

UNBOUNDED COMMITMENT:

A KIERKEGAARDIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

by

LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOX



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Department of Theology and Religion

School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the existential challenges and opportunities posed by religious diversity. It argues that philosophical engagements with diversity misrepresent and obstruct full engagement with it. The thesis reconceptualises diversity from a Kierkegaardian perspective, sensitive to the existential dimensions of religion and focused on religious commitment.

Drawing on features of Kierkegaard's description of religious faith, particularly uncertainty, risk, paradox and transcendence, it proposes that an authentic, Christian response to religious diversity is one of unbounded commitment. It is unbounded in that it is an absolute, boundless commitment and deep fidelity to God's revelation, but entails a venturing, boundary-crossing, radical openness to finding this in sites of offence. Deep engagement with religious others goes to the heart of faith in Christ as well as expressing fundamental truths about the human situation itself. A concluding sketch is provided of how deep interreligious encounter can be achieved through indirect communication focused on the character of the participants.

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Key to Abbreviations:

ID: Interreligious dialogue.

IE: Interreligious encounter.

RD: Religious diversity.

UC: Unbounded commitment.

UCM: Unbounded commitment as a model for participating in IE.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: READING KIERKEGAARD IN A CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS
DIVERSITY

1.1. Thesis and Methodology

(1.1.a) Thesis

Diversity within and between religions is an abiding phenomenon that necessitates and provides opportunities for deep philosophical and theological reflection. The focus of this thesis is on the existential challenges and opportunities posed by religious diversity (RD) to Christians who must face agonistic questions in constructing and living out identities in a diverse context, in relation to religions that make absolute and exclusive claims while having a sense of their universal significance beyond their own borders.

My thesis revolves around three core arguments. First, I argue that philosophical engagements with RD have misrepresented the nature of diversity by viewing it as an objective problem. This impairs a full engagement with diversity and occludes a range of solutions to the challenges it presents. I provide an alternative framework based on an existential understanding of religion and analysis of commitment, reconceptualising the debate from a Kierkegaardian perspective that is more sensitive to how religious identity is experienced from the inside and bound up with ways of being in the world.

Second, I draw on central features of Kierkegaard's description of religious faith, such as uncertainty, commitment, and paradox, to construct my own approach to the existential challenge of RD. This approach offers fertile resources for understanding the agonistic situation of Christians navigating the tensions between fidelity and openness in the face diversity. I argue that

Christians can engage authentically in open and faithful ways with religious others, proposing an approach of unbounded commitment. This approach is unbounded in that it is an absolute, boundless commitment and deep fidelity but entails a venturing, boundary-crossing openness. It is aware of its own finitude and uncertainty and acknowledges the paradoxical nature of the divine as manifesting in unexpected places. On this basis, I show that deep engagement with religious others is not simply necessitated by the religiously diverse context but goes to the heart of Christian devotion and is the most authentic expression of faith in Christ, wherein transformation is achieved through encounter with divine grace in the other, as well as expressing fundamental truths about the human situation itself.

Third, I argue that this prioritisation of interpersonal relationships over theory can aid the practical implementation of interreligious encounter, deep encounter and exchange occurring across religious boundaries through how participants relate to each other.

(1.1.b) Methodology

My thesis engages with the challenge of diversity from the perspective of a Christian philosophy of religion, aiming to offer a convincing philosophical position that provides a basis for deep theoretical, existential, and practical engagement with RD.¹ While the focus is on the existential challenge, my conviction is that engaging in this way provides resources for Christian theological reflection that can reinvigorate Christianity in a context of diversity

¹ Christianity informs my own position, Kierkegaard's position, and Western philosophy of religion, but it is hoped that my thesis will also provide insights for non-Christians.

by calling it to deep engagement with diversity while also affirming the authenticity of its own approach.

My philosophical method is postmetaphysical and utilises concepts and approaches informed by existential phenomenology. The focus is on religion as it relates to features of subjectivity and embodied ways of being. Its aim is to be descriptively sensitive to these features, offering an exploration of religiousness and diversity as it is experienced from the inside of religious identity.² It also offers existential and pragmatic critiques in relation to the ways of being facilitated by different approaches to diversity, with a view to developing an authentic response to the challenges of RD.

A dialogue with Kierkegaardian texts is employed to develop a unique, Kierkegaardian inspired approach to RD. These have been chosen as the basis for my position because they explore existential features of religion as it relates to the person and are focused on descriptive accuracy and authenticity. Kierkegaard's understanding of religion offers a fuller alternative than the dominant, reductive engagements with diversity in philosophy of religion, yet it is not usually considered in the debate. I aim to present an approach that is recognisably Kierkegaardian, is persuasive for Christian philosophers of religion, and which also provides fecund resources for engaging with RD.

This chapter defines key terms regarding RD, explains my methodology in approaching the Kierkegaardian corpus, and outlines the direction of the thesis.

² The following terms are used broadly in the thesis, unless described in more detail. Subjectivity is used to refer to the person's ability to phenomenally be, particularly their own being, in unique, interpretative ways, from the inside. The phrase ways of being is used to refer to the ways in which people live out their core existential commitments through their values, beliefs, and identities. Selfhood is used to refer to the condition of being a self, particularly in relation to constituting identity by coordinating the dialectical tensions of their being.

1.2. Scoping the Question of Religious Diversity

The dominant problematization of RD in philosophy of religion is challenged in later chapters, but, for orientation in the debate, the following definitions are used. Religion is defined as a way of interpreting and being in the world that makes reference to something taken as ultimate or as having ultimate importance.³ This is an expansive definition, including socio-cultural structures; textual and oral bodies and traditions; sets of practices and norms; and personal beliefs, practices, and identities. This definition is a provisional heuristic tool to orient the analysis, rather than a prescriptive claim about the nature of religion.

RD refers to the existence of different structures that can be categorised as religious. Many such structures offer what appear to be incompatible claims, accounts, and ways of being. Many assert their own exclusive truth and may have developed in contradistinction from other such structures in a supersessionist or antagonistic way. RD includes interreligious diversity, diversity of different religions, and intrareligious diversity, differences within bodies that identify as

³ This definition has been chosen for several reasons. First, it coheres closely with the definition offered by a range of Kierkegaardian texts (see Chapter 2). Second, it is the definition offered by many of the philosophers and theologians engaged in the debate over RD [See, for example: Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), p. 18. Peter Byrne, 'A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity'. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 37. John Hick, 'The Next Step beyond Dialogue'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 5. Paul F. Knitter, 'Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?' In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 37. Ninian Smart, 'The Philosophy of Worldviews, or the Philosophy of Religion Transformed'. In, Thomas Dean (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), p. 19. Though Hedges does not use the term, the definitions he offers, by referring to an afterlife and guiding norms, are compatible with this definition. Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010), p. 78.] Third, this focuses on the central problem in religious diversity: when ultimate but apparently inconsistent claims are made. Fourth, while there may be bodies that are best characterized as religions that do not make such ultimate claims [Suzanne Owen, 'The World Religions Paradigm Time for a Change'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, Vol 10, Issue 3, pp. 253 – 268. (2011)], religions that do make such claims provide a paradigmatic case of diversity because ultimate claims are likely to be exclusive.

the same religion. While there are many examples of difference, because they are concerned with ultimacy, religions may offer competing interpretations that are viewed as ultimately important and authoritative in the identities of their adherents. The primary case of RD is the difference between such interpretative schema, as Byrne observes, 'different religions contain competing accounts of the character of the metaphysically and axiologically ultimate reality and...of the character of the ultimate good human beings can attain through relation to this reality.'⁴

RD raises a number of questions for philosophers of religion. Byrne identifies four preoccupations.⁵ It raises epistemological questions about accounts, truth-claims, and knowledge: are claims exclusive, how is doxastic disagreement to be handled, and how is one to decide on which accounts to accept?⁶ This is particularly problematic given that religions may provide the criteria by which claims are legitimated, such that legitimisation criteria reflect the same diversity as religious claims.⁷ It raises questions about the nature of religion and RD. It raises questions about the nature of the ultimate, which is likely be the primary site contested by religions. It raises moral questions about the relationship between religion and the human good, such as how competing

⁴ Peter Byrne, 'A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity'. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 30. Further examples of difference include: different values and practices; different texts, traditions, institutions and authorities; different accounts of and beliefs about the universe, the divine, the afterlife, salvation, and human condition.

⁵ Peter Byrne, 'A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity'. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 29.

⁶ David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), vii.

⁷ Kevin Meeker and Philip L. Quinn, 'Introduction: The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity'. In, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 2.

soteriological claims are to be navigated, how one is to deal with competing sets of religious values, and whether religions can contribute to human flourishing.⁸

Christian theological questions posed by RD include how diversity is to be accounted for within a Christian framework, in relation to claims about the revelatory and soteriologically normative status of Christ.⁹ It raises missiological questions about how Christianity should approach other religions and their adherents, particularly in relation to dialogue, evangelism, and obligations to love.¹⁰ At a deeper level, it has profound implications for Christian self-understanding, and can be an occasion for reformulating Christian doctrines.

RD also raises existential questions about how one is to relate to others and constitute one's identity in relation to the diverse options. Many people find encounter with diversity to be damaging to the integrity of their identity and the strength of their conviction, pluralisation contributing to secularisation and loss of belief.¹¹ That this occurs even amongst those who are not engaged in

⁸ A fifth feature, neglected by many philosophers of religion, are the implications of diversity for philosophical methodology: how are philosophers to engage with the wealth of data provided by religions, both methodologically and in relation to their objectives, particularly when the focus of philosophy of religion in the West has been on Christianity. David Cheetham, 'Comparative Philosophy of Religion.' In, David Cheetham and Rolfe King (eds.), *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 101-116.

⁹ Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, 'Editors' Introduction'. In, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin (eds.), *The Question of Theological Truth* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 16 and p. 6. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), vii. And, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ix. And, Gavin D'Costa, 'Christianity and the World Religions: A Theological Appraisal'. In, Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange (eds.), *Only One Way?* (London: SCM Press, 2011), p. 3. Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), viii.

¹¹ 'If there is more than one sacred canopy present in society...they cannot both (or indeed all) be true.... The next question is unavoidable: could it be that there is no ultimate truth at all...? [P]luralism erodes the plausibility structures generated by monopolistic religious institutions in so far as it offers alternatives.' [Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage, 2007), p. 53. See also: Peter L. Berger, 'Secularization and De-Secularization'. In, Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami and David Smith (eds.), *Religions in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 296.] On the existential dimension of this, see: Mark S. McLeod-Harrison, *Repairing Eden: Humility, Mysticism and the Existential Problem of Religious Diversity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 13.

theological reflection, indicates that this is an existential problem that arises from everyday encounters between people as much as a theoretical problem arising from consideration of conflicting truth-claims.

Diversity poses questions about the nature of philosophy: has Western philosophy operated within a logic of identity that excludes difference? How should philosophy engage with alterity in the light of this challenge?¹² Stewart, Schmidt-Leukel, Plantinga, and Griffiths claim the central question for philosophers of religion is how many religions mediate salvific truth.¹³ This preoccupation has had a decisive influence in shaping the typology of approaches to RD and it will be argued that this is one of the primary problems with philosophical engagements with diversity.

The dominant typology of positions classifies positions based on the number of religions viewed as being true and saving.¹⁴ Exclusivism asserts that

¹² On the accusation that philosophy has been totalising and thus exclusionary, see Levinas' claim that, 'The philosophical discourse of the West claims the amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy.' [Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy'. In, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 129.] Recovering alterity is the heart of the range of continental approaches that can be characterized as philosophies of alterity. [Todd May, 'Philosophies of Difference'. In, John Mullarkey and Beth Lord (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Continental Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 93-108.]

¹³ Robert B. Stewart, 'Can Only One Religion Be True? Considering This Question.' In, Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *Can Only One Religion Be True? Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 3. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19. Alvin Plantinga, 'A Defense of Religious Exclusivism'. In, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, p. 172. Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 7-12.

¹⁴ This was introduced by Race, is defended by Schmidt-Leukel, and is described as the 'classical typology' by Hedges. [Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982). And, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*. And, Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 17. See also: Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM, 2009), vii.]

one religion is exclusively true and saving.¹⁵ Inclusivism asserts that one religion is superior in terms of truth and/or salvation, but many other religions are ‘included’, as having some degree of access to these.¹⁶ Pluralism asserts that many religions have parity in mediating truth and salvation.¹⁷ These positions are nuanced and critiqued in later chapters.

This thesis aims to provide a convincing Kierkegaardian position on RD, focused on the existential challenges but applicable to some of these questions. It does not position itself within the typology and constructs a different typology and approach, rejecting the importance of some of the central questions identified above and engaging with RD at a deeper level.

To present a full, convincing position, the thesis aims to understand RD while avoiding metaphysical or ultimate claims.¹⁸ It aims to convince Christians by drawing on Christological themes and values of love. Above all, it aims to incorporate the subjective dimension of religious devotion, which has been overlooked by the classical view, to facilitate deep and authentic interpersonal relationships in a context of pervasive RD.

¹⁵ See, for example, Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, pp. 20-22. Daniel Strange, ‘Exclusivisms’. In, Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, p. 5. Plantinga defends exclusivism. [Alvin Plantinga, ‘A Defense of Religious Exclusivism’. In, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, pp. 172-192.]

¹⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, p. 57. Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.36. D’Costa defends this approach. [Gavin D’Costa, ‘Christ, The Trinity, and Religious Plurality.’ In, Gavin D’Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 16-29.]

¹⁷ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 26. Hick defends such an approach. [John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1989).]

¹⁸ The criteria chosen as key to the persuasiveness of my approach are influenced by Knitter’s criteria for a successful response, but I propose my own as Knitter remains, to a great extent, within the classical view of diversity. Paul F Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (New York: Orbis, 2002), pp. 1-2; pp. 109-111.

1.3. Methodology in Approaching the Kierkegaardian Corpus

This section positions my approach to the Kierkegaardian literature. It positions my descriptive-thematic approach in relation to dominant methodologies in Kierkegaardian scholarship. It outlines the problem posed by the fragmentation of the authorship and proposes a solution through a detailed consideration of its nature alongside Kierkegaard's self-interpretations. Finally, it explains my use of the spheres of existence as grounding an existential exploration of selfhood, particularly with a view to living out religiousness in authentic ways.

(1.3.a) Typology of Approaches

My thesis focuses on the writings of Climacus and Anti-Climacus, which are a part of Kierkegaard's authorship and are interpreted as pursuing particular authorial projects and presenting a wealth of material for philosophical engagement with religiousness.¹⁹ The authorship presents a range of different styles, genres, and perspectives, and the interpretation of it entails numerous

¹⁹ The Kierkegaardian corpus comprises three main groups of texts. I follow Michael Strawser's formal categorisation of these as it is a useful schema and is in conformity with Kierkegaard's own comments. [Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard From Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), xxiii.] The group referred to as 'the authorship' is composed of the works published from *Either/Or* in 1843 to *For Self Examination* in 1851. The works published from 1843 to 1848 are acknowledged by Kierkegaard as 'the whole authorship' (PoV, p. 289), and the same books up to 1846 are acknowledged by Climacus (CUP, pp. 251-300) and Kierkegaard (CUP, p. 625). Also included are the books published between 1848 and 1851, which Kierkegaard saw as a continuation of the authorial program described in CUP and PoV. The second group is composed of unpublished completed texts and texts not acknowledged by Kierkegaard as part of 'the authorship'. These include 'pre-authorship' works and publications from Kierkegaard's student days, unpublished complete works, and Kierkegaard's 'post-authorship' polemic against the Danish church, published in pamphlets and newspaper articles. The third group comprises Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks, letters, and incomplete works left in the form of notes.

problems, necessitating the adoption of a defensible methodology.²⁰ Four approaches have dominated scholarship.²¹

(1.3.a.i) Biographical-psychological approaches utilise the details of Kierkegaard's life to interpret the corpus.²² Kierkegaard's writings are partly a response to his life and struggles, '[Kierkegaard's] writings are so closely meshed with the background details of the author's life that knowledge of this is indispensable to their content.'²³ However, this approach will not be pursued because it can overlook the philosophical and theological content of the authorship, as Taylor observes, 'Scholarship...becomes an elaborate detective game of trying to discern which passages of the pseudonyms actually refer to Kierkegaard himself. In such investigations, the theological method and

²⁰ Hence Mannheim calls it, 'bafflingly complex'. Ronald J. Manheimer, *Kierkegaard as Educator* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xv.

²¹ This typology remains relevant, as demonstrated by Barrett's continuing use of it to categorise American receptions of Kierkegaard's work. This typology is outlined in: David R. Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3. Law is building on the typologies offered by Henriksen and Taylor [Aage Henriksen, *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia: A Historical and Critical Study* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1951), pp. 11-12. Mark C Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 26.] Lee C. Barrett, 'The USA: From Neo-Orthodoxy to Plurality.' In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Kierkegaard's International Reception, Tome III: The Near East, Asia, Australia and the Americas* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) pp.229-269.

²² Henriksen identifies this as the dominant approach in Scandinavian scholarship up to 1851. [Aage Henriksen, *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia: A Historical and Critical Study*, p. 12.] Early proponents included Thompson and Haecker; it is continued in recent scholarship by biographies on Kierkegaard such as Garff's, which utilises Kierkegaard's life to support an interpretation of the corpus. [Josiah Thompson, *The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967). Theodor Haecker, *Kierkegaard the Cripple* (London: Harvill, 1948). Joakim Garff, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Trans. Bruce H Kirmmse (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).] Garff's biography is used to support his earlier contention that the corpus cannot be seen as a unity or its theology taken seriously, portraying Kierkegaard instead as an actor who adopts and discards numerous facades throughout his life. [Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In Jonathan Reé and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 75-102.] Many introductory works, even by commentators who do not otherwise adopt this approach, consider Kierkegaard's life and its relation to the corpus. [An early example is James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953). A more recent example is Michael Watts, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).]

²³ Alistair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001), i. Kierkegaard supports this approach by positing an essential and intimate connection between an author's 'written' and 'lived' communications (PoV, p. 57).

philosophical ideas are forgotten.’²⁴ Indeed, one reason that Kierkegaard employed pseudonyms was to confront the reader directly with the content of the works and detach biographical issues from them (CUP, pp. 625-630).

(1.3.a.ii) Historical-comparative approaches aim to understand Kierkegaard’s thought by its context in the history of ideas and alongside other thinkers.²⁵ This includes charting the concepts and movements that influenced Kierkegaard and his influence over later movements.²⁶ While this approach helps to clarify the meaning of concepts employed by Kierkegaard, it will not be used as my primary methodology. The conceptual content of the authorship bears a problematic relationship to its predecessors, borrowing much but also using concepts in innovative and subversive ways, such that it is difficult to establish when Kierkegaard’s employment of these is in earnest.²⁷ The texts must be given

²⁴ Mark C Taylor, *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self*, p. 15. A further problem is that the primary sources for this approach are problematic; Kierkegaard’s employment of pseudonyms and obfuscating literary devices makes it difficult to identify reliable autobiographical data in the authorship and he asks that they not be identified with his own views (CUP, pp. 625-630). For arguments on the unreliability of Kierkegaard’s journals and signed works, particularly relating to their editorial treatment, see: Joakim Garff, “‘To produce was my life.’ Problems and Perspectives within the Kierkegaardian Biography”, trans. S.E.Ake. In, N.J.Cappelørn and J.Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 75-93.

²⁵ This is the approach underlying the series *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* edited by Jon Stewart, which traces the influences on Kierkegaard’s thought from the ancient world through to his impact on the history of ideas and subsequent movements (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007-1011). Recent anthologies devote as much space to the influences and impact of Kierkegaard as to Kierkegaardian ideas and literature. See, for example: Jon Stewart (ed.), *A Companion to Kierkegaard* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015). John Lippitt and George Pattison (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁶ As an example of the former, which relates him to Hegelianism, see: Mark C Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) and Jon Stewart (Ed.) *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003). Since existential philosophy and Neo-Orthodox theology were significant movements that claimed influence from Kierkegaard’s works and introduced many English language scholars to Kierkegaard, understanding Kierkegaard through the lens provided by these movements was, for several decades, the dominant way of approaching Kierkegaard. [Lee C. Barrett, ‘The USA: From Neo-Orthodoxy to Plurality.’ In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Kierkegaard’s International Reception, Tome III: The Near East, Asia, Australia and the Americas*, pp. 231-235.]

²⁷ This is evident, for example, in the unresolved issue of Kierkegaard’s relations to Hegel. M.G. Piety cites various scholars in support of her view that, ‘despite the fact that their terminology is similar, Kierkegaard and Hegel were very differing sorts of thinkers...[and] when Kierkegaard uses what appear to be Hegelian terms, these terms...have another meaning’ [M.G. Piety, *Ways of*

careful analysis to determine Kierkegaard's own use of the concepts in order to be compared with other concepts or applied to later debates.

(1.3.a.iii) Literary approaches apply literary critical tools to the form of the works in order to explicate the meaning of the texts as literary productions. It has been adopted by deconstructionist readings that focus on the literary devices utilised to displace textual meaning.²⁸ Such approaches can provide helpful tools for understanding textual devices, but by themselves they provide insufficient resources for a thorough analysis of the conceptual content of the authorship. Indeed, most deconstructionist interpretations deny the possibility of such conceptual analysis given the form of the authorship, 'The meanings that are available exist at the level of the displacements, the deferrals, and the supplements.'²⁹ For this reason I will not adopt this approach, though I will deal with it as a challenge to my thesis.

(1.3.a.iv) Descriptive-thematic approaches attempt a descriptive and conceptual analysis of the content of the works. They can be divided into two main groups: descriptive approaches that aim to elaborate the content of particular works, and thematic approaches that aim to identify and analyse particular themes running through the corpus or structures underlying it.³⁰

Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralist Epistemology (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), p. 6.], whereas Jon Stewart regards Kierkegaard as partially derivative of Hegel in the concepts he uses. [Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).]

²⁸ For example, Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986) and Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

²⁹ Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, p.5.

³⁰ For examples, see: C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript": The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1983); Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Peder Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

(1.3.b) Approaching the Kierkegaardian Authorship

My thesis adopts a descriptive-thematic approach as the most appropriate for a philosophical appreciation of the texts. In order to achieve a close understanding of their content, it focuses on the texts produced by the pseudonyms Climacus (PF and CUP) and Anti-Climacus (PiC and SuD), drawing on the wider authorship only to illuminate these. It attempts a thematic description of the concepts that emerge from them in order to construct a coherent, Kierkegaardian position that can then be applied to RD.

These texts are not considered authoritative or as most closely representing Kierkegaard's views, but are chosen because they contain a thoroughly developed position on the nature of religiousness and provide a clear structure for analysis.³¹ They are particularly pertinent for engaging with RD because they expound religion in relation to existential structures, emphasise the necessity of subjectivity and risk for faith and, as will be shown, are responding to exclusivist views of Christianity. These texts provide fertile resources for engaging with diversity and can be understood as a concerted effort to engage with alterity as the basis for religious life.

³¹ I follow Perkins, Westphal, and Cappelørn in regarding the two pseudonymous characters as closely connected, with 'Anti' signifying Anti-Climacus' developing from rather than rejecting Climacus and presenting an intensification and dialogue with Climacian themes rather than a revocation of them. Westphal, for example, argues that Anti-Climacus maps out Religiousness C, thereby understanding it as fitting into the agenda and framework provided by Climacus. [Robert L. Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus in His Social and Political Environment'. In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), p. 275; Merold Westphal, 'Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence'. In, Perkins (ed.), IKCPC, p. 26; Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'The Movements of Offense Toward, Away From, and Within Faith: "Blessed is he who is not offended at me"'. In, Perkins (ed.), IKCPC, p. 95]. Further weight is given to this choice of texts by SuD having been originally penned as a signed work; Evans regards them as close to Kierkegaard's own views. [C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p.8.] However, the question of whether they reflect Kierkegaard's own views is not pursued in the thesis.

(1.3.c) Fragmentation and Indirection in the Authorship

This methodology entails two contentious assertions: that the texts evince a conceptual content and that this is formulated in a sufficiently coherent manner to permit thematic analysis. I will justify these assertions in relation to the fragmented nature of the corpus and Kierkegaard's interpretations of it.

(1.3.c.i) Fragmentation in the Authorship

The authorship is fragmented into two primary groups of literature: the pseudonymous and signed texts, each of which is itself fragmented into a diverse body of texts, and all of which threaten to be irreconcilably distant from their author. A primary fragmenting factor is Kierkegaard's claim that the pseudonyms are distinct characters, with their own worldviews, concerns, and personalities; each provides axiomatic starting points for the elaboration of distinct life-views (CUP, pp. 625-626). The pseudonyms frequently operate in different genres, identify unique concerns, and often criticise one another, providing no single perspective but only fragmentary and often incompatible perspectives on various themes.³² No position in the authorship is easily identifiable with Kierkegaard's and the authorship precludes his ability to

³² No clearer progress can be made by focusing on the signed works as they are similarly fragmented and do not present a unified perspective. While Kierkegaard's signed discourses present a somewhat more unified picture, occupying the same genre of upbuilding discourse and exhibiting many structural and conceptual commonalities, they are fragmented by the development of this conceptuality over the course of the different discourses and by the corresponding degree of 'religiosity', in terms of their conceptuality, ascribed to them by Kierkegaard [Compare, for example, the categorisation of them on PoV, p. 9, PoV, p. 30 and CUP, p. 256]. Barrett demonstrates the different authorial voices employed in WoL and JFY. [Lee C. Barrett, 'Authorial Voices and the Limits of Communication in Kierkegaard's Signed Literature: A Comparison of *Works of Love* to *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself!*'. In, R. L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself!* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).]

interpret the pseudonymous texts from an authoritative authorial position since the texts are the products of the distinct pseudonyms, 'Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party' (CUP, p. 626). PoV extends this to the signed works and the authorship itself (PoV, p. 33).

Furthermore, various devices of indirection are used in the works that makes it difficult to produce coherent interpretations of them. The pseudonyms often refuse to give clear definitions of key concepts and when they do these are frequently supplemented with strings of definitions that compete with one another or never reach a final definition. Many discussions and definitions are also ironic, with the aim of subverting the concepts presented.

(1.3.c.ii) *Kierkegaardian Interpretations of the Authorship*

In tension with the authorship's pervasive fragmentation is Kierkegaard's preoccupation with interpreting it as a coherent project. Three main interpretations are offered: Climacus', 'A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature' (CUP, pp. 251-300), Kierkegaard's, 'FORKLARING' (CUP, pp. 625-630), and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*.³³ These interpretations concur in identifying the fragmentation as an essential feature of the authorship and explaining it as an authorial strategy that indicates an underlying coherence.

Kierkegaard's 'FORKLARING' maintains that the fragmentary and multi-perspectival nature of the authorship is essential to its production and the

³³ It is possible to add a fourth interpretation: *Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed*. It is my view, however, that this presents a summarised form of the interpretation offered in *Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed*, with omissions simply to avoid some of the complications and inconsistencies Kierkegaard identified in the longer work.

meaning of the individual texts. It has the aim of constructing the distinct pseudonymous life-views and existence-possibilities, provoking subjective, existential engagement with these and pursuing a wider strategy of reflecting on personhood, 'read[ing] through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships...handed down from the fathers.' (CUP, pp. 629-630)

Climacus similarly sees fragmentation and indirection as essential to the corpus: its concern with subjective truth and appropriation necessitates a method that engages the reader in a maieutic fashion rather than communicating objective propositions (CUP, p. 68). He also identifies an underlying common theme of the distinct works: the development of human selfhood, which is charted in a trajectory through the various existence-possibilities sketched by the pseudonyms, 'That subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, is my thesis; that the pseudonymous authors relate themselves to it is easy enough to see' (CUP, p. 281).

Fragmentation serves this purpose by mapping out distinct existential possibilities, ensuring these cannot be taken as parts of a coherent, objective system but must be engaged with and appropriated subjectively. The question of selfhood cannot be resolved through Kierkegaard's authorial 'solutions', but only by the free choice of the reader, 'Thus it is left to the reader to put it all together by himself' (CUP, p. 298). Jansen offers a concise summary of this procedure, 'the placing together of dialectical contrasts without offering any explanation that may influence the recipient's interpretation...place[s] the recipient before a

riddle he or she has to solve...by self-consciously appropriating the message.'³⁴ While the texts represent different existence-possibilities, these are engaged in dialogue with one another on key questions about how one is to live, construct identity, and form relationships.³⁵

In addition to this unifying dialogue, Climacus sees the works as coherent by their sketching stages in the development of authentic selfhood, such that there is openness between the different perspectives. The corpus does not produce a multiplicity of irreconcilable perspectives but rather establishes a dialogue between them in which problems, questions, and concepts raised in earlier stages are critiqued, resolved, or developed in later stages (CUP, p. 253), with a view to facilitating authentic selfhood for readers, particularly authentic Christian religiousness, 'The pseudonymous authors and I along with them were all subjective.... That subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, that existing is the decisive factor, that this was the way to take to Christianity, which is precisely inwardness, but, please note, not every inwardness, which was why the preliminary stages definitely had to be insisted upon—that was my idea.' (CUP, pp. 282-283)

While this is only Climacus' interpretation, this makes it all the more significant because he aspires to the fragmentation and indirection evident in the authorship yet also claims to be pursuing a unifying agenda. PF and CUP possess the inter-textual relationships Climacus ascribes to the other works, critiquing

³⁴ Nerina Jansen, 'Deception in Service of Truth: Magister Kierkegaard and the Problem of Communication'. In, R. L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1997) p.121.

³⁵ For example, *EOI* advocates the avoidance of marriage and pursuit of seduction as features of aesthetic existence, while *EOII* critiques this position, advocating marriage as the pinnacle of the ethical life; later works evaluate the religious life as requiring the renunciation of marriage (CUP, pp. 298-299).

them and utilising conceptual tools developed in them with a view to facilitating authentic selfhood and religiousness.³⁶

PoV similarly posits fragmentation between the different life-views as a strategy in the service of a singular intention to address the same religious issue throughout the disparate texts, that of achieving authentic Christian religiousness (PoV, p. 23). This was necessary to address the various life-views of his contemporaries and to raise the question of religiousness as a distinct and authentic existence-possibility in a way that facilitated subjective appropriation (PoV, pp. 41-43). For this reason, Kierkegaard claims that the authorship must be read as a dialectical or dialogical whole in order to appreciate the range of options and critiques being presented (PoV, p. 77) and engage with the process of developing authentic religious selfhood through these (PoV, p. 31).³⁷

This does not mean that the distinct perspectives should be homogenised to a single or religious meaning, because the fragmentation is itself essential to their distinct meanings (PoV, p. 9; p. 24). Kierkegaard's assertion is that, while the aesthetic works have distinct and autonomous meanings, the aesthetic works take on new meaning in the context of the dialogue of the wider authorship. By raising the religious question within the aesthetic sphere, Kierkegaard posits a correlation between the issues and categories encountered in the aesthetic-ethical and religious spheres. The pseudonymous works are not passing moments in the transition to the religious sphere but are vital in introducing and

³⁶ This is evident from the location of the interpretation, midway through CUP and the discussion of subjectivity, its inclusion here indicating an attempt on Climacus' part to utilise the conceptual resources provided by the foregoing authorship in relation to key concepts, including subjectivity and faith, and to establish his own relation to them. Westphal makes the same observation, claiming, 'the reviews are not an interruption of his argument but an important supplement to it.' [Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), p. 130.]

³⁷ Hence he claims his interpretation could not have been firmly established prior to CUP, before the dialogical interrelationships of the texts were firmly established (PoV, p. 23).

exploring concepts, questions and perspectives that are also developed within the religious, and all of these perspectives are related to the wider question of how to live out authentic selfhood.

To sum up, these interpretations consistently assert that the authorship is essentially fragmented between the distinct texts and life-views. This fragmentation does not preclude coherence in the authorship, which is predicated as its basis. The interpretations assert that the fragmentation is existential, formulating and exploring distinct life-views and existence-possibilities from the inside; maieutic, aiming to provoke subjective rather than objective engagement; dialogical and critical; and upbuilding, presenting the stages on the way to authentic selfhood and Christian religiousness.³⁸ The works must be compared and contrasted as fragments within a wider whole that will enable readers to enter into dialogue with and between the different perspectives on the question of how they are to live.

(1.3.c.iii) *Fragmenting Perspectives Rejected*

The validity of fragmenting and unifying interpretations can now be assessed. Fragmenting perspectives share three tenets: the form and content of the authorship thoroughly fragments it into a body of incompatible texts; this fragmentation is essential to the meaning of the texts and any attempt to overcome it misrepresents them; the texts must be analysed as autonomous units and no coherent concepts can be derived from them.³⁹

³⁸ Jacob Golomb offers a similar list of the maieutic procedures of the corpus. Jacob Golomb, 'Kierkegaard's ironic ladder to authentic faith'. In, Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 99-104.

³⁹ This approach is shared by: Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* and Roger Poole, "My wish, my prayer": Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart. In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart

As an example, Poole argues that the form of the authorship and its use of indirect communication fragments it into a plethora of competing and incompatible perspectives.⁴⁰ First, he argues that the works share no universal themes and their subject matters are often unrelated. Second, he argues that when they appear to expound similar concepts, these concepts are radically different because they are formulated within distinct life-views and conceptualities, ‘incommensurability of concepts, even though they may be mediated by the same *word*, emerges as the most striking markers of difference across these pseudonymous works.’⁴¹ Third, the texts deconstruct themselves by continually supplementing the meaning of key concepts within the same text.⁴² The texts do not offer a basis for a singular exegesis but rather aim to create aporia, confounding readers and subverting the concepts, ‘The text pullulates with ambiguities, paradoxes, oxymorons, apparent self-contradictions...the effect on the reader is one of ever-growing incomprehension.’⁴³ Poole concludes that

(eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*; Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*; Joakim Garff, ‘The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard’s Work as an Author’. In, Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*; Della Rae Zurick, ‘The Artificial Søren Kierkegaard: A Question of Authorial Authority’. In, P. Houe, G. D. Marino and S. H. Rossel (eds.), *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Geoffrey A. Hale, ‘“Fragmentary Prodigality”: Søren Kierkegaard, Language and Authority’. In, P. Houe, G. D. Marino and S. H. Rossel (eds.), *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*; and Johan de Mylius, ‘Kierkegaard om sit “system”’. Regnskabet. Pseudonymerne og den ikke eksisterende forfatter’. In Birgit Bertung, Paul Müller, and Fritz Norlan (eds.), *Kierkegaard: Pseudonymitet* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1993).

⁴⁰ Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Roger Poole, ‘“My wish, my prayer”: Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart.’ In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, p. 161. For example, he points out that B, Johannes de Silentio, and Climacus all deal with ‘the ethical’, but that, while they use the same term, each has an irreconcilably different understanding of it, ‘The same word, the ethical, used in different works and in different conceptual frameworks, is not capable of an univocal, stable, definition. The term is context dependent.’ [Roger Poole, ‘“My wish, my prayer”: Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart’. In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, p. 162.]

⁴² For example the presentation of the concept ‘repetition’ in Rep constantly modifies the concept, establishing numerous competing definitions of repetition, such that the actual meaning of ‘repetition’ is deferred without conclusion and a univocal interpretation is precluded. The same is claimed of ‘spirit’ in SuD and ‘faith’ in CUP.

⁴³ Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*, p. 100.

unifying approaches misunderstand the nature of the texts.⁴⁴ The only relationship between the works that Poole is willing to accept is, 'a relation of significant tension': their relationship is that they are opposed.⁴⁵

Since they assert coherence, Kierkegaard's interpretations present a problem for fragmenting perspectives. Fragmenting perspectives thus cite evidence for rejecting these interpretations and claim that, by offering yet more incoherent perspectives on the corpus, they intensify the fragmentation. Garff and Mackey identify the following reasons for rejecting these interpretations.

They claim there is no single Kierkegaardian interpretation, but at least four.⁴⁶ They claim that the preoccupation with supplementing his interpretations supports the case that no single interpretation of the authorship is possible and that it forms part of a series of interpretations that demand yet more interpretations.⁴⁷ However, Kierkegaard does not offer a series of self-interpretations, since the first is offered from Climacus' perspective and the fourth, *On My Work as an Author*, is a 'truncated version' of PoV.⁴⁸ There are only two distinct Kierkegaardian interpretations, 'FORKLARING' and PoV and Kierkegaard's attempt to attain greater clarity does not invalidate these unless they are established to be inconsistent.

⁴⁴ Roger Poole, "My wish, my prayer": Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart'. In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Roger Poole, "My wish, my prayer": Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart'. In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, p. 162.

⁴⁶ Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In, Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, pp. 77-79.

⁴⁷ This is evident, they claim, even within single interpretations, such as PoV. For example, after the main body of the text of PoV, it includes an Epilogue, a Conclusion (attributed to a poet), a Supplement, and a Postscript. [Louis Mackey, *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard*, p. 163.]

⁴⁸ This was written because of Kierkegaard's decision not to publish PoV. See: Howard Hong's introduction to Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), xviii.

Garff, Mackey, Zurick, and Mylius attempt to demonstrate inconsistencies between PoV and 'FORKLARING'.⁴⁹ They claim CUP does not affirm PoV's view that the pseudonymous texts are part of a maieutic, religiously motivated strategy, 'Climacus seems neither interested in pseudonymity as a maieutic strategy nor to have any idea that it is supposed to be a religious author's dissimulating form of presentation.'⁵⁰ Rather, they claim Climacus interprets the indirection as a polemic against objectivity, and 'FORKLARING' sees it as a literary device necessary for generating independent life-views.⁵¹ Thus they assert that while CUP posits indirection as an end in itself, PoV posits it as merely a dispensable mode of communication necessary to achieve a religious end, 'In the first instance the pseudonymity is to be taken absolutely, in the second

⁴⁹ Garff cites two other arguments that I will not consider in detail because they go beyond the nature of pseudonymity, but these can be similarly shown to be invalid. First, he claims that PoV's list of 'authorial works' omits books like *The Two Ages*. Far from invalidating his interpretation, this supports Kierkegaard's contention that those he lists serve a specific authorial strategy: the works omitted from the list are omitted because they do not serve the same strategy. [Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, pp. 80-81.] Second, Garff cites Kierkegaard's decision not to publish PoV, arguing that this was motivated by Kierkegaard's recognition of the disparity between his 'empirical self' and the 'textual self' posited in this text [Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, p.95.] As evidence, he cites Kierkegaard's comments in his journal, "'The Point of View for My Work as an Author" must not be published, no, no!' [Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer* X:1 A 78, p.62. [Hong, VI: 6327, p.108]] In this entry, Kierkegaard states this is because: it makes him seem 'extraordinary' or 'heroic', insufficiently emphasising his personal sense of sin and guilt; it is too personal; and it would disrupt the indirection. Garff omits the latter points, which contradict his use of the passage. They indicate that Kierkegaard's decision not to publish derived from his recognition that it was too accurate and personal and because it penetrated the indirection too accurately and could thereby disrupt it. Hence, his decision not to publish it did not derive, as Garff claims, from Kierkegaard's recognition of its disparity from his authorial work but rather because it unveiled his unifying project too deeply and prematurely. Hence in the same entry Kierkegaard claims, "The book itself is true, and is, in my view, masterly. But a thing like that can only be published after my death.... No, a thing like that one finishes, puts it away in a desk, sealed and marked: to be opened after my death.' [Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer* X:1 A 78, p.64. [Journals and Papers VI: 6327, p. 109]]

⁵⁰ Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, p. 79.

⁵¹ Johan de Mylius, 'Kierkegaard om sit "system". Regnskabet. Pseudonymerne og den ikke eksisterende forfatter'. In, Birgit Bertung, Paul Müller, and Fritz Norlan (Eds.), *Kierkegaard: Pseudonymitet*, p. 24.

instance as a provisional screen'.⁵² They also argue that 'FORKLARING' precludes the position adopted by PoV because the latter, 'seems to assert his authorial authority to determine the meaning of his works', in contravention of the former's limitations of his interpretative power, wherein, 'Kierkegaard renounces every connection with his pseudonyms'.⁵³

It can be shown that this argument is fallacious and that Kierkegaard's interpretations are compatible, with PoV anticipated by the earlier interpretations. In CUP, Climacus and Kierkegaard explain indirection as employed by the corpus to provoke existential engagement with Christianity (CUP, p. 17; p. 300). Furthermore, PoV does not revoke the pseudonymous status of the works affirmed by FORKLARING. Both attribute the same role to Kierkegaard as, 'author of the authors' (CUP, p. 627), and arranging the different perspectives as a 'duplexity' (PoV, pp. 29-30) so as to facilitate a dialogue between distinct perspectives that are not his own. Neither makes claims about the internal meanings or content of these works. It is rather offered as an interpretation of the structure of the authorship and the inter-textual meaning generated by viewing it as a dialogue, as Kierkegaard observes, 'I indeed do not, in the writings on my authorial work, talk directly about the pseudonyms or identify myself with the pseudonyms, but merely show their importance for the maieutic.'⁵⁴ At most there is a difference in emphasis between the different interpretations.

⁵² Aage Henriksen, *Methods and Results of Kierkegaard Studies in Scandinavia: A Historical and A Critical Study*, p.9.

⁵³ Della Rae Zurick 'The Artificial Søren Kierkegaard: A Question of Authorial Authority'. In, Paul Houe, Gordon D Marino and Sven Hakon Rossel (eds.), *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 164; pp. 165-166.

⁵⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer*, Volume X:3. A 258, p. 191. [*Journals and Papers* VI 6654, p.338].

Fragmenting approaches fail to understand the dialogical unity posited of the authorship by all three interpretations, which see fragmentation and indirection as motivated by the desire to initiate a dialogue with the readers about questions of selfhood. While the distinct perspectives are formulated with their own life-views, this does not preclude dialogue between them about the same concepts, even if it is purely negative. The tension between them appealed to by Poole is indicative of such a dialogue: disagreement requires shared subject matters. Hence his claim that their view of the ethical differs because they have different appraisals of what it demands of human existence fails to see that they are in a coherent dialogue about this issue.⁵⁵ Poole also fails to see that the unresolved definitions of concepts in the works is the means of their open-ended dialogical interrelationship: supplement allows them to be compared to each other as well as eliciting subjective responses from the reader.

These approaches misrepresent the authorship by reading it as proto-deconstructionist. Garff and Hale claim that Kierkegaard embraced the limits of language and critique of logocentrism, denying the ability of any text to present a unified perspective or be interpreted as having a single meaning.⁵⁶ As evidence, Garff cites Climacus' criticism of 'the Honorable Gentleman's' variations in expressing his beliefs, 'the problem is not that 'the Honorable Gentleman' said

⁵⁵ Roger Poole, "My wish, my prayer": Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart'. In, N. J. Cappelørn and J. Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Revisited*, pp. 160-162.

