and go beyond them in faith.¹⁰⁴ In *CUP* (1846) Climacus recognises Socrates and Hamann as proponents of the distinction between what a person understands and what he does not understand.¹⁰⁵ This is, of course, an important theme in Kierkegaard's whole authorship where, among other things, he characterises the true nature of Christianity as something which is "against the understanding".¹⁰⁶

101 *SKS* 27, 149, Papir 185. Translation from Kosch 2008, 72.

102 *SKS* 4, 256-7 / *PF*, 52-3.

103 See, e.g. Swain 1967, 344.

104 *SKS* 4, 243 / *PF*, 37.

105 *SKS* 7, 507 / *CUPI*, 558. This is in fact the second and last mention of Hamann in *CUP*.

106 See the whole paragraph in *SKS* 7, 516 / *CUPI*, 567-8.

Interestingly, right after the perhaps ambivalent tribute to Hamann in *CUP* quoted above Climacus also gives Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) a similar kind of credit:

I do not deny that Jacobi has often inspired me, although I am well aware that his dialectical skill is not in proportion to his noble enthusiasm, but he is the eloquent protest of a noble, unadulterated, lovable, highly gifted mind against the systematic crimping of existence, a triumphant consciousness of and an inspired battling for the significance of existence as something longer and deeper than the few years during which one forgets oneself in studying the system.¹⁰⁷

Jacobi, like Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), was an important figure of the so-called “German Counter-Enlightenment” and a critic of Kant’s transcendental idealism (especially as formulated by the early Fichte).¹⁰⁸ The so-called Pantheism Controversy (Pantheismusstreit) between Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was triggered by Jacobi disclosing G. E. Lessing’s (1729-81) alleged Spinozism in his *On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*.¹⁰⁹ In late eighteenth-century Germany Spinoza was considered an atheist, a severe critic of the Holy Scriptures and a revolutionary political thinker. That Lessing, who Rasmussen describes as “the most prominent German thinker between Leibniz (1646-1716) and Kant (1724-1804), identified himself with the pantheistic philosophy of Spinoza could not help but produce a public scandal.”¹¹⁰ Beiser sums up the significance of the controversy as follows:

107 *SKS* 7, 227 / *CUP* 1, 250.

108 di Giovanni 2010. See also Rehder 1965.

109 *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1785; 2nd ed., 1789).

110 Rasmussen 2009, 34.

The main problem raised by the controversy—the dilemma of a rational nihilism or an irrational fideism—became a central issue for Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. It is indeed no exaggeration to say that the pantheism controversy had as great an impact upon nineteenth-century philosophy as Kant’s first *Kritik*.¹¹¹

Jacobi had been accused of irrationalism because of how he had used the term “faith” (Glaube) in the *Spinoza Letters*, and in his *David Hume on Faith* he tried to clear himself of these charges by appealing to Hume’s theory of belief. To freely follow di Giovanni¹¹² in explicating this issue, it seems that Jacobi in his *Spinoza Letters* wanted to show that fully developed rationalistic philosophy culminates in Spinoza’s pantheistic and atheistic system. This is the great merit of Spinoza—not to give up on his ideals of philosophy no matter where they lead. However, rationalistic philosophy, in a way, operates in a sphere of its own and, according to Jacobi, this is also its greatest problem, i.e. there is no room left for concrete existence and true religiosity (cf. Climacus’s “crimping of existence” in the paragraph from *CUP* quoted above). According to di Giovanni, Jacobi’s “objection against the rationalism of the philosophers boiled down to precisely this—that it was the product of a reason that had lost touch with its intuitive sources, and was therefore given to mistaking its own productions for the real thing. On this score, Jacobi thought that he had found a strange ally in the most rationalist of all philosophers [i.e. Spinoza].”¹¹³ Unfortunately, Jacobi’s resort to experience and common sense was obscured by his religious musings towards the end of the *Spinoza Letters* and this led others to believe that by “intuition”—an alternative to rationalistic philosophies—he really meant religious “faith”. In *David Hume on Faith* Jacobi tries to defend his use of “faith” (“Glaube”) in the *Spinoza Letters* by declaring that

¹¹¹ Beiser 1987,44.

¹¹² di Giovanni 2010.

¹¹³ di Giovanni 2010.

according to Hume there are convictions or beliefs that are based on experience rather than rational arguments and his “faith” (Jacobi’s) is of this kind. So, Jacobi argues, he is as much an irrationalist as Hume, i.e. not at all. However, Hamann and others criticised Jacobi for not recognising the difference in the meanings of English “belief” and “faith” and German “Glaube”, but Jacobi, despite his religious rhetoric, claimed that he had used “Glaube” in the sense of “belief”. I find it surprising that Hamann was critical of Jacobi’s use of Hume’s “belief” considering his own liberal ideas on the importance of believing in many areas of life. It may be, though, that Hamann was critical of Jacobi because he thought that Jacobi had clearly used “Glaube” in the *Spinoza Letters* in the sense of “faith” and now he was trying to defend himself by saying that he had really used it in the sense of Hume’s “belief”.¹¹⁴ Without discussing it further, because of Hume’s reputation as a sceptic and Jacobi considering himself to be a realist, Jacobi now faced a problem of how to distance himself from Hume’s scepticism.¹¹⁵

There is a discussion of Lessing’s and Jacobi’s dialogue in *On the Doctrine of Spinoza* in Climacus’s *CUP*,¹¹⁶ where Climacus discusses Jacobi’s notion of leap at length and actually criticises it.¹¹⁷ However, from the explicit point of view of the study at hand, there are no direct

114 Professor di Giovanni made this point in an email correspondence with me on the issue. See also di Giovanni 1998, 46n9.

115 On this issue, see di Giovanni 2010 and for a more extensive survey of Jacobi’s thought, see di Giovanni’s “Introductory Study” in Jacobi 2009, 1-167. Cloeren 1988 is an interesting contribution to the history of ideas regarding German *Sprachkritik* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a precursor of certain features of modern analytic philosophy and especially the work of Wittgenstein. Cloeren 1988 includes many references to Hume as one of the sources of *Sprachkritik* and discusses Hamann and Jacobi as examples of its many practitioners (see Cloeren 1988, 21-26 and 62-66). Cloeren 1988, 125-137 also includes Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel’s speculative philosophy in this tradition. I will discuss this feature of Kierkegaard’s critique of “Speculation” in ch. 5.3.

116 See, e.g. *SKS* 7, 98-103 / *CUP* 1, 100-104.

117 See Rasmussen’s 2009, 37-40 analysis of Climacus’s critique.

references to Jacobi's *David Hume on Faith* by Kierkegaard. In *PF*, though, there is an interesting reference to Jacobi by Climacus: "[O]ne must remember that the cognitive inference is from cause to effect or rather from ground to consequent (Jacobi)."¹¹⁸ I will discuss this reference in more detail in chapter 4.2 but there is reason to believe that Climacus is here referring to Humean ideas as well. In his journal JJ there is a quotation from Jacobi about the superficiality of Descartes' cogito. Kierkegaard wrote it some two years before the publication of the *CUP* (1846). I will return to this issue in chapter 5.3.1.

I conclude that based on direct historical evidence it seems that Kierkegaard did not really write about Hume but he knew several important Humean ideas. Kierkegaard learnt about Hume through lectures and through the writings of Hamann and Jacobi Hume's ideas about the limits of human reason and the importance of belief and faith in the everyday life and religion had an important influence on Kierkegaard's thought. As such, Hamann's and Jacobi's interpretations of Hume are controversial and even seem, at least partly, self-serving. However, it is plausible to argue that they were at least partial ingredients when Kierkegaard, mainly in the writings of Johannes Climacus, developed his idea of the paradoxical nature of Christianity and his criticism of "Speculation" or philosophy that has lost its ground in concrete human existence. Without going into details, Kierkegaard may also have learnt about Hume through several books in his extensive library.¹¹⁹

In what follows, before analysing and comparing Hume's and Kierkegaard's views of belief in more detail, I shall explicate the relation between Hume's concept of a miracle and Kierkegaard's notion of the absolute paradox. Hume's discussion of miracles is a classic in the philosophy of

¹¹⁸ *SKS* 4, 283 / *PF*, 84.

¹¹⁹ Miles 2009, 30-32 lists apparently all the books with respective page numbers in H. P. Rohde, ed., *Auktionsprotokol over Søren Kierkegaards bogsamling*, including an English translation by Helen Fogh (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 1967) that discuss Hume.

religion and Kierkegaard is well-known for his idea of the absolute paradox or “the most improbable thing” as the object of faith. He also calls paradox “the wonder”.¹²⁰ Bearing in mind Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christianity à la Hume-Hamann-Jacobi and, in particular, his familiarity with the conclusion of Hume’s “Of Miracles”, I believe it is worthwhile to compare these two terms.¹²¹ Pojman quotes the conclusion of “Of Miracles” and even claims that “although this was written by Hume and not Kierkegaard, and although it was written ironically in order to undermine Christian belief rather than support it, the quotation might well serve as the traditional interpretation of Kierkegaard’s view of Christian belief as set forth in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.”¹²²

120 *SKS* 4, 256 / *PF*, 52.

121 According to Mossner 1965, 59, Kierkegaard was “highly influenced by this [Hume’s emphasis on faith in “Of Miracles”] and other passages in Hume through the intermediacy of Johann Hamann and formulated the doctrine of religion by faith alone in his exposition of Christian existentialism.” See also Petersen 2004, 58-62, who interprets *PF* as “in part an extensive reflection and development of Hamann’s argument” in Hamann’s *Brocken (Fragments, 1758)*.

122 Pojman 1977, 75.

3. Kierkegaard and the Idea of the Miraculous

In addition to my three¹²³ more or less overlapping papers on Kierkegaard's view of the miraculous, there seems to be only one more by Jolita Pons.¹²⁴ Kierkegaard is not known for having written explicitly about the philosophical problem of miracles but, as Pons observes, Kierkegaard does discuss miracles "quite extensively".¹²⁵ On the other hand, Hume's "Of Miracles" (*EHU* 10) is still the obvious classic of the topic. As Gaskin has recently observed:

[t]wo-and-one-half centuries after its publication, "Of Miracles," Section 10 in the first *Enquiry*, is still spawning book-length responses together with an unabated stream of discussion articles. Indeed, "Of Miracles" is manifestly one of those rare philosophical pieces whose very inconsistencies and ambiguities are more fruitful than the cautious balance of a thousand lesser works.¹²⁶

Despite being a chapter of *EHU*, "Of Miracles" dates from Hume's work on *T* during the late 1730s and was, as Beauchamp points out, "first prepared as an essay and is among Hume's earliest writings in philosophy".¹²⁷ According to Hume,

123 Kivelä 1998, 2002 and 2006 (the chapter at hand is partly an updated version of these).

124 Pons 2010.

125 Pons 2010, 19. In addition to what I discuss more closely in this chapter, Kierkegaard discusses miracles several times in his published works and in his journals and notebooks. See Pons's article for these references.

126 Gaskin 2009, 498.

127 *EHU*, xii. For the early reception of "Of Miracles", see Beauchamp in *EHU*, lxxxiii-xciii, cii-civ. See also Russell 2008 for a monograph length, "irreligious" interpretation of *T*.

A miracle may be accurately defined, *a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.¹²⁸

However, Hume also begs

the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony; though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history.¹²⁹

Not surprisingly, defining a miracle as a violation or a transgression of a law of nature, as Hume does, is not without its problems. For example, to refer to a recent encyclopedia entry on miracles,¹³⁰ the fact that the concept of a miracle predates any modern concept of a natural law by centuries, although this does not preclude Hume's discussion, raises the question of why Hume's definition of a miracle should be favoured over others'. It is also difficult to say which law of nature does an alleged miracle violate, e.g. it is not a law of nature that dead men stay dead in the regular

128 *EHU* 10.12n23; *SBN* 115n1. Hume points out in the same footnote that a miracle does not have to seem contrary to the laws of nature but it may still be such a violation. For example, there is nothing miraculous if it should suddenly start to rain heavily, but if this were caused by a command of someone the sudden onset of rain would indeed be considered a miracle.

129 *EHU* 10.36; *SBN*, 127.

130 McGrew 2011. See also Twelftree, ed., 2011 for a collection of essays on miracles.

scientific sense of the term.¹³¹ Further, given Hume’s alleged “regularity” theory of natural laws and causation, it becomes difficult to see what would constitute a violation of a law of nature that is only a statement of natural regularity.¹³² Hume is often thought to hold the view that causation is just a regular succession or constant conjunction of events, i.e. that there are no causal powers or natural necessities in natural bodies.¹³³ Kripke thinks that, if Hume is right about causation, then “even if God were to look at [two causally related] events, he would discern nothing relating them other than that one succeeds the other”.¹³⁴ What “really” was Hume’s view of causation is a classic and ongoing problem of interpretation, and Stroud and G. Strawson are, among others, “participants” in the so-called “New Hume Debate”.

G. Strawson is one of the “New Humeans”. They consider that Hume was a realist of some sort about causal powers and external objects or, as Richman puts it that “Hume’s analysis of our everyday beliefs has as one of its conclusions that the beliefs in the existence of external, independent objects and causes objectively so-called meet at least minimal epistemic standards for assent.”¹³⁵ On the other side of the debate are those who read Hume as a strict epistemic sceptic on these matters. Stroud, for example, as a representative of the standard interpretation, finds Hume’s theory of ideas he inherited from Locke and Berkeley very problematic.¹³⁶ This theory renders

131 It seems that C. D. Broad does not problematise this in his classic article “Hume’s Theory of the Credibility of Miracles” (1916-1917). See Broad 1916-1917, 89-90.

132 See Broad 1916-1917, 91-94 for an early discussion of this issue.

133 See, e.g. G. Strawson 2007, 31 for a brief description of the “standard” view of Humean causation. (G. Strawson 2007 is a partial recast of his *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume* (1989)). Hume’s famous and scholarly inspirational definitions of cause and causation are found in *EHU* 29; *SBN* 76-77 and *T* 1.3.14.31, 1.3.14.35; *SBN* 170, 172.

134 Kripke 1982, 67.

135 Richman 2007, 1.

136 A theory which Hume, according to Stroud 2007, 28, “imbibed without question just as he unhesitatingly took in the air he breathed”. (Stroud 2007 originally appeared in 1993.)

objects into qualities like colours and shapes and, Stroud objects, “really leaves no room for the intelligible predication of those or any other perceived qualities to an enduring object, despite those philosophers’ [Locke’s, Berkeley’s and Hume’s] understandable tendency to continue to speak as if it did.”¹³⁷ It further appears, based on Humean theories, that we simultaneously think that there are causal connections between things and that there really are no such things. Stroud seems to mean that we in fact act like there are real causal connections between real independent objects in the world despite the “results” of the theory of ideas. The Humean “projectivist” idea (a view that the New Humeans think Hume does not hold)¹³⁸, as Stroud sees it, that some kind of creative process somehow takes something from our impressions and makes us “spread” it on to objects we simply believe to populate the world is only a “fairy story” if it does not account for how all of this happens.¹³⁹ On the other hand, in my judgement, it can be argued that one of the overall points of Hume’s thought on epistemology and metaphysics is to suggest that abstract thought in fact easily leads to such difficulties as Stroud describes. Playing that famous game of backgammon is unproblematic (see *T* 1.4.7.9, *SBN* 269) but practising philosophy may have surprising results.

G. Strawson argues that the problem of the standard view is that it confuses epistemology and ontology, i.e. it is “catastrophic” to move from the epistemological claim that (E) all we can ever know of causation is regular succession to the ontological claim that (O) all that causation is, in the objects, is regular succession. G. Strawson thinks that the “former is arguably true” and “the latter is fantastically implausible” or even “‘absurd,’ as Hume would have put it”.¹⁴⁰ In my view, G. Strawson makes an elegant point when he appeals to Hume’s scepticism regarding knowledge claims about the nature of reality. From the Humean sceptical point of view, both positive claims

137 Stroud 2007, 28.

138 Richman 2007, 12.

139 Stroud 2007, 29.

140 G. Strawson 2007, 33.

about what does exist (mental occurrences or “perceptions” excluded) and positive claims about what definitely (or knowably) does not exist are equally unwarranted. So, “this point about Hume’s scepticism is enough to refute any attribution of (O) to him”.¹⁴¹ In reference to Kripke on God on causation, it seems that we just do not know what God sees in causal relations. G. Strawson’s overall view is that Hume nowhere commits himself to the view that regularity is all there is to causation in the world, but Hume does think that we are ignorant of its nature.¹⁴²

A violation of a law of nature that states only an observed regularity would only mean that the law in question is, in fact, not a law. Hume does not in fact discuss laws of nature directly. According to Mumford’s overview, Hume’s “argument”¹⁴³ concerns necessary connections in nature and his conclusion is that there are none or, at the very least, that we have no good reason to believe in them. It is safe to conclude that if there really are no necessary connections, then there are no laws in nature.”¹⁴⁴ Probably partly because of the form of an essay and partly because of its early date among Hume’s writings “Of Miracles” may appear disconnected from Hume’s basic ideas or at least from how they are formulated in *T* and *EHU*. For example, there is no appeal to impressions and ideas that resemble those impressions nor does Hume directly bring forth his scepticism in his discussion of miracles. However, Fogelin argues in his *A Defence of Hume on Miracles* that, in fact, “Hume’s attitude toward miracles is of a piece with some of his most fundamental philosophical commitments”.¹⁴⁵ Without going into details, Fogelin’s short study is a defence of Hume against

141 G. Strawson 2007, 34.

142 G. Strawson 2007, 48. Millican 2007 is a long article against the New Hume interpretation of causation, where Millican tries to move beyond the stalemate of the debate by “systematic analysis and tracking of Hume’s reasoning as it develops in the texts” (212).

143 This refers to Hume’s overall view, not his argument in “Of Miracles”.

144 Mumford 2004, 15-16 (see also the first part of Mumford’s book for an account of, as Mumford calls it, “Humean lawlessness”).

145 Fogelin 2003, 55.

recent “bashes” against his discussion of miracles.¹⁴⁶ Before returning to Hume’s discussion of miracles, I shall examine what Kierkegaard explicitly wrote about miracles.

3.1 Kierkegaard on miracles

As Kierkegaard shows very little explicit interest in natural laws or in the order of nature in general, it is not surprising that he also shows very little interest in miracles explicitly defined as violations of natural laws.¹⁴⁷ Reading commentators, one observes that miracles are almost exclusively mentioned in connection with Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus and, respectively, their *CUP*, *PF* and *PC*.¹⁴⁸ But Kierkegaard makes philosophically relevant

146 Fogelin examines, as representative examples, Johnson 1999 and Earman 2000.

147 However, see Garff 2005, 50-56 for the young Kierkegaard’s “profound admiration for the natural sciences” and his eventual decision not to make them his principal field of study. For reservations regarding natural sciences by the mature Kierkegaard, see *SKS* 20, 118; NB:73 / *JP* 3, 2809 from the year 1846. Kierkegaard insists that “scientificity becomes especially dangerous and corruptive when it wants to enter into the realm of the spirit”. In *SKS* 20, 126; NB:75 / *JP* 3, 2810 from the same year Kierkegaard declares:

To me there is something repulsive when a natural scientist, after having pointed to some ingenious design in nature, sententiously declares that this reminds us of the verse that God has counted every hair of our heads. O, the fool and his science, he has never known what faith is! Faith believes it without all his science, and it would only become disgusted with itself in reading all his volumes if these, please note, were supposed to lead to faith, strengthen faith, etc.

148 See, for example, Evans 1983, 236, 258-259, 268; Evans 1992, 160-162, 165-166, 195n39 and Evans 1994, 63, 68-70, 76, 82-83; Ferreira 1990, 63-66; Law 1993, 187-188, 195; Pojman 1983, 135-136, 140 and Pojman 1986, 71-73.

remarks about miracles in his signed writings and in his unpublished writings, too. For example, there is a whole topical section on miracles in *JP*.

In the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard writes about John the Baptist, whose origin Kierkegaard describes

as marvelous [vidunderlig] as the origin of the one whose coming he proclaimed, but the difference here again was the same as the difference between the marvel [Vidunderlige] that an aged woman becomes pregnant, which is contrary to the order of nature [mod Naturens Orden], and that a pure virgin bears a child by the power of God, which is above the order of nature [over Naturens Orden].¹⁴⁹

In his journal NB 17 Kierkegaard also refers to this same biblical event, and calls it one of “the highest collisions, where the expected is altogether opposed to the order of nature [mod Naturens Orden] (for example, that Sara gets a child although far beyond the natural age to bear children).”¹⁵⁰

Interestingly, right before this entry (as noted in the previous chapter), there is an allusion to Hamann’s approving response to Hume’s view on Christianity.¹⁵¹ According to Kierkegaard, some event being contrary to the order of nature does not mean that it is an overriding of the order of nature (or, perhaps, a transgression of a law of nature), because there is no law or order of nature forbidding an aged woman becoming pregnant, within certain biological preconditions, of course. Kierkegaard seems to mean that an event is “contrary (or opposed) to the order of nature” when it is something very rare and surprising but still belongs to the natural realm of things and “above the

149 *SKS* 5, 271 / *EUD*, 277. Regarding the use of “marvel” instead of “miracle” by the Hongs, Danish “vidunder” can also be translated as “miracle”.

150 *SKS* 23, 177-178; NB17:21 / *JP* 3, 3130.

151 *SKS* 23, 177; NB17:20.

order of nature” when it clearly violates some uniformly established regularity of nature. In my view, Kierkegaard’s “above the order of nature” refers to the “truly miraculous” as something very exceptional, which violates or transgresses the order of nature—that is, like a “pure virgin” bearing a child by the “power of God”. “Contrary to the order of nature” refers to the “merely marvellous” in the sense of something very rare and surprising, but not overriding what is possible in the natural realm of things—a woman can sometimes bear children although she is “far beyond the natural age” to do so. The paragraph from *EUD* cited above is the only one in Kierkegaard’s published writings, as well as, to my knowledge, in his unpublished writings, where he explicitly discusses miracles in relation to the natural order. Kierkegaard uses the phrase “contrary (or opposed) to the order of nature” [“mod Naturens Orden”] once (as cited above) in his published writings and, to my knowledge, once (as cited above) in his unpublished writings. Kierkegaard uses “above the order of nature” [“over Naturens Orden”] only in the paragraph in *EUD* cited above and “the order of nature” (or “the natural order”) only twice in addition to the paragraphs cited above, in the simple sense of “this is just how things are in this world we live in”.¹⁵²

Also in *EUD* Kierkegaard writes how

[y]outh understands it immediately—how marvelous [vidunderligt]—but is not the fact it is marvelous again the explanation! There was a thinker, much admired in memory, who taught that miracle [Underet] was a characteristic of the Jewish people, that in a characteristic way this people leaped over the intervening causes [mellemliggende Aarsager] to reach God.¹⁵³

152 *SKS* 6, 252 / *SLW*, 271 and *SKS* 12, 168 / *PC*, 165. For Kierkegaard’s other (in passing) references to an ordered reality, see, e.g. Anti-Climacus’s idea in *SUD* according to which God wants to maintain order in existence, because God “is not a God of confusion” (*SKS* 11, 229 / *SUD*, 117). See also *SKS* 5, 391 / *TTL*, 9 and *SKS* 9, 212 / *WL*, 209.

153 *SKS* 5, 242 / *EUD*, 243.

The thinker Kierkegaard is referring to is Spinoza. In his journal *JJ* Kierkegaard discusses the same issue:

It is strange that, against miracles, revelation, etc., Spinoza constantly uses the objection that it was a peculiarity of the Jews to refer something immediately back to God and jump over the intermediate causes [Mellem-Aarsagerne], just as if it were merely a peculiarity of the Jews and not of all religiousness, so that Spinoza himself would have done so if he, too, had had religiousness, and as if the difficulty did not lie just here: whether, how far, in what way—in short, inquiries which would give the keenest thinking plenty to do.¹⁵⁴

Kierkegaard thus suggests that there is a connection between seeing something as a miracle and “leaping over the intervening causes to reach God”.¹⁵⁵ Further, this trait is something that is characteristic, according to Kierkegaard, of all religiousness. Kierkegaard seems to suggest that religious people have a kind of inclination to see natural events as miracles or God’s acts, and that they do not bother with the (intermediate) natural causes of these events—that is, they leap over the intervening causes to reach God and, in a way, see God everywhere. Hence, a “miracle” under discussion in the paragraph above from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* does not (based on the quoted *Journals and Papers* entry, too) necessarily override the order of nature and, consequently, is not necessarily a “truly miraculous” event. This is supported textually by Kierkegaard’s use of

154 *SKS* 18, 186; *JJ*:192 / *KJN* 2, 186.

155 Regarding the expression “intermediate cause”, see also *SKS* 5, 49-50 / *EUD*, 41; *SKS* 4, 275 / *PF*, 75 and *SKS* 7, 493 / *CUP* 1, 543.

“Under” instead of “Mirakel”.¹⁵⁶ It is more like an expression of its user’s religious attitude and faith in a certain interpretation of a certain event than a description of the event itself.

Regarding Kierkegaard’s explicit use of “laws of nature”, in *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard writes how Ascension “disrupts or contravenes natural laws” and how it “goes against all the laws of nature”,¹⁵⁷ but he does not call Ascension a miracle and, in fact, does not explicitly discuss natural laws in relation to miracles at all. I am aware of about twenty occasions¹⁵⁸ on which Kierkegaard uses the word “Naturlov” (and its derivatives) in his published writings, journals and notebooks. I will not list them all here—they are easy to find on sk.dk—but I shall comment on some of them because of their more or less explicit philosophical nature. For example, in his Notebook 13 (labelled “Philosophica”), Kierkegaard asks

What do I learn from experience?

Nothing; or mere numerical knowledge. As soon as I derive a law from experience, I put more into it than there is in experience. Unadorned experiential data would be tabular, like meteorological observations, which are both tabulations of individual events as well as calculations of the average; this average, though, proves nothing; it’s only a number I derive from the past. Period.¹⁵⁹

156 According to Pons’s 2010, 17n1 impression, though, “Kierkegaard uses *under* and *mirakel* synonymously”.

157 *SKS* 13, 91-92 / *For Self-Examination*, 69-70. (In my paper on Kierkegaard on miracles (2002) this quotation is incorrect. The name of Kierkegaard’s work and the footnote referring to it are both wrong, see p. 12 and the footnote 10 on pp. 14-15.)

158 Based on sk.dk. As observed in the previous chapter, this online edition of *SKS* excludes volumes 15, 16, and 28 at the time of this writing.

159 *SKS* 19, 411; Notebook 13:46 / *KJN* 3, 409.

This is from the second part of Notebook 13 (labelled “Problemata”), where Kierkegaard formulates philosophical questions based on his notes on different philosophers from the “Philosophica” part of Notebook 13. A number of these questions and issues are especially relevant for *PF*.¹⁶⁰ One may be tempted to see a certain Humean tone in the entry just quoted. We can only list “unadorned” data but, roughly speaking, all conclusions from this data add something extra to it. It is very Humean to think that the apparently binding connections between things and events in the world are “just” products of uniform or regular experience and are not really there in the world or that we at least do not know if they are there. However, there is no evidence in the “Philosophica” part of the notebook of any reading of Hume or about Hume by Kierkegaard.¹⁶¹ However, given Kierkegaard’s partial knowledge of Hume’s thought, it is possible that the quoted journal entry is an example of a direct Humean influence on Kierkegaard’s thought. There are notes on Greek sceptics, too, in Notebook 13 so it is possible that Kierkegaard’s acquaintance with their thought was another inspiration for the “sceptical” entry at hand.¹⁶²

Also in the “Interlude” of *PF* there is an interesting reference to intervening causes and natural law. According to Johannes Climacus,

[t]he change of coming into existence is actuality; the transition takes place in freedom. No coming into existence is necessary—not before it came into existence, for then it cannot come into existence, and not after it has come into existence, for then it has not come into existence. All coming into existence occurs in freedom, not by way of necessity. Nothing coming into existence comes into

¹⁶⁰ See *KJN* 3, 732.

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard used W. G. Tennemann’s *Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1798-1819) for his notes on different philosophers. It also includes a chapter on Hume (vol. 11, 417-68; this information is from Miles 2009, 31).

¹⁶² See *SKS* 19, 396-399; Notebook 13:28-35 / *KJN* 3, 393-397.

existence by way of a ground, but everything by way of a cause. Every cause ends in a freely acting cause. The intervening causes are misleading in that the coming into existence appears to be necessary; the truth about them is that they, as having themselves come into existence, *definitively* point back to a freely acting cause. As soon as coming into existence is definitively reflected upon, even an inference from natural law is not evidence of the necessity of any coming into existence. So also with manifestations of freedom, as soon as one refuses to be deceived by its manifestations but reflects on its coming into existence.¹⁶³

These famous paragraphs from Climacus's *PF* could be discussed from many different points of view. From the perspective of the work at hand, we may note that Climacus suggests that the apparent necessity or inevitability of things going on in the world—coming into existence—is indeed only that—apparent. A chain of events may mislead an observer into thinking that what took place had no alternative especially if there had been many instances of like events before. Climacus also points out that even the strong bond of natural laws is not that strong. One should not be misled by the uniformity of natural laws—a point made in the aforementioned notebook entry, too. Again, one may be tempted to think that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hume's thought is at least partly behind Climacus's musings. His talk of causes instead of grounds and the only apparent necessity of coming into existence and inferences from natural laws suggest a Humean influence on Climacus. However, Climacus's target seems to be Hegel's philosophy¹⁶⁴ and his sources the philosophies of Aristotle and Leibniz.¹⁶⁵ Still, I suggest that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hume's thought may be one source for the ideas in the paragraphs quoted from *PF*, and whether this is true or not, there are,

163 *SKS* 4, 275 / *PF*, 75.

164 See the Hongs in *PF*, 299n17.

165 See especially the "Problemata" of Notebook 13.

in my judgement, Humean ideas behind Climacus's important deliberations in the "Interlude" of *PF*.¹⁶⁶

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes how "faith always relates itself to what is not seen" and how a person "by faith *believes the unseen into* ['til' is in boldface in the original] what is seen" and a little later, regarding love's forgiveness, "the miracle of faith happens (and every miracle [Mirakel] is then a miracle of faith—no wonder, therefore, that along with faith miracles [Miraklerne] have also been abolished!)." ¹⁶⁷ In *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* Kierkegaard writes, in an arguably fideistic tone, how "indeed, no gaze is as sharp-sighted as that of faith, and yet faith, humanly speaking, is blind; reason, understanding, is, humanly speaking, sighted, but faith is against the understanding."¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard seems to mean that faith is blind in the sense that it goes beyond the immediate and in this sense does not see it. Understanding, on the other hand, sees only the immediate and in this sense is sighted. In *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* Kierkegaard refers to miraculous healings by Christ: "In order to be healed, the person must believe—now he believes and is healed. Now he is healed—and now that he is saved, his faith is twice as strong. It is not this way: he believed and then the miracle happened and

166 See Bejerholm's short "Cause and Effect" (1980), where Bejerholm argues (referring to *PF*) that "[w]ithout exactly mentioning Hume's criticism of the concepts of cause and effect, SK [S. Kierkegaard] doubts the possibility of making deductions from effect to cause. It is impossible to experience anything directly as an 'effect'. If a phenomenon is understood as an 'effect' produced, in the last resort, by the first, 'absolute' cause, viz. God, this is an act of faith" (270). Although Bejerholm may be right in identifying Climacus's "absolutely freely acting cause" as God, to my knowledge Kierkegaard nowhere explicitly says this. On Kierkegaard's knowledge of Leibniz's thought behind his ideas of the difference between human and divine cognition and agency in the "Interlude" of *PF*, see Løkke and Waaler 2009, 66-69.

167 *SKS* 9, 292-293 / *WL*, 294-295.

168 *SKS* 11, 268 / *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 132.

then it was all over.”¹⁶⁹ In my view, Kierkegaard means that believing and miraculous healing come together and that faith is not something that is just picked up when it is needed and then dropped off after it has shown its usefulness: “No, the fulfillment doubles his faith; after the fulfillment, his faith is twice as strong as it was before he was saved.”¹⁷⁰ Further, the miraculous in a way emerges as a part of the “state of faith”, which is provided by God. So, there is evidence in Kierkegaard’s signed writings, too, of faith trying to grasp what is not immediate in our experience and that the idea of a miracle is closely linked to the idea of faith.¹⁷¹

One could argue, Kierkegaard suggests in journal NB11, that because a miracle is unreasonable, it cannot be a miracle—but, Kierkegaard asks “would it be a miracle if it were reasonable?”¹⁷² On the other hand, one could conclude that because one has finally been able to establish that a miracle is understandable, it is indeed a miracle—but then, Kierkegaard points out, “it is indeed no miracle”¹⁷³. Kierkegaard then asks intellectual analysers of a miracle to “let miracle be what it is: an object of faith.”¹⁷⁴ This is an interesting point because, to turn to the writings of Climacus, the contradictory and paradoxical unity of the god and a human being in the teacher is, according to Climacus in PF, not a, but *the* object of faith [Troens Gjenstand].¹⁷⁵ So, bearing in mind Kierkegaard’s at least partial familiarity with Hume’s “Of Miracles” and Hamann’s interpretation of it, one could argue for the miraculousness of the paradox and, indeed, Climacus

169 SKS 12, 292 / *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 176.

170 SKS 12, 292 / *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, 176.

171 Pons 2010, 19-23 seems to agree with me in my aforementioned articles on this issue.

172 SKS 22, 44; NB11:75 / *JP* 3, 2720.

173 SKS 22, 44; NB11:75 / *JP* 3, 2720.

174 SKS 22, 44; NB11:75 / *JP* 3, 2720. Anti-Climacus makes the same statement in SKS 12,131 / *PC*, 126.

175 SKS 4, 264 / *PF*, 62. However, in *FT* Johannes de Silentio calls also “the eternal being [det evige Vesen]” or God “the object of faith [Troens Gjenstand]” (SKS 4, 145 / *FT*, 51). Climacus also ironically asks in *PF* that “is that not what philosophers are for—to make supernatural [overnaturlige] things ordinary and trivial?” (SKS 4, 256 / *PF*, 53).

seems to suggest something like this in the *PF* when he writes that “the paradox is the most improbable [det Usandsynligste]” and “the paradox is the wonder [Underet]”.¹⁷⁶ Right after these descriptions he recognises Hamann, among others, as one of his sources of inspiration behind his formulations describing the paradox.¹⁷⁷ According to Kierkegaard in *PF*, a human thinker is passionately interested in the boundaries of his or her thinking faculty and is committed to, in Kierkegaard’s own words, “the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think”.¹⁷⁸ That “unknown”, [Ubekjendte] which thought tries to think, but cannot, is “*the god* [Guden]”.¹⁷⁹ According to Howard V. Hong, in an earlier standard edition of *PF*, this rather peculiar expression means Eternal in time or God in history—the Incarnation, i.e. the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard also describes the unknown as “the absolutely different [det absolut Forskjellige]”.¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard seems to think that a human thinker is so fundamentally locked in his or her categories of thought that even when he or she is trying to grasp something totally different from anything human there is no way of avoiding those basic categories.¹⁸² I shall return shortly to the issue of the miraculous or wondrous paradox.

Kierkegaard discusses or rather mentions miracles apparently in the sense Hume defined them in *CUP* in a context where he comments on Lessing.¹⁸³ Kierkegaard writes how Lessing “does

176 *SKS* 4, 256 / *PF*, 52.

177 See *SKS* 4, 257 / *PF*, 53-4.

178 *SKS* 4, 243 / *PF*, 37.

179 *SKS* 4, 245 / *PF*, 39.

180 *Philosophical Fragments* (orig. transl. and Introduction by David Swenson, new Introduction and Commentary by Niels Thulstrup, revised transl. and transl. of the Commentary by Howard V. Hong; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), x.

181 *SKS* 4, 249 / *PF*, 44. Kierkegaard’s terminology refers to Hegel’s three concepts of “different” (see *SKS* 4K, 246).