⁵⁶ Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author'. In, Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, p. 82. Geoffrey A. Hale, "'Fragmentary Prodigality": Søren Kierkegaard, Language and Authority'. In, P. Houe, G. D. Marino, and S. H. Rossel (eds.), *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*.

something he did not mean, but rather that he meant something he could not say, which is why he always ended up saying something other than what he meant.⁵⁷

However, their textual evidence that Kierkegaard held these deconstructionist views of language is derived from misinterpretations of his pseudonymous works that are also projected on the whole authorship. Hale cites the pseudonymous representative of aesthetic despair in EOI.⁵⁸ Moreover, Climacus does not claim that ‘the Honorable Gentleman’s’ predicament is derived from his inability to give linguistic expression of his meaning but rather from his existential embodiment being at variance with his expression, such that his subjective existence deconstructs his objective position. Walsh makes this same point, noting Climacus’ concern, ‘is not with the interpretation of a text but rather with its appropriation in the life of a believer.’⁵⁹

The limits of communication asserted by Kierkegaard and the pseudonyms in all of these cases are existential, linked with embodiment and appropriation, not linguistic.⁶⁰ Kierkegaard uses indirection as a method of facilitating honest and responsible engagement with existential possibilities, through which the reader is brought to personal truth and a decisive commitment to authentic selfhood, rather than playfully suspending meaning

⁵⁷ Joakim Garff, ‘The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard’s Work as an Author’. In Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (eds.), *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey A. Hale, ‘“Fragmentary Prodigality”: Søren Kierkegaard, Language and Authority’. In P. Houe, G. D. Marino, and S. H. Rossel (eds.), *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, pp. 180-181.

⁵⁹ Sylvia Walsh, ‘Reading Kierkegaard With Kierkegaard Against Garff’. *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter Number 38*. July 1999. The Kierkegaard Library, St Olaf College. 21 September 2005. <<http://www.stolaf.edu/collections/kierkegaard/newsletter/issue38/38002.htm>> Paragraph 3.

⁶⁰ Hence the journal entry Hale cites is quoted out of its context, in which Kierkegaard’s claim to be a pseudonym is qualified to mean that the texts present an ideal of Christian existence that he himself does not embody. Hence it is not presented as limiting his interpretative control over meaning, about which he comments, ‘No one can, like I, illuminate the structure of the whole’, but rather of indicating that he does not personally embody what the texts do communicate. [Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer X:2 A 89*, p. 69. [*Journals and Papers VI 6505*, p.232]]

and commitment.⁶¹ This is admitted by Norris, an advocate of deconstruction, who notes that, 'Kierkegaard carries deconstruction only to the point where its strategies supposedly come up against an undeconstructible bedrock of authenticated truth.'⁶² A deconstructive reading jeopardises this advocacy of authenticity, fundamentally misrepresenting the authorship.

(1.3.c.iv) *Unifying Perspectives*

Unifying perspectives fall into four main groups: (U1) those that posit a coherent, systematic unity in the content of the works; (U2) those that assign interpretative authority to a particular part of the corpus and use it as the hermeneutical key to the rest; (U3) those that posit an underlying conceptual structure; and (U4) those that posit a unifying methodology underlying the texts.

As an example of (U1), Sponheim claims that there are several unifying theological 'rhythms' that recur throughout the corpus and that provide conceptual focal points around which the texts revolve and of which they provide a systematic exploration.⁶³ Since the distinct perspectives are an essential component of the authorship's meaning, this approach fails to do justice to the fragmentation evident in it.

As an example of (U2), Hartshorne assigns interpretative authority to the signed and Anti-Climacus texts.⁶⁴ He argues that these lack fragmentation and

⁶¹ This argument is supported by Hall, who sees Kierkegaard as using the authenticity of existence as a measure of truth, whereas deconstruction sunders existence, meaning and truth. He argues that the 'sundered' view of communication is critiqued as an expression of aesthetic despair and disengagement in *EOI* as, 'de-spirited sensuality...spirit sundered from its true place, its world, others, its own body.' [Ronald. L. Hall, *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.189.]

⁶² Christopher Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 88.

⁶³ Paul Sponheim, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 5.

⁶⁴ M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard: Godly Deceiver: The Nature and Meaning of His Pseudonymous Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). As other examples, see:

provide a coherent, Christian perspective from which to interpret the rest. Kingo similarly adopts this approach, claiming that ‘religious upbuilding’, as explicated in the upbuilding discourses, provides the unifying ‘orienting-perspective’ for interpreting all texts in the corpus.⁶⁵ This understates the degree of fragmentation operative in the signed works, which often present different perspectives.⁶⁶ It also devalues the pseudonymous works and their exploration of concepts that are prerequisites of developments in the signed works.⁶⁷ The unity this imposes is a reductive unity that does not explain the deeper, dialectical coherence Kierkegaard and Climacus posit of the authorship.

(1.3.d) My Approach: Dialogical Coherence and Kierkegaard as a Philosopher of Authentic Selfhood

The perspective adopted by this thesis is a fusion of (U3) and (U4). It views the authorship as fragmented, but posits a unifying strategy in the trajectory of the authorship that is also underpinned by a number of concepts and structures. The authorship is viewed as a dialogue between genuinely distinct perspectives but on shared subject matters. To this end, Climacus and

Eduard Geismar, *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), p. 42. Louis Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999), p. 12.

⁶⁵ ‘Orienteringspunktet’. Anders Kingo, *Den opbyggelige tale* (Copenhagen: G.E.C.Gad, 1987), p. 137.

⁶⁶ Pattison warns against any such reduction of the authorship to an authoritative religious perspective, pointing out that the use of left and right hand imagery in the corpus, which in PoV seems to favour the religious, is ambiguous. Climacus, for example, argues for choosing the left over the right if the right is understood as leading to fixture or hubris in truth-claims (CUP, p. 106) [George Pattison, ‘Kierkegaard’s Hands.’ In Robert L. Perkins (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Point of View* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), pp. 104-116.]

⁶⁷ Michael Strawser demonstrates this convincingly, claiming that, ‘the aesthetic is present in the religious’. Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification*, p. 179. An example of this failure is Hartshorne’s treatment of CUP, which he interprets as a covert deconstruction of subjective self-actualisation in favour of grace and faith. He fails to recognise the important positive function of the text in mapping out a process of development that leads to religious existence, including its reflections on grace and faith. [M. Holmes Hartshorne, *Kierkegaard: Godly Deceiver: The Nature and Meaning of His Pseudonymous Writings*, p. 43.]

Anti-Climacus' texts have been chosen because of their dialogical, thematic, and conceptual relationship to each other. Two conceptual structures are key to the unity underpinning their distinct perspectives.

(1.3.d.i) *The Spheres of Existence*

In conformity with a number of commentators, I identify the theory of the stages, 'stadier', or spheres of existence, 'Existents-Spærer' as providing an underlying structure.⁶⁸ The authorship aims to map out, through the spheres of existence, various ways of being and constituting personhood in the human situation.⁶⁹ These spheres express whole life-views and ways of being in the world, 'existence-possibilities', grounded in existential commitments (CUP, p. 253). These are presented in the different texts so as to draw readers into dialogue with and between them on how they are to constitute their own personhood, particularly with a view to living out authentic selfhood in response to the human situation.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Climacus' exegesis of the authorship in terms of the spheres is provided in 'A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature' (CUP, pp. 251-300). See also: Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, p. 6. And: Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self*.

⁶⁹ My use of the term personhood relies on Hannay's claim that personhood and 'personal truth', in an age threatened by spiritlessness, are the best ways to describe the concern of Kierkegaard's contemporaries. This is supported by Kierkegaard's claim that the authorship's aim is to facilitate personal appropriation in response to a universal challenge, 'to read through solo, if possible in a more inward way, the original text of individual human existence-relationships' (CUP, pp. 629-630). For Hannay's justification of the preference of the term personhood over a range of alternative terms, see: Alastair Hannay, 'Kierkegaard on Commitment, Personality, and Identity'. In, Edward F. Mooney (ed.), *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁷⁰ It is common to identify several main spheres, such as the aesthetic, ethical and religious, but this is to be avoided because it homogenises the perspectives in a way that impairs the fragmentation of the authorship. The list of seven spheres outlined by Climacus is not definitive but includes more than Kierkegaard's homogenisation of them into three: immediacy, finite common sense, irony, ethics, humour and Religiousness A and B (CUP, pp. 531-532). This is not unique to Climacus: Pojman lists at least nine that emerge in the corpus. [Louis Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 29.] Thus, it should not be taken as a reductive approach to human ways of being. Furthermore, the various spheres are presented and evaluated differently in different Kierkegaardian works, such that the perspectivism they convey is intrinsic

This approach attributes several levels of coherence to the authorship. First, it posits the unity of subject in the disparate works as attempts to map out particular life-views with a view to constituting personhood. Second, it posits relationships between the texts, in that they may occupy similar life-views or may develop concepts raised in different spheres, positively or critically. Third, it posits a coherent dialogue over the course of the authorship.

The evidence supports this approach. Whatever their other preoccupations, the texts have a relation to the question of personhood; and some general life-views, such as the aesthetic, ethical, and religious, recur throughout the corpus. This approach explains the necessity of fragmentation in the corpus and is compatible with Kierkegaard's interpretations, which posit it as motivated by the desire to explore such possibilities.

Three distinct elements are discernable in Climacus' analysis of the spheres: (S1) the commitment itself, (S2) indications of how the commitment can be subjectively appropriated and lived out, and (S3) how this is incorporated into living out an authentic response to the human situation and constituting selfhood.⁷¹ These are evident in Climacus' explanation of the task of constituting authentic selfhood as entailing subjective appropriations of the universal identities the spheres present (CUP, p. 73) in responding authentically to the human situation, "To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation...and the

to the model itself: even the understanding of the model of the spheres occurs from within the perspective provided by one's sphere. Hence this approach should not be seen as privileging the religious texts: each sphere is evaluated from within other spheres, such that it is not possible to achieve an authoritative perspective that is not relative and partial. This suggests that, rather than providing a neat map of the stages of human development, these provide fragmented and eclectic depictions of various ways of being: 'sketches' that are important for the Climacian and Kierkegaardian projects and evaluated from their own perspectives. The term 'sketch' is taken from: Peder Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity*, p. 169.

⁷¹ The significance of these will not be fully explained in this chapter, but it provides the basis for discussions in subsequent chapters.

point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.⁷² This is further illuminated by Anti-Climacus' claim that the human condition involves two competing factors: the infinite possibilities and capacities of agency and imagination alongside the finite limitations, contingency of identity, and necessary features of finite human existence (SuD, p. 13), all of which must be dialectically incorporated in a self-relation in authentic selfhood.⁷³

(S1) The different spheres depict universalised and entire 'life-views' (CUP, p. 80): sets of possibilities and resources that inform ways of being and developing personhood. Each sphere provides an idealised set of possibilities and is autonomous and total, in that it expresses a full way of being. They are defined and distinguished from each other by central, core commitments that provide 'psychological consistency' in how they shape the rest of a person's way of being (CUP, p. 625). Defining commitments include: 'disclosure' and 'duty', which constitute, 'the life of the ethical' (CUP, p. 258; p. 267); and 'depression', which is the essence of the aesthetic and motivates its pursuit of diversionary desire and pleasure (CUP, p. 253). Each sphere can have a distinct set of criteria for decision-making, different ways of interpreting experience, different values, moods and experiences, existential struggles (CUP, p. 625), ways of configuring

⁷² CUP, p. 192. 'Virkelighed', actuality, is used to signify the concrete nature of existence as a processual, eventful, and temporal reality, particularly linked to subjective activity in transforming subjectivity in relation to one's context (CUP, p. 339). This interpretation is supported by: Julia Watkin, *Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard's Philosophy* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2001), p. 12.

⁷³ The reasons for this are not clearly stated by the pseudonyms, who are content with a phenomenological exploration of the spheres. Piette sees it as a result of the emergence of communal living, in which the person has to adopt a 'minimal' modality through which they curtail their capacity for endless subjective creation and allow stable cooperation with others by adopting certain structures as normative and constructing identities from the limited range of possibilities provided by these social and cultural norms. [Albert Piette, 'Existence, Minimality, and Believing'. In, Michael Jackson and Albert Piette (eds.), *What is Existential Anthropology?* (Oxford: Berhahn Books, 2015), p. 191; p. 209.]

relationships (CUP, p. 266; p. 294), and foster different personality traits (CUP, p. 296).⁷⁴

(S2) Persons exist in finite and deterministic contexts that impose limitations and necessity on their existential activity. The very resources that can be used to constitute personhood must be drawn from the limited environment in which they live, 'His concrete self...has necessity and limitations, is this very specific being with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations, etc.' (SuD, p. 68) It also includes identities and characteristics that one may have inherited from one's situation, such as the cultural norms and structures of society. Their abilities are also limited, such that they cannot achieve all of the possibilities that are imagined in the idealised spheres. Their local existential context means that they will face specific challenges and have certain predetermined possibilities. The general features of the spheres will be lived out and appropriated in how they are expressed in these contexts.

(S3) Human persons are always engaged in negotiating these polarities of their being, as, 'that child who is begotten by the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is there continually striving', the various forces being ineliminable and thus entailing a continual task of constituting subjectivity by how one relates the tensions.⁷⁵ Thus, for Climacus, subjectivity is not a given

⁷⁴ These include features such as: 'good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc.' (CUP, p. 625) the 'hiddenness' of the aesthetic and 'openness' of the ethical (CUP, p. 254), self-responsibility and choice, an appropriative internalisation of existential orientations like doubt (CUP, p. 255), humour or faith (CUP, p. 271).

⁷⁵ CUP, p. 92. This view of authentic personhood as a dialectical structure of relational, self-relational, subjective activity that holds together elements in tension is echoed by Anti-Climacus in SuD (SuD, pp. 13-14), which presents authentic selfhood as the task of embodying the infinite and the finite in the concrete situation of actuality (SuD, p. 30). This interpretation is supported by: Arthur Krenz, 'The Socratic-Dialectical Anthropology of Søren Kierkegaard's *Postscript*'. In

but something that is developed through agency and the appropriation of the existential structures of the distinct spheres (CUP, p. 254).⁷⁶ This can be seen, for example, in how a single identity is subjectively expressed and moulded by different people who share a cultural identity or by the same person in different situations, as Piette observes, 'Humans possess a special skill for modalizing their presence by constantly injecting nuances, by creating mixtures of being, by fluidly shifting between modes and situations'.⁷⁷

This duality of the human condition has two significant consequences for personhood. First, all personhood is agonistic, alienated, and split.⁷⁸ Every sphere, including Christian existence, revolves around core existential conflicts that arise from living out their core commitments in the existential situation of the person, 'the comic is present in every stage of life...because where there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comic is present.'⁷⁹ These never find resolution within the sphere, each sphere entailing an, 'agony when existence is confused for them' (CUP, p. 264). As examples, Climacus identifies the 'cleft' in the aesthetic sphere of EOI caused by its experience of pain and depression (CUP, p. 252-253) and pursuit of diversionary desire; and the 'collision' between ethical obligation and the infinite passion of faith in FaT (CUP, p. 259). The nature of this conflict and how it is confronted and

Poul Houe, Gordon Marino and Sven Hakon Rossel (eds.) *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, pp. 17-26.

⁷⁶ George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p. 38.

⁷⁷ Albert Piette, 'Existence, Minimality, and Believing'. In, Michael Jackson and Albert Piette (eds.), *What is Existential Anthropology?*, p. 190.

⁷⁸ This is why Anti-Climacus claims that despair, 'tvivlelsen' is universal: because all persons are in doubt in this hopeless, heart-broken and desperate situation (SuD, p. 16). On 'tvivlelsen' as doubt, desperation and brokenness, see: *Dansk-Engelsk Ordbog*, ed. by Hermann Vinterberg and C. A. Bodelsen, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998), p. 2298.

⁷⁹ CUP, pp. 513-514. This is in conformity with Anti-Climacus' view of the person as defined by a central cleft between the finite and the infinite (SuD) and subverts the Hegelian idea of the subject as emerging through a dialectic as, for the pseudonyms, it never finds synthesis or completion as it always remains in process.

appropriated in the sphere is the defining struggle within each sphere, 'not in annulling the misunderstanding but in enthusiastically willing to endure it', (CUP, p. 268) and, though it is never resolved in the sphere, it may impel the individual to enter into other spheres, wherein the conflict may be intensified or overcome only to be replaced with new struggles. It is for this reason that Climacus equates the deepest inwardness with the deepest suffering, passion and strenuousness (CUP, p. 385). The formation of authentic selfhood is thus an agonistic process of becoming (CUP, p. 86), coterminous with the life of the person and of which alterity is an irrevocable feature as the person strives to live out their internal fragmentation through relations to others.

The ways of being described in the spheres are fragmented, complex, and multifarious, as are the relationships between them. Agency, although it plays a vital role in commitment and appropriation, is only a component, alongside passion, imagination, and deterministic factors, such as the existential situation in which one finds oneself. The attempt to construct subjectivity will always be a provisional, strenuous, artful activity and any reductive view of the spheres or their relationships must be avoided; readers must experiment for themselves, guided by the pioneering explorations of the texts, rather than assuming a predetermined outcome or that they can be easily adopted and dispensed with as acts of will.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Hence Climacus remarks about Christianity, 'what life-development is the condition for properly embracing Christianity.' (CUP, p. 292) Jøthen rejects Derrida's interpretation of the spheres on the grounds that it over emphasises will and agency, presenting a reductive view of subjectivity. [Peder Jøthen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity*, p. 4.]

The presentation of the spheres incorporates evaluations of the various ways of being with a view to facilitating authentic selfhood.⁸¹ Hence Climacus enquires into, 'what it means to exist *sensu eminenti*' (CUP, p. 385), and asserts that, 'subjectivity, inwardness, is truth' (CUP, p. 281), indicating that his aim is to uncover the way of being that facilitates living out authentic selfhood as one's personal, subjective truth in the context of the human situation.

Authenticity within a sphere involves subjectively appropriating and incorporating the infinite possibilities and capacities in the context of the finite situation and the limitations and resources it provides: living out one of these identities uniquely and subjectively in response to the existential challenges one faces, such that it becomes subjectively true. Hence the self is described as 'angular' and authenticity entails living out and grinding these identities into shape through subjective appropriation (SuD, p. 33). The spheres provide the possibilities that authentic selfhood lives out, like raw material that the skilful sculptor is able to shape into art.⁸² One is able to exercise agency in relating to or moving between these 'existence-relations' (CUP, p. 251; p. 630); they are also

⁸¹ My interpretation concurs with Pattison's claim that, 'subjectivity is not a capacity we simply possess'. (p. 38). This requires my interpretation distinguish between the existential context, which Climacus calls 'actuality', and subjectivity. While subjective appropriation is necessitated by the existential context, it is not the default position of human activity in the way that the embodied, existential context is: all human activity is embodied and existential, even if it aims to obfuscate this in objective abstraction, but not all human activity is subjective. Climacus presents subjectivity as a task that must be actualised by the person: a task. These are linked, in that the existential context demands a personal, individual, creative response in which one acknowledges the necessity of anxious choice, but the latter is not guaranteed, and much of culture and human activity is aimed at diversion from the necessity of this strenuous, self-creative task, such as the aesthetic sphere of *Either/Or I*. Hence Kierkegaard describes the development of subjectivity as being a development of the universal human situation, 'a person becomes that which he is essentially regarded to be (a horse, if it is trained and the trainer has good sense, becomes precisely a horse).' [Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer VIII:2 B 82 [Journals and Papers I 650, p. 279]* This also indicates that the advocacy of subjectivity is not the advocacy of passivity in simply adhering to one's relative position but rather requires a process of existential development on the part of the subjective thinker.

⁸² I owe this metaphor to: Peter Mehl, *Thinking Through Kierkegaard: Existential Identity in a Pluralistic World* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 88.

subjective and relative in that they are appropriated in various ways by those who live them out. Climacus refers to this as 'double-reflection' (CUP, pp. 73-80), in which a universalised set of possibilities and identities becomes subjectively instantiated.⁸³

⁸³ Hannay notes that the pseudonyms' conception of authentic selfhood can be interpreted in two ways: (i) As a revisionist Hegelian approach, which sees reality as composed of opposites that the subject must navigate and bring together in identity; here, its difference to Hegel is simply in positing a different identity, religiousness, as the authentic way to achieve this cohesive identity. (ii) As a 'deficit/fulfilment project' (p. 49), in which personhood is encountered as lacking and is composed by finding and living out a commitment capable of overcoming this deficit and fulfilling the project of authentic personhood; this is achieved by the absolute commitment of faith. [Alastair Hannay, 'Kierkegaard on Commitment, Personality, and Identity'. In, Edward F. Mooney (ed.), *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, pp. 48-49.] The core question is whether authenticity is achieved through (i) unity, cohesion and identity or (ii) remains within an agonistic dialectic that it lives out in authentic ways. Authenticity as unity of selfhood is supported, for example, by Connell, who claims that a 'positive synthesis' of selfhood is achieved in Christian and ethical spheres. [George B. Connell, *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 186.] Many narrativists, like Davenport, similarly claim that cohesive identity is achieved through the regulative principles of 'wholeheartedness' or 'volitional unity' [John J. Davenport, 'The Virtues of Ambivalence: Wholeheartedness as Existential *Telos* and the Unwillable Completion of Narratives'. In, John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes (eds.), *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 153.], which bring, 'our central commitments', into a, 'complex form of coherence', that he terms, 'unity' (p. 155). Although Davenport accepts that, for Kierkegaard, such unity is, in its fullest sense, eschatological, this is achieved through this-worldly wholeheartedness, not in a deus ex machine event (p. 159). Davenport rejects the priority of the idea of 'lack' in this process (pp. 154-155) on the grounds that identity involves living one's commitment in a wholehearted way rather than as a, 'completion of a "lack"' (p. 155). The interpretation offered here favours (ii), because the subject is defined by lacuna and its project is to find authentic personhood outside of itself in its relationships to others. This interpretation also incorporates features of (i), because the lacuna of 'spiritlessness' and project of constituting selfhood are marked by the contexts of fragmentation, collision and paradox. Authentic selfhood entails embodying and living out the tensions and paradoxes of the human situation, not fleeing them or negating them in synthetic identity and it is for this reason that authentic religiousness is described as 'pathos-filled and dialectical...because passion is the very tension in the contradiction' (CUP, pp. 385-386). I concur with Lippitt in seeing narrative wholeheartedness as a repressive act that fails to acknowledge and live out the ambivalence of the human situation [John Lippitt, 'Forgiveness and the Rat Man: Kierkegaard, 'Narrative Unity' and 'Wholeheartedness' Revisited'. In, John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes (eds.), *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self*, p. 133.] and with Helms' emphasis on narrative unity as hoped for but perpetually suspended, 'The task of a self...is in hope to anticipate convergence and fulfilment – that is, eucatastrophe – until the last possible moment.' [Eleanor Helms, 'The End in the Beginning: Eschatology in Kierkegaard's Literary Criticism'. In, John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes (eds.), *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self*, pp. 122-123.] Indeed, the view of the person as, like an author, bringing a unity to his body of work fails to appreciate the fragmentation of the author him/herself: the author is not an autonomous creator. This coheres with Climacus' view that the process of becoming never ends for the living person, such that unity, identity and the security of coherence are never achieved: it is a strenuous task one can never move beyond, 'Existence is the spacing that holds apart; the systematic is the conclusiveness that combines' (CUP, p. 118), and that continually produces failures that require continual recourse to grace (PiC, p. 67). This also fits with the Hegelian context and conceptuality of CUP and SuD, rather than the teleological Aristotelian view of authenticity as fulfilling human nature or Frankfurtian narrative unity. Yet this does not support

Climacus and Anti-Climacus contend that authenticity involves integrating the infinite/finite polarities of human existence into a dialectical identity that lives out both. Since the resources actualised in personhood are provided by the social context, authentic relationships are integral in pursuing authentic selfhood, as Evans observes, ‘What makes the self a self is a “criterion,” a goal or end by which the self measures itself. However, that criterion or sense of an ideal self is given in and through relations with others.... [It] is fundamentally a matter of coming to understand for oneself the ideals of selfhood that are embedded in the language and institutions of a society, so that one can consciously pursue those ideals for oneself.’⁸⁴ Conversely, inauthentic existence, marked by despair, is particularly characterised by inauthentic relationships with others.⁸⁵

Climacus and Anti-Climacus associate authenticity with the religious sphere.⁸⁶ Christian religiousness is considered as the most authentic way of

Hannay’s view that SuD supports Hegelian unity of selfhood. Rather, SuD subverts and and short circuits Hegelian unity through Hegel’s own structures: the dialectical emergence of consciousness from nothing. It also explains the relationship between lacuna and the fragmented nature of the human situation: what is lacked is the possibility of identity that the emergence of dialectical consciousness occasions.

⁸⁴ C. Stephen Evans, ‘Who is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death?* God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self’. In, C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. 271. This is supported by Collins’ argument that the authorship is immersed in dialogue with a range of literary figures and movements as part of his exploration of authentic and inauthentic selfhood, ‘The ideals and personages they celebrate provide him with multiple glints of human selfhood, different ways in which to realize our potential for becoming selves.’ [James Collins, ‘Kierkegaard’s Imagery of the Self’. In, Joseph H. Smith (ed.), *Kierkegaard’s Truth: The Disclosure of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 55.]

⁸⁵ This interpretation is supported by numerous texts in the early authorship, such as EO and SoLW, which sketch various relationships that are characterized by despair. This leads Elrod to define despair in relation to its social dimensions. [John W. Elrod, ‘The Social Dimension of Despair’. In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness unto Death* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 109.

⁸⁶ The possibility, suggested by my preceding exegesis of the spheres, that one can live out any sphere authentically, such as being an authentic aesthete, is not recognised by most interpreters, who accept the argument of PoV that the authorship advocates Christian existence. The perspectivism advocated in Chapter 2 precludes such an approach. As was also noted above, evaluations are made from within the perspective of a sphere, such that no objectively true

responding to the human situation. Indeed, Anti-Climacus argues that the person only exists as an authentic self in relation to God (SuD, p. 16).⁸⁷ Similarly, Climacus argues that a way of being is authentic when, as in Christianity, it entails an absolute, passionate commitment to an absolute, in the context of the human situation defined by finitude, temporality, and incapacity; this commitment is strenuous and uncertain because the individual lacks the guarantees to support such a commitment; it is made through an existentially transforming faith. This is seen as both authentically religious, because it provides a central role for faith, and as the most authentic response to the agonistic nature of the human situation. While this may reflect their deterministic religious context, it does demonstrate that the spheres can be assessed from how they facilitate response to the serious existential challenges facing human persons.

(1.3.d.ii) *Dialogical Method*

Given the impossibility of extricating oneself from one's life-view and one's own agonistic nature, all identities are fragmented, relative, and perspectival. By presenting life-views in this way, the authorship aims to draw readers into the process of engaging with them subjectively. A dialogical model fits the texts and claims of CUP and PoV, since this does not see the textual

conclusions can be reached about the value and viability of different spheres. This is also supported by the texts themselves. EOI, for example, maps out various strategies for maintaining the purity, erotic energy and perpetuity of the aesthetic sphere, such as seduction and the rotation method, thereby providing an image of the authentic aesthete. Since this thesis is focused on RD, it is not necessary to consider the viability of non-religious ways of being further here, though the discussion does have important consequences for the meaning of Kierkegaard's work and its wider significance beyond religion.

⁸⁷ This is similarly Evans' interpretation. Although he sees personhood as requiring the relation to others in a social context, it is ultimately only achieved by divine assistance. [C. Stephen Evans, 'Who is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self'. In, C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, p. 271.

perspectives as univocal but as distinct participants, dialogically related by considering similar themes from different perspectives.⁸⁸ This also draws readers into dialogue with and between the perspectives on the question of how they are to respond to the existential challenge of constituting personhood, the task being, 'to draw the multiplicity of selves and stages into a meaningful pattern.'⁸⁹

My thesis utilises a dialogical approach, treating Climacus and Anti-Climacus as distinct writers discussing related themes.⁹⁰ This follows the method advocated by Cappelørn and Deuser, attempting to construct an understanding of the concepts from the bottom up, rather than presupposing a unifying system, 'the corpus...must build itself up from the individual texts.'⁹¹ My thesis also enters into dialogue with their positions and brings them into dialogue with others to develop resources for engaging with RD and living out an authentic way of being in response to it. This approach is particularly apposite for

⁸⁸ Sinnett notes that this fits with the critical approach the pseudonyms take to each other, thereby retaining the fragmentation that characterizes the authorship, '[the] two sides not only do not confirm each other, but *are in rather spectacular conflict with each other.*' [M. W. Sinnett, *Restoring the Conversation: Socratic Dialectic in the Authorship of Søren Kierkegaard* (St Andrews: Theology in Scotland, 2000) p.11.] For comparable, dialogical approaches see, for example: George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002); W. Glenn Kirkconnell, 'The Elegant Unity of Kierkegaard's Authorship.' In Robert L. Perkins (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Point of View*, pp. 377-390. Pattison notes, for example, that *Fear and Trembling* and the accompanying *Upbuilding Discourses* offer different portrayals of Abraham, and both involve discussions of 'silence' in the presence of the divine. Kirkconnell identifies recurring themes that are the basis for inter-textual dialogue in *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition* and the accompanying *Upbuilding Discourses*, such as the focus on trial in relation to 'inner being' and the consideration of happy love achieved through seduction (EOI), marriage (EOII), which are criticised as 'recollection-love' by Rep in its support of 'repeated-love' but this similarly fails as it is assessed by the upbuilding discourse.

⁸⁹ Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology from Either/Or to Sickness unto Death* (London: Routledge, 1996) p.2.

⁹⁰ For this reason, when citing or discussing a text, it will be attributed to the particular pseudonym. Where I occasionally use the word 'Kierkegaardian' it should be taken as shorthand for the pseudonymous views that I am outlining.

⁹¹ Hermann Deuser and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, 'Perspectives in Kierkegaard Research'. In, N. J. Cappelørn and H. Deuser (eds.), *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook: 1996* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p.12.

responding to RD: by presenting an irresolvable dialogue between irreducible perspectives, the authorship provides prime resources for engaging with religious diversity itself, and my dialogue with these opens this out to advocate deep existential engagement with others as integral to authentic selfhood.

1.4. Kierkegaard and Religious Diversity

(1.4.a) Literature

Protracted, Kierkegaardian treatments of RD are offered by Fehir and Connell.⁹² Both identify Kierkegaardian resources for addressing RD, drawing on themes like subjectivity, paradox, and uncertainty to circumvent problematic questions of conflicting truth-claims.⁹³ I concur with Connell's proposal that a Kierkegaardian approach incorporates both faithfulness and openness in a way that embraces, 'specific religious convictions and texts...[yet] opens up those specific resources in ways that invite broader conversations.'⁹⁴ Beyond this, our approaches diverge.

Fehir and Connell claim that Kierkegaard devotes little attention to RD; Fehir sees diversity as, 'not a very "Kierkegaardian" question at all'.⁹⁵ Rather, they see this question as imposed by the contemporary situation: in the light of the limited and exclusivist resources provided by Kierkegaard, engagement with RD is a necessary evil.⁹⁶ While they attempt to draw pluralist or inclusivist resources from Kierkegaard, they see this as impeded by his adherence to an exclusivist conception of faith as absolute commitment and of Christianity as the highest expression of this, 'Like Plantinga, Kierkegaard describes faith as full, unqualified commitment (subjective certainty) to a belief that is acknowledged

⁹² These were published near the completion of my thesis, after which my position was already established, but engagement with them has allowed me to identify and address problems to which they succumb. George B. Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016) [Hereafter Connell, KPRD]. Aaron Fehir, *Kierkegaardian Reflections on the Problem of Religious Pluralism* (London: Lexington Books, 2015) [Hereafter Fehir, KRPRP].

⁹³ Connell, KPRD, pp. 69-80. Fehir, KRPRP, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁴ George B. Connell, KPRD, p. 13.

⁹⁵ Aaron Fehir, KRPRP, ix.

⁹⁶ Connell sees Kierkegaard's primary engagement with extant religious diversity as being in his supersessionist and disparaging comments about Judaism and other religious traditions, which he sees Kierkegaard as grouping into a threefold typology of Christian-Jew-Pagan. [Connell, KPRD, pp. 28-29.]

as objectively uncertain.⁹⁷ The result is that they see Kierkegaard's position on diversity as underdeveloped or flawed and, in developing fuller positions, they are forced to be unfaithful to his position.⁹⁸ Connell develops a 'parallelist' position, which balances the absolute commitment of faith with a humour that allows persons to take religiousness, 'with a grain of salt', such that they can coexist alongside others while maintaining their own faith in a 'laid back' attitude of tolerant humility.⁹⁹

In contrast, I argue that a more authentically Kierkegaardian response to RD is facilitated by, and latently present in, the authorship. Moreover, this approach provides for a fuller and more radical alternative to the dominant paradigms. Rather than attempting to identify the Kierkegaardian response as exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist, I argue that the problem can be completely reconceptualised from a Kierkegaardian perspective and that this facilitates a full, authentic engagement with diversity. This is not an unfortunate consequence of living in a diverse context in which one has to learn to live parallel with others; rather, full engagement with others is a fundamental feature of authentic Kierkegaardian religiousness.

(1.4.b) Kierkegaard's Exclusivist Context

Contrary to Fehir's view that Kierkegaard did not face problems of diversity, it is evident that the authorship is critically engaged with at least one central issue about diversity: exclusivist views of Christianity. The opening sections of CUP are engaged with a crisis of religious authority (CUP, pp. 23-49)

⁹⁷ Connell, KPRD, p. 102. See also: Fehir, KRPRP, x.

⁹⁸ Connell, KPRD, p. 105. Aaron Fehir, KRPRP, xiii.

⁹⁹ Connell, KPRD, p. 100.

and the whole text explores the nature of and basis for personal religious commitment. Henriksen interprets Climacus as responding to the decline of the socially given plausibility structures on which Christianity was dependent, due to an awareness of RD.¹⁰⁰ Henriksen fails to cite evidence for the link between this decline and RD; it is possible that the decline results from other factors.¹⁰¹ The source of the crisis appears to be a number of contentious theological disputes to which Kierkegaard was exposed in the 1830's and 1840's. These revolved around the question of the locus of authority in Christianity and, due to the diversity within Christianity, involved various exclusivist appeals to different authorities.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Jan-Olav Henriksen, *The Reconstruction of Religion: Lessing, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), p. 7.

¹⁰¹ For example, it could be occasioned by the choice between atheism and Christianity or, as Bahler suggests, between commitment to Christianity or 'paganism'. Indeed, Climacus does not discuss non-Christian religions. [Brock Bahler, 'Kierkegaard's View of Religious Pluralism in Concluding Unscientific Postscript.' *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 3, no.1 (2011) p. 5. [<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal/vol3/iss1/2>]]

¹⁰² For example, Martensen's critical review of Kolthoff's *Apocalypsis Joanni Apostolo vindicate*, written when he was Kierkegaard's private theology tutor in 1834, rejected its appeal to 'the unanimity of the Church tradition', and argued that the Protestant principle requires a decision of personal conscience supported by critical biblical scholarship on the issue of the canonicity of a text, 'he must, according to the Protestant principle, have this conviction at first hand, i.e., he must know its originality and genuineness *as such*.' [Martensen, *Maanedskrift for Litteratur*, vol.12, p. 21. In Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialectic: A Study in the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel's Publishers, 2007), p. 58]. Mynster's authoritarian ecclesial intervention in the Baptist controversy of the early 1840's, in which he argued for the state-imposed baptism of children enshrined in the royal edict *Kancelliplakat* (1842), provoked a controversy about the nature of faith and commitment in relation to church authorities. Kierkegaard's contemporaries regarded CUP as a contribution to this debate and as criticising appeals to and reliance on church authorities, Eriksson citing it as opposing the church's, 'wretched faith in authority' in favour of the view that, 'each person has faith on his own, and not by means of a foreign faith, not by means of another's faith.' [Magnus Eriksson, *Tro, Overto og Vantrø*, p. 105. Cited in Gerhard Schreiber, 'Eriksson: An Opponent of Martensen and an Unwelcome Ally of Kierkegaard.' In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries, Tome II: Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 58] Grundtvig's 'church theory' similarly invested authority in the church, positing the uniting aspect of true Christianity throughout the ages as Christian acceptance of salvation through reception of the church-distributed sacrament of baptism. [N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Udvalgte Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1904-09), vol.10, p. 353. Cited in Anders Holm, 'Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant.' In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries, Tome II: Theology*, p. 98] The locus of authority was also at stake in the debates over Hegelian interpretations of Christianity. For Heiberg, Hegelian rationalism legitimated Christian belief by showing that, even though it was a human religion, it represented a manifestation of Spirit, 'philosophy confirms the legitimacy of our finite undertakings, specifically by showing how the infinite is their goal'. [Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *On the*

Furthermore, the positions of Kierkegaard's opponents, who had significant impacts on Christianity in Denmark, were exclusivist.¹⁰³ Mynster and Grundtvig maintained the exclusive authority and truth of a revelation mediated by scripture, creeds, sacraments or the church. Mynster saw 'immediate conviction' as a possibility for the recipients of the divine revelation mediated by church tradition, 'Here the Christian finds what he seeks, a sensate phenomenon, in which the eternal clearly comes forth and which satisfies the religious drive.... Thus, I know that the divine has been revealed and come closer to me'.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Martensen and Heiberg's approaches to RD were exclusivist, investing authority in Hegelian dialectic. Martensen utilised a Hegelian hierarchy of religious truth with primitive, 'oprindelige', religion finding its highest development in a Hegelian, philosophical demythologisation of Christianity.¹⁰⁵ Heiberg stressed that religions make competing and mutually exclusive claims because they are contextual expressions of the infinite, but speculative philosophy provides a way of unveiling the infinite, overcoming diversity in a higher exclusivist unity, 'When one recognizes that the truth is the common, substantial content which unites them...and one knows this by...grasping their

Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age. In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Heiberg's On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2005), p. 102] Martensen and Heiberg are clearly targets of sections of CUP. [See: 'The Speculative Point of View.' CUP, p. 50. And Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer X:6 B 114*, pp. 147-8 and *Papirer X:6 B 121 [Journals and Papers VI, 6574, p.275]*. See also: Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations with Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 517].

¹⁰³ Many interpreters see the opening sections of CUP as part of Kierkegaard's fideistic campaign against rationalism, [e.g. Robert M. Adams, *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)] but this fails to explain why Mynster and institutional Christianity are targets alongside Hegel. Interpreting the text as critiquing exclusivism explains its diverse targets.

¹⁰⁴ Jakob Peter Mynster, 'On Religious Conviction'. In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Heiberg's On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialectic: A Study in the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen*, p.45.

common substance as *Concept*...and this is what philosophy is—then one realizes that they all can exist peacefully alongside one another.’¹⁰⁶

Climacus criticises these exclusivist views in, ‘The Historical Point of View’ (CUP, p. 23), which describes the assertions of Mynster and Grundtvig, and, ‘The Speculative Point of View’ (CUP, p. 50), which describes the views of the Danish Hegelians.¹⁰⁷ My thesis will demonstrate that Climacus and Anti-Climacus critique the theoretical commitments that underpin these exclusivist positions, particularly in relation to religious knowing and salvation. Climacus’ construction of faith as subjective commitment provides a critical response to a context of exclusivism and aims to demonstrate its inimical effects on Christian faith and religiousness. Thus, although the authorship is not directly engaged with questions about RD, it emerged from a context dominated by religious exclusivism and issues of peer diversity.

It will also be shown that, in reflecting on the exclusivist context, Kierkegaard provides compelling reasons to reject the approaches of exclusivism and pluralism and also the underlying conception of religion and diversity on which these positions are based. His reconceptualization of religious faith and commitment on non-exclusivist grounds will also be shown to facilitate and energise a full engagement with RD as integral to authentic religiousness itself, providing a deeper response to RD than Connell’s parallelism.

¹⁰⁶ Johan Ludvig Heiberg, *On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age*. In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Heiberg’s On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age and Other Texts*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Hence Climacus claims to lack authority himself so as to not perpetuate the debate about the location of authority (CUP, p. 618). This is also apparent in the focus of the opening sections of CUP: ‘The Historical Point of View’ criticises reliance on the authority of the bible and ecclesial tradition, and ‘The Speculative Point of View’ rejects attempts to legitimate the truth of religious positions through appeal to reason (CUP, p. 23; p. 50). Holm notes that the title of Part One of CUP, ‘The Objective Issue of the Truth of Christianity’, refers to the titles of Grundtvig’s treatises, ‘On True Christianity’ and ‘On Christianity’s Truth’. [Anders Holm, ‘Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant.’ In Jon Stewart (ed.) *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries, Tome II: Theology*, p. 98].

(1.4.c) Kierkegaardian Resources for Engaging with RD in Philosophy of Religion

Chapter 3 demonstrates that engagements with RD in philosophy of religion have been characterised by the abstraction of the discipline and its focus on truth-claims and knowledge.¹⁰⁸ Alongside its different conception of religion, the authorship presents a different conception of philosophy. A full discussion of Kierkegaard's philosophical project is beyond this thesis, but I follow a number of commentators in identifying several key features of his philosophical approach that make it particularly valuable for approaching RD.¹⁰⁹

First, Kierkegaard's philosophical focus is on persons and their lived, subjective situations. Climacus identifies the person as the subject matter of philosophy, 'every human being is assigned to himself. In that regard, he himself is more than enough for himself; indeed, he is the only place where *he* can with certainty study it' (CUP, pp. 141-142). Anti-Climacus' complaint against Hegelian

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Swinburne's outline of the programme of philosophy of religion as aimed at verifying/falsifying religious beliefs that are expressed in coherent metaphysical systems. [Richard Swinburne, 'The Value and Christian Routes of Analytical Philosophy of Religion.' In, Harriet Harris & Christopher Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis* (Ashgate, 2005), p. 34.]

¹⁰⁹ My understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophical project is particularly influenced by continental appropriations of Kierkegaard, such as Goodchild's view that, in contrast to analytical philosophy, such philosophers, 'question the whole framework of the debate by questioning confidence in the empirical and rational epistemologies used to decide the issue' and recognise 'religion' is not merely a matter of purely rational concern, but is shaped by imagination and passion, involving the whole person.' [Philip Goodchild, 'Continental Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction.' In Philip Goodchild (ed.) *Rethinking Philosophy of Religion: Approaches from Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 9-10.] This also involves reading Kierkegaard in relation to existential and phenomenological philosophy, as it understands him as aiming to reflect on human existence in ways that are fuller and more descriptively accurate, sensitive and imaginative. [That Kierkegaard is a proto-phenomenologist is the thesis of the contributors to Jeffrey Hanson (ed.) *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).] I do not regard Kierkegaard as an anti-philosopher, but as arguing for a more expansive philosophy that incorporated human existence and emotion more fully as well as aiming, under the influence of the projects of ancient philosophy, to provide resources for living a good human life. [In support of the view that Kierkegaard attempts to reintroduce such themes from ancient philosophy, see: Rick Furtak, 'Kierkegaard and the Passions of Hellenistic Philosophy.' In Tonny Aagaard Olesen, Richard Purkarthofer and K.Brian Soderquist (eds.), *Kierkegardiana 24* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2007), p. 69.]

rationality is that its abstraction is reductive by eliminating the actuality and specificity of human subjects and their emotional and existential features (SuD, pp. 43-44). This approach thus stresses the centrality of descriptive, phenomenological accuracy in understanding human persons and their existential situations, incorporating imagination, emotion, experimentation, and a focus on human realities, such as questions of personhood and identity.¹¹⁰ Such aspects of human being are regarded by Kierkegaard as integral to our relationships to the world, which are, in turn, integral to our ways of knowing, as Furtak observes, 'For Kierkegaard...the emotions ought to be acknowledged as a valuable kind of cognitive rationality.'¹¹¹ Furthermore, philosophers are called to be emotionally engaged and passionate in response to the ultimate importance of existential questions for their lives (CUP, p. 73; SuD, p. 5). Hence a Kierkegaardian approach to philosophy may provide a fuller conception of human rationality that is more sensitive to the subjects on which it reflects and has deeper existential significance for philosophers.