182 See *SKS* 4, 249-250 / *PF*, 44-45. See also Grøn 2004 for the “transcendence of thought” in *PF*.

183 *SKS* 7, 94-96 / *CUP*, 95-98.

not deny (for he is quick to make concessions so that the categories can become clear) that what is said in the Scriptures about miracles and prophecies is as reliable as other historical reports, in fact, is as reliable as historical reports in general can be”¹⁸⁴—that is, not reliable, since, according to Climacus, all historical knowledge is always doubtful and only an approximation.¹⁸⁵ Climacus suggest that from some event being historical it logically follows that this event is contingent and that all reports depicting that event are doubtful. Climacus points out now that the alleged miracle by Christ is a historical and contingent event and, consequently, all reports recording it are inevitably doubtful and there is nothing one can do to change the situation. As Evans argues, the idea that historical knowledge is approximative seems to imply that there must be something to be approximated, i.e. some independent object of knowledge and, further, that Kierkegaard is then “committed to a kind of metaphysical realism”.¹⁸⁶ This is an interesting point and has not been much discussed by commentators. In fact Evans’s article seems to be the only study explicitly dedicated to the question of realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard’s thought. In my view, Climacus’s point in *CUP* that an existential system is only possible for God may also be interpreted to imply a kind of realism for Kierkegaard. Climacus seems to suggest that because existence (or life) can be a system for God there is in fact an independent reality which allows this divine approach and even that there really is God, realistically understood.¹⁸⁷ However, this may be “too philosophical” an interpretation because Climacus may also be speaking in metaphors and be emphasising the limits of human reasoning with the idea of an omniscient God.

184 *SKS* 7, 94 / *CUP*, 96. Climacus is here referring to Lessing’s treatise “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power” (see Lessing 1967, 51-6). However, Climacus is critical towards Lessing’s apparent position according to which there is an important difference between reading about miracles in later reports and being contemporary with them (see *SKS* 7, 94-97 / *CUP*, 95-9).

185 *SKS* 7, 30 / *CUP*, 23.

186 Evans 1998, 166.

187 See *SKS* 7, 114 / *CUP*, 118 and ch. 5.3.1 for Climacus on “systems”.

What if I had lived during the time of the god as the teacher and had had the opportunity of witnessing personally his life and teaching? Would not this contemporaneity have made a difference? This is one of the issues of *PF* where Climacus's well-known "Thought-Project" [Tanke-Projekt] is to find an alternative to the Socratic-Platonic understanding of knowledge (or truth [Sandhed]) as recollection. Climacus argues that to be a real alternative the alleged alternative must involve the idea that not only truth but also the condition for understanding it must come from outside the realm of human abilities. Climacus does not say it explicitly in *PF* but the reader soon understands that Climacus's alternative is Christianity.¹⁸⁸ This is important because it is perhaps the central theme in Kierkegaard's whole authorship that Christianity should not be understood in an idealistic (Hegelian) fashion. To return to the question above, Climacus's answer is a clear "no", for contemporaneity with Christ would make no difference compared to a person who is reading about Christ's miracles in the Bible. In my view, Climacus's main point in "The Situation of the Contemporary Follower" in *PF* is the non-immediate divinity of "the god". According to Climacus, the servant form of the god is not like a disguise, which can be taken off at will. The god really is a servant and a human being, but at the same time he is a godhead. Climacus even writes how the god "has himself become captive, so to speak, in his resolution and is now obliged to continue (to go on talking loosely) whether he wants to or not. He cannot betray his identity."¹⁸⁹ To further "go on talking loosely", it is not possible for the learner to take a peek behind the god's human form and get a glimpse of his "true" divinity. That is, it is not humanly possible; only the god himself can grant the learner this occasion. Even an attempt to increase the amount of historical information about the god by the learner brings neither the god's divinity nor the learner's eternal happiness any closer to the learner, or, as Climacus puts it, "it is easy for the contemporary learner to become a

188 In *CUP* Climacus is explicit on what he is talking about, i.e. Christianity.

189 *SKS* 4, 258 / *PF*, 55.

historical eyewitness, but the trouble is that knowing a historical fact—indeed, knowing all the historical facts with the trustworthiness of an eyewitness—by no means makes the eyewitness a follower, which is understandable, because such knowledge means nothing more to him than the historical.”¹⁹⁰ Consequently, to return explicitly to miracles, no amount of trustworthy eyewitness information attesting the authenticity of the alleged miracle, say, the raising of Lazarus from death, can make the eternally significant occasion more “available” to the eyewitness learner than to a learner who learns about the miracle two thousand years later in the Bible.¹⁹¹ So, according to Climacus, a miracle is not a “back-door” from the historical to the eternal in the sense that the more or less established historical authenticity of a miracle would make the transition from the historical to the eternal more obvious or more direct than in a case of no historical evidence supporting the authenticity of an alleged miracle.¹⁹²

Anti-Climacus in *PC* discusses, among other things, the situation when a person encounters a human being who claims to be God and who performs alleged miracles. What should that person think of such a “God”? More particularly, if that person thinks that that enigmatic human being might really be God, could then a well-established miracle finally convince him and demonstrate that he really is dealing with God? Anti-Climacus’s answer is a clear negative: “The miracle can demonstrate nothing, for if you do not believe him [Christ] to be who he says he is, then you deny

190 *SKS* 4, 261-262 / *PF*, 59.

191 See also *The Book on Adler* (*Kierkegaard’s Writings*, vol. 24), 47 (*Pap.* VII 2 B 235, 89), where Petrus Minor points out that if “one can understand that those men eighteen hundred years ago believed that it was a miracle, then one can just as well say straight out that one does not believe it oneself.” Petrus’s point is that if a person has “real” faith, he can encounter Christ in his own everyday life without being offended by Christ’s paradoxical nature. This person also understands that the demand to “eyeball” an alleged miracle in order to believe its authenticity is a misunderstanding of faith. See also ch. 4.2 for a discussion of this issue.

192 This discussion continues in ch. 4.2.

the miracle.”¹⁹³ Anti-Climacus’s point is, as I see it, that if a person first wants to form a well-founded belief in the authenticity of a certain miracle by Christ and then, based on this belief, is ready to conclude and believe that Christ really is who he says he is, this means that the person in question has completely misunderstood what miracles can do: “The miracle can make aware—now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed.”¹⁹⁴ Anti-Climacus means that if you see a miracle this means that you also see Christ, but if a person doubts Christ’s authenticity then he or she cannot also believe that Christ’s alleged miracles really happened. Anti-Climacus thinks that miracles can make a person aware that he is now possibly in the presence of God, but there cannot be anything like a direct route from miracles to faith, because miracles are never immediately miracles. From something being inexplicable (like an alleged miracle), in Anti-Climacus’s words, “it still does not follow that it is a miracle”.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Anti-Climacus suggests, Christ’s or “God-man’s” miracles are His indirect communication.¹⁹⁶ It is then up to each person to decide what they amount to.¹⁹⁷ In my view, Anti-Climacus means that faith, as he understands it, does not come in small “packages”—either you believe the whole thing or you do not believe anything at all. Faith in the truth that Christ really is who he says he is—faith in the paradox—is not a conclusion of an argument based on the established authenticity of Christ’s miraculous acts.

193 *SKS* 12, 105-106 / *PC*, 97.

194 *SKS* 12, 106 / *PC*, 97. See also *SKS* 12, 54-55 / *PC*, 41-2.

195 *SKS* 12, 106 / *PC*, 97.

196 *SKS* 12, 130-132 / *PC*, 126-127. See also Pons 2010, 25-29 for miracles as indirect communication.

197 Interestingly, Kierkegaard suggests in a journal entry (as quoted by the Hongs in *PC*, 358) that, in *PC*, he wanted to take issue with “naturalism”. In my view, Kierkegaard means that he wants to object to the idea that Christianity is direct communication, i.e. that its central message can be appropriated as one teaching among others.

To conclude then, regarding Kierkegaard's idea of the miraculous, Kierkegaard, in his signed writings, uses the difference between an event "contrary to the order of nature" and an event "above the order of nature" to suggest that he endorses a distinction between the "merely marvellous" and the "truly miraculous" in the following sense: the "truly miraculous" refers to an event which violates the established order of nature, and the "merely marvellous" refers to an event which is very unusual and surprising, but does not violate the established order of nature. There is evidence in Kierkegaard's signed writings and in his pseudonymous writings that he recognises a strong order of nature and a strong bond of natural laws. On the other hand, Kierkegaard thinks that a person should not let the order of intervening causes alienate him from God, who is the source and preserver of all order. Further, based on textual evidence, the idea of a miracle expressed explicitly in terms of violation of the laws or order of nature à la Hume is not important to Kierkegaard.¹⁹⁸

According to Kierkegaard the miraculous element is never immediately observable in an alleged miracle. Historical contemporaneity makes no difference: a miracle is no more immediate to an eyewitness than it is to someone who reads about the alleged miracle two thousand years later in the Bible. Historical reports are always doubtful, and so are personal experiences, in the sense that there is an unavoidable logical gap between an immediate experience and the leap of belief or faith to "what really happened". I claim that the idea of the unavoidable doubtfulness of all historical knowledge and the non-immediate meaning of personal experience are the most important philosophical reasons for Kierkegaard's tangential interest in the concept of miracle as a

198 Kierkegaard's use of "Naturlovene" in *SKS* 13, 91-92 / *For Self-Examination*, 69-70 (as quoted above) is actually listed as an example of "Natur-lov" in *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1919-1954). Pons 2010, 18-19 quotes my 2002 article and agrees with me that Kierkegaard was not interested in the traditional philosophical problem of the relation of miracles to the natural laws and continues in her somewhat theologically oriented paper how for Kierkegaard "the miracles in the New Testament are neither outside nor against natural laws but rather above them. Indeed, for Kierkegaard miracles represent or reflect an utterly new order of things."

philosophical problem.¹⁹⁹ Reports telling about true miracles are just a subsection under the section which includes all historical—that is, doubtful—reports. For Kierkegaard, what we experience happening now and what we are told happened before is never self-evident and is embedded in the contingent and concrete temporal reality and, consequently, cannot function as departure point for Kierkegaardian eternal ambitions. Even personal and “convincing” miraculous experience would make no difference, because the miraculous element observed in a subjective experience is never immediate or self-evident, but “emerges” only in the happy passion of faith, which, consequently, is in the focus of interest when miracles are concerned.

The historical study of miracles leads to doubtful historical results, but faith deals with the eternal, and there is no immediate or direct way from the former to the latter, both Anti-Climacus and Climacus say. As noted above, Hume admits explicitly the possibility of “miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature” that can be established by human testimony. However, Hume also maintains that a miracle “can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion”.²⁰⁰ Why is this?

3.2 Is the absolute paradox a miracle?

According to Hume our most obvious factual beliefs concerning our immediate environment are almost inevitable in nature. They are not the results of rational arguments but, as observed in the

199 As Kosch 2010, 185n8 points out, “Hume’s discussion is directed at belief in miracles based on testimony. But the discussion in *Fragments* makes it clear that Kierkegaard thinks a similar case can be made for direct experience of wonders.”

200 *EHU* 10.36; *SBN* 127.

first chapter, the results of constant experience and, in a way, have been forced on us by our own human nature.²⁰¹ This means that our experience of the common course of nature is so compelling that when we experience one thing (say, see a fire in a fireplace) we are inevitably led (or forced) by our earlier experience to expect that thing (flames will burn if I get too close to them) which usually accompanies the first experience. All beliefs concerning matters of fact are derived from these customary conjunctions. This idea, as Hume puts it, “that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have” is important to Hume, for it is “[t]he maxim, by which we most commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings.”²⁰²

Armstrong argues, as I see interpret him, that when Hume writes “that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion,” Hume means that if the occurrence of an event has been undeniably established (including miracles, granted this were possible), this is because that human experience which supports it is so universal that the event (miracle) cannot be claimed by members of any particular religion to support just their religious convictions.²⁰³ The Humean idea behind this is that we call miracles only those events which violate those of our beliefs which our most uniform experience has established, i.e. what Hume calls “the laws of nature” and refers to as causal regularity in nature.²⁰⁴ Consequently, an established miracle would ipso facto mean that something very exceptional but at the same time universally endorsed has happened. Again consequently, because of the universal approval, it can be seen, as Armstrong does, that a miracle loses its religious significance in the sense of serving as the foundation of a particular system of religion, or as Armstrong puts it, “it would be an act of arrogation for a

201 See, e.g. *EHU* 5.8; *SBN*, 46-47. See the next chapter for an explication of this important Humean idea.

202 *EHU* 10.16; *SBN*, 117.

203 Armstrong 1995.

204 *EHU* 10.12; *SBN* 114-115. See Beauchamp’s “Annotations to the *Enquiry*,” p. 247ann.12 in *EHUopt*.

particular religion to claim a miracle so widely witnessed”.²⁰⁵ This is why Hume denies the use of a miracle to support a certain “system of religion” like, e.g. Christianity. This is, of course, just one interpretation of Hume’s discussion but, in my view, it catches well the Humean idea that if there were credible miracle reports it would ipso facto mean that they would have to be so widely accepted as true that the supporters of one religious “system” could not argue that they “verify” just their religious beliefs.

Above I tried to establish that the reasons for Kierkegaard’s limited interest in miracles as defined by Hume are the unavoidable doubtfulness of all historical knowledge and the “non-immediate” meaning of personal experience. However, these two can also be seen as key elements in Kierkegaard’s vision of Christianity, which is based on a clear distinction between knowledge and faith.²⁰⁶ Kierkegaard stresses that “faith is a sphere of its own, and the immediate identifying mark of every misunderstanding of Christianity is that it changes it into a doctrine and draws it into the range of intellectuality.”²⁰⁷ It is misleading to think that the “religious issue” (my phrase) is one of gaining reliable knowledge of the historical events relating to Christianity or finding a satisfying philosophical analysis of the dogma of Christianity.²⁰⁸ Faith should always involve the element of uncertainty and risk and it should avoid objective justifications or it “loses that infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness, which is the condition of faith, the *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere] in which faith can come into existence.”²⁰⁹ Being or becoming a Christian is the most important thing and in this project knowledge of, say, the authenticity of the story of the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead is of no use. Being a Christian involves having faith in the absolute

205 Armstrong 1995, 72.

206 See, e.g. *SKS* 7, 35-37 / *CUP1*, 28-31.

207 *SKS* 7, 298 / *CUP1*, 327.

208 This is Climacus’s topic in the part one of *CUP* titled “The Objective Issue of the Truth of Christianity.”

209 *SKS* 7, 36 / *CUP1*, 29.

paradox which cannot be an object of knowledge because it is something that thought itself cannot think. So, the absolute paradox must be very far from being a foundation for Christianity in the sense of establishing its intellectual or doctrinal truth. Christianity does not lack objective justifications because it

is not a doctrine [Lære] about the unity of the divine and the human, about subject-object, not to mention the rest of the logical paraphrases of Christianity. In other words, if Christianity were a doctrine, then the relation to it would not be one of faith, since there is only an intellectual [intellectuel] relation to a doctrine. Christianity, therefore, is not a doctrine but the fact that the god has existed.²¹⁰

Because this fact is incomprehensible, the establishing of its possibility cannot be a result of some objective (historical or philosophical) research. So, it is evident that in Kierkegaard's view the "absolute paradox" should not even be considered as a candidate for Hume's miracle proper in the sense of something which could possibly confirm the truth of the Christian "system of religion" that, if properly understood, cannot be true or false. One may wonder now that if Christianity is not a "doctrine", what do Christian claims refer to or what are Christian thoughts about? If they are not "intellectual" or cognitive, then maybe they are not "about" the world at all. Climacus's claim that Christianity is not a doctrine but a fact (that the god has existed) is problematic because surely a would-be believer has to decide what to think of this (absolutely) paradoxical claim. On the other hand, Climacus possibly means that a believer has to "fideistically" or existentially embrace "the

210 *SKS* 7, 298 / *CUP* 1, 326. In *SKS* 4, 264 / *PF*, 62 Climacus points out that to comprehend Spinoza's teaching does not mean that one is occupied with Spinoza himself and draws attention to his idea that Christianity (Climacus's non-explicit alternative to Socratic way of learning in *PF*) is really about being "occupied" with the historical god-man, not with his teaching.

fact” and live his or her life as if the fact were true although he or she cannot in fact grasp how it could be true because it cannot be intellectually grasped to be true. In this sense there seems to be a distinct fideistic tone in Kierkegaard’s view of Christianity as not a doctrine. Climacus’s stance may also be seen as a form of Wittgensteinian antirealism about religion in the sense that he seems to suggest that Christianity or perhaps religious beliefs in general are not about the existence of entities but more about a commitment to a certain “form of life”. Wittgenstein’s “philosophy of religion” or perhaps his thoughts on religion after he abandoned the famous picture theory of language may appear antirealistic regarding the existence of God and the justification of religious beliefs. It is the use of terms and concepts, not what they refer to, which gives them their meaning and their justification, the later Wittgenstein argues.²¹¹ However, one of the problems of this kind of antirealism is that it easily leads to relativism. If beliefs get their justification through social practices, then because there are so many different forms of life the number of these belief systems becomes very large and, as Trigg puts it, “[c]hanges of a way of life cannot thus be motivated by reason, precisely because what counts as a reason can only be recognized within a particular tradition or community which already possesses some shared understanding.”²¹² As Trigg points out, if religious beliefs are not about the objective reality, religion itself is privatized and becomes a subjective matter.²¹³ I find this also a major problem of a Kierkegaardian view of Christianity and religion. What can Christianity be about when the object of faith is something essentially

211 See, e.g. Trigg 2010, 652-653 for a short description of the Wittgensteinian view of religion. This approach is, not surprisingly, without its problems. See, e.g. Whittaker 2010 for a concise and critical discussion of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion including problems about whether the later Wittgenstein was a realist or antirealist. For demanding discussions regarding the issue of realism vs. antirealism, including philosophy of religion, see, e.g. Alston, ed., 2002.

212 Trigg 2010, 653.

213 Trigg 2010, 657.

incomprehensible and when all historical and philosophical inquiries seem to have no bearing on its validity?

But is the absolute paradox Hume's miracle proper in the sense of a violation or transgression of a law of nature by a divine volition? Surely the latter part of the definition seems confirmed: Christ's alleged appearance on earth is a wilful act of the Christian God. But does His appearance violate the law(s) of nature? Having a pure virgin as a biological mother about two thousand years ago seems to establish this. However, Climacus's point about the paradoxicality of the absolute paradox is not this. In his view, as I see it, the crux of the matter is that there is no way we can tell a difference between an ordinary human being and this alleged godhead. He does not just appear human, he is human but at the same time divine. And this, Climacus thinks, is absolutely paradoxical. For example, Climacus claims that the "thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc. is certainly the paradox *sensu strictissimo*, the absolute paradox" and that "the paradox is primarily that God, the eternal, has entered into time as an individual human being".²¹⁴ Consequently, all this means that there is nothing observably miraculous in the absolute paradox. There is a human being who is allegedly an incarnated son of God but there is nothing observably extraordinary about that. The human form in question is not like some disguise or costume underneath which there is a godhead which could be disclosed at the will of the god: the human "servant form is not something put on but is actual, not a parastatic but an actual body [intet parastatisk Legeme, men et virkeligt]".²¹⁵ What we see is a human being in whom, as Anti-Climacus

214 *SKS* 7, 198, 541 / *CUPI*, 217, 596. Climacus is not always clear about the difference between the meanings of "the paradox" and "the absolute paradox". When he writes about "the paradox" or "the absolute paradox," he sometimes uses "the paradox" when he is clearly referring to "the absolute paradox" (see, e.g. *SKS* 4, 263 / *PF*, 61).

215 *SKS* 4, 258 / *PF*, 55. Climacus's choice of the term "parastatisk" is interesting and rare because it is not listed in the *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* or in recent Danish-English dictionaries. Its English translation, "parastatic", meaning "relating to what is presented to the mind, relating to appearance,

argues in *PC*, “there is nothing to be seen *directly*, an individual human being who then does miracles and himself claims to do miracles!”²¹⁶ Indeed, what the enigmatic individual does can make a difference: he might even turn water into wine or raise people from the dead. The point is that miracles, in their religious sense, are extraordinary events performed by someone. The performer himself is not per se a miracle but a miracle-worker. Of course our possible belief in the high credibility of the stories relating the alleged miracles performed by the miracle-worker may lead us to speculate on the miraculous origin and nature of the miracle-worker. So, to get our bearings clear, it seems obvious that there is nothing miraculous in itself about Climacus’ “Guden” living his life among people in the sense of him explicitly violating laws of nature. But his alleged abilities are another matter.

I suggest an analogy, regarding observability, between the absolute paradox and the idea of “real presence” of transubstantiation to which Hume refers in the first paragraph of *EHU* 10.

“Transubstantiation” means

in Christianity, the change by which the substance (though not the appearance) of the bread and wine in the Eucharist becomes Christ’s Real Presence—that is, His body and blood. In Roman Catholicism and some other Christian Churches the doctrine, which was first called transubstantiation in the 12th

virtual” (see the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (=OED), 2nd Ed. in <http://dictionary.oed.com/>), as it is found in the David F. Swenson’s translation of *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1936, p.44) is listed as an example of its English use in the OED. Climacus’s phrase “parastatisk Legeme” means some kind of “pseudo-body”, something that seems like a real human body but is not really one (see *SKS* K4, 253).

216 *SKS* 12, 105 / *PC*, 97 [there is no exclamation mark in the *SKS*-original]. The Hongs (*PC*, xiii) note that the “Anti” in “Anti-Climacus” may be misleading: “It does not mean ‘against’ but ‘before,’ a relation of rank, the higher, as in ‘before me’ in the First Commandment.” Anti-Climacus in *PC* writes explicitly about “Christ” unlike Johannes Climacus in *PF* with his “Thought-Project”.

century, aims at safeguarding the literal truth of Christ's Presence while emphasizing the fact that there is no change in the empirical appearances of the bread and wine.²¹⁷

Hume applauds (*EHU* 10.1; *SBN*, 109) John Tillotson's (1630-94) argument, based on the evaluation of sensible evidence, against the idea of the "real presence" in the Eucharist and thinks (*EHU* 10.2; *SBN*, 110) that his own argument in "Of Miracles" is "of a like nature".²¹⁸ Interestingly, regarding the nature of the absolute paradox, it seems that "Roman Catholics" have held that transubstantiation is more like a mystery known only by faith than a miracle perceptible to the senses.²¹⁹ As the divine aspect of the absolute paradox seems to be imperceptible, too, the absolute paradox appears more like a mystery than a more "visible" miracle to a "bystander". Its paradoxical part then seems like a mysterious and non-observable change in substance, like in transubstantiation, that we must either believe has taken place or, in Kierkegaard's terminology, be "offended" at the claim. Interestingly, William James, in his third lecture of *Pragmatism* (1907) ("Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered"), refers to the Eucharist and thinks that in this "one [and, in fact, only] case scholasticism has proved the importance of the substance-idea by treating it pragmatically".²²⁰ James refers to the traditional philosophical problems regarding the difference between substance and its accidents and their unfortunate technicality. But, with the Eucharist, the "substance-notion breaks into life", i.e. because for once it is allowed that substances can separate from their accidents and then exchange them. The accidents of the wafer remain the

217 See "transubstantiation" in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* 2006, <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9073224>>. Retrieved August 28, 2006.

218 For an evaluation of this claim by Hume, see Levine 1988. See also Appendix 1 in Fogelin 2003 for Hume's "curious relationship" to Tillotson.

219 See Beauchamp's first annotation to section 10 (*EHUopt*, 246) .

220 James 1949, 88.

same but the “bread-substance” is “miraculously” substituted by the divine. However, as James points out, this “will only be treated seriously by those who already believe in the ‘real presence’ on independent grounds”.²²¹ In Kierkegaard’s terminology, James appears to be the one “offended” at the “real presence”.²²²

Hume’s “miracle” may be seen to refer to at least two things. Firstly, “a miracle” may refer to an allegedly extraordinary historical event caused “by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent”. This is consonant with Hume’s actual definition of a miracle. Secondly, originating from the conclusion of “Of Miracles”, “a miracle” may refer to a radical personal experience during which a person is led to assent to the Christian Religion against his normal principles of reasoning and against “custom and experience”.²²³ However, in my view, this miracle may also be understood on the lines of the “miracle proper”. Hume’s second miracle is not a violation of the normal course of nature but a violation of the normal course of *human* nature, overriding the usual course of how beliefs are formed. Hence the miraculousness of both of Hume’s “miracles” originates from a breach in the normal course of “natures”. Regarding having Climacus’s absolute paradox as the object of faith and not being offended by it, I believe Hume’s second miracle is like the condition for understanding the truth in *PF*, which must come from outside of the human realm to be a genuine alternative to Socratic recollection.

Both Hume and Kierkegaard think that it is a misunderstanding to try to establish the truth of Christianity by appealing to reasoning based on extraordinary empirical evidence. This is more evident in the writings of Kierkegaard, but Hume, too, thinks that what causes human beings to

²²¹ James 1949, 89.

²²² I will comment on James again in ch. 5.3.1, where I discuss Hume’s criticism of the notion of substance that James considered pragmatic.

²²³ See Kosch 2010, 186 for briefly mentioning that Kierkegaard subscribed to Hume’s idea that religious belief is “a sort of miracle”.

believe in Christianity is something that is alien to their regular or even humanly natural ways of thinking. Hume writes about “a miracle in the believer’s own person” and in the passive tense “whoever is moved by Faith”. These formulations make it sound like believing in Christianity is something that happens to a person independent of his or her own control. On the other hand, Kierkegaard in *PF* is looking for an alternative to a Socratic view of learning the truth by way of remembering. He suggests that if the truth cannot be remembered then the truth and the condition for understanding it must be given to the learner from outside himself or herself by the teacher, i.e. the god.²²⁴ This alternative is a real alternative if not only the truth but also the condition for understanding are provided from somewhere outside human resources. So, according to Kierkegaard in *PF*, there is not much a learner can do when he or she wants to get in touch with what is crucial for his eternal spiritual well-being. Only faith clinging to the absolute paradox can help in this tormenting situation, but “faith is no an act of will” because its condition is not present in human faculties.²²⁵ There is nothing original about this idea in itself: it seems that both Hume and Kierkegaard share the view that, as described by Alston, “though it is often held that God accompanied his major revelations with miracles to indicate their status, it is also widely held that these indications do not constitute a decisive proof of that status. Hence it has been thought that divine assistance is required for a person to have firm faith in divine revelation, that faith is, at least in part, a gift of God.”²²⁶ Of course, Hume did not, unlike Kierkegaard, long for such a gift. One should exercise caution though, when expressing views on Hume’s views of religion and religious belief.²²⁷ When Hume writes, for example, in “Of Miracles” that “[o]ur most holy religion is

224 See *SKS* 4, 222-226 / *PF*, 14-18.

225 See *SKS* 4, 264 / *PF*, 62-63.

226 Alston 1998. See also Wolterstorff 1998, 540-1 for the many issues this view raises.

227 The rest of this paragraph is based on Gaskin 2009, 487-490.

founded on *Faith*, not on reason”,²²⁸ there is good reason to think that Hume is being ironic. It was common practice in eighteenth-century Europe that atheism or anti-religion was hidden behind orthodox claims for fear of prosecution.²²⁹ These claims could then be used as a defence when the need arose. This is probably the case with Hume and his apparently “pro-religious” statements in “Of Miracles” and elsewhere. On the other hand, it appears that Hume was too consistent a sceptic to pronounce outright atheism. Despite Hume’s perhaps hard-to-identify stance towards religion, it may be argued that his arguments that contribute to the philosophy of religion stand or fall on their own philosophical merits.

Both Hume and Kierkegaard can be seen to hold at least partly similar views about the nature of Christianity. They both think that the question is not the objective truth of Christianity. Hume concludes that miracles cannot be used as possible confirming events for the truth of the Christian Religion because established events enjoy so wide support among human beings that they cannot be used to serve just one particular religion. Also, more generally, Hume thinks that reason alone is not enough to convince us of its truthfulness. Kierkegaard considers that Christianity is not a doctrine and consequently that the question of truth does not even rise because the object of faith is the absolute paradox. Miracles explicitly defined by Hume do not interest Kierkegaard because reports describing them are just as historical as other historical reports and ipso facto always doubtful. The absolute paradox cannot therefore be a possible supporting event (Hume’s first miracle) for the credibility of Christianity. The absolute paradox, with a condition to understand it, is more like that Hume’s non-human factor (Hume’s second miracle) which makes a believer believe contrary to custom and experience.

228 *EHU* 10.40; *SBN* 130.

229 See also Nadler 2011, 176-177 for Descartes’ similar fears and reservations in the seventeenth century regarding the publication and formulations of his cosmological writings because of the Inquisition’s treatment of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642).

The idea that Christian faith is a result of the work of God (or the Holy Spirit), can be used to argue for the rationality of Christian faith in the following way.²³⁰ Theistic belief is irrational if it is produced by malfunctioning cognitive faculties (Marx's view, according to Plantinga) or if it is produced by a cognitive mechanism that is aimed, not at the truth, but at psychological well-being (Freud's view, according to Plantinga). Theistic belief is not produced by these faculties or mechanisms but is at least partly a supernatural product of the work of the Holy Spirit (Calvin's view, according to Plantinga). Hence, theistic belief is not irrational in this sense. This, as Plantinga calls it, is the "religious riposte"²³¹ against the idea that religious beliefs are products of malfunctioning cognitive faculties. Plantinga argues that whether one calls certain human beliefs rational or irrational depends on one's view about what sort of beings humans are and, therefore, the rationality of theistic belief is "at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but a metaphysical or theological dispute".²³² Many people have rich and strong religious experiences and there is often no reason to think that there are pathological causes for their beliefs or that they are somehow cognitively dysfunctional. If I were such a person and had a rich spiritual (in the Christian sense of the term) life, then I would believe, for example, that all living things are ultimately God's creations including humans and that the real living God has planted Christian belief in my mind. In this case, according to Plantinga, it would be "internally rational" for me to have religious beliefs, i.e. my doxastic response to my experience would be appropriate and right.²³³ On the other hand, if I were a natural scientist I would believe that all living things and their behaviour are products of natural selection and that human beliefs, including religious ones, originate eventually in these natural

230 See Plantinga 1998, 216-7.

231 Plantinga 1998, 216.

232 Plantinga 1998, 217.

233 Plantinga 2010, 677-678.

processes and that there is no guarantee of their rationality.²³⁴ I would then probably think that Christian belief is irrational. From this Plantinga argues that to determine the rationality of Christian belief we first have to determine whether Christian belief is true or, to use more technical terminology, “[t]he only possibly successful objections [to Christian or theistic belief] are *de facto* objections; the *de jure* objections drop away”.²³⁵ Plantinga’s point is that the issue of the rationality of Christian belief is not only an epistemological problem but is fundamentally about the truth of Christian belief. His externalism regarding epistemic warrant means that warranted belief or knowledge depends on conditions that are not under our direct control and, if Plantinga is right, then, as Clark puts it, “classical foundationalism has completely misunderstood the nature of epistemic warrant”.²³⁶ Further, it is important to bear in mind, as Koistinen points out, that a significant part of Plantinga’s work “may be understood as religiously committed Christian (or Calvinist) philosophy – that is, as a type of inquiry which is based on religious or theological presuppositions and which is addressed in the first place to persons who have already accepted the Christian faith.”²³⁷ As I see it, as Plantinga seems to think,²³⁸ the view that the warranty of Christian or religious belief in general depends on whether one believes it is true seems to evade the important question of settling what are the criteria for calling belief formations non-pathological or not cognitively dysfunctional. Surely a belief formation can be questionable regarding whether it produces true beliefs and still not be pathological (e.g. human fear of the dark)? As Clark points out, one objection against Reformed epistemology is that it seems to allow the rational acceptability of

234 See, e.g. Dennett 2006 for “religion as a natural phenomenon”.

235 Plantinga 1998, 217.

236 Clark 2004. E.g., according to Fumerton 2010, the “foundationalist’s thesis in short is that all knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a foundation of noninferential knowledge or justified belief.” See Plantinga 2000 for his notion of “warranted Christian belief”.

237 Koistinen 2000, 113.

238 E.g. Plantinga 2010, 679.

almost all beliefs if they are just results of properly functioning faculties that usually yield true beliefs.²³⁹

Before moving on to the next chapter I would like to underline that the practice of naming events “miracles” and “paradoxes” is very problematic. Consider McKinnon’s short “comment” with the following conclusion:

There are no miracles or violations of natural law: this is because *natural law* is simply an expression for the way in which things actually happen. There are no paradoxes or events in which things act contrary to their real nature: this is because the essence or nature of a thing is simply a shorthand for the various ways in which it can act. Finally, a related claim for which the ground has not yet been turned; there are no irrational events because, in the last analysis, *rational* can only mean something like *the way in which things really are*.²⁴⁰

Every concise philosophical formulation has its problems but I am convinced that all Kierkegaard enthusiasts would greatly benefit philosophically from keeping this one by McKinnon in mind. There are no references to Kierkegaard (or to any other philosopher) in McKinnon’s article, but given that he has published several papers on Kierkegaard²⁴¹ it is plausible to assume that he has Climacus’s absolute paradox in mind, too. To my knowledge, McKinnon’s article is the only one which explicitly discusses miracles and paradoxes on a general level and points out that the same kinds of problems relate to both of them when used as descriptions of events.

239 Clark 2004. In addition, Clark lists two more primary reasons to reject Reformed epistemology, i.e. it can be denied that humans have some kind of divine sense and Reformed epistemology appears to be a kind of fideism.

240 McKinnon 1967, 312.

241 See, e.g. McKinnon 1969, 1973 and 1977-1978.

McKinnon's apparently strong view of the impossibility of miracles echoes in fact that of Spinoza's in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 1670). As Nadler argues, Spinoza's position on miracles is much more radical than Hume's.²⁴² Compared to Hume's epistemological argumentation, Spinoza makes a strong metaphysical point about reality when he insists on the absolute impossibility of miracles. Spinoza claims in *Tractatus* that "[n]o event can occur to contravene Nature, which preserves an eternal and fixed and immutable order. . . . Nothing can happen in Nature to contravene her own universal laws, nor yet anything that is not in agreement with these laws or that does not follow from them."²⁴³ From this it is not that great a leap to McKinnon's view that events can only take place according to their essences and that natural laws only express how things actually happen.

Bearing in mind Hume's description of religious belief in *EHU* 10.41 as some kind of upheaval of the principles of understanding it may be argued that Hume criticises religious belief along the lines that it is some kind of distortion of the regular workings of the mind and in this sense seems to present *de jure* criticism of Christian belief.²⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, too, seems to think that religious belief is something that needs a certain distortion or non-human "condition" to happen. But for Kierkegaard, unlike arguably for Hume, there is nothing wrong with this—philosophically or otherwise. For all their differences regarding *Christian* belief, both Hume and Kierkegaard think

242 Nadler 2011, 90-91.

243 As quoted by Nadler 2011, 91.

244 Interestingly, Fogelin 2003, 60-61 argues that Hume, because of his ambition to develop a "science of man" and his "commitment to methods of natural science" opposed the idea that there are causes outside the natural order of things in his discussion of miracles because these would limit the realm of natural science. This does not invalidate his overall point, but Fogelin's formulation seems to be anachronistic because, as Hintikka 1969, 40 has pointed out, Hume was "completely blind" to the experimental method in sciences in the modern active sense of the term. (See also my discussion in ch. 5.1).

that humans are nevertheless naturally or unavoidably believers. In what sense is the topic of the next chapter.

4. Hume and Kierkegaard on Belief

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English* a “belief” (noun) means (1) “an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof” or “something one accepts as true or real; a firmly held opinion” or “a religious conviction” and (2) (belief in) “trust, faith, or confidence in (someone or something)”.²⁴⁵ On the other hand, “faith” (mass noun) means (1) “complete trust or confidence in someone or something” or (2) “strong beliefs in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof”.²⁴⁶ These modern and partly overlapping definitions of “belief” and “faith” reflect the fact that, especially in religious contexts, “belief” and “faith” have often been used interchangeably. In medieval Latin “fides” (faith) generally means both “belief” and “faith” and in the New Testament the Greek word “pistis” (faith) has both intellectual and religious connotations.²⁴⁷ Also in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1224/6-1274) and even Martin Luther (1483-1546) the elements of intellectual assent and wilful acting were merged but, in MacGregor’s words, “in much Christian literature, however, not least among heirs of the Reformation, the term *faith* is invested with a volitional connotation and *belief* with an intellectual one.”²⁴⁸

Many central philosophical questions originate from the study of the concepts of “belief” and “faith”. For example, regarding modern discussions of “belief”, one may ask, is a belief a

245 “belief noun” *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Edited by Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2010. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Helsinki University. 29 March 2011
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0070750>>

246 “faith noun” *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Edited by Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2010. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Helsinki University. 29 March 2011
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e0285660>>

247 MacGregor 1987, 426.

248 MacGregor 1987, 426.

propositional attitude or an intentional state directed to some proposition? Given that we often state what we believe in that-clauses, how is belief in the, at least apparent, absence of language possible; that is, can non-human animals believe?²⁴⁹ Further, if we choose a behavioural point of view, what is the relation between belief and desire and certain behaviour they induce?²⁵⁰ On the other hand, epistemologists try to determine what is the relation between “belief” and “knowledge”. According to perhaps the most common version of what may be called the standard view, in Luper’s words, “while some beliefs count as knowledge, not all do”.²⁵¹ It is rather a common view that for someone to know, for example, that there are black holes, he or she must also have a belief that such phenomena exist (“entailment thesis”). It is also obviously natural to think that, for example, my belief in the existence of unicorns does not count as knowledge, so the “converse entailment thesis” is false. Not surprisingly, there are at least four different challenges to this view that combines the entailment thesis with the denial of the converse thesis: the identity thesis, the incompatibility thesis, the separability thesis, and the eliminativism thesis. The supporters of identity thesis, if there are any, would claim that knowledge entails belief and vice versa. If you claimed that knowledge and belief are incompatible, you would support the incompatibility thesis. Given that I may pass a test and know the required material rather well but still not feel confident about my abilities, is it not true that knowledge and belief are separable? Finally, to put it extremely briefly, an eliminativist would argue that the notion of belief is scientifically outmoded and that epistemologists should turn to more primitive elements of cognition.²⁵²

249 See also Hume’s discussion about reason of (non-human) animals in *EHU* 9 and Beauchamp for classical and modern accounts of the topic (in *EHU*, 165-169).

250 For a brief discussion of these and other related issues, see Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 1998.

251 Luper 1998, 707.

252 The latter half of this paragraph is based on Lupper 1998.

According to a recent major encyclopaedic entry, the philosophical discussions on “faith” have focused primarily on three topics: “the nature of faith, the connection between God’s goodness and human responsibility, and the relation of faith to reason”.²⁵³ One may inquire, for example, regarding the nature of faith, whether it is some form of knowledge or, perhaps, virtue or trust. Or, regarding God’s goodness, whether lack of faith is the responsibility of the individual or of God. The third topic, the relation of faith to reason, can be divided into two: the relation of faith to theorising and the rationality of faith. These kinds of issues originate from the New Testament because, in Wolterstorff’s words, “of the prominence the New Testament gives to faith in its description of the mode of life that it advocates” and because “the New Testament belongs to the canon of the Christian Church and that Christianity has been powerfully formative of philosophy in the West”.²⁵⁴

After these general introductory observations I now turn to Hume’s and Kierkegaard’s views of belief. I will argue that there is an important analogy between the functions of Hume’s “belief” and Kierkegaard’s *Tro* (belief or faith) with its two senses: (1) *Troen i almindelig Forstand* (faith in the ordinary sense, i.e. belief) and (2) *Troen i eminent Forstand* (faith in the eminent sense, i.e. religious faith or belief).²⁵⁵ “The Danish Socrates” wrote about ordinary and eminent faith on the same page, but for Hume, “the gentle skeptic”, religious faith was not high on his agenda, at least not in the sense that it was for Kierkegaard for whom it was an essential element in the philosophy

253 Wolterstorff 1998, 538.

254 Wolterstorff 1998, 539.

255 Apparently, according to Glebe-Moeller 1997, Wittgenstein, an admirer of Kierkegaard, “has borrowed his distinction between belief in a historical report and that kind of belief demanded by Christianity from Climacus or Kierkegaard. In PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS we find the same distinction between ‘faith in the direct and ordinary sense (belief)’, which relates to history, and Christian belief, which is ‘faith in the eminent sense’.”

or view of human life he wanted to propagate.²⁵⁶ As a consequence, scholars discussing Hume's theory of belief do not typically investigate what Hume has to say about religious belief. Of course, there are exceptions to this. For example, one topic in Hume scholarship is whether or not religious belief is a so-called "natural belief".

4.1 Hume's theory of belief

Ideas and impressions, or the "perceptions of the mind" and relations (both natural and philosophical) are the essential notions of Hume's thought (*T* 1.1.1, 1.1.5, *EHU* 2.1-3). Impressions are lively perceptions like sensory perceptions or "sensations" in Hume's terminology (*T* 1.1.1.1, *EHU* 2.3) and ideas are their less lively and forceful copies in thinking. Further, both impressions and ideas can be divided into simple and complex ones (*T* 1.1.1.2). For example, the complex impression of an apple consists of different simple and distinguishable impressions like its colour, taste and smell (Hume's own example in *T* 1.1.1.2). According to Hume, every idea, if not simple, resolves into simple ideas, and they in turn are all copies of impressions. Hume challenges those who think otherwise to present a counterexample to his thesis. Hume admits that there is one "contradictory phaenomenon" which may prove that his thesis is not absolute and refers to the famous issue of the particular shade of blue. It seems to Hume that a person who has never had an impression of a particular shade of blue can still form an idea of that missing shade if he or she is presented a gradual chart of different shades of that colour (*T* 1.1.1.10 and *EHU* 2.8). However, Hume thinks that we should not alter our general maxim due to this "particular and singular"

256 The quoted descriptions of Kierkegaard and Hume are by Popkin 1951, 274.

example (*T*, 1.1.1.10; *SBN*, 6).²⁵⁷ As an example of an idea which turns out to be complex Hume discusses the idea of God, “as meaning *an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being*” which we form by “augmenting” our own finite qualities of goodness and wisdom without limit (*EHU* 2.6).

So impressions have a central place in this schema. Every element or idea of human reflection or thought originates in impressions and by tracing every idea to its corresponding impression we eventually learn what that particular idea is really about. If that original corresponding impression cannot be found then we are dealing with an idea with a questionable cognitive content. Hume hopes his schema of the relation of impressions and ideas will help to resolve metaphysical disputes and thinks that we should cling to the strength and vividness of impressions in times of philosophical confusion:

All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure: The mind has but a slender hold of them: They are apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas; and when we have often employed any term, though without a distinct meaning, we are apt to imagine it has a determinate idea, annexed to it. On the contrary, all impressions, that is, all sensations, either outward or inward, are strong and vivid: The limits between them are more exactly determined: Nor is it easy to fall into any error or mistake with regard to them. When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light, we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.²⁵⁸

257 See, for example, Flage 1981,1982; Morreall 1982; Thomas 1982; Fogelin 1984; Johnson 1984; Nelson 1989; Losee 1992; Savage 1992; Williams 1992 and Durland 1996 for a discussion of the problem of the missing shade of blue.

258 *EHU* 2.9, *SBN* 21-2.

This approach has been described as “Hume’s account of definition”, meaning that “a precise account of the troublesome idea or term” is just that definition of a problematic term.²⁵⁹ These critical views of Hume can be interpreted as “neo-positivist” or “neo-empiricist” but, it has been argued, this may be misleading. For example, according to Michaud “Hume never entertained the project of a foundationalist reconstruction of our knowledge. In this sense, the principle of priority of impressions to ideas must not be read as a genetic and constructive principle: it is a test for dubious meanings.”²⁶⁰ Further, Livingston thinks that “[...] it is important to place Hume’s criticism of philosophy in the context of the Latin rhetorical tradition, where it is more at home than in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of empiricism.”²⁶¹

Hume’s view of the perceptions of the mind also plays an important role in his theory of belief. In *T* 1.3.7, where Hume defines belief, Hume focuses on “free” causal reasoning where the conclusiveness of demonstrative or intuitive reasoning is not possible. Only in reasonings concerning matters of fact is the imagination “free to conceive both sides of the question”.²⁶² The conclusions of causal reasonings are contingent and they are about the existence of objects or of their qualities. But, Hume argues in *T* 1.3.7.2, when we have an idea or a simple conception of a thing or an object, the idea of existence of this thing is not something we can separate from the other ideas we have of this thing. For example, “when we affirm, that God is existent, we simply form the idea of such a being, as he is represented to us; nor is the existence, which we attribute to him, conceiv’d by a particular idea, which we join to the idea of his other qualities, and can again

259 Morris 2010.

260 Michaud 1987, 371.

261 Livingston 1998, 387.

262 *T* 1.3.7.3; *SBN* 95.

separate and distinguish from them.”²⁶³ Hume argues further and claims “that the conception of the existence of any object is no addition to the simple conception of it” and “that the belief of the existence joins no new ideas to those, which compose the idea of the object.”²⁶⁴ So, there is no “belief-idea” which attached to a conception of an object results in a belief in the existence of the object in question. But, of course, there is a difference between believing in God’s existence and just having an idea of God including the idea of his existence. Hume maintains that “as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the *manner*, in which we conceive it.”²⁶⁵

If believing something about a thing or that a thing exists brings no new idea to the idea of a thing, then it follows that a person who believes (falsely) that (Hume’s example) “mercury is heavier than gold” and a person who does not believe it can both form the same ideas of the issue in question. What then is the difference between disbelief or incredulity and belief? Obviously we can believe either that mercury is heavier than gold or the opposite, but not simultaneously both. Hume thinks that from this

it evidently follows, that the belief must make some difference betwixt that conception to which we assent, and that from which we dissent. We may mingle, and unite, and separate, and confound, and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways; but ’till there appears some principle, which fixes one of these different situations, we have in reality no opinion: And this principle, as it plainly makes no addition to our precedent ideas, can only change the *manner* of our conceiving them.²⁶⁶

263 *T* 1.3.7.2; *SBN* 94. See the next chapter for Kant’s formulation of this point.

264 *T* 1.3.7.2; *SBN* 94.

265 *T* 1.3.7.2; *SBN* 94-5.

266 *T* 1.3.7.4; *SBN* 95-6.

Before arriving at his definition of belief Hume reminds us of his view of the two kinds of perceptions of mind—impressions and ideas. Importantly, because ideas are copies of impressions an idea can only vary in strength and vivacity to remain an idea of just a particular impression or object, and because belief is only a change in the manner ideas are conceived it, too, can only intensify the liveliness of an idea. So, Hume concludes, “[a]n opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin’d, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION,”²⁶⁷ and three sections later in different words, “[b]elief, therefore, since it causes an idea to imitate the effects of the impressions, must make it resemble them in these qualities, and is nothing but *a more vivid and intense conception of any idea*.”²⁶⁸ Belief, then, is something that locks a certain configuration of ideas in a way that carries with it a feeling of liveliness that imagination alone cannot produce. This seems to be intuitively true because when a person becomes convinced that a certain factual statement really is true it obviously “feels” different than merely entertaining the possibility of its truth.

According to Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, “an earlier tradition associated with the British Empiricists views belief as a kind of pale imitation of perceptual experience. But recent work on belief largely takes for granted a sharp distinction between belief and the various mental images that may or may not accompany it.”²⁶⁹ Hume does not seem to take this distinction for granted when, in his discussion of belief, he operates with the differences in the vividness and liveliness of different conceptions of an object. He writes, for example, when analysing the difference between fiction and belief in *EHU* that “belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an

²⁶⁷ *T* 1.3.7.5; *SBN* 96.

²⁶⁸ *T* 1.3.10.3; *SBN* 119-20.

²⁶⁹ Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 1998, 703.

object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain.”²⁷⁰ Hume means that the feeling or sentiment which accompanies our conception of an event we believe has actually taken place is very different from the feeling which accompanies an event we understand is, for example, an invention of an imaginative author of historical novels. The former feeling is much stronger, more vivid and livelier than the latter and its presence means that we believe in the factualness of the event in question. This does not mean that our experience of reading powerful fiction cannot be very vivid and lively but it is still different from the experience of, for example, the factualness of watching evening news on the TV.²⁷¹ It is also important to note that beliefs or ideas with that certain strong feeling are, of course, not rationally justified because of this feeling. Hume is here interested in the identifying marks of beliefs not in whether these beliefs are justified or in what sense they might be justified. To use modern terminology, beliefs are mainly “occurrences” for Hume in contrast to “dispositional” accounts of beliefs. The difference between these accounts is, roughly, that the accounts of the former kind refer to statements about actual occurrences, while the latter refer to claims about what is likely to happen under certain circumstances. For example, the statement “Kjell is cycling a 100 km race in three hours” refers to something that is occurring at the time someone says it and can be true only if Kjell really is rotating the pedals of his bike when someone utters the statement. On the other hand, the statement “Kjell cycles 100 km in three hours” does not entail that at the time of its utterance Kjell really is on his bike and so can be true even if at the time of its utterance Kjell is drinking champagne in Paris after the final stage of the Tour de France. The point is that the latter can be true even if the former is false, but the latter cannot be true if there are no conditions under which the former is true or, in other words, if it is not likely to

²⁷⁰ *EHU* 5.12; *SBN* 49.

²⁷¹ The relation between history and fiction or factual and fictional writing was widely discussed in the eighteenth century. For a survey of how Hume’s discussion of belief in *T* relates to this topic, see Frasca-Spada 2005.

happen.²⁷² In my view, Hume’s alleged interest in the occurrence account of belief reflects his interest in this minute actuality of what is going on or what is *occurring* in a person’s mind when he perceives an impression or, in Hume’s own words, in “that act of the mind, which renders realities, or what is taken for such, more present to us than fictions”.²⁷³ Hume wants to describe the natural mechanisms of a perceived impression leading to a lively idea or belief and is not interested in the truth of the belief in question and this is why, I suggest, he is not interested in formulating his theory of belief in dispositional terms.²⁷⁴ Hume’s theory of belief here seems to be more philosophy of mind—or his “science of man”—than epistemology in the sense that he does not ask whether or not our certain beliefs are true but how we come to hold them and what kind they are. This is a general tenet of Hume’s thought and it is illustrated, for example, when he discusses the power of nature over the sceptic’s reasonings and observes how we “may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but ’tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.”²⁷⁵

Hume’s point seems to be that a belief consists of two parts: firstly, there is an (often complex) impression of something (a horse, perhaps) and, secondly, there is a feeling of liveliness and vividness attached to the idea in question. Out of this emerges a human belief of a horse out there.²⁷⁶ We can imagine many things existing—a horse with a human head, for example—but we cannot attach that feeling of liveliness to our idea of horses with human heads just by willing it, or in Hume’s words, “we can, in our conception, join the head of a man to the body of a horse; but it is

272 The reference to modern terminology regarding the concept of belief in this paragraph is based on Schwitzgebel 2010.

273 *EHU* 5.12; *SBN* 48-9.

274 See Marušić 2010 for whether Hume holds a dispositional account of belief.

275 *T* 1.4.2.1; *SBN* 187.

276 For Hume’s view of the “Reason of Animals”, see *EHU* 9.

not in our power to believe, that such an animal has ever really existed. It follows, therefore, that the difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure.”²⁷⁷

Here then Hume seems to be clear on the matter that we cannot just decide what we believe.

In the next paragraph in *EHU* Hume admits how difficult it is to try to define belief:

Were we to attempt a *definition* of this sentiment, we should, perhaps, find it a very difficult, if not an impossible task; in the same manner as if we should endeavour to define the feeling of cold or passion or anger, to a creature who never had any experience of these sentiments. *Belief* is the true and proper name of this feeling; and no one is ever at a loss to know the meaning of that term; because every man is every moment conscious of the sentiment represented by it. It may not, however, be improper to attempt a *description* of this sentiment; in hopes we may, by that means, arrive at some analogies, which may afford a more perfect explication of it. I say, then, that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain.²⁷⁸

Hume’s discussion of the nature of belief is by no means unequivocal, which also these *EHU* citations indicate and commentators have keenly observed. Gorman, for example, finds at least nine categories of belief in Hume and adds (discouragingly?) that “if one were in a really bad mood, one could probably split Hume’s formulations into even more categories”.²⁷⁹ It is confusing and seems inconsistent when Hume suggests that there is some distinguishing sentiment or feeling

²⁷⁷ *EHU* 5.10-11; *SBN* 48.

²⁷⁸ *EHU* 5.12; *SBN* 48-49.

²⁷⁹ Gorman 1993, 89.

accompanying belief but then, Hume says, belief is this feeling. Hume himself admits the descriptive nature of his discussion of the nature of belief. We can only describe belief in “unphilosophical” terms.²⁸⁰ In a way Hume seems to be more modest in *EHU* than in *T* when analysing the nature of belief. In *EHU* he explicitly recognises the difficulties in trying to define the concept of belief and “only” tries to describe the sentiment of belief. This relation between Hume’s views in *T* and *EHU* is an important topic in Hume scholarship.²⁸¹

“Fiction” has also another important sense for Hume besides the obvious sense referring to fantastic figures and stories. We learn, for example, from indexes of the old and new editions of *T* that, among others, “double existence of perceptions and objects”, “the idea of substance” and “faculties and occult qualities, sympathies, and antipathies in Nature” all seem to be fictions.²⁸² Interestingly, it has been suggested that “fictions are so important that what is commonly called Hume’s theory of impressions and ideas ought to be called the theory of impressions, ideas, *and fictions*.”²⁸³ I will discuss the idea of philosophical fictions later in chapter 5.2.

What causes or brings about belief or the lively conception of an idea? The issue now is not the content or idea of what is believed or “realities” as Hume calls it in *EHU* but the liveliness that is associated with it.²⁸⁴ What is its origin? Hume discusses this in *T* 1.3.8 right after the discussion of the nature of belief. What Hume has in mind here are Everyman’s everyday beliefs which could be described as instinctual in nature like, for example, when a father hears his daughter’s voice from

280 *EHU* 5.12; *SBN* 49.

281 See, for example, Morris 2010. Buckle 2001, vii argues against the view that *EHU* is a toned-down version of the more “serious” *T* and is convinced that *EHU* is “a unified work, and the best introduction to the coherence of Hume’s mature thought”.

282 See *Tv2*, 1098-9 and *SBN* 662.

283 Traiger 1987, 381.

284 *EHU* 5.12; *SBN* 49.

another room out of his sight he instantaneously “believes” that his daughter is there and possibly talking on the phone or to her friend. But our exemplary father does not conclude this in his mind, he just believes it the very moment he hears his daughter’s voice. He can be wrong, of course. Possibly what he hears is a recording his daughter has set up before sneaking out to a death metal concert. But this is not important. The issue is the liveliness or the vivacity of the emerged belief, the lively conception of his daughter in the apartment. So, in Humean terminology, from the impression of hearing her familiar voice there occurs a transition in the mind of the father to a lively conception of his daughter present nearby. There is a relation between the impression and the idea. What kind is it in general? According to Hume in the *T* 1.3.8, *contiguity*, *resemblance* and *causation* are the relations behind transitions from impressions to lively ideas. These are not introduced here for the first time because they are the three important Humean qualities of natural relations which are the principles of natural association Hume discusses in the *T* 1.1.4. There are also seven philosophical relations: resemblance, identity, space and time, quantity or number, degrees in quality, contrariety and cause and effect (*T* 1.1.5.3-9). Natural relations are the guiding principles of how ideas associate themselves in the mind and they are provided by nature. Hume seems to think that because of the regularity of how the human mind works it follows that there must be some guiding principles behind that regularity:

As all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases, nothing wou’d be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty, were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places. Were ideas entirely loose and unconnected, chance alone wou’d join them; and ’tis impossible the same simple ideas should fall regularly into complex ones (as they commonly do) without some

bond of union among them, some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another.²⁸⁵

But Hume emphasises that despite these natural principles and the guiding quality they provide

Nor yet are we to conclude, that without it the mind cannot join two ideas; for nothing is more free than that faculty: But we are only to regard it as a gentle force, which commonly prevails, and is the cause why, among other things, languages so nearly correspond to each other; nature in a manner pointing out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united into a complex one.²⁸⁶

We immediately learn that the relations of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect can be both natural and philosophical. The former are guiding principles of our everyday experience and the latter provide us with mental tools to compare ideas and objects which natural relations do not associate like, e.g. my mortgage and the origin of the Neanderthals. Maybe, as has been suggested, Hume calls his philosophical relations *philosophical* because he thinks that imaginative comparisons are an essential component of philosophical enterprise.²⁸⁷

It is natural to think that when I experience something familiar or something *resembling* past experience my mind “automatically” turns to ideas which accompanied that experience. The familiarity of hearing my daughter’s voice causes me to think that she is somewhere around because of numerous occasions of like experiences. And, of course, this is not a conclusion of a argument. When I see my daughter’s mobile phone on the kitchen table I at that same moment think of how

285 T 1.1.4.1; *SBN* 10-11.

286 T 1.1.4.1; *SBN* 10-11.

287 See Norton’s characterisation in *Topt*, I20-I21.

we talked on the phone yesterday. My everyday experience is *contiguous* – my ideas naturally follow one another in a manner they have done before. When I see my daughter’s framed drawing hanging on the wall by my desk I remember how she drew it for me in the kindergarten. In a way she is the *cause* of it hanging there and this causal link may cause me to think how much she has grown since those kindergarten days. In Hume’s words, “[t]his phaenomenon clearly proves, that a present impression with a relation of causation may enliven any idea, and consequently produce belief or assent, according to the precedent definition of it.”²⁸⁸ The general principle behind this belief formation via natural relations is, according to Hume, CUSTOM.²⁸⁹ Past repetitions of like experiences are the origin of our beliefs about the world we live in. Hume indeed believes that “we may establish it as a certain truth, that all the belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv’d solely from that origin”.²⁹⁰ Hume emphasises that it is specifically present impressions that induce beliefs. Customary transitions from ideas to other ideas occur but they lack the force of impressions and therefore do not cause beliefs. I may for some reason think about my daughter’s voice but that “idea” does not cause me to believe that she is somewhere around. Hume allows himself to “conclude upon the whole, that belief is a more vivid and intense conception of an idea, proceeding from its relation to a present impression.”²⁹¹ Though Hume himself did not use the term “natural belief” the idea of natural beliefs as a special class of beliefs has received much attention from Hume scholars.²⁹² Kemp Smith argued in his classic *The Philosophy of David Hume* that natural beliefs are “two in number-belief in the continuing and therefore independent existence of objects (including other selves) and belief in causal dependence”.²⁹³ These natural beliefs are a

288 *T* 1.3.8.6; *SBN* 101.

289 Hume capitalises this in *T* 1.3.8.10; *SBN* 102.

290 *T* 1.3.8.10; *SBN* 102.

291 *T* 1.3.8.11; *SBN* 103.

292 See Kemp Smith 1905 for the first discussion of “natural belief”.

293 Kemp Smith 1949, 116n1.

framework, again in Kemp Smith's words, "in the absence of which none of our other more specific beliefs, in the modes in which they are found to occur, could have been possible to the mind."²⁹⁴

Gaskin adds a third: "Belief in the reliability of our senses qualified to take account of acknowledged and isolatable areas of deception and confusion (many locations)."²⁹⁵ Natural beliefs have also been regarded as beliefs which cannot be doubted.²⁹⁶ The everyday beliefs I discussed above do not in themselves qualify as "natural" in this regard because I can easily doubt, for example, whether or not my daughter is in her room when I hear her voice. On the other hand, it seems plausible to argue that I cannot doubt the immediate belief that my daughter is somewhere around which immediately causally follows the audible sensation of hearing her voice but, of course, if I then ask her something and get no reply, I may begin to wonder what is going on and then even doubt my original belief of her being at home. It is, in my view, the former kind of immediate beliefs Hume has in mind in the discussion of belief induced by a present impression presented in this chapter. These beliefs also seem to be, for example, non-rational and necessary as a precondition of action, which have also been seen as identifying marks of natural beliefs.²⁹⁷ Further, belief in causation induced by custom—causation being one of the natural relations—has been seen as natural and indispensable.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it seems, according to Hume, that beliefs based on philosophical relations, despite their deliberate nature, also acquire their status of belief eventually through custom. I may, for example, count the apples and oranges in my fruit basket to

294 Kemp Smith 1949, 124. According to Gaskin 1978, 134 "a natural belief is in a certain sense 'non-rational' but it is *not* irrational or unreasonable and it *does* have the very important practical justification that things 'work out well' if I have the belief and *cannot work out* if I do not have the belief."

295 Gaskin 1978, 132.

296 See McCormick 1993 for lucid accounts of classic and modern discussions of the Humean "natural belief" and her own view of the different meanings of "natural" for Hume.

297 Gaskin 1984, 286.

298 Kemp Smith 1905, 152.

find out, for some reason, which I have more of, but the belief I come to hold is based eventually on the persuasive power of natural relations.²⁹⁹ Again, I may be wrong. If there are many pieces of fruit I may make a mistake in counting them, but my belief is still formed in the same way as when I get the numbers right.

One way to sum up Hume's theory of belief discussed in this chapter is to say that Hume wants to explain the formation of our *factual* beliefs in terms of his theory of the perceptions of the mind. The persuasive natural relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation based on customary past repetitions guide our minds from impressions to lively ideas associated with them, that is, to beliefs. Because belief is not something that can be willingly added to ideas or thoughts, the Humean factual beliefs are instinctive, non-rational and, eventually, involuntary and even necessary.³⁰⁰ Kierkegaard is not known for having a theory of belief but he has things to say about his *Tros*.

4.2 Kierkegaard's two *Tros*

These characterisations from *PF* by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus sound promising for Kierkegaard's view of belief:

Belief [Troen] is the opposite of doubt. Belief and doubt are not two kinds of knowledge that can be defined in continuity with each other, for neither of them is a cognitive act [Erkjendelses-Akter], and

299 For more on this issue, see, e.g. Waxman 2003, 80-3.

300 See Buckle 2001, 175-6.

they are opposite passions [Lidenskaber]. Belief is a sense [Sands] for coming into existence, and doubt is a protest against any conclusion that wants to go beyond immediate sensation and immediate knowledge.³⁰¹

According to Climacus, then, belief is (i) not doubt, (ii) not a kind of knowledge and (iii) not a cognitive act but a passion and a sense for coming into existence and, it seems, because it is the opposite of doubt, it wants to reach or conclude beyond what is immediately present to the senses. That belief and doubt are not degrees of knowledge seems to be the most general description here and means that belief does not refer to an attained cognitive conviction and doubt or doubting does not mean that this conviction “is still under construction” and perhaps will be established after some pondering of the issue at hand. They are not, so to speak, at the opposite ends of the “knowledge continuum” and are, in fact, not on this continuum at all.³⁰² Further, belief and doubt are passions and belief is a sense for something emerging while doubt objects against jumping to conclusions from immediacies.

Johannes Climacus probably knows what he is talking about, regarding doubt at least, because the title of his philosophical autobiography is *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est. A Narrative* [*Johannes Climacus. eller De omnibus dubitandum est. En Fortælling*] (1842-43, published unfinished and posthumously). So “one must doubt everything”. Not surprisingly, this text is about Cartesian doubt and the relation between doubt and philosophy. It has

301 SKS 4, 283 / PF, 84.

302 Conant 1997 refers to what I have called the “knowledge continuum” with the expression “the single spectrum of possible degrees of epistemological certainty”. (Conant explicitly refers to *CUP* and Climacus’s idea of the incommensurability of religious faith and objective reasoning.)

even been judged (by Hannah Arendt) “perhaps still the deepest interpretation of Cartesian doubt”.³⁰³ I will return to this work in ch. 5.3.

Climacus’s quotation above is from the famous *Interlude* [*Mellemspil*] of *PF* in which Climacus ponders the question, as the subtitle reads, *Is the Past More Necessary than the Future? Or Has the Possible, by Having Become Actual, Become More Necessary than It Was?*³⁰⁴ If one wants to find evidence of Humean influence on Kierkegaard’s theoretical philosophy then *PF* is the place to go.

Interestingly, Climacus explicitly uses two senses of *Tro* in the *Interlude*: first, there is the “direct and ordinary sense”, which refers roughly to the first dictionary meaning of “belief” quoted above and, second, “the wholly eminent sense” referring to the religious meaning of “belief”.³⁰⁵ The latter religious sense of faith refers to, and especially for Climacus, faith in God who somehow, allegedly, took a human form and acted as a historical agent. The former, direct and ordinary faith, refers to belief in the existence of objects and their properties which are not immediately present to our senses. The Danish word for the two beliefs is *Tro*, which Climacus uses in the *Interlude* in the “ordinary meaning” until the *Appendix* where he discusses its “eminent” role.³⁰⁶ Climacus’s point concerning his distinction is that we need one belief for, so to speak, regular historical events and one for the special fact—Climacus calls it “that historical fact [hiint historiske Faktum]”³⁰⁷—of God living as a human being. “Ordinary belief” is an instrument or an organ to arrange our everyday experience into a continuous whole. Our experience is a multitude of immediate sensations which in themselves as separate experiences do not form a history in the sense of things

303 Arendt 1998, 275n32.

304 *SKS* 4, 272 / *PF*, 72.

305 *SKS* 4, 280-6 / *PF*, 81-8.

306 See Thulstrup’s *Commentary* to *PF* 1962, 251 and the Hongs’ *Notes* to *PF*, 311n42.

307 *SKS* 4, 285-6 / *PF*, 87-8.

interacting, appearing and disappearing in a way that makes us experience a coherent reality with a history, present and future. Climacus formulates this in the following way:

Because the historical intrinsically has the *illusiveness* [Svigagtighed³⁰⁸] of coming into existence, it cannot be sensed directly and immediately. The immediate impression [Indtryk] of a natural phenomenon [Naturphænomen] or of an event is not the impression of the historical, for the *coming into existence* cannot be sensed immediately—but only the presence. But the presence of the historical has the coming into existence within itself—otherwise it is not the presence of the historical.³⁰⁹

The organ to grasp the historicalness of the coming into existence has to be of such nature that it cancels the uncertainty which is an inherent feature of concrete temporal reality. This uncertainty means that when we ponder the past and try to acquire knowledge of what has happened we should realise that although the past is what it is, events could still have taken place differently. In this sense the past is very uncertain but in the sense of being past, something that cannot change any more, it is certain and, in Climacus's words, "[o]nly in this contradiction between certainty and uncertainty, this *discrimen* [distinctive mark] of something that has come into existence and thus also of the past, is the past understood".³¹⁰ Climacus is writing philosophy of history here because he, in the *Interlude* and in *PF* on the whole, discusses, for example, all these major questions of philosophy of history: (1) What does history consist of—individual actions, social structures, periods and regions, civilisations, large causal processes, divine intervention? (2) Does history as a whole have meaning, structure, or direction, beyond the individual events and actions that make it

308 In *PF* 1962, 100 'Svigagtighed' is translated as 'elusiveness' by Swenson & Hong.

309 *SKS* 4, 280 / *PF*, 81. We may observe that Climacus is using very empiricist language here.

310 *SKS* 4, 279 / *PF*, 79.

up? (3) What is involved in our knowing, representing, and explaining history? (4) To what extent is human history constitutive of the human present?³¹¹ In a way *PF* is a study in the philosophy of history because in it Climacus actually ponders questions like (as examples of those just mentioned): (1) What if a divine intervention were a part of history? (2) Is there progress in history and could events have taken place differently than they did? (3) How is knowledge of past events possible? (4) What does it mean to be contemporary to an event in history? This is not surprising bearing in mind that Kierkegaard in much of his philosophical writing polemises against Hegel's or at least his contemporary Danish Hegelians' view of philosophy of history. This is of course a classic topic in Kierkegaard scholarship.³¹²

When I believe that something has happened and tell about it to my friend, I do not report a chain of immediate impressions like colours and shapes. Instead, I tell him or her that I have observed meaningful relations among events taking place around me or, after reading first hand reports of past events, I have come to a conclusion that such and such event really took place. Judgement and evaluation come after the immediate experience. Interestingly, Climacus points out that immediate cognition lacks both the certitude and incertitude of belief in action:

Immediate sense perception and cognition do not have any intimation of the unsureness with which belief approaches its object, but neither do they have the certitude that extricates itself from the incertitude.³¹³

311 These formulations are from Little 2008.

312 See, for example, Thulstrup 1980, an English translation of the original Danish classic from 1967.

Stewart 2003 is a modern survey of the issue challenging Thulstrup's views.

313 *SKS* 4, 281 / *PF*, 82.

But what is the nature of the certitude of belief? Is it a conscious decision or an act of will, perhaps?

It is probably something non-cognitive bearing in mind the quotation above starting this chapter.

Climacus thinks that in order to understand belief one must apprehend the nature of Greek

scepticism that was

a withdrawing skepticism (εποχή [suspension of judgment]); they doubted not by virtue of knowledge but by virtue of will (deny assent—μετριοπαθεῖν [moderate feeling]). This implies that doubt can be terminated only in freedom, by an act of will, something every Greek skeptic would understand, inasmuch as he understood himself, but he would not terminate his skepticism precisely because he *willed* to doubt.³¹⁴

It is intuitively plausible to think, like Climacus does, that scepticism is about doubt. If I am a sceptic about the truth of the basic assumptions of astrology it means that I doubt their truth. But it seems that ancient scepticism was not about doubt. For example, Vogt observes that sceptical investigation as described by Sextus Empiricus (ca. 160–210 CE) does not involve doubt and we should, in Vogt's words, "refrain from invoking the modern conception of doubt as at all fundamental in the reconstruction of ancient Greek skepticism".³¹⁵ In general, it seems that ancient scepticism very broadly described was more belief than knowledge-oriented meaning, that because there is no certain knowledge about reality we should not only hold back from making knowledge claims but should hold back from belief, too.³¹⁶ In the previous quotation then, Climacus seems to proceed intuitively and to ignore the actual absence of doubt in Greek scepticism and to concur that

314 *SKS* 4, 281 / *PF*, 82.

315 Vogt 2010.

316 The view of ancient Greek scepticism in this paragraph is based on Vogt 2010.

it was not about knowledge in the sense just described. Climacus does not really refer to Greek sceptics in his discussion but there are several allusions to, for example, Sextus Empiricus.³¹⁷

Be this as it may, Climacus is not writing a dissertation and does discuss Greek scepticism in terms of the nature of doubt. Climacus argues that the suspension of judgement—a state of mind the Greek sceptics aspired to—was something that they willed. They freely willed to doubt and avoided drawing conclusions from “correct” immediate experience. There was nothing inevitable or necessary in this for them. The sceptics used cognition—like the argument from illusion of the apparently broken stick in the water—to preserve their state of mind which was their main goal and avoided making declarations of their negative cognitive results because of the fear of drawing conclusions from anything.

Likewise, for Climacus, “belief is not a knowledge [en Erkjendelse], but an act of freedom, an expression of will”.³¹⁸ So, even though belief and doubt are opposites, they have this in common. They are not cognitive acts but acts of will. They do opposite things. Belief, so to speak, believes that such and such has taken place and for certain reasons. For example, I believe, for now at least, that the sun has come into existence through complex physical events originating from the Big Bang. Or, someone else may believe that God created the sun and the rest of the universe in an act of divine will. We both have our reasons for our beliefs but our beliefs do not follow inevitably or logically from those reasons. This applies to my scientific world view, too. Even professors of cosmology have to make decisions along the lines of “OK, all the evidence points to a certain direction: there must have been some kind of a Big Bang and eventually it caused stars like the sun to form. I am convinced and believe it.” Some kind of determination has to be made for a belief to

317 See the Hongs’ Notes in *PF*, 311-313.

318 *SKS* 4, 282 / *PF*, 83.

form and this also means the disappearance of doubt regarding the issue at hand. Climacus formulates this as follows:

The conclusion of belief is no conclusion [Slutning] but a resolution [Beslutning], and thus doubt is excluded.³¹⁹

Climacus has epistemological reasons for his proposition. It seems plausible to argue that because the sun is there at the centre of the solar system (effect), it has come into existence through complex physical events (cause). This seems to be an inference from effect to cause. On the other hand, it could be argued that given the Big Bang and physical laws governing the behaviour of elementary particles (cause), the sun eventually formed (effect). This seems to be an inference from cause to effect. The citing of causes for some effect to emerge is very common in ordinary life and in science and in modern discussion of the subject, although it has been questioned whether or not all explanations in these areas are causal there is a rather general agreement that many scientific explanations cite information about causes.³²⁰ It seems that the examples of inferences I just gave are both about the sun, though. The problem is the sun's existence: not how its existence could be proved but, generally, how were the stars, the sun included, formed? What caused and causes such events or effects? Climacus refers to Jacobi when he ponders the direction of causal inferences:

[O]ne must remember that the cognitive inference is from cause to effect or rather from ground to consequent (Jacobi). This is not entirely true, because I cannot immediately sense or know that what I

319 *SKS* 4, 283 / *PF*, 84.