In relation to RD, this provides a number of advances beyond the limited approach of analytical philosophy of religion. It has the potential to view religions not as abstract metaphysical systems, such that the question of diversity is primarily about conflicting-truth claims and knowledge, but rather as bound up with the subjective commitments, emotions, and situations of their

¹¹⁰ As Kevin Hart observes, Kierkegaard, 'is a philosopher for whom proving is less important than showing.' Kevin Hart, 'The Elusive Reductions of Søren Kierkegaard.' In, Jeffrey Hanson (ed.), *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ Rick Furtak, 'Kierkegaard and the Passions of Hellenistic Philosophy.' In, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, Richard Purkarthofer and K.Brian Soderquist (eds.), *Kierkegaardiana 24*, p. 71. Grøn identifies this as helping to explain the focus of various Kierkegaardian works on subjectivity as something other than relativism or egocentric denial of intersubjectivity: they are concerned with subjectivity itself as the possibility of relating, not with specific relationships, 'not subjectivity as foundation for relating to the world, but subjectivity *as* relating.' [Arne Grøn, 'Self-Givenness and Self-Understanding: Kierkegaard and the Question of Phenomenology.' In, Jeffrey Hanson (ed.), *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, p. 84.]

adherents. This presents a wider and more descriptively accurate approach to RD. Moreover, it acknowledges the emotional and existential problems posed by RD, which require approaches that facilitate existential response to these challenges.

Second, the Kierkegaardian authorship has the aim of facilitating authentic selfhood and, 'a properly religious way of being in the world', that is a response to a divine reality.¹¹² The Kierkegaardian approach prioritises the development of selfhood and healthy interpersonal relationships. The fruits of philosophical rationality must be pragmatically valuable to human persons in living out transformed, authentic lives in response to their existential and religious situations.¹¹³ Indeed, given the view of religiousness mapped out by the authorship: that it is a passionate, risky venture encountered at the limits of one's identity and in encounters with inassimilable others who make absolute demands, a central strand of my argument is that there are fecund intersections between authentic religious faith and deep engagement with RD.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Jeffrey Bloechl, 'Kierkegaard Between Fundamental Ontology and Theology: Phenomenological Approaches to Love of God.' In, Jeffrey Hanson (ed.), *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, p. 25. See also: George Pattison, 'Kierkegaard and the Limits of Phenomenology.' In, Jeffrey Hanson (ed.), *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, pp. 193-4. In this way, it goes beyond phenomenological description and epoche.

¹¹³ Come sees this as Kierkegaard's central philosophical commitment, 'his goal, his *ending* is not a system of ideas or even understanding, but is to turn his 'subjective reflexion' toward the task of transformation of his concrete existence as a self.' Arnold B. Come, 'Kierkegaard's Method: Does He Have One?' In, N. J. Cappelørn, Helge Hultberg and Poul Lübcke (eds.), *Kierkegaardiana XIV* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1988), p. 22.]

¹¹⁴ This is suggested by Levinas, who sees such a radical encounter with the other as key to Kierkegaardian views of transcendence. Emmanuel Levinas, 'A Propos of "Kierkegaard Vivant"'. In, Daniel W. Conway (ed.), *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Volume 1*, p. 115.

1.5. Prolegomenon

My thesis is that a Kierkegaardian perspective on religion provides a critique of and alternative to the limited, dominant approaches to RD within philosophy of religion. An exegesis of and dialogue with Kierkegaardian concepts is used to construct the approach of unbounded commitment, which entails both passionate fidelity and boundary-crossing openness. It is argued that this provides an authentic Christian response to the central, existential challenges posed by RD that incentivises and energises full, deep engagement with others. This provides a persuasive approach to RD as it incorporates the subjective nature of religious commitment and retains the fidelity that Christians feel towards Christ alongside radical openness and obligation to finding God's grace and revelation in others.

Chapter 2 outlines a Kierkegaardian approach to religiousness through a close exegesis of Climacus' and Anti-Climacus' conceptions of religion, religious epistemology, and Christology. In dialogue with their texts, I sketch an existential-phenomenological approach to religion that is used to identify key features of Christian faith and devotion as well as to present a Kierkegaardian conception of authentic Christian religiousness as a transforming relation to an absolute in the finite human situation. To develop this position as a fuller basis for engaging with the literature on RD, I also map out an existential epistemology inspired by Climacus that denies the possibility of objective religious knowledge as always preceded by tacit existential commitments that are inextricably subjective and hermeneutical. The pseudonyms' Christologies are also outlined, as the unique and universal claims made about Christ pose serious problems for engagement with diversity and have provided the basis for many influential

Christian approaches to it. Later chapters seek to build on these Christological themes to show how they can motivate rather than obstruct full engagement with RD.

Chapters 3 and 4 outline and critique the dominant approaches to RD. Chapter 3 critiques the classical typology developed by philosophers of religion. It is argued that this problematization and typology of approaches fundamentally misrepresents the nature of religion and RD by understanding them objectively. This is critiqued from the Kierkegaardian perspective developed in Chapter 2. It then proposes an alternative, existential typology, which understands positions based on the type of commitment they foster: closed commitment, Quixotic commitment, partial commitment, or non-commitment. These are identified as varieties of despair that are expressed in the ways of being facilitated by pluralism and exclusivism. Chapter 4 utilises this existential typology to critique exclusivist and pluralist Christologies as leading to types of inauthentic existence: closed or Quixotic commitment. My interpretation of the pseudonyms' Christologies are distinguished from these positions and used to critique them as well as to open up new avenues for engagement with RD from a Christian perspective.

Chapters 5 and 6 develop an alternative, Kierkegaardian approach to RD, summed up as unbounded commitment, and sketch an existential theology of religions alongside an authentic Christian religiousness that is engaged with RD. Chapter 5 outlines the basic features of my existential theology of religions, contrasting it with inclusivism and expounding two key theoretical commitments: existential situationism and the Christological horizon of divine activity beyond Christian boundaries. In elucidating these features, the aim is to

define unbounded commitment as a way of living out authentic Christian religiousness with full fidelity to Christ that is simultaneously radically open to others and does not cling to its own boundaries. This incorporates Christological themes that assert God's activity in the other such that these two factors in tension energise each other: the radical commitment to Christ demands radical openness to others and the encounter with others is the site at which divine revelation and grace are encountered most fully. Chapter 6 proposes resources for facilitating deep fidelity and open engagement in interreligious encounter, through the attitudes and behaviours of participants.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUSNESS AS BEING IN TRANSFORMATION:

AN EXISTENTIAL VIEW OF RELIGION

(2.1) Argument in Brief

This chapter engages with Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and Anti-Climacus' *Practice in Christianity*. Utilising the insights of these texts, it sketches an existential approach to religion as a way of being in response to features of the human situation. In this framework, it presents a conception of authentic Christian religiousness as a transforming relation to an absolute in the finite human context. To facilitate the application of this position to RD, the second part of the chapter outlines my interpretation of Climacus' epistemology of religious knowing as an interpretative activity underpinned by existential commitments and delimited by the ineluctable contingency of its human context, such that objective religious knowledge cannot be possessed because it is entirely dependent on tacit subjective commitments. The third part of the chapter outlines my interpretation of the key features of the pseudonyms' Christologies as presenting a collision with a radical other in an offensive site as integral to authentic Christian faith. This provides a conception of authentic Christian religiousness that later chapters apply to RD.

(2.2) The Pseudonyms' Existential Approach to Religion Through the Spheres of Existence

(2.2.a) Religions in the Spheres of Existence

Section 1.3.d claimed that the spheres of existence provide the context for interpreting PF and CUP. The central question of CUP is, 'Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness...can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?' (CUP, p. 15, See also, PF, p. 1) Climacus qualifies this to mean that he is inquiring into how the person enters into Christian faith, which claims to achieve this, 'I...have heard that Christianity is one's prerequisite for this good. I now ask how I may enter into relation to this doctrine.' (CUP, pp. 15-16) This involves the question of how a normative, universalised religious identity and way of being, like Christianity, can be lived out in authentic selfhood in the specific situations of individuals (CUP, p. 73). He produces an existential-phenomenological account, focused on how embodied consciousness is enabled to adopt and affected by adopting Christian religiousness as a means of arriving at selfhood, 'the issue is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relation to Christianity' (CUP, p. 15).

Climacus charts religiousness by exploring how individuals configure personhood in a process of movement between different ways of being and boundary situations, such as the aesthetic and ethical (CUP, pp. 251-300). He also presents authentic selfhood as incorporating general features of subjectivity, such as the passionate appropriation of an ultimate relationship (Religiousness

A), and the specifically Christian form of religious subjectivity (Religiousness B).¹¹⁵

This framework allows for an understanding of religion to be formulated under the inspiration of the texts. Religions are understood as spheres of existence: existence-possibilities and ways of being in the world through how personhood is configured. The term religiousness, signifying a subjective way of being religious, is to be preferred over religion, which conveys an image of a static, objective body. The corpus invites the application of this to a range of religions, not just Christianity, by depicting various religious existence-possibilities.¹¹⁶ Climacus offers an existential-expressive account of religiousness as an activity of embodied consciousness, which he explores through a proto-phenomenological analysis focussed on how this is directed when individuals express it subjectively in ways that are religious.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ He interprets the entire Kierkegaardian authorship in the same way (CUP, pp. 251-300).

¹¹⁶ For examples, FaT, CUP, SoLW and EUD each have different configurations of their core faith-commitments and conflicts. Pojman makes this observation, though he fails to appreciate its value for understanding distinct religions by conflating them into two main spheres. Louis Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 37; p. 40.

¹¹⁷ This need not be a comprehensive account of religion, nor is it the only view developed within the Kierkegaardian corpus. It is rather offered as a thought-experiment or 'imaginary construction' exploring the consequences of religion in relation to human subjectivity (CUP, p. 15 and p. 617). While the claim that religions are a human activity and way of constructing subjectivity could compete with religions' own understandings of themselves, for example, as divinely revealed, this need not be the case: Climacus distinguishes between the objects of religious devotion and religious commitments themselves ('the issue is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relation to Christianity' [CUP, p.15]), making only minimal pronouncements about the objects and confining himself to an epistemological position on the undecidability and unknowability of the essential nature and truth of such objects from the human perspective and thus asserts that the subjective human commitment is always a decisive issue, as one must decide whether and how to commit in the face of uncertainty. Whatever else religions may be, they are, at their core, human responses. Thus, Climacus is willing to entertain the possibility of a divine origin of Christianity but maintains that even if a person shows subservience to a particular religious system, this entails their own decision to do this with a lack of sufficient guarantees. This enables Climacus to maintain a balanced account of religion, between the excesses of supernaturalist neglect of the human character of religion, which is unfaithful to the genesis and character of scripture as a fallible and historically relative entity [Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 212] and a purely anthropocentric account that omits the supernatural and thus the fundamental claims of Christianity. This approach allows a more faithful and descriptive approach to the existential, experiential and empirical data of Christianity [John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*

The spheres provide a model for describing and analysing religions as ways of being and configuring personhood around core commitments and conflicts in addition to understanding encounters and transitions between different religions as ways of responding to the human situation. Other important features elucidated include how religions shape subjectivity, facilitate action and decision-making, the moods and experiences they provoke, how they configure relationships, values and thought. While the emphasis is on phenomenological, descriptive accuracy, key evaluative questions include whether it is a viable and coherent way of being and what happens when its structures are pursued to their maximum limits and boundaries.

Phenomenological components include Climacus' exploration of guilt, renunciation, suffering, and faith as they are expressed and experienced subjectively. Religiousness is understood as a way of constituting one's subjectivity, particularly shaping and cultivating 'inwardness' as an internal capacity of subjectivity that involves, 'imagination, feeling, and dialectics in impassioned existence-inwardness.... But first and last, passion'.¹¹⁸ Subjectivity should not be understood as, 'whim, eccentricity, or arbitrary taste'; rather, it refers to the process of configuring personhood creatively in a lived context, as Mooney explains, particularly embodying, 'a complex relational pattern of deep

(London: SCM Press, 1977 [Revised Edition]), pp. 56-57], allows religions to be seen as vital ways of responding to the existential challenges posed by the human situation and, in a secular and religiously diverse context, it also offers the possibility of dialogue and comprehension of diversity as relative to different human responses to the divine [George Pattison, *Agnosis: Theology in the Void* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 165.]

¹¹⁸ CUP, p. 350; 405. While no clear definition is offered of inwardness, it is closely linked with such factors in Climacus' claim, 'inwardness is subjectivity; subjectivity is essentially passion, and at its maximum an infinite, personally interested passion for one's eternal happiness.' (CUP, p. 33)

personal concern', that emphasises personal agency and responsibility.¹¹⁹ Religious subjectivities are thus to be described as both experiential, in that they are features of conscious experience, and existential, in that they entail particular configurations of subjectivity and embodied activity, shaping, organising and expressing personhood. Hence, for example, passion is understood not as a merely affective state but primarily as pathos-filled action.¹²⁰ His model is existential-expressive in that it regards religious language and structures as expressing and shaping existential commitments.

(2.2.b) The Nature of Religious Commitment

The three components identified in the theory of the spheres in Chapter 1 can be used to unpack how religions are to be understood within this framework. (S1) They are autonomous sets of possibilities for interpreting and responding to an absolute or 'evig salighed' in the human situation. (S2) They are subjectively appropriated in the local situations of individual persons. (S3) Authentic religiousness involves a particular way of subjectively navigating these possibilities in the human situation.

(2.2.b.i – S1) The defining commitment of religious ways of being is to an absolute. Religions present particular possibilities for responding to existential questions of ultimacy, matters of ultimate importance to persons because they relate to their 'evig salighed' (CUP, p. 15).¹²¹ The term 'evig salighed' is used

¹¹⁹ Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 182.

¹²⁰ Evans interprets consciousness and its affects as existentially embodied in this way. [C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Postscript and Fragments: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p. 138.]

¹²¹ CUP, p. 15. Note that he does not commit to any position on whether an 'evig salighed' actually exists; he simply defines religion as a decision to act as if it exists. 'Evig Salighed' can be

broadly to signify factors that have ultimate, decisive significance for the meaning of a person's life and questions of salvation and the afterlife.¹²² It is particularly linked to questions arising from an awareness of human mortality; hence he identifies Christianity as a particular stance on temporality: 'the here and hereafter' (CUP, p. 570).¹²³ Such questions also arise from quasi-universal

interpreted as eternal life, blessedness, happiness or salvation, and Climacus also links it with immortality and relationships to God. For analysis of these equivocations, see: Abraham Khan, *Salighed as Happiness? Kierkegaard on the Concept of Salighed* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985). The term 'ultimate' is not used here to prioritise any particular values: as Smart observes, what people regard as ultimate may vary widely. It is intended in a minimalist sense to signify issues raised by humans who are free, finite and mortal and thus are faced with forced decisions on the meaning and continuity of their lives in the light of such boundary situations that circumscribe all possible human experience, meaning and value: it is intended to identify, 'the thought that some of our concerns – our questions about meaning and therefore about value – are deeper and more towards the limits of life than many everyday questions.' [Ninian Smart, 'What is Religion?' In Ninian Smart; John J. Shepherd (ed.) *Ninian Smart on World Religions, Volume 1: Religious Experience and Philosophical Analysis* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009 [1975]), p. 116.] Cheetham criticises this definition of religion, which he identifies in Tillich's notion of religion as ultimate concern that lies at the heart of cultures, for being, 'too inclusive to allow differentiation.' [David Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 63.] There is insufficient space for a full response to this criticism. Though Climacus and Kierkegaard are not invested in the task of categorizing phenomena so as to enable scholarly investigation of them, they share Cheetham's concern that religiousness should not be subsumed under broader cultural constructs. However, their description of Religiousness A will be taken as mapping out a particular way in which ultimate concern and commitment is expressed in religious ways: not all forms of ultimate commitment are religious, though they may intersect and compete with religious concerns, and they are only considered such when they include various existential components, thus allowing for a more focused definition than Cheetham sees Tillich as providing.

¹²² Czakó sees the question of the afterlife as central to Kierkegaard and Climacus because it is a paradigmatic type of religious question: its reality cannot be known through proof, but whether there is an afterlife and what form it takes will have profound existential implications for the person, such that it is a forced question of ultimacy that cannot be answered adequately and only responded to. [István Czakó, 'Rethinking Religion Existentially'. In, Jon Stewart (ed.), *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, pp. 289-290.]

¹²³ Mortality has a central role because it is a universal feature of the human condition that has profound existential implications for the person. It adds infinite weight and importance (CUP, p. 21) to temporal choices because it places a limit on the number of these, such that they are made, metaphorically, for eternity. It also finitises one's life and its meanings and objectives and raises the question of the meaning of the whole and of eternity, as Macquarrie points out, 'Death...is an ultimate in human existence, bringing us to a point where we have to face the most serious questions about the meaning and goal of human life or, indeed, whether it has any meaning or goal.' [John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity* (London: SCM, 1982), p. 241.] That this is a prominent feature of much religious reflection supports the contention that religions are attempting to respond to this universal feature of the human condition in different ways. An encounter with death at a graveside is the occasion for Climacus' own religious awakening or 'call' (CUP, p. 234; 239) and he sees it as eliciting religious responses as it provokes subjective engagement with death as something that affects oneself, breaks one out of immersion in immanence and occupation in a finite teleologies and raises questions about survival and the afterlife, questions that are more important as they relate to eternity rather than finite life, as well as precluding certainty in the answers given to these questions (CUP, p. 82).

encounters: humans encounter their own mortality and the mortality of others through the loss of contingent relationships and death.¹²⁴ The ambiguity of the term 'evig salighed' is deliberate as it signifies the experiential, subjective and diverse nature of responses, 'it can be defined only by the mode in which it is acquired.' (CUP, p. 427) Climacus thus acknowledges that the awareness of mortality can take various forms and provokes various responses and questions depending on the context.

Religions are distinct life-views and ways of being that interpret this situation in relation to the absolute and provide sets of possibilities for responding to these. Religions differ insofar as they identify different absolutes and facilitate different forms of appropriative response. These possibilities will be enshrined in social bodies, texts, traditions, and other sources, incorporating accounts, narratives, religious practices, and moral systems that describe and foster their ways of being.

(2.2.b.ii – S2) The defining struggle in appropriating religious ways of being is to live out subjectively an absolute commitment to the absolute in the human situation defined by finitude, temporality, and mortality (CUP, p. 86), confronting the anxiety and despair that emerges from this in passionate ways. This is subjective insofar as individuals must exercise agency in applying the possibilities of (S1) in their unique and local situations, deciding how to integrate these possibilities and express them in their identities and lives. Nevertheless, it

¹²⁴ This claim should not be understood normatively: the ways these events are interpreted and experienced is itself subjective and contextual. Hence the possible objection, that the question of ultimacy is only posed by the religious context, is not problematic for Climacus. He admits that this may be the case and simply requires that something, whether an encounter with mortality or religious structures, exists to provoke the question, 'it is not I who of my own accord have become so audacious; it is Christianity that compels me. It attaches an entirely different sort of importance to my own little self and to every ever-so-little-self, since it wants to make him eternally happy' (CUP, p. 16).

is likely that there will be comparable structures evident in religions, such as renunciation of relative ends (CUP, p. 387), because they express commitments to absolutes. Religious appropriations may also obstruct authentic responses to the human situation, expressing existential cowardice or offering palliatives that exploit the anxiety that attends the human situation for the purpose of exercising power over adherents; Climacus has this worry about forms of Christianity (CUP, pp. 610-616).¹²⁵

A defining feature of religious ways of being is that they are agonistic and pulled between forces that the person must navigate in living them out. Climacus' situation, his description of religiousness, and the fragmented form of CUP convey this. Climacus has encountered Christianity as an 'outsider' in such a way that it makes absolute demands on him and he must decide how to respond to this collision (CUP, pp. 16-17); this occurs in a context in which there is tension between the dominant form of Christendom and the high demands of authentic Christianity, making appropriation 'difficult' (CUP, p. 606). Religious questions arise in a context of irrevocable anxiety, uncertainty, yet where mortality and temporality demand immediate and full responses; the human situation is one of immersion in relative ends, making a relation to the absolute one of tension, conflict, renunciation, guilt, suffering and struggle (CUP, pp. 387-555). Moreover, the revelation itself is encountered as paradoxical, disrupting expectations and announcing possibilities in tension with what seems possible; it is, 'an unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge' (PF, p. 39; see also: PiC, p. 143).

¹²⁵ For example, Climacus rejects the practice of ascetic renunciation on the grounds that it supplants the existential renunciation of relative ends (CUP, p. 408).

The Absolute Paradox encountered by Christians in Jesus heightens the collision further as Christians must decide how to respond to the revelation occurring in the most offensive site. Anti-Climacus develops this, describing the Christian life as one of conflict with and persecution by the Established Order (PiC, pp. 249-250).

Alterity is thus intrinsic to religious identities, which are not static, stable or secure. Religious identities are sources of existential struggle and inward conflict; a marker of authenticity will be uniqueness and diversity of expression, which demonstrate that people are appropriating and living out the structures subjectively. (S1) and (S2) fit with the nature of religions: they provide general structures of belief and practice that are bound up with identity and ways of being, yet are always locally interpreted and expressed in the lives of their adherents, leading to pervasive diversity in religious expression, even in the same religion.

(2.2.c) Authentic Religiousness: Passionate and Transforming Faith-Commitment

Religions are to be understood primarily through how they shape subjectivity and evaluated pragmatically in relation to whether they facilitate or obstruct authentic personhood. Religious ways of being are authentic responses (S3) when they successfully integrate passionate faith and activities of appropriative self-transformation directed at sustaining the relationship to an absolute as a reality by living out its consequences in the finite human situation. These factors are necessary to express that it is taken to be of ultimate importance for the person and provides a religious perspective on his/her life and death as finding meaning in relation to something beyond it.

A feature of Climacus' exposition of the spheres that is easily applicable to RD, because it acknowledges different forms of religiousness, is his distinction between Religiousness A, immanent religiousness (CUP, pp. 387-560), and Religiousness B, dialectical religiousness (CUP, pp. 561-586).¹²⁶ A and B should not be equated with specific religions; rather they describe the two sets of features that are integrated in authentic religiousness, as Climacus observes, 'An existence-issue...is pathos-filled and dialectical.... I ask the reader continually to recollect that the difficulty finally consists in combining the two, that the existing person who in absolute passion and filled with pathos expresses by his existence his pathos-filled relation to the eternal happiness—must now relate to the dialectical decision.' (CUP, p. 386)¹²⁷ This coheres with the processual way in

¹²⁶ Connell identifies three main ways in which this distinction has been interpreted: (i) as asserting the exclusive superiority of B, which is equated with Christianity, over the untenable form of religiousness described as A; (ii) as incorporating A into B in a supersessionist or inclusivist manner; or (iii) retaining A and B in a higher, dialectical unity-in-tension. [Connell, KPRD, p. 151.] Interpretations (i) and (ii) are incompatible with Climacus' claims and the interpretation that authentic selfhood entails an agonistic commitment that lives out tensions that never find resolution. It is admitted that some of Climacus' claims support (i) or (ii) [See, for example, CUP, pp. 581-583, which identifies B with Christianity and sees adherents of A as excluded and existing in paganism.] B is identified with religiousness that is, 'linked to a historical condition' of revelation, as in the Incarnation (CUP, p. 582).

¹²⁷ Hence he asserts, 'the definition of truth as inwardness...must also be more explicitly understood before it is even religious, to say nothing of being Christianly religious.' CUP, p. 258. See also his claim that it represents an intensification of subjectivity that is intensified not by focussing its innate resources but by encountering a paradoxical object of faith that provokes a new form of commitment, which nevertheless incorporates the preceding structures in a dialectical way (CUP, p. 610). Lowrie concurs with this interpretation, asserting, 'not only did he affirm that it [Religiousness A, the religion of immanence] is the permanent substratum of all religion, but it was the religiousness which he expounded in eighty-six Edifying Discourses'. [Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 200] This reading, that Religiousness A remains 'at play' within B is supported by Ferreira on the grounds that features of A are integral to living out B. [M. Jamie Ferreira, 'The "Socratic secret": the postscript to the *Philosophical Crumbs*. In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 18] Evans disagrees, arguing that Climacus does not apply his anthropocentric interpretation to Christianity, which he presents as divinely instituted. Evans distinguishes between religions of immanence (A), which he takes to be immanent because founded on human capacities, and the 'transcendent' religion of Christianity (B), in which, 'God is known outside man's general religious consciousness', because this is inadequate and requires divine revelation to establish a relation. [C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Postscript and Fragments: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p. 45; 148] This interpretation is fallacious. The central concepts through which Christianity is described are existential-expressive: 'sin-consciousness', 'offence'

which Climacus sees the spheres as related (CUP, pp. 251-300), though the struggle to relate these is an unending, subjective task.¹²⁸

Religiousness A describes the immanent features of passionate religiousness as it attempts to sustain an absolute relation to its absolute (CUP, p. 581); this provides a range of possibilities for passionate agency and appropriation. Religiousness is, 'pathos-filled', involving deep emotion and existential, 'exertion' (CUP, pp. 385-386). At the same time, the person remains a finite, temporal being in a context of anxiety and uncertainty, such that the central agony in religiousness is sustaining an absolute relation in one's finite situation. As examples, Climacus cites renunciation, relating oneself passionately and absolutely to the absolute's existential demands and relatively to all relative demands on one's existence as (CUP, pp. 387-430); and the resulting suffering and struggle (CUP, pp. 431-524).

and 'the pain of sympathy' and Evans' transition from the exposition of structures of human consciousness to the activities of God has no parallel in the text and breaches Climacus' own disavowal of knowledge of the nature and activity of God independent of human existence (CUP, pp. 583-585). Moreover, Climacus does not use Evans' term 'transcendens' to describe Christianity, but uses 'dialectical' instead to emphasise the role of consciousness in passionately holding together the competing forces through a particular configuration of subjectivity (CUP, p. 576). B's realisation of the human incapacity to establish a relationship to the divine arises from embodied experience and the structure of human existence itself as having to decide its eternal fate temporally. Furthermore, Christian faith is 'pathos-filled and dialectical', involving a risky commitment that is never resolved, even by God, in the existence of the individual (CUP, p. 385), such that B does not supersede A: the individual knows the relationship to be impossible and relies on divine grace while simultaneously striving for it, 'the dialectical is decisive only insofar as it is joined together with the pathos-filled and gives rise to a new pathos.' (CUP, p. 555)

¹²⁸ It is this processual interrelationship that provides the primary evidence for interpretation (i) and (ii) above. However, the prioritisation of A over B is descriptive, not ontological or existential, as Westphal similarly concludes that. [Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 209.] This is also informed by Westphal's argument that spheres reveal the inadequacy of a merely immanent embodiment of a sphere, teleologically suspending such immanence and opening up the agonistic struggle at the core of every sphere, 'A...form of life is immediate just to the degree that it takes itself to be self-sufficient, complete, absolute. The necessity of passing beyond it is the experience of its other as such, as the other that reveals its insufficiency, incompleteness and relativity.' [Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B'. In, George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (eds.), *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics and Politics in Kierkegaard* (London: Humanities Press International, 1992), p. 111.]

This agony of religiousness is heightened to a paradoxical level through the incorporation of the features described as Religiousness B. Religions like Christianity do not regard themselves as, 'purely human' but as responses to divine revelation and activity (CUP, pp. 581-583). Indeed, Christianity sees relating to the absolute as impossible because of human sin and finitude; it is made possible through a divinely initiated, saving revelation of divine grace that transforms the person. This allows Climacus to acknowledge the relational, transforming, transcendent, and paradoxical aspects of religions.

Together, these features are incorporated into Climacus' description of faith as the core commitment animating authentic religiousness. Given the subjectivity and agony of religiousness, different emphases are possible in the definition of faith, but it incorporates several main features, summed up in his description of it as, '*An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness*' (CUP, p. 203).¹²⁹ Faith is a passionate, appropriative activity (CUP, p. 611) yet passive and receptive response (CUP, pp. 581-582) to divine agency. It is fragile in that it is a commitment of one party to another, which thus lacks any guarantees and is dependent on hope and fidelity (CUP, p. 202); hence it is compared to a leap (CUP, p. 93) and being, 'out on 70,000 fathoms' (CUP, p. 204). It entails a passionate, total commitment in a context of total insecurity and uncertainty, 'Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness' (CUP, p. 611). The disparity between the passionate commitment of faith and the insecurity of the situation makes faith appear 'difficult', impossible, paradoxical,

¹²⁹ Five types of Climacian emphases are identified by Westphal and are incorporated into my definition of faith: it is a response to revelation, it overcomes offence, it is an objective uncertainty but passionate certainty, it is a leap and appears irrational. [Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*.]

and absurd (CUP, pp. 557-558). Yet it is this paradoxicality that makes it a self-transcendent, transforming commitment. Hence Westphal notes that, while it is insecure, this should not be equated with doubt, offence, or despair, which it faces through its passionate embrace of commitment and insecurity.¹³⁰

This insecurity is insurmountable. Religious faith is the opposite of a static, secure identity and is lived out over the course of a lifetime through the entire way of being of a person. One never achieves security since the insecurity is coterminous with life, resulting from the finitude of the human situation and its dependence on a relationship to the divine through faith and hope. As Pattison observes, 'Our end can never be had other than in what Kierkegaard calls the mode of "anticipation".... The *hope* that I might, actually, become the person that I believe myself to be can only exist for me as a possibility'.¹³¹

Such faith is seen by Climacus as the fullest expression of authentic religiousness because it incorporates the tensions of relating to an absolute in the human situation. It is also seen as the most authentic way of being for all people, '*the truth*, the highest truth there is for an *existing* person' (CUP, p. 203), because it lives out the tensions of the human situation itself, allowing for the most passionate existence. All ways of being involve relational commitments that are lived out agonistically in a situation of insecurity; religious faith expresses such acts of agonistic, relational fidelity in the most absolute way yet in full awareness of the finitude and incapacity of the person, and, 'the way to be commended is naturally the one that especially accentuates what it means to exist.' (CUP, p. 193)

¹³⁰ Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, pp. 152-153.

¹³¹ George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, p.41.

(2.3) The Pseudonyms' Existential Epistemology

Much of the philosophical debate over RD is focused on doxastic disagreement and religious knowing. To enable engagement with this, my Climacian inspired approach to religious knowing will now be outlined.¹³² This is illuminated with brief references to the Heideggerian insight that embodied coping and skilfulness precede purely cognitive processes.¹³³

Climacus' epistemology asserts that knowledge is an activity: it is 'interested' in that it entails existential involvement and occurs in the embodied context of the knower. This involves existential perspectivism in that the person's sphere, with its core commitments, decisively shapes their thinking and evaluating. Knowing is thus interpretative and local to individual perspectives and existential activities; it is also circumscribed by the finitude and temporality of human activity. Climacus' epistemological reflections revolve around his distinction of objective knowing and subjective knowing.

(2.3.a) Objective Knowing and the Existential Basis of Knowing

(2.3.a.i) Objective Knowing

Objective knowing comprehends its objects through representational correspondence between thought and reality in a, 'unity of thinking and being'

¹³² This will be referred to as an existential epistemology. I concur with Holmer in seeing Kierkegaard and Climacus as not advocating a clear epistemology; even Piety, who claims they do, admits their inconsistent use of key terms like knowledge. [Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012), p. 160. M. G. Piety, *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralist Epistemology*, p. 16.] However, Climacus makes various consistent claims about knowledge and I will present these as offering a minimalist epistemology in relation to which a view of religious knowing can be constructed.

¹³³ My interpretation of Climacus is influenced by a Heideggerian view of knowledge and by Holmer's more Wittgensteinian approach, particularly on the nature of subjective knowing. This interpretation is discussed and justified below [Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*.]

that incorporates known objects into human generated schemas (CUP, p. 86). As an approach with the aim of achieving such knowledge, objectivity is associated with three main features. (i) It aims to distance itself from the relative, subjective situations of knowers, becoming 'disinterested' and dispassionate so as to achieve a direct comprehension unhampered by subjectivity and bias (CUP, pp. 52-54; p. 121). (ii) To this end, it aims to evidence and legitimise knowledge in rational and presuppositionless ways (CUP, p. 112). (iii) This focus on legitimisation and the acquisition of direct correspondence with reality leads to objectivity aspiring to construct totalising systems (CUP, p. 109).¹³⁴

Objectivity aims to abstract from the local perspective of persons, 'Modern speculative thought has mustered everything to enable the individual to transcend himself objectively, but this just cannot be done.' (CUP, p. 197) While Adams argues that subjective interest in a subject and dispassion in one's evaluation are not incompatible, he fails to identify the underlying existential epistemology that justifies Climacus' argument: that objective thinking fails to acknowledge the existential commitments that underpin it and thus fails to engage at an existential level, only at a second order level that veils the underlying existential commitments and cannot distinguish between levels of importance in knowledge, 'despite the great amount one comes to know about China and Monomotapa, the boundary between the individual and the world-historical nevertheless remains undecided.' (CUP, p. 154)¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Climacus sees metaphysical systems, such as Hegel's, as the essential expression of this endeavour, as they present a method of thought and a theory of reality that regulates the various concepts and legitimises the link between knowing and being.

¹³⁵ Robert M. Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, pp. 45-46. Hence a recurring theme of the corpus is that progress in understanding is not to be made by the accumulation of more knowledge, which only perpetuates the problem that the underlying existential commitments are overlooked, 'Objectively understood, there are more than enough results everywhere, but no decisive result

Climacus argues that such correspondence with and certainty about reality is a ‘mirage’ (CUP, p. 198) and fantasy (CUP, p. 121) because ways of knowing are not ‘presuppositionless’ (CUP, p. 14) and fail to provide legitimating foundations, being dependent on ineliminable underlying commitments and configurations of subjectivity, ‘every beginning, when it is *made* (if it is not arbitrariness by not being conscious of this) does not occur by immanent thinking but is *made* by virtue of a resolution, essentially by virtue of faith.’¹³⁶ Climacus seems to have in mind a variation of the problem of the regress of justification: that any attempt to justify a belief requires further justification of the process of justification, which makes the process groundless or grounded in an arbitrary foundationalist commitment to certain basic beliefs as inherently authoritative in producing warranted beliefs. Hence, Climacus aims to identify a contradiction in Hegelian metaphysics as being presuppositionless, ‘immediate’, yet beginning with a process of reflection, ‘The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself achieved through reflection.*’ (CUP, p. 112)

(2.3.a.ii) *The Existential Basis of Knowing*

In contrast, Climacus argues that all structures of representation are generated by embodied existential commitments and are thus intrinsically perspectival. The only actuality available to the person is their own existential

anywhere’ (CUP, p. 34), such that, ‘speculative thought does not permit the issue to arise at all, and thus all of its response is only a mystification.’ (CUP, p. 57).

¹³⁶ CUP, p. 189. This explains his criticism of scholarly ‘postponement’ of existential decisions: they have already adopted an existential stance but by proceeding on this basis as if it is a legitimated discourse they fail to acknowledge this. This interpretation is supported by: Harold Durfee, ‘Metaphilosophy in the Shadow of Kierkegaard’. In, Joseph H. Smith (ed.), *Kierkegaard’s Truth: The Disclosure of the Self*, p. 102.

actuality.¹³⁷ The person's commitment to a certain way of being provides the basis for all subsequent questions, thinking, and methodologies. Knowing takes place at a point on an existential hermeneutical circle, entailing prior layers of decision-making activities that provide the motivation, methods, questions, and the orientation to certain projects and ends.¹³⁸ Knowing is also 'interested' in that it is always intertwined with emotions, experience and other existential factors.¹³⁹ Scholarly abstraction itself is an existential activity that projects the features that it veils; hence Climacus describes it as 'ventriloquism' (CUP, p. 111). Moreover, the adoption of an existence-possibility is an anxious decision that lacks any guarantees, because it precedes all structures of legitimisation, and emerges from the embodied, existential situation and history of the person, who is in a perpetual process of becoming (CUP, p. 118).

Climacus thus advocates existential perspectivism: knowledge is an interpretation that reflects how the world looks from the perspective of one's way of being.¹⁴⁰ Holmer notes that 'truth' and 'reality' are seen by Climacus as relative to these local interpretations, 'there is no one definition of truth, applicable to all the circumstances where the word is used', because such terms

¹³⁷ Hence Climacus asserts, 'A system of existence cannot be given' (CUP, p. 119). 'Virkelighed', actuality, is used to signify the concrete nature of existence as a processual, eventful and temporal reality, particularly linked to subjective activity in transforming subjectivity in relation to one's context (CUP, p. 339). This interpretation is supported by: Julia Watkin, *Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard's Philosophy*, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p. 90.

¹³⁹ This is supported by Furtak's contention that Kierkegaard regards emotion as an important feature of knowing. Rick Furtak, 'Kierkegaard and the Passions of Hellenistic Philosophy.' In, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, Richard Purkarthofer and K.Brian Soderquist (eds.), *Kierkegaardiana 24*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ Jaspers interprets Climacus in the same way asserting that, 'Being is interpretation.' Karl Jaspers, 'The Origin of the Contemporary Philosophical Situation: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.' In William L. McBride, *Existentialist Background: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), p. 220.

represent their located perspectives and meanings, being, 'a subtle consequence of how a person, a subject, addresses the things around him.'¹⁴¹

This invites a Heideggerian view of knowing as, 'an ongoing activity of coping with the world by bodily, social, and cultural beings. This coping can never be accounted for in terms of representations, but provides the background against which our representations have the sense that they do'.¹⁴² Holmer similarly interprets Climacus as claiming that philosophical theorising is derivative, secondary, or even obstructive to living an authentic life, as Heidegger explains, 'The kind of dealing which is closest to us is...not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of 'knowledge'.¹⁴³

Personhood is a precarious and contingent activity that is continually passing into the non-existence of the past and future, and has no necessary features: it could always be otherwise or not be at all (CUP, p. 80). Moreover, Climacus suggests that reality itself is in a process of becoming or 'in motion'; it could be at bottom polyphonous, requiring a multiplicity of mobile, interpretative schema and being inexpressible in singular systems that are 'contractions' of meaning.¹⁴⁴

(2.3.a.iii) *Application to Ethico-Religious Knowledge*

¹⁴¹ Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, p. 76 and p. 53.

¹⁴² Charles Taylor, 'Closed world structures'. In, Mark A. Wrathall (ed.), *Religion After Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 50.

¹⁴³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 95. Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, p. 160.

¹⁴⁴ CUP, p. 118. Carlisle offers such an interpretation. Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

Durfee explains Climacus' logic in a similar way, 'Those plural systems offer us logical possibilities, but no assurances, so that the selection between them must be by decisional and not rational criteria.' Harold Durfee, 'Metaphilosophy in the Shadow of Kierkegaard'. In, Joseph H. Smith (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Truth: The Disclosure of the Self*, p. 103.

Climacus' primary concern is to demonstrate the insufficiency of objectivity as an approach to ethico-religious matters. Since religiousness is a passionate response to existential matters of 'infinite interest' to the person, a dispassionate approach misrepresents and obstructs it, 'if Christianity requires this infinite interest in the individual subject...it is easy to see that in speculative thought he cannot possibly find what he is seeking.—This can also be expressed as follows: speculative thought does not permit the issue to arise at all, and thus all of its response is only a mystification.' (CUP, p. 57) An objective approach requires evidence or authoritative guarantees as a basis for knowing, but the finite nature of the person, anxiety, and temporality of the human situation and paradoxical, offensive nature of the objects of religious devotion indicate that no such security can be obtained; indeed, reason is likely to be offended by faith (PF, pp. 49-50). Reason deals with quantitative approximations that always fall short of the absolute demonstration or evidence needed to secure a qualitative, absolute commitment and 'leap' (CUP, p. 93), 'Objectively understood, there are more than enough results everywhere, but no decisive results anywhere...because decision is rooted in subjectivity' (CUP, p. 34). Moreover, given the agonistic, temporal nature of the human situation and the undecidability of existential questions, humans have to respond without being able to know how to respond and religiousness is a task for a lifetime, it cannot be expressed in a systematic, secure system, 'A system of existence cannot be given.... System and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite.' (CUP, p. 118)

Climacus depicts the inadequacy of objectivity for ethical-religious knowing in the form of the escaped lunatic. The lunatic cites objective truths,

'Boom! The earth is round!' to demonstrate his sanity, showing his lunacy by his 'parroting' of truths that are not appropriate to his situation. The objective thinker demonstrates he has lost his mind in a horrifyingly comic way because of the disparity between his dispassionate, speculative reduction of reality to facts and the absolute magnitude of the pressing existential and ethico-religious questions he faces (CUP, pp. 195-196).

Climacus' assertion of the layered, existential, and relational character of knowing posits relationships with others as a basic condition of understanding in a way that is particularly pertinent for religions, which integrate ethical values and relate to an absolute other. His critique of objectivity challenges the drive towards exclusivist realism in Western philosophy as ethically and religiously harmful.

Objectivity is unable to deal with values and decisions on the formation of subjectivity because of its focus on problems and 'facts' about reality or 'the case in point', for example, inquiring into the nature of moral values as objectively real properties rather than as relating to subjective commitment (CUP, p. 253). Hegelian metaphysics is particularly guilty of this, Climacus argues, because it omits the role of the individual as the agent of history by describing the fundamental constituents of reality as the metaphysical components that determine reality and measures ethical achievement by the quantity of effects rather than the quality of ethical intention, 'ethics looks with a suspicious eye at all world-historical knowledge, because this easily becomes a trap, a demoralising esthetic...because the distinction between what does and what does not become world-historical is quantitative dialectic...neutralised in the

esthetic-metaphysical category of “the great”.¹⁴⁵ Like Levinas, Climacus levels a philosophical and ethical charge at Western rationality: that its totalising methods entail inauthentic and demoralising relationships to others that deracinate persons from their existential context of ethical agency.¹⁴⁶

Climacus also sees rationality as awoken by the other, through its desire for and interest in inassimilable, mysterious others. This is particularly evident in religion, which is a response to something taken as an absolute and transcendent reality. He describes this desire as motivating rationality, arguing that it is the nature of human understanding that it is driven towards its own boundaries and downfall in an encounter with what it cannot comprehend, ‘the understanding’s paradoxical passion that wills collision awakens and, without really understanding itself, wills its own downfall.’ (PF, pp. 38-39) This is because understanding is motivated by desire for consummation with the other; hence he describes it as motivated by an existential lacuna, ‘It is the same with the paradox of erotic love. A person lives undisturbed in himself, and then awakens the paradox of self-love as love for another, for one missing’ (PF, p. 39). Objectivity represents an attempt to secure a relationship to the other by mastering it within a system of representation but the paradox is that it cannot be possessed and still be the desirable, transcendent other. As in love, one can only sustain a relationship to the other, not master it, such that the collision with the other occasions the decision of how to relate to it: in faith or offence (PF, p. 49).