320 According to Woodward 2010.

immediately sense or know is an effect, I must already have made it dubious in the uncertainty of coming into existence.³²¹

As discussed above, Jacobi was heavily influenced by Hume in his thought including his criticism of Kant's critical philosophy. Like Hamann, Jacobi's use of Hume is controversial and Jacobi used Hume to attack reason and defend his idea of the necessity of faith. Beiser writes how it is "Hume who taught him that the beliefs of common sense are not demonstrable by reason and that the sphere of faith extends into all the the corners of life. [...] But Jacobi's use of Hume's skepticism, much like Hamann's, was self-serving."³²² Climacus does not take sides which of the directions of causal inferences is "right"—this is not his goal here and correctly so, as I see it. His "Jacobean/Humean" point is that because only immediate cognition is reliable—it is what it is—we cannot directly observe causes and effects, only immediate sensations. When we call something "a cause" or "an effect" we are actually already interpreting beyond our immediate experience to something that we think or believe is going on and are, in fact, excluding certain possibilities in favour of something else.³²³ Belief—or faith in its ordinary meaning—takes it role here and excludes doubt. Belief is needed to structure the experienced reality into something that makes sense. This sense may come from different points of view like, for example, religious or scientific or even Hegelian philosophy of history.

As has been observed, the Humean element in Climacus's discussion presented in this chapter is rather clear. For example, in Thulstrup's view "[i]t is curious that Kierkegaard does not take Hume's epistemology into consideration here [Climacus's reference to Jacobi]" and the Hongs

321 *SKS* 4, 283 / *PF*, 84.

322 Beiser 1987, 91. See also di Giovanni 1998 and Pinkard 2002, 87-104.

323 I ignore here the problem of "neutral" immediate experience.

think “[a] reference to David Hume might have been made in the text of *Fragments* in connection with Jacobi.”³²⁴ Do Hume’s and Climacus’s beliefs do the same job, i.e. terminate or exclude doubt? In the *Appendix* to the *Interlude* Climacus points out that “[w]hat has been said here applies to the directly historical, whose contradiction is only that it has come into existence, whose contradiction*³²⁵ is only that of coming into existence.”³²⁶ Climacus wants his reader to remember that what he has written about belief so far has been really about faith in the ordinary sense. What about faith in the eminent sense? As is well known, *PF* is a philosophical “Thought Project [Tanke-Projekt]” in which Climacus tries to find an alternative to the Socratic/Platonic method of gaining knowledge or learning the truth through recollection.³²⁷ This he finds in Christian faith, which is essentially faith in the historical Christ who is an eternal godhead and at the same time a human being. This strange historical fact is “the absolute paradox” and the true object of faith in the eminent sense. As I suggested above, Climacus contributes to the philosophy of history in *PF*. His discussion of the notion of contemporaneity to an allegedly historical event is one such issue.³²⁸ It is intuitively plausible to think that if I am an eyewitness and contemporary to some event then I have, so to speak, a “privileged access” to what really happened compared to someone who reads about the event, for example, ten years later. But Climacus disagrees. He argues that because historical events apprehended as such all involve the uncertainty of coming into existence they are interpretations of immediacies supported by belief. So, even direct eyewitness cannot cross this “divide of interpretation”, not to mention someone who ten years later inquires into the matter. The

324 *PF*1962, 252 and *PF*, 314n57. See Evans 2004, 70-71 for Climacus’s ironical “plagiarism”.

325 In this asterisk marked footnote in the original text Climacus begs that “contradiction” here must not be understood in a “volatilised” sense of Hegel and “others” as something that has the power to produce something.

326 *SKS* 4, 285 / *PF*, 86.

327 See Hong 1982 for “Tanke-Experiment” in Kierkegaard.

328 I have already discussed this issue in ch. 3.1 from the point of view of alleged miracles.

historicalness of the historical is never immediate. Now, Climacus asks, what if the historical fact were the “assumption that the god *has* been?”³²⁹ “That historical fact” is something special. It, in Climacus’s words,

has no immediate contemporary, because it is historical to the first power (faith in the ordinary sense) [belief]); it has no immediate contemporary to the second power, since it is based on a contradiction (faith in the eminent sense).³³⁰

So, not only faith has to deal with the historicalness of that fact, it also has to apprehend its contradictory nature, i.e. that something eternal is at same time a concrete human being. Even for faith this is quite a task. It follows from the contradictoriness of that fact that its non-contemporariness is enhanced. In a sense it has to be believed twice. Firstly, there is the regular historicalness of that fact that it shares with other allegedly historical facts to be dealt with. Secondly, it is contradictory and this distances it even more from the would be-believer. Climacus argues that this contradictoriness is in a sense an equalizer regarding the status of those interested in what is happening or what has happened. It was no easier for contemporaries of “the god” to apprehend his divinity than it is for someone two thousand years later, because passing years do not wear down self-contradiction or, as Climacus puts it, “for those who are very different with respect to time, this latter equality absorbs the differences among those who are temporally different in the first sense.”³³¹ Climacus does not hold that the issue of contemporaneity is just like that taken care of. Surely there must be important differences between the experiences of contemporaries to an

329 *SKS* 4, 285 / *PF*, 86 -7.

330 *SKS* 4, 286 / *PF*, 87-8.

331 *SKS* 4, 286 / *PF*, 88.

event and later generations who, for example, read about it in an old book whose historical trustworthiness is highly controversial. Climacus does indeed discuss this issue in *The Follower at Second Hand* right after the *Interlude* and its discussion of the two senses of faith but the *epistemology* behind the perhaps surprising nature of contemporaneity can be found in the *Interlude*.

Interestingly, Climacus in *PF* discusses existence in a very Humean-Kantian spirit and declares that “whether one wants to call existence an *accessorium* [addition] or the eternal *prius* [presupposition], it can never be demonstrated [bevises].”³³² For Climacus, existence does not come in degrees. “A fly, when it is,” he writes, “has just as much being as the god.”³³³ Climacus wants to make a clear-cut distinction between factual being and ideal being. The former is concrete temporal existence and the latter is some kind of atemporal conceptual being. Ignoring this difference induces much confusion. According to Climacus, when we want to demonstrate that something exists, we in fact postulate that that something already exists and in fact just elaborate what a term means. It is a mistake to think that we can demonstrate that something exists because when we think we are doing this we in fact are “demonstrating” that something already existing has some properties, so we are not in fact demonstrating its existence. Or, in Climacus’s words, “I do not demonstrate that a stone exists but that something which exists is a stone,” and “the court of law does not demonstrate that a criminal exists but that the accused, who does indeed exist, is a criminal.”³³⁴ The same applies to the special case of God. When we, for example, try to demonstrate God’s existence from his works we in fact already interpret our immediate experience in a sense that there must be God who has done all this, i.e. created the universe. Yet this divine meaning is not immediately present in our

332 SKS 4, 245 / *PF*, 40.

333 SKS 4, 246n / *PF*, 41n.

334 SKS 4, 245 / *PF*, 40.

experience, so we are actually just developing the idea of God as a creator of things. We cannot just by developing a concept of a thing argue for its concrete existence. To elaborate on Climacus's example of the accused on trial, Climacus's point is that the prosecutor cannot "demonstrate" the existence of the particular criminal but he or she in fact argues in a court of law that someone already existing, the accused in question, is the criminal. So, existence is here presupposed, not demonstrated. Climacus in this discussion in *PF* is arguing against the rationalist project of demonstrating that God exists and is commenting especially on Spinoza.³³⁵ It has been argued that Kierkegaard has a "hidden debt" to Kant, but here it is perhaps not so hidden, or as Green puts it,

[p]resupposed in this remark [see the quotation starting this paragraph] is the idea that existence is not a predicate but the affirmation of the reality of the object with its predicates, an idea at the heart of Kant's criticism of the ontological argument in the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the first *Critique*.³³⁶

The Hume-Kant-Kierkegaard connection is a deep scholarly topic, but for now it suffices to briefly comment on how Climacus's notion of existence as presented above compares to that of Hume's referred to in the previous chapter of my study.³³⁷ It seems that Hume and Climacus at least partially

335 Carlisle 2009, 177-179. See Evans 1998, 156-159 for problems with determining whether Climacus's view of God in *CUP* is realistic or antirealistic.

336 Green 1992, 14. The title of Green 1992 is *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*. For Kant's famous discussion of the ontological argument including the view that "[b]eing is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing," see Kant 1929, A 592-602 = B 620-630 ("A" refers to the text of the first edition of the first *Critique* and "B" to the text of the second edition of the first *Critique*). For a brief point on the more general Kantian view idea that it is a mistake to maintain that *ens realissimum* or the most real being provides us with an idea of an object to which it would be appropriate to apply real determining predicates, see Grier 2012.

337 Kant's position regarding the themes of this thesis is one important direction where it could be developed. After a brief survey, it appears that there is surprisingly little work done on Kierkegaard's

share the view that existence or being is not something that can be added to or separated from the idea of a thing. When we form an idea of an object we ipso facto conceive it existing in at least some manner. Hume's point of view is how beliefs are formed and the difference between belief and idea, whereas Climacus's is ontological and, particularly, addresses the difference between factual and ideal being.

In my view, Climacus's ordinary belief as the opposite of doubt is at least partly analogous to Hume's belief as a lively conception. Both do the job of structuring our experience into a view of a coherent reality. Immediate experience is out of reach of doubt and is raw material for human nature when it forms a picture of the world where there are relations like causation between objects and their properties. Climacus's belief leads to the termination of doubt and in a sense Hume's belief acts in the same role in the sense that it disregards the uncertainty inherent in the conclusions drawn from our immediate experience. Custom behind belief is such a powerful factor that it prevents human beings, and maybe also other animals, from noticing that their beliefs about what and how things are going on may not have rational grounds. Maybe this trait in human nature has been favoured by natural selection because a sceptical attitude expressed in behaviour may have been a handicap to survival among predatory animals.³³⁸ On the whole, Climacus, unlike Hume, is not trying to present an overall view about the workings of human nature. His focus is on "that

relations to Kant. (Of course, there is a vast amount of writing on Hume's relations to Kant). Green 1992 seems to be the first monograph on the topic. Green 2011 is a collection of his articles mainly from the 1990s and 2000s. Knappe 2004 is a dissertation based monograph on Kant and Kierkegaard including a discussion and comparison of Kierkegaard's and Kant's theories of knowledge. See also Kosch 2010 and Stern 2012. I only proceed in the "Kant direction" in this thesis to a limited extent though I propose that it is an interesting new "chapter" in work on Kierkegaard's relations to Hume.

338 According to Evans 1998, 171, "Kierkegaard seems to be of the opinion, shared by Hume and Reid and Moore, that certain kinds of beliefs are just natural though perhaps not inevitable; they are called forth by life itself."

[alleged] historical fact” and what should a human being do about it. Because all historical facts are doubtful it is only natural to think à la Climacus that if a human being should anchor his philosophy of life on an alleged historical fact—which happens to be contradictory in nature—he or she should investigate, among other things, what is his or her cognitive relation to that alleged fact and historical knowledge in general. Incidentally, to suggest a comparison for further study, there seem to be parallels between what has been called Charles Sanders Peirce’s (1839–1914) “doubt-belief theory of inquiry” (see Peirce’s “The Fixation of Belief” (1877)) and Climacus’s view of the interplay of doubt and belief. Like Climacus, Peirce describes doubt and belief in a sensuous or “non-cognitive” way. For example, according to Peirce, “[w]e generally know when we wish to ask a question and when we wish to pronounce a judgment, for there is a dissimilarity between the sensation of doubting and that of believing. [...] The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions. Doubt never has such an effect” and “[t]he irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle *inquiry*, though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a very apt designation.”³³⁹ I am not aware of any studies of Climacus’s and Peirce’s views of belief and doubt but it has been argued, based on *Hume*’s and Peirce’s views on the nature and role of belief, that, among other things, belief should be understood as a non-cognitive category, i.e. along the “pragmatist’s way”.³⁴⁰ So, given the discussion of this chapter, Climacus’s views of doubt and belief are clearly connected to this theme and maybe to the pragmatist tradition in general.³⁴¹ On the

339 Peirce 1877. (These quotations are from the third and fourth part of “The Fixation of Belief”. I cite the online edition of the text with no page numbers.)

340 Pitt 2005. Incidentally, there is an article by Peirce on Hume on miracles (see Peirce 1935 (original 1901)).

341 See Emmanuel 1991 and 1996, 50-60 for Kierkegaard’s alleged pragmatism.

other hand, the comparison of Peirce's Hegelianism³⁴² and Kierkegaard's relation to Hegelianism is another interesting issue.

According to Popkin, Kierkegaard and Hume

come to the conclusion that I call 'epistemological skepticism'—the view that none of our opinions, beliefs, etc. can be based on adequate rational evidence. However, neither of them accepts that view which the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptics thought followed from this—that we should suspend judgment with regard to any assertions which lack adequate rational evidence. (This addenda I call "psychological skepticism.") They both insist that there is a basis for belief, though not a rational one.³⁴³

Later in his article (in which he compares exclusively *T* and *PF*) Popkin argues that

Kierkegaard does not hold, as Hume does, that even the skeptic must believe some things because nature compels him to. One can believe or doubt. Either act is a free choice determined not by the degree of evidence available but by the doubter's or believer's desires. Since the faith that Kierkegaard

342 See, e.g. Burch 2010 for a concise discussion of this issue. Stern and Walker 1998 covers Hegelianism in America and Britain in the nineteenth century.

343 Popkin 1951, 278. In his later article Popkin emphasises the sceptical elements in Kierkegaard's thought and the extreme irrationality of his thought. He concludes that "the sceptical Christianity of Kierkegaard accepts the full consequences of Hume's irreligious scepticism, and admits that Christianity is opposed to all reason and experience. But in accepting these consequences, it is possible that Kierkegaard has made religion so irrational that it becomes both unintelligible and unrecognizable, that it becomes a faith so blind that it cannot see" (Popkin 1972, 372). See also Popkin 1992, 215-218, who makes essentially the same points as in his earlier articles.

wishes the reader to adopt is independent of anything we might call reasonable evidence, the decision to believe it, or to doubt it, is a passion.³⁴⁴

Popkin does not recognise the difference between ordinary and eminent belief. It indeed seems that Climacus thinks that a person can just will to believe that something has taken place or come into existence.³⁴⁵ Kierkegaard has even been seen as a classic example of a volitionalist account of belief according to which beliefs can be directly willed.³⁴⁶ In my view, when Climacus calls belief an act of freedom and an expression of will, it does not follow that he means all believing is an expression of will. I think it is plausible to argue—although I will not go into details here—that Climacus does not mean every belief is a conscious act of the will and that I can believe just about anything I choose. When I see a star, I do not just have a raw “sense-data” in my mind’s eye and then decide what it really is that I see. Climacus nowhere endorses this kind of mechanism. He is only saying that a wilful element is present in believing and doubting but it is not always conscious. I agree with

344 Popkin 1951, 279.

345 William James’s “Will to Believe” (1897) is a classic writing on the issue of believing without certitude. It seems that, according to James, it is almost like a human condition that we just have to believe and then act without rational justification. James 1897, 14 asks: “Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?” However, James’s point is not that we should just start believing any kind of absurdity or that we were allowed to do so. James actually seems to think that it would better to use the term “right” instead of “will” to believe. His idea of “living options” means that in certain situations when religious believing seems like a viable or “living” option to a person then that person has a right to believe. The justification of his or her belief is grounded in the “living” experience of a believer, James seems to mean (see James 1897, 29-32). The comparison of the idea of the necessity of believing in Hume, Kierkegaard and James would be an interesting research topic.

346 Pojman 1986.

Evans and contra Popkin on this interpretation.³⁴⁷ But this is all about ordinary believing; what about faith in the eminent sense, is it a wilful act?

Climacus's stand on the nature of religious faith seems to be clear when he writes in *PF* that "faith [Troen] is not an act of will [Villies-Akt], for it is always the case that all human willing is efficacious only within the condition [Betingelsen]." ³⁴⁸ So, despite the fact that faith in the eminent sense is not an act of will, it involves some wilful elements, but only "within the condition". What does Climacus mean? This is a large issue but Climacus's point is roughly that because of the contradictory nature of the object of faith—the incarnation or "the god"—it is not possible for the would-be believer through his or her own abilities alone to posit this object as his or her object of faith. The enabling "condition" for this must come from the god himself. This condition is then some kind of transformative framework of non-human origin which makes a person responsive to something that cannot be grasped by his or her mental faculties.³⁴⁹ When this condition is provided, wilful believing becomes possible. The wilfulness of the faith in the eminent sense is then in this crucial sense limited. For Kierkegaard, faith in the eminent sense is something special because it leads an individual to that special historical fact and it should not be trivialised by philosophers.

To my knowledge, Anti-Climacus's *PC* is the only other writing by Kierkegaard where the exact expression "faith in the eminent sense" ("Troen i eminent Forstand") is used.³⁵⁰ There Anti-Climacus ponders on the alternatives of communicating faith in the eminent sense directly or indirectly. However, in a long footnote in *CUP* (regarding, as Climacus puts it, "the design of *Fragments*"), Climacus uses the expressions "faith *sensu eminentiori*" and "paradox *sensu eminentiori*" (again, to my knowledge, these expressions are not used anywhere else in

³⁴⁷ Evans 1989.

³⁴⁸ *SKS* 4, 264 / *PF*, 62.

³⁴⁹ See also, above, the chapter on miracles.

³⁵⁰ *SKS* 12, 137 / *PC*, 133.

Kierkegaard's writings) referring to personal or "inward" senses of "faith" and "paradox"³⁵¹. I am not aware of any other uses of "faith in the ordinary sense" ("Troen i almindelig Forstand") than the ones in *PF*.

351 *SKS* 7, 188 / *CUP1*, 206n-207n.

5. Hume and Kierkegaard on Philosophy Gone Astray

According to Hume there is true and false philosophy and true and false metaphysics.³⁵² Hume uses the distinctions of true and false philosophy and true and false metaphysics to explicate what he thinks has gone wrong with rationalist philosophy. On the other hand, Kierkegaard in his famous criticism of the “system” or “speculation”, i.e. the Hegelian rationalism of his contemporary Danish thinkers, criticises philosophy that has lost its contact with concrete temporal existence. I will argue in this chapter that these two criticisms of a certain kind of philosophy and philosophising share interesting and surprising similarities considering the different philosophical traditions their proponents are often placed in—Hume as the key figure of the British Empiricist movement and Kierkegaard as the “father of existentialism”³⁵³ and a fervent reformer of the Christian faith.

5.1 *Hume on true and false philosophy*

The notion of true and false philosophy is not something one often comes across when one reads about Hume, which is not surprising because Hume himself does not often use this distinction. Hume does not explicitly define what true and false philosophy are but he suggests what they are like. For example, Hume thinks that

352 According to Hume, also religion can be “true” or “false”. In his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” Hume presents these as “the corruptions of true religion” (*E*, 73). Hume also, at least twice, briefly refers to “true atheism” (*T* 1.4.5.17; *SBN* 240 and *NHR* 4.4).

353 See, for example, McDonald 2009.

[n]othing is more requisite for a true philosopher, than to restrain the intemperate desire of searching into causes, and having establish'd any doctrine upon a sufficient number of experiments, rest contented with that, when he sees a farther examination would lead him into obscure and uncertain speculations.³⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, it seems that Hume's own approach to philosophical problems is of the true kind while others are often of the false kind. Roughly speaking, the biggest flaw of the false philosophy is that it is out of bounds. The setting of these bounds is probably the most important thing in Hume's philosophising. Bearing in mind the importance of Hume's theory of the perceptions of the mind it is not surprising to observe that it is also behind Hume's distinction between true and false philosophy. Hume points out that his

intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations. For besides that this belongs not to my present purpose, I am afraid, that such an enterprize is beyond the reach of human understanding, and that we can never pretend to know body otherwise than by those external properties, which discover themselves to the senses. As to those who attempt any thing farther, I cannot approve of their ambition, till I see, in some one instance at least, that they have met with success. But at present I content myself with knowing perfectly the manner in which objects affect my senses, and their connections with each other, as far as experience informs me of them. This suffices for the conduct of life; and this also suffices for my philosophy, which pretends only to explain the nature and causes of our perceptions, or impressions and ideas.³⁵⁵

354 *T* 1.1.4.6; *SBN* 12-13.

355 *T* 1.2.5.26; *SBN* 64. Compare this to what Kant later said about the impossibility of knowing what is the case with the objects in themselves independent of human sensibility in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (see

It is essential to Humean thought that true philosophers should only describe how different kind of human ideas are formed with reference to sensory experience. When we observe that we entertain certain beliefs about our surroundings, we should only try to explain how we come to hold those beliefs and not try to make statements about the true nature of events independent of us perceiving them in one way or another. This is what Hume says “my philosophy” is all about. In a footnote to the previously quoted paragraph, Hume argues, as an example of what he means, that “*the Newtonian philosophy*” should only be understood as an enquiry into the appearances that objects make on our senses, not into the real nature of objects if we want to avoid full “scepticism and uncertainty”.³⁵⁶ If this is true philosophy, then one way to formulate what it means to be “led astray by a false philosophy” is

when we transfer the determination of the thought to external objects, and suppose any real intelligible connexion betwixt them; that being a quality, which can only belong to the mind that considers them.³⁵⁷

So, in a sense, Hume’s true philosophy is about the workings of the human mind or nature, not how things really are. One important feature of false philosophising is then a kind of philosophical blindness to the epistemological “divide” between mind and external objects. Hume is often seen as a thinker who wants to severely limit the amount of possible human knowledge based on his

Kant 1929, A42/B59–60).

356 *T* 1.2.5.26n12; *SBN* 634. For a discussion of Hume’s relation to Newtonianism, see Schliesser 2007.

357 *T* 1.3.14.27; *SBN* 168.

empiricist standpoint and this view is justified in many ways and maybe even more so, if the point of view to his thought is strictly philosophical and, particularly, epistemological.

On the other hand, Livingston, more from the point of view of the history of ideas, declares that “no philosopher has suffered more from the narrowing of vision that comes from the modern habit of epistemological classification than Hume” and sees Hume as not an empiricist in the *ideological* sense of the term and thinks that one should “resist the prejudice of epistemological classification and to look for a broader topic under which to understand Hume’s thought”.³⁵⁸ Livingston also points out that the term empiricism “appears in English around the middle of the seventeenth century and denotes a medical quack who, without scientific knowledge, practices by trial and error. It was largely a term of abuse throughout the eighteenth century” and begins to take on the modern favourable connotations only in the late nineteenth century “as when Thomas Huxley says in 1881 that ‘all true science begins with empiricism’”.³⁵⁹ In my view, though, it does not follow from this that it is somehow misleading to describe Hume as an “empiricist” from a modern point of view if the history of the term empiricism is acknowledged at the same time. Nevertheless, it seems that, especially in the analytic tradition, scholars often have too narrow an interest in just certain epistemological dimensions of Hume’s thought more or less ignoring the “philosophy of culture” emerging from his writings. Further, as a warning against anachronistic interpretations of classic texts, Hintikka claims that the essential difference between Hume’s thought and that which is typical in the practice of modern natural sciences is the fact that Hume does not differentiate the concepts of ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’.³⁶⁰ Hintikka argues that when Hume writes about “the

358 Livingston 1998, 3, 7. Livingston already in 1976 complains how most “Hume scholarship still congregates around the epistemological and ontological problems raised in Book I of the *Treatise*, and even here there is a fairly limited selection of topics” (Livingston and King, eds., 1976, 4).

359 Livingston 1998, 4.

360 Hintikka 1969, 39-40.

experimental Method of Reasoning” in the subtitle of *T*, he in fact means a method based on experience and does not mean experiments in the sense that they are actively performed in the modern natural sciences. This means that for Hume the role of an enquirer into human nature remains passive. Hintikka even declares that Hume, in a sense, was “completely blind” to the experimental method in the modern active sense of the term.³⁶¹ I suggest then that this brief excursion into the history of ideas at least partially explicates the passive role of the true philosopher in *T* and elsewhere in Hume’s writings. He or she is an experiential observer and enquirer into human perceptual reality but does not actively perform experiments to probe into their true or probable nature. Or possibly the issue of the missing shade of blue is at least a thought experiment? If it is, then it seems that this is only the case from the post-Humean perspective, because the term ‘thought experiment’ was not used in the English language until 1854.³⁶² So, to wrap up this section with the title of Hintikka’s paper, “concepts have their fate, too”.³⁶³

5.2 Hume on ancient and modern philosophical fictions

In the chapter on Hume’s notion of belief and Kierkegaard’s notion of Tro I suggested that the idea of fiction in the non-ordinary sense of something that is invented like characters in fantasy novels is important to Hume. Hume, for example, believes that

³⁶¹ Hintikka 1969, 40.

³⁶² See “thought, n.”. OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/201055?redirectedFrom=thought%20experiment> (accessed April 06, 2011).

³⁶³ The title of Hintikka’s original paper in Finnish reads “Käsitteilläkin on kohtalonsa”.

there might be several useful discoveries made from a criticism of the fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning *substances, and substantial forms, and accidents, and occult qualities*; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature.³⁶⁴

So, according to Hume, the objects to which these traditional metaphysical terms allegedly refer seem to be in some sense fictitious. However, the study of the use of this terminology is in some essential way informative of the workings of human nature. One might think that possibly only the ancient philosophers were on the wrong track in their discussion of substance etc. and now, “modern” philosophers (from Hume’s point of view) have got things right? Actually, they do not seem to do better than the ancients:

THE opinions of the antient philosophers, their fictions of substance and accident, and their reasonings concerning substantial forms and occult qualities, are like the spectres in the dark, and are deriv’d from principles, which, however common, are neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature. The *modern philosophy* pretends to be entirely free from this defect, and to arise only from the solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination. Upon what grounds this pretension is founded must now be the subject of our enquiry.³⁶⁵

Hume suggests then that the solid foundations of modern philosophy may not be that solid after all and continues:

364 T 1.4.3.1; SBN 219.

365 T 1.4.4.2; SBN 226.

The fundamental principle of that [modern] philosophy is the opinion concerning colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold; which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv'd from the operation of the external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. Upon examination, I find only one of the reasons commonly produc'd for this opinion to be satisfactory, viz. that deriv'd from the variations of those impressions, even while the external object, to all appearance, continues the same.³⁶⁶

Modern philosophers, too, have formed at least one fiction or “philosophical hypotheses”, i.e. the double existence of perceptions and objects (to which the previous quotation alludes).³⁶⁷ With this Hume refers to one of the most classic problems of philosophy with several epistemological and ontological dimensions, i.e. “the problem of perception”. What is it that we perceive? Do our senses, as we constantly use them, apprehend objects as they truly are? Or is there some kind of private sense-data³⁶⁸ hovering between us and the objects we perceive and in a sense blocking our view of how things really are? If this is the case, how can we acquire any knowledge of objects that is not only knowledge of the qualities of the sense-data? One may have an ontology that says there are only persons or a person and sense-data and, consequently, an epistemology that any synthetic knowledge one may have is only about that sense-data. On the other hand, one may argue that there are material objects that are possibly the cause of knowable sense-data but one cannot have any knowledge of them.³⁶⁹ Hume’s overall position regarding the problem of perception has often been

366 *T* 1.4.4.3; *SBN* 226.

367 *T* 1.4.2.52; *SBN* 214-216.

368 Or sense-datum. According to *OED*, this term was first used in the late 1800s.

369 For discussions of these and related questions, see, for example, Smith 2002, BonJour 2009 and Crane 2011.

seen as, in modern terminology, phenomenalist. One way to formulate this view is that “the content of propositions about material objects and the material world is *entirely* concerned with features and relations of the immediate objects of our perceptual experience, that is, the features and relations of our sense-data.”³⁷⁰

Before explicating the fictitiousness of the double existence of perceptions and objects of modern philosophy, I will discuss Hume’s criticism of the fictitious notion of substance of ancient philosophy.

5.2.1 The ancient fiction of substance

The concept of substance has been widely discussed in the history of philosophy and the term has many meanings.³⁷¹ In general it may be characterised in the two following ways. The first way is the

370 BonJour 2009. For example, Wright 1983 has challenged the view that Hume is a phenomenalist.

371 Aristotle’s (384–322 BCE) account of substance in *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, Book Z is historically by far the most seminal one. Aristotle seems to mean, in the first paragraph of *Metaphysics*, Book Z (Aristotle 1984, vol. 2, 1623) that substance is some kind of primary being by which all other kind of being is: “Clearly then it is in virtue of this category [substance] that each of the others *is*. Therefore that which is primarily and *is* simply (not *is* something) must be substance.” Substance is then a “what” of a thing like “man” or “God”, not its qualities like “good” or “beautiful”. A little later Aristotle notes that “[w]e have now outlined the nature of substance, showing that it is that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated” (Aristotle 1984, vol. 2, 1625). There is obviously much more to Aristotle’s account, but here is expressed the idea that substance is some kind of independent thing contra its qualities or properties that cannot “be” without it. Other classic accounts of substance were formulated, e.g. by Descartes and Kant. According to Descartes, there are only two kinds of substance: material and mental. The former for him is more “stuff” than a “thing” in the sense that there is only one material substance. However, for Descartes, each person is a different mental substance. For Kant,

more generic, and here substances are some kind of basic building blocks of reality. So, one might argue, atoms are the substances of the atomists because everything else is constructed of them. In this use, the term substance is something one may use to describe some basic elements in a philosophical system, or, to quote Robinson's perhaps more philosophical formulation, "[i]n this sense of 'substance' any realist philosophical system acknowledges the existence of substances. Probably the only theories which do not would be those forms of logical positivism or pragmatism which treat ontology as a matter of convention. According to such theories, there are no real facts about what is ontologically basic, and so nothing is objectively substance."³⁷² Robinson argues, vaguely in my view, that in the same way Hume's impressions and ideas are the substances of his system if "substance" is used in this generic sense.³⁷³ It is very plausible to argue that impressions and ideas are the "substances" of Hume's *philosophy* because his theory of them is the basis of his views on different philosophical issues but it is not obvious that they are, according to Hume, the constituents of *reality itself*. Hume's theory of impressions and ideas is more about why we experience reality the way we do than what reality is like. Or in Hume's words, already quoted, "this also suffices for my philosophy, which pretends only to explain the nature and causes of our perceptions, or impressions and ideas." So, it may be argued, Humean impressions and ideas are the substances of the workings of human nature.

The notion of substance can also be used in a more specific sense, i.e. substances are some particular kinds of basic entities which are sometimes but not always used in philosophical theories. This means that in this specific sense of substance, the basic building blocks of being of some

substance is an essential category of the understanding, which, with certain other categories, makes the human experience of physical world possible. (See, e.g. Robinson 2009 for concise characterisations of substance in the history of Western philosophy.)

³⁷² Robinson 2009.

³⁷³ Robinson 2009.

philosophical system are not necessarily its substances, and that a particular philosophical system does not have to use the concept of substance at all. As Robinson observes, this “conception of substance derives from the intuitive notion of individual *thing* or *object*, which contrast mainly with properties and events.”³⁷⁴ In this sense, Hume’s impressions and ideas are not substances of his philosophy because, simply, Hume does not call them such. All in all, there are many—Robinson presents eventually eight—overlapping ideas contributing to the philosophical concept of substance.³⁷⁵

According to Hume in *T* 1.1.4-5 the aforementioned (see ch. 4.1) natural relations of resemblance, contiguity in space and time, and cause and effect are both relations and forms or principles of the natural association of ideas and they also produce many complex ideas that are frequently used in human thought. Hume declares that “[t]hese complex ideas may be divided into RELATIONS, MODES, and SUBSTANCES”.³⁷⁶ The natural relations and philosophical relations are not, perhaps confusingly, two exclusive groups for Hume. For example, according to Hume, the relation of resemblance can be both natural and philosophical and is in fact “a relation, without which no philosophical relation can exist”, meaning that it is also essential to the philosophical relation of cause and effect.³⁷⁷ Hume indeed explicitly acknowledges that there are two important senses of the term “relation”. It may be used for that quality by which ideas naturally and involuntarily follow each other in everyday experience or it may be used in the more philosophical and voluntary sense. Hume does not use the words voluntary or involuntary here but, instead and respectively, expressions like “the one naturally introduces the other” and “particular subject of

³⁷⁴ Robinson 2009.

³⁷⁵ In presenting the two senses of substance I have primarily relied on Robinson 2009. See also Ayers 1998 for a brief history of the concept of substance.

³⁷⁶ *T* 1.1.4.7; *SBN* 13.

³⁷⁷ *T* 1.1.5.3,9; *SBN* 14,15.

comparison, without a connecting principle”.³⁷⁸ What about modes and substances? Why does Hume discuss them in relation with relations?

It seems that Hume’s criticism of the notion of substance is concerned with its use in the specific sense of thing or object vs. its properties. Hume, based on his theory of perceptions of the mind, argues that because we experience only qualities or accidents of objects, not substance itself, we do not really have a clear idea of substance. We cannot experience anything holding together those different qualities in our experience but because we in fact do experience them together, the idea of a substance, Hume argues, is just a collection of simple ideas

that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection.³⁷⁹

We experience different qualities of an apple like its colour, shape and taste, but this is all, there is no “apple substance”, contra “apple properties”, that we can experience. What we call “substance” now is, in Hume’s words, “an unknown *something*”, in which those simple ideas, based on simple impressions, “inhere” or have their being in.³⁸⁰ Hume also calls this unknown something a “fiction” and seems to suggest that although the formation of the idea of, for an example, “apple substance” is natural by the principles of association, it is not unavoidable because it can happen that the fiction does not form. But even in this case the ideas that may form a substance, are still often “closely and

378 *T* 1.1.5.1; *SBN* 13-14.

379 *T* 1.1.6.2; *SBN* 16.

380 *T* 1.1.6.2; *SBN* 16. Hume’s use of “inhere” here is used as an example sentence for the meaning of “inhere” in the *OED*. See: “inhere, v.”. *OED* Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95941?redirectedFrom=inhere> (accessed April 11, 2011).

inseparably connected by the relations of contiguity and causation”.³⁸¹ One could argue then that the fictitiousness of the idea of substance inheres in, according to Hume, the fact that there is no corresponding sensational impression from which it is derived. It is natural to think that there are substances, Hume roughly says, but one should not be led astray to think that there really are substances acting as hangers for different sensory qualities.³⁸² The idea of substance is useful because it gives unity to our experience and allows us to speak of one and the same thing in our experience. According to Hume, the idea of substance allows that new qualities are attached to it without the thing changing into something else. Hume observes that, for example, our idea of gold allows the new quality of being dissoluble in aqua regia to be joined to other qualities we previously conceived to be connected to the substance of gold. After this we regard this new quality like it had always been a part of our idea of gold. Modes are different because they often change into different modes when new qualities are added to them. If, for example, we join the quality of singing to the mode of the complex idea of acting we get a new mode, opera. Hume, in the one-page section of “Of modes and substances” (*T* 1.1.6) is not altogether rejecting the idea of substance, but he warns against making too much of it philosophically by analysing what “substance” really means according to his theory of perceptions of the mind. Like many other early modern philosophers, Hume’s target here is the scholastic vocabulary of substance and mode, and the crux of his criticism is basically that of John Locke’s (1632-1704).³⁸³ It seems then that, at least here, Hume’s discussion of modes and substances is an example of an idea of substance as something logically different from its properties.

381 *T* 1.1.6.2; *SBN* 16.

382 Hume in passing also rejects the idea that the idea of substance could be based on an impression of reflection, i.e. passion or emotion (*T* 1.1.6.1; *SBN* 16).

383 See the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 430-1.

Hume presents a more thorough account of the idea or concept of substance in the section of “Of the antient philosophy” (*T* 1.4.3). By ancient philosophy Hume is referring to Aristotelian doctrines of substance, substantial form, and accident.³⁸⁴ As quoted above, Hume thinks that the criticism of the fictions of ancient philosophy like substances, substantial forms, accidents and occult qualities might yield “useful discoveries”. Hume’s point of view is here very typical of him because he tries to explain how we come to hold certain notions like substance and other related ideas.