¹⁴⁵ CUP, p. 134. Climacus even describes it as annulling the agency of God in history (CUP, p. 156).

¹⁴⁶ See, for example: Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Philosophy’. In Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.) *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, pp. 131-135.

(2.3.b) Essential Knowing is Subjective; Subjective Truth

In contrast to objective knowing, Climacus advocates subjective knowing and equates truth and subjectivity, 'subjectivity is truth' (CUP, p. 203). The meaning of this claim is a contentious issue and is key to positioning Climacus in relation to exclusivism and pluralism. It could be interpreted as advocating relativistic views that commitment makes something true or that there are no truths beyond relative commitments.¹⁴⁷ Climacus' defence of the 'how' of commitment as the measure of subjective truth seems to support this, '*If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth.*' (CUP, p. 199) Climacus' assertion of the superiority of the passionate, authentic idolater over the hypocritical, inauthentic Christian, on the grounds of their different existential orientations seems to apply this to support religious relativism (CUP, p. 201).

In order to avoid this conclusion, numerous commentators see subjectivity as entailing an appropriative relation to objective truths, such that subjectivity incorporates an objective pole and the highest position is both objectively and subjectively true.¹⁴⁸ Evans, for example, claims that, '[the] thesis that objective truth is the outcome of subjective truth is held by Kierkegaard as well as Climacus'.¹⁴⁹ For such interpreters, Climacus and Kierkegaard are exclusivists about truth and are simply concerned to describe a subjective way of

¹⁴⁷ MacIntyre, for example, sees Kierkegaard as advocating an amoral position that what is chosen does not matter, only that a choice is made and, furthermore, for seeing this choice as subjective and groundless, accusing him of advocating, 'the distinctively modern standpoint...[that]...moral commitment...[is] the expression of a criterionless choice...a type of choice for which no rational justification can be given.' [Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985 [Second Edition]), p.39.]

¹⁴⁸ Hannay argues that subjective appropriation is a necessary condition but, without an objective component, insufficient for subjective truth. [Alister Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 136-7.]

¹⁴⁹ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Postscript and Fragments: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p. 129.

arriving at this truth. Hence Piety claims that subjective truth is simply the appropriation of objectively true ethico-religious knowledge in one's life.¹⁵⁰ She asserts that Kierkegaard and Climacus are exclusivists about the truth of Christianity, "There is, for Kierkegaard, a single ethical-religious reality—that is, Christianity—it is just that the way to knowledge of this reality is through the individual, through attention to his subjective experience as such."¹⁵¹ She also rejects pluralist and relativist interpretations, 'Kierkegaard's claim that truth is subjectivity means no more than that when "truth" is prescriptive of an individual's existence, the substance of the prescription ought to be expressed in that existence, not that Christianity may be "true" for one person and Buddhism... "true" for another.'¹⁵²

This concern is justified in that Climacus, the most radical advocate of subjectivity in the authorship, emphasises the possibility of specific, authentic responses to the real human situation alongside his assertion of uncertainty and the irrevocable subjectivity of knowing. While acknowledging this, I follow Holmer in rejecting attempts to incorporate an objective pole into subjectivity and I reject exclusivist interpretations.

Objective truth cannot be integrated into subjectivity because the ultimate truths are inaccessible within the processual development of the subject; no security or conclusions can be achieved (CUP, pp. 85-86), and the individual remains perpetually alienated from reality as a system (CUP, p. 109; p. 118). Identity between thought and reality cannot be achieved: only the relation is accessible, 'the ethical actuality', never the objects or 'historical externality'

¹⁵⁰ M. G. Piety, *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralist Epistemology*, p. 129; p. 162.

¹⁵¹ M. G. Piety, *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralist Epistemology*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁵² M. G. Piety, 'The epistemology of the *Postscript*.' In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p. 201

(CUP, p. 575).¹⁵³ As Mooney observes, persons lack the ability to determine 'decisive' answers to the forced existential and ethico-religious questions, 'Subjectivity becomes an apt and even urgent orientation...because our needs as persons far exceed our cognitive needs. *We need much more in life than cognitive success.*'¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, objective truth-claims are themselves products of subjective interpretations and existential decisions.

Piety's interpretation misunderstands the nature of subjective truth and knowing. Climacus describes subjective knowing as taking account of the interpretative and existential features of knowing in the existence of the knower. 'Subjective reflection' is a means of interpreting and constituting the underlying activities of subjectivity through which the person interacts with and knows existence. He refers to such knowing as 'essential knowing', because, 'the knowledge is related to the knower, who is essentially an existing person' (CUP, pp. 197-198). Stokes interprets it as 'essential' because it establishes the foundational meaning of the commitments and structures for the individual: subjective reflection is a means of exploring meaning-conferral structures that inform existential activity, 'All questions of inquiry will be attended by a nonconceptual 'question'... 'how does all this relate to *me*?'¹⁵⁵ It is also 'essential' because the practical and ethical implications of the human situation indicate that the most important questions, which are normative for human life and are

¹⁵³ While Climacus admits the necessity of knowing about Christianity in order to constitute Christian subjectivity, this knowledge is not objective but always subjective and performative know-how, "What is Christianity?".... [T]he person asking about it is asking in terms of existing and in the interest of existing', (CUP, p. 373) that is, 'whether he would be a Christian', and he contrasts this with knowledge of cognitive knowledge (CUP, p. 372). Furthermore, this relation is intersubjective (CUP, pp. 200-201), directed at personal beings, like Christ, such that the relation can never be objectified and exists only subjectively as a relation to a relational being or event, 'Actuality, that is, that such and such has actually happened, is the object of faith' (CUP, p. 581).

¹⁵⁴ Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*, p. 184.

¹⁵⁵ Patrick Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 175.

thus 'forced' questions, relate to subjectivity and must be engaged with in the context of embodied existence: one has to decide how one is going to live, construct selfhood, form relationships and act in relation to others.

Subjective truths are not principles that can be objectively true or false but are rather decisions on what relationships one should have and how one is to configure one's identity. There can be no objectively true answers to such questions as "Should I date this person?", "Should I pursue a career in the theatre or music?", or, "what is the subjective significance of death for me and how should I respond to it?"

Hence, as examples of his principle of subjective truth, Climacus cites the questions, '*what it means to die*' (CUP, p. 165), '*what it means to be immortal*' (CUP, p. 171), '*what does it mean that I should thank God?*' (CUP, p. 177) and, '*what does it mean to marry?*' (CUP, p. 179) In these cases, the existential meaning and how one relates cannot be determined by objective facts; objectivity obstructs subjective responsiveness and is likely to be an evasive procedure aimed at disengaging from the anxiety of appropriative choice.

Hence, Climacus argues that the doctrine of immortality cannot be proven to be true and doing this would negate its underlying existential meaning and ability to elicit existential action: it essentially expresses hope for something that seems impossible in the present situation; proving it to be true would prevent it providing such hope, 'Objectively the question cannot be answered at all, because objectively the question of immortality is precisely the intensification and highest development of the developed subjectivity.' (CUP, p. 173) On such questions, one simply has to decide what to do, and it is the authenticity with which the decision is made that is the mark of truth. Holmer interprets

subjective truth in the same way, seeing it as referring to the existential reality that, 'Every man has to synthesise his hopes, his plans, his expectations, and his projects with actual situations.'¹⁵⁶

Authenticity and subjective truth do not involve conformity with ethical principles, as Piety claims, as they are relative and situational. However, since Climacus regards the person as essentially relational (see Chapters 1 and 6), authenticity exists not simply in such specific relationships but in one's entire way of being in response to the human situation, allowing a range of general features of authenticity to be identified, 'To subjective reflection, truth becomes appropriation...and the point is to immerse oneself, existing, in subjectivity.' (CUP, p. 192) The meaning of the claim that truth is subjectivity is that an authentic way of sustaining personhood and relationships is the personal truth for which one should strive: one can be true to oneself and to what it is to be a human person. Relationships do not make particular things true, as in the relativist position, but the orientation of relating is itself truth because it signifies a whole way of being in the world and a means of making things 'true for me'.¹⁵⁷

As Dreyfus observes, a subjective relation to the existential situation of actuality is itself truth because it is the precondition for all subsequent meaning, comprehension and beliefs: it, 'centres and outlines a whole world within which an infinite variety of experience can occur for an individual'; subjectivity is an existential hermeneutical commitment, 'to a world which it opens up and lays

¹⁵⁶ Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁷ Hence he rejects the idea that Don Quixote's passionate embodiment of idiosyncrasies makes them true on the grounds that it is an inauthentic way of being in the world. (CUP, p. 195)

out as real for him.’¹⁵⁸ It is for this reason that subjectivity is linked most closely with an ‘evig salighed’ and ‘essential knowing’: because it relates to the way one constructs subjectivity itself in relation to what one considers most important.

The existential context of persons necessitates passionate, appropriative activity, agency, decision, creativity, interest, and the formation of personhood to interpret and configure its relational place and animate existence.¹⁵⁹ This is balanced by acknowledging the finite and provisional nature of human existence and knowing: a passionate commitment alongside a refusal of attachment to any answers as finally authoritative that would allow subjectivity to be translated into objectivity, ‘he always keeps open the wound of negativity.’¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Samuel J. Todes and Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘The Existentialist Critique of Objectivity.’ In, William L. McBride (ed.), *Existentialist Background: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger*, p. 251.

¹⁵⁹ CUP, p. 294. Subjective reflection addresses such questions as how to relate and configure subjectivity (CUP, p. 129), personal ethical choices (CUP, p. 121), activity (CUP, p. 158) and realities facing the subject, like death (CUP, p. 165). This interpretation is supported by Mooney, who sees it as analysing, ‘lines of meaningful connection that structure self and world.’ Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard’s Moral-Religious Psychology from EITHER/OR to SICKNESS UNTO DEATH*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶⁰ CUP, p. 85. Mehl rejects this interpretation, citing Climacus’ claim that, ‘The ethical is the only certainty...the only secure knowledge’ (CUP, p. 152), and arguing that actuality provides, ‘our Archimedean point, our certain grounding in the shifting sands of the empirical.’ [Peter Mehl, *Thinking Through Kierkegaard: Existential Identity in a Pluralistic World*, p. 49]. Mehl thus criticises Climacus for making a Cartesian move to the certainty of the subject and for setting the criteria of objective certainty illegitimately high: ‘truth for finite humans is educated guesses, relative informed beliefs’. [Peter Mehl, *Thinking Through Kierkegaard: Existential Identity in a Pluralistic World*, p. 55]. However, Mehl misinterprets the ‘certainty’ ascribed to the ethical: the ethical is not a basis of certain knowledge but is defined as a, ‘task assigned to every human being’; its certainty is thus contrasted with the uncertainty of other tasks and involves only the certainty that everyone, by virtue of their relational, existential context, has this task, ‘the ethical is...the reconciling fellowship with every human being.’ (CUP, pp. 152-153)

2.4. Key Features of the Pseudonyms' Christologies

(2.4.a) Existential Christology

The pseudonyms interpret faith in Jesus as the defining relationship of Christian religiousness. Anti-Climacus sees imitative and contemporaneous relationships with Jesus as the heart of authentic Christian religiousness.¹⁶¹ In conformity with their existential approach, they explicate their Christologies as expressing particular ways of being in relation to Jesus. This is particularly significant for RD: Christology has provided the basis for Christian positions on other religions, claims of Jesus' uniqueness and universal significance posing serious obstacles to full engagement with others. As will be shown in later chapters, the pseudonyms' Christologies also provide a basis for a deeper engagement with diversity.

Climacus identifies the central problematic of Christian faith as being how its claims about the universal and eternal soteriological significance of its object of faith, Jesus, relate to the uniqueness and locatedness of that object as present in a particular historical moment and accessible to people in later times only through their subjective appropriation of it in reliance on testimonies about that historical event. His central question is, 'Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness...can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?' (PF, p. 1; See also CUP, p. 17). Comparably, Anti-Climacus focuses on Jesus' universal soteriological invitation and the possibility of faith/offence that is generated by its being issued from a specific, intrinsically offensive site (PiC, p. 9).

¹⁶¹ Merold Westphal sees this as the core of Anti-Climacian faith. See: Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* pp. 231-277.

Their Christologies focus on the relationship between the person, their 'evig salighed', and the specific historical object offering 'evig salighed'.¹⁶² They offer phenomenological and existential accounts of how the person enters into and is affected by faith in Jesus as saviour, for example, by coming to share in its subjective truth (PiC, p.205).¹⁶³ They offer thin, existential Christologies, focused on interpreting Christological language as expressing the heuristic function of Jesus in bringing about a salvific, existential transformation of the person.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² The relationship between Jesus and the 'evig salighed', including doctrinal formulations of the nature of Jesus, lie outside of human consciousness and the pseudonyms reject the usefulness of historically, doctrinally and metaphysically focussed Christologies, which are grounded in particular conceptions of this relationship. Hence there is no consideration by the pseudonyms of how the two natures relate, nor of how Jesus relates to the Trinity, of the virgin birth, atonement, redemption, Christ's sacrificial death, or the cosmic defeat of death and sin in the resurrection. The pseudonyms devote some attention to this by expounding the claim that Jesus is a 'sign', arguing that offence is partly generated by the person's inability to reconcile the two aspects of Jesus' nature (PiC, p. 81), and asserting his role as divine saviour. This has led some interpreters to seek to find a framework for interpreting Kierkegaard as possessing an underlying theological or metaphysical Christology. It is used by Law, for example, to support his claim that Kierkegaard adheres to a Chalcedonian and Kenotic Christology [David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*]. Such attempts will not be considered as they fail to recognise the existential emphases and agenda of the texts to contrast two bodies, Jesus and the Danish church, rather than provide substantive reflection on the actual nature of Christ. However, the thrust of these reflections is polemical, aimed at critiquing Christologies that focus on the nature of Jesus. Both pseudonyms criticise such Christologies as precluding personal transformation, obfuscating the existential and soteriological nature of the relationship to Christ by focussing on objective issues (CUP, p. 610, PiC, p. 26), attempting to make the nature of Christ intelligible within a metaphysical system or attempting to legitimate beliefs about Jesus through historical demonstration, theological arguments or the authority of the 'Established Order' to secure the exclusive truth of Christianity in a way that occludes the necessity of risk for faith. Anti-Climacus' reflections on Jesus contrast the Jesus of the New Testament and the contemporary Danish church, offering an ideology-critique of the hegemonic uses of Christology rather than attempting to construct a substantial Christology. [Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 380.] A similar interpretation of the context is offered by, Robert L. Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus in His Social and Political Environment'. In, Perkins (ed.), IKCPC]

¹⁶³ 'the being of truth is the redoubling of truth within yourself...that your life...expresses the truth approximately in the striving for it...just as the truth was in Christ a life, for he was the truth.' For example: becoming, 'a new person', expressing, 'repentance' and experiencing, 'rebirth'. (PF, pp. 18-19). That their Christologies are explored in relation to the existential transformation effected in the person through a faith-relationship with Jesus is acknowledged even by commentators who stress their Christian orthodoxy, such as Rae, Law and Gouwens. Gouwens, for example, refers to them as 'functional' Christologies. [Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 58. David R. Law, 'Making Christianity difficult: the "existentialist theology" of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*.' In Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.) *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, pp. 219-246. David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 144.]

¹⁶⁴ My interpretation coheres with Law's view of Kierkegaard as an existential theologian, but I reject Law's doctrinally focused understanding of the relationship on the grounds that he leans

Substantial claims are made about Jesus' nature: that he is the God-man (PiC, p. 143), the presence of God on earth, 'as an individual human being', (PiC, p.31) and is the Absolute Paradox (PF, p. 37). However, these are explicated existentially in relation to how they are experienced: offence repelling the person (PF, p. 49; PiC, p. 139); undermining understanding (PF, pp. 38-9); and exciting a subjective, passionate appropriation (PF, p. 44; CUP, p. 385; PiC, p. 202), that includes love (PF, p. 25; PiC, p. 181), suffering (CUP, p. 431; PiC, p. 179) and repentance (PiC, p. 67), all summed up in the life of faith (PF, p. 65; CUP, p. 611; PiC p. 82) and a dialectical relationship of 'contemporaneity' between Jesus and the person that is based on fidelity and grace (PF, pp. 26-32 and PiC, p. 64).

Climacus views Jesus through the lens of 'the moment' within the life of the person in which Jesus becomes a 'saviour' for the person (PF, pp. 17-18), 'the eternal, previously non-existent, came into existence in that moment' (PF, p. 13). He states that all additional information about Jesus, beyond what is required to effect this transformation, is superfluous, 'Even if the contemporary generation had not left anything behind except these words, "We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died." – that is enough.... [T]his little announcement...is enough to become an occasion for someone who comes later,

towards seeing the doctrines as objectively fixed by Creedal Christianity, with the Kierkegaardian interest simply being in their subjective appropriation, 'Here it is not *doctrine* that is the problem, but *the way the individual relates him/herself to doctrine.*' [David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 15] In contrast, my interpretation is that Kierkegaard offers a more radical reinterpretation of Christian symbols as existential, describing ways of being rather than offering quasi-metaphysical pronouncement about the nature of God. In this way, my account is closer to Barrett's claim that, '[For Climacus] Doctrines are not connected by logical relations, but by concrete activities and emotions. The synthesis of the various concepts and propositions occurs in the lives of individuals, not on paper.' [Lee Barrett, 'The Paradox of Faith in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: Gift or Task?' In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994), p. 283].

and the most prolix report can never in all eternity become more for the person who comes later.' (PF, p. 104) Though Anti-Climacus devotes more attention to the details of Jesus' life: that he suffered and was a 'lowly' person in conflict with religious institutions (PiC, p. 47, 56, 59), he similarly explicates its significance in relation to the respondent and rejects the importance of Jesus if he does not have this relation to personal transformation, 'So inseparable is the possibility of offense from faith that if the God-man were not the possibility of offense he could not be the object of faith, either.' (PiC, p. 143).

(2.4.b) A relationship with Jesus facilitates collision and transformation

The transformation achieved by faith in Jesus arises in a situation of tension and 'collision' that is essential for the possibility of faith; this tension is coterminous with faith and is described as a relationship. Both pseudonyms argue that the presence of God in Jesus cannot be demonstrated or made intelligible because it is incommensurate with any historical evidence, even Jesus' miracles (CUP, p. 24; PiC, p. 96); that it is implausible and paradoxical because contrary to human expectations of the divine; and that the presence of God in Jesus is thus offensive to human persons but that this presents an opportunity for a decision, 'either to be offended or to believe' (PiC, p.105, See also: PF, p. 49), and for faith as a venture in a context of objective uncertainty (CUP, p. 203).

Human incapacity and the necessity of transformation in religiousness is prefigured in the structures of consciousness itself and could be encountered in various religious and non-religious configurations of subjectivity (PF, pp. 38-

39).¹⁶⁵ The more rigorously one attempts to absolutise the absolute and relativise the relative in renunciation, the more one realises one's guilt, inadequacy and failure. However, both pseudonyms identify the incapacity of religious striving as most fully expressed in a limit-point encounter or collision with revelation. Jesus provides the paradigmatic form of such revelation as the Absolute Paradox (PF, p. 53) or 'sign of contradiction' (PiC, p. 125).

Anti-Climacus provides a tripartite account of how Jesus occasions this collision, incorporating Climacus' analysis. All three relate to the hiddenness or 'incognito' of God's presence in Jesus (PiC, p. 131), which is similarly identified by Climacus' 'god's poem' as the primary motive of the incarnation: hiddenness is necessary to retain the freedom of human response (PF, pp. 26-32) and hiddenness in a place that seems to contradict the presence of God is necessary to facilitate the collision that makes faith possible.

The first type of offence is Jesus' undermining of attempts to commit to an 'evig salighed' in a context of security. Though this collision is due to the nature of understanding and reason (PF, p. 49), this is because the understanding is motivated by underlying existential structures and commitments that underpin rationality; Jesus, 'discloses the thoughts of hearts.' (PiC, p. 126)¹⁶⁶ For both pseudonyms, this is the existential demand that humans feel for the commitment to be secured and legitimated by reasons, evidence or institutional authority, particularly when dealing with something as important and decisive as one's 'evig salighed'. (CUP, p. 21) The pseudonyms argue that historical and theological argument can never demonstrate the presence of God in Jesus. Many of the

¹⁶⁵ Westphal makes this observation in: Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, p. 224.

¹⁶⁶ This interpretation is indebted to: David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, p. 132.

proposed evidences for this, such as Jesus' signs and miracles, are themselves dependent on belief or are ambiguous and open to interpretation in what they demonstrate (PiC, p. 96). They are, at best, 'approximations' (CUP, p. 23). Moreover, there are no criteria that could demonstrate that a human being is God, only, at best, a human with extremely unusual powers, 'At most...that Jesus Christ was a great man' (PiC p. 27). The historical actions will always be 'incommensurable' with the infinite divine nature asserted, such that, 'If I, then, or anyone starts with the assumption that it was a human being, it can never in all eternity be shown that it was God.' (PiC, p. 29)

The two 'essential' types of offence are collisions brought about by the disparity between one's expectations and the revelation, 'that an individual human being speaks or acts as if he were God' (PiC, p. 94) and that God became incarnate as a lowly person, 'that he, the loftily exalted one, the Father's only begotten Son, that he should suffer in this manner, that he should be surrendered powerless into the hands of his enemies.' (PiC, p. 103) Human expectations entail assumptions about the nature of God, where God is to be found and how God is to be related to, enshrined in established cultural-ethical-religious norms. The identification of God in Jesus is opposed to 'convention', the authorities and general population (PiC, p. 56), and the 'established order' of society and religion (PiC, p. 47 and pp. 86-87); Jesus is seen as a blasphemer (PiC, p. 54), and thus the opposite of a religious ideal.¹⁶⁷ Far from demonstrating his divinity, the historical details make it more implausible as he is identified with the 'abased', 'this lowly man who moreover claimed to be God (which literally amounts to pouring oil on

¹⁶⁷ Westphal supports this interpretation claiming that, 'for most of the jurors the problem is not intellectual but social.' Merold Westphal, 'Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence'. In, Perkins (ed.), IKCPC, p. 34.

fire).’ (PiC, p. 37) This also makes his link to an ‘evig salighed’ and offer of salvation absurd: ‘it is a contradiction for someone to want to help others when he himself is most in need of help.’ (PiC, p. 39) Finally, as a prototype, he makes the religious life itself repelling, because he unveils it as a life of suffering and struggle (PiC, p. 63).

(2.4.c) Contemporaneity with Jesus

The result of the collision for faith is to make it impossible to achieve through human effort, forcing the person to rely on transformation through divine grace. While it is possible that the foregoing could be achieved without specifically Christological symbols, the idea that divine grace is received through contemporaneity with Jesus directly introduces the uniqueness and necessity of Jesus into Climacus’ and Anti-Climacus’ explication of Christian religiousness. Jesus is the means through which human incapacity is overcome, necessitating a reliance on divine activity (PF, p. 22), grace (PiC, p. 67) and a relationship with the specific historical Jesus as the object of faith and medium for this activity. According to Climacus’ ‘god’s poem’, the religious life is a relationship to God, which requires a historical person in which God adopts the ‘form of a servant’ (PF, p. 31) in a full kenosis and suffering (PiC, pp. 33-34) that establishes his equality with even the ‘lowliest’ person (PF, p. 31), thereby allowing for a relationship of love (PF, p. 28) that is freely accessible to all (PiC, p. 55). Climacus understands this relationship as primarily constituted by an existential appropriation of structures that arise from a commitment to Jesus as the prototype of the Christian life: renunciation, resignation, suffering, repentance, and faith. Anti-Climacus understands faith as synonymous with a transforming,

inter-subjective relationship with Jesus as a contemporary, 'This contemporaneity is the condition of faith, and, more sharply defined, it is faith.' (PiC, p. 9)

The possibility of contemporaneity with Jesus is problematic because Anti-Climacus claims it is not the risen Christ but the historical person of Jesus in his abasement who becomes contemporaneous with the person. This leads some to interpret the pseudonyms as requiring the authority of Christian structures to mediate information. Law, for example, sees contemporaneity as requiring information about Jesus that can be mediated in memory and in spoken and written reports.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Rae asserts the necessity of believing in the veracity of biblical narratives.¹⁶⁹ The nature of contemporaneity is also unclear. Some interpreters, such as Rae, interpret it as an ethical commitment, imitating Jesus' self-sacrificial love and suffering: one is contemporaneous with Jesus by following him as prototype.¹⁷⁰ Anti-Climacus explains it in this way but this is a heuristic device intended to unveil the impossibility of achieving such high demands through striving (PiC, p. 65).¹⁷¹

In order to resolve this difficulty, various uses of 'contemporaneity' can be distinguished. Contemporaneity can signify being historically contemporary; it can signify embodying Jesus' life in obedience to him as prototype, something that cannot be fully achieved; it can also signify a personal relationship with him through faith. The latter entails that it is a relationship with an actual person;

¹⁶⁸ David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, pp. 197-199.

¹⁶⁹ Murray A. Rae, 'The Forgetfulness of Historical-Talkative Remembrance in Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*'. In, Perkins (ed.), *IKCPC*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁰ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, pp. 80-82.

¹⁷¹ Rae admits this in, Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p. 81. He offers a more coherent interpretation that relates the two in: Murray A. Rae, 'The Forgetfulness of Historical-Talkative Remembrance in Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*'. In, Perkins (ed.), *IKCPC*, p. 86.

hence Anti-Climacus contrasts it with viewing Jesus as a historical or poetic figure, 'Only the contemporary is actuality for me. That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality—for you.' (PiC, p.64) In that it signifies a relationship between an individual person and Jesus, it is also individualising: faith is only achieved by individuals in relation to their own experiences, appropriation and relationship.¹⁷² This 'living simultaneously' (PiC, p. 64) with Jesus also requires that Jesus' history is 'sacred history', that is, that it intersects with all moments of human history, Jesus existing at the same time as every person, 'His life on earth accompanies the human race and accompanies each particular generation as the eternal history; his life on earth has the eternal contemporaneity.' (PiC, p.64) Anti-Climacus only hints at how Jesus is present in this latter way, linking it to faith (PiC, p. 9); religious experience for the believer, such as the comfort of Jesus' presence (PiC, pp. 15-16); and the appropriative transformation it produces, particularly Jesus' love (PiC, p. 181) and suffering (PiC, p. 179), relating to Jesus by becoming like him. This is in conformity with an existential-expressive approach, as it necessitates religious experience and existential response as integral to Christian faith and religiousness.

¹⁷² This argument is made in: Leo Stan, 'Contemporaneity'. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 63.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the pseudonyms' descriptions of religiousness. They map out a form of authentic Christian religiousness, incorporating an implicit epistemology and Christology, in the context of a wider view of religiousness. They understand authentic religiousness as a way of being that is perpetually transforming and takes place within a process of striving to live out authentic selfhood, which commits absolutely to an absolute in the anxious human situation defined by finitude, temporality, and mortality. Objective certainty and knowledge cannot be achieved and the aim of persons is to develop authentic, subjective interpretations and ways of being. In the case of Christian religiousness, although this begins with the subjective striving of the person, the person is revealed by the process and, more specifically, in the Christian's confrontation with Jesus, to be incapable of achieving it; they are thus forced to rely on divine grace and assistance, which is mediated by contemporaneity with Jesus, which is thus the means of achieving a transforming religious relationship with God.

Viewing religions as spheres of existence opens up a range of options for engaging with RD that are developed in subsequent chapters. Chapters 3 and 4 use it to critique the classical philosophical view of RD. Chapters 5 and 6 argue that the existential situations in which religiousness arises are diverse and subjective, such that diversity is to be expected and serves as a marker of the authenticity of the commitment (5.3.a). The depiction of authentic religiousness also implies a number of points at which engagement with alterity and diversity is integral to authentic selfhood (5.3.a), particularly in relation to Christological themes: Jesus provides a collision with an inassimilable and offensive yet

revelatory other, located beyond religious boundaries (5.3.b). Further resources provided by viewing religions as spheres of existence, explored in Chapter 6, include: how they intersect or interact, how one makes transitions between them, how they relate to the shared human situation, and how one communicates them to outsiders.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND THE CLASSICAL VIEW: A CRITIQUE OF THE DOMINANT

PHILOSOPHICAL TYPOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

(3.1) Argument in Brief

This chapter draws together the existential approach to religion and epistemology outlined in Chapter 2 to critique the classical philosophical problematization and typology of approaches to RD, hereafter referred to as the classical view (CV). It then proposes an alternative typology of approaches to RD as an existential problem.

CV is outlined and it is argued that it is founded on an objective ontology, as evinced by its preoccupation with questions of truth and the correspondence of religions to metaphysical realities. The prioritisation of such questions is insufficiently sensitive to the subjective and interpretative nature of religions; as such it favours exclusivism and is evident particularly in exclusivist positions, but it is also implicit in pluralistic positions within CV because they define themselves in relation to CV's problematization of RD.

Four theses are identified as entailed in this objective ontology and each one is subjected to a Kierkegaardian critique. This critique is applied to representative approaches across the spectrum of the typology in order to demonstrate that they share a common, objective, and exclusivist ontology. In each case, the thesis is first explained as it is evident in CV as well as exclusivism and pluralism. Second, it is demonstrated that it fundamentally misunderstands the nature of religions and RD by interpreting them as objective, metaphysical, doctrinal, or institutional structures, rather than subjective ways of being. It is

then argued that the existential approach is superior because it incorporates the subjective and resists reifying religious structures.

The final section of the chapter proposes an alternative typology of commitment, focused on the types of religiousness evident in the different approaches to RD: closed commitment, Quixotic commitment, partial commitment and non-commitment. This is intended to provide a Kierkegaardian understanding of positions on diversity, which is applied in Chapter 4, as well as to open up new possibilities for developing positions on diversity beyond those provided by CV.

(3.2) The Problematization of Religious Diversity in the Classical View

(3.2.a) The Classical View (CV)

The philosophical problematization of RD, that is, the philosophical understanding of the nature of RD and the questions and problems that it poses, is dominated by CV, which also provides a typology of possible responses.¹⁷³ Schmidt-Leukel's outline and defence of CV is taken here as the representative of it.¹⁷⁴

Schmidt-Leukel sees RD as raising the central question of whether and how many times, 'mediation of a salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality', is a property of religions: none (atheism); once (exclusivism); many times, but with one superior case (inclusivism); or many times, equally (pluralism).¹⁷⁵ He thus sees the primary problem of being in which religion(s) truth and salvation are located. This problem is explored in relation to epistemological and doxastic questions: what one is to believe in the context of competing religious truth-claims and how one is to legitimise one's beliefs.¹⁷⁶ He

¹⁷³ This was introduced by Race. [Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*.] It is termed the 'classical typology' by Hedges, [Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 17]. See also: Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, vii. Knitter identifies a theological typology that organises positions differently, in relation to the insider perspective adopted by adherents of a religion on the relation of their religion to other religions, replacing them, fulfilling them or having parity with each other. However, Knitter and Hedges correlate these positions to the classical typology: replacement (exclusivism), fulfilment (inclusivism), mutuality (pluralism) and acceptance (particularism); they are also indebted to the same problematization: the question is about the objective status and relationship between different extant religious bodies. [Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, vii-ix. Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 20.]

¹⁷⁴ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*.

¹⁷⁵ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), p. 19. See also: Robert B. Stewart, 'Can Only One Religion Be True? Considering This Question.' In, Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *Can Only One Religion Be True? Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Schmidt-Leukel is no exception in this. For example, see: Kevin Meeker and Philip L. Quinn, 'Introduction: The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity'. In, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin

claims that the typology is ‘comprehensive’, such that no other approaches are possible, and that one must answer the question of which position one is to adopt when confronted with RD.¹⁷⁷ While he admits that theologians might adopt different perspectives, such as bracketing questions of truth and salvation, such perspectives are not positions on the problem of RD; insofar as they are, they will conform to one of the positions.¹⁷⁸

CV entails definitions of religion, truth, and salvation. These are loosely defined as they depend on which position is adopted, but CV offers prescriptive meta-definitions given that its problematization makes reference to religion, truth and salvation as the contested issues. A fourth feature implicit in CV is its epistemological assumption that the problem is resolvable objectively, through philosophical rationality.¹⁷⁹

Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, p. 2. Basinger similarly focuses on the question of, ‘what we can know or justifiably say’. [David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*, vii.] Byrne sees it as raising a fuller range of questions, though he similarly identifies epistemological questions and questions of the truth of accounts as the core issues because he sees religions as offering competing accounts of God and the ultimate. [Peter Byrne, ‘A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity’. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 29; p. 37.]

¹⁷⁷ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 20. This claim is rejected by a number of scholars as being reductive, but they fail to provide alternative suggestions that do not directly correlate to CV; most are simply concerned to nuance the threefold typology. For example, Morgan argues that the three categories are inadequate because they combined two distinct questions: the question of salvation and the question of the relationship between world religions; these are distinct such that one could be an exclusivist about one question but a pluralist about the other. He also argues that they homogenise the various positions within each of the three. However, his proposal is simply to offer a wider list of varieties of exclusivism and inclusivism in relation to the two distinct questions [Christopher W. Morgan, ‘Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms’. In, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), p. 22; p. 26; pp. 36-39)] For similar proposals about CV, see: Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 238. And: Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 27. When practical solutions are offered, as in D’Costa’s proposal of the need for interreligious prayer, this is similarly grounded in a philosophical or theological account

CV defines religion as a body that asserts that there is something that is, 'more important than anything else in the world', and that this is a, 'transcendent reality', about which it possesses and mediates, 'some form of [salvific] knowledge (or revelation)', and which is normative for belief and conduct.¹⁸⁰ CV claims that this will usually be in the form of a 'grand narrative' that makes total and 'universal' claims about the whole of reality.¹⁸¹ Moreover, religion is primarily identified with 'world religions'.¹⁸²

CV defines contested claims as truth-claims expressed in accounts or narratives that are in some way universal or total in the claims they make about

that is presented as solving the problem through the practical resources it provides, as in D'Costa's claim that, 'We are, thankfully, not God and cannot know the prudential meaning of religious diversity, if indeed there is any such meaning, but we do know that God's trinity calls Christians to seek to serve and worship this God in sometimes quite unpredictable ways.' [Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 166.] The same is true of McKim's argument for the religious ambiguity of the cosmos: it solves the problem because the ambiguity indicates, 'how their beliefs should be held.' [Robert McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 153.]

¹⁸⁰ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 18.

¹⁸¹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology'. In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 23. This definition is shared by most scholars engaged with the question. Byrne, for example, defines a religion as making claims about the ultimate [Peter Byrne, 'A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity'. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 29]. Although McKim does not emphasise religious accounts in this way, he similarly defines religions as forms of life that are, 'comprehensive...and of central importance', to their adherents, such that they are foundational, in the same way as accounts of reality, for everything else in their lives; he also sees epistemic questions and questions of truth as the central issues. [Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 12.]

¹⁸² Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 21. This excludes positions not regarded as religious, including atheism, which Schmidt-Leukel distinguishes as a fourth position in CV, ruling out the possibility that atheists could be pluralists or inclusivists, and humanism. It also privileges specific religious groups. For example, there is no consideration of new religious movements or minority religions in most anthologies that include a range of perspectives from Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism [See, for example: Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (eds.), *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*]. While Race and Hedges include a short section on it, this focuses on the New Age, which they acknowledge to be 'passé' and they admit that new religious movements are, 'Often ignored or side-lined (if not excluded outright) in discussions', despite being one of the most prevalent groups of religions in the West. [Paul Hedges, 'New Religious Movements' In, Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, p. 232].

reality, 'Has not every religious belief – in so far as it explicitly or implicitly contains some universal claims – already an element of a grand or metanarrative?'¹⁸³ CV also entails a view on the truth-status of the philosophical positions on diversity: one of the positions is expected to offer a true account and solution of the problem of RD, and this is determined by the correspondence of the theory to reality; it is also exclusivist in that it is assumed that this position is incompatible with the other philosophical theories and religious positions on diversity.¹⁸⁴ If pluralism is true, it is exclusively true, 'If a pluralist account renders a broadly true picture, it inevitably excludes the truth of a particular religion's exclusivist or inclusivist superiority claim'.¹⁸⁵ Truth is also defined as absolute: the truth that is contested between religions and the approaches of CV are not mundane truth-claims but rather make vital or ultimate claims about the nature of reality itself. This is emphasised because CV defines the truth-claims as salvific and thus as having decisive importance for the person.

Although salvation is defined more loosely, the concept has a Christian heritage, eschatological implications about the destiny of the person, and moral dimensions pertaining to the value of life. Moreover, by seeing this as mediated by the knowledge and practices possessed by religions, Schmidt-Leukel follows the Christian bias towards seeing salvation as entailing right belief and conduct achieved through conformity with religious groups and as being agency-centred:

¹⁸³ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology'. In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁴ Markham argues that the debate utilizes various different conceptions of truth. However, all posit the necessity of some form of correspondence to reality, whether this is a direct correspondence of propositions, or of coherent systems. Ian S. Markham, 'Truth in Religion'. In, Chad Meister and Paul Copan (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 194-195.

¹⁸⁵ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology'. In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, p. 23.

the aim of the person should be to identify the right religion, beliefs and practices so that he/she can adopt them and thereby achieve salvation.¹⁸⁶

(3.2.b) Four Approaches Within CV

This chapter considers four approaches within CV: Plantinga's exclusivism, Lindbeck's particularism, Hick's pluralism, and Cobb's complementary pluralism. These highlight the core features of CV that are to be subjected to my Kierkegaardian critique.¹⁸⁷

Plantinga's exclusivism asserts that there are objectively true religious beliefs that can be justifiably believed because cognitive faculties provide sufficiently reliable access to reality.¹⁸⁸ Plantinga claims that one religion contains all religious-truth claims about God, reality and salvation in an exclusive way: when religions make claims that are incompatible with these, they are false, 'the exclusivist holds that the tenets of some or the tenets of *one* religion—Christianity, let's say—are in fact truth...[and] that any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false.'¹⁸⁹

Lindbeck's particularism adopts a cultural-linguistic view of religions as, 'a variegated set of cultural-linguistic systems', that provide the basis for all

¹⁸⁶ Heim notes and criticizes this Christian-centric view of salvation as afflicting varieties of pluralism and CV, proposing that 'salvations' should be used instead to preserve the plurality and distinctness of religious aims. He equates salvation with the diverse and distinct ends pursued by religions, claiming that, 'Religious aims and fulfilments are various.' [S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), p. 145.]

¹⁸⁷ Inclusivism is considered in Chapter 5 rather than here as it is closer to the position that will be defended and many of its defenders, such as Heim and Morgan, offer similar criticisms of CV to those offered here.

¹⁸⁸ Alvin Plantinga, 'A Defense of Religious Exclusivism'. In, Alvin Plantinga, James F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 187. For further examples, see: Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, pp. 20-22. Daniel Strange, 'Exclusivisms'. In, Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ Alvin Plantinga, 'A Defense of Religious Exclusivism'. In, Alvin Plantinga, James F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, p. 189.

experience, thought and value-judgements; without these culturally mediated structures, these are impossible.¹⁹⁰ As ‘comprehensive’ interpretative structures, Lindbeck concludes religions are ‘untranslatable’: outside and between such structures there are no shared values, experiences, rationalities or rules for discourse, because these emerge only from within the hermeneutical regimes.¹⁹¹ Moreover, because one cannot achieve a non-tradition specific perspective to decide on religious truth, pluralism is rejected and a position of ‘indeterminacy’ with regards to other religions is adopted. Nevertheless, the approach adopts an exclusivist position on its own religion, as Hedges observes, ‘Being based in a Christian context, they believe that tradition tells them that salvation is only possible through their path’.¹⁹²

Hick’s pluralism asserts that many religions have parity in mediating truth and salvation, such that, ‘there is more than one legitimate way to what can broadly be termed ‘salvation’’.¹⁹³ Hick advances the Kantian claim that the divine, or Real, cannot be experienced or described in itself, only as it is experienced through a range of filters that make experience possible and that are provided by the relative situation of the experiencer, including his/her choices and culture.¹⁹⁴ Their situational and mediated nature means that religions are interpretative, religious language being a symbolic expression of human

¹⁹⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), p.40. Milbank outlines a similar version of particularism. See: John Milbank, ‘The End of Dialogue’. In, Gavin D’Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 174-191. And: John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 [Second Edition]).

¹⁹¹ George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.’ In, George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.), *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (London: SCM Press, 2002), p. 231.

¹⁹² Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 28.

¹⁹³ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 26. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*.

¹⁹⁴ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 2005 [Second, Revised Edition]), pp. 103-4. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 246.

experiences of the Real rather than ontological description.¹⁹⁵ Religious language and structures interpret and express experiences of God's will, love and the ideal life. They also effect, 'human...transformation', from 'self-centredness' to 'Reality-centeredness' or altruism, 'Love, compassion, self-sacrificing concern for the good of others, generous kindness and forgiveness'.¹⁹⁶ This provides the normative moral-soteriological 'criterion' for interpreting and judging the validity of religious traditions.¹⁹⁷ Hick asserts that pluralism accurately describes the nature of religions and provides a basis for a global community by equalising them and seeing their core as a universal commitment to altruism.¹⁹⁸

Cobb's complementary pluralism asserts that there is genuine difference in reality itself, 'the totality of what is, is very complex, far exceeding all that we can ever hope to know or think.'¹⁹⁹ It asserts that different religions have genuinely encountered different aspects of this totality, 'in different parts of the world at different times, remarkable individuals have penetrated into this reality

¹⁹⁵ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, pp. 105-106. This reading is informed by Sinkinson's exposition of the relationship of situational awareness to interpretation in Hick's position and of his reading of Hick as advocating a form of expressive-experiential model of religion. [Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), p. 37.]

¹⁹⁶ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 105. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 240; 309; 325.

¹⁹⁷ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 325. The role of critical assessment of religions in Hick's pluralism should not be stressed too greatly because Sinkinson observes that, for Hick, 'the knowledge of God varies among religions by a matter of *degree*, not as a matter of *kind*.'

[Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*, p. 118] While some religions may more accurately present the core moral truths than others, it cannot be said that one is true and another false. Nevertheless, as evinced in Hick's discussion here and in the development of his position as sketched by Sinkinson, the objective of providing a credible, universal religion informed by philosophical needs and the enlightenment method is a feature of Hick's approach.