Hume presents what he thinks are contradictions in human experience.³⁸⁵ It is understood “by the most judicious philosophers” that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections of sensible qualities which we often or always find together in our experience. Despite the fact that these qualities are distinct from each other, we still often experience that there is a one thing that remains the same when it goes through more or less considerable changes. The contradictions lie between (1) the distinctiveness of the sensible qualities and the experienced simplicity of the object and between (2) the variation of the sensible qualities and the identity of the experienced object. The latter is illustrated when we examine whether the object at hand is considered over successive periods of time or any two distinctive periods of time. In the case of change over successive periods of time the mind is presented with qualities that are often or always united together making the mind move smoothly from one quality or perception to another and so experiencing a unity or identity among in fact distinctive qualities, which are only slightly different from each other. This is explained, according to Hume, by the fact that if the influence of two ideas on the mind is similar, then the mind easily takes the one for the other. So, because in fact different collections of qualities

384 See the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 478.

385 *T* 1.4.3.2; *SBN* 219.

have the same effect on the mind, the mind actually experiences the object as identical over time as if it were considering an unchangeable object.³⁸⁶

But what if the mind considers the object at hand over two distinct periods of time? For example, if I see an apple when it is just picked and then after many weeks when it has already gone bad, I do not find it as obvious that it is the same apple as in a case when I had seen the apple daily and witnessed it gradually going bad. In this case there appears to be difference or diversity in my experience of an object and, further, this case seems to contradict the case when the object was considered identical over successive periods of time. In a sense, then, the identity of the object is now breached. Hume formulates the situation and the mind's solution to it as follows:

When we gradually follow an object in its successive changes, the smooth progress of the thought makes us ascribe an identity to the succession; because 'tis by a similar act of the mind we consider an unchangeable object. When we compare its situation after a considerable change the progress of the thought is broke; and consequently we are presented with the idea of diversity: In order to reconcile which contradictions the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance, or original and first matter*.³⁸⁷

The “contradiction” of variance and identity in experience is then resolved by the feigning of the fiction of substance.³⁸⁸ Hume says that “[w]e entertain a like notion with regard to the *simplicity* of

386 *T* 1.4.3.3-4; *SBN* 220.

387 *T* 1.4.3.4; *SBN* 220.

388 See the different meanings of the verb “feign” (e.g. “to imagine, believe erroneously and arbitrarily”) in OED: “feign, v.”. OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69014?rskey=Ajaykb&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 13,

substances, and from like causes”.³⁸⁹ Like in the case of the identity of an object, what makes an object appear simple or almost “perfectly simple and indivisible” is the fact that there is a strong tie between the parts of an object. These “parts” are now its sensory qualities like the colour, taste and form of a fruit. The mind experiences these as a single thing and the object appears almost as if it had no distinct sensory parts. An egg has a certain colour, shape and taste, which can vary in a certain amount³⁹⁰ and whenever I am presented with one, there immediately forms an idea of an egg in my mind and this idea is “simple” in the sense that it is not consciously formed of distinct perceptions or “parts”. On the other hand, when the mind considers its object from—Hume seems to mean—a more philosophical point of view, the more natural notions are destroyed and what remains are only distinct and separable qualities.³⁹¹ Imagination is then obliged

to feign an unknown something, or *original* substance and matter, as a principle of union or cohesion among these qualities, and as what may give the compound object a title to be call’d one thing, notwithstanding its diversity and composition.³⁹²

The idea of substance is then an answer to philosophical problems of perception and the use of it resolves the tension or contradiction between the different manners of viewing objects, i.e. that of everyday experience and that of philosophical experience. Importantly, the formation of the idea of substance for Hume is a customary process like the formation of belief I discussed above. The

2011).

389 *T* 1.4.3.5; *SBN* 221.

390 But perhaps not as much as in the classic Donald Duck story “Lost in the Andes” by Carl Barks (*Four Color Comics*, no. 223, 1949), where chickens lay square eggs.

391 *T* 1.4.3.5; *SBN* 221.

392 *T* 1.4.3.5; *SBN* 221.

habitual and unexceptional discovery of unity in our diverse experience induces us to feign the notion of substance supporting this unity just like, Hume argues, the same kind of habit makes us believe a connection between cause and effect.³⁹³ In *T* 1.4.3 (“Of the antient philosophy”) then, Hume tries to explain how we come to entertain the idea of substance when in *T* 1.1.6 (“Of modes and substances”) he argued why we do not in fact have a clear idea of it, i.e. because there is no corresponding impression to it. Eventually, in *T* 1.4.3, Hume concludes:

Every quality being a distinct thing from another, may be conceiv’d to exist apart, and may exist apart, not only from every other quality, but from that unintelligible chimera of a substance.³⁹⁴

Hume is also famous for his influential critique of the idea of substantial self and how we come to hold the idea of self generally (see *T* 1.4.5-6). In his essay “Of the Immortality of the Soul” (1755, though not published until 1777) Hume seems to sum up his view on the notion of substance when he says that

But just metaphysics teach us, that the notion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect, and that we have no other idea of any substance than as an aggregate of particular qualities, inhering in an unknown something. Matter, therefore, and spirit are at bottom equally unknown; and we cannot determine what qualities may inhere in the one or in the other.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ *T* 1.4.3.7; *SBN* 221.

³⁹⁴ *T* 1.4.3.7; *SBN* 222.

³⁹⁵ *E*, 591.

“Just metaphysics” then, like true philosophy, seems to teach us that the true nature of objects beyond their “qualities” is essentially unknown to the human enquirer. Also in *EHU* we learn how we must be careful about the nature and scope of the metaphysics we practise:

The only method of freeing learning, at once, from these abstruse questions, is to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after: And must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate.³⁹⁶

“These abstruse questions” being now those traditional metaphysical questions that try to widen the proper sphere of human understanding and “penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding”.³⁹⁷

This criticism of traditional metaphysics by Hume and its emphasis on the perceptual qualities was applauded by the Logical Positivists.³⁹⁸ Ayer’s classic *Language, Truth and Logic*

³⁹⁶ *EHU* 1.12; *SBN* 12.

³⁹⁷ *EHU* 1.11; *SBN* 11. According to Stewart, Hume’s famous recommendation at the end of the *EHU* to commit “school metaphysics” to the flames may arguably refer to the metaphysics taught by Hume’s college teacher Colin Drummond, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the College of Edinburgh. In Stewart’s view, in reference to Hume’s evidently less than inspiring college days, “the evidence is plainly incomplete but, such as it is, it gives no grounds to think that Hume caught the philosophical bug at college” (2005, 25). Hume attended college between the ages of ten and fourteen.

³⁹⁸ According to Livingston (in Livingston and King, eds., 1976, 3), The Logical Positivists were the first philosophical movement to treat Hume as not a sceptic and one of that movement’s few past predecessors. It seems, according Livingston 1984, 9, that The Logical Positivists’ phenomenalist interpretation of Hume relied heavily on T. H. Green’s important introductory essay to his and T. Grose’s republication of Hume’s philosophical works in 1874-75. (For some reason Livingston speaks only of T.

(1936) is also a classic example of this with its appropriately titled first chapter: “The Elimination of Metaphysics”. Ayer explicitly admits that his views derive from the “doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume.”³⁹⁹ Regarding the notion of substance, Ayer says that the dispute concerning the number of substances that there are in the world is “fictitious” (based on his “criterion” of what count as genuine factual propositions) and possibly alludes to Hume here with the term “fictitious”.⁴⁰⁰ Ayer also argues, again in Humean spirit, that the use of the term ‘substance’ is a sign of an infection of a “primitive superstition”.⁴⁰¹ The victims of this unfortunate disease think

that to every name a single real entity must correspond assume that it is necessary to distinguish logically between the thing itself and any, or all of its sensible properties. And so they employ the term “substance” to refer to the thing itself. But from the fact that we happen to employ a single word to refer to a thing, and make that word the grammatical subject of the sentences in which we refer to sensible appearances of the thing, it does not by any means follow that the thing itself is a “simple entity,” or that it cannot be defined in terms of the totality of its appearances.⁴⁰²

In my view, the idea that theorising about substances as “things themselves” is a sign of linguistic confusion clearly echoes Hume’s observation in *T* 1.4.3.10. Hume points out there that it often happens that the frequent use of unintelligible terms like “faculty” or “occult quality” makes us

H. Green republishing Hume’s philosophical works when it was actually done by Green and Grose.)

399 Ayer 1936, 11.

400 Ayer 1936, 26-28.

401 For Hume’s use of the term “superstition”, see, for example, *T* 1.3.8.4,6 and 1.4.7.13 and *EHU* 1.12 (quoted below).

402 Ayer 1936, 32.

“fancy” that they are as intelligible as terms that really are such. Ayer also admits that he adopts a “thoroughgoing phenomenism” and says, for example, that “[i]t is the philosopher’s business to give a correct definition of material things in terms of sensations” and declares that we “have not to enquire whether a phenomenist ‘theory of perception’ or some other sort of theory is correct, but only what form of phenomenist theory is correct.”⁴⁰³ Possibly then Ayer, like Hamann working on his *Socratic Memorabilia*, was “full of Hume” when he wrote his seminal work on the tradition of analytical philosophy.⁴⁰⁴ The *extreme* difference between these works is perhaps a good example of Selby-Bigge’s observation that Hume

is ambitious rather than shy of saying the same thing in different ways, and at the same time he is often slovenly and indifferent about his words and formulae. This makes it easy to find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all.⁴⁰⁵

Although Kemp Smith (in 1941, five years after Ayer’s aforementioned book) places Hume in the tradition of “positivism or naturalism” he also points out that “it is not of that familiar type which seeks to limit knowledge to material phenomena, but rather is akin to the broader, more humanistic philosophy which was developed by Comte in his later years, and which rests the hopes on the future of those sciences which more immediately concern our human nature.”⁴⁰⁶ Kemp Smith adds

403 Ayer 1936, 13, 48 and 54-5. For Hume’s account of belief in bodies from the time when phenomenism was still influential, see Price 1940.

404 See ch. 2.

405 *EHU SBN*, vii. Hume is generally known for his analytical clarity and is often considered a master of English style, but Selby-Bigge is here warning against over-hasty interpretations of Hume’s writings (Selby-Bigge seems to have especially *T* in mind).

406 Kemp Smith 1949, 154.

how “Hume’s philosophy is not fundamentally sceptical; it is positive and naturalistic, and, we may here add, humanistic in tendency.”⁴⁰⁷ In addition, Livingston, more than forty years later, seems to echo Kemp Smith’s tone when he says that “Hume’s science of man is primarily a historical science”.⁴⁰⁸

Hume’s philosophy did not merely inspire the analytical tradition in philosophy in the twentieth century. Edmund Husserl, for example, found *T 1* inspiring in his criticism of Western science and Gilles Deleuze even wrote a book on Hume.⁴⁰⁹ Hume apparently had an important influence on Deleuze because, according to Martin Bell, Deleuze’s book on Hume was his first on the history of philosophy and Deleuze’s “commitment to a form of empiricism, which persists throughout all his work and which he called ‘transcendental empiricism’, begins with that study.”⁴¹⁰

The positivistic interpretation of Hume’s critique of metaphysics has been challenged by, among others, Fogelin in his important *Hume’s Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (1985). Fogelin wants to minimise the existence of the alleged positivistic themes in Hume’s philosophy against the “strong temptation to place Hume at the head of the logical positivistic tradition – a view, by the way, shared by the positivists and their critics.”⁴¹¹ Fogelin thinks that Hume is not “a conceptual sceptic concerning any of the concepts that arise in daily life”,⁴¹² but his true targets are

407 Kemp Smith 1949, 155.

408 Livingston 1984, ix. See also Schmidt 2003 for an ambitious attempt to present Hume’s thought as a whole including his contributions to humanistic and social scientific disciplines in addition to philosophy.

409 Davie 1977 and Deleuze 1991 (original 1953; Deleuze’s first book, actually).

410 M. Bell 2005, 95. See also J. A. Bell 2009 for a book length study on Hume’s influence on Deleuze. See also the short discussion on William James on the notion of substance later in this chapter.

411 Fogelin 1985, 7. See, also, Garrett 2005, who writes how “[t]he logical positivists of the early twentieth century [...] saw Hume’s concern to trace the content of concepts to their experiential basis as a precursor of their own methodology – which they regarded as properly purged of Hume’s conflation of philosophy and psychology.” For this purge in Ayer’s work, see Ayer 1936, 186-7.

412 Fogelin 1985, 7.

the philosophical fictions or the Baconian “Idols of the Theatre”.⁴¹³ (“A conceptual sceptic” is someone who, according to Fogelin’s schema, “challenges the very intelligibility of a system of beliefs”).⁴¹⁴ According to Fogelin, Hume’s criticism of the notion of substance is not straightforwardly positivistic and claims that Hume’s “appeal to impressions is used primarily for the analysis of ideas and only secondarily to show that words are sometimes used without meaning”.⁴¹⁵ Fogelin thinks that Hume does not simply say that we have no idea of substance because we cannot produce the appropriate impression but instead says (in the *T* 1.1) that our common-sense idea of substance is not one *simple* idea but a complex one formed by the imagination from a collection of simple ideas.⁴¹⁶ There is nothing wrong with this kind of common-sense notion but there is something wrong with the philosophical notion of substance.

According to Livingston’s summary of Kemp Smith’s view (in Kemp Smith 1949) Hume “should be read not as a sceptic, virtuous or otherwise, but as one who has worked out a highly original naturalistic defense of common sense beliefs along with a criticism of dogmatic metaphysics”.⁴¹⁷ Popkin points out that a philosopher who can deny, as Popkin thinks Hume does, the possibility (and/or necessity) of metaphysics “is obviously a metaphysician of sorts”.⁴¹⁸ But of what sort then? It is arguable that Hume practised what P. F. Strawson later in his *Individuals* called “descriptive” metaphysics gaining its name from being “content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world” when its counterpart “revisionary” metaphysics “is concerned to produce a better structure”.⁴¹⁹ P. F. Strawson does not present this distinction as exclusive admitting

413 For more on this Baconian terminology, see, e.g. Milton 1998 & 2003.

414 Fogelin 1985, 6.

415 Fogelin 1985, 10.

416 See Fogelin 1985, 10-11.

417 Livingston in Livingston and King, eds., 1976, 4.

418 Popkin 1951, 280n 2.

419 P. F. Strawson 1959, 9. Craig 1998 outlines the project of descriptive metaphysics followingly: “Even

that there has probably not been a metaphysician who had been wholly one thing or the other. P. F. Strawson thinks that, broadly, Descartes, Leibniz and Berkeley are revisionary, Aristotle and Kant descriptive, but Hume, “the ironist of philosophy, is more difficult to place. He appears now under one aspect, now under another”.⁴²⁰

Interestingly, according to Hume, there are three “opinions” regarding the issue of the status of external bodies:

Considering this subject we may observe a gradation of three opinions, that rise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge. These opinions are that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true; where we shall find upon enquiry, that the true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge.⁴²¹

We all act according to the belief that there are material physical bodies “out there” independent of us perceiving them and that we perceive them at least for the most part as they “really” are, i.e. that they are directly present to the senses. This is the opinion of “the vulgar”. True philosophers

the philosopher with a low opinion of the prospects for traditional metaphysics can believe that there is a general framework which we in fact use for thinking about reality, and can undertake to describe and explore it. This project, which can claim an illustrious ancestor in Kant, has in the twentieth century sometimes been called descriptive metaphysics, though what it inquires into are our most general patterns of thought, and the nature of things themselves only indirectly, if at all. Though quite compatible with a low estimate of traditional metaphysics as defined by our two primary questions [Are there principles applying to everything that is real, to all that is? What is ultimately real?] it does imply that there is a small but fairly stable core of human thought for it to investigate.”

420 P. F. Strawson 1959, 9.

421 *T* 1.4.3.9; *SBN* 222-223.

understand that the idea of material bodies is problematic in the sense that the apparently strong and regular connections between objects and qualities of objects are only effects of an unalterable custom and that it is not possible to draw conclusions from these connections about what objects are really like beyond or independent of immediate appearances or impressions. True philosophers are content with this situation and learn to treat “all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference”.⁴²² In this sense they are vulgar. They eventually act like the vulgar but, in a sense, their vulgarity is moderated by their awareness of the certain fragility of their position. False philosophers are not satisfied with appearances but want to go behind them and find secret powers and causes, which are responsible for the coherence and regularity of our everyday experience and so they feign notions like substance and substantial form. Hume eloquently sums up the fate of false philosophers:

For what can be imagin'd more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where 'tis impossible it can ever exist?⁴²³

But what is a false philosopher's belief in substance really about? If there is no corresponding impression to his or her idea of substance and if substance is an “unintelligible chimera”, what does his belief in substance amount to? Hume's answer seems to be the one already hinted at in reference to Ayer, i.e. some kind of comfort found in words. Hume argues that when we frequently use terms which are really unintelligible they eventually gain the status of terms which are, in fact, intelligible. So custom is at work here, too:

422 *T* 1.4.3.9; *SBN* 223.

423 *T* 1.4.3.9; *SBN* 223.

The resemblance of their [intelligible and unintelligible terms'] appearance deceives the mind, as is usual, and makes us imagine a thorough resemblance and conformity. By this means these [false] philosophers set themselves at ease, and arrive at last, by an illusion, at the same indifference, which the people attain by their stupidity, and true philosophers by their moderate scepticism. They need only say, that any phænomenon, which puzzles them, arises from a faculty or an occult quality, and there is an end of all dispute and enquiry upon the matter.⁴²⁴

Hume makes a similar point in *EHU* about the benefit of “educated indifference”, or, more precisely,

[i]ndolence, which, to some persons, affords a safeguard against this deceitful philosophy [false and adulterated metaphysics], is, with others, overbalanced by curiosity; and despair, which, at some moments, prevails, may give place afterwards to sanguine hopes and expectations. Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy, fitted for all persons and all dispositions; and is alone able to subvert that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon, which, being mixed up with popular superstition, renders it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners, and gives it the air of science and wisdom.⁴²⁵

Fogelin argues that the illusion of the false philosopher, i.e. the illusion of intelligibility where there is none, is much more radical than the illusion of “the people”, i.e. the illusion of a connectedness

424 *T* 1.4.3.10; *SBN* 224. The term “occult quality” refers to a secret, hidden, or invisible cause of an effect and it is arguable that when someone uses it he or she only wants to hide his or her ignorance of the matter at hand (see the Nortons’ annotations in Hume *Topt*, 479.)

425 *EHU* 1.12; *SBN* 12-13.

between qualities that does not exist.⁴²⁶ Common-sense non-philosophical beliefs may be unfounded and often fictitious but they are not unintelligible. However, to quote Fogelin, “[u]nintelligibility emerges when the philosopher, in the throes of partial insight, falls back on empty verbiage in his attempts to find a surrogate for the views he has rejected but still cannot abandon”.⁴²⁷ The indifference of the false philosopher is then reached at the expense of the intelligibility of the terminology used.

To answer then the aforementioned question, why does Hume group together relations, modes and substances and calls them “the common subjects of our thoughts and reasoning”,⁴²⁸ when he is eventually critical of the use of the latter two? I suggest that Hume’s point is that there is nothing wrong with the notions of mode and substance if they are used in the sense of a true philosophical understanding of educated vulgarity being purged of their traditional metaphysical burden of false philosophy. Our idea of more or less material objects sustaining their identity and simplicity in spite of perceptual variations is one of the key elements of human everyday experience in the sense of how we react to our environment. Natural and philosophical relations, on the other hand, allow us to form involuntary or voluntary beliefs regarding our environment. Human nature seems to operate with a certain conceptual apparatus inhering in the perceptions of the mind, Hume argues, but we should be careful—as true philosophers—about drawing inferences, based on this apparatus, about the ontology⁴²⁹ of the reality independent of these perceptions.

426 Fogelin 1985, 12.

427 Fogelin 1985, 12.

428 *T* 1.1.5; *SBN* 15.

429 Hume does not use this term in *T* (nor in *EHU* and *EPM*), but it has been used in English language philosophy since the 17th century. See “ontology, n.”. OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131551?redirectedFrom=ontology> (accessed April 18, 2011).

William James (in the third lecture of his *Pragmatism*) also refers to the lure of language when he points out how “nominalists” adopted “the opinion that substance is a spurious idea due to our inveterate human trick of turning names into things”.⁴³⁰ He also refers to Berkeley’s famous criticism of the notion of material substance and Locke’s and Hume’s criticisms of the notion of spiritual substance. Importantly, he considers these classic approaches to metaphysics pragmatistic.⁴³¹ Regarding the latter two, according to James,

Locke, compromiser that he was, passively tolerated the belief in a substantial soul behind our consciousness. But his successor Hume, and most empirical psychologists after him, have denied the soul, save as the name for verifiable cohesions in our inner life.⁴³²

Without going into details, it seems that given James’s pragmatist criticism of metaphysics and his alignment with the British empiricists, the comparison of his thought with the latter’s could be scholarly fruitful. After a brief glance, there appears to be surprisingly few studies explicitly

⁴³⁰ James 1949, 86-87.

⁴³¹ James 1949, 89-90. For Berkeley’s arguments against material substance, see *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) in Berkeley 1901, Vol. I, Part I, § 10 and § 14 and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713) in Berkeley 1901, Vol. I, 384-386.

⁴³² James 1949, 92.

dedicated to the topic.⁴³³ Now, to proceed to our next topic, what is wrong with the modern fiction that there are perceptions and corresponding objects?

5.2.2 *The modern fiction of the double existence of perceptions and objects*

Hume's discussion of the concept of substance is a short section of *T* 1.4 ("Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy") and, more precisely, part of one of the main issues in *T* 1.4, i.e. that of "scepticism with regard to senses", which is the title of the long section *T* 1.4.2. To start with, Hume asks a very typical question:

We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.⁴³⁴

433 One of the first is Shouse 1952 who claims that, e.g. "Hume's evaluation of skepticism and of intellectualism [...] is a prime example of pragmatic thinking" (527). A more recent study is Klein 2009, where he aims to show that, among other things, in his "revised empiricism" James "had to give up several of Hume's basic assumptions, including the assumption that perceptual experience is fundamentally composed of psychological atoms" (416). Interestingly, as Klein 2009, 416 points out, the "claim that there are no psychological atoms is interesting because James supported it with experimental data rather than with introspective description or *a priori* argument". Inukai 2012 argues that, in James's work, there is an empiricist solution to what Inukai calls the "Bundling Problem" of Hume's thought (which Hume himself admits), i.e. the problem of how can there be unified bundles of perceptions when all perceptions are distinct existences and the mind never perceives any real connections between them?

434 *T* 1.4.2.1; *SBN* 187.

Hume hints at what it is to be expected regarding the issue of objects existing independent of someone observing them, i.e. the issue of “external existence”, entitled in *T* 1.2.6 “Of the idea of existence, and of external existence”. Here, as already noted in the chapter on Hume’s notion of belief, Hume argues that the idea of something existent makes no addition to the idea of it. To have an idea of something and conceiving it as existent are one and the same thing. This is so, to put it briefly, because there is no one impression of existence that is attached to all other impressions. Hence, in Hume’s words, “the idea of existence is not deriv’d from any particular impression”.⁴³⁵ In a sense now, Hume thinks that every object that is presented to the mind, is *ipso facto* existent. This may strike one as strange, but Hume does not, of course, mean that imagining something somehow makes it real. What he must mean is that having an idea of something and having an idea of something as existent are one and the same thing.

What about the idea of external existence? For Hume, because of his theory of perceptions of the mind, i.e. that all ideas inhere in antecedent impressions and only these ideas and impressions can ever be present to the mind, it follows that all ideas of things existing, including those involving external objects like books and laptops, are impressions and ideas, too. So, when we try to conceive distinct objects existing “out there”, we have only our perceptions to turn to and can form a concept of external objects only in relation to those perceptions without, Hume argues, “pretending to comprehend the related [external] objects”.⁴³⁶ Here, as so often in Hume’s writings, the human mind ends up looking at its own image when it ponders what is going on around it. Hume seems to leave no doubt of this “human condition” when he muses as follows:

435 *T* 1.2.6.3; *SBN* 66.

436 *T* 1.2.6.9; *SBN* 68.

Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd.⁴³⁷

Later in *T* 1.4.2 Hume elaborates on this basic point, i.e. that there is no notion of external existence independent of perceptions, when he enquires why we think objects continue their existence when no one perceives them and why we think they have a distinct existence from perceiving minds.⁴³⁸ Hume thinks there are three possible sources for these views or opinions, i.e. senses, reason and the imagination.

Hume argues, beginning with the senses, that they cannot be the source for the view of a continued existence of objects simply because it often happens that objects cease to appear to the senses and so the senses cannot be the source of a *continued* existence of objects. Basically then, Hume's point is that something that is essentially discontinued or interrupted, like human sensory experience, cannot induce the idea of continuance. But, to argue against Hume here, could not the regularity of human sensory experience, despite discontinuous perceptions, bring about the idea of continued existence? There is so much regularity in my sensory experience that just this regularity makes me entertain the notion of a continued existence. I will return to this point soon.

Senses cannot produce the idea of a distinct existence either because, if they did, they would have to be able to present the object at hand and its image. But they cannot do this because, according to Hume, "all perceptions are the same in the manner of their existence".⁴³⁹ Hume seems

⁴³⁷ *T* 1.2.6.8; *SBN* 68.

⁴³⁸ *T* 1.4.2.2; *SBN* 187-8.

⁴³⁹ *T* 1.4.2.13; *SBN* 192-3.

to mean that the senses cannot produce something that is “original” compared to something that is its “image” and in this sense perhaps something “less” than the “original”. If something is distinct then it has to be distinct from something else or else the notion of distinct is senseless. So we cannot compare perceptions with their original sources, if there even are such. Further, Hume’s point that all perceptions are equal “in the manner of their existence” means that the difference between the perhaps more objective qualities like “figure, bulk, motion and solidity of bodies” and more subjective qualities like “colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat and cold” or, to use traditional philosophical terminology (which Hume here does not), the difference between primary and secondary qualities, collapses (I will discuss this issue later in this sub-chapter). There is no essential difference between them *as perceptions*. So there is no perceptual point of reference on which the idea of a distinct existence could be based. All perceptions as perceptions, for Hume, are equally subjective or mind dependent.⁴⁴⁰

Hume thinks that reason does no better than the senses. Hume argues that because rational or philosophical arguments possibly supporting the idea that a continued and distinct existence can be attributed to some objects are known to “very few”, it is not on them that “children, peasants, and the greatest part of mankind” base their belief in external objects.⁴⁴¹ And the fact that the opinion of “the vulgar”, i.e. perceptions are objects or that objects are directly perceived, clearly contradicts the philosophical one that “every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind” also indicates that “the sentiment” that there are external objects cannot be based on the “faculty of the understanding”.⁴⁴²

440 For Hume’s own summary of the issue of senses as a possible source for the notions of a continued and distinct existence, see *T* 1.4.2.11-13.

441 *T* 1.4.2.14; *SBN* 193.

442 *T* 1.4.2.14; *SBN* 193.

So we are left with the imagination as the only possible source for the notion of a continued and distinct existence of bodies. For Hume, there are ideas of the memory and ideas of the imagination.⁴⁴³ (There is in fact a short section, *T* 1.1.3, titled “Of the ideas of the memory and imagination.”) The former are more vivacious than the latter because they have retained the lively nature of the original impressions they copy and are in this sense “intermediates” between ideas and impressions.⁴⁴⁴ The more faint ideas of the imagination can be arranged more freely than the ideas of the memory and they are the source of fantastic characters and events in “poems and romances”. The imagination can also manipulate ideas—because impressions are separable and ideas divide into simple and complex—according to the aforementioned principles of association (resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect).

My aforementioned suggestion, “contra” Hume, that the senses can be the source of the notion of a continued and distinct existence is in fact what Hume is saying regarding the *imagination* as such a source. Hume observes, probably in opposition to Locke, that it is not the force or involuntariness of impressions that make them appear to exist as continued and distinct because the forcible and involuntary impression of, for example, pain caused by the heat of a fire is not supposed to have any being except in the perception.⁴⁴⁵ But because all impressions are in fact “internal and perishing existences”, what then makes us attribute a continued and distinct existence to some of them?

Hume answers, regarding the idea of a *continued* existence, that this is due to the constancy and coherence of certain impressions. My everyday experience is full of regular features: houses, trees, groceries and cycling routes (admittedly, the existence of these is probably different from that

443 *T* 1.1.3.1; *SBN* 8-9.

444 *T* 1.1.3.1; *SBN* 8-9.

445 *T* 1.4.2.16; *SBN* 194.

of trees) are there in their usual places day after day and often year after year. Hume argues that it is the constancy of these impressions that makes me attribute a continued existence to the objects of these impressions. Hume emphasises that this

is the case with all the impressions, whose objects are suppos'd to have an external existence; and is the case with no other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary.⁴⁴⁶

But things and seasons change and the familiar surroundings of my life do not, of course, appear exactly similar even after short periods of time, not to mention months and years. But despite these changes, a certain coherence appears amidst these changes, i.e. the tree in front of my house does not suddenly appear to have grown fifteen feet overnight. There seems to be certain patterns that various changes do not break. So, Hume summarises, this

coherence, therefore, in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy.⁴⁴⁷

Hume compares the imagination to a boat that is put in motion and that does not change its course without a new impulse directing it to some other direction. When the imagination “sails” forward it observes more and more coherence on its course and naturally conceives this coherence to be as complete as possible and realises that this coherence would increase if different coherent objects had a continued existence. This continued existence, Hume argues,

446 *T* 1.4.2.18; *SBN* 195.

447 *T* 1.4.2.19; *SBN* 195.

gives us a notion of a much greater regularity among objects, than what they have when we look no farther than our senses.⁴⁴⁸

Hume admits, though, that the coherence of objects is not enough and what is needed in addition is the aforementioned constancy of their appearances to give an adequate account of the idea of a continued existence. Hume argues that the perceptions of the sun, for example, share such a resemblance year after year that we naturally think that they are individually the same in the sense that they are perceptions of the same sun. Hume stresses, though, the central idea of his discussion, that these perceptions are in fact different.⁴⁴⁹ What we have therefore, is a certain difficulty. We realise that although our perceptions of the sun resemble each other greatly, our previous perceptions are in a sense annihilated to give room for the present. Hume says that “this interruption of their existence is contrary to their perfect identity.”⁴⁵⁰ We solve or, in fact, disguise this difficulty by supposing that there is a real and continued existence that we do not perceive during, Hume must mean, those interruptions in our perceptions. When I wake up in the middle of the night and do not see the sun shining when I look out of the window, I naturally think that the sun has not ceased to exist, but that because it is night, the sun is visible somewhere else on earth. This is how the constancy or resemblance of our perceptions brings about their “perfect identity” or continued existence. So, it may be argued, the senses in this sense *are* the source of an idea of continued existence but not, crucially, without the activity of the imagination.

448 *T* 1.4.2.22; *SBN* 198.

449 *T* 1.4.2.24; *SBN* 199.

450 *T* 1.4.2.24; *SBN* 199.

Hume thinks that there are four things to be accounted for to justify his system and gives a detailed analysis of each of them.⁴⁵¹ For the purposes of this study, I believe it suffices to discuss what Hume presents after this analysis and towards the end of the section under discussion. Hume starts with a rough summary of what in *T* 1.4.2 he has said about the idea of a continued and distinct existence.⁴⁵²

Hume observes that the vulgar suppose that “their perceptions be their only objects” and believe in “the continu’d existence of matter”.⁴⁵³ Reason (and senses, though Hume does not mention it here), as has been established, cannot be the source of these opinions because it reveals that only distinct perceptions are present in the mind (which is, famously, “nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, tho’ falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity.”)⁴⁵⁴ These opinions must therefore arise from the imagination, which has a propensity, because of the resemblance of certain perceptions, to attribute an identity to those perceptions. This is how, in Hume’s words, “the fiction of a continu’d existence” is formed. According to Hume, this fiction

as well as the identity, is really false, as is acknowledg’d by all philosophers,⁴⁵⁵ and has no other effect than to remedy the interruption of our perceptions, which is the only circumstance that is contrary to their identity.⁴⁵⁶

451 *T* 1.4.2.25-42; *SBN* 199-209.

452 *T* 1.4.2.43-45; *SBN* 209-11.

453 *T* 1.4.2.43; *SBN* 209.

454 *T* 1.4.2.39; *SBN* 207.

455 Those who think that only perceptions are present to the mind and that interrupted perceptions are different entities (see the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 476-7).

456 *T* 1.4.2.43; *SBN* 209.

Now, the opinion of a continued existence of objects seems to be false but what about the idea of a distinct or independent existence of objects? In *T* 1.4.2.2 Hume observed that “the decision of the one question decides the other” because, obviously, if objects continue to exist when they are not perceived, then of course they exist independently of the perceptions and, likewise, if they are distinct and exist independently of the perceptions, then they must continue to exist when they are not perceived. Later in *T* 1.4.2.44 he formulates this “intimate connexion” even more firmly when he says that “we no sooner establish the one than the other follows, as a necessary consequence”.⁴⁵⁷ It seems now that we could establish the truth or falsity of both of these opinions just by showing that either of them is true or false. Hume indeed thinks it is easy to show that our perceptions do not possess independent existence just by observing that objects appear differently to us depending on, for example, how far we are from them or whether or not our senses are somehow distorted.⁴⁵⁸ The idea of distinct existence is false, basically, because all our perceptions depend on our “organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits”.⁴⁵⁹ Consequently, it seems now that the opinion of a continued existence is false just based on the simple and classic observations about how our senses can deceive us and how our perceptions are therefore dependent on our biological architecture.⁴⁶⁰ One may now wonder why give, like Hume does, a difficult and detailed analysis of how the idea of a continued existence is formed if it can be dismissed as false just like that? In my view, Hume gives his reason for this in *T* 1.4.2.2, where he says that

⁴⁵⁷ *T* 1.4.2.44; *SBN* 210.

⁴⁵⁸ *T* 1.4.2.45; *SBN* 210-211.

⁴⁵⁹ *T* 1.4.2.45; *SBN* 211.

⁴⁶⁰ See the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 477.

tho' the decision of the one question decides the other; yet that we may the more easily discover the principles of human nature, from whence the decision arises, we shall carry along with us this distinction.⁴⁶¹

Hume is saying here that the distinction between the idea of a continued existence and that of a distinct existence is perhaps artificial but—at the same time—illustrative of the workings of human nature. The belief in the continued and distinct existence of objects that we directly perceive is so natural and strong that—despite the aforementioned difficulties—even many philosophically oriented persons do not reject it. Instead, to solve the difficulties, philosophers distinguish between perceptions and objects. Perceptions are perishable and interrupted and objects have a continued and distinct existence. In this way, philosophers can maintain the natural opinion that there is something permanent (objects) in human experience that also exists independently of the perceiver and, on the other hand, they can endorse the opinion that perceptions are discontinuous and dependent. But, Hume announces, “however philosophical this new system may be esteem’d, I assert that ’tis only a palliative remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself.”⁴⁶² By the “vulgar system” Hume means the opinion that our perceptions are our only objects and that they have a continued and distinct existence.

Hume argues first, contra the idea of the double existence of perceptions and objects, that it cannot be based on reason. The reason for this is that because we can be certain of only our immediate perceptions that are also, in Hume’s words, “the first foundation of all our conclusions”,⁴⁶³ and that because we can only draw conclusions of what exists based on the relation

⁴⁶¹ *T* 1.4.2.2; *SBN* 187-8.

⁴⁶² *T* 1.4.2.46; *SBN* 211-12.

⁴⁶³ *T* 1.4.2.47; *SBN* 212.

of cause and effect, it follows that our causal inferences can be only about those perceptions, never about perceptions and objects. It also follows that the idea that perceptions and objects exist cannot be based on “reason” because all our existential statements are causal and about perceptions. Of course, the theory of double existence is based on reason in the sense that it is a conceptual construction. But what Hume means now is that it is not based on reason because it is not in fact rationally tenable.

Hume also argues that the source of the notion of double existence cannot be based on imagination either. Although this cannot be proved as conclusively as in the former case of reason, it is very difficult to show how the imagination could be the source of the notion of double existence and Hume challenges anyone to argue this to Hume’s “satisfaction”.⁴⁶⁴ Hume thinks, as I interpret his view in *T* 1.4.2.48, that the natural opinion that perceptions are our only objects and that they are continuous and distinct is *so* natural compared to the one of double existence of perceptions and objects that it is not plausible that the latter could be formed as effortlessly as the former.

The mind is indeed, Hume observes, here in an “intermediate situation”.⁴⁶⁵ In a way, it has two masters to serve. It has to satisfy the demands of the imagination and its natural inclinations to form a coherent whole out of a multitude of perceptions on the one hand and the demands of its more reflective side on the other. These latter reflective demands contradict the former natural ones and what emerges is the “monstrous offspring of two principles”, i.e. a “new fiction” of “the double existence of perceptions and objects”.⁴⁶⁶ Hume elaborates on this as follows:

⁴⁶⁴ *T* 1.4.2.48; *SBN* 212-13.

⁴⁶⁵ *T* 1.4.2.52; *SBN* 216.

⁴⁶⁶ *T* 1.4.2.52; *SBN* 215.

Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires.⁴⁶⁷

Hume announces now that the philosophical system is absurd because “it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition” by feigning a second set of existing things, i.e. the objects of the double existence theory that, it turns out, have to be just a new set of perceptions, because perceptions are the only things that can be present to the senses.⁴⁶⁸ But this is a confusion, because these objects of the double existence theory are now, in a way, in fact perceptions that cannot be present to the senses! These waters of the philosophical system are now, if not deep, then at least muddy. It seems then that we are faced with only problems and doubts when we consider such a seemingly simple question like what is it that we perceive. Hume's tone towards the end of this discussion is indeed more and more sceptical and he asks, nearly stupefied,

[w]hat then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that

467 *T* 1.4.2.52; *SBN* 215.

468 *T* 1.4.2.56; *SBN* 217-218.

manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. ⁴⁶⁹

It seems then that when Hume said, as quoted earlier, that the philosophical system is only a “palliative remedy”, he meant that the malady is the sceptical doubt regarding the reason and the senses and that the philosophical system is only an illusory cure for this malady because it is based on confusion of what is really present to the senses and what kind of existential inferences can be drawn from them. When Hume discusses “modern philosophy” (i.e. the philosophy of Galileo, Descartes and his followers, Gassendi, Hobbes, Boyle and Locke)⁴⁷⁰ in a separate section (*T* 1.4.4), he observes, as already quoted above, that the

fundamental principle of that philosophy is the opinion concerning colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold; which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv’d from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. ⁴⁷¹

Hume’s overall point is, to put it briefly, that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is illusory.⁴⁷² When we remove the sensory qualities like colours and sounds of objects, as Hume puts it, “from the rank of continu’d independent existences”,⁴⁷³ it seems that we are left with

⁴⁶⁹ *T* 1.4.2.56-7; *SBN* 218.

⁴⁷⁰ See the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 480.

⁴⁷¹ *T* 1.4.4.3; *SBN* 226.

⁴⁷² For the “standard account” of this distinction, see Smith 1998.

⁴⁷³ *T* 1.4.4.5; *SBN* 227.

primary qualities like extension and solidity and the various modifications of these having these continued and independent existences. The attempt to explain the operations of the external objects by this distinction leads in fact, Hume (not originally)⁴⁷⁴ argues, to “the most extravagant scepticism concerning them.”⁴⁷⁵ This is so because we cannot have impressions of primary qualities independent of secondary qualities, because all these impressions are in fact specific impressions of, for example, extension and solidity. There is no impression of extension or solidity without some solid or extended object that is present to the senses. Hume observes as an example that as solidity is nothing but an impossibility of annihilation (for why Hume thinks this is the case, see *T* 1.2.4.4-7), this impossibility of being annihilated cannot exist itself, but “requires some object or real existence, to which it may belong”.⁴⁷⁶ Hume is then forced to conclude that when

we reason from cause and effect, we conclude, that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu’d and independent existence. When we exclude these sensible qualities there remains nothing in the universe, which has such an existence.⁴⁷⁷

Now, it seems that both ancient and modern philosophers are in fact lost with their systems of external objects, but they do not recognise it because they are in a sense blinded by their philosophical vocabulary. The notion of substance and the idea of double existence of perceptions and objects or the distinction between primary and secondary qualities of objects delude

474 See the Nortons’ annotations in *Topt*, 481.

475 *T* 1.4.4.6; *SBN* 227-8.

476 *T* 1.4.4.11; *SBN* 230.

477 *T* 1.4.4.15; *SBN* 231.

philosophers into thinking that they can escape the realm of impressions when in fact the discontinuous and dependent impressions are all they have to reason from.

The mind is trapped in the intermediate situation between imagination and reason and it seems, because of this entrapment, it cannot escape scepticism regarding external objects if it recognises the true nature of perceptions.⁴⁷⁸ Luckily, according to Hume, there is one true lifeline for the forlorn sceptic out of his or her confusions, i.e. “carelessness and in-attention”⁴⁷⁹ as in the discussion of the previous chapter regarding the notions of substance, faculty and occult quality. False modern philosophers achieve this indifference by feigning philosophical fictions. Through “moderate scepticism” true philosophers, like Hume, understand that theoretical philosophical considerations often lead to embarrassing results regarding what knowledge claims can be rationally justified, but this does not really matter that much because human natural inclinations provide a new basis for these claims. Scepticism partly prevails, but its victory is moderated or put into perspective by a view of how the mind works powered by its natural propensities.

In a way, Hegelianism was Kierkegaard’s “modern philosophy” and, like Hume in his time, Kierkegaard wanted to show how illusory or fragile its foundations are.

478 One might ask why does Hume’s critical approach to philosophy not also target his own theory of ideas including the view of perceptions of the mind? Should he not be sceptical about that, too? Would not this lead to a circularity of doubt? I leave these questions open. Possibly Hume really did imbibe without question Berkeley’s and Locke’s theory of ideas “just as he unhesitatingly took in the air he breathed” (see Stroud 2007, 28 as already quoted in ch. 3).

479 *T* 1.4.2.57; *SBN* 218.

5.3 Kierkegaard's critique of the "system"

It may be argued that when one enquires into Kierkegaard's views on philosophy one is actually enquiring into Kierkegaard's (and his pseudonyms') views on Hegel's philosophy or that of Hegel's followers.⁴⁸⁰ For example, according to Phillips, when Kierkegaard

speaks of philosophy, it must be remembered, he is thinking, and attacking, philosophy of a certain kind; one associated, rightly or wrongly, with the influence of Hegel. He was opposed to an abstractionism which subordinated everything to a system. What he wanted to show us was the faces of different possibilities in human life.⁴⁸¹

And, according to Thomas,

Kierkegaard's self-appointed task in philosophy was to provide a corrective for what he regarded as the System's obsessive concern or preoccupation with the world-historical. For Hegel the task of the philosopher was to contemplate world-history, but for Kierkegaard this was to pretend to do something the philosopher could not do. [...] The world-historical is an abstraction which is not in fact the object of philosophy. Therefore the Hegelian characterisation of philosophy falsifies the relation of philosophy and life.⁴⁸²

480 Johannes Climacus loves to ridicule Danish thinkers' enthusiasm to follow Hegel in their own philosophies. Consider, for example, Climacus's statement: "Alas, 'what the German will not do for money'—and what will the Dane not do afterward, once the German has done it" (SKS 7, 134 / CUP1, 144).

481 Phillips 1980, 9.

482 Thomas 1973, 33.

Johannes Climacus's *CUP* is often regarded as Kierkegaard's most important text about Hegel's philosophy. Further, it is also often considered the most philosophical and even the most important work in Kierkegaard's whole authorship.⁴⁸³ In *CUP* Climacus argues in favour of the "subjective" against the "objective" point of view where Christianity is concerned and, accordingly, propagates the famous (or infamous) thesis "Truth is Subjectivity".⁴⁸⁴ This apparent "anti-objectivity", with its condemning talk about "the system" and "speculation", obviously seems targeted against Hegel's philosophy. Climacus wants to show, among other things, the emptiness of objective thinking, or speculation, when a person is interested in becoming a Christian. "Thus," Stewart argues, "Christianity is presented as the antipode of speculative philosophy, and the two positions are in a sense carved out in relation to one another."⁴⁸⁵ Climacus's critique of philosophy is directed against rationalistic philosophy which tries to reveal the true essence of human existence embedded in world-historical reason and which tries to philosophically justify the teachings of Christianity. Johnson observes how "[c]ustomarily, when Climacus criticizes philosophy, the Danish word is '*Speculationen*'. "⁴⁸⁶ If a thinker, like Climacus, has reservations about reason's relevance regarding understanding what being a Christian really means, it at least seems that Hegel is not his or her man. Consider, for example, the following characterisation by Horstmann:

483 Stewart 2003, 448-50. Johnson 1978, 443-444 argues, possibly apologetically, that there are many signs of a philosophical work in *CUP*: Climacus (1) attempts to analyse, to clarify, to draw distinctions, and to define, (2) offers a diagnosis of human condition, (3) makes and defends of philosophical claims and (4) allies himself with some philosophers (Socrates, Lessing, Hamann, and "the Greeks") and distances himself from others (Hegel or "perhaps the post-Hegelian crowd in Germany and Denmark" and, in lesser measure, Plato and Descartes).

484 *SKS* 7, 173-228 / *CUP I*, 189-251.

485 Stewart 2003, 451.

486 Johnson 1978, 455n42.

For Hegel, the fundamental principle which explains all reality is reason. Reason, as Hegel understands it, is not some quality which is attributed to some human subject; it is, by contrast, the sum of all reality. In accordance with this belief, Hegel claims that reason and reality are strictly identical: only reason is real and only reality is reasonable. The considerations which moved Hegel to identify reason with reality are various. On the one hand, certain motives rooted in Hegel's theological convictions play a role. According to these convictions, one must be able to give a philosophical interpretation of the whole of reality which can simultaneously act as a justification of the basic assumptions of Christianity.⁴⁸⁷

On the other hand, when one reads what Kierkegaard writes about Hegel and the system (in *CUP*, for example), one begins to wonder whether Kierkegaard's view of Hegel's philosophy or Hegelianism is justified, and how justified it really is to interpret Kierkegaard as opposing Hegel on almost every issue. For example, Kierkegaard seldom explicitly refers to Hegel's primary texts.⁴⁸⁸ Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel is, of course, a classic topic of Kierkegaard scholarship and, not surprisingly, anything but black-and-white. For example, M. Westphal writes how Kierkegaard "is one of the great anti-Hegelians", and how, on the other hand, he "is never simply anti-Hegelian".⁴⁸⁹ Stewart, in his thorough *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (2003), has challenged the

487 Horstmann 1998&2004.

488 This is my policy, too. I have chosen not to refer to Hegel's original writings because the "actual" relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard is not, I believe, crucial to the points I try to make in this thesis. Stewart 2003 is a penetrating study of the issue and his 2007 publication is particularly about, as the title reads, "Hegel: Kierkegaard's Use and Reading of Hegel's Primary Texts". For the relation of Kierkegaard's theory of stages to Hegel's thought, see Liehu 1990.

489 M. Westphal 1998, 101.

standard view according to which Kierkegaard categorically rejected Hegel's philosophy.⁴⁹⁰

Commenting on *CUP* Stewart argues that Climacus's main targets are not Hegel and his philosophy but the Danish Hegelians Heiberg and Martensen and the non-Hegelian Grundtvig.⁴⁹¹ He claims, "contrary to the standard view, that Hegel's presence in the *Postscript* is at best secondhand".⁴⁹² According to Stewart, it seems that Climacus, in his criticism of "system" and "speculation," did not really have Hegel in mind but Heiberg's and Martensen's unsound interpretations of his philosophy. For example, Heiberg tried to incorporate believer's personal and subjective religious experience into philosophical system and thought that there is no need for separate sphere of religion.⁴⁹³ But this was never Hegel's intention. When he wrote about religion what he had in mind was a philosophy of religion as part of his system, not believer's personal faith. In Stewart's words, "[t]here is thus no claim made about private emotions of particular individuals. Indeed, Hegel himself claimed that such things cannot be grasped philosophically; they belong to the bad infinity

490 About "the standard view", see Stewart 2003, 3-27.

491 Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1960) was an important literary figure during the so-called Golden Age of Denmark (see, e.g. Kirmmse 1990, 136-68). Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-84) was a theologian who was important for the reception of Hegel's philosophy in Denmark. Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) was the leading figure of the Golden Age who in his historical works, among other things, discussed the role of the Scandinavian people in the development of Christianity. Regarding the "Golden Age of Denmark", see Kirmmse 1990, 198, who describes Grundtvig as "surely the most gigantic and protean figure of the Danish Golden Age. Poet and pastor; politician and prophet; theologian and philologist; historian and popular educator—this titan broke all normal boundaries in his restless and almost unlimited productivity" (see also the whole chapter on Grundtvig in Kirmmse 1990, 198-237). For assessments of Kierkegaard's relation to Grundtvig, see Holm 2005 and Kvist 2005.

492 Stewart 2003, 452. Stewart's view is in direct opposition to, e.g. that of M. Westphal's 1998, 107, who claims that in *FT* and *CUP* Kierkegaard's "polemic against Hegel will find its most overt and most sustained expression". M. Westphal also maintains that Climacus's direct target in *CUP* (and in *FT*) is Hegel's philosophy, not any exaggerated Danish form of it.

493 See Stewart 2003, 477-483.

of particularity and have nothing to do with philosophy.”⁴⁹⁴ Hence, it may be argued, as Stewart does, that Climacus’ target, in his criticism of philosophical understanding of Christianity, is not and even cannot be Hegel’s thought but Heiberg’s interpretation of it.

Climacus insists in *CUP* and *PF*, as observed above, on the absolutely paradoxical nature of Christianity.⁴⁹⁵ He strongly objects attempts to “mediate”⁴⁹⁶ or conceptually reconcile this defining feature of Christianity by the Hegelians. Stewart argues that when Climacus defends his view in *CUP* and *PF* it is not in fact against Hegel but Martensen’s mediation attempt in his article “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medi*” (1839).⁴⁹⁷ Stewart finds, especially regarding *PF*, textual evidence for this. Regarding *CUP*’s chapter “Subjective Truth, Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity”,⁴⁹⁸ where, among other things, Climacus discusses themes already familiar from *PF*, Stewart argues that “Hegel and Climacus are at cross purposes since they are clearly discussing two quite different things. Hegel wants to give an analysis in the academic field of the philosophy of religion, whereas Climacus is concerned with religious faith.”⁴⁹⁹ According to Stewart, Hegel could quite well accept Climacus’s idea of the paradox because its context is the believer’s personal religious experience, not abstract philosophy of religion.⁵⁰⁰ Thus,

494 Stewart 2003, 480. See *SKS* 7, 109-110 / *CUP1*, 112-113, where Climacus ironically wonders how something “bad or spurious” can have something to do with logic.

495 *SKS* 7, 198 / *CUP1*, 217.

496 See, for example, Thulstrup 1984, 168-169 and the Hongs in *CUP2*, 186-187n32 for the meaning and origin of this important term.

497 See Stewart 2003, 347-355, 470-472. See also Waaler and Tolstrup 2004, 209, who discuss *PF* in relation to the debate between Mynster and Martensen about rationalism and supernaturalism and claim that the historical context of *PF* supplies “us with significant information for understanding and interpreting the text”.

498 *SKS* 7, 173-228 / *CUP1*, 189-251.

499 Stewart 2003, 471.

500 Stewart 2003, 472.

it seems again that Climacus's target is not Hegel but Martensen and the Danish debate about the relevance of Hegelianism in Kierkegaard's time. Further, there is indeed evidence in Kierkegaard's journals that *CUP*'s target is, in Kierkegaard's own words, "modern speculation (especially that of the post-Hegelian gang)" and that Kierkegaard respects Hegel's scholarship.⁵⁰¹ These are just two short examples of Stewart's approach but they represent his general point of view according to which Kierkegaard's target in his whole authorship is seldom Hegel but often Danish Hegelians.

On the other hand, when discussing "actual and ethical subjectivity",⁵⁰² Climacus contrasts abstract thinking which is "thinking where there is no thinker",⁵⁰³ with concrete thinking, "where there are a thinker and a specific something (in the sense of particularity) that is being thought, where existence gives the existing thinker thought, time, and space".⁵⁰⁴ Then Climacus ironically argues that Hegel really should have published his *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, 1812-1816, rev. 1831) under the title "Pure Thinking" without the author's name, date, preface and distracting explanations. Climacus point is that if Hegel really wanted to operate on the abstract level he should have been more logical with his *Logik* and left out all identifying marks disclosing the author of the work.⁵⁰⁵ Here then, Climacus seems to directly argue against Hegel and not Hegel's Danish followers. Also Dunning, in his review of Stewart's book, points out that not all scholars have blindly followed "the standard view" and that "Hegel may have been Kierkegaard's intended target more often than Stewart admits".⁵⁰⁶

501 *CUP*2, 162-163 / *Pap.* X6 B 128. See also Stewart 2003, 465-466.

502 *SKS* 7, 274-328 / *CUP*1, 301-360.

503 *SKS* 7, 303 / *CUP*1, 332.

504 *SKS* 7, 303 / *CUP*1, 332.

505 See *SKS* 7, 304 / *CUP*1, 332-333.

506 Dunning 2004, 501. Like Dunning, Perkins 2004 and M. Westphal 2004 are impressed by the scholarly merits of Stewart's book but are not convinced by its argument.

Kierkegaard's strong critique of Hegelian and Platonic idealism might lead one to suspect that he denounced all kinds of rationalist metaphysical systems. But, as Grimsley has argued, the situation is more complicated than this.⁵⁰⁷ Grimsley discusses Kierkegaard's relation to Leibniz and argues that Kierkegaard had a much higher regard for Leibniz's philosophy than Hegel's. Certainly, Leibniz had a "system", too, but at least he, from Kierkegaard's point of view, concentrated on such important questions as freedom and necessity and the nature of good and evil and, importantly, saw the problem of ultimate human destiny in relation to God's existence.⁵⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, Kierkegaard eventually became more critical of Leibniz's thought because of Leibniz's final goal of, as Grimsley puts it, "reconciliation between the claims of Christianity, on the one hand, and metaphysics and science on the other: he wanted to show that both viewpoints were 'reasonable' when properly understood."⁵⁰⁹ On the other hand, bearing in mind the difference between the domains of "abstract" or academic philosophy of religion and the private experiential religious world of a human individual, one could argue that the work in the former does not *per se* undermine the relevance of the latter. Surely Kierkegaard's own analysis of the absolute paradox as the object of faith is philosophy of religion, but his points seems to be that, from the individual's point of view, intellectual analysis of what it means to be a Christian is irrelevant because only believing matters. Kierkegaard's analysis does not settle the issue of the object of faith. Instead, he seems to show how strange believing can be, of which the "Knight of Faith" in *FT* is a good example.

Kierkegaard knew Leibniz's anti-Lockean *New Essays on Human Understanding* (*Nouveau essais sur l'entendement humain*), which was, according to Serjeantson, unknown to Hume when he

507 Grimsley 1965.

508 On the other hand, did not Hegel discuss just about everything in his writings?

509 Grimsley 1965, 396. Kierkegaard's relation to Leibniz has also been explored by Perkins 1973, Sorainen 1952, Waaler 1998 and Løkke and Waler 2009. See also Popkin 1951.

wrote *T* because, despite being written 1703-1705, it was not published until 1765.⁵¹⁰ This historical fact is interesting because *New Essays* is a commentary on Nicolas Malebranche's (1638-1715) *The Search After Truth* (*De la recherche de la vérité*, 1674-5), which in turn was an important source for Hume as Hume himself recognises.⁵¹¹ This "pseudo-connection" between Hume and Kierkegaard is potentially an interesting new topic of research, because there appears to be no studies on Malebranche as Kierkegaard's source nor on their philosophical connections. As with Hume, one can learn from sks.dk that there are no references to Malebranche in Kierkegaard's published writings and only one in his journals and three in his notebooks. There are some more references to Leibniz and there are many more indirect references to Leibniz than to Malebranche.

5.3.1 Logical system vs. a system of existence

Kierkegaard was a thinker who loved differences and hated speculative thinkers' attempts, as he saw it, to water them down. He strongly argued, for example, for the difference between being in a temporal and factual sense (=existence) and being in an atemporal or "ideal" sense.⁵¹² Kierkegaard thought that his own age, in Climacus's words in *CUP*, "had come to know too much and had forgotten to exist and what inwardness is".⁵¹³ He expresses the same idea—which may be labelled

510 Serjeantson 2005, 189.

511 For a concise discussion of Malebranche's thought see, e.g. Schmalz 2009.

512 See, e.g. *SKS* 7, 301-6 / *CUP* 1, 330-35. See also the Hongs' "Foreword" in *PF* 1962, xii-xiii and their "Notes" in *PF*, 280n25, 297n6.

513 *SKS* 7, 238-239 / *CUP* 1, 263.

as one of the key issues of Kierkegaard's authorship—in different words when Climacus asks, also in *CUP*,

[i]ndeed, what is an existing human being? Our age knows all too well how little it is, but therein lies the specific immorality of the age. Every age has its own; the immorality of our age is perhaps not lust and pleasure and sensuality, but rather a pantheistic, debauched contempt for individual human beings.⁵¹⁴

This “contempt for individual human beings” refers to Kierkegaard's view that Hegelian systematisers miss true individuality because of their emphasis on the large scale metaphysical trends in history. Kierkegaard insisted that there are distinctions or differences that cannot be reconciled by human means, contrary to what speculative philosophers claim. Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonym of *CA*, regrets to observe that “[t]he age of making distinctions is past. It has been vanquished by the system. In our day, whoever loves to make distinctions is regarded as an eccentric whose soul clings to something that has long since vanished.”⁵¹⁵ One of the important distinctions Kierkegaard wants to uphold is the one between concrete existence and ideal being—the former should not be dissolved into the latter. An illustrative example of this is Climacus's discussion in *CUP* under the subheading “(a) a logical system can be given; (b) but a system of existence cannot be given”.⁵¹⁶ In the most recent English translation of the *Efterskrift* (by Hannay)

514 *SKS* 7, 324 / *CUP1*, 355.

515 *SKS* 4, 310 / *CA*, 3.

516 *SKS* 7, 105 / *CUP1*, 109.

this reads, perhaps more to the point, “(a) *there can be a logical system*, (b) *but there can be no system for life itself*”.⁵¹⁷

According to Climacus, if one wants to construct a logical system, then “nothing may be incorporated [into the system] that has a relation to existence, that is not indifferent to existence”.⁵¹⁸ Climacus’s general point is that concrete temporal existence and “being” in the abstract sense, like the being of concepts and conceptual or logical relations do not mix. If one blends them, like Climacus thinks Hegel has done by having brought “movement into logic”, only confusion arises in the realm of logic. As such, this sounds plausible. Surely logical or conceptual relations cannot be temporal in the sense that it somehow takes a period of time for these relations to occur or that there is some kind of conceptual development taking place over time. The Pythagorean theorem, for example, is true of all triangles whether once drawn or imagined or not.⁵¹⁹ It does not somehow “become” true for each triangle that I for some reason decide to draw. It is also plausible to think that logical relations cannot in some sense capture or grasp a person’s individual existence. Climacus’s blaming of Hegel for bringing movement into logic seems to consist in his view that Hegel has somehow distorted this common-sense view and made some kind of category mistake.⁵²⁰ In connection to this, Climacus refers approvingly to F. A. Trendelenburg’s (1802-72) *Logische Untersuchungen* (1840), where Trendelenburg presents his critique of Hegelian logic.⁵²¹ Of course, Hegel’s logic is not logic in the sense that Aristotle’s logic or modern formal logic are.

517 CUPH, 92. The original Danish reads “(a) *et logisk System kan der gives*; b) *men der kan ikke gives noget Tilværelsens System*”.

518 SKS 7, 107 / CUP1, 110.

519 For a survey of the basic issues of the philosophy of mathematics, see, e.g. Horsten 2008.

520 Stewart 2003, 488n177.

521 SKS 7, 106-107 / CUP1, 110. It appears that Kierkegaard relies on classical Aristotelian logic in his criticism of Hegelian logic but, according to Løkke and Waaler 2010, 3, there are strong reasons to reject or substantially modify this “all too common view”.

For example, Redding contends, regarding Hegel's *Science of Logic*,

that for Hegel logic is not simply a science of the *form* of our thoughts but is also a science of actual 'content' as well, and as such is a type of *ontology*. Thus it is not just about the concepts 'being,' 'nothing,' 'becoming' and so on, but about *being, nothing, becoming* and so on, *themselves*.⁵²²

It is just this kind of "ontological approach" to concepts that is problematic to Climacus. Climacus seems to say that concepts do not have a life of their own where "movement" or different things are taking place between concepts. He, for example, evidently in reference to Hegelian "being" as such, writes how "a logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning is just like pure being, a pure chimera [Chimære]".⁵²³ Interestingly, from the point of view of this thesis, Climacus is here using the same word, and in the original Danish as well, as Hume does to describe the notion of substance.⁵²⁴ It seems now that Climacus, when criticising the Hegelian notion of pure being separated from concrete existence, concurs here with the Humean idea, discussed above, that existence is not an idea that can be separated from other ideas we have of a certain thing.⁵²⁵ Climacus and Hume argue that the notion of "pure being" (Climacus) or existence as "different from the idea of any object" (Hume) refer to illusory and fictional things. Like the ancient fiction of substance for Hume, the notions of pure being and an absolute beginning in a logical system are for Climacus only fantastical conceptual structures. And, like the double

⁵²² Redding 2010.

⁵²³ *SKS* 7, 108 / *CUP* 1, 112.

⁵²⁴ *T* 1.4.3.7; *SBN* 222.

⁵²⁵ See *T* 1.3.7.2; *SBN* 94-5 and *SKS* K7, 169. According to Thulstrup 1984, 225, a pure chimera is "the same as nothing because when the concept of being is thought in its purity by abstracting from all concrete existence it passes over into its opposite—nothing."

existence of perceptions and objects is for Hume a monstrous offspring of two conflicting principles, so the idea of movement in logic is a confusion of two logically distinct domains, i.e. that of “static” and atemporal logic and that of concrete existence. Climacus also muses on this issue later in *CUP*:

To think existence *sub specie aeterni* and in abstraction is essentially to annul it, and the merit of it resembles the much-heralded merit of cancelling the principle of contradiction. Existence without motion is unthinkable, and motion is unthinkable *sub specie aeterni*. To omit motion is not exactly a masterstroke, and to introduce it into logic as transition, and along with it time and space, is only new confusion. But since all thinking is eternal, the difficulty is for the existing person. [...] But again there is the difficulty that existence puts it together in this way: the one who is thinking is existing.⁵²⁶

Climacus stresses again the essential distinction between the realms of concrete existence and abstraction and the inevitable confusion that arises if this distinction is ignored. In addition, Climacus suggests that the situation of a existing human thinker is problematic because in some sense there is an eternal element in us thinkers, too, because of the possibly eternal element in thinking. It seems that the Hongs and Hannay differ significantly in translating the quoted paragraph. The Hongs translate the original “Forsaavidt al Tænken imidlertid er evig” as “But since all thinking is eternal”, whereas Hannay’s translation reads “But in so far as all thought is eternal”. In my view, the latter alternative is more correct, because it does not lose the conditional tone of Climacus’s original as the Hongs’ translation appears to do. Be this as it may, Climacus

526 *SKS* 7, 281 / *CUP1*, 308-9.

nevertheless thinks that the possible union of temporal existence and “eternity” in the human thinker is more complicated than it would perhaps seem.⁵²⁷

Besides making a confusing category mistake, Climacus thinks that the idea that the “system begins with the immediate and therefore without presuppositions and therefore absolutely, that is, the beginning of the system is the absolute beginning”⁵²⁸ is illusory. To explicate this, “beginning absolutely with the immediate” seems to mean some kind of correspondence with thought and reality in the sense that “thought” can begin with a clean slate without bringing anything of its own with it to distort the situation. Climacus is now discussing the issue of the beginning of philosophy, which was much debated in Germany in Hegel’s time.⁵²⁹ According to Climacus, there can be no immediate beginning in philosophy because, put simply, first there has to be someone living and with some “conceptual baggage” to make that beginning and therefore this beginning is not immediate. It is apparently fine to think that the system begins without presuppositions with the immediate and therefore makes an “absolute beginning” but how this is done has not been questioned. Climacus formulates this problem as follows:

How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately? The answer to this must certainly be an unconditional no. If the system is assumed to be after existence [life itself] (whereby a confusion with a system of existence [life] is created), the system does indeed come afterward and consequently does not begin immediately with the immediate with which existence

527 For Kierkegaard’s view of the self [Selvet] as a synthesis, see, e.g. the opening paragraphs of *SUD* (*SKS* 11, 129-130 / *SUD*, 13-14). See also Liehu 1990, 43-61 and Ukkola 1961, 49-115 for a discussion of this issue. Also Pörn 1984 is partly a discussion of the self as a synthesis in *SUD* and, in addition, a discussion of its relation to modern analytical philosophy of mind.

528 *SKS* 7, 108 / *CUPI*, 111.

529 Stewart 2003, 489.

began, even though in another sense existence [life itself] did not begin with it, because the immediate never is but is annulled when it is. The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself achieved through reflection*.⁵³⁰

Now, even though the idea of beginning immediately with the immediate may somehow be theoretically acceptable, the attempt to in fact do this turns out to be impossible. There has to be a reflecting consciousness to start up the system. But in order to make a beginning this reflection has to come to an end. Climacus writes how the

beginning can occur only when reflection is stopped, and reflection can be stopped only by something else, and this something else is something altogether different from logical, since it is a resolution [Beslutning]. But if a resolution is required, presuppositionlessness is abandoned.⁵³¹

Now, like in *PF* regarding doubt and belief, Climacus argues that reflection and argumentation do not come to a halt on their own for a resolution or decision is needed. The beginning of the system seems to be then like the formation of belief for Climacus in *PF*, i.e. something that does not come about by itself but through a decision. In this sense there is something non-logical and presupposed in the allegedly logical system, because a decision has to be based on something, i.e. on a presupposition. Climacus also suggests that instead of “speaking or dreaming” of an absolute beginning, we could speak of a “leap [Spring]”.⁵³² Interestingly, Climacus observes that when “the Hegelians”, instead of being immersed in their logic, “are pleasant people, when they are like the

530 *SKS* 7, 108 / *CUP I*, 112 (*CUPH*, 95).

531 *SKS* 7, 110 / *CUP I*, 113.

532 *SKS* 7, 211-2 / *CUP I*, 114-5.

rest of us (only more learned and gifted etc., something I shall always be willing to admit)—they know that reflection can be stopped only by a leap.”⁵³³ In my view, Climacus suggests, like Hume does, that there are in a sense at least two important frames of mind, i.e. philosophical and everyday. The latter natural one has a power over the former to halt its abstract philosophical speculations and to get us to go on with our lives.⁵³⁴

According to Climacus, it is absurd to maintain that there is some kind of conceptual-ontological reality with “movement” and life of its own and which discloses itself in the concrete world. Where there is thinking, there is always a concrete thinker. If a philosopher thinks he or she can somehow clear his or her mind of all presuppositions and then start to build his or her philosophical system from nothing, he or she entertains an illusory view of philosophical reflection. One’s world view or perspective upon the world is not the “end result” of a rational argument but a committed choice, a resolution of the will.

Climacus thinks that the need for the presence of a concrete thinker and reflective decision to make a beginning in philosophy—“reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it”⁵³⁵—itself shows that there can be no (à la the Hongs) “system of existence” or (à la Hannay) “system for life” [Tilværelsens System].⁵³⁶ In a sense now, the notion of a “system for life” is a contradiction in terms because “life” or concrete existence, unlike a system, is a temporal category, if “system” is understood properly in its anti-Hegelian sense. Climacus suggests that if a thinker who practises

533 *SKS* 7, 211-2 / *CUPI*, 115.

534 For Hume’s musings on this, see, e.g. *T* 1.4.7.9-10; *SBN* 269-270.

535 *SKS* 7, 112 / *CUPI*, 116 .

536 *SKS* 7, 108 / *CUPI*, 112 [*CUPH*, 94].

“logical thought” does not forget that he or she is at same time an “empirical *I*” instead of a “pure *I*”,⁵³⁷ there is nothing wrong with being a logical thinker who works out a system. Climacus writes:

Whoever wants to be a philosopher will certainly also want to be somewhat informed on this point [i.e. what is the relation between the empirical *I* and the pure *I*?] and above all not want to become a ludicrous creature by being transmogrified—*eins, zwei, drei, kokolorum*—into speculative thought. If the person occupied with logical thought is also human enough not to forget that he is an existing individual, even if he has finished the system, the fantasticality and the charlatanry will gradually vanish.⁵³⁸

The difference between the empirical *I* and the pure *I* is also behind Climacus’s brief criticism of the Cartesian cogito much later in *CUP*.⁵³⁹ Climacus argues that the famous “cogito ergo sum” is really a tautology. If the *I* in the cogito is an individual human being, then the statement, Climacus argues, “demonstrates nothing”. Climacus point is that because “I think” already means that I am existing, then of course “I am”. This means that “the first consequently says even more than the last”.⁵⁴⁰ But, Climacus thinks, if the cogito is understood to refer to a concrete individual, then what will happen is that “philosophy shouts: Foolishness, foolishness, here it is not the matter of my *I* or your *I* but of the pure *I*.”⁵⁴¹ But because this pure *I* can have only “thought-existence” [Tanke-

537 A reference to Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s (1762–1814) notion of “pure *I*” as a foundation of his *Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge* or *Wissenschaftslehre* (on this, see, e.g. Breazeale 2009).

538 *SKS* 7, 113 / *CUP I*, 117.

539 *SKS* 7, 288-90 / *CUP I*, 317-18. As observed above (ch. 4.2), doubt and especially Cartesian doubt were the topics of Climacus’s philosophical “autobiography” *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*.

540 *SKS* 7, 288 / *CUP I*, 317.

541 *SKS* 7, 288-9 / *CUP I*, 317.

Existents], it follows, Climacus thinks, that “there is no conclusion, for then the statement is a tautology”.⁵⁴² Again, Climacus seems to want to point out the certain emptiness of thought that is separated from concrete existence.

Despite appearances, Climacus’s (and Kierkegaard’s) point—that there is something fundamentally wrong with the Hegelian system construction—seems to be pretty simple. Climacus says something like “be philosophers and logicians, but do not forget that you are living persons, too, and that your conceptual systems are only that—conceptual systems”. This fictitious credo does not in fact differ that much from the famous and real one by Hume: “Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.”⁵⁴³ In a recent collection of papers on Kierkegaard’s several philosophical sources in the “Renaissance and Modern Traditions”,⁵⁴⁴ Miles briefly observes that Hume and Kierkegaard “agree to a great extent about what might be called the ethics of philosophy”.⁵⁴⁵ According to Miles’s interpretation, which I basically share, both Hume and Kierkegaard think that a philosopher should philosophise as a concrete human being without losing himself or herself in unnatural abstractions. Miles concludes his paper and writes how “the confluence of the ideas [of] these thinkers [Hume and Kierkegaard] flows deeper than their overlapping skepticism regarding reason and religion.”⁵⁴⁶

A poor Kierkegaard scholar may think that because there cannot be a system for life (or of existence), there *ipso facto* is no such thing. But Climacus, whose self-appointed task is to make difficulties everywhere,⁵⁴⁷ says that this is not at all the case and

542 *SKS* 7, 289 / *CUP I*, 317.

543 *EHU* 1.6; *SBN* 9.

544 Stewart, ed., 2009.

545 Miles 2009, 23.

546 Miles 2009, 29.

547 *SKS* 7, 171-2 / *CUP I*, 186-7.

[n]either is this implied in what has been said. Existence [Life] itself is a system—for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and conclusiveness [finality] correspond to each other, but existence [life] is the very opposite. Abstractly viewed, system and existence [existing] cannot be thought conjointly, because in order to think existence [life], systematic thought must think it as annulled and consequently not as existing [life]. Existence is the spacing that holds apart; the systematic is the conclusiveness that combines.⁵⁴⁸

Without claiming that Boethius is Climacus's actual source here, the idea that life itself is a system for God may be seen to refer to a controversial view that Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 475-7 - 526)⁵⁴⁹ presents in his classic *Consolation of Philosophy* (*De consolazione Philosophiae*, 520-526?), i.e. it follows from God's omniscience that every event happens necessarily.⁵⁵⁰ If God knows everything what has happened and will happen, then at least in this sense all "life" is a system for him, and granting that everything happens necessarily, there is certain conclusiveness or finality in this "systematic" view of life.⁵⁵¹ Climacus makes an interesting point regarding

548 SKS 7, 114 / CUP1, 118 (CUPH, 100). Incidentally, William James 1897, 13 also seems to agree with Climacus on the idea of the conclusiveness of systems when he points out that "[a] system, to be a system at all, must come as a *closed* system, reversible in this or that detail, perchance, but in its essential features never."