¹⁹⁸ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, ix; see also pp. 103-4. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 246.

¹⁹⁹ Cobb, cited in: David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, David Ray Griffin (ed.), *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 47.

and discovered features of it that are really there to be found'.²⁰⁰ Religions thus possess truth and different religions contain truths that are complementary by describing different features of reality, even if they appear to compete by making absolute claims. Conflict is also explicable by the truths they communicate being answers to different questions or a result of the many falsehoods that religions also contain.²⁰¹ Cobb defends three theses as integral to his pluralism: linguistic realism and the correspondence of true cognitive systems to reality, the truth of the pluralist ontology as a description of reality, and the true and referential nature of veridical religious experiences.²⁰² He also advocates the 'normative' thesis that RD is a great good, 'the diversity is acceptable and...people should learn to live with it in mutual appreciation.'²⁰³

(3.2.c) The Modernist, Christian Context of CV

The exclusivist positions attributed to Kierkegaard's contemporaries in 1.4.b are products of a modernist conception of religion and its appropriation of Christianity, which also underpins much of philosophy of religion and CV.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Cobb, cited in: David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 47.

²⁰¹ David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 47-48.

²⁰² John B. Cobb Jr., 'Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 254-258. Hence, for example, he claims that 'totality' is polyphonous and can be described as having three facets. [Cobb, cited in: David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 47.]

²⁰³ John B. Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism*. Ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1999), p. 50. Cited in David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 50.

²⁰⁴ The reliance of philosophy of religion on a modernist conception of religion has been noted by numerous critics. Schilbrack summarises many of these criticisms in: Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 85-88, 105-110. I differ from some of these critics in that they usually identify only pluralism as dependent on modernity, which is often seen to be hostile to exclusivism. For example, D'Costa only claims that most pluralisms are dependent on a modernist conception of religion. [D'Costa, *MRT*, pp. 1-2.] The reason that this conception of religion is definitive for CV and exclusivist positions that may seek to define themselves in pre-modern ways or with greater fidelity to a

Hegel provides an influential source of this conception of religion for Kierkegaard, explicitly formulating it in the context of the 'legitimation crises' facing Christianity that included the challenge of RD.²⁰⁵ A core feature of this construction of religion, which also impairs the engagement with diversity, is its positing of a universal essence of religion that explains its nature in a way that annuls diversity and imposes reified religious identities and boundaries.²⁰⁶

religious tradition is that it is a result of a Christian conception of religion as institutional, doctrinal, soteriological and theological as much as it is indebted to a modernist emphasis on reason and truth. Moreover, the debate occurs in the context of philosophy of religion, which has been decisively shaped by the modernist context, particularly due to the decisive influence Hegel over the discipline.

²⁰⁵ Berger identifies contributing factors to this crisis as the awareness of religious alternatives produced by the Reformation, exposure to the Orient, secularisation and the threat of religious conservatism. [Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Harper Collins, 1980), p. 17] Though there could be other sources, Hegel provides a primary source for Kierkegaard's context. This chapter lacks the space to demonstrate the trajectory of this construction of religion from early to contemporary philosophy of religion, but sufficient commonalities between them will be demonstrated to accept this thesis. Capps identifies Schleiermacher, Kant, and Descartes as sources. [Walter Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 1-13] Westphal identifies its origins in Hegel [Merold Westphal, 'The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion'. In Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.) *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 111-117]. See also: For the sources of these claims, see Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (eds.) *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) and Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialectic: A Study in the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen*.

²⁰⁶ This can be traced back to Lessing. Climacus acknowledges this by utilizing Lessing's description of the tension in Christianity between faith and history (CUP, p. 67). This essentialism derives from Lessing's distinction between 'positive' religions and the natural essence of religion, which bifurcates necessary religious truths and values from the contingent, mythological, and historical structures in which they are expressed by religions, thereby providing a paradigmatic vantage point from which to understand and assess specific religions. Lessing asserts the existence of a universal, simple, and credible natural religion that is realizable through innate moral and rational faculties that are predisposed towards it, these delivering an awareness of the existence of God and the necessity of living appropriately. [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'On the Origin of Revealed Religion'. In Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.35.] According to Lessing, positive religion develops through accretion provoked by the societal context and thus tends to be divisive, degrading the moral value of religion: it, 'weakens and suppresses' the 'essential elements' of natural religion and, 'The best revealed or positive religion is that which contains the fewest conventional additions to natural religion, and imposes the fewest limitations on the good effects of natural religion'. [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'On the Origin of Revealed Religion'. In Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 36.] Like different religions, peer diversity is a degradation of natural religion as it signifies a failure to find consensus and results from partisanship and lack of clarity in the structures of positive religions; hence Lessing's criticism of Christianity as, 'so uncertain and ambiguous that there is scarcely a single passage which any two individuals, throughout the history of the world, have thought of in the same way.' [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'The Religion of Christ'. In Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p.179.] Lessing's dismissal of the historical claims of religions, which include the resurrection of Jesus and the

This is evident in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. The paradigmatic 'concept' of religion as, 'the relation of the subject, of the subjective consciousness, to God, who is spirit', posits the essence of religion as the identification of human consciousness with the structure of existence through a complete and true comprehension of it.²⁰⁷ Specific 'determinate' religions are interpreted as moments in the, 'single sequence of configurations', evolving towards this complete comprehension; they are cognitive-propositional bodies of 'representational' or symbolic thinking about reality that bear some truths or partial truths in symbolic form and are left behind in the development of historical consciousness once this truth has been extracted, like plants that die having passed on their essential genetic information.²⁰⁸ This imposes static identities on religions dependent on the particular truths they realise and interprets and stratifies them hierarchically in relation to a single 'Absolute Religion' that supersedes them: an Hegelian interpretation of Christianity, which is legitimated by a divinely endorsed apotheosis of the structure as, 'the concept of God's own self', which serves an ideological function of justifying Hegelian Christianity as the consummate religion, with other religions as lower stages in a supersessionist development.²⁰⁹

history of Israel, as lacking the requisite doxastic certainty for religious belief and being a contingent knowledge that differs from the necessary truths of theological reason, further enforces this dismissal of specific religions. [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power'. In, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing; H.B. Nisbet (ed.), *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 85-86.]

²⁰⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Volume I*, ed. and trans. by Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 178.

²⁰⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Volume I*, pp. 182-183. This is applied to numerous religions, which are analysed schematically in: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Volume II*, ed. and trans. by Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

²⁰⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; Peter C. Hodgson (ed.) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Volume I*, p.184. This critique is developed further by Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, 'What if *Religio* Remained Untranslatable?' In Philip Goodchild (ed.) *Difference in Philosophy of Religion* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2003) pp. 87-100.

(3.2.d) The Objective, Exclusivist Ontology of CV

A number of common features emerge from the sketch of CV, Kierkegaard's exclusivist context (1.4.b), and the shared modernist, Christian construction of the essence of religion that underpins both. For this reason, the pseudonyms' criticism of their exclusivist contemporaries can be extended to a critique of CV and four theses that my analysis identifies as underpinning it. These theses misrepresent religion and RD and can be critiqued from the perspective of the conception of religiousness developed in Chapter 2. Although these theses are particularly evident in exclusivism, it will be shown that they underpin all positions within CV, which has an exclusivist bias and ontology.

The theses are as follows. (i) The substantive thesis is that religions exist as reified entities independently of the existential activities that constitute them; they are different instantiations of a single phenomenon or concept such that diversity is only apparent or is a result of different bodies contesting the same facts. (ii) The hegemonic thesis is that truth and salvation can only be obtained within the context of particular religious practices or institutions and in obedience to certain authorities, such as church sacraments or prescribed creeds; the question posed by RD is which and how many such bodies mediate this. (iii) The metaphysical thesis is that religions and/or positions within CV express truths or principles that can be exclusively true, such that a primary question posed by diversity is which account it true. (iv) The doxastic thesis is that religious truth can be apprehended with certainty, such that diversity is a phenomenon that can and should be overcome by adopting a particular philosophical-religious position.

Goodchild identifies implicit ontologies and epistemologies in the various approaches to RD, including exclusivism's singular and pluralism's polyphonic conception of being.²¹⁰ Griffin similarly sees an ontology and epistemology of naturalism as underpinning pluralism just as supernaturalism underpins exclusivism: exclusivism entails the ability to receive and know a revelation directly through supernatural means; pluralism entails that religious knowing is inextricably limited to the natural, cultural context, such that religious knowing will be interpretative and relative, with RD as a consequence.²¹¹

My Kierkegaardian analysis of CV goes further by arguing that exclusivism and pluralism are grounded in the more fundamental, objective, exclusivist ontology expressed in the four theses. This chapter will demonstrate that the theses are present in CV and evince an exclusivist, objective ontology. This is objective in that it signifies a theory of being as a sum of objects with which thought can correspond directly. It is exclusivist in that the problem is to be solved by adopting a single explanatory schema and/or religious perspective on diversity. This chapter will critique this as misrepresenting religion and RD. CV does not offer an engagement with RD from the 'inside', as it is experienced persons because the existential, subjective nature of religion is invisible to CV. It will also be argued that, given the description of the human situation and authentic religiousness in Chapter 2, this expresses an inauthentic response to RD and posits an illegitimate perspective for the philosopher.

²¹⁰ Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 194.

²¹¹ Supernaturalism, 'allows for divine causation to override the normal belief-forming processes of particular human beings, cancelling out the causes of fallibility and error, so that human beings could be vehicles of *infallible* revelation'. In contrast, the naturalist ontology supports a naturalist and pluralist epistemology, 'Human beings are fallible, their belief-forming processes being shaped by cultural conditioning, sin, and ignorance.' [David Ray Griffin, 'Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 14-15.]

(3.3) The Substantive and Hegemonic Theses

(3.3.a) The Theses Evident in CV

The Substantive Thesis

The substantive thesis is that religions are objective entities that exist independently of the local, subjective existential activities that constitute them and that these correspond to the entities described by scholars.²¹² Since these are understood as variations of the same genus, religion, they are defined primarily through ahistorical philosophical construction, rather than empirical or phenomenological description. This problematizes RD as the problem of the relationship between these distinct bodies as variations of the same type. This thesis configures the debate with an exclusivist bias: by being variations of the same type yet having different structures and claims about the same religious matters, religious conflict is integral to CV's conception of diversity and is most easily explained as deviation from the core truth.

The Hegemonic Thesis

The hegemonic thesis asserts that truth and salvation are obtained in the context of specific religious bodies. RD is an objective problem to be solved by determining which and how many religions are valid and authoritative and in which religious bodies truth is located: none, one, or many.²¹³

²¹² Schilbrack notes that this is a common scholarly conceit in academic studies of religion. There are a range of 'social constructivist' criticisms of this approach. [Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, p. 85.]

²¹³ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19.

The debate focuses on the relation of truth/salvation to large, extant groups with clear identities, as opposed to groups that have ceased to exist, are small, or not defined as religions; thus, the debate privileges certain groups over others.²¹⁴ Furthermore, this is dependent upon a conception of specific religions as lacking in peer diversity, with static, fixed boundaries and homogenised identities imposed upon them. For example, it focuses on the relationship between reified bodies like Christianity and Islam.

The conviction of this thesis is that large, powerful, homogeneous, totalising systems, institutions, and groups mediate religious truth and reality and that individuals need to associate with and submit to them as authorities in order to acquire knowledge and salvation. This favours exclusivism because it sees truth as inhering in whole sets of beliefs possessed by singular bodies; it also asserts that only some of the perspectives can be valid: those represented by religions rather than individuals or atheistic worldviews. This also privileges religion as a distinct, unique sphere of human activity, rather than something entangled with subjective, local human life and culturally relative structures.

The Theses Evident in CV

Both theses are evident in Schmidt-Leukel's categorisation of approaches based on the number of religions in which they claim truth is present.²¹⁵ He

²¹⁴ See, for example, the discussion in: Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, p. 2. And the religions covered in: Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, ix. And: Paul F. Knitter (ed.) *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, v-vi. See also: Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ix-xi. See also Hedges' admission that groups such as new religious movements have been ignored in the debate [Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, p. 232.]

²¹⁵ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19.

explicitly privileges ‘traditional religions’ in the options he considers: none, which he equates with atheism, one, some or many.²¹⁶ His failure to conceive of the possibility that one could reject the claim that salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by religions without this equating to atheism reveals this privileging of religious hegemonies.²¹⁷ Similarly, he does not see atheism as a perspective that can have parity with other religions or be true on a pluralistic model. He emphasises the hegemonic thesis further by suggesting that pluralism asserts parity between ‘world religions’ rather than the religious commitments of specific individuals.²¹⁸ This is also evident in Griffiths’ framing of the debate in terms of the definition of religion as, ‘a form of life that seems to those who belong to it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance to the ordering of their lives.’²¹⁹ CV combines this with Christian concepts, as is evident in Schmidt-Leukel’s claim that religions offer salvific knowledge and are to be understood as coherent systems or institutions that mediate a relation to the divine through doctrine and practice.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19. See also, p. 21, where he reiterates this claim, ‘The first option—*atheist/naturalist*—can be excluded as a religious or theological option...since it rests on the denial of a transcendent reality’. Morgan identifies this problem, noting that CV is responding to two distinct questions that are often collapsed into each other: the relation of world religions to salvation and the possibility of salvation outside of Christianity. [Christopher W. Morgan, ‘Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms’. In, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, p. 22.]

²¹⁷ He even distinguishes pluralism about religions from ‘relativism’ about ‘world views or value systems’, seeing the latter as not involved in the debate. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 22.

²¹⁸ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 21.

²¹⁹ Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, p. 12. Depoortere and Lambkin similarly see the question as being about the number of religions that mediate truth. Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, ‘The Question of Theological Truth in a Multireligious World: Reflections at the Interface of Continental Philosophy and Interreligious Studies’. In, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin (eds.), *The Question of Theological Truth*, p. 275.

²²⁰ Heim offers the same criticism of the singularity of ‘salvation’ in CV. Heim, *STDR*, p. 145.

These theses are evident in exclusivism and particularism. Lindbeck defines religions as ‘comprehensive’ interpretative structures that are total in that they are the basis for all experience and beliefs that are held within them, ‘religions are producers of experience’, and, ‘comprehensive interpretative schemes...which structure human experience and understanding of self and world’, particularly in relation to issues that are taken to be, ‘more important than anything else’.²²¹ They provide all of the data and structures necessary for the life of their adherents. Furthermore, they are enshrined in and transmitted by communal bodies that deliver the grammar and vocabulary of the structures in narratives and practices; this is acquired by membership of the body.²²² Although these bodies may develop as traditions over time, they have core, unifying characteristics that allow them to be spoken of as a single body, such as ‘the Church’. They thus exist independently of and prior to all personal experiential and existential activities, which are dependent upon them. This also leads him to understand RD as the clash of these opposing cultural gestalts.²²³ Plantinga similarly links exclusivism with the idea that entire religions must be true or false in his claim that the question is not about which individual claims are true but about which religious system is true, ‘the exclusivist holds that...the tenets of *one* religion—Christianity, let’s say—are in fact truth...[and] that any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false.’²²⁴

²²¹ Lindbeck, ND, p.30, 32 and 33.

²²² Lindbeck, ND, p.33.

²²³ George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.’ In George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.) *The Church in a Postliberal Age*.

²²⁴ Alvin Plantinga, James F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, p. 189.

Pluralistic positions are more sensitive to the relative, eclectic nature of religious bodies and their blurred boundaries. Hick admits the plurality of Christian devotions and beliefs about Jesus, which, 'are so widely various that they must in part reflect the variety of temperaments and ideals...within the world of believers.... Jesus has been able to become so many things to many men.'²²⁵ Nevertheless, the theses are evident in his totalising vision of pluralism: religions are different manifestations of the same truths and structures.²²⁶ While Cobb tries to avoid a reified understanding of religion, he provides a typology of religious responses as theistic, acosmic, and cosmic; he thereby transfers the reification from religions to religious responses.²²⁷

The hegemonic thesis is also evident in the pluralist tendency to emphasise the necessity of extant religions. Knitter implicitly rejects the ability of individuals to possess truth and salvation without involvement with religions by asserting the contingency of religious understanding on religions.²²⁸ Griffin omits incorporating the value of individual perspectives in his assertion that pluralism entails an acceptance of the validity of the perspectives of other religions, 'the acceptance of the idea that there are indeed religions others than one's own that provide saving truths and values to their adherents.'²²⁹

²²⁵ John Hick, 'Jesus and the World Religions'. In, John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 168.

²²⁶ Sinkinson claims that this is the case in Hick's pluralism. [Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*, p. 118.]

²²⁷ John B. Cobb Jr., 'Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 243-246. David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 49.

²²⁸ For example, he claims that Christians must recognise revelation as necessarily embodied in religious structures and equates God working through religious structures with God working through people, 'unless Christians recognise that the Divine Spirit can breathe in other religions, they will not allow the Spirit to be what it showed itself to be in Jesus – an always embodied Spirit. The Spirit touches people through other people, through stories, gestures, music, and dance – and may do so through other religions.' [Paul F Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 101].

²²⁹ David Ray Griffin, 'Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 3.

(3.3.b) The Theses Misrepresent Religion

The existential model of religion emphasises the role of experience and subjective, existential activity in religious identity. From this perspective, the decontextualisation of religiousness from its subjective context in the ways of being of individuals fundamentally misrepresents it and presents a dehumanising approach to human phenomena. Furthermore, this rejects the hegemonic thesis as there are no timeless religious bodies that exist separate to local appropriations in personal, existential activity.

The pseudonyms admit that persons are located, but, by focusing on how idealised religious identities are appropriated and interpreted in local, existential activity, they incorporate the shared, embodied human situation alongside the eclectic, subjective nature of religious identities and commitments, rather than focussing on homogenised, institutional contexts. This provides a superior approach to religious phenomena and exposes weaknesses in CV in three areas: (i) it provides a better fit with the role of human agency in religions, (ii) it is more descriptively accurate by taking into account intrareligious diversity and the blurred boundaries extant in interreligious diversity, and (iii) it avoids some ideologically loaded Western impositions.

(3.3.b.i) CV fails to incorporate subjectivity and human agency adequately

The substantive and hegemonic theses present religions as static entities and individuals as passive recipients who learn the language of the system or acquire salvific truth and knowledge through membership of and adherence to the system. This reflects the religions' totalisation of their own structures, often

for the purposes of control and becoming, 'established orders' (PiC, p. 219), and scholarship, which tends towards abstraction and the objectification of its structures as timeless explanatory systems, disengaging from the temporal by imposing static identities on religions, 'when an existence is turned over to the past, it is indeed finished...and to that extent is turned over to the systematic view.' (CUP, p. 118)²³⁰ Climacus sketches this process whereby scholarly inquiry into Christianity itself becomes the object of inquiry and the content of Christianity becomes the history of scholarship about the content, scholarship becoming parasitic upon itself and thus increasingly detached from subjective religiousness (CUP, pp. 23-49). On Lindbeck's account, for example, what development occurs within religion is initiated by the system itself, not by people acquiring new experiences or ways of experiencing.

Viewing religions as separate from or prior to experience and agency marginalises the role of people in the formation and development of religions: religions cannot grow out of experience because they are a precondition of it. Given the important role played by experience and agency in religion and, in particular, in religious innovation and the development of new religious positions, this is false. From a Climacian perspective, agency and experience are adaptable and central to being in the world, 'The decision rests in the subject; the appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness' (CUP, p. 610). The view that these are passively received from systems that generate them puts the relationship the wrong way round: such systems are generated by embodied human activity.

²³⁰ Hence Goncalves observes that identifying singular religious identities, such as 'Hindu' or 'Christian' overlooks the 'agonistic' and fragmented history of those identities. [Paulo Goncalves, 'Religious 'Worlds' and their Alien Invaders.' In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p.116.] Heim identifies the same problem with CV, 'Its categories treat religious traditions as reified, single entities which "sit still" for people to make the kind of global judgements that the types represent.' [Heim, STDR, p. 4.]

The centrality of agency and experience is evident in various ways in religion, such as when religiousness is responding to newly encountered existential challenges in passionate ways.²³¹ The agonistic nature of the religious sphere (2.2) demonstrates that there can only be subjective appropriation in navigating the tensions, never a fixed and received identity. The substantive thesis describes commitment as a matter of identifying the right group and theory, rather than responding anxiously to the personal significance of one's own mortality in one's encounters with the absolute claims of religions. This fails to capture the passionate, anxious leaps involved for many in conversion to a religion, and their continuing devotion, particularly when it occurs in crisis or boundary situations of existential struggle, 'In the language of abstraction, that which is the difficulty of existence and of the existing person never actually appears; even less is the difficulty explained'. (CUP, p. 301-302)

²³¹ Evidence in support of the role of agency and the agonistic nature of religions is cited by the anthropologist Piette, who lists a range of ways in which general religious norms, beliefs, identities, and structures are expressed in subjective, ambivalent and nuanced ways that depend on human agency and appropriation as the primary factor, for example in acts of religious fidelity and infidelity, dialectics of hope and doubt, different interpretations of beliefs, attaching different significance to rituals and experiencing different emotions (pp. 196-197), leading him to conclude that, 'A believer's everyday life is no doubt structured by a dynamic between all of these synchronisations between himself and the divinity.' (Albert Piette, 'Existence, Minimality, and Believing'. In, Michael Jackson and Albert Piette (eds.), *What is Existential Anthropology?*, pp. 196-200). Similarly, in her research on individuals leaving religious organisations, sociologist Ebaugh identifies six stages in a dialectical process of leaving that includes the developments internal to the religious structures, as described by the cultural-linguistic model, the social context that shapes this religious identity and the person's own subjective, existential history, experiences, commitments and appropriations of the religious identity. The role of agency is central to her findings, which also support the pseudonyms' view of personhood as a dialectic between the two factors of the universal identity and the specific appropriation, 'Throughout the six stages that characterize her exit process there is continual interaction between the issue of who I am to myself and who I am to relevant others. The creation of an identity of an ex-nun results from the process of harmonizing self-definition and role expectations.' (Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, 'Leaving the Convent: The Experience of Role Exit and Self-Transformation'. In, Joseph A Kotarba and Andrea Fontana (eds.), *The Existential Self in Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 175. The importance of subjectivity is also to be preferred as a default position because it fits the empirical data, that there are many different and subjective ways of configuring subjectivity, even within a single religion, without entailing further theorising.

The substantive thesis also occludes the subjectivity of religions. Religions are multifaceted bodies that have developed, and continue to develop, through existential usage by persons: how human persons have subjectively raised, reflected on, interpreted, and addressed their local, existential situations, including the subjective appropriation of religious structures from preceding generations. Furthermore, religions are entangled with and commodified in relation to a range of local spheres of activity. The involvement of subjectivity is particularly evident in a religiously diverse context in which individuals choose how to interact and engage with the various religious structures. This fits the pseudonyms' view of religions as tied to the relative, existential, subjective, and intersubjective personal activities of the people who compose religious communities, religiousness involving a, 'double reflection': an appropriation of religious structures, subjectively and innovatively applied in each new, relative existential context.

(3.3.b.ii) *CV is at variance with the phenomena observable in religions*

The existential approach is more descriptively accurate with regards to religions themselves, particularly in relation to RD, demonstrating CV's lack of attentiveness to the phenomena. Religions display a wide array of intrareligious diversity regarding all of the central claims and practices and are eclectic, fragmented, and interpreted in local, individual contexts. Alterity is internal to religious identities, which are fragmented and incorporate various layers of existential histories, identities, and structures.²³² CV's failure to recognise the

²³² There is insufficient space to justify this claim fully. Mandair notes that the denial of peer diversity and locality of religious structures through the imposition of single, homogenized identities with reified boundaries misrepresents phenomena by constructing it as 'Buddhism' or

centrality of intrareligious diversity is evident from its homogenisation of these into distinct, reified religions.

For example, Christianity is not a singular structure. It develops temporally, with different sources being appealed to as authorities, including individuals, doctrines, and texts; the interpretations of these, and how they are to be lived out in Christian practice, also remain local to particular global and historical contexts (CUP, p. 38). Even if all Christians are thought to believe something central about Christ, which is probably a fallacious view, how this is subjectively appropriated in a local context will vary widely.²³³ The local variations of Christian religiousness are a result of a complex, subjective interaction between the given multifaceted religious identity, the local existential sites of usage, needs, and relationships, and how each individual navigates the two in subjective, creative, existential action.

Christianity is thus a rhizomatic tangle of interconnected yet heterogeneous structures that present labyrinthine channels of embedded identity, shifting through time, rather than a timeless essence enshrined in an institution. Given that Christianity represents one of the more institutional religions, with a foundational canon, creedal pronouncements, and several

'Hinduism'. Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, 'What if *Religio* Remained Untranslatable?' In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 89. This is a problem with analytical philosophy of religion itself, as Insole observes in accusing it of 'forgetting history', citing Swinburne's claim that, 'we are interested in the truth, not in who says it.' Christopher J. Insole, 'Political Liberalism, Analytical Philosophy of Religion and the Forgetting of History'. In, Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 161. It is also supported by Goncalves [Paulo Goncalves, 'Religious 'Worlds' and their Alien Invaders.' In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p.116] and Deleuzian complexity theory, which asserts the polyphonous and rhizomatic nature of being, 'Nature doesn't work that way...this system of thought has never reached an understanding of multiplicity.' [Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 5].

²³³ John Hick, 'Jesus and the World Religions'. In, John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, p. 168.

powerful institutions, this provides a compelling reason to suppose that other religions are also diverse. Goncalves argues that this is ignored by the cultural-linguistic model, 'such approaches are not, as they claim, so much *describing*, but rather *generating, promoting and perpetuating* idealized...fantasms of quasi-autonomous and homogeneous religious traditions', overlooking the, 'agonistic' history of how these religious identities come about.²³⁴

CV also overlooks the permeable boundaries between religions and misunderstands the nature of intrareligious diversity, conceiving of religions as hermetically sealed entities that exist in a vacuum, as in Lindbeck's view that they are 'untranslatable'. CV reifies religious boundaries by asking about the relation between different 'Established Orders' rather than individuals and their relative interpretations, 'The established order wants to be a totality that recognises nothing above itself but has every individual under it' (PiC, p. 91). The question is asked about the relation between large religious groups, rather than asking about the relation of individuals. In reality, religious identities have permeable boundaries, which often blur and interact through meeting with alternative structures in processes of synthesis and hybridity.

(3.3.b.iii) *CV is ideologically loaded*

CV imposes Western concepts on to RD. Schmidt-Leukel responds a similar objection, offered by Heim, that, '*The typology...does not do justice to the radical diversity of the religions.*'²³⁵ He sees this objection as relating to the

²³⁴ Paulo Goncalves, 'Religious 'Worlds' and their Alien Invaders.' In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 116.

²³⁵ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 16.

imposition of an 'unequivocal' model of soteriology that neglects the diversity of soteriological claims in different religions. He responds that this is the problem CV aims to explore: whether there are many, one, or no salvific visions mediated by religions.²³⁶ Although Knitter acknowledges the dangers of homogenisation, he gives a similar response.²³⁷

Schmidt-Leukel and Knitter fail to appreciate the core of the objection, which is not that CV assumes a particular position on the definition of salvation but rather that it assumes that religions are to be understood as entities that are concerned with salvation however it is defined. The procedure of CV is not, as Schmidt-Leukel asserts, that of observing various claims about salvation and thus having to decide how these are to be understood in relation to one another; rather it assumes that the Western Christian concern with salvation is the central issue different religions are concerned with, that this is the issue that needs to be decided about, and that resolving the problem of RD amounts to deciding this issue.²³⁸ The very use of the word 'salvation' is ideologically loaded and derived from a Christian context, as is the idea of religion as sacramentally mediating such salvation.²³⁹

The view that a religion is indispensable and total reflects the mono-religious ideology of premodern Europe and the idea of religion as a universal,

²³⁶ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 26. For Heim's presentation of this objection, see: Heim, *STDR*, p. 4.

²³⁷ Paul F. Knitter, 'Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?' In Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, p. 37.

²³⁸ Knitter, for example, defines his pluralistic position as entailing the view that, 'other religions may be ways of salvation just as much as Christianity.' [Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), p. 17.]

²³⁹ The context of religion, 'demands to be taken into account, reflected, thematized, dated.' Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone.' In Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds.) *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 4.

culture-transcending phenomenon represents an attempt of modern Western culture to interface with other cultures.²⁴⁰ This privileges religions that cohere more directly with the Western paradigm of religion as cognitive and relating to God, contravening the objectivity of the philosophical enterprise, and precluding a global perspective and full engagement with RD.²⁴¹

The pseudonyms are particularly sensitive to attempts to enmesh Christianity with culture for the ideological purpose of supporting either. They accuse Western societies of using a reified notion of Christianity to support Western hegemony and identities, ‘people...have wanted to form comparatively and quantitatively a direct transition from culture to Christianity.’ (CUP, p. 606; See also: PiC, p. 111-112). A particular concern that they share is that this prevents the ability of religions to provide a transforming alternative or critique of socio-cultural norms; instead they are ways of imposing whatever cultural norms they have been commodified to, ‘This dubious situation has been remedied by the presupposition that everyone in Christendom is a Christian.... [But] the most dangerous illusion of all is to become so sure of being one that all Christendom must be defended against the Turk—instead of defending the faith within oneself against the illusion about the Turk.’ (CUP, p. 608. See also: PiC, pp. 211-212). CV projects a single, Christian concept on to RD.

²⁴⁰ Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, p. 86.

²⁴¹ Cheetham notes this as a limitation of philosophy of religion as traditionally conceived. [David Cheetham, ‘Comparative Philosophy of Religion.’ In, David Cheetham and Rolfe King (eds.), *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 101.] Swinburne admits this by advocating such an approach, ‘The Philosophy of Religion is an examination of the meaning and justification of religious claims...more typical of Western religions – Christianity, Judaism, Islam – than of Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism, which tend to concentrate much more on the practice of a way of life than on a theoretical system.’ [Richard Swinburne, ‘Philosophy of Religion.’ In, Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 763.]

(3.3.b.iv) *The existential view of religion avoids the problems while incorporating the insights of these positions*

Focusing on religiousness as developing in relation to shared, quasi-universal existential situations that are faced subjectively by individual persons enables the existential approach to acknowledge and explain the diversity of religious phenomena and their points of intersection. Comparable features, such as certain beliefs, values, and practices, arise from the shared existential contexts denied by exclusivists like Lindbeck, but diversity results from the relative subjective responses to these contexts.²⁴² The existential approach thus incorporates Lindbeck's insight that religion entails more than experience, which always has a reciprocal relationship to its context, and that there is no singular cross-cultural experience because of the relativity of this background. Yet it avoids Lindbeck's limitations because it identifies the existential context, including subjective appropriation, agency, and a shared human situation and public space, as providing this background.

This acknowledges the rhizomatic connections between and heterogeneity of such bodies as potentially connected, by virtue of their historical and global context as well as their origin in existential human activity, yet also forming concentrated manifestations of such subjective activity when they form into collective bodies of individuals. They are prone to continual reinterpretation and remapping by those who associate with them.²⁴³ Moreover, this occurs at various sites in religions, not just in the theologically literate

²⁴² Even Lindbeck is forced to admit one commonality: that, as comprehensive schema, all religions identify issues taken to be, 'more important than anything else'. [Lindbeck, ND, p. 32.]

²⁴³ Hence Deleuze and Guattari advocate a cartographic and exploratory approach for describing rhizomes. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 13.

authorities who determine and legislate on the regimes of phrases; individuals choose how to navigate, interact with, use, subvert, or leave them. This avoids a 'clash of religions' model, focused on large, powerful, homogenised groups.

RD must also be recognised as a central feature of religiousness and as integral to the nature of religions as personal and subjective and thus existing within vaguely defined religious bodies as well as between them; indeed, it is to be welcomed as a sign of deep personal appropriation and engagement, rather than a deviation from an artificially prescribed essence. Furthermore, the pseudonyms identify a public space, in the shared human situation, where engagement between religions is possible and important, given that humans are facing existentially ultimate questions.

(3.4) The Metaphysical and Doxastic Theses

(3.4.a) The Theses Evident in CV

The Metaphysical Thesis

The metaphysical thesis is that religions, and/or the theory of RD, express objective, propositional truths, prescriptions, and accounts that purport to accurately describe reality: they are sets of doctrines, metaphysical propositions, or axiological codes that make claims about reality that can be true, false, or contain degrees of truth.²⁴⁴ The conception of metaphysical truth may be of two main kinds: propositional or coherentist, such that religions may be conceived of as offering specific propositions that correspond to reality or accounts that correspond as a whole.²⁴⁵ Given its hegemonic view of religion, CV is usually formulated in terms of the latter: Schmidt-Leukel, for example, views religions as offering total accounts of reality. This also presents RD as primarily an intellectual problem of disagreement between different metaphysical accounts.²⁴⁶

This thesis solidifies the link between CV's objective ontology and religious exclusivism: both posit the ability of human-generated schemas to describe reality, and, as mediating sets of truths about reality, competing religions are unlikely to both have validity as there will be a single account of reality that is true. It requires that there is a reality, whether singular or

²⁴⁴ Schilbrack notes this as a deficiency of academic approaches to religion, but proceeds to do this himself by identifying religions as offering superempirical accounts. Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, p. 97.

²⁴⁵ Four are identified by Markham, though these two are the accounts of truth in the approaches considered here. Ian S. Markham, 'Truth in Religion'. In, Chad Meister and Paul Copan (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 194-195.

²⁴⁶ Adams, for example, claims that a central difficulty for reconciling different religious positions is that, '*religions pack into their philosophical theologies metaphysical claims*', and specifically rules out interpreting such accounts as metaphorical. [Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Which Is It? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology?' In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, p. 41.]

polyphonous, in relation to which religions are/are not situated.²⁴⁷ Climacus identifies the correspondence theory of truth as integral to an objective ontology: objective reflection aims to comprehend its objects through cognitive correspondence between the objects of thought and the objects of reality in a 'unity of thinking and being' (CUP, p. 86).

The Doxastic Thesis

The doxastic thesis asserts that true religious knowledge about the position one should take on RD can be possessed with sufficient certainty to justify belief in it. In conformity with the assertion of the metaphysical thesis that RD is an intellectual problem revolving around competing accounts of reality, the doxastic thesis asserts that this problem can be solved through the adoption of a true explanatory position provided by a specific religion or theoretical perspective. This position will be global and generic, seizing on a feature of reality to explain a range of phenomena. This is evident in Schmidt-Leukel's totalisation of CV's rationality as definitive: that CV outlines all of the available options, that one must adopt a position on it, and that philosophical rationality can, in principle, solve the problem.²⁴⁸ This is an exclusivist gesture as it asserts our capability of achieving religious knowledge that is more than a provisional, finite schema and is sufficient to justify commitment to a single position as accurately corresponding to reality in the face of a range of alternatives.

²⁴⁷ See, for example, McKim's definition of the problem as revolving around the status of competing religions in relation to truth and salvation. Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, pp. 6-7. Similarly, Quinn and Meeker claim that, 'we use the term *religious diversity* to refer to the undisputed fact that different religions espouse doctrines that are at least apparently in conflict and offer alternative paths of salvation'. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, p. 3.

²⁴⁸ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 27.

The Theses Evident in CV

Byrne provides an example of the use of these theses in his definition of RD as being, ‘The fact...that different religions contain competing accounts of the character of the metaphysically and axiologically ultimate reality and...of the character of the ultimate good human beings can attain through relation to this reality.’²⁴⁹ This is similarly apparent in Schmidt-Leukel’s claim that religions understand themselves as mediating, ‘a salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality’.²⁵⁰ This presents the nature of RD as being the existence of different accounts of reality; the problem it presents is capable of a satisfactory, intellectual resolution.²⁵¹

The propositional version of the theses are evident in Plantinga’s exclusivist claim that religions contain propositions that purport to be true by accurately describing reality and that these can be known to a sufficient level to be believed.²⁵² Although Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model aims to avoid reducing religions to propositional truth-claims in the way that the cognitive-propositional model does, his view is coherentist: religions present whole accounts of reality through their hermeneutical structures.

This description of an objective ontology and correspondence theory of epistemology seems to be at odds with pluralism, particularly Griffin’s naturalism, which asserts the diversity of reality itself as eluding any single

²⁴⁹ Peter Byrne, ‘A Philosophical Approach to Questions about Religious Diversity’. In, Chad Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19.

²⁵¹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed’. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19.

²⁵² Alvin Plantinga, James F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, p. 187.

religious perspective, and Hick's Kantianism, which asserts the impossibility of correspondence given the interpretative, perspectival nature of religious knowing.

However, Hick's pluralism transfers the metaphysical thesis to the pluralistic position itself in claiming to accurately describe the religious situation. Insofar as pluralism purports to give the true or superior account of religions, it offers a single account that replaces other philosophical and theological accounts and religions' own accounts with the truth claims and moral framework of pluralism.²⁵³ Pluralism also asserts the certainty of the pluralist perspective above the particular claims to truth made by religions and of pluralism as the solution of the problem of diversity.

A number of critics identify the same exclusivist gesture in pluralism. Heim claims that, 'each appears to deconstruct the pluralism it seeks to affirm. They insist that despite any apparent indications to the contrary, there is no diversity in the religious object (Hick), in the human religious attitude (Smith), or the primary religious function (Knitter). Thus they agree that the faiths cannot be regarded as serious religious alternatives.'²⁵⁴ This exclusivism is not accidental; its cause is, according to Heim, pluralism's underlying assertion that their theory of religion is true and that, 'Pluralistic theories of religion should be accepted to the exclusion of all others.'²⁵⁵ Such pluralism is self-contradictory because it asserts that many religions are true and that only the religion of pluralism is true. Plantinga uses this contradiction to argue for the necessity of

²⁵³ As an example, see: David Ray Griffin, 'Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 12.

²⁵⁴ Heim, *STDR*, p. 102. See also D'Costa's claim that Hick's pluralism is an 'Enlightenment exclusivism' founded in a Kantian, ontological agnosticism. [D'Costa, *MRT*, p. 30.]

²⁵⁵ Heim, *STDR*, p. 141.

exclusivism, even for pluralists, on the grounds that holding a belief entails rejecting opposing beliefs, 'the pluralist...thinks the thing to do when there is internal epistemic parity is to withhold judgement; he knows there are others who don't think so, and for all he knows, that belief has internal parity with his; if he continues in that belief, therefore, he will be in the same condition as the exclusivist'.²⁵⁶

Schmidt-Leukel's response is that the typology is not claiming that all truth-claims must fit into this model, but only the claims about salvation made by religions; thus one can be an exclusivist about one's pluralism while rejecting religious exclusivism.²⁵⁷ Pluralism can be expressed as an account of religion rather than a religious position itself, thereby escaping the objection that it is an exclusivist competitor.

However, as Heim observes, most pluralistic positions blur the line between their pluralism and the religious position they advocate in that only one account is to be believed.²⁵⁸ Indeed, as Adams observes, their accounts are at odds with religions' own accounts of themselves and are asserted to be exclusively true when the religious claims are incompatible with them.²⁵⁹ As

²⁵⁶ Alvin Plantinga, 'A Defense of Religious Exclusivism'. In, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, p. 182. His doxastic principle is that, 'if he believes (1) or (2), then he must also believe that those who believe something incompatible with them are mistaken and believe what is false.' Alvin Plantinga, 'A Defense of Religious Exclusivism'. In, Alvin Plantinga, James F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, p. 192.

²⁵⁷ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed'. In, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, p. 24. He considers related issues in: Schmidt-Leukel identifies various such objections in, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology'. In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, pp. 21-22.

²⁵⁸ Heim, STDR, p. 142.

²⁵⁹ Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Which Is It? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology?' In, Sharada Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*, p. 40. Knitter's alternative response is that pluralism is compatible with elements of those religious traditions, such that it is not a competitor because, 'All the religions possess the resources within their own traditions to adopt the pluralist model', but by doing this he makes an exclusivist gesture by asserting a single

D'Costa claims, pluralism is a competitor to religions in regarding their accounts as mythological and in need of revision or rejection, 'all religions are seen to make "mythological" (or false) claims, except for pluralists who possess a non-mythological set of ontological assumptions'.²⁶⁰ Moreover, Schmidt-Leukel's defence confirms the accusation that CV assumes the philosopher's ability to accurately and exclusively describe reality in a set of propositions, in this case, meta-level propositions about the nature of reality and status of religions.²⁶¹

Griffin ascribes an exclusivist ontology to 'identist' pluralisms, such as Hick's, that assert a higher ontological unity and account for diversity only epistemologically, as a result of different perceptions. He claims that 'differential' and 'deep' ontological pluralisms, such as Cobb's, escape the charge by adopting a pluralist ontology that stresses that religious difference is irrevocable and reflected in reality itself.²⁶² However, Griffin and Cobb remain guilty of the exclusivist gesture of claiming to accurately describe reality.

Griffin's naturalism is an assertion about reality and includes claims to accurately describe the human situation, an epistemological thesis about religious knowing, and theological thesis about how the divine interacts with the world and should be spoken of. Cobb similarly defends three exclusivist assertions as integral to his pluralism. (C1) He advocates linguistic realism, asserting that, 'Our language refers beyond itself to a real world', such that religions, and his pluralistic account, make claims that are true if they

truth to which the different bodies correspond and also by assigning interpretative authority to a pluralist interpretation of the content of religions. [Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, x.]

²⁶⁰ D'Costa, MRT, p. 46.

²⁶¹ Hence, as will be shown in Chapter 4, some pluralisms are forced to adopt forms of antirealism, because denying there is a reality to which thought corresponds is the only avenue for rejecting the implicit exclusivism of correspondence theories.

²⁶² David Ray Griffin, 'Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep'. In, Griffin (ed.), DRP, p. 29.

correspond to the polyphonal reality, 'the great religious thinkers of West and East have apprehended real features of a real world.'²⁶³ (C2) He asserts that different religions have genuinely encountered different aspects of the 'totality' and describe this in language that corresponds to reality. The truths conveyed by religions are thus complementary: they are valid descriptions, even if they appear to compete.²⁶⁴ (C3) He also asserts the truth of the pluralist ontology as a description of reality.²⁶⁵ Pluralism is 'normative' and should be adopted as true because its pluralistic insights corresponds to the polyphonal nature of reality.²⁶⁶

Pluralisms also make an exclusivist gesture by asserting a set of religious and moral principles that are held to be true, not simply second order theories about what truth claims can be made, further blurring the theory/religion distinction as suggested in Heim's criticism. For example, Griffin claims that a primary motive in developing pluralism has been a conception of the 'primacy of divine love' as incompatible with exclusivism and its exclusion of access to God, a point similarly made by Hick, 'Can we accept that the God of love who seeks to save all mankind has nevertheless ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation?'²⁶⁷ Hick also asserts that religions focus on moving the individual from self-centredness to reality-centredness and that this is the moral objective truth communicated by

²⁶³ John B. Cobb Jr., 'Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 256-257 and p. 258.

²⁶⁴ David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 47-48.

²⁶⁵ John B. Cobb Jr., 'Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 254-258.

²⁶⁶ John B. Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism*. Ed. Paul F. Knitter, p. 50. Cited in David Ray Griffin, 'John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 50.

²⁶⁷ David Ray Griffin, 'Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep'. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 10-11. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (Macmillan, 1973), p. 122.

religions that underlies their apparent differences.²⁶⁸ Similarly, Griffin claims that pluralism is to be promoted as having social and global utility and that religions contain moral values that are conducive to this: ‘The growth of religious pluralism in the various traditions could encourage a mutual respect and appreciation that would facilitate cooperation.’²⁶⁹ This evinces the metaphysical thesis: there is a single moral framework that should guide belief-formation and decision-making and this can be found in religions.

Even deep pluralism is thus grounded in a metaphysical account of reality that is claimed to be true, to solve the problem of diversity, and to supersede religious claims. This is particularly problematic because it conflicts with the deeper pluralist conviction that all knowing is situational and context-bound, including meta-theories about religion.²⁷⁰ The existential epistemology outlined in 2.3 makes this pluralist assertion invalid; it adopts that view that would be more coherent within a pluralist position: the necessity of interpretation goes to the core of understanding and is inescapable, even in theories themselves, which operate within a particular, relative interpretative framework.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Sinkinson observes that this commits Hick to an exclusivist ethics. [Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*, p. 169.]

²⁶⁹ David Ray Griffin, ‘Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep’. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ Heim makes a similar criticism. [Heim, *STDR*, p. 143.] The focus of my critique is exclusivism and it should not be taken as a definitive refutation of deep pluralism. Cobb shares a number of affinities with the critique, such as his rejection of the reification of religion and the attempt to identify its essence or a common notion of salvation. [John B. Cobb Jr., ‘Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism’. In, Griffin (ed.), *DRP*, pp. 243-251.] My critique demonstrates that pluralist positions are hampered by defining themselves in relation to CV and a typology that is configured along exclusivist lines that emphasizes the problem as objective and theoretical and requiring the deployment of a generic, global account of reality. They fail to capitalize on their hermeneutical insights into religion as interpretative contextual frameworks because they fail to apply the same insight to philosophical and metaphysical accounts. Deep pluralism may be able to respond to my critique, but it must do so through a more radical departure from CV than Cobb and Griffin achieve.

²⁷¹ Heim refers to this as the, ‘orientational pluralist’ insight. Heim, *STDR*, p. 143.

(3.4.b) The Theses Misrepresent Religion

The existential conception of religiousness and religious knowing, which regards certainty as unachievable and undesirable in the light of its interpretative and embodied nature, is opposed to the view of religions as metaphysical accounts and the idea of religious certainty. The ontology of CV also posits singularity and unity as the essence of the relationship between reality and consciousness; it fosters totalising visions of the Truth of the whole.²⁷² This view of religious truth is an onto-theological gesture critiqued by the pseudonyms.²⁷³

Westphal identifies the onto-theological gesture as the utilisation of the divine as an explicable concept that can be directly described through a theological system and through which existence can be understood as a totality with the person occupying, 'the divine perspective on the world'; it thus serves as the foundational criterion of legitimisation for the philosophical system.²⁷⁴ The divine, understood homophously as in exclusivism or polyphonously as in pluralism, provides the singular concept in which CV's ontology is expressed and justified, allowing existence to be thought as systematic totality, 'Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, that is, in general...[and] as a whole.'²⁷⁵ This grounds and predetermines the relations one is to sustain to others and religions. The pseudonyms reject this onto-theological gesture of the exclusivist theses in several ways: totalising systems misrepresent religion, posit an illegitimate

²⁷² Hence Goodchild identifies exclusivism as Neoplatonic, though he fails to see pluralism as making the same gesture. Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 194.

²⁷³ Westphal interprets Kierkegaard as part of the tradition of defining and rejecting ontotheology. Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 6.

²⁷⁴ Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*, p. 6.

²⁷⁵ Martin Heidegger, 'The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics'. In, John D. Caputo (ed.), *The Religious* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 69.

perspective of the philosopher and are designed to insulate persons against the anxiety of existence through acts of domination. In all three cases, the problem derives from ascribing interpretative authority to metaphysical accounts.

(3.4.b.i) *CV focuses on metaphysical accounts that impede authentic religiousness*

The metaphysical thesis defines religion 'objectively': as a set of doctrines, metaphysical propositions, or code of values that makes claims about reality (CUP, p. 218). This distorts religions by objectifying their essentially subjective, existential and experiential content, as ways of being in the world, and translating them into sets of intellectual or moral assertions, 'attention is immediately turned outward in order to find out what Christianity's doctrine is' (CUP, p. 607).

The ways of being religious that are facilitated by CV translate the encounter with different religions into an objective problem about deciding between truth-claims and gaining certainty. According to Climacus, this perpetually postpones real existential engagement because there can be no, 'transition from something objective to a subjective acceptance' (CUP, pp. 129-130). This is because the aim of the objective approach, in attempting to decide the matter rationally and impartially, is to abstract from the personal, subjective, existential commitments (CUP, p. 118). This intellectualisation is inimical to passion, which requires existential encounter; hence, Climacus links objectivity with the inability to have the passion of faith or feel religious 'terror' (CUP, p. 215) and 'unutterable joy' (CUP, p. 221).

Marginalising the role of accounts and truth-claims in religion seems spurious, as religions do involve such features, but the pseudonyms' contention

is that these are secondary to the existential activity and wider range of features. Their account coheres more closely with religious phenomena, which include narratives, practices, and a range of embodied experiences, emotions, and activities more than metaphysical treatises. This acknowledges the existential nature of encounters with religion: humans turn to religious ways of being when it comes to questions that cannot be empirically or objectively answered: death, afterlife, salvation, values, meaning, and identity. The meaning of religious truth-claims is lived out relationally and subjectively through the resources that religions provide, so propositional elements must be considered as expressions tied to the existential context that gives rise to them. Extricating propositions from this context has the result of altering the meaning of the beliefs and ignoring the subjective dimension of knowing from which they emerge and to which they relate.²⁷⁶ The priority of embodied coping over theory means that the more fundamental questions posed by RD are existential, about how one is to relate to others, not theoretical. Hence Cheetham observes that, far from being a more limited perspective, comparative theologians who avoid CV may demonstrate, 'a *fuller comprehension* of these basic questions by soberly recognizing the appropriateness of a more finite task...[that] has acknowledged its human limitations in light of the depths and complexity of ultimate questions.'²⁷⁷

Climacus also critiques the metaphysical thesis' objective conception of religious absolutes as totality-of-explanation as incommensurate with the absolute commitment elicited by the question of one's 'evig salighed'. The latter,

²⁷⁶ Climacus notes the use of the Danish 'ophaeve', 'annul', to translate Hegel's 'aufheben', 'synthesis', the implication being that its extraction of truth negates the diversity and specificity of Christianity by regarding the variations as merely rhetorical variations (CUP, p. 220).

²⁷⁷ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 76.

which he sees as the proper object of religious devotion, is qualitatively distinct in that it elicits devotion, not intellectual assent, 'Objectively understood, there are more than enough results everywhere, but no decisive results anywhere...because decision is rooted in subjectivity' (CUP, p. 34).

(3.4.b.ii) *CV posits the unachievable goal of gaining secure knowledge of absolute religious truth*

The approach to reality as a total system is impossible for existing beings, 'A system of existence cannot be given.... System and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite.' (CUP, p. 118) First, such a totalising grasp is impossible because one is dealing with human realities, not fixed, timeless essences. Resolving the issue for CV also requires the achievement of an unachievable certitude that a particular system is exclusively and totally true and not merely provisional, yet, as products of human subjects, all systems are provisional and relative to ways of being, such that a neutral view from nowhere cannot be achieved, 'certainty is impossible for a person in a process of becoming, and is indeed a deception.' (CUP, p. 74) Authentic religiousness is consciously aware of its nature as a commitment necessitated by the anxious, uncertain, agonistic, and processual limitations of the human situation. This context entails that beliefs inevitably change and evolve: a belief may seem to have certitude or be the result of reliable methods but, since all positions and methods are the result of changeable interpretations and commitments, all positions are uncertain and provisional.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ 'Oh yes, in the end everything will become clear, but the end is not here yet.' (CUP, p. 13).

Furthermore, the onto-theological gesture is an act of despair, intended to insulate one against encounter with the other and the agonistic nature of personhood legitimising one's singular conception of reality,

'In a human being there is always a desire...to have something really firm and fixed that can exclude the dialectical, but this is cowardliness and fraudulence toward the divine. Even the most certain of all, a revelation, *eo ipso* becomes dialectical when I am to appropriate it.... It is, however, far more comfortable to be objective and superstitious, boasting about it and proclaiming thoughtlessness.' (CUP, p. 35)

Viewed objectively, how one is to interact with religious others is dependent on one's theoretical account of diversity, but this suspends the eventfulness of the encounter and occasion for relationship and transformation that all such encounters present. Indeed, if the problem of RD could be solved with certainty, faith would become impossible, since there would be no risk or uncertainty, 'Without risk, no faith' (CUP, p. 204). The desire for a doxastic resolution of the problem, from Climacus' perspective, is an attempt to gain a security that is impossible and demonstrates despair.

(3.4.b.iii) *CV is incompatible with divine transcendence*

These theses also conflict with the experience of the divine as a transcendent or ineffable personal being. As Buber observes, for example, the objectification of a Thou is an inappropriate relationship to an absolute because it assumes a complete grasp of the absolute through its characteristics and thus the superiority of the observer over the observed as capable of describing and

manipulating it.²⁷⁹ Objectification of a Thou in a set of characteristics also reduces it to being an object among others, rather than a unique, personal presence, 'in the exclusive situation of what is over against it.'²⁸⁰ The pseudonyms' identification of the object of Christian faith as paradoxical, offensive, and opposed to reason (PF, p. 53; PiC, p. 125) disrupts any attempt to incorporate it into such an onto-theology, calling, instead for the language of collision, discontinuity, and disruption in conformity with encounters wherein reason is stretched to its limits and collapses, 'the understanding's paradoxical passion that wills collision awakens and, without really understanding itself, wills its own downfall.' (PF, pp. 38-39)

Furthermore, the pseudonyms' describe encounters with the divine in which existential transformation is encountered as generated from the outside, even if it is initiated by an act of faith, as in the transforming relationship with Jesus through God's grace (PF, pp. 26-32; PiC, p. 64). On such a view of divine activity, religions convey transcendent and seemingly impossible encounters without claiming to describe the nature of the being encountered in total or metaphysical ways. CV precludes such eventfulness because it legislates and pre-emptly the meaning of the other and the presence of God. God cannot be encountered in an eventful, transforming way, because God's presence in a particular religious system is predetermined by the philosophical reflection of CV.

Finally, the pseudonyms defend a personalist view of the nature of God and describe the 'God-relationship' as involving a relationship of

²⁷⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 17.

²⁸⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 30.

contemporaneity with God as a person, such as Jesus.²⁸¹ By asserting that God is a personal being, who can only be related to personally, the pseudonyms aim to preclude the conception of God as a component of a metaphysical system, such as a *causa sui*. For a response within CV to be valid, it must make claims about the divine that are true but, on the personalist account, God, as a personal entity, can only be encountered relationally and cannot be presented in a propositional system, 'to bring forth God objectively...is not achieved in all eternity, for God is a subject and hence only for subjectivity in inwardness.'²⁸²

Beyond this encounter with a personal being, Climacus claims that God is an inexpressible mystery, and neither revelation nor nature provide a way of penetrating into it (CUP, pp. 245-246). Rather than delivering knowledge, the effects of the relationship are transforming, such that the other is only known as it affects the person and is never laid bare, 'With regard to the essential truth, a direct relation between spirit and spirit is unthinkable.' (CUP, p. 247) Part of the role assigned to the Absolute Paradox in Christianity is to destabilise onto-theological structures because, as 'absurd', it cannot be known only related to (CUP, p. 213). Climacus also argues that if a direct relationship to God were possible, through adherence to exclusivist structures, God would be culpable for

²⁸¹ Personalism is here understood loosely as the claim that God is 'a personal agent' who interacts with humans, for example, through prayer, and who is possessed of intentions, will and personality. I follow Moser and McCreary in defining Climacus as a theological personalist in this way. Paul K. Moser and Mark L. McCreary, 'Kierkegaard's Conception of God'. *Philosophy Compass*, 5/2 (2010), p. 129.

²⁸² CUP, pp. 199-200. This is sometimes interpreted as advocating theological antirealism: Cupitt, for example, claims that God is a product of subjectivity [Don Cupitt, *The World to Come* (London: SCM Press, 1982), p. 46]. This is fallacious as Climacus argues that God can only be related to subjectively precisely because God is a subject and hence he compares the God-relation to other interpersonal relations (CUP, p. 247). Law supports this interpretation, 'God is a subject. Therefore the appropriate relationship is a subjective relationship. But this does not mean that God is a feature of human *existence*.' [David Law, 'Making Christianity difficult: the "existentialist theology" of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*.' In Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.) *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p. 234].

failing to make this available to everyone: 'Oddly enough...it does not occur to anyone to complain about God, who...would seem to be able in the communication of truth to relate himself directly' (CUP, p. 243).

3.5. An Existential Typology of Approaches to Religious Diversity

CV has been shown to be inappropriate as a means of approaching RD because it misrepresents the nature of religion, the nature of diversity, and because it is an unachievable and inauthentic approach to religious knowing and devotion. A typology must be more sensitive to the subjective and existential dimensions that are vital to religious devotion. Rather than utilising the blunt, objective typology provided by CV, a new typology must be constructed to describe the existential orientations and ways of being that are possible when confronted with RD as an existential problem. As an existential problem, the primary dilemmas it poses relate to how one is to configure commitment and openness, relate to others and construct authentic ways of being in the situation of diversity.

Cheetham has suggested the need to adopt an aesthetic approach to the typology, focussed on the 'tone of voice' and ways of speaking adopted by the positions.²⁸³ This is comparable to Connell's utilisation of 'moods' as describing fundamental orientations in one's way of being in the world. In a strategy similar to my own, Connell identifies exclusivism with 'seriousness' and pluralism with 'irony'.²⁸⁴ I will now propose an alternative typology of approaches to RD, focused on the ways of being they facilitate and express, with the aim of providing a fuller, Kierkegaardian account of the subjective and existential dimensions than these two suggestions.

²⁸³ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 4.

²⁸⁴ Connell, KPRD, p. 85. Chapter 4 will develop this in two ways: it will be argued that pluralism and exclusivism advocate entire ways of being, not simply tones of voice or moods, and that these ways of being are not simply limited perspectives but are entirely inauthentic and inimical to developing authentic religiousness and engaging with religious diversity.

Despair

Climacus and Anti-Climacus outline various ways of being that they regard as inauthentic responses to the human situation. Anti-Climacus describes these through his typology of despair, which he expounds, in relation to his ontology of the person, as a misrelation to oneself.²⁸⁵ It signifies a failure to constitute selfhood, particularly in relation to an identity that one has willed.²⁸⁶ As such, it provides an understanding of inauthentic religiousness as a failed attempt to constitute selfhood through commitment.

SuD maps out varieties of despair that fail to live out the dialectic of the human situation of finitude/infinity, possibility/necessity and, to add Climacus', universality and specificity (SuD, pp. 29-74). Anti-Climacus identifies four types of despair: 'to lack finitude' (SuD, p. 30), 'to lack infinity' (SuD, p. 33), 'to lack necessity' (SuD, p. 35) and 'to lack possibility' (SuD, p. 37). He also sees ways of being as either conscious or unconscious of this despair.

All forms of despair are underpinned by spiritlessness and are linked to anxiety, weakness (SuD, p. 61), existential cowardice, and a misplaced confidence that is in denial about the precariousness of its own situation, 'the anxiety that characterises spiritlessness is recognised precisely by its spiritless sense of security.' (SuD, p. 44)²⁸⁷ Anti-Climacus recognises that living in the human situation is an anxious struggle in which one must respond to a range of crises

²⁸⁵ I follow McCarthy in defining despair as, 'misrelationship to oneself in one's inner life'. Vincent McCarthy, *Kierkegaard as Psychologist* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), p. 138.

²⁸⁶ McCarthy sees will as the primary issue in despair. Vincent McCarthy, *Kierkegaard as Psychologist*, pp. 139-140.

²⁸⁷ Pattison notes that anxiety in CA provides the theoretical basis for Anti-Climacus' exegesis, though he identifies a modification of the concept in SuD, which treats anxiety as a symptom of despair. There is insufficient space to analyse the differences, but I follow Pattison in arguing that despair is best understood as resulting from the universal condition of anxiety, such that there can be an authentic response to despair in the anxious human situation. George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, p. 65.

and difficulties but without the ability to do so on the basis of secure foundations because one remains temporal and finite. In the face of this situation, adhering to a seemingly secure, authoritarian structure, disengaging by becoming absorbed in known fantasies, attempting to master the situation by committing in accordance with the level of security one can achieve, or avoiding the question altogether are failures to respond to the real human situation as an unending, dialectical struggle to constitute identity. Such approaches will fail to respond to the human situation in the most authentic, fullest, and most passionate way possible; the loss of selfhood may go completely unnoticed if their diversionary tactics are successful (SuD, pp. 32-33; p. 45). In short, many religious ways of being, like many of the other spheres, are in despair; fleeing or failing to address selfhood and utilising aspects of their way of being to support this spiritlessness. Features of despair can be identified in a range of responses to RD that are described by CV.

(3.5.a) Closed Commitment

Two parallel forms of despair, lacking finitude and lacking possibility, are expressed in closed ways of being and commitment. Lacking finitude involves absorption in 'the fantastic' (SuD, p. 30), through how feeling, knowing, and/or willing are configured (SuD, p. 30). When linked to knowledge, lacking finitude is evident in attempts to ground personhood through the accumulation of objective, 'inhuman knowledge' (SuD, p. 31). This is described as lacking finitude for two reasons. It does not acknowledge sufficiently the relative, finite situations and interests of the existing person in a way that facilitates personal, existential action, focusing purely on the universal identity, facts, knowledge, or

ideals rather than integrating the specificity of the person's appropriation of this identity (CUP, p. 73). Hence Anti-Climacus compares it to the situation of one who builds a palace while forgetting they live in the doghouse next door (SuD, pp. 43-44). It can be seen in forms of aesthetic life that have become so focused on romantic ideals that they cause aesthetes to become detached from their real lives and relationships. It is based in the erroneous fantasy that the person can escape his/her finitude, often by coming into the secure possession of truth.

Lacking possibility signifies a lack of agency in developing personhood, 'The determinist, the fatalist, is in despair...because for him everything has become necessary.' (SuD, p. 40) This type of despair sees identity as conferred by external factors over which the individual has no control; its opposite is to believe that there are other possibilities for transformation and that human agency makes a real difference in this; hence Anti-Climacus compares it to the value of prayer for affecting real change (SuD, pp. 40-41). It may see selfhood as inherited or as an impossibility and is likely to see identities as inescapable and fixed by historical or socio-cultural factors.

The despair of lacking finitude is evident in most forms of exclusivism and in pluralisms that assert the exclusive religious truth of the pluralist hypothesis. Religious faith is defined as objective and total assent to a particular set of beliefs, practices, values or an institution, whether this is the exclusivist claims made by a specific religion or the exclusivist claims of pluralism. This orientation asserts a single account of religious truth and claims that this truth can be known by adherents; it rejects alternative perspectives; it understands religious commitment as paradigmatically grounded in this, such that it is entirely secure, 'the objective way is of the opinion that it has a security that the subjective way

does not have' (CUP, p. 194). Because the religious object is taken as guaranteeing truth, the finite and temporal nature and concerns of the person, and their inescapable anxiety and uncertainty, are seen as negated (CUP, p. 195); their only task is to conform to the external group of the true religion(s).

The despair of lacking possibility is present in forms of exclusivism that assert the necessity and inescapability of culturally bound religious belonging. The cultural-linguistic view, for example, asserts that identity is conferred by being born into a particular context which then provides the whole horizon for agency and understanding; those outside of this are simply others who can never be understood or engaged with due to the accident of fate or history that a particular religion dominates in a particular group of people.

Religious commitment can be closed in various ways and is particularly evident in exclusivism and particularism. First, it is closed to the possibility that it could be in error or that other interpretations could be valuable or true. It is closed to the possibility that others can even be understood or that one can escape the confines of the religious identity in ways that are transforming: one is confined to the necessary religious identity in which one finds oneself and other religions are alien others that can never be engaged with. It denies the need to and possibility of engaging with alternatives, or to develop its own position, on the basis that its commitment is known to be the truth or is secured in some other way. Because it posits an illegitimate authority to its own structures, Climacus compares this to paganism in that it involves believing various mythical accounts to be true in a directly accessible way through conformity with immanent religious structures, 'Direct recognisability is paganism; all solemn assurances that this is indeed Christ and that he is the true God are futile as soon

as it ends with direct recognisability. A mythological figure is directly distinguishable. If one charges an orthodox with this, he becomes furious and flares up: Yes, but Christ is indeed the true God...one can see that in his gentle countenance. But if one can see it in him, then he is *eo ipso* a mythological figure.' (CUP, p.600. See also: CUP, p. 248; PiC, p. 125) He also describes this as a lunatic fixation on a particular object that disengages from the existential situation (CUP, pp. 195-196).

Second, it is equated by Climacus with authoritarian views of religion as identical with a fixed body of knowledge such as rational, philosophical method, the bible, creeds, or church as the basis for securing certain knowledge and personhood (CUP, pp. 19-57). Such commitment is slavish obedience, not agency-driven appropriation, in which a prefabricated religious identity is simply taken on by a person coming to identify in relation to a religious group. This is a closed commitment, because religiousness is defined as conformity with these objective structures, 'not by what has taken place within the individual but by what has taken place *with* the individual'. (CUP, pp. 609-610). It clings to an identity derived from external factors, in which creative agency is not involved because the identity is taken as the only possibility for the person. This closed commitment is inauthentic because it forgets the existential struggles individual persons face that require existential, rather than cognitive, responses and it also effaces the role of agency in the formation of authentic selfhood.

Subjectivity may be seen as bias in such an orientation: the local religious perspective that one must surmount to obtain a fuller perspective (pluralism) or the personal aspects of identity that must be renounced in conformity with objective religious patterns (exclusivism). Alternatively, subjectivity may be

acknowledged as something to be shaped by religious structures in order to allow the perception of truth, 'the pathos of immediacy', in which 'appropriation' is defined as, 'a temporary function whereby one temporarily adheres to something that is to become an object for understanding' (CUP, p. 609). This is the case where exclusivists assert that knowledge can be achieved through forms of apotheosis. Religious truth is achieved by adherents becoming subjectively identical: the subjectivity of the person and their inward, local expression of religiousness are subsumed or displaced and capable of being expressed only within the limited confines of particular religious structures.

The ways in which it is closed not only misrepresent the human situation; they also obstruct authentic Christian religiousness. This is bound up with Christological motifs of encountering God in the other, particularly where this is thought to be impossible, in such a way that the encounter is transforming and opens up new possibilities. It also requires personal appropriation of religious identities in a context of radical insecurity and uncertainty befitting the existential and agonistic struggles of life, such that they become subjectively true. Anti-Climacus describes the closed commitment that rules out other possibilities as thus having no God beyond its own constructs, 'or, what amounts to the same thing, his God is necessity' (SuD, p. 40). For religion to present encounters with the impossible that are the occasion for transforming faith, it must be able to conceive of an open world of radical possibilities.

(3.5.b) Quixotic Commitment

While Climacus sees closed commitment as the deeper lunacy because it has become detached from the defining realities of the human situation, he views

Quixotic commitment as passionate but misguided, 'Don Quixote is the prototype of the subjective lunacy in which the passion of inwardness grasps a particular fixed finite idea.' (CUP, p. 195) Although Don Quixote is passionate and has inwardness, his lunacy does not reflect his existential situation in that he lives out a fictional, illusory life. Since the fallacy of his situation cannot, on Climacus' understanding, be an objective fallacy, such as committing to a religious truth that is untrue, it must rather be that his subjectivity is in some way configured that it is inappropriate to his existential situation, just as Don Quixote is committed to being a knight, when he is not a knight.

Quixotic commitment can be equated to the forms of despair of lacking finitude and lacking necessity. While lacking finitude through the abstraction of knowledge corresponds most obviously to exclusivist ways of being, finitude can also be forgotten by living out a 'fantasized existence' (SuD, p. 32). Anti-Climacus' example is of a religious person who is 'intoxicated' and 'swept off his feet', carried away by his own religious imaginations in a way that is divorced from his real existential situation and the challenges he faces and that impairs his ability for existential action and transformation, 'he cannot come back to himself, become himself' (SuD, p. 32). Another possible example is one who attempts to live according to their own resources, without acknowledging their reliance on God and that, 'subjectivity is untruth' (CUP, p. 207; PiC, p. 67).

This can be further elaborated in connection with its parallel: lacking necessity. Part of this necessity is the real existential situation in which one finds oneself, 'His concrete self...has necessity and limitations, is this very specific being with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations, etc.' (SuD, p. 68) This includes identities and

characteristics that one may have inherited from one's situation, such that the self is described as 'angular' and authenticity entails living out and grinding these identities into shape through subjective appropriation (SuD, p. 33).

Anti-Climacus sees agency in developing authentic selfhood not as the ability to dispense with contingently derived identity but as the ability to work through it. This also expresses the Climacian and Anti-Climacian conviction that authentic selfhood is achieved by deepening in a sphere rather than becoming a long legged fly that can skate across a range of identities and possibilities with ease, 'To become is a movement away from that place, but to become oneself is a movement in that place.' (SuD, p. 36) A religious identity, while diverse and subjectively appropriated is also, 'a very definite something' (SuD, p. 36), that provides the resources one must appropriate.

Pluralism and nihilistic relativism, by making identity easily dispensable, fail to provide the resources for a full, deep engagement with the existential situations and struggles in which persons necessarily or inevitably find themselves. Easy transition between identities is a mechanism for irresponsibility, evasion, diversion and disengagement from the real struggles, 'Eventually...the time that should be used for actuality grows shorter and shorter; everything becomes more and more momentary.... The instant something appears to be possible, a new possibility appears, and finally these phantasmagoria follow one another in such rapid succession that it seems as if everything were possible, and this is...the point at which the individual himself becomes a mirage.' (SuD, p. 36)

The view that exercising agency in making transitions of identity or embracing full multiple-religious belonging can ultimately undermine the ability

of agency to face the existential situation seems counterintuitive. Could the pluralist not be responding to the existential situations precisely by making such transitions to structures that allow him/her the flexibility in addressing each situation as it is encountered? It will be shown in later chapters that such deep encounters play an important part in authenticity. However, the concern that pluralism's levelling of options undermines the ability of these options to engage with existential situations by making them too readily dispensable has traction. The view that a religious identity is easily dispensable entails that its existential struggles are finite and can be terminated by adopting a different identity. For example, in a Christian context a person is struggling with experiencing themselves as sinful. A temptation facing this person will be to rid him/herself of this existential struggle by simply adopting a different religious identity that lacks the concept of sin. But if this route is taken, the underlying features of the human situation to which the idea of sin is responding will go unaddressed and, far from finding new ways to address the situation, the individual will simply have disengaged from it. Hence Climacus asserts that, 'Repentance...viewed religiously, will not have its day and then be over; the uncertainty of faith will not have its day and then be over; the consciousness of sin will not have its day and be over—in that case we return to the esthetic.' (CUP, p. 524)

Authentic selfhood requires a realistic view of the human situation and commitment to face its existential struggles in a long-term process that balances the resources at one's disposal, including the identities one has inherited, with subjective appropriation. Forms of pluralism that see religious identity as dispensable or as requiring modification so that it is understood as a useful myth, fail to provide such an approach. Chapter 4 will show that various types of

antirealism and pluralism endorse this type of commitment, in that they endorse commitment when the objects of faith are not real, when the relationship is purely with oneself rather than God, or because they rely on one's own moral capacity and resources: they are fixations on self-generated fantasies that are known to be fantasies by the one who commits.

(3.5.c) *Partial Commitment*

This way of being is evident in orientations that possess a limited degree of commitment that corresponds to the limited degree of certainty that has been achieved, with faith in proportion to, 'probabilities and guarantees' (CUP, p. 11). Climacus describes this as living, '*in suspensio*', that is, committing in accordance with the current stage of one's ability to demonstrate the truth of one's position (PF, p. 42) or committing in accordance with the partial, 'approximation knowledge' (CUP, pp. 21-34) religious truth will always possess. An example is an evidentialist view that asserts the necessity of commitment being commensurate with the evidence, 'A wise man...proportions his belief to the evidence.'²⁸⁸ It is also evident in hermeneutical, antirealist and 'weak' conceptions of faith that equate a loss of belief in objective reality with a non-committal faith. For example, Cupitt rejects Kierkegaardian commitment as incompatible with the loss of the real, favouring 'nihilism', and claiming, 'we should simply expend ourselves and our lives.... One should not cling to one's selfhood or to anything that one has done, been, made or loved.'²⁸⁹ Such

²⁸⁸ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [Third Edition]), p. 110.

²⁸⁹ Don Cupitt, *Solar Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1995), p. 47. Some antirealists differ on this point. Caputo's conception of weak faith, for example, advocates the Kierkegaardian view that

approaches are essentially objective in their configuration of faith, due to their idea that the level of commitment must correspond to the amount of objective certainty; they prioritise rationality and the supremacy of reason. They express a form of existential commitment, but the aim is to keep it disentangled from too much involvement with local structures. Such commitment fails to live out the full, passionate, relational life that the pseudonyms see as the most authentic response to the human situation; to care, love, and commit deeply as if every relationship and every choice had deep significance, and is eventful and transforming for the person.

(3.5.d) *Non-commitment*

The opposite of the exclusivist lack of finitude is the lack of infinitude, which Anti-Climacus equates with secularism, nihilism, and misplaced material commitments, 'the attribution of infinite worth to the indifferent' (SuD, p. 33). He equates this with a lack of spirituality because it constructs personhood in relation to purely finite concerns and is a refusal to commit to any religious way of being. It includes indifference to religious questions and 'offence' at the demands made by religions and at the location posited of the divine in Jesus. Such orientations reject the viability of faith commitments as either impossible of achieving the requisite level of certainty to make commitment credible or as having so much to disconfirm it that commitment is irrational and thus to be rejected as 'foolishness' (PF, p. 52). This is a reasonable response, given the religious incapacity of reason. In relation to the divinity of Jesus, for example, 'If I,

uncertainty is a prerequisite of passionate commitment: 'the very highest passion is driven by non-knowing.' John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 129.

then, or anyone starts with the assumption that it was a human being, it can never in all eternity be shown that it was God.' (PiC, p. 29)

This may also be grounded in an existential distaste for or antipathy to faith and/or its objects, as in offence at the demands of Christian faith or location posited of the divine (PiC, p. 9). Climacus also detects it as an orientation within religions themselves, evident when a person sees all of the existential and religious questions as resolved and commitment as unnecessary by virtue of their membership of a religious group, 'No, if someone were to say, plainly and simply, that he was concerned about himself, that it was not quite right for him to call himself a Christian...his wife would tell him, "Hubby darling.... How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish, aren't you?... You aren't a Jew, are you, or a Mohammedan? What else would you be then?"' (CUP, p. 50)

While this is a reasonable approach in relation to reason and, if it is a form of offence, may be a higher insight into the nature of the demands presented by religions because it recognises them as something that should provoke a passionate response, it is seen by Anti-Climacus as expressing one of the first two forms of despair because it is a repressive denial of what one is, a spiritual being that is more than its rational faculty (SuD, p. 14).²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ As non-commitment is not a primary way of being seriously religious but rather a rejection of religiousness, it will not be considered further in this thesis.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that CV fails to adequately conceptualise the nature of and problems posed by RD, primarily because it is committed to an objective, exclusivist ontology and is blind to the more central subjective and existential dimensions of religiousness. An existential typology of commitment has been proposed as a superior way of understanding the different ways of being fostered by responses to RD, categorising the positions within CV based on the types of commitment they evince, how these configure religiousness, and how they express forms of despair. Chapter 4 interprets and critiques the exclusivist Christology of Barth and pluralist Christology of Hick from this perspective, identifying them as forms of inauthentic commitment.

To avoid the problems of CV, an approach to RD should build on my existential typology to identify the existential questions underlying RD. It should explore the nature of commitment and faith, as these are relative to the rich and varied ways in which religiousness is expressed in different ways of being and in how religious identities are manifested in local, subjective situations, rather than focusing on the relationship between religious hegemonies. It should recognise that its own criteria of legitimisation are existentially, as well as culturally and religiously, relative, such that no global, generic solutions are possible. Indeed, it should seek to avoid any theoretical resolution of the problem as this inevitably negates the diversity, overlooks the elusive and transcendent nature ascribed to many objects of religious devotion, and posits an illegitimate position for the philosopher. Instead, it should seek to foster encounter, be sensitive to the relative commitments and aim for deep description and empathetic engagement over theoretical conclusions. Above all, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, the

focus should be on how the engagement with diversity can be configured to facilitate full relationships as part of an authentic way of being in the world that has faced up to despair in the way that best expresses a full, creative, and passionate response to the human situation.

CHAPTER 4

FOLLOWING CHRIST AUTHENTICALLY:

KIERKEGAARDIAN CHRISTOLOGY AND DIVERSITY

4.1. Argument in Brief

The previous chapter critiqued CV's conceptualisation of RD and the range of responses to it, focused on how it misrepresents the nature of religion and limits the responses to diversity by grounding the debate in an exclusivist ontology. Since religions and theories, according to my existential approach, express ways of being, the misrepresentation of religiousness in CV is not simply an error; it expresses and fosters ways of being that are inauthentic and despairing. This chapter resituates the positions of exclusivism and pluralism within my existential typology of commitment and critiques them as expressing types of inauthentic commitment that are inimical to authentic religious ways of being in the world. Rather than providing a robust basis for strong faith and commitment, the objective nature of religious exclusivism undermines it, just as the objective nature of pluralism undermines its ability to embrace RD.

This critique focuses on two Christologies: Barth's exclusivist Christology and Hick's pluralist Christology. Christology has been chosen to provide the basis for the critique for several reasons. First, Barth and Hick represent diametrically opposed and influential alternatives on RD, utilising Christologies to support their positions. Second, Christian claims about Christ provide the primary problem for Christian engagements with diversity yet are central to Christian faith, such that a critique of exclusivism and pluralism from the perspective of Christology will disallow them from being options for Christians. To be

convincing to Christian theologians, the Kierkegaardian model proposed in this thesis must address the central position of Christ in Christian devotion.²⁹¹ Third, the pseudonyms' Christologies have often been interpreted as offering exclusivist or pluralist perspectives on Christ, and it will be necessary to refute these interpretations to develop a Kierkegaardian alternative. Christology is vital in the pseudonyms' elaboration of authentic Christian religiousness, which, as outlined in 2.4, entails a relationship of contemporaneity with Jesus. It will be argued that the pseudonyms' Christologies offer a direct critique of such positions, such that, far from providing an obstacle to engagement with diversity, their Christologies are the primary ways they reflect on otherness, presenting an opportunity rather than an obstacle to encounter with religious others.

²⁹¹ Knitter, for example, asserts that the 'uniqueness of Christ' is the central problem for Christian theological engagements with diversity. [Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions*, p. 20] He sees the measure of a successful Christian response as being that it is able to preserve the uniqueness and global significance of Jesus in a way that does not disrupt engagement and dialogue. [Paul F Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p.111.] Beyond theoretical accounts of diversity, many theologians also look to Christ's character of service and message of love, humility and mercy as a model for how to engage with religious others. [See, for example: Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, trans. Phillip Berryman (New York: Maryknoll, 2002), pp. 20-30. And: D'Costa, MRT, p. 166.] The centrality of Christology in the Christian debate over religious diversity is indicated by its importance even for those demythologise and dispense with realist claims about Christ, such as Hick. Sinkinson, for example, sees Hick's turn to pluralism as dependent on his Christological position. [Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths: A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*, pp. 10-11.]

4.2. Exclusivist Christology

(4.2.a) Barth's Exclusivist Christology: Closed Commitment

Revelation: The Doxastic and Metaphysical Theses

Christology has provided the foundation for Christian exclusivism, underpinning the exclusivist theses identified in the previous chapter. As a representative example, Barth's Christology supports several of his central, exclusivist claims.²⁹² First, Jesus presents a unique revelatory incarnation of God, all truths about God being exclusively available through knowledge about God's presence in Jesus, 'Who God is and what it is to be divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed Himself and His nature, the essence of the divine.'²⁹³ As this historical event is recorded in the New Testament and expounded in the gospel and creeds, this supports the exclusivist claim that Christianity possesses exclusive truths about God. Indeed, as the focal point of cosmic and human history, Jesus supports the onto-theological gesture of exclusivism, as the totality of reality and God are understood and possessed in this site.

Conformity with Christ: The Doxastic Thesis

Barth offers Christological support for the exclusivist doxastic thesis by asserting that salvation effects metanoia, a transformation in the person that

²⁹² Barth has been chosen because he developed an influential and entirely negative appraisal of religions and religious diversity, leading Knitter to present him as the most extreme form of exclusivist, offering a 'total replacement model'. [Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 25.] His Christology also developed under the influence of Kierkegaard, particularly on the radical otherness of God and 'infinite qualitative distance' between God and humanity, which he interpreted in an exclusivist light in opposition to alternative readings of Kierkegaard's Christology found, for example, in Bultmann. [Karl Barth, 'Rudolf Bultmann – An Attempt to Understand Him'. In H. W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, (London: SPCK, 1972), Volume II, p. 94. This Barthian connection has also supported exclusivist interpretations of Kierkegaard's Christology.

²⁹³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), p. 186 [59.1].

grants a privileged perspective for knowing religious truth with certainty, 'He Himself makes us ready to listen to the Word'.²⁹⁴ This transformation of the person into 'conformity with Christ' grants a higher epistemic and moral position for accepting and obeying the revelation, 'This directing and integrating into Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, and in it he can hear and receive the divine revelation.'²⁹⁵

Salvation in the Church: The Substantive and Hegemonic Theses

Barth claims that Jesus is decisive for salvation history, which is the result he achieves as the outcome of his sacrificial death, '[He] founded a new world and inaugurated a new aeon—and all this in His passion.'²⁹⁶ This salvation is made available through the presence of Jesus to those who are saved, which is a possibility because Jesus is not dead and thus consigned to the past but, as resurrected, can come as a living person into relation with subsequent generations, 'The event of Easter Day is the removing of the barrier between His life in His time and their life in their times, the initiation of His lordship as the Lord of all time'.²⁹⁷ It is the resurrection that secures Jesus' 'contemporaneity' with all believers.²⁹⁸ This supports the exclusivist assertion that only Christianity is saving, particularly its gospel message as this mediates the salvific knowledge

²⁹⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), p. 221 [16.1].

²⁹⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 277 [16.2].

²⁹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1*, p. 254 [59.2].

²⁹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1*, p. 316 [59.3].

²⁹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1*, p. 348 [59.3]. Various commentators point out that, without resurrection, Barth believes there is no mechanism for contemporaneity. [E.g., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), p. 184]. John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2004 [Second Edition]), p. 123. George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth's Christology: its basic Chalcedonian character'. In John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 138-9.

and relationship, 'To know it, we must know it as such.... To speak of it, we must tell it as history.... To say atonement is to say Jesus Christ.'²⁹⁹

The exclusivist hegemonic thesis, that truth and salvation are located exclusively in the institutions, scriptures and creeds of Christianity, is similarly supported by Barth's equation of the church with Jesus' continuing presence, 'The community is the earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ Himself.... The Church is His body, created and continually renewed by the awakening power of the Holy Spirit.'³⁰⁰ He claims that the Church is established by God, who thus defines the true religious community by the institutional boundaries of the physical church, 'a quite visible coming together, which originates with the twelve apostles...a visible group'.³⁰¹

Soteriological activity cannot take place outside these boundaries; participation in the Church is necessary for salvation, '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*'.³⁰² Regarding non-Christian religions, Barth argues that, 'religion is unbelief.'³⁰³ He asserts that religions are the attempts of 'godless man' to, 'arbitrarily and wilfully', reach God through human activity.³⁰⁴ As a human construct, 'In religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute'.³⁰⁵ This evaluation of religions derives from Barth's assertion that, as divinely initiated in Jesus, salvation and revelation has to be imparted to passive recipients; in contrast to religions that represent attempts to appease God or deify humanity, 'God in Jesus Christ, is the One who takes on Himself the

²⁹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1*, p. 157 [15.2].

³⁰⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4.1*, p. 661 [62.2].

³⁰¹ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 142.

³⁰² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 220 [16.1].

³⁰³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 299 [17.2].

³⁰⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 300 and p. 302 [17.2].

³⁰⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 303 [17.2].

sin of the world'.³⁰⁶ An exception is made for the Church as it is identified as the unique embodiment of Jesus, 'the Church, even though it is a human gathering and institution, cannot therefore be regarded as a human production...the church cannot be thought of otherwise than as the reality of God's revelation to us'.³⁰⁷

Barth's understanding of the Church as a, 'community...created by the Word of God', asserts the singularity of the message, 'Word', that is imparted to 'witnesses', the apostles, enabling him to assert the universality and singularity of Christianity, in which peer diversity is explained as a later development and departure from the initial Christian unity: the true church is the single, catholic Church.³⁰⁸ Intrareligious diversity is thus identified as an aberration; the purpose of theology is to ensure the orthodoxy of belief by its singularity and conformity to the singular revelation, 'In theology the question about truth is...does the community properly understand the word in its purity as the truth?'³⁰⁹ Unity, singularity and truth are thus equated through the presence-of-God-in-Jesus-as-Church; this is gained by people through a transformation of their moral and epistemic condition through participation in the institution of the Church. This is a paradigmatic type of closed commitment because it argues for the necessity of complete acceptance of a single religious structure that is configured as hermetically sealed and transcendent of all immanent, human structures; it also disallows any engagement with external bodies, which are equated with sin and idolatry.

³⁰⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 309 [17.2].

³⁰⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1.2*, p. 221 [16.1].

³⁰⁸ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 37-38.

See also: Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, pp. 142-143.

³⁰⁹ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p. 39.