549 Different sources provide different dates, this is from Marenbon 2010.

550 On Boethius, see, e.g. Marenbon 2010.

551 It seems that Boethius had an important influence on Kierkegaard. Westfall 2008, 219 even declares that "Kierkegaard's kinship with Boethius as a philosopher and an author is particularly profound". According to Westfall 2008, 208-209, Kierkegaard refers to Boethius mainly with regard to the Platonic opposition of philosophy to poetry and to the discussion of the compatibility of freedom and divine foreknowledge. It seems that Leibniz's discussion of the latter issue in his *Theodicy* (1710) crucially influenced Kierkegaard's understanding of Boethius's thought.

pantheistic systems and systems in general. He observes how pantheistic systems have been attacked “by saying that they cancel freedom and the distinction between good and evil” and thinks that this could also have been expressed by saying that “every such system fantastically volatilizes the concept of existence”.⁵⁵² Climacus now suggests that the idea of the divine unity of everything or that everything happening or existing is divine self-expression to some extent waters down free choice and moral distinctions and, Climacus thinks, this in fact means that the idea that there are concrete human beings making “real” moral choices is compromised or vaporised. This is what Climacus means, as quoted above, by the “pantheistic contempt of human beings”.

Climacus further argues that in fact “every system must be pantheistic simply because of the conclusiveness”.⁵⁵³ Climacus’s point is not surprising bearing in mind his criticism of Hegelian system. Conclusiveness means, roughly, that everything happens in the world according to a certain (pre-established?) plan or that everything that happens in the world serves some goal. In a way now, Climacus brings forth a religious dimension of his criticism of Hegelian metaphysics. If everything existing and happening is directed towards some goal, then it is natural to think that this unity has some kind of supernatural or divine support or origin or that it is essentially divine itself. Climacus does not explicate what he exactly means by the term “pantheism”, but, to quote a modern characterisation, “the defining feature of pantheism is allegedly that God is wholly immanent. However, what is actually (or mostly) involved in this claim is that pantheism denies the theistic view that God transcends the world.”⁵⁵⁴ In reference to this, Climacus’s view seems to be completely theistic. Climacus’s overall point in both *PF* and *CUP* is that God is something totally other and different compared to a concrete human being. In fact, the allegedly divine presence in the

⁵⁵² *SKS* 7, 117 / *CUP* 1, 122.

⁵⁵³ *SKS* 7, 117 / *CUP* 1, 122.

⁵⁵⁴ Levine 2011.

world (“the god”) was established in *PF* as an absolute paradox and the object of faith. Climacus’s *Guden* is so strange that it cannot be grasped rationally how he could have lived on Earth as a human being. Later in *CUP* Climacus argues, repeating his point in *PF*, that the “only consistency outside Christianity is that of pantheism, the taking of oneself out of existence back into the eternal through recollection, whereby all existence-decisions become only shadow play compared with what is eternally decided from behind.”⁵⁵⁵ There seems to be then, according to Climacus, a certain deterministic element in pantheism, too. This is also its non-Christian feature suggesting that Climacus thinks that genuinely “free” choosing is possible within Christianity. Climacus’s point—that all systems must be pantheistic, because they are conclusive—is, in my view, based on the idea that if everything happens for a reason or according to a “system”, then this leads to a kind of divination of the world. Still much later in *CUP* Climacus observes how in “immanence God is neither a something, but everything, and is infinitely everything”.⁵⁵⁶ A personal God is replaced by a divine manifestation, which can also be grasped rationally (for example, in the Hegelian fashion)—an idea totally antithetical to Climacus’s view. As observed in the chapter on Kierkegaard’s view of the miraculous, Kierkegaard claims that pantheists are not in fact that religious, because he said this of Spinoza, who is well-known for his pantheistic *Ethics* (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*, 1677).⁵⁵⁷ Strangely though, Climacus’s view of the object of faith, i.e. the incarnated god is so out of this world or alien that, it seems to me, it becomes problematic to understand how can it be a defining feature of a historical religion. However, possibly this is just what being an absolute paradox and an object of faith means.⁵⁵⁸

555 *SKS* 7, 207 / *CUP* 1, 226-7.

556 *SKS* 7, 510 / *CUP* 1, 561.

557 Or, as it was called, “a book forged in hell” (see Nadler 2011).

558 However, Kylliäinen, in his recent thesis, argues against the “solipsistic” interpretations of Kierkegaard and emphasises the “contextualist” dimensions of his thought. According to Kylliäinen 2009, 19

Leaving the pantheism issue aside, Climacus's idea that life itself is a system for God is plausible whether one shares his theistic point of view or not.⁵⁵⁹ If there is a God and He is the Creator of all things and "sees" everything that is going on in the world, then all of reality is in this sense a "system" to him.⁵⁶⁰ Climacus also reminds us here of the issue in *PF*, i.e. whether the past is more necessary than the future. It may seem, Climacus argues, that a person's past life—as finished and finalised—can be grasped by a systematic thinker as necessary in the sense that it cannot change any more, but even this is illusory, because, in Climacus's words, "[w]hoever is himself existing cannot gain this conclusiveness [finality] outside existence [life], a conclusiveness [finality] that corresponds to the eternity into which the past has entered".⁵⁶¹ Climacus's point is that a human thinker is so trapped in his concrete and temporal existence that he or she cannot even grasp the apparently fixed past "systematically", i.e. as a part of some kind of plan enfolding in reality. But, again, there is one "systematic thinker" for whom even this is possible. It is, Climacus writes, "he who himself is outside existence [life] and yet in existence, who in his eternity is forever concluded and yet includes existence [life] within himself—it is God".⁵⁶²

Kierkegaard "did not neglect, but took into consideration the social, historical, and natural context of human existence". From the point of view of analytic philosophy on Kierkegaard's thought, especially the writings of Johannes Climacus may indeed seem "solipsistic" because of his constant emphasis on individual choice and taking a risk with faith in the most improbable thing and, of course, the idea of the subjectivity of truth. Kylliäinen's study is an important "corrective" to these kind of approaches to Kierkegaard's thought. There are no doubt both kinds of elements in Kierkegaard's thought, but his writings that most obviously appear "philosophical" do seem to have many "solipsistic" characteristics. This is importantly due to the fact that they are in strong opposition to the alleged "objectivism" of Hegelianism (ignoring now the various forms "Hegelianism" can adopt).

559 For Climacus's somewhat ambiguous relation to Christianity, see, e.g. *SKS* 7, 23-6 / *CUP1*, 14-17.

560 Cf. this with Kripke's view of what God could see in causal relations if causality is only a "Humean" regular succession of events (see ch. 3).

561 *SKS* 7, 114 / *CUP1*, 118-9 (*CUPH*, 101).

562 *SKS* 7, 115 / *CUP1*, 119 (*CUPH*, 101).

Climacus is not saying that there are reasons to think that God exists; he is more truly explicating what it would mean to be able to grasp “life” (or existence) as a system. It would take a God-like eye in the sky point of view, Climacus argues, to be able to do this. But this is an impossibility for a human thinker, no matter how systematic he or she thinks he or she is. On the one hand, is it not logically possible that “life” is a system, and we just do not know it? Climacus is then only saying that we should act like it is not a system to preserve our subjectivity. By introducing the God-perspective Climacus emphasises the ridiculousness of the project of Hegelian systematic thinkers. He is in fact arguing that to be able to accomplish their mission, they would have to turn into something non-human, i.e. atemporal creatures with a God-like view of life.⁵⁶³ But, of course, they cannot do this because, as Climacus puts it, “existence possesses the remarkable quality that an existing person exists whether he wants to or not”.⁵⁶⁴ Ignoring this existential claim results in comical consequences. Climacus writes:

It is from this side that an objection must first be made to modern speculative thought, that it has not a false presupposition but a comic presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten in a kind of world-historical absentmindedness what it means to be a human being, not what it means to be human in general, for even speculators might be swayed to consider that sort of thing, but what it means that we, you and I and he, are human beings, each one on his own.⁵⁶⁵

563 See Thuslstrup 1984, 221-222 on the comicality of the pantheistic systems of philosophy and how they “emasculate” concrete existence and ethical striving. Much later in *CUP* Climacus describes the crucial ontological difference between God and a human being as follows: “God does not think, he creates; God does not exist [existere], he is eternal. A human being thinks and exists, and existence [Existents] separates thinking and being, holds them apart from each other in succession” (*SKS* 7, 303 / *CUP I*, 332).

564 *SKS* 7, 116 / *CUP I*, 120.

565 *SKS* 7, 116 / *CUP I*, 120.

Climacus is now saying that speculative thinkers commit in fact some kind of existential categorical mistake in their work on a system of existence or life and in having forgotten, again in Climacus's words, "that philosophizing is not speaking fantastically to fantastical beings but speaking to existing individuals".⁵⁶⁶ Regarding Climacus's view on what it means to be a philosopher, perhaps it is redundant to quote again Hume's aforementioned credo? In my view, Climacus with his criticism of speculative or systematic thought wants, in a way, to set philosophy in a proper perspective. Philosophy, for Climacus, seems to have no special status in the sense that it could somehow penetrate into the true nature of things like Hegelians, in Climacus's view, think it can. There indeed seems to be a break or a separation between systematic thought and reality or being. Climacus describes this as follows:

The systematic idea is subject-object, is the unity of thinking and being; existence, on the other hand, is precisely the separation. From this it by no means follows that existence is thoughtless, but existence has spaced and does space subject from object, thought from being. Objectively understood, thinking is pure thinking, which just as abstractly-objectively corresponds to its object, which in turn is therefore itself, and the truth is the correspondence of thinking with itself. This objective thinking has no relation to the existing subjectivity, and while the difficult question always remains—namely, how the existing subject gains entrance into this objectivity in which subjectivity is pure abstract subjectivity (which again is an objective qualification and does not signify any existing human being)—it is certain that the existing subjectivity evaporates more and more.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁶ *SKS* 7, 116 / *CUP* 1, 121.

⁵⁶⁷ *SKS* 7, 118-9 / *CUP* 1, 123.

To further elaborate on what Climacus thinks is wrong with “objective thinking”, it seems to me that what he has in mind is a certain self-satisfied or self-enclosed philosophy whose practitioners spin concepts into a system that they believe mirrors reality so well that these philosophers eventually (and comically) think that in a sense their system is more real than reality itself. This lure of a certain kind of abstract thought is so strong that these philosophers themselves, as existing human beings, “vanish into thin air”,⁵⁶⁸ meaning that abstract subjectivity gains such a momentum in their thinking that no entrance remains for the existing subject any more. Again, Climacus is not grouping all abstract thought under his criticism, only Hegelian abstraction. This is one way to understand his observation above that “it by no means follows that existence is thoughtless”.⁵⁶⁹ Of course people think, Climacus seems to be saying, but they should be wary of the pitfalls of equating thought and being. Existence is indeed the separation of these distinct realms and systematic thought their union.

Durfee suggests that this analysis by Climacus is the source of Kierkegaard’s “metaphilosophical” suggestions.⁵⁷⁰ Theoretical constructions do not just become adopted as “true” if only a properly receptive mind is there to appreciate their logical force, for an existential commitment is always needed. In other words, there is in fact a breach between thought and being, which has not been recognised and dealt with properly in modern philosophy and theorising in general. Bearing in mind how Hegel himself thought that the whole of Western philosophy culminates in his own philosophical system (without that breach) it follows that, according to Durfee’s perhaps broad-brush view, attacking Hegelianism, like Kierkegaard and Climacus did,

568 As Hannay translates the last line of the just quoted paragraph (*CUPH*, 105).

569 The original Danish “tankeløs” is as ambiguous as the English “thoughtless”.

570 Durfee 1981, 99.

consequently means attacking the basic principles of Western philosophy itself—or at least Western philosophy à la Hegel.⁵⁷¹

Besides Johannes Climacus, there is at least one other “meta-philosopher” in Kierkegaard’s corpus, and it is one of his short writings that I discuss next.

5.3.2 *Nicolaus Notabene, a meta-philosopher*

Kierkegaard’s pseudonym’s Nicolaus Notabene’s polemical *Prefaces* (*Forord*, 1844) is a collection of prefaces with a preface. They are writings for various polemical projects published as one book. The seventh preface, for example, was actually intended to be a preface to the *CA* but, for stylistic reasons, Kierkegaard decided to write a new preface for this work and publish the old, more polemical one in the *Prefaces*.⁵⁷² The last of these writings is particularly interesting and very little commented on in literature, as is in fact the whole *Prefaces*.⁵⁷³ *Preface VIII* is nothing less than ironic musings about the possibility of publishing a philosophical journal along with thoughts about the value and nature of the Hegelian philosophy and is, in fact, probably inspired by

571 See Durfee 1981, 92-3.

572 For the cultural and historical background of *Prefaces*, see Hannay 2001, 244-7 and the “Historical Introduction” by Nichol in *P/WS*, vii-xiv.

573 Perkins, ed., 2006, 1 observes how “[u]ntil recently *Prefaces* has been honored with almost universal and unbroken neglect.” Hannay 2001, 247 characterises *Preface VIII* in the chapter “Notabene’s Meditation” in his biography of Kierkegaard as “much the longest and most significant” of all the eight prefaces. See also Stewart’s 2003, 441-447 discussion of the role of Hegel and Hegelianism in *Preface VIII*. Surprisingly, Hannay does not discuss *Prefaces* at all in his *Kierkegaard and Philosophy: Selected Essays* (2003).

Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (*Meditationes de prima philosophia*, 1641).⁵⁷⁴ This journal would eventually be, as Hannay puts it, “the first journal of metaphilosophy or, behind the cover of its irony, the first antiphilosophical journal of philosophy”.⁵⁷⁵ Notabene, though, does not think that the chances that he will succeed in his publishing project are very good because even the eminent Heiberg managed to publish only two issues of his journal *Perseus, en Journal for den Speculative Idee*. Notabene writes how he is not Prof. Heiberg and “indeed, not being Prof. Heiberg, I am even less than that, I am only a John Doe [N. N.]”.⁵⁷⁶ Despite the apparently poor prospects for his upcoming journal, Notabene still hopes he will succeed because his purpose and expectation are completely different from those who have previously tried to publish a philosophical journal.

Notabene, ironically, observes that however satisfying it indeed is to see philosophy “spread throughout the land”, he is not quite sure if all those who pass themselves off as philosophers have really understood what has been said and what they themselves have said. Making fun of the idea of the importance of doubting everything in philosophy, Notabene notes that because it seems that he is unable to “ascend the dizzying thought of doubting everything” and because he nevertheless wants to doubt something, he has decided to doubt “whether all the philosophizers understood what they said and what was said”.⁵⁷⁷

The issue of doubt is also the theme of Kierkegaard's aforementioned *JC* where the reader is told how, after repeatedly hearing that to become a philosopher one must doubt everything, Johannes Climacus, with an interest in entering into philosophy, begins to investigate the following three theses (which refer to Martensen and Hegel):⁵⁷⁸ “(1) *philosophy begins with doubt*; (2) *in*

⁵⁷⁴ Hannay 2001, 247.

⁵⁷⁵ Hannay 2001, 247.

⁵⁷⁶ *SKS* 4, 509 / *P/WS*, 48.

⁵⁷⁷ *SKS* 4, 510 / *P/WS*, 49.

⁵⁷⁸ *JC*, 323n13-324n15.

*order to philosophize, one must have doubted; (3) modern philosophy begins with doubt.*⁵⁷⁹ The point of Climacus's ironical discussion seems to be that despite the apparent reasonableness of these kinds of utterances what they really mean is in fact very problematic. For example, regarding the third thesis, because "modern" is a "historical predicate", one may conclude that there has been an older philosophy that had not begun with doubt or one may wonder whether a more recent philosophy with that older kind of beginning could still go on being philosophy after modern philosophy had begun with doubt or "whether, after modern philosophy had begun with doubt, this would have a decisive influence on the whole future".⁵⁸⁰ If beginning philosophy with doubt turns out to be an essential beginning, i.e. that every kind of philosophy should begin with doubt, it follows that all future philosophies should also begin with doubt and that to call that "older version philosophy is merely an accommodation".⁵⁸¹ But now it appears that the third thesis has been changed into the first, i.e. that philosophy begins with doubt. This would also mean that it had been changed from a historical to a philosophical thesis. On the other hand, the idea that philosophy begins with doubt seems, despite its perhaps philosophical or ahistorical appearance, nevertheless historical because, according to Kierkegaard's narration,⁵⁸² the possibility of doubt means that there is some antecedent principle one can doubt.⁵⁸³ This point—that to be able to doubt there must be something to doubt—leads, Climacus discovers, to an infinite regress of sorts. Doubt is like a rare sword in an old saga about a knight who received a special sword from a troll. The trouble with the sword was that it craved blood the instant it was drawn. The knight was so curious to see his gift

579 *JC*, 132.

580 *JC*, 134.

581 *JC*, 134.

582 *JC*, an unfinished manuscript, has neither pseudonymous author nor editor. It is a "narrative" about Johannes Climacus by Kierkegaard.

583 *JC*, 144-145.

that he promptly drew it out, and then, as Kierkegaard puts it, “the troll had to bite the dust”.⁵⁸⁴

Likewise doubt “kills” its master: the one who tells about doubt to another may become a victim of his own teaching and then the new master becomes a victim of someone else’s doubt and so on.

This regress (Kierkegaard himself does not use this or a like term) eventually means that the learner about doubt as the beginning of philosophy is in fact left outside of philosophy because, if the learner really doubts everything, he in fact excludes himself from philosophy or prevents himself from entering it.⁵⁸⁵ Climacus is now forced to conclude that the

beautiful prospect opened up to him by this thesis [philosophy begins with doubt] had disappeared; he had only one recourse—to assume that this beginning was a beginning that preceded the beginning of philosophy. In that case, thesis no. one was identical with thesis no. two.⁵⁸⁶

It seems then that “in order to philosophize, one must have doubted” (thesis no. two).

Unfortunately, because *JC* was left unfinished, there are only six pages in Kierkegaard’s narrative before the book ends. However, just like in *PF*, where Climacus argues that doubt and belief are not cognitive acts but opposite passions,⁵⁸⁷ Kierkegaard tells how Climacus, among other things, comes to the conclusion that

⁵⁸⁴ *JC*, 155.

⁵⁸⁵ *JC*, 156.

⁵⁸⁶ *JC*, 156. (The bracketed text is my addition. Kierkegaard uses the same clarification in the preceding paragraph.)

⁵⁸⁷ See ch. 4.2.

it would be a misunderstanding for someone to think that doubt can be overcome by so-called objective thinking. Doubt is a higher form than any objective thinking, for it presupposes the latter but has something more, a third, which is interest or consciousness.⁵⁸⁸

All systematic knowledge (like “mathematics, esthetics, metaphysics”) is disinterested and because of the discrepancy with interested doubt all attempts to systematically conquer doubt are doomed. So doubt is not in this sense a cognitive problem at all. By, for example, metaphysics being the presupposition of doubt, Climacus seems to mean that doubt must have something to doubt or to put in question, i.e. like Hegelian metaphysics. If interest is cancelled one might think that doubt is overcome but this is wrong, doubt is only neutralised and all disinterested knowledge “is simply a retrogression”.⁵⁸⁹ So, according to Climacus, there is a difference between overcoming doubt and neutralising it. What he seems to suggest with this difference is that doubt cannot in fact emerge in objective thinking in itself; where there is doubt, there is always or *ipso facto* an interested point of view. Climacus refers approvingly to the Greek sceptics’ view of doubt because they understood, as Climacus sees it, that “they could cancel doubt by transforming interest into apathy”.⁵⁹⁰ There is something personal about doubt and this is why it is not a systematic problem open to an “abstract” philosophical solution that could settle the issue for all. In this sense doubt is an existential matter, everyone has to deal with it himself or herself and there is no ready-made solution one can cling to. Neutralising doubt with abstract thought is now only a pseudo-solution because it only means that doubt is treated in a way that misses its true nature. It is indeed, as Kierkegaard “paraphrases”

⁵⁸⁸ *JC*, 170.

⁵⁸⁹ *JC*, 170.

⁵⁹⁰ *JC*, 170. For recent discussions of Kierkegaard’s relation to Greek scepticism and the Stoics’ “apathy”, see Rudd 2010 and Furtak 2010.

Climacus's thinking, "a play on words to speak about an objective doubt".⁵⁹¹ In my view, it is just this misunderstanding of the nature of doubt that led to the aforementioned difficulties regarding the relation between doubt and philosophy.

To return to Notabene's preface, he makes a point similar to the one I discussed in the previous chapter, i.e. that philosophy is not in fact a self-sufficient and self-enclosed (or at least should not be!) discipline mirroring reality, but in fact a human practice possibly involving several human faculties in addition to the rational faculty. Notabene writes:

This doubt is overcome not in the system, but in life [Livet]. But if this is the case, what good is it then that philosophy overcomes all doubt if there is still doubt about whether people actually do understand philosophy? This doubt cannot be a matter of indifference either to those concerned or to philosophy—not to those concerned, because they do indeed want to understand philosophy; not to philosophy, because it does indeed want to be understood.⁵⁹²

Now, Notabene seems to suggest that even doubt concerning the very intelligibility of philosophy is not just a philosophical problem. "Philosophy" may convince itself that it has overcome doubt and it may be just the case seen from within philosophy, but it does not as yet mean that philosophy has at the same time justified its rationale as a discipline among other human disciplines and faculties. Notabene makes fun of the wish of other disciplines, especially theology's, to "gravitate" to philosophy, suggesting that this philosophisation of disciplines as the "demand of the times" is not without its problems. Notabene likes to think the best of his fellow human beings but he nevertheless has his doubts whether or not they understand what they say. It is the removal of this

⁵⁹¹ *JC*, 170.

⁵⁹² *SKS* 4, 510 / *P/WS*, 49.

doubt of his that Notabene declares is the purpose of his, hopefully, upcoming journal. Notabene wants to serve philosophy and help it to make itself more understandable to people and thinks that he is qualified to do this because he is, well, “obtuse [‘dum’ in the Danish original] enough not to understand it”.⁵⁹³ This is, Notabene believes, a fortunate situation for philosophy because “[w]hen does philosophy appear more glorious than when it makes itself comprehensible even to the unwise?”⁵⁹⁴

Naturally, Notabene expects that his journal achieves its purpose. But because of the purpose of his journal—to halt Notabene’s doubting regarding the actual intelligibility of philosophy—it may be difficult for him to get subscribers *and* contributors to his journal. Commercially, people may have reservations about becoming paying subscribers to Notabene’s journal, since it seems that he has, unlike regular and more instructive journals, nothing to give to them because of his own personal agenda. Charitable support is also questionable, because, in return Notabene can only give his benefactor “a receipt and cordial thanks”.⁵⁹⁵ Hannay calls the situation concerning the contributions “slightly paradoxical”.⁵⁹⁶ It is indeed that. If Notabene were to receive many contributions, then this would mean that there were others like him who had not understood philosophy and that the chances that Notabene would overcome his doubts were diminished. Ironically, though, our wannabe scholarly publisher is optimistic and thinks that he would get no contributions and that his “scholarly expectation [to understand philosophy] gains probability to such a degree that it becomes almost a certainty”.⁵⁹⁷ Notabene’s amusing

593 SKS 4, 512 / P/WS, 51.

594 SKS 4, 513 / P/WS, 52-53.

595 SKS 4, 515 / P/WS, 54.

596 Hannay 2001, 249.

597 SKS 4, 515 / P/WS, 55.

argumentation of course means that he thinks that the apparent intelligibility of philosophy is only illusory and that it is only intelligible in its own self-enclosed world.

Notabene, like Climacus, enjoys pointing out an apparently paradoxical feature in the work of the Hegelian systematisers. If Hegelian philosophy is somehow a complete and conclusive system and has explained everything, why, Notabene and Climacus seem to ask, is there still so much philosophising going on in Denmark? Further, given this completeness, how is it possible that some philosophers have gone “beyond Hegel [over Hegel]”⁵⁹⁸ in their philosophies? How can one go beyond that which includes everything? Notabene writes:

Hegel knew how to formulate the whole of modern philosophy in such a way that it looks as if he brought everything to an end and everything previous tended toward to him. Someone else now makes a similar presentation, a presentation that to a hair is inseparable from Hegel’s, that consequently is pervaded at every point by this final thought, and to this is added a concluding paragraph in which one testifies that one has gone beyond Hegel. Here my understanding again comes to a halt, and yet what is all that I need? A triviality, two words are enough, a tiny categorical definition concerning the relation to Hegel.⁵⁹⁹

Referring to Danish philosophers who “zealously and successfully have comprehended”⁶⁰⁰ Hegel’s philosophy Notabene, again ironically, observes that he can eventually understand it, too, aided by

598 SKS 4, 517 / P/WS, 57. A frequent, ironic expression in Kierkegaard’s corpus referring to attempts to build a philosophical system along the lines of Hegel’s *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1817).

599 SKS 4, 517-8 / P/WS, 57.

600 SKS 4, 517 / P/WS, 56.

his countrymen's instruction.⁶⁰¹ But, it may happen that Notabene turns out to be so "dum" that philosophy cannot have anything to do with him. Notabene in fact uses his alleged stupidity against philosophy's claim to be absolute or all-encompassing and against the idea that philosophy is essential for human "blessedness". He mocks Hegelian dialectics with his typically florid prose and argues that if he cannot understand philosophy, and philosophy in turn is so "sagacious" that it cannot understand his obtuseness, then the "opposites are mediated into a higher unity, that is, a common obtuseness".⁶⁰² Philosophy has to include Notabene's stupidity because, if it did not, it would render itself "finite" and, Notabene concludes, not absolute or all-encompassing.⁶⁰³ Notabene thinks that (Hegelian) philosophy's inclusion of him with his stupidity is in fact a pseudo-solution to the problem of how can one who does not understand philosophy and has doubts about its intelligibility be a part of the "system". He observes how he may "slip into philosophy" aided by the cultured organisers of the system but "this is said easily enough but is not so easily understood".⁶⁰⁴

Maybe, Notabene keeps on wondering about the consequences of his "Dumhed", he is denied something essentially human because of it? Notabene writes:

Furthermore, I must ask whether I can become blessed like other human beings, despite my obtuseness. If so, then the question is through what means do I dare hope for that. Is it through philosophy? Does it perhaps have the remarkable quality that it makes all blessed, both those who understand it and those who do not understand it? If this is denied, is it then because of my

601 There seems to be good reason to think that in *Preface VIII* Notabene's target of criticism is Martensen and Heiberg and their Hegelianism, not Hegel himself (see Stewart 2003, 441-7 and Hannay 2001, 249-50).

602 SKS 4, 518 / *P/WS*, 58.

603 SKS 4, 518 / *P/WS*, 58.

604 SKS 4, 519 / *P/WS*, 59.

obtuseness? This does not seem reasonable, since precisely that is my unblessedness. Through what, then, do I dare to hope to become blessed?⁶⁰⁵

Importantly, Notabene now argues, based on the idea of the difference between what is accidentally and what is essentially human, that there is something “higher than philosophy”. Notabene observes that if he becomes blessed through something else than philosophy on the basis of his stupidity, which is an accidental quality and not essentially human, then it seems that he becomes blessed like only stupid people become blessed and not like other human beings. And further, if this were the case, to quote Notabene, “I must indeed come into contradiction with the essential in me, but such a contradiction is indeed unblessedness.”⁶⁰⁶ It seems then, Notabene continues to argue, that becoming truly blessed means that one becomes blessed on the basis of that which is essentially human. But, Notabene clearly suggests that because the ability to understand philosophy or to have some kind of “philosophical propensity” is also an accidental quality (otherwise Notabene, too, would understand philosophy!), it follows that

when the philosopher becomes blessed through his philosophy, this is an accidental blessedness. There is, then, something higher than philosophy. It is higher in that it includes me and similar bunglers [Stympere]. If this is so, then the question is: will philosophy continue to be called the absolute?⁶⁰⁷

605 *SKS* 4, 519-20 / *P/WS*, 59.

606 *SKS* 4, 520 / *P/WS*, 60.

607 *SKS* 4, 520 / *P/WS*, 60.

Notabene, the “meta-philosopher”, clearly means that it should not be called such. Hannay calls Notabene’s reasoning an “apparently devastating argument against philosophy”.⁶⁰⁸ In my view, when Notabene criticises the Hegelian idea of the inclusiveness of philosophy, he in fact questions the traditional objective of philosophy to be some kind ultimate discipline in finding out what is essentially important in being a human being. He suggests that philosophy is just one human activity among others and is not essential for one to be “blessed” or, to generalise his point, to somehow approach or grasp the true nature or “meaning” of human existence at its most personal level. Although what Notabene (or Kierkegaard) has in mind in his metaphilosophical observations is especially, as he saw it, the rationalism of his contemporary Danish Hegelians, it may be argued that he in fact argues against the rational view of humankind in general according to which it is the use of his or her intellectual faculty that is the most important thing in life and that which is somehow “essentially” human. Moreover, it seems that Notabene thinks that there there is *something* that is essentially human and on which people can become blessed. If there was not, then all human features would be accidental and there would be nothing universally human to become blessed on.

Now, one would expect that after his criticism of philosophy Notabene would eventually put aside his plans to publish a philosophical journal but, as so often happens when one reads Kierkegaard, the situation is not as simple as that. Notabene admits that he is “regrettably, a bit slow, and there is lot to be learned here” and thinks that his “journal presumably could survive even if my expectation is not fulfilled completely in accord with my desire”.⁶⁰⁹

Perhaps, now, it is not Notabene’s stupidity but his defiance against philosophy that is the problem and that he would, because of this, be declared unfit for people to have anything to do with

608 Hannay 2001, 251.

609 SKS 4, 520 / P/WS, 60.

him. On the other hand, Notabene inquires, “[p]hilosophy does indeed possess the truth, but the truth still is and still remains the strongest; how then could a narrow-minded defiance possibly stand against it?”⁶¹⁰ What follows now in *Preface VIII* is a discussion on the relation between defiance and stupidity (or obtuseness or “Dumhed”) in the form of an almost daunting series of questions. Notabene first observes how it would be appropriate on behalf of philosophy as a scholarly discipline to try to define more accurately what kind of defiance it is that makes communication between a human being and philosophy impossible. One may wonder, granting that defiance and stupidity are not identical, what is their relation? For instance, they are both in certain ways obstacles to understanding philosophy. They are similar but not identical, so there must be some dissimilarity between them, to paraphrase Notabene’s increasingly florid prose in *Preface VIII*.⁶¹¹ If this dissimilarity increases proportionally, i.e. the less defiant a person becomes, the less stupid or more wise he or she also becomes, it would in fact be easy for philosophy to make itself understandable or, to alter only a little Notabene’s formulation, bring a person to wisdom. Now it is assumed that wisdom has in fact a superior command over the defiance of the will. If, on the other hand, the dissimilarity between defiance and stupidity increases inversely, i.e. in Notabene’s words, “when the obtuseness has been transmuted into wisdom [i.e. obtuseness decreases] the defiance is potentiated to its ultimate”, then, Notabene seems to think, it follows that “there is indeed a power superior to knowledge, a power superior to knowledge’s imperative”—(just like he argued before, that there is something higher than philosophy). How come this follows? In my view, to read Notabene sympathetically, Notabene suggests that both wisdom and defiance cannot increase simultaneously, because increasing wisdom would mean that defiance against philosophy should decrease and because this does not happen, it means that a third factor besides defiance and

610 *SKS* 4, 521 / *P/WS*, 61.

611 To avoid repetitive footnoting on this issue, it is sufficient to note that Notabene’s discussion at hand is only two pages long in *SKS* 4, 520-2 / *P/WS*, 60-2.

stupidity has entered the situation. Notabene does not say it, but it seems that he thinks that this latter alternative is plausible, because if it were not, then he would not have reservations about the intelligibility of philosophy. Perhaps he also suggests that he in fact has wisdom about the real nature of philosophy and because he also has defiance, it means that some “power” lets him keep them both. The question now is: what is this power?

Notabene “answers” this question by asking roughly twenty more in the following manner:

[w]hat is this power and how does it relate to knowledge; the question is: cannot this power become the object of scholarly treatment; what is the name of the scholarly discipline that treats of this matter; what is its relation to the scholarly discipline that treats of knowledge [theory of knowledge⁶¹²]; by becoming a scholarly discipline does it not become an object of knowledge; what relation does knowledge now have to this power that has shown itself to be superior to knowledge; must it itself be helpful in order for knowledge to be able to understand it; [...] is all knowing necessary knowing or is all knowing to an equal degree both free and necessary; if this is the case, then this power is able to exclude me from all knowing; if this is not the case, then it is able to exclude me from only a certain kind of knowing; is the kind of knowing from which it is capable of excluding me superior for that reason or is the other kind of knowing superior for the opposite reason; if this is the case, then is philosophy indeed not the highest, but only, even at its highest, that is, in the latter kind of knowing, a knowledge of the highest?⁶¹³

If this is not Kierkegaardian “indirect communication”, I do not know what is. Or possibly Notabene’s reasoning is a parody of the reasoning he can find in the texts of Hegelians? Indeed, as

612 Hannay’s translation in Hannay 2001, 251.

613 *SKS* 4, 522 / *P/WS*, 62

Hannay puts it, “the latter part of the passage sounds rather like Hegel in the mouth of a Helfgott”.⁶¹⁴ Why does Notabene conclude that philosophy at its best is knowledge of the highest, but not the highest? Notabene has argued for a power which has a control over knowledge, so it seems that knowledge in this sense cannot be the highest because it is not independent or sovereign. So, it “follows” that philosophy as some kind of knowledge-oriented discipline has to be secondary compared to this power and at its best it can only be knowledge of this higher power. Probably Notabene here wants to suggest, contra to his contemporary Hegelians, that philosophy is, at its best, only second in line when the “highest” is at stake and that knowledge itself is secondary to the “highest”. In this manner he continues his criticism of the over-rationalised view of man. Of course, the idea of a “power” is just an assumption and Notabene’s argument—based on a discussion on the relation between defiance and stupidity—is, as Hannay observes, “in no way conclusive”.⁶¹⁵

Towards the end of *Preface VIII* Notabene imagines that “philosophy itself would condescend to speak to me”.⁶¹⁶ Philosophy comforts Notabene in telling that there are others like him who do not understand philosophy and says that “I am only for the chosen ones, for those who were marked early in their cradles”, but philosophy also says that “what is universally present in the speech of the simplest as well as that of the most sagacious, is gathered here and increases its quiet growth”, suggesting that everything plays its part under philosophy’s umbrella.⁶¹⁷ Notabene is happy to hear of this all-inclusiveness but, in his imagined reply, he wonders why philosophy puts up with what is going on “in these latter days” and why does it “not send forth one of your lovers who not only has thoughts in his head but wrath in his nostrils to consume the hypocritical

614 Hannay 2001, 252.

615 Hannay 2001, 252.

616 SKS 4, 522 / *P/WS*, 62.

617 SKS 4, 523 / *P/WS*, 63. For Boethius’s influence on Kierkegaard, one should consider the partially dialogue form of *Preface VIII* with the dialogue form of *De consolatione*.

worshippers who profane your pure character, who disquiet us who are weak by wanting to make it an imperative for us to understand you.”⁶¹⁸

This would make everyone happy, because then “the chosen ones will follow you, and the rest of us will not sorrow too much over our having been excluded”.⁶¹⁹ On the other hand, Notabene seems to wonder, again ironically, that if everybody and everything are united in the absolute, how is it possible that only the chosen ones are allowed to become lovers of philosophy when philosophy, as is often claimed, is of such importance? It seems now to follow from this division between the initiated and the uninitiated, that Notabene’s publishing project should be dropped. It is just the lot of some people that they do not understand philosophy. But, Notabene writes,

although I, just as I had earlier abandoned any pretension of being a philosopher, had now also abandoned hope of becoming that, there still was a multiplicity of *deliberations* that might interest the majority of people inasmuch as they would be excluded from philosophy. My journal is titled “Philosophical Deliberations [Overveielser].” I could very well still indulge in deliberations without being a philosopher; moreover, I perhaps could nevertheless even call them “philosophical deliberations” because there must continually remain a *confinium* [border territory] between philosophy and the doctrine in which the rest of us seek refuge, and in this regard philosophy could indeed be of assistance to us, if in no other way than by thrusting away.⁶²⁰

618 SKS 4, 524 / P/WS, 64.

619 SKS 4, 524 / P/WS, 64.

620 SKS 4, 524-5 / P/WS, 65.

The idea of a philosophical journal is not just a pseudonymous fiction, because Kierkegaard had in fact plans to publish such a journal, as one can learn in a journal entry from 1842 (two years before the publication of *Prefaces*):

Descartes has largely laid down his system in the first 6 *meditationes*. So it is not always necessary to write systems. I will publish “Philosophical Deliberations” in pamphlets, and I can come out with my interim provisional reflections in these. It might not be such a bad idea to write in Latin.⁶²¹

Interestingly, it seems now that “systems” are not always to be avoided, because Descartes, too, has one. By “it is not always necessary to write systems” Kierkegaard probably suggests something like that there is an important difference between writing down one’s philosophical thoughts as personal deliberations—as Descartes in fact did—and presenting philosophy as impersonal or objective truths about rational workings of reality as, in Kierkegaard’s view, his contemporary Hegelians were doing. It seems now, to return to Notabene’s publishing project, that he may after all have something to give, if not to philosophy itself, then to something closely related to it. Notabene is interested in operating in the semi-philosophical borderline between, in my view, the Hegelian philosophy and common-sense beliefs in how things are in the world. Bearing in mind that Kierkegaard had plans to put his interim or temporary thoughts in his pamphlets, it seems that what Notabene has in mind are just these kinds of unsystematic philosophical or conceptual observations or deliberations. I suggest that at least the writings of Johannes Climacus—*PF* and *CUP*—are just these kinds of philosophical deliberations. They are—this is important for Climacus—unsystematic or unscientific or unscholarly⁶²² crumbs of philosophy. For example, *PF* is “just” a thought project

621 *SKS* 18, 148; *JJ*:14 / *KJN* 2, 138.

622 See Hannay 2003, 13.

or, if you like, a *deliberation* of an idea of what would an alternative to the Platonic-Socratic idea of learning the truth by recollection be like. In a way now, “both” Notabene and Kierkegaard argue that deliberations or discussions can be philosophical without being “systems” in the Hegelian sense of the term.

Notabene still thinks there might be a job for him and his journal, because if philosophy

continues to become more and more a riddle, more and more difficult in its expression, if along this path it continues to want to achieve its lofty goal of being understood by all, then perhaps my lofty expectation can be fulfilled, my pium desiderium [pious wish] to become a philosopher.⁶²³

It seems that Notabene means that if philosophy keeps on becoming more and more difficult, then in his journal he can do “border territory” work on the nature and relevance of philosophy and in this sense, in spite of everything, become a philosopher.

Much can be made of Kierkegaard’s literary techniques including his use of pseudonyms, but it seems to be safe to say that the target of *Preface VIII* and *Prefaces* as a whole is the Hegelian philosophy of Kierkegaard’s contemporary intellects including the Hegelian philosophisation of Christian theology.⁶²⁴ This issue is of historical interest, but it is of more general interest, too. For example, the ideas that doubt is somehow overcome in life, not in the system, and that there are things in some sense higher than knowledge and philosophy (understood as Hegelian) suggest that at least some philosophical problems are “existential”, too, and that philosophy may not be the ultimate answer to life’s challenges or in some sense the “highest”.⁶²⁵

623 SKS 4, 525 / *P/WS*, 65.

624 See, e.g. Nichol’s “Historical Introduction” in *P/WS*.

625 For a “textbook example” of the alleged value of philosophy, consider, e.g. these musings by Bertrand

6. Conclusion and Revocation

To illustrate and compare Hume's and Kierkegaard's views of philosophical activity, let us consider Livingston's view of how Hume saw philosophical reflection is structured.⁶²⁶ Livingston's position is that Hume implicitly assumed in his criticism of false philosophy that there are three principles of philosophical activity. Livingston calls these the principles of ultimacy, autonomy and dominion (Hume himself does not use this terminology). Livingston seems to mean that these describe what may be called philosophy's traditional claim for universality or having some kind of privileged access to "how things really are". The first principle (ultimacy) means that philosophers are looking for the ultimate understanding of things without the distorting and conditioning influence of cultural customs. As Livingston puts it,

[p]hilosophical thought can never rest until it believes itself to have achieved an understanding that is final, absolute, and unconditioned. And when it does come to rest, it will have such a belief.⁶²⁷

The principle of autonomy means that the philosopher should adopt a neutral point of view or

Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy*: "Philosophy is to be studied [...] above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good" (Russell 1968 (original 1912), 93-94).

626 Based on Livingston's own sketch of Hume's view in Livingston 1998, 16-23.

627 Livingston 1998, 18. (Should not the concluding sentence read something like "when it believes it has achieved such an understanding, it will come to rest"?)

that the philosopher, at least in thought, cease being a participant in the prejudices of common life and imagine himself the sovereign spectator and arbiter of them. He must occupy, to use Descartes's expression, an Archimedian point outside the prejudices of common life as a whole from which critical principles can be formulated untainted by prejudice.⁶²⁸

In a way then, according to this principle, the philosopher can step outside the world and see it as it is without any "cultural resolution" (my own term).

The principle of dominion means by the ultimacy principle that rival or different philosophical systems are contrary. If philosophers are looking for the ultimate understanding of things, then different views of how things really are cannot, of course, be simultaneously true. One has to be right and "rule" over the others. An example of this is Plato's doctrine of the philosopher kings. On the other hand, to partially question Livingston's view, do rival philosophical systems need to be altogether contrary? Is it not possible that they differ on some issues and agree on others?

But the point is, Livingston argues, and not surprisingly after what I have presented in this dissertation, that these principles are not something Hume recommends that philosophers should adopt as such if they want to achieve the supposed objective of philosophy: real human self-understanding. Realising the importance of these philosophical and in fact at least partially misleading guiding lights may and should help philosophers to rethink the nature of their enterprise and eventually reach the status of true philosophers. Livingston writes how

[a]nyone, then, who philosophizes engages in an act of reflection guided by the principles of ultimacy, autonomy, and dominion. But what Hume discovered is that these principles do not cohere with other

628 Livingston 1998, 18.

principles of our nature and that, consequently, philosophy so understood is inconsistent with human nature. And since philosophy is supposed to yield human self-understanding, it is inconsistent with *its* own nature. If philosophy is to continue, it must take account of this discovery and reform itself.⁶²⁹

According to Livingston's schema, Hume's discussion of the problematic nature of the notion of substance is an example of a more general view of the "dialectical circle of philosophical self-knowledge".⁶³⁰ Roughly, this means that from the vulgar opinion there emerges the critical opinion of the false philosophy with its illusory idea of the freedom from the prejudices of the vulgar. After this, when false philosophers have reached the *cul-de-sacs* of alienated abstract thought—like the traditional notion of substance, the idea of the double-existence of perceptions and objects, and the extreme scepticism concerning human cognizance—there emerges true philosophy accepting that it

629 Livingston 1998, 19.

630 Livingston 1998, 20. Interestingly, Fogelin also emphasises Hume's interest in a kind of natural history of human thinking. In Fogelin's view an important aspect of Hume's philosophy is "the thought that ideas have a history" which "is usually associated with such philosophers as Hegel and Marx. Yet this doctrine has an important place in Hume's philosophy, a fact, I think, that is not generally appreciated" (1985, 80). Fogelin 1985, 81 continues how

[e]xplaining the origins and character of philosophical positions (including his own) forms an important part of Hume's Science of Man. Thus in Section II of Part IV, Hume discusses the philosopher's view of double existence; in Section III he examines the 'fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning *substances*, and *accidents*, and *occult qualities*' [...] and then in Section IV he examines modern philosophy's distinction between primary and secondary qualities. In each case Hume not only rejects these positions, but attempts to provide an account of why philosophers have produced them and given them their assent.

See also Pompa 1990 and K. Westphal 1989 for relations between Hegel and Hume.

inheres in common opinions. Livingston's overall view is that Hume reformed the autonomy principle, left the ultimacy principle intact and rejected the idea of the dominion of autonomous reason in favour of the historical and social custom which, as Livingston observes, "requires, by its very nature, deference to others".⁶³¹ It seems that Hume's famous sceptical results can be seen to be indications of what happens when reflective reason is allowed to operate under the illusion that it is autonomous or independent from historical custom. According to Livingston's interpretation, philosophy can be only relatively autonomous, i.e. philosophers can continue to analyse and criticise everyday beliefs and opinions but they should simultaneously understand that their critical principles are themselves derived from historical custom. This understanding of the "autonomy of custom" rather than of reason separates true philosophers from false as follows:

The false philosopher imagines himself to be the sovereign spectator of and lawgiver to whatever domain of custom he is reflecting upon. By contrast the true philosopher recognizes that he is a critical participant in whatever domain of custom he is reflecting upon and so is not entirely free of its authority.⁶³²

Despite its dependence on different customs, the Humean true philosophy is not just about these customs. Livingston argues that because customs can be intentional and about reality like causal judgments, which are not about the experiences that trigger them but rather about the invisible powers that produce these experiences, true philosophers are still looking for the ultimate understanding of reality. It seems then that the true philosopher's analysis of how we come to hold causal beliefs, i.e. because of constant experience of certain things, is not, after all, just an analysis

631 Livingston 1998, 22.

632 Livingston 1998, 21.

of “human nature” but is also an attempt to answer one of the ultimate questions about the nature of reality. In my view, the idea of Hume retaining the principle of ultimacy is problematic. As observed in chapter 5.1, Hume points out that his “intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations” and how “such an enterprize is beyond the reach of human understanding”.⁶³³ Further, it seems that Hume’s discussion of human nature is just that and not a discussion of inhuman nature “out there”. An observer can observe how the human mind works, but why it works like that appears to remain a mystery for Hume.

Livingston’s analysis of the dialectic of true and false philosophy has many merits especially with its attempt to take into account all of Hume’s writings.⁶³⁴ As Livingston observes—interestingly from the point of view my thesis—his own perhaps Hegelian choice of words in his description of the dialectical act of philosophical self-examination in *T* 1.4 by Hume is based on his view that “Hume is not an empiricist and because, in this part of the *Treatise*, he anticipates something of the Logic of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is also an act of philosophical self-inquiry.”⁶³⁵ But Livingston also says that he does not “wish to make too much of the comparison between Hume and Hegel” and much later in his book concludes how “the character of their respective dialectics is different” and how

the fundamental difference turns on how they view the relation between philosophy and experience. For Hegel, philosophy is not grounded in experience, nor is it one experience among others; philosophy and experience are the same. This does not mean that in having something as simple as a sense experience, one is making a philosophical claim, but only that if one were to say what that

633 *T* 1.2.5.26; *SBN* 64.

634 See also Livingston 1984.

635 Livingston 1998, 12.

experience is, one would be making a philosophical claim. And since the *telos* of philosophy is to achieve a self-determining, absolutely coherent form of experience, this must also be the *telos* of all experience. Each experience is an implicit form of the philosophical act waiting to be unfolded.⁶³⁶

I also find this an excellent description of what kind of philosophy Kierkegaard made his pseudonyms oppose. Climacus and Notabene strongly criticised philosophy that is detached from concrete existence in the sense that everything happening is just waiting to be explained as a gradual fulfilment of a certain metaphysical *telos*. But this does not prevent them from favouring philosophy that is *grounded* in human individual experience.

In my view, both Hume and Kierkegaard reject the idea that one can adopt an absolute or unrestricted philosophical attitude to reality. Human reasoning or philosophising is done by actual human beings. This perhaps “tautological” fact should not be ignored. It has happened too often in philosophy that philosophers, without them observing it, have given too grand a status to their conceptual systems and begun to think that such objects as they have been led to construct when trying to solve philosophical problems really exist.

636 Livingston 1998, 13, 388. Berry 2007, 550 argues against attempts (like Livingston’s) to downplay Hume’s universalism, as though Hume were subscribing to some sort of relativism or historicism:

In fine, Hume’s universalist account of human nature does not disregard cultural differences but neither does his recognition of those equate to a Geertzian anthropological or neo-Hegelian historicist perspective. Hume’s science of man is authentically yet distinctively Enlightened.

See also Berry 1982 for a monograph-length study on Hume and Hegel.

Kierkegaard argued that there can be no system of life and Hume argued that the philosophical system solving the important problem of perception yields a fictitious and “monstrous” solution—including the notions of substance and primary and secondary qualities—which only appears to be plausible. Both of these critiques are based on the idea that a human thinker is essentially confined to his spatio-temporal existence and that the concepts developed in his or her work do not mirror reality as such but in fact inhere in this concrete existence.

Does Kierkegaard think that philosophers should keep on looking for the ultimate answers about what reality is like? He does think that the Hegelian idea of the all-encompassing system is illusory and its spokesmen comical in their attempts to complete the system with a regular and never-ending flow of additional paragraphs and by representing concrete and temporal individuals as some kind of means whose *telos* lies in the yet unfulfilled purpose of history. And Kierkegaard does think that a philosophical interpretation of Christianity misses its existential content. On the other hand, Kierkegaard may be seen to hold the view that there is nothing wrong with philosophising as long as one understands its limitations. Philosophy is more like an inquiry concerning what is possible than what is real, but this “realness” as a ground of philosophy must not be forgotten. I suggest that Notabene’s philosophical deliberations and Climacus’ crumbs and “unscientific” observations in their meta-philosophical and perhaps “thought experimental” approach, and with their emphasis on what philosophy can mean for the concrete individual, represent what may be called Kierkegaard’s idea of the “true” philosophy as something rooted in human concreteness.

This is further illustrated by the idea of the principle of the autonomy of philosophy according to which there is some kind of neutral point of view from which philosophers can observe the true nature of reality. As observed above, Climacus rejected the idea of a presupposition-free philosophy as illusory and insisted that a leap or a resolution is necessary when one starts to

philosophise. In my view, this means that Climacus, too, rejected the idea of reason operating autonomously independent of other human faculties. Further, the impossibility of the system of existence, except from a divine point of view or *sub specie aeternitatis*, also reflects Climacus's idea that human reasoning cannot operate on its own without concrete and temporal restrictions. Climacus contrasts abstract thinking which is "thinking where there is no thinker"⁶³⁷ with concrete thinking, "where there are a thinker and a specific something (in the sense of particularity) that is being thought, where existence gives the existing thinker thought, time, and space".⁶³⁸ In my view, it is plausible to argue that the idea that "existence gives the existing thinker thought, time, and space" is another way to express the Humean idea that the true philosopher philosophises under the autonomy of custom.⁶³⁹ It also seems that Kierkegaard's sceptical, ironic, and meta-philosophical attitude towards Hegelian speculation indicates that the idea of the dominion of some philosophical "school" with its firm view on how things are in the world is alien to Kierkegaard.

To finish this thesis I want to suggest a partial affinity between Climacus's "revocation" of *CUP* and Hume's conclusion of the first book of *T* (with the inspired title "Conclusion of this book"). *CUP* is a complex and often baffling work even for the best of us.⁶⁴⁰ Perhaps its most baffling part is its ending. After several hundred pages Climacus, in "An Understanding with the

⁶³⁷ *SKS* 7, 303 / *CUP* 1, 332.

⁶³⁸ *SKS* 7, 303 / *CUP* 1, 332.

⁶³⁹ Hume's famously observes in *E* 5.6; *SBN* 44 that "[c]ustom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those that have appeared in the past." One may point out that Hume and Kierkegaard seem to differ on this issue. Kierkegaard's criticism of the customary or habitual nature of 'Christendom' may be interpreted as a critique of the Humean positive attitude to custom and habit. However, in my view, Hume's custom as the "great guide" is more basic or natural to human beings than Kierkegaard's habitual Christianity. From a Humean point of view it would be perfectly logical to emphasise custom as he in fact does *and* criticise habitual religiosity along the lines of Kierkegaard.

⁶⁴⁰ The eminent Ludwig Wittgenstein found *CUP* "too deep" for him (see Glebe-Moeller 1997).

Reader” [Forstaaelse med Læseren], announces that his “book is superfluous [overflødig]. Therefore, let no one bother to appeal to it, because one who appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it.”⁶⁴¹ A little later Climacus points out that “what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but has a revocation [Tilbagekaldelse] to boot.”⁶⁴² Climacus sees himself as a humourist and does not claim the burdensome status of being an authority on the topics he discusses in *CUP*. Climacus loves to portray himself as an outsider among “speculative thinkers and great men with matchless discoveries”⁶⁴³ and stresses the personal and private nature of his work without, ironically, any world-historical significance. Climacus is not trying to import a new more subjective doctrinal framework into the discussion either. His issue, “How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises?” or “How do I become a Christian?”, should not really be a philosophical or intellectual problem at all.⁶⁴⁴ But why then write hundreds of pages of analysis about the subjective issue of Christianity including, for example, a discussion of Lessing’s philosophy of religion and a defence of the notorious thesis that “truth is subjectivity”, when, eventually, everything terminates in revocation? Is Climacus trying to show in principle the futility of the philosophical approach to Christianity? First he seems to reject the objective point of view and then, after presenting the apparently “right” subjective approach, it turns out that even this does not bring a person closer to being a Christian. Climacus points out that “to write a book and to

641 *SKS* 7, 561 / *CUP* 1, 618.

642 *SKS* 7, 562 / *CUP* 1, 619. One can easily establish that the *Postscript* is the book about “revocation” or “Tilbagekaldelse” among Kierkegaard’s writings. Climacus uses the term at least fifteen times in the *Postscript* and is in fact, to my knowledge, the only pseudonym to use the term in this special sense.

643 *SKS* 7, 560 / *CUP* 1, 617. “Matchless discoveries” [mageløse Opdagelser] refers to Grundtvig and his vision of the Christian Church as a cultic community. See, e.g. Kirmmse 1990, 210-214 for a discussion of this issue. See also *SKS* 7, 41-52 / *CUP* 1, 34-46.

644 *SKS* 7, 26, 560 / *CUP* 1, 17, 617.

revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it, that to write a book that does not demand to be important for anyone is still not the same as letting it be unwritten.”⁶⁴⁵ Johnson observes how Kierkegaard scholars have only “recently” (Johnson’s paper is from 1978) attended to the revocation and how in the classic Kierkegaard discussions the revocation is not mentioned at all.⁶⁴⁶ According to Johnson, the point of revocation is that Climacus wants to withdraw himself to emphasise the crucial importance of the reader’s own existence and to encourage the reader to reflect on whether he or she, like so many others, has forgotten what it really means to exist. So, in Johnson’s own words, “[o]ne understands the *Postscript* only when one sees that it is superfluous; only when one is ready to dispense with it; only when one understands that understanding the *Postscript* is not the real point at all.”⁶⁴⁷ Bearing in mind that Climacus, a philosopher, who says he is not a Christian, objects to all doctrinal interpretations of Christianity and stresses its subjective nature, it would seem strange indeed if he insisted that people should somehow live by “the teachings of the *Postscript*”. Johnson even writes that in one sense “the *Postscript* is no philosophical document at all. Correctly understood, it disappears before the reader’s eyes, leaving him in the solitude of his own thought and existence.”⁶⁴⁸ Johnson finds reasons to argue that in *CUP* Climacus sees philosophy as a way of life in the Socratic or Greek fashion and describes it as limited (or not autonomous), uncertain and a persistent striving.⁶⁴⁹ This means, as I interpret

645 *SKS* 7, 563 / *CUP* 1, 621.

646 Johnson 1978, 454n32. In June 2011 *Philosopher’s Index* gave only a handful of results after running the search “Kierkegaard revocation”, so it seems that the priorities of Kierkegaard scholars regarding the revocation have not changed much since the publication of Johnson’s article.

647 Johnson 1978, 447.

648 Johnson 1978, 447-448.

649 See Johnson 1978, 451-2. Johnson 1978 451-452 thinks that Climacus’s conception of “other simpler philosophy [eenfoldigere Philosophie]” (*SKS* 7, 116 / *CUP* 1, 121) is a revived version of the Greek idea of philosophy as a way of life. On the epigraph page of *CA* Vigilius Haufniensis calls Socrates “the simple wise man” and quotes Hamann who greatly admired Socrates because he could make the distinction

Johnson, that philosophy should be something like a person's conceptual ally, tool or check in defence of his subjective and concrete existence against objectifying elements in one's culture. Climacus in *CUP* can be seen to show how philosophy as an abstract discipline à la Hegelians alienates people from their individual existence and true Christianity and how subjective commitment is really the thing which defines us as humans.

Phillips, in his *Philosophy's Cool Place*, discusses a contemplative conception of philosophy in Wittgensteinian terms and writes how, in that kind of philosophy's spirit, "[w]e are asked to give a certain kind of attention to our surroundings without meddling with them".⁶⁵⁰ Phillips, among other things, discusses Climacus's Revocation, too, and stresses the importance of deciding in what sense Climacus revokes his text because "[t]hat is the vital question as far as Kierkegaard's relation to philosophical authorship is concerned".⁶⁵¹ Phillips states that "[m]y view is that Kierkegaard the religious author makes Climacus the philosopher, who is not a Christian, tell us that his work is to be revoked, put aside, because it cannot answer a *religious* question: 'I, Johannes Climacus, [...] ask how I am to become a Christian'".⁶⁵² Phillips's point seems to be that in *CUP* Kierkegaard wants to show the limits of philosophy where becoming a Christian is concerned. Philosophy can be a helpful conceptual elucidator in this project but belief in a philosophical thesis and religious belief must not be confused (cf. the Danish Hegelians' attempts to justify Christianity philosophically). A philosophical understanding of Christianity, the one Climacus presents in *CUP*, helps a person to

between what he could understand and what he could not understand. See also Stewart 2003, 463 on Kierkegaard's "conception of the true philosopher in the Greek sense" vs. academics like Martensen and Howland 2006 for a study of Kierkegaard's relation to Socrates.

650 Phillips 1999, ix. The "motto" of his book is from Wittgenstein's *Culture and Value*: "My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them."

651 Phillips 1999, 30.

652 Phillips 1999, 30. Phillips quotes here the Swenson and Lowrie translation of *CUP* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 545.

see what is philosophically involved in becoming a Christian, but this understanding does not make a person more or less Christian. In this sense *CUP* is superfluous. If a person wants to become a Christian he or she has to make an existential decision. Climacus shows how a philosophical (as Hegelians would see it) approach to Christianity leads a person in completely the wrong direction because it misses the commitment-demanding nature of Christianity.

Famously, Wittgenstein also “revoked” his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). He said that, in some sense, what he has written is nonsensical and should be abandoned.⁶⁵³ As Johnson points out, it is not easy to “resist the temptation to comment on the tantalizing similarities between Climacus’s Revocation, and the surprising climax of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”.⁶⁵⁴ Conant agrees with Johnson on this and is of the opinion that one cannot in fact be in a position to understand *CUP* and *Tractatus* unless one has come to terms with the revocation of these works. Regarding *CUP* particularly, his “suggestion is that the work as a whole represents an elaborate REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM of the philosophical project of clarifying and propounding what it is to be a Christian”.⁶⁵⁵ Conant has much to say about Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein but what I want to emphasise in his article referred to is the idea that the apparently “philosophical results” about the “subjective” nature of Christianity in *CUP* do not really matter that much in the sense that an

653 Wittgenstein writes in *Tractatus* § 6.54: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.” (Pears-McGuinness translation of *Tractatus* (New York: Humanities Press, 1961)).

654 Johnson 1978, 446. See also Creegan 1989 who thinks that the striking similarity between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is their reliance on indirect methods of communication. See also Goodman 1986, Ferreira 1994, Mullhall 2001 and Lippitt & Hutto 1998. Työrinoja 1984 is a Finnish thesis on “later” Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion.

655 Conant 1997. (Conant 1997 seems to be available only online and without page breaks, so my references to it have no page numbers.)

aspiring believer should understand them if she or he wants to become a Christian. As Conant observes, there is a difference between understanding a piece of apparently philosophical writing and understanding what the author of this work has tried to do. To *interpret* and summarise Conant's reading of Kierkegaard (and Wittgenstein), it seems that Climacus's philosophical discussions in *CUP* are intended to show that all kinds of philosophical "explanations" of Christianity are irrelevant from a point of view of an actual human being. Climacus is a philosopher of religion, but one should not cling to his "teaching" anymore than one should cling to some kind of Hegelian understanding of Christianity. In a sense Climacus's view of Christianity is "better" because it dispels the illusion of the importance of intellectualised Christianity, but it is still "philosophy" and can only make a person aware of the situation. It is like what Anti-Climacus said about miracles: "The miracle can make aware—now you are in the tension, and it depends upon what you choose, offense or faith; it is your heart that must be disclosed."⁶⁵⁶ The "philosophy" of *CUP* can make one aware but still a decision or resolution has to be made just like it had to be made in the case of belief and doubt in *PF*. And possibly even this is not enough because, as was observed in ch. 4.2, faith in the eminent or religious sense is not a matter of will or that it is wilful only "within the condition". As Conant concludes his discussion, "[a]ccording to the readings I have attempted to sketch in this paper, we are not asked, at the end of each of these works [*CUP* and *Tractatus*], to understand the theses each of these authors appears to advance, but we are asked to try to understand what they are up to in constructing such an appearance, and the sign that we have succeeded in doing so, they tell us, is that we are no longer tempted to advance such theses ourselves—that we throw them away."⁶⁵⁷ Of course, it does not follow from Climacus's revocation

⁶⁵⁶ *SKS* 12, 106 / *PC*, 97. See also *SKS* 12, 54-55 / *PC*, 41-2.

⁶⁵⁷ Conant 1997. See also Conant 1993 and 1995 for comparisons of Kierkegaardian and Wittgensteinian themes. Creegan 1989 also thinks that the striking similarity between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is their reliance on indirect methods of communication.

that philosophy of religion is altogether pointless but, Climacus emphasises, one should pay close attention to its actual status in individual human existence.

Now, it seems that philosophy can in a sense only “show” what is involved in being a Christian from a philosophical (now understood very generally) point of view, but this understanding does not make a person more or less Christian compared to one who does not share this philosophical point of view.

As for Hume, in *T* 1.4.7 Hume stops to draw breath and to

ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken, and which undoubtedly requires the utmost art and industry to be brought to a happy conclusion. Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap'd shipwreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances. My memory of past errors and perplexities, makes me diffident for the future. The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries, encrease my apprehensions. And the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity.⁶⁵⁸

The opening paragraphs of the Conclusion of *T* 1 have a melancholy and pessimistic air to them. Hume thinks he has made angry “all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians” and when he looks “abroad” he sees “on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction” and when he turns his eye inward he finds “nothing but doubt and

658 *T* 1.4.7.1; *SBN* 263-264.

ignorance”.⁶⁵⁹ It does not look good then bearing in mind Hume’s intention, as he described it in the Introduction of *T* 1, to lay the foundation for the new “science of MAN” on which even “*Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent”, not to mention “*Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics*” and where he maintains that in the science of man we cannot find “the ultimate original qualities” of human nature beyond experience and “any hypothesis” which claims the contrary, “ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical”.⁶⁶⁰ Does Hume’s forsakenness in the Conclusion of *T* 1 mean that he thinks he has failed in his attempt and reached a dead-end? This cannot be so, because *T* still has two more “Books” after the Conclusion. Has not Hume successfully explained and seemingly to his own satisfaction, for example, the real nature of human causal reasoning and how our beliefs are formed? Yes, human faculties may seem weak from a strictly rationalistic point of view but they also have, Hume has argued, their own natural consistence based on habit and custom. There indeed seems to be a tension between Hume’s sceptical and naturalistic results. Kemp Smith asks, “[w]hich is the more fundamental in his thinking, the naturalism or the scepticism? And are they compatible with one another?”⁶⁶¹ and argues that scepticism (of the non-excessive and non-Pyrrhonian type) serves as man’s important ally against mistaken moral and speculative endeavours, but it is Nature which really keeps him on the right track by giving rise to all those beliefs which man shares with other animals.⁶⁶² P. F. Strawson describes Hume’s “double role” as both the “arch-skeptic” and the “arch-naturalist”⁶⁶³ and recognises the two level of Hume’s thought: “the level of philosophically

659 *T* 1.4.7.2; *SBN* 264.

660 *T* Introduction 4-5, 8; *SBN* xv-xvii.

661 Kemp Smith 1949, 129.

662 Kemp Smith 1949, 129-132. Kemp Smith 1949, 9-10 suggests that Hume’s forsakenness or uncertainty refers to his attempt to find an original interpretation for “the theory of ideas” presented in *T* 1.1.1-7 which is essentially Hutcheson’s version of Locke’s “theory of ideas” (see Kemp Smith 1949, 3).

663 P. F. Strawson 1985, 3.

critical thinking and the level of everyday empirical thinking, at which the pretensions of critical thinking are completely overridden and suppressed by Nature, by an inescapable natural commitment to belief: to belief in the existence of body and in inductively based expectations.”⁶⁶⁴ P. F. Strawson presents Wittgenstein as Hume’s modern naturalist ally based on Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* and thinks that “there is, in Wittgenstein’s work, as in Hume’s, the distinction between ‘what it is vain’ to make a matter of inquiry, what ‘we must take for granted in all our reasonings,’ as Hume puts it, on the other hand, and what is genuinely matter for inquiry on the other.”⁶⁶⁵ However, P. F. Strawson finds Hume’s position “much the simpler” than Wittgenstein’s because Wittgenstein’s view is more dynamic or socio-historical.⁶⁶⁶

In his thesis the Finnish philosopher and Hume scholar Jani Hakkarainen seems to side with this kind of interpretation of Hume (his focus is mainly on *EHU*).⁶⁶⁷ According to his highly analytical study of the sceptical and metaphysically realist (i.e. that there are mind-independent, external, and continuous entities) elements in Hume’s thought, there is a certain kind of balance between the points of view of philosophers and common people. As Hakkarainen points out, and what has hopefully also become clear from my own study, Hume does not want to make the distinction between these points of view an exclusive one.⁶⁶⁸ It is his overall view that common sense and philosophical elements cannot be in fact separated in individual human life. If some philosopher tries to separate them, he ends up practising false philosophy. Roughly, according to Hakkarainen, this distinction resolves the dilemma of the realist and sceptical elements in Hume’s thought. Simply put, philosophers are sceptics and common people are realists regarding the

⁶⁶⁴ P. F. Strawson 1985, 12-13.

⁶⁶⁵ P. F. Strawson 1985, 14-15.

⁶⁶⁶ P. F. Strawson 1985, 18-19.

⁶⁶⁷ However, there are no references to P. F. Strawson 1985 in Hakkarainen 2007.

⁶⁶⁸ See Hakkarainen 2007, 285.

existence of “Real” entities. This “no one Hume”⁶⁶⁹ interpretation of Hume on Real entities means, in my view, that there seems to be an existential (or pragmatistic) solution to this issue in Hume’s thought. Philosophical problems are not just philosophical, Hume suggests, they are the problems of those who practise philosophy as actual human beings and the solutions to these problems are not just intellectual. They are “solved” by putting them in perspective with actual human existence.⁶⁷⁰

Morris argues that Hume in the Conclusion of *T* 1 is not, in fact, “expressing the despair that is the result of finding flaws in his own position. Rather, he is offering us a dramatic representation of the forlorn state of a conscientious traditional metaphysician, perhaps even that of a ‘modern philosopher’.”⁶⁷¹ Kail interprets the Conclusion as an opposing response to Malebranche’s view according to which man’s virtue consists in resemblance to God by the use of reason.⁶⁷² In Kail’s view, as I see it, Hume’s despair in the Conclusion reflects the Humean rejection of this over-rationalised view of human nature or the Humean rejection of “artificial life”. An excessive use of reason at the expense of other human natural inclinations, like the company of other people, leads to experiences of solitude and despair which Hume describes in the Conclusion. Indeed, in *T* 1.4 Hume may be seen, as Kail does, to oppose monkish or ascetic ideals and to examine “the relentless

669 In Hakkarainen 2007, 12 he explains that this means that Hume may be interpreted to have a different position on the existence of Real Entities at different times.

670 The “New Hume” discussion or debate is also relevant in regard to the relations between “common life” experiences and the philosophical attitude to the workings of human nature. (Hume uses the expression “common life” frequently in *T* and *EHU* (see, e.g. *T* 1.3.7.7; *SBN* 97 and *EHU* 1.3; *SBN* 6-7). It means everyday experience not made self-conscious by philosophy (see Richman 2007, 4)). If the New Humeans are “right” and there are more realist elements in Hume’s thought than has usually been observed, then the conflict between the common life experience and the philosophical one is not that great after all (Richman 2007, 4-5).

671 Morris 2000, 107.

672 Kail 2005.

and solitary exercise of reason with no regard to other interests”.⁶⁷³ This criticism of artificial life is also, in my view, behind Kierkegaard’s or Climacus’s criticism of the “System” and its idea that reason or philosophy “gone astray” distorts the view of what it means to be a concrete human individual.

In my view, both Hume’s “Conclusion” and Climacus’s “An Understanding with the Reader” (and perhaps *T* and *CUP* in general) share the idea of a certain “dead-endedness” of philosophising understood as something that can lead a person to his or her personal fulfilment or that can answer ultimate questions about life and reality. But this does not apply to all kinds of philosophising and the fulfilment that can be achieved through a certain kind of philosophising is of a moderated form and is more down to earth than what has been traditionally expected of philosophy. Philosophers should continue discussing “life”, Hume and Kierkegaard suggest, but not in its high-flying metaphysical sense, but as it is familiar to everyone in historical customs. Also, traditional philosophical problems should be addressed without forgetting reason’s dependence on everyday experience. Philosophers, to be true, should not try to ignore their temporal concreteness and their dependence on the different historical traditions in all fields of life. If they do ignore these conditions of their thinking and turn false, then they in fact alienate themselves from their own essential human features. It may be an exaggeration to say that Hume’s “Conclusion” is “indirect communication” along the lines of Kierkegaard, so I do not say it, but it, too, has a certain air of revoking in the sense that in the “Conclusion” Hume may be seen to put in perspective what he has said before in *T*. So, it may not only be interesting to understand and analyse Hume’s arguments preceding the “Conclusion”, it may be philosophically or metaphilosophically relevant to consider

673 Kail 2005, 137.

their status from the point of view of Hume's despair in the "Conclusion" and even from Climacus's idea of the revocation of *CUP*.⁶⁷⁴

It seems then that Popkin was only partially right when he said that Hume and Kierkegaard emerged "from their critical attacks on metaphysics along totally different paths".⁶⁷⁵ Kierkegaard was perhaps even profoundly inspired by the ideas (potentially?) present in Hume's thought. He, unlike Hume, embraced the idea of nearly miraculous personal transformation and believing in the most improbable thing. However, they shared the idea that at some basic level we are all nevertheless natural believers. They also understood the lure of abstract thought and saw the dangers of thinking in a sense too highly of the philosophical enterprise itself and agreed on the idea that it is not in fact that tautological or redundant to say that philosophers, too, are human beings. Perhaps this is one of those simple things of which Johannes Climacus asks: "*Is it not precisely the simple that is most difficult for the wise man to understand?*"⁶⁷⁶

674 It would be worth reflecting more on the question regarding the general intellectual projects of Hume and Kierkegaard. One might convincingly argue that Kierkegaard wants to move beyond philosophy towards realisation of Christian life and Hume wants to replace rationalism with his naturalistic philosophy. However, in my view, they both seem to share the view according to which the "point" of human life is not to intellectually or philosophically address reality. Instead, they seem to think that this kind of intellectual detachment is in fact impossible for actual persons. On the other hand, Hume's view of man appears to be much more natural than Kierkegaard's, who suggests that, in some sense, also eternal and infinite features ontologically define man. I leave a more thorough treatment of these kinds of questions to future studies.

675 See the introduction of this thesis and Popkin 1951, 274.

676 *SKS* 7, 148 / *CUP I*, 160. An important line of research for further projects on the Hume-Kierkegaard connection would be to compare more thoroughly the different intellectual contexts of Hume and Kierkegaard. Hume addresses the rationalism of the 17th-century philosophers and Kierkegaard addresses the rationalism of German idealism. A discussion of Kant's position in this schema would produce a more nuanced view of the philosophical positions of Hume and Kierkegaard bearing in mind that Kant is an important link between Hume and Hegel.

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