(4.2.b) Exclusivist Interpretations of the Pseudonyms' Christology

Although the previous chapter demonstrated the pseudonyms' rejection of the exclusivist thesis, it is possible that the authorship reintroduces exclusivism: it could be that it presents a higher perspective than Climacus' subjective religiousness, either in his own Religiousness B or in Anti-Climacus' or Kierkegaard's Christian religiousness. It is also possible that their position is incoherent, retaining exclusivism despite their rejection of its theses, or that they construct an alternative type of exclusivist closed commitment on the basis of their Christological reflections. Connell argues that Kierkegaard defends an exclusivism because he advocates commitment as, 'going "all in"', an orientation he sees as comparable to Plantinga's position, 'Like Plantinga, Kierkegaard describes faith as full, unqualified commitment (subjective certainty) to a belief that is acknowledged as objectively uncertain.'³¹⁰ Central to the authorship's elaboration of religiousness are Christological reflections and concepts, such as 'the Absolute Paradox', 'the absurd', and 'offence', that stress the uniqueness of Jesus and the normative status of the relationship to him, 'he is the Saviour, and for no human being is there salvation except through him.' (PiC, p.77) Moreover, the central question posed by both pseudonyms is about the nature of faith in Jesus (e.g. PF, p. 1; CUP, p. 17, p. 381, pp. 629-630; PiC, p. 9).

Rae's interpretation of the pseudonyms coheres with the exclusivist elements of Barth's Christology. He claims that Kierkegaard's existential approach aims to encourage appropriation of orthodox Christological beliefs, 'If it is not true...that in Jesus God himself has come among us...then it is of little consequence how we respond to the apostolic testimony presented in the New

³¹⁰ Connell, KPRD, p. 102.

Testament. The individual's existential response to Christ is of eternal significance precisely because the doctrinal claims are true.'³¹¹ These 'doctrinal claims' are the historical claims of the New Testament, the two-natures of Christ, and the necessity of the revelation of God in Christ for obtaining religious truth and salvation.³¹² McCombs agrees, asserting the centrality of Christological revelation for Kierkegaard, 'The non-negotiable core of the distinction between Socratic subjectivity and Christian faith is that neither Socrates nor any other human being could, without grace and revelation, fully discover Christianity so as to become a Christian and save his soul.'³¹³ Law identifies the same exclusivist argument: human beings lack the capability of arriving at religious truth, which is provided exclusively in salvation through Christ.³¹⁴

Rae interprets the pseudonyms as supporting the exclusivist doxastic thesis, asserting that, 'Reason is reinstated', after its collision with the paradox, such that the Christian is able to comprehend the initially paradoxical mystery through revelation, God thus being exclusively known by the Christian, who possesses a higher epistemic status.³¹⁵ He claims that the trustworthiness of the biblical witness is confirmed by experiential and existential transformations in the believer, granting them unique epistemic access to theological truth,

³¹¹ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p. 59.

³¹² Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 19.

³¹³ Richard McCombs, *The Paradoxical Rationality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 148.

³¹⁴ David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, p. 156.

³¹⁵ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, p. 21. This view is echoed by Evans' claim that the paradox of the incarnation is only 'apparent' and not essential: that is, it does not exist in reality, only from the perspective of the unbeliever who has not yet been transformed to grasp the real unity of God and man in Christ. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, pp. 131-132. It can also be found in: Richard McCombs, *The Paradoxical Rationality of Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 147.

Christian experience providing 'plausibility structures' that ground Christian belief.³¹⁶ Non-Christians lack epistemic parity with Christians.

Rae also argues that this locates the boundaries of truth and salvation within the body of the Church because it possesses and transmits the necessary propositional and doctrinal information about Jesus, 'the grace of God...has come among us...as the Spirit who makes eloquent the testimony of those who are called to bear witness to the Truth'.³¹⁷ Emmanuel offers a comparable interpretation of the pseudonyms' emphasis on lived appropriation, arguing that, by equating Christian faith with the entire range of life fostered by Christianity, rather than merely belief or experience, Kierkegaard advocates an embryonic version of the cultural-linguistic approach, 'There is thus affirmed a sort of correspondence between the totality of Christian thought and practice, the Christian form of life, and the ultimate reality of things.'³¹⁸ Thus, Kierkegaard is interpreted as advocating closed commitment: religiousness as total submission to revelation mediated by the Church that entails conformity with its structures, creeds and beliefs. This also elevates the believer to a higher level than outsiders, such that there can be no dialogue between them: the higher rationality of the Christian will seem like foolishness to the non-Christian.

(4.2.c) The pseudonyms' Christologies as ideology-critiques of exclusivist Christology and its closed commitment

Such commentators are correct in identifying the pseudonyms as asserting the contingency of Christian faith on the presence of God in the

³¹⁶ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, p. 96; p. 131.

³¹⁷ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, p. 19.

³¹⁸ Steven M. Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 107.

historical Jesus, because it is the collision of this with the universal need of humanity for salvation that is their primary question.³¹⁹ However, the three central features of the pseudonyms' Christologies refute the exclusivist interpretation and, furthermore, configure Christology in an anti-exclusivist way. Their existential approach rejects the closed commitment of Christian dogmatism as obstructing existential transformation through faith in Jesus; they define Jesus as an oppositional figure to Christianity itself, entailing uncertainty, hiddenness, offence and collision; they elucidate contemporaneity as individual and personal experience of Jesus unmediated by religious institutions.

The core of their objection to exclusivist Christology is its advocacy of closed commitment, which they see as having an inimical existential impact on religiousness, as being ecclesiocentric and illegitimate, and as aimed at removing the agency and anxious choice that is integral to faith for the purposes of control and reinforcing institutional power. The features of their Christologies also provide an ideological critique of the ecclesial use of Christology to legitimise exclusivist Christianity. This is not tangential to their Christologies; both Climacus and Anti-Climacus attempt a deconstruction of Christianity through the tensions generated by its hegemonic, exclusivist manipulation of the symbol of Jesus.³²⁰ Indeed, they see the irruption of God in Jesus as providing a perpetual, anti-ideological impetus by always announcing an alternative to the immanent

³¹⁹ E.g. PF, p. 1, CUP, p. 17; p. 381, pp. 629-630.

³²⁰ Anti-Climacus uses the term 'Christendom' to signify that he is criticising a particular configuration of Christian faith within the contemporary institution of the church. Kirmmse, Perkins and Hong all assert that the position of the Danish Lutheran Church in the public sphere is the target of the critique of *Practice in Christianity*. I will develop their interpretation to suggest that it is not merely the historical situation of the church in Danish society that the pseudonyms regard as illegitimate and that they provide a more fundamental critique of the utilization of Christology as a totalitarian ideology. Robert L. Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus in His Social and Political Environment'. In Perkins (ed.), IKCPC, p. 275. And, Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 395.

religious community, “My kingdom is not of this world,”...is eternally valid, for all times just as valid a statement about the relationship between Christ’s kingdom and this world.’ (PiC, p. 211)

Hence Climacus’ central question is how the individual is to become an authentic Christian against the backdrop of inauthentic Christian religiousness: how one is to become a Christian in Christendom (CUP, p. 612).³²¹ Climacus sees this as a difficulty for two reasons. First, where passion is involved this is misdirected into ‘going beyond’ faith and defending the rational or doctrinal authority of Christianity, as in the case of the ‘honourable gentleman’ (CUP, pp. 612-615) and the ‘learned research scholar’ (CUP, p. 27). Second, Christian religiousness is seen as the default cultural identity and so has ceased to be an occasion for passionate transformation, “The name “Christian” is used in the same way those people borrowed bonds—in order to attend the general meeting where the fate of the Christians is decided by Christians who for their own sake do not care about being Christians.’ (CUP, p. 612)

Both of these correspond to despairing closed commitment as defined in 3.5. The despair of closed commitment is that it lacks finitude by positing an illegitimate perspective of the person, allowing them to attain ‘inhuman knowledge’, denying the finitude of the human situation and replacing the existential commitment of faith with cognition. It was also identified as denying possibility and agency in its exclusion of other possibilities and seeing identity as conferred by external factors. These types of despair are motivated by an

³²¹ For this reason, Walsh identifies CUP as the beginning of Kierkegaard’s polemic against Christianity [Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 27.]

authoritarian ideology that exploits the agonistic and anxious human situation. All of these features can be identified in the religiousness of Barth.

(4.2.c.i) The pseudonyms' existential Christologies versus the closed commitment and 'inhuman knowledge' of exclusivism

Barth's exclusivism asserts versions of the doxastic and metaphysical theses: the truth of Christian belief is the object of closed commitment. In order to be secure, the Christian has to know that he/she has the truth and that all other options are false, such that closed commitment is based on a process of legitimisation via belief in the authority of Christianity: X has truth/salvation because X adheres to Y (prescribed beliefs and practices) as true, and is justified in committing to these totally, because Z, an authority in such matters, (for example: the bible, church, creedal affirmations), has stated that Y is true. On this model, the truth of the incarnation is understood as a set of beliefs and practices that are legitimised by Christianity and must be accepted with unwavering commitment. The pseudonyms reject this on numerous points.

The truth communicated in Jesus is existential, not doctrinal.

The pseudonyms reject the idea that faith in Jesus entails acceptance of a set of truths and practices. The diversity of views of Jesus is preserved by the pseudonyms' emphasis on personal, subjective appropriation as the authentic expression of commitment. Regarding revelation, the pseudonyms emphasise that no theological doctrines are communicated as the person cannot be communicated in sets of historical or theological propositions (PiC, pp. 23-24); through them, 'one comes to know something about him that is different from

what he is.' (PiC, p. 26) Anti-Climacus uses only minimal doctrinal language: he does not offer a doctrine of redemption or discuss the place of Christ in the Trinity, 'Christianity is no doctrine; all talk of offense with regard to it as doctrine is a misunderstanding', including, 'the *doctrine* of the God-man'. (PiC, p. 106) Similarly, the 'god's poem' does not utilize any biblical imagery but is offered as a 'poetic venture' (PF, p. 26), couched in universalisable narrative motifs. Though Jesus delivers the truth to persons who are in 'untruth', this is understood as him affecting a subjective, existential transformation rather than establishing a norm for belief and conduct. The pseudonyms also do not consider Jesus' actions in relation to changes in the cosmos, salvation history, or the establishment of a church community. They either reject or view as irrelevant the exclusivist idea of the ontological necessity of Christ for salvation: God's love is the cause of salvation, in desiring loving relationships with human persons and Jesus is understood as the manifestation of this love, not its cause.³²²

Closed commitment voices a demand for an unachievable certainty

The pseudonyms argue that closed commitment voices a demand for an unachievable certainty. The existential basis of knowing undermines appeals to authorities in that it posits existential commitments and perspectival interpretations as underpinning rationality and the appeals to authorities themselves. Believing Y to be true because of Z is incommensurate with faith because relying on accepted doxastic guarantees produces only intellectual and partial commitment, not the relational and appropriative passion of personal faith (CUP, pp. 23-59). Indeed, no knowledge can be certain or

³²² See the analogy of the Maiden and the King. (PF, pp. 26-30).

presuppositionless if an authority is appealed to, because the believer has to acknowledge his/her prior commitment to accept Z as an authority (CUP, p. 14). There is a regress of justification in any reliance on an authority, making it arbitrary or justifiable only by further warrants and authorities that legitimate its status as an authority, inaugurating the Christian into an unending approximation process that veils the groundlessness of knowing and its perspectival nature as dependent on decision. (CUP, p. 28)

Climacus applies this to a range of authorities typically appealed to by Christians: 'Just as previously the Bible was supposed to decide objectively what is essentially Christian and what is not, now the Church was supposed to be the secure objective stronghold. More specifically, it is the Living Word in the Church, the Creed, and the Word with the sacraments.' (CUP, p.37) For example, if the bible is identified as an authority, its authenticity, the shape of the canon, method of interpretation, a theological doctrine of revelation, and similar factors have to be determined, but these are reliant on the authority of further discourses.³²³

Tensions inherent in exclusivism lead to this self-defeating logic as the claim to exclusivity makes the question of legitimisation both necessary yet incapable of being satisfied: legitimating metanarratives collapse due to their inability to satisfy their own demand for exclusive and legitimated knowledge. It identifies a site as an authoritative revelation but veils the initial choice to identify this as an authority, veiling the role of the subject in an act of transference or 'ventriloquism' (CUP, p. 111). The exclusivist focus on knowledge

³²³ Climacus sketches such attempts in: CUP, pp. 23-49, observing that, 'If Scripture is viewed as the secure stronghold...the important thing is to secure Scripture historically-critically', (CUP p. 24) and concludes this is inevitably unsuccessful (CUP, p. 34).

and certainty makes faith a form of objectivity that cannot satisfy its own demand for a rational, legitimating foundation.³²⁴ The result is that it becomes increasingly repressive and in denial about its own insecure nature or degrades into a partial commitment in conformity with the degree of certainty.

Far from overcoming these epistemic limitations for Christians, encounter with Jesus further precludes certainty about religious truth. Because the presence of God in Jesus is hidden, paradoxical, and offensive to human reason and expectations, a Christian cannot know that he possesses the truth. Such ideas are compared to a triumph of invention where, due to an inventor's breakthrough, the discovery of some new truth or item is possessed, 'here the emphasis is placed upon the truth, the yield, and on the race, human society...which takes over the truth as a matter of course, and it is accidental that a single individual has discovered it'. (PiC, p. 210) Such certainty would also undermine the human freedom that Climacus claims motivates divine hiddenness as it would necessitate human acceptance of Jesus (PF, pp. 26-32). Anti-Climacus rejects this view of faith as it degrades its absolute and life-long task of commitment. This directly refutes the interpretations of Rae and Evans that the paradox ceases to be a paradox for the higher rationality of Christianity. Similarly, Climacus views faith not as a sequitur at the end of a sequence in which capacity, Religiousness A, fails and incapacity is overcome by divine initiative in Religiousness B; rather, the two remain in tension, such that the dialectic of capacity-incapacity is never resolved (CUP, p. 576).

³²⁴ Harvey thus sums up Climacus' argument as being that, 'the choice of a dogmatic method cannot change the orientation of the will because the choice is subject to the very influences of the will the method seeks to overcome.' Michael G. Harvey, *Skepticism, Relativism, and Religious Knowledge* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), p. 41.

To sum up, exclusivist closed commitment replaces the passionate commitment of faith in the real human situation of anxiety and uncertainty with a closed adherence to knowledge that is in denial about its limitations.

(4.2.c.ii) Opposition and collision in the pseudonyms' Christologies versus exclusivism's denial of possibility and agency

Faith requires a collision with Christ as the transforming other; exclusivism obstructs this

Although the pseudonyms identify Jesus as the site of divine activity, by expounding this as 'the sign of offence' and 'Absolute Paradox', they aim to preclude attempts to incorporate him into ideological structures or validate the 'the Established Order'. Anti-Climacus recognises that moral and rational norms are generated by social structures and that these tend to be authoritarian metanarratives, presenting themselves as absolute, certain and legitimising all other structures. The pseudonyms' contention is that Jesus must be a source of offence, in conflict with the Established Order, in order to be an object of faith, which is appropriated by Christians living out religiousness in the same way, 'To be a Christian...means to express being Christian within an environment that is the opposite of being Christian'; rather than being in, 'an environment that is synonymous, homogeneous', (PiC, p. 212). Indeed, faith itself requires a context of 'opposition'; Climacus interprets *Fear and Trembling* as positing a suspension of the ethical that places the faithful in this situation, 'The suspension consists in the individual's finding himself in a state exactly opposite to what the ethical requires.' (CUP, pp. 266-267) The pseudonyms thus locate the believer in the area of the profane rejected by the established order, not the sacred, 'the

possibility of offense lies precisely in this, that it is the believer in whom the world sees a criminal.' (PiC, p. 120)

Exclusivist attempts to establish the certainty of Christ by authoritarian appeals to doctrine, institution, or theology obfuscate the offence, precluding faith and the encounter with the absolute paradox (CUP, p. 49, PiC, pp. 35-6), 'In established Christendom, this and every other possibility of offense is basically abolished...one becomes a Christian in the most pleasant way of the world without being aware of the slightest possibility of offense.' (PiC, p. 111) It results in a fictional Jesus, created by and in support of the established order; a 'capricious arbitrariness that knows that it itself has produced the god'.³²⁵ (PF, p. 45) The recontextualisation of Jesus in a system of guarantees that secure it and make it intelligible thus prevents its religious and transforming efficacy and even the need to personally engage with it. For example, communion appropriates Jesus' offensive identification of himself with the 'living bread' in a structure that makes it intelligible and normative rather than offensive, 'These words have now been placed in the context of Holy Communion; a doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's body has been advanced, and because one has in Christendom a fantastic Christ-figure, all this is not incomprehensible and in no way does it contain the possibility of offence.' (PiC, p. 99)

As the Absolute Paradox, there can be no question of incorporating Jesus into a system or set of doctrinal claims: the encounter with Jesus is not a comfortable encounter with doctrines in a context that asserts their truth; it is the collision with a radical other that disrupts all claims to authority. Climacus

³²⁵ This is evident in the use of Jesus to support the status of Emperors, priests, the church and Barth's understanding of Jesus as a paradox that undermines liberal, humanistic bodies and supports his own conservative community.

argues that the earliest Christians had no such institutional guarantees to support their faith, such that exclusivism's provision of, 'probabilities and guarantees' presents an unbiblical faith, 'It would be a gross injustice if any later generation would safely, that is, objectively, be able to insinuate itself into Christianity and thus partake of what an earlier generation had purchased in the utmost danger of subjectivity and had spent a lifetime acquiring in this very danger.' (CUP, p. 42)

This demand for certainty expresses the desire for mastery over the divine, degrading it from being an absolute reality that is encountered only in anxious and uncertain decision-making. Certainty stifles the passionate commitment that is essential to faith, which is dependent on acts of will and risk, 'as soon as uncertainty does not continually keep the religious person hovering...as soon as certainty seals with lead, as it were, the religious person—well, then he is naturally about to become part of the mass.'³²⁶ Epistemic humility is a condition of Climacian faith: in order to realise the necessity of an existential commitment one must realise the risk involved, 'Without risk, no faith', and the more awareness of the risk, the greater the passion of faith needed to commit, 'the less objective reliability, the deeper is the possible inwardness.' (CUP, p. 204; p. 209)

Caputo supports this position, arguing that certainty about structures entails a fixture and static adherence to norms, usually delivered from the past and limited to a particular context, such that they convey only the possible.³²⁷ He argues that experiences are eventful, involving new configurations of

³²⁶ CUP, p. 507; pp. 282-3.

³²⁷ John D. Caputo, 'Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event'. In, Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.), *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 47.

subjectivity; they elude one's current capabilities of representation, and initiate unthinkable changes in one's life: impossibilities that one can only venture into. Encounter with 'epistemological undecidability' combined with future-oriented passionate faith and hope opens subjectivity to such new and futural experiences in the absence of guarantees, 'the very highest passion is driven by non-knowing.'³²⁸ Caputo attributes the same view to Kierkegaard: since the highest passion of faith is paradoxical, the passion of faith drives the individual to continually revise, revolutionise, or move beyond present possibilities to new ones led on by an unending process of promise and seeking, 'Before he has made the venture, he can understand it only as lunacy...when he has ventured it, he is no longer the same person.' (CUP, p. 423) While Climacus does posit a transformation akin to metanoia, this is not to an elevated epistemic perspective whereby truth is known with certainty, but rather the ability to embrace religiousness without certainty and an impossibility that transcends immanent possibilities. Indeed, given the processual nature of human existence, the knower should welcome uncertainty as the most appropriate expression of the human situation, remaining open to possibilities beyond current beliefs, by being, 'never a teacher, but a learner' (CUP, p. 85).

Climacus' understanding of religion as a response to ultimacy that makes claims and promises that breach the possibilities conveyed by past experience, entailing hope and faith, requires openness to the future and new experiences. Hence Climacus argues that, in order to maintain human free will and the necessity of choice and decision, the universe has to be religiously ambiguous and mysterious in order to allow for faith, 'And why is God illusive? Precisely

³²⁸ John D. Caputo, *On Religion*, p.129.

because he is truth and in being illusive, seeks to keep a person from untruth.' (CUP, pp. 243-244) This is strenuous and requires a continual 'striving' as humans find certainty comforting (CUP, p. 92), but such fixture is fantasy and precludes faith because it is inappropriate to our situation, 'one continually feels an urge to have something finished, but this urge is of evil and must be renounced.' (CUP, p. 86) Exclusivism is incompatible with faith as it entails an attachment to existing, paradigmatic structures and experiences; it demands certainty in an area of perpetual uncertainty and thereby precludes faith.³²⁹

Relying on authorities obstructs personal commitment, agency and freedom

The pseudonyms argue that doxastic reliance on and subservience to authority for the validation of knowledge is inimical to the centrality of agency in religiousness. It makes believers passive in receiving something achieved by someone else and sees truth as something already possessed: one, 'has nothing more about or for which to struggle.' (PiC, p. 211) Seeing identity as secured from an external source degrades the possibility of personal, subjective appropriation, and obfuscates the personal source of commitment. Hence he also

³²⁹ Indeed, that this claim occurs immediately after a discussion of the Christian paradox is further evidence that Climacus is not an advocate of exclusivist and irrationalist fideism. The error of Penelhum's interpretation emerges here: he sees him as positing a consuming and irrational faith commitment since he rules out the approximation process of scholarship for its inability to give certainty but fails to recognise that Climacus is not defending certainty, only commitment. [Terence Penelhum, 'Fideism.' In, Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, p. 379]. Furthermore, contrary to Evans' interpretation that Climacus' emphasis on human incapacity; that, 'changing himself is something the individual cannot do', (CUP, p. 363) as privileging Christian truth as revealed, Carlisle's interpretation coheres with my argument. Human incapacity is understood by Climacus not as necessitating a reliance on authoritative revelation, as this could not replace the authority of subjectivity and the need to decide whether it constituted a revelation (CUP, p. 24), but as entailing that subjectivity is constituted through acts of openness and a refusal of attachment to one's structures as absolute: subjectivity is formed only in a context of dependence. [See: C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Postscript and Fragments: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p. 148. Clare Carlisle, 'Climacus on the Task of Becoming a Christian'. In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p. 186].

complains that Christianity confuses the existence of churches with people being Christian (PiC, p. 211). By understanding salvation as adherence to propositions, there is no need to appropriate and transcend, core aspects of faith, only to conform to the predetermined, objective structures, 'When the matter is treated objectively, the subject cannot impassionedly relate himself to the decision, can least of all be impassionedly, infinitely interested.' (CUP, p. 31)

Climacus compares such an orientation to the lunacy of a person who cites propositions popularly regarded as objective facts as the basis for his identity, thereby failing to realise the necessity of personal appropriation. For Climacus, this is dehumanising because it negates personality, 'One does not know whether one dares to believe that it is a human being with whom one is speaking, or perhaps a "walking stick," an artificial contrivance'. (CUP, p. 196) Since knowing is underpinned by subjective commitments, individuals have inescapable freedoms and active roles in the formation of their beliefs and faith. Relinquishing this authority is impossible because, in adhering to an authority, one is still acting as the authority by conferring authority upon it. In response to the Christian who claims, 'I rest in a confidence in others, in the authority of the saints, etc.', he thus asserts, 'This is an illusion, because dialectics merely turns and asks...about what authority is then and why he now regards these as authorities...not about *the faith* he has *out of confidence in them* but about *the faith* he has *in them*.' (CUP, p. 24)

Exclusivism is a hegemonic gesture aiming at domination

Personhood lacks security and entails a perpetual, dialectical struggle with irresolvable conflicts in the face of serious existential challenges. All

persons can do in this situation is exercise freedom in deciding how to respond. Climacus identifies pedagogic authoritarianism as a mechanism of interpellation into a hegemonic system that aims to veil its local human origins and remove the freedom of the individual learner for the purposes of 'domination' (CUP, p .13). The pseudonyms see this as entailing calculated, self-interested bargaining that is motivated by the reality of the human situation as always uncertain, fearful, and anxious about its future: one need not risk, decide, respond or be concerned about one's 'evig salighed' (PiC, p. 112) because the site where one obtains it is made obvious and the institution exists to deal with it. Religions that operate in this way exploit the anxiety of the human situation, the existential terror and ease of existential cowardice and the desire for union; this usually serves the purposes of control by the promise of security and unity, as Zizek observes, 'the Social is always an inconsistent field structured around a constitutive impossibility, traversed by a central 'antagonism', and in this context, ideological fantasy gives the enjoyment that masks this in a unity.'³³⁰

The 'established order' of Christianity offers such a vision of community, which it presents as exclusive and 'necessary'. The diversity of the community is an ineliminable remainder that threatens to undermine this fantasy and it is addressed by being embodied in a scapegoat: the other who is disrupting the social harmony. Ideology is thus configured through exclusion of a particular group as other, allowing it to admit the diversity that is the social reality while simultaneously denying it as the reality of the community, 'the 'Jew' is just the embodiment of a certain blockage – of the impossibility which prevents the

³³⁰ Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 142.

society from achieving its full identity as a closed homogeneous totality.³³¹ Totalitarian ideology is thus a metaphysics of violence and this is appealing to individuals precisely because of its totalitarianism and exclusionary structures, which promise unity and security and explain agonising fragmentation with the promise of its elimination.

This gesture is evident in Barth's description of the singular and tangible boundaries of the church and exclusion of human religions as sinful. Barth uses Jesus to construct the sacred as a normative social location, distinct from the diverse profane, to preserve the fictional unity of the sacred community. This is an act of exclusion that translates into actual violence because the fantasy of the singular, unified body is maintained in the context of the fractional, factional reality by the interpretation of internal diversity as heresy to be eliminated in the purification of the body and external diversity as a sinful otherness to be conquered through conversion. For Barth, salvation means the elimination of the other. Far from being open to otherness, admitting the present fallibility of the Church is a means of auto-immunising against otherness: the fallibility is an undesirable reality resulting from the presence of otherness and it will be overcome in the eschatological triumph of the body, when others cease to exist.³³² This also endorses further acts of discrimination extant in the social structure it supports, stratifying factors such as gender, sexuality, and social status according to the idea of God's will, such that it makes these structures

³³¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 143.

³³² Barth asserts the fallibility of specific congregations as not undermining the divine unity of the Church in: Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, p. 142. Derrida claims that elimination of the other would eliminate Christianity, as the other is an integral part of maintaining the fantasy, '*It makes violence of itself, does violence to itself and keeps itself from the other.*' The auto-immunity of religion can only indemnify itself without assignable end.' Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone.' In, Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds.) *Religion*, p. 66.

deontologically valid and thus incapable of being challenged or changed as mere social conventions. As Woodhead puts it, church authorities are, 'accountable not to empirical evidence but to a divine revelation to which they claim to have privileged access.'³³³

The pseudonyms' critique shares an ethical dimension to Lyotard's critique of metanarratives, which are not simply epistemologically misguided but perpetuate themselves through domination and violence.³³⁴ Exclusivism presents itself as a metanarrative: a hegemonic construction of reality that functions by asserting its exclusive truth as, 'the whole and the one', and its control of reality through its correspondence to it, 'the reconciliation of concept and the sensible'; it silences alternative accounts as false and reflecting the inferior nature of their adherents and suppresses the fundamentally polyphonous nature of reality: it 'seizes reality' through 'terror'.³³⁵

Lyotard's solution, of denying the possibility of a single representation of reality, is found in the pseudonyms' advocacy of perspectivism, 'The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unrepresentable; let us

³³³ Linda Woodhead, 'Theology: The Trouble It's In'. In, Gavin Hyman (ed.) *New Directions in Philosophical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 174.

³³⁴ Thacker makes this point, seeing Lyotard as often being misinterpreted by those who focus on metanarratives as primarily epistemological structures aimed at legitimization. Justin Thacker, *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 119.

³³⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 82. For the link with institutional murder of the other, see: Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), pp. 3-4. Smith tries to defend Christianity against the interpretation of it as a metanarrative on the grounds that it does not make scientific, legitimising claims. [James K. A. Smith, 'A Little Story about Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion and Postmodernism Revisited.' In, Myron B. Penner (ed.), *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) p. 125.] However, he fails to see the deeper structure posited by Lyotard of metanarratives: that they assert a direct and total correspondence of the system with reality. Hence, Geivett comes closer to understanding Lyotard's criticism by seeing Christianity as a metanarrative in that it claims to offer a full account of reality. R. Douglas Geivett, 'Is God a Story? Postmodernity and the Task of Theology.' In, Myron B. Penner (ed.), *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, p. 50.

activate the differences'.³³⁶ The pseudonyms also assert the value and necessity of the individual person for meaning and truth. It is by ignoring the person that Barth's exclusivism is able to construct Christianity 'from above', as a fixed, uniform, timeless essence that exists in a vacuum and to view diversity as an aberration. Paying attention to the role and situation of the person forces religions to acknowledge their public contexts, relative, agonistic histories, and that the people who constitute them exist in a diverse context of continued meeting with others and the internal alterity of their own subjective identities.

Exclusivism equates faith with conformity to established norms and therefore precludes existential and social transformation

The pseudonyms argue that closed commitment disrupts both personal and social activity. The idea that the community possesses truth in a final form and that the members are recipients of this promotes passivity in the laity, producing 'admirers' rather than 'imitators' (PiC, p. 237)³³⁷ Moreover, just as certainty precludes faith, identifying Jesus with the Church and equating Christian faith with conformity to the social and behavioural norms of an 'Established Order' precludes social transformation and praxis, 'If everyone around defines himself as being a Christian *just like* "the others," then no one, if it is looked at this way, is really confessing Christ.' (PiC, p. 219) To foster the fantasy of unity, such groups promote visible observances that signify membership of the group rather than subjective, 'inward', existential

³³⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 82.

³³⁷ A criticism acknowledged by Dulles, who argues that the Catholic Church's pre-Vatican II favouring of an institutional model of the church impaired the ability of the church to adapt to change and the subjective interpretations and activity of the laity, who are instead seen as passive recipients. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002 [Expanded Edition]), pp. 35-37.

transformation to a different way of being, 'the relationship with God is abolished; custom, ordinances, and the like are deified...under the guise of worshipping and adoring God, they worship and adore their own invention'. (PiC, p. 92. See also, PiC, p. 225). This is inimical to faith because it translates religious action and spirituality into behaviour that contributes to social function and the preservation of the group, 'the relationship with God is also secularised; we want it to coincide with a certain relativity, do not want it to be something essentially different from our positions in life, etc.' (PiC, p. 91)

Barth's identification of the church as a sacred space might be thought to construct an external perspective against the profane established order, empowering social action, but Anti-Climacus argues that the church cannot be extricated from its social context, such that the deification of it also deifies the social order and prevents critique (PiC, p. 92), as Perkins observes, 'The result of Christendom is that Christianity is eviscerated as a source of judgement against the world and instead becomes, at best, just a part of the furniture of the world or, at worst, a tool in the hands of those who are willing [to] exploit humankind's understanding of or need for the divine in their private and/or political interests.'³³⁸ The only way for Christian faith to empower personal and social transformation is thus to resist being identified with any established order, existing always as a prophetic, unrealized reality in response to the transforming, eventful encounter with Christ as the sign of offence.³³⁹

³³⁸ Robert L. Perkins, 'Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus in His Social and Political Environment'. In, Perkins (ed.), IKCPC, p. 284.

³³⁹ Kirmmse interprets Kierkegaard as a 'dualist' for this reason, 'It is only as individuals related to God and not as participants in civilization-building, history making humanity, that human beings have their genuinely and essentially human existence.' Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 395. However, by categorizing it in this way, Kirmmse fails to see the potential for Kierkegaard to engage in social critique.

(4.2.c.iii) Contemporaneity is a personal relationship

The pseudonyms share the exclusivist emphasis on contemporaneity with Jesus, but Barth has an opposing conception of what this entails. Barth emphasises that contemporaneity is only possible with the resurrected Christ in the body of the church, whereas Anti-Climacus emphasises contemporaneity with the suffering, lowly historical Jesus (PiC, p. 64) and identifies contemporaneity with the resurrected Jesus as impossible, 'his loftiness does not begin until his ascension to heaven, and since that time not one single word has been heard from him—thus, every word he said was said in his abasement.' (PiC, pp. 161-162) He also rejects the idea that this presence is encountered in the church as, 'the illusion of a Church triumphant' (PiC, p. 209)³⁴⁰

Furthermore, the pseudonyms have an individualist conception of faith as a personal, subjective relationship that is undermined by membership of a collective. Anti-Climacus sees this as part of the reason for Jesus' collision with the religious authorities: he asserted an individual, personal relationship to God rather than one mediated by membership of a religious body. Hence he asserts that the individual is, 'higher than the established order', (PiC, p. 85) and claims, 'the more one deifies the established order, the more natural is the conclusion: ergo, the one who disapproves of or rebels against this divinity, the established order—ergo, he must be rather close to imagining that he is God.... [The] blasphemy is actually a projection from the impiety with which one venerates the established order as divine'. (PiC, pp. 88-89)

³⁴⁰ Anti-Climacus' opposition to this is so strong that it leads him to dubious assertions, such as his claim that the gospel spreads itself, rather than being spread by the church, 'the invitation goes out, and wherever there is a crossroad, *it* stands still and calls out. *It* stands at the crossroad'. (PiC, p.16, emphasis added).

The pseudonyms argue that exclusivist attitudes and prescribed practices are incapable of mediating this personal relationship with God.³⁴¹ Climacus sees them as locating the religious task in the fulfilment of relative ends rather than in the relationship to God; they are competitors to faith, such as the idea that a relationship to God is achieved by a muscular display of gesticulated obeisance, 'because the most decisive outward expression is only relative' (CUP, p. 492; pp. 90-91). He also asserts that locating the relationship to God in specific religious acts grants a sporadic and fractious commitment, 'Does "always to thank God" mean that once a year, on the second Sunday in Lent at Vespers, I bear in mind that I am always to thank God...? Consequently, thanking God, this simple matter, suddenly assigns me one of the most strenuous tasks, one that will be sufficient for my entire life.' (CUP, pp. 178-179)

Exclusivist religion takes its religious rituals and practices as guaranteeing the presence of God. This is at variance with a dominant stream of Christian belief that asserts the transcendence and unknowability of the divine; that God eludes human rationality and comprehension. Like Heidegger, the pseudonyms claim that this rational approach prevents God being related to in a worshipful way because he is mastered.³⁴² Exclusivism is idolatry that functions by mastering the divine and translating it into human categories: so God is no longer encountered as subject or 'Lord' (CUP, p. 46; 156) but as a projection of human structures, 'the vengeance that God does not exist for me at all, even though I pray.' (CUP, p. 163) Such a God is compared to a corseted actor, 'God is metaphysically laced in a half-metaphysical, half-esthetic-dramatic, conventional

³⁴¹ Including infant baptism (CUP, p. 595), liturgical practice (CUP, p. 479) and monasticism (CUP, p. 415).

³⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 72.

corset, which is immanent.' (CUP, p. 156) Exclusivism is a costume drama in which creativity and freedom on the part of the divine and human subjects are replaced by a restricting costume and script; the participants are forced to play a regulated role rather than engaging in deep relationships as free subjects.

Climacus does not see religious bodies as entirely redundant since they can provide messages for appropriation, such as claims about one's 'evig salighed', but he advocates the need for 'dialectical intrepidity' in being aware of and having 'admiration' for religious bodies from which one initially learns but then the necessity of appropriating these personally and creatively in one's own existential situations.³⁴³ Religious practices can have a place, but this must be determined freely by the individual in relation to God (CUP, pp. 157-158). Hence, Climacus contrasts exclusivist conceptions of prayer and thanksgiving as observance of external regulations with the life-long, subjective embodiment of these.³⁴⁴ They also require a comic appreciation of how they fail to express the internal relationship to God, but which one simultaneously engages in as if they relate one to God (CUP, pp. 505-506).

To summarise, Barthian exclusivism is a despairing, closed commitment that is repressive and in denial about the real, finite human situation as well as obstructing freedom, possibility and the eventful, transforming encounter with God.

³⁴³ CUP, p. 12. For example, Climacus' question about the nature of faith is provoked by the Christian context: 'I have heard that Christianity is one's prerequisite for this good [an 'evig salighed']. I now ask how I may enter into relation to this doctrine.... It is Christianity itself that compels me.' (CUP, pp. 15-16).

³⁴⁴ CUP, p. 162; 177. His example is of the contrast between one who takes his marriage for granted as constituted by his possession of a church mandated marriage certificate and one who understands that this is irrelevant and that his marriage is constituted by his personal and life-long commitment to his wife. (CUP, p. 162)

4.3. Hick's Pluralist Christology

Section 3.5.b claimed that pluralism advocates a form of Quixotic commitment by knowingly embracing its own fantasies and disengaging from the real existential situations of persons. Insofar as it presents a competitor thesis to religions, it can also be seen as advocating a type of closed or partial commitment to religions, as these are reinterpreted or rejected in the light of pluralism.

(4.3.a) The Central Features of Hick's Christology

The pseudonyms' existential and heuristic foci could suggest that they advocate Christological antirealism, Jesus serving as a mythological symbol that expresses religious experience and elicits existential transformation. Representative of this approach, Hick interprets Christology as, 'a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us.'³⁴⁵ Hick understands Christological language as being a symbolic expression of human experiences, rather than a factual description of Jesus or God, such that it must be demythologised to uncover its experiential and moral messages, 'The mythic story expresses the significance of a point in history where we can see human life lived in faithful response to God and see God's nature reflected in that human response.'³⁴⁶ Jesus, and other religious figures, express experiences of God's will, love, and the ideal life; they effect, 'human...transformation', from 'self-centredness' to 'Reality-centeredness' or altruism, 'Love, compassion, self-

³⁴⁵ John Hick (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate*. For Hick, a myth is a more elaborate form of metaphor, 'A myth, so defined, is a much extended metaphor.' John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 105.

³⁴⁶ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, pp. 105-106.

sacrificing concern for the good of others, generous kindness and forgiveness'.³⁴⁷ Different religions are comparable to poetic works in that they are fictions that express different peoples' experience of a singular reality, though the reality also transcends their fictions.

This entails that Hick is able to make some minimal claims about the Real, and that these can be derived from sources that are not prone to the cultural conditioning of all other religious knowing, whether that is from a comparative analysis that allows certain features of the Real to be perceived by the scholar or because these are somehow innate or transcend the contextually limited human perspective.³⁴⁸ The core truth that he identifies, transformation, is seen as escaping this because it is the development of an immanent potential of humanity itself; it is an intensification of humanity's benign characteristics against its selfish drives. Its independence from religious traditions is necessitated by Hick's thesis that it provides the normative 'criterion' for judging the validity of religious traditions and view that religions are human responses to the divine rather than grounded in divine revelation, 'not an alien ideal imposed by supernatural authority but one arising out of our human nature (though always in tension with other aspects of that nature), reinforced, refined and elevated to new levels within the religious traditions.'³⁴⁹

Hick sees this pluralism as providing a basis for a global community by equalising religions and seeing their core as a universal commitment to equality and altruism, 'a non-traditional Christianity based upon this understanding of

³⁴⁷ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 105. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 240; 309; 325.

³⁴⁸ He is building on the modernist, essentialist concept of religion outlined in Chapter 3, particularly with its origins in Schleiermacher's experiential-expressive view and Lessing's commitment to a simple, moral-rational core of religion.

³⁴⁹ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 325.

Jesus can see itself as one among a number of different human responses to the ultimate transcendent Reality that we call God, and can better serve the development of a world community and world peace'.³⁵⁰ Christ is not unique and provides no privileged view of God, only dispensable symbols obtainable in a range of religions and in need of demythologisation to uncover their universal ethical meaning.

It is because of this tension between providing a single, true account of the Real and a universal set of moral principles, and its assertion of the relativity and contextuality of religious knowing that it is seen by many critics as offering a conflicted message as both a first order discourse about the Real that competes with religions and a second order discourse that simply seeks to provide a model of religion that emerges from comparison of religions.³⁵¹

If Hick's pluralism is interpreted as a first order discourse that asserts its own ability to transcend the limited perspective of religions, his pluralism is a form of closed commitment. However, closed commitment does not provide the best model for understanding Hick's way of being in the world, particularly interpreted from the perspective of Christology, because he does not commit to the central features of exclusivism: he does not believe God's presence is located in a hegemonically defined space, nor does he ascribe particular doctrines or truths to religions that are thought to correspond directly to reality.

³⁵⁰ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, ix; see also pp. 103-4. And, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 246.

³⁵¹ See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this ambiguity of whether it is advocating a 'change of status' or 'change of content' and on whether it is offering a competitor religion or theory of religion. Cheetham sums up the range of tones with which pluralism can speak, 'Pluralists are sending out a confused message. Pluralism can be portrayed as a second-order philosophical explanation or empirical observation which sits behind-the-scenes (Hick); or as an agonistic or sceptical attitude (Byrne), or as heralding a bold crossing of the Rubicon which calls for doctrines to be altered for the sake of justice and for profound re-examination of theological claims (Kaufman, Knitter).' [Cheetham, WMTR, p. 45.]

Quixotic commitment maps onto Hick's religiousness, in conformity with the unstable nature of his position, which functions by '*speaking quietly*', but ultimately having to adopt a 'loud' first-order speech.³⁵² Quixotic commitment emphasises the inwardness and agency of the subject: he is genuinely engaged in appropriating the object of his devotion. However, the object is something known by the pluralist to be a fiction. Hence he displays, 'the subjective lunacy in which the passion of inwardness grasps a particular fixed finite idea.' (CUP, p. 195) Quixotic commitment is tragi-comic because it involves the complete commitment of the person to his own fantasy (CUP, p. 196; SuD, p. 32). Similarly, Hick's pluralistic Christology entails a self-contradictory commitment to living a reality-centred life through religions that fail to correspond to this reality. Its pluralism is also insufficiently pluralist because it fails to apply pluralism to its own theory; hence it is in despair through its repressive denial.³⁵³ Various further features that mark pluralism out as Quixotic commitment will be explored below, including a reliance on the immanence of moral transformation that is inappropriate in the human situation just as Don Quixote's life as a knight does not reflect his real capabilities, and its eliminative Christology, which fictionalises the objects of faith and its relationships.

(4.3.b) Pluralistic Interpretations of the Pseudonyms Rejected

The pseudonyms' Christologies share some features with Hick's: the experiential exposition of Christological language, the soteriological and heuristic view of Jesus as a catalyst in existential transformation and the critique

³⁵² Cheetham, WMTR, p. 58.

³⁵³ See my criticism in Chapter 3 that, from the perspective of my existential epistemology, pluralism is insufficiently pluralist by failing to apply its hermeneutical principles to itself.

of doctrinally focused and exclusivist Christologies as inimical to the religious life and impossible given the hiddenness of God. This postmetaphysical approach also invites the antirealist view that Christological language expresses features of subjectivity that can be found in a plurality of religions. However, it will be argued that the pseudonyms construct postmetaphysical but not antirealist Christologies because the central features of their Christologies are opposed to the eliminative, immanentist and pluralist theses; they view pluralism as a Quixotic, tragi-comic commitment.

(3.b.i) The Eliminative Thesis

The eliminative claim is that language about Jesus must be interpreted as symbolising features of consciousness and an ethico-religious message rather than as describing real truths about Jesus. Realism is here defined as (R1) a commitment to the existence of a mind-independent reality and/or (R2) a commitment to objective truth as determined by correspondence of thought to reality.³⁵⁴ The pseudonyms have been interpreted as antirealists because their existential approach rejects (R2).

Cupitt interprets Kierkegaard as an antirealist about God in that his existential understanding of religious language is eliminative: a way of describing human aspiration that does not make any descriptive claims about God, *'the doctrine of God is an encoded set of spiritual directives.'*³⁵⁵ Climacus

³⁵⁴ I follow the definition offered in: C. Stephen Evans, 'Realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*'. In, Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 155.

³⁵⁵ Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM, 1980), p. 101. Evans argues that Climacus is a realist about (R2), citing Climacus' distinction between objective and subjective truth as indicating that objective truths exist as 'an ideal to be approximated', and his incorporation of an 'objective pole' or 'content' in Christian appropriation, entailing that what is appropriated must

agrees with the antirealists' denial of (R2): structures of understanding cannot correspond directly to reality and project a fictional schema and metaphysics of presence that equates reality with its own structures, 'Objectively understood, thinking is pure thinking, which just as abstractly-objectively corresponds to its object, which in turn is therefore itself, and truth is the correspondence of thinking with itself. This objective truth is the correspondence of thinking with itself. This objective truth has no relation to the existing subjectivity...[which] evaporates more and more.' (CUP, p. 123)

Cupitt argues that realist positions structure the world linguistically into 'asymmetrical binary opposites' that impose a discriminatory schema onto existence under the pretence of describing reality.³⁵⁶ A 'real' God is the foundation of this schema as the discriminatory binaries correspond to his will and sacred/profane organisation of the cosmos, 'God is...the Great Discriminator.'³⁵⁷ Cupitt thus equates realism and religious exclusivism with discrimination, claiming that the rejection of realist metaphysics opens up the path for an immanentist faith focused on human life.

In rejecting (R2), the pseudonyms are aligned with the postmetaphysical critique of ontotheology. By identifying God with the specific person of Jesus, the idea of God as the knowable *causa sui* that provides an explanatory, external perspective on reality as a totality is opposed. Instead of describing the nature of

be objectively true. [C. Stephen Evans, 'Realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*'. In, Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, p. 171. See also: CUP p. 380.] However, Evans' interpretation fails to acknowledge Climacus' argument that ethico-religious truths are always subjective.

³⁵⁶ He follows Derrida in identifying a preference for presence in Western rationality, such that the male is elevated above the female, white above black and sameness over otherness. Don Cupitt, 'Anti-Discrimination.' In, Graham Ward (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 484.

³⁵⁷ Don Cupitt, 'Anti-Discrimination.' In, Graham Ward (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, p. 485.

reality through God, humans can only talk about the life and person of Jesus in relation to their experience of immanent life, forgiveness and empowerment; Jesus grants no privileged information about the cosmos, nor the ability to adopt the 'view from nowhere'.

Caputo interprets Climacus as defending an antirealist subjectivism: faith as passionate commitment to structures one knows to be objectively false.³⁵⁸ He sees this as entailing the rejection of realist thesis (R1). Caputo identifies this position as pluralistic, since it asserts that all singular religious claims are false; he sees alterity and equality as integral to religious faith.³⁵⁹ This equality relies on the falsehood of religions, because it requires that no facts can be acquired, 'The faithful need to concede...that it is "true" in the same way that a novel can be deeply true even though it is rightly classified as "fiction" not "fact".'³⁶⁰ This even precludes gaining any benefit from fictional structures that are believed to be true: openness and creativity requires the awareness that they are untrue.

This antirealist, eliminativist interpretation of the pseudonyms must be rejected. The pseudonyms subscribe to realist claim (R1), defending a postmetaphysical conception of the transcendent reality of God and Jesus: these are not anthropological constructs. The pseudonyms' antirealist language (CUP, p. 138; p. 163) asserts only the inaccessibility of God through human-generated structures, such as cognition, without the existential relationship to God as a personal being through faith (CUP, p. 320). The shared error of antirealists and

³⁵⁸ Caputo interprets Kierkegaard as engaged in a similar project to himself in: John D. Caputo, 'Looking the Impossible in the Eye: Kierkegaard, Derrida, and the Repetition of Religion'. In Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart (eds.) *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2002* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 1-25.

³⁵⁹ John D. Caputo, 'Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event'. In Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.) *After the Death of God*, p. 77.

³⁶⁰ John D. Caputo, *On Religion*, p. 112.

realists is their equation of the rejection of metaphysics, and the possibility of correspondence between thought and reality, with antirealism about the mind-independence of reality: they both totalise thought in that they cannot conceive of the possibility of a reality (R1) that is incapable of corresponding to it (R2).

In contrast, the pseudonyms' denial of (R2) results from their realism about (R1): existence is such that it can only be encountered existentially, in actual existence; not cognitively, 'who then is able to know what lives within him—the only actuality that does not become a possibility by being known and cannot be known only by being thought'. (CUP, p. 320) For Caputo, the contingency of religious structures results from the grounding of religious knowing in language and the inexpressibility of the flux; for Climacus it is ontological: the finitude and processual nature of human persons leads to existential questions and structures of subjectivity that conjoin the undecidability of religion. For Climacus, the truth cannot be known and so humans must determine how they are to respond to their existential crises, whereas for Caputo there is no truth to be known and nothing to be described by language so all human responses are equally fictional interpretations of the unobtainable.

Underlying thought is an embodied activity through which the person is in existential contact and potentially relationships with mind-independent realities that elude the linguistic and cognitive and gives meaning to these second order activities. This explains Kierkegaard's anachronistic incorporation of an 'objective pole': it misleadingly expresses, in the language of objectivity, his

commitment to a reality beyond pure subjectivism.³⁶¹ An existential discourse that is attentive to the concrete actuality of the person can convey this reality indirectly insofar as it enables an encounter with first-person, subjective embodiment and thereby with reality itself (CUP, pp. 320-321); this is what their existential, postmetaphysical Christologies aim to do.

From this perspective, pluralist, eliminative Christologies are forms of Quixotic commitment. Faith, though animated by passionate uncertainty, is a tragic-comic self-deception because it asserts that there is no reality to which it is responding. There is also no reason to privilege the ways of being found in religions in the way that Hick and Caputo do, as, 'forms of life that uniquely instruct us about the meaning of our lives', because many hermeneutical structures could be capable of the same.³⁶² Indeed, pluralist moral considerations should lead to a rejection of religious ways of being: given the oppressive nature of religious structures, which seem to entail the policing of boundaries and asymmetrical binary opposites, Cupitt's assertion that religion is always discriminating suggests that non-religious structures are preferable.³⁶³

Climacus retains a fuller role for critical and self-critical reflection, as humans have to decide how to respond to the issues they face. Whereas critical reflection would be a pointless exercise for Caputo except in deconstructing the authoritarian claims of others, Climacus recognises that commitment to a particular religious structure emerges from a personal decision that is

³⁶¹ Gouwens offers a similar interpretation, claiming, 'While Christianity is not a doctrine, Christianity has doctrines.... Yet...the "what" is a human being, "the actuality of another person," not a teaching.' David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, p. 126 (citing CUP, p. 580).

³⁶² John D. Caputo, 'Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event'. In Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.) *After the Death of God*, p. 77.

³⁶³ John D. Caputo, 'Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event'. In Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.) *After the Death of God*, p. 77. Don Cupitt, 'Anti-Discrimination'. In, Graham Ward (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, pp. 482-489.

existential, critical, and dialectically faithful, as part of a process of existential development, experimentation, and exploration.

Climacus offers a more cogent account of the diversity and integrity of religions and their relation to passion: they develop as genuinely distinct alternatives, configured in response to quasi-universal, existential encounters and genuinely make claims about the real human situation and matters of ultimate existential import. Passion is the response such a precarious position on vital undecidable issues would elicit. As hermeneutical bodies that interpret reality, such bodies still provide perspectives on reality whereas narratives known to be fictional, entailing a suspension of disbelief, lack the existential purchase to be objects of religious commitment.³⁶⁴ Given the definition of authenticity as living out a response to the human situation, the denial of a human situation obstructs authentic being. Like Don Quixote, antirealists are play-acting roles known to be fictitious, aesthetically toying with masks as opposed to living in the existential struggle of life.

The pseudonyms also retain the integrity and heterogeneity of the other that Caputo praises but fails to achieve. Passion results from engagement with forces in tension, not by the annulment of difference by equality or sameness. Caputo indicates the need for individuals to navigate through the tensions but his levelling of religions as equally fictitious annuls the tensions.³⁶⁵ Climacus interprets religions as genuinely competing alternatives, not as various fictions that have the same moral, and faith is made possible by the processual,

³⁶⁴ Geivett makes this distinction. R. Douglas Geivett, 'Is God a Story? Postmodernity and the Task of Theology.' In Myron B. Penner (ed.) *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, pp. 38-9.

³⁶⁵ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 282.

appropriative way these are navigated.³⁶⁶ By avoiding antirealism, Climacus is able to see religious structures as providing distinct and vital orientations on human existence rather than homogenising them as antirealism does: they posit the real possibility of an 'evig salighed'.

Hick's pluralism is also unable to posit an intersubjective relationship as the core of religiousness: human beings cannot relate directly to God as a personal being. Such a God is mythological; remembered as a lost relationship, not as a present relationship, as Cupitt admits by comparing it to the memory of a departed loved one. Hence Michener refers to this position as, 'Theological Necrophilia'.³⁶⁷ This is another way in which the real tensions and struggles at the core of Christian faith are negated by Quixotic pluralism: there is no struggle to relate to an Other that exists in opposition to myself and that decentres me because it is simply a projection of my situation. This is in complete opposition to the pseudonyms' advocacy of religious faith as a personal relationship with God through Jesus as a real person. It is because God is a personal being that he can only be encountered in interpersonal relationships, not apprehended in a set of objective, metaphysical claims. Hence Climacus explains his seemingly antirealist language about God as expressing the idea that a relationship to God is the only possible basis for knowing God, comparing it to a relationship of marriage without which, 'God does not exist for me at all'. (CUP, pp. 162-163)

(4.3.b.ii) The Immanentist Thesis

³⁶⁶ For Caputo, this 'moral' is the call to love. John D. Caputo, 'Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event'. In Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.) *After the Death of God*, p. 78.

³⁶⁷ Ronald T. Michener, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology* (Ashgate, 2007), p. 141.

The immanentist thesis is that religion should actualise benign traits inherent in the person and empower their immanent life. Antirealists interpret assertions of divine incarnation as affirming the immanence of God to all human beings and life as opposed to positing an otherworldly transcendence.³⁶⁸ As was argued above, Hick has to commit to the immanence of access to moral values as the criterion for interpreting and judging the validity of religions. Caputo argues that realist, eschatological Christologies configure transcendence through, 'a celestial being [who] comes down to earth in order to rescue mortals from flesh, to ferry them off to heaven', and that this disempowers life in contrast to a Christology of, 'the becoming-flesh of God', which affirms immanence.³⁶⁹ According to Altizer, the experience of, 'God's death in Christ', combined with, 'a fully incarnate Christ', rejects the idea of a life-denying transcendence, understood as a relation to, 'the inhuman authority and power of an infinitely distant Creator and Judge', and promotes the immanent realm of this-worldly human agency as the proper environment of humanity, with an autonomy and freedom from guilt through the divine acceptance and forgiveness of humanity present in Jesus.³⁷⁰

Cupitt interprets Climacus as asserting that the objective reality of God obstructs authentic faith and the collision necessary for it: if God is an objective reality, only conformity to the Christian pattern is demanded, not a passionate, subjective and creative spirituality, 'Kierkegaard...is approaching a fully non-

³⁶⁸ Thomas J. J. Altizer, 'A Wager, from *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*'. In, Thomas J. J. Altizer (ed.), *Toward a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967), p. 307.

³⁶⁹ John D. Caputo, 'Bodies without Flesh: Overcoming the Soft Gnosticism of Incarnational Theology'. In, Katharine Sarah Moody and Steven Shakespeare (eds.), *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 87.

³⁷⁰ Thomas J J Altizer, 'A Wager, from *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*'. In, Thomas J J Altizer (ed.), *Toward a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology*, p. 306, p. 303 and p. 312.

cognitivist and voluntarist philosophy of religion.... Objectified Christianity is a contradiction in terms, for Christianity is that one is called to a certain mode of existence. Faith is not an affirmation that something is descriptively the case, but an infinite passion of inwardness.³⁷¹ Cupitt also sees Kierkegaardian spirituality as an innate potential that has an immanent life of free, autonomous, and creative spirituality as its aim; Christological language expresses this poetically.³⁷²

The pseudonyms concur that a relationship with Jesus effects this-worldly transformation and empowers creative ways of being, particularly enabling one to confront challenges that are central to human life, such as suffering and guilt. Transcendence occurs in life, not an eschatological event at its end. However, the heuristic function of Jesus is dependent on a collision and divine intervention that entails his transcendent reality. The inassimilable otherness of Jesus as a real and external object is necessary to generate the dissonance for offence and faith. Offence is generated by the paradoxical claim that God is really present in Jesus; it is offensive because it undermines expectations about where God is to be found. The specificity and exclusivity of this presence of God as a specific human being (PiC, p. 82), including its uniqueness in human history (PiC, p. 34), and the fact that God is made present in its opposite, are the sources of offence and are thus integral to Jesus presenting the opportunity for faith (PiC, p. 82).³⁷³

Climacus argues that if it does not really exist but is simply a way of describing immanent human structures, then it is not genuinely other but simply a projection and affirmation of the relative structures that it is meant to

³⁷¹ Don Cupitt, *The World to Come*, p. 47.

³⁷² Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, p. 107, 139 and p. 167.

³⁷³ 'Essentially offence is related to the composite of God and man, or to the God-man.' (PiC, p.81) This is offensive due to the 'infinite chasmic difference between God and man' (PiC, p.63).

challenge and transform, '[a] capricious arbitrariness that knows that it itself has produced the god.' (PF, p. 45) Cupitt recognises the relational nature of transformation, proposing the model of a relationship to a departed loved-one who remains an inspiring presence even though he/she no longer exists. However, such a relationship is dependent upon the memory that they were once a living person. Acting 'as if' one is in relation to a real God when one is not is a form of, 'play-acting'.³⁷⁴ Such a passionate relation to a non-reality is the essence of Quixotic madness because it is out of touch with reality and fixated on a fictional 'finite idea' knowingly generated by the person (CUP, p. 195).

This is also 'fixed' in that it precludes encounters with any religious realities by denying, *prima facie*, that such realities exist. Utilising self-generated structures appropriates the unknown into familiar structures, thereby reducing mystery to a consciously self-generated sameness, 'in defining the unknown as the different the understanding ultimately goes astray and confuses the different with likeness'. (PF, p. 46) Pluralist Christologies motivated by a desire to make Jesus credible in a context of RD are misguided, because they disempower the efficacy of Jesus as a source of offence and transforming faith, relinquishing a medium through which otherness can be encountered and understood. Rae suggests that a Kierkegaardian interpretation of eliminative Christologies is that their fictionalisation is generated by offence as a strategy of disengagement from an unacceptable reality, something admitted as a motive by Hick.³⁷⁵ Only a personal encounter with a really existing other that disrupts the ability of human

³⁷⁴ This criticism of Cupitt is offered in: Ronald T. Michener, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*.

³⁷⁵ Murray A. Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, p. 192. For example: 'From our point of view today it is less easy to accept stories of a physical resurrection, particularly when they refer to an event nearly twenty centuries ago and when the written evidence is in detail so conflicting'. John Hick, 'Jesus and the World Religions'. In, John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, p. 171.

structures to appropriate and assimilate it and that mediates the mysterious reality of God to human persons can effect their transformation.

Furthermore, the pseudonyms assert that the condition and pattern of faith is not a development of immanent structures possessed by the person, as Hick claims, because transformation must be initiated by an external reality. They argue that human sinfulness, existing in 'untruth', necessitates divine intervention in the transformation (PF, p. 14-15, CUP, p. 207, PiC, p. 67). Authenticity is made possible only by particular relationships to others. From the pseudonyms' perspective, Hick adheres to the 'Socratic' fallacy that human beings possess the religious truth, which simply has to be actualized through recollection, with the symbol or teaching of Jesus being one catalyst for this; they thereby eliminate Jesus' reality in a way that precludes his salvific function. (PF, p. 11, CUP, p. 221, PiC, p. 29, and pp. 63-4) Like Don Quixote, they fail because their aspirations are unachievable in their existential situation.

(4.3.b.iii) The Pluralist Thesis

The pluralist thesis, that a pluralistic conception of religion is the best way of achieving the objective of religions, a global ethic, is supported by antirealists who see Jesus as a victim of an exclusivist metaphysics of violence. Jesus serves as a symbol that exposes and condemns such violence as is inherent in religious structures by their denial of alternative perspectives. Vattimo interprets Jesus' violent death as opening up the possibility for a religious experience that reverses, 'the original violence of the sacred', by deconstructing religious boundaries and exclusivism, 'God calls us...to desacralize the violence and dissolve the ultimacy and peremptoriness claimed by objectivist

metaphysics.³⁷⁶ Like Hick, Cupitt sees Jesus as delivering an ethical message that is inherently pluralistic: that the kingdom of God is immanent, worldly and universal and so the divine is accessible within the public sphere, and thus to all, rather than manifested in the private structures of a religious institution; this promotes equality and human flourishing, 'postmodern culture, with its ubiquitous, scattered religiosity and its opposition to discrimination, is a secular realisation of the traditional kingdom of God.... I do see in our postmodern humanitarian ethics the best realisation of the Christian ideal yet seen on earth.'³⁷⁷

Kierkegaard accepts the critique of the metaphysics of violence: the violent rejection of Jesus indicts exclusivist religious establishments and their self-deification. However, the soteriological aim of authentic Christianity, as conceived of by the pseudonyms, is a transforming, personal relationship with God, not the establishment of a pluralistic ethic or community; hence the recurring use of the idea of 'inwardness' as integral to the character of faith. The pseudonyms' contention is that pluralism's prioritising a global ethic occludes the authentic relationship with God and other persons that is necessary to provide a basis for personal transformation, loving relationships to others and a wholesome, just society.

³⁷⁶ Gianni Vattimo, 'Heidegger and Girard: *Kenosis* and the End of Metaphysics.' In, Gianni Vattimo, Rene Girard and Pierpaolo Antonello (ed.), *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 86-87. See also Caputo's claim that this equates God's kingdom with victims of exclusion and human and religious violence, 'For over and against the glorifying of violence...[it] is thus to slumdogs everywhere that Jesus brings good news, among whose bodies his own sacred body circulates, and among whom his own crucified body is finally to be numbered.' [John D. Caputo, 'Bodies without Flesh: Overcoming the Soft Gnosticism of Incarnational Theology'. In, Katharine Sarah Moody and Steven Shakespeare (eds.), *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion and the Affirmation of Life*, p. 90.]

³⁷⁷ Don Cupitt, 'Anti-Discrimination.' In, Graham Ward (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, p. 488.

It is in this regard that pluralism's claim to accurately interpret other religions and to possess a true, normative moral code breaks from Quixotic commitment and becomes an authoritative, closed commitment. Hick's pluralism breaches the locatedness of religious knowing by failing to acknowledge the relative and partial nature of its own moral principles.³⁷⁸ Climacus argues that extracting from or interpreting Christianity as a rhetorical expression of philosophical-moral truth 'annuls' (CUP, p. 222) the specificity of Christian faith for its adherents (CUP, p. 224). From this perspective, Hick's pluralism is a totalising imposition in the service of a global ideology, 'he belittles the otherness of the Christian tradition and the otherness of other traditions, in accordance with the demands of universal ethical religion'.³⁷⁹

The ethical challenge of the encounter with others is always situational and specific to one's relationships. Because it imposes theoretical, objective, explanatory schema onto intersubjective situations, pluralism pre-empts the meaning of the religious other and precludes a genuine, transforming existential encounter with them: scholars, 'have already found a "solution" to the problem of RD in advocating a particular position within the threefold typology', and do not need to engage with the specifics of different religions.³⁸⁰ This is a demoralising approach in which the normative morality of pluralism obstructs a situational morality that is sensitive to the needs, opportunities, and situations of persons.

³⁷⁸ Dell'Olio argues this in: Andrew J. Dell'Olio, 'Between Exclusivity and Plurality: Toward a Postmodern Christian Philosophy of Other Religions'. In, Merold Westphal (ed.), *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 275.

³⁷⁹ Graham Adams, *Christ and the Other: In Dialogue with Hick and Newbigin* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 48. See also: John Hick, 'Jesus and the World Religions'. In, John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, p. 181.

³⁸⁰ Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, 'The Question of Theological Truth in a Multireligious World: Reflections at the Interface of Continental Philosophy and Interreligious Studies'. In, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin (eds.), *The Question of Theological Truth*, p. 279. Cheetham makes the same point in: Cheetham, WMTR, p. 75.

Climacus similarly notes that objectivity assumes the matter is already decided in its 'illusory results', such that this closed commitment immunises pluralists from having moral demands placed on their existence by actual encounter with others (CUP, p. 81). Interreligious encounters in particular times and places between specific persons are seen as instances of the intellectual problem of RD rather than as relationships experienced personally, from the inside, and carrying unique moral obligations, 'the particular, the accidental, is indeed a constituent of the actual and in direct opposition to abstraction'. (CUP, pp. 301-302)³⁸¹ In particular, it is the inability of onto-theological structures to permit the irresolvable differends that subjective individuals represent that leads to the violent incorporation of others into the conceptual field of the thinker, appropriated according to his own organising principles, 'Existence, like motion, is a very difficult matter to handle. If I think it, I cancel it, and then I do not think it.' (CUP, p. 309) From this perspective, a truly universal ethic is one that is situational and respects difference, rather than imposing a single vision, 'The pluralism of being is not produced as a multiplicity of a constellation spread out before a possible gaze, for thus it would be already totalized, joined into an entity.'³⁸²

³⁸¹ Where the person is considered, this is often in relation to epistemological questions, such as whether belief is warranted in a context of diversity. For example: David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*.

³⁸² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 306.

4.4. Conclusion

Exclusivism and pluralism have been shown to be totalising, authoritarian visions that objectify religiousness as closed commitment or endorse a sporadic, Quixotic commitment to fictions; in both cases, religions are configured so as to preclude transformative encounters with them and eliminate the reality and moral weight of the other. These approaches are undesirable and unachievable, obstructing the passionate, subjective appropriation that is the essence of authentic religiousness. Subsequent chapters develop a further position within the existential typology of commitment: unbounded commitment. This position prioritises the subjective and existential and aims to present a type of commitment that is integral to authentic selfhood and religiousness. It will also incorporate the pseudonyms' Christologies and argue that a deep engagement with otherness is possible for Christians and is demanded by central Christological motifs.

CHAPTER 5

UNBOUNDED COMMITMENT:

AN EXISTENTIAL POSITION ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

5.1. Argument in Brief

This chapter utilises my existential approach and typology of commitment to problematize RD, describing the issues diversity presents for a Kierkegaardian theology of religions (5.2.a). Building on the pseudonyms' existential phenomenology of authentic Christian religiousness, an alternative to closed and Quixotic commitment is developed: unbounded commitment (5.2.b). It is argued that this configuration of religiousness presents a way of being that is particularly apposite in a context of RD, providing a range of meaningful and constructive ways in which Christians can engage with alterity. Unbounded commitment is compared and contrasted with inclusivism to unpack its contribution to the debate and because significant affinities between the two approaches are identifiable, such as their soteriological focus and their attempts to provide a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism (5.2.c.i). It will be shown, however, that unbounded commitment provides a superior approach in several ways (5.2.c.ii-iii), particularly because it avoids the objective approach of CV that underpins many inclusivist positions.

UC's relation to religions is explored as a grounding orientation for living out religious identity in a context of RD, and the features of the thin theology of religions that emerges from this approach are described (5.3). Two theological contributions of UC to engagements with diversity are identified. Existential situationism (5.3.a) accounts for RD as arising from the diversity of existential situations, and asserts the reality of specific religious encounters but denies the

ability of the person to legislate about religious truth. It also posits alterity as integral to religious identity. UC's Christology (5.3.b) understands divine activity as universal and correlating to structures of the human situation, yet specific and located in particular ways, providing reasons for Christians to assume, even given the limits imposed by existential situationism, that the divine is operative beyond their boundaries.

The chapter concludes by considering the criticism that an appropriate response to the religious uncertainty of the human situation is one of suspension of judgement or partial commitment, and that the pseudonyms' advocacy of absolute religious commitment is thus incoherent. It is argued that the human situation forces existential decisions about commitment, of which deep religious commitment is a valid type (5.4). Throughout, it is argued that unbounded commitment provides resources for revivifying Christian devotion and theology in the context of RD by embracing faith as a tension between passionate commitment to religious encounters and their transcendent, transforming nature.

5.2. Unbounded Commitment (UC)

(5.2.a) The Questions for an Existential Theology of Religions

It has been established that CV's problematization of RD is a blunt, objective description of the situation: it conceives of RD as an objective problem and proposes positions that adopt objective stances on it. To avoid these errors, RD should not be approached as an objective problem raising intellectual questions about the propositional truth-claims of religions or the relationship between religious institutions; it should not be seen as a problem that requires and is capable of theoretical, philosophical, or theological resolutions.

An alternative to these approaches is provided by types of comparative theology that prioritise thorough empirical engagement with a range of religions, constructing theological reflection a posteriori rather than seeking to impose an a priori theoretical system or understand religions from the perspective of a particular religion.³⁸³ For this reason, they aim to be, 'not ultimate or decisive but tentative and exploratory.'³⁸⁴ My rejection of CV similarly prioritises interreligious encounters rather than attempting to predetermine their outcomes through a theoretical model, providing an approach that enables meetings between the various ways of being religious that are involved and that is exploratory in conformity with the open, processual nature of the person.

However, while comparative theology entails a more neutral approach that brackets the perspective of the researcher in the preliminary stages of the encounter, the pseudonyms favour an existential engagement that rejects the

³⁸³ For this understanding of comparative theology, see: Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 14.

³⁸⁴ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 75.

value of neutrality and passive receptivity.³⁸⁵ Furthermore, comparative theologies often emphasise religious encounter as primarily a matter of learning, gaining insights, and reading, locating their approach within the objective problematization of RD.³⁸⁶ Instead an existential theology of religions must be formulated, grounded in an existential-phenomenological account of the human situation and ways of being, that emphasises encounter as interpersonal, not inter-textual, and asserts that IE must be value-laden because religious questions are not neutral questions and a neutral response to them misunderstands them: they are occasions for passionate appropriation or offence (CUP, p. 31). A theology must not be an abstract discourse that sterilises encounters with others and occludes their existential and transformative potential.

As an existential issue, the debate over RD should be reconfigured around the more fundamental questions of commitment, how persons embody religiousness in a context of diversity, and how they relate to the task of living out authentic selfhood, 'subjectively, one speaks about the subject...the question is about the subject's acceptance of it' (CUP, p. 129), rather than whether groups and their truth-claims correspond to reality, 'The objective issue, then, would be about the truth of Christianity. The subjective issue is about the individual's relation to Christianity.' (CUP, p. 17) Various existential questions are raised by RD. What does the existence of other religious ways of being, and the existence of

³⁸⁵ Clooney does not deny the role of the theologian as bringing his/her existential, cultural and religious background and interests to the engagement, but he asserts the necessity of minimising this as far as possible for the sake of achieving a neutral understanding, particularly in the early, data gathering stage of learning, 'While we cannot permanently suspend our modern sensitivities...learning does require that we do more listening and less judging. Interreligious learning requires all the more that we not rush to impose our values on their theological traditions before long and patient study makes us able to speak to some good purpose.' [Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, p. 61.]

³⁸⁶ As an example, see: Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, pp. 57-64.

diversity itself, mean for one's own way of being and how should one commit in the light of this? What possibilities do other religious ways of being present, what existential demands are encountered in them, and how should one respond? Questions of how religions relate to one's own subjectivity, wider human capacities for being in the world and confronting existential situations, and of what possibilities, demands, and ways of being they present in themselves are central.³⁸⁷

For Christians, the theological question also arises: how is God's revelation perceived and related to in the context of diversity? To be persuasive to Christian theologians, my theology of religions draws on Christological themes emphasised by the pseudonyms and shows how these demand a deep engagement with alterity from Christians. Central Christological commitments provide an impetus for Christians to engage in interreligious encounter because they assert that God is to be found beyond Christian boundaries, in the least expected locations. Christians are called to engage with religious others because of God's revelation in Jesus; fidelity to the Christian revelation can exist alongside and, indeed, motivate deep engagement across religious boundaries.

(5.2.b) A Preliminary Sketch of Unbounded Commitment

An alternative form of religious commitment to closed and Quixotic commitment that prioritises existential factors, inspired by the pseudonyms, is faith as unbounded commitment (UC). This way of committing is 'dialectical' and strenuous in that it sustains a 'pathos-filled' relation and absolute commitment

³⁸⁷ A related question is how there can be communication and meeting between different perspectives about matters of ultimate importance. This is explored in Chapter 6.

to the absolute but which is 'paradoxical' because it is conscious of its finitude and limitations.

The pseudonyms' focus is how the universal features of Christian identity can be appropriated authentically in the local, existential situations of each person (CUP, p. 73) and the infinite capacities and finite features integrated into authentic selfhood. RD is a fundamental feature of the situation of necessity and finitude, also presenting a range of possibilities for infinitude, such that the pseudonyms provide a strong impetus for engagement with diversity in relation to questions of how to live out authentic selfhood. Thus, while the term dialectical pathos describes an authentic religious relationship of the person to his/her own *evig salighed*, UC will be used to characterise this way of being in relation to the wider context of RD.

Authentic religiousness in a situation of diversity is unbounded in two ways. First, it is a passionate, total commitment in a context of anxiousness and uncertainty, lacking any exclusivist guarantees and security; it is unbounded because its commitment is unconditional and limitless, 'Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness'. (CUP, p. 611) Second, it is expressed in horizontally transcendent, boundary-crossing, deep, and open engagements with others that aim to transcend any structures and limitations; it is unbounded in that it cannot be contained in boundaries. Hence it is described as breaking with immanence (CUP, p. 572) and never finds fixture or definitive, exclusive expression in any religious structures or boundaries. Dialectical pathos entails a deeply passionate, venturing, boundary-crossing orientation, aware of its own finitude and

uncertainty and acknowledging the transcendent nature of the divine as always eluding it and manifesting in unexpected places.

The idea of faith as unbounded commitment is described in Climacus' image that contrasts it with sawing wood:

'In sawing wood, one should not press down too hard on the saw.... If one presses down with all one's might, one will never manage to saw at all....

[But] whoever is impassionedly, infinitely interested in his eternal happiness makes himself as subjectively heavy as possible.' (CUP, p. 57)

Climacus' contention is that faith can be sustained as a total existential commitment, and part of this entails a refusal to cling to epistemic guarantees.

UC's commitment is expressed in relationships wherein one is committed absolutely to the other, but 'open', not in the sense of being noncommittal or having competing commitments, but in the sense of retaining the freedom of both parties, refusing to objectify the other in acts of domination and realising that the other person spills over one's representation of him/her, having infinite depth, just as the face of the other elicits a relationship but veils/communicates an inassimilable depth. Hence Climacus compares the openness and fragility entailed by genuine commitment to the, 'weak hope of being loved by the beloved' (CUP, p. 202). Like all relationships, faith lacks any guarantees and is dependent on hope and fidelity (CUP, p. 202); this is heightened beyond human relationships by virtue of being ultimately important and having a paradoxical object that cannot be secured but related to only in inwardness and through reliance on grace.

Chapters 6 and 7 develop the idea that engaging with alterity is integral to the deep openness of UC. This is expounded particularly in relation to

Christological imagery in order to demonstrate its persuasiveness within a Christian framework: the object of Christian faith subverts religious expectations by its identification of God's presence in the most unexpected and offensive places: in relationships with inassimilable others. The encounter with diversity permits a revelatory, boundary-crossing encounter that is integral to unbounded commitment.

(5.2.c) Unbounded Commitment and Inclusivism

Inclusivism makes a number of similar gestures to UC. It seeks a balance between the extremes of exclusivism and pluralism, for example, by asserting that salvation can extend beyond religious boundaries and focusing on orthopraxy over orthodoxy. Comparison of the two positions demonstrates the insights and superiority of UC.

(5.2.c.i) The Central Features of Inclusivism

Netland's, Griffiths', and McKim's identification of inclusivist theses provides a definition of inclusivism.³⁸⁸ I1-I3 are theses about religious truth, I4-I7 are theses about salvation. Inclusivism asserts: (I1) one religion incorporates more true beliefs than others, and, (I2) 'Others do fairly well overall in terms of truth'.³⁸⁹ They do well in that they may share some true beliefs with the true religion and/or have their own true beliefs that do not conflict with the true religion. This may also entail 'Open Inclusivism': (I3) others can be learned from,

³⁸⁸ This list is indicative and not comprehensive. It acknowledges Heim's and Morgan's claim that inclusivist positions can develop in nuanced ways that attempt to overcome the limitations of CV. [Heim, STDR, p. 4. Christopher W. Morgan, 'Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms'. In, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, p. 22.]

³⁸⁹ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p.36.

possessing new truths or insights.³⁹⁰ (-I3) 'Closed inclusivism' rejects this, asserting that adherents of the true religion cannot learn from others, as they possess most fully all the truths possessed by others.

Regarding the salvific effects of religion, inclusivism asserts: (I4) the teleological thesis that only one religion possesses and fully expresses the normative way of salvation; and (I5) the universality thesis that, 'Salvation is available to outsiders'.³⁹¹ This may also entail (I6) the privilege thesis, 'Outsiders are not as well situated with respect to salvation as we are.'³⁹² How (I6) is true leads to a range of different inclusivist positions. The fulfilment analysis (I6a) asserts that, 'Outsiders can achieve salvation but only via our tradition.'³⁹³ This could include a universalist eschatological event in which others achieve this; this is a 'fulfilment' in the sense that, for example, 'Christ is...the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion.'³⁹⁴ The 'anonymous membership' analysis (I6b) asserts that, 'Some outsiders belong to our group without knowing that they do so, where this involves their achieving salvation because they so belong.'³⁹⁵ Analogous to a drowning man being saved by a mysterious stranger he knows nothing about, Rahner, for example, asserts that, '*all grace is Christ's grace*'.³⁹⁶ The 'best route'

³⁹⁰ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 37. As further examples of what can be learned, D'Costa cites the fresh perspectives others grant on the true religion; '*narratives of oppression*', through which one learns from the criticisms offered by others; '*narratives of holiness*', through which one learns how to apply moral messages; and '*indigenization*', where the true religion is appropriated to its local contexts. [Gavin D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality'. In, Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 24-25.]

³⁹¹ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 72. Morgan distinguishes various positions on how this is achieved, including through general revelation, world religions and postmortem evangelism. [Christopher W. Morgan, 'Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms'. In, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, p. 36.]

³⁹² Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 72.

³⁹³ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 72.

³⁹⁴ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 86.

³⁹⁵ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 79.

³⁹⁶ Paul F Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 72.

analysis (I6c) asserts that one tradition is more efficacious in producing salvation or produces a fuller quality of soteriological transformation but salvation is still present elsewhere.³⁹⁷

I1, I2, I4 and I5 are necessary and sufficient features of inclusivist positions. The core of the inclusivist position is that one religion is true and saving, but that many located outside the boundaries of this religion are 'included', having access to degrees of truth and salvation. It thus asserts a substantial overlap in the beliefs and soteriological status of many insiders and outsiders, 'the home religion teaches more religious truths, or teaches them more fully, than does any alien religion...the home religion is at the top of a hierarchy of truth-teaching religions'.³⁹⁸

D'Costa provides an influential model of Christian inclusivism. He claims that the two central Christian claims are the universality of God's salvific agency (I2, I5) and the specificity of this as only known through Christ and the Spirit (I1, I4, I6).³⁹⁹ He argues that exclusivism neglects the former, pluralism neglects the latter, and that only inclusivism incorporates both. He argues for a Christian 'Trinitarian Christocentric' inclusivism that acknowledges the universality of divine activity beyond the boundaries of Christianity, throughout the world and human history, through the Spirit, '*Pneumatology allows the particularity of Christ to be related to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind.*'⁴⁰⁰ Yet this grace is necessarily embodied in religious structures (I3), and embodied most fully in Christ, 'Jesus is the normative criteria for God, while not foreclosing

³⁹⁷ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 87.

³⁹⁸ Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, p. 57.

³⁹⁹ Gavin D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality'. In, Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, p. 17.

⁴⁰⁰ Gavin D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality'. In, Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, p. 19.

the on going self-disclosure of God in history, through the Spirit.⁴⁰¹ Hence dialogue cannot replace mission.⁴⁰² With this proviso, he claims that Christians must be open to new expressions of Christian faith and practice as these are inculturated in the local contexts in which the spirit is active, such that Christians can, to some extent, learn from others (I3).⁴⁰³ There can be no assumptions about other religions, leaving Christianity open to exploration, 'change, challenge, and questioning.'⁴⁰⁴ He also proposes practice, such as prayer and charity, as a means of facilitating such learning and encounter.⁴⁰⁵

(5.2.c.ii) *Comparison of Inclusivism with Unbounded Commitment*

Connell identifies a number of affinities between the Climacian view and inclusivism: the example of the authentic idolater and inauthentic Christian presents the idea that salvation extends beyond the borders of true religious beliefs, such that one can have an authentic religious life without possessing religious truth, 'Climacus makes the characteristic inclusivist gesture of asserting that genuine worship reaches the true God despite the misguided beliefs of the worshipper about God.'⁴⁰⁶ Climacus does not challenge the truth of central Christological beliefs, but rather the Christians' views of the lives of religious others as being excluded.⁴⁰⁷

The pseudonyms' approach rejects the attempt to place religions into a hierarchy of truths because religions are subjective configurations of faith-

⁴⁰¹ Gavin D'Costa, 'Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality'. In, Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, p. 23. He also claims that this entails 'discernment' to determine whether the Spirit is active. [D'Costa, MRT, pp. 128-129.]

⁴⁰² D'Costa, MRT, p. 132.

⁴⁰³ D'Costa, MRT, p. 131.

⁴⁰⁴ D'Costa, MRT, p. 133.

⁴⁰⁵ D'Costa, MRT, p. 150.

⁴⁰⁶ Connell, KPRD, p. 75.

⁴⁰⁷ Connell, KPRD, p. 76.

commitments. However, the pseudonyms are committed to certain truths, such as theological realism, and presuppose elements of a Christian understanding of the human situation as characterised by mortality, finitude, and anxiety (I1); insofar as perspectives incorporate such insights and enable authentic responses to these, they possess significant truths (I2 and I3). The religious truths the pseudonyms affirm are soteriological and existential (I4): they posit a real relationship between the person and Jesus, in which Christians experience divine grace and love and are transformed. These truths are 'weak', in that they are second order, relative interpretations of prior existential commitments and experiences.⁴⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the truth of religions is dependent on the possibility of those religions effecting existential transformation and facilitating authentic selfhood and collision with the Absolute Paradox facilitates the fullest realisation of this, 'The "how" can fit only one thing, the absolute paradox' (CUP, p. 610). Thus, they accept versions of I4, I5 and I6.

Their soteriological focus is further comparable to inclusivism because it prioritises orthopraxy over orthodoxy, distinguishing between knowing the truth and having salvation in such a way that it is possible that a person outside the true religion could have authentic faith without possessing true religious beliefs (I5), as in the case of the authentic idol-worshipper (CUP, p. 201).

(5.2.c.iii) *The Spectre of Exclusivism*

⁴⁰⁸ This may seem to be incoherent with the preceding rejection of objectivity and the ability of theory to describe actuality. However, Climacus does not rule out the possibility of describing actuality; CUP and the Kierkegaardian authorship are attempts to do this (CUP, p. 630). Rather, the Kierkegaardian contention is that this must be done through existential engagement and with the proviso that this endeavour is dialectical, interpretative and always inconclusive. There is a major difference between a systematic metaphysics and the fragmented observations on the nature of some existential commitments offered by Kierkegaard, even if these observations are underpinned by certain claims about the human situation.

However, UC cannot be interpreted as a type of inclusivism for several reasons. Inclusivism leads to passivity with regards to other religions: one can rest content that one has the highest, in the case of (I6), or sufficient, in the case of (I3), access to salvific truth. Inclusivism rejects the necessity of engagement with other religions: at most, other religions can be learned from and add to, in a syncretistic manner, one's religious position; they do not present vital configurations of identity in which one's 'evig salighed' is at stake. Hence, for example, D'Costa sees their contribution as being, at most, to reveal how Christian religiousness can be expressed and developed in different cultural contexts, measured by discernment in accordance with Christian norms, 'There can be no question of "other revelations"'.⁴⁰⁹ This silences their otherness in the same way as closed commitment and is incompatible with the claims of religions themselves to mediate vital messages.

Interpreted as inclusivism, UC is also prone to Goodchild's objection that it is a form of exclusivist, closed commitment. Goodchild argues that any view of subjectivity as configured in relation to a singular conviction expresses, 'The logic of monotheism', which is, 're-enacted whenever religious identity is formed, in covenant with and in the image of a single God, by means of the exclusion of other identities.'⁴¹⁰ Inclusivist theses (I1), (I4) and (I6) are guilty of this and if UC is understood as asserting a paradigmatic superiority over other ways of being, it appears to offer a case of, 'devotion [which] passes a threshold of intensity where it begins to exclude all other devotions.'⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ D'Costa, MRT, pp. 129-131.

⁴¹⁰ Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 197.

⁴¹¹ Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 197.

Connell makes a similar point in rejecting an inclusivist reading of CUP, noting that the inclusivist must assume their ability to accurately identify the location of religious truth, something denied by CUP, which, 'calls into question an implicit objectivism in the inclusivist's judgement of the superior truth of her own faith. It simultaneously renders dubious the whole enterprise of speculating about whether people outside one's own faith are saved or not.'⁴¹² Inclusivism is in danger of 'forgetting finitude' in an exclusivist self-confidence, and its closed commitment is incompatible with the anxious, boundary crossing pursuit of authentic selfhood in a paradoxical, dialectical process of becoming.

Connell's solution is to interpret Kierkegaard as offering a 'parallelist' alternative.⁴¹³ This embraces humour as a means of de-intensifying collision and lives out religiousness in a paradoxical way that involves openness to the other because of, 'our own tentative, incomplete, fallible hold on the very truth we acknowledge', counterbalanced by, 'deep fidelity to one's own faith'.⁴¹⁴ This shares a number of features with UC and highlights the danger of UC collapsing into exclusivism or pluralism, as Connell's own interpretation does.

Connell admits that Kierkegaard tends towards the 'serious' mood of particularism in his view of faith as total, certain commitment and, 'going "all in."' ⁴¹⁵ He compares this to Plantinga's particularism, 'Like Plantinga, Kierkegaard describes faith as full, unqualified commitment (subjective certainty) to a belief that is acknowledged as objectively uncertain.'⁴¹⁶ The result, Connell admits, is that Kierkegaard fails to achieve the paradoxical 'double

⁴¹² Connell, KPRD, p. 80.

⁴¹³ Connell, KPRD, pp. 6-7.

⁴¹⁴ Connell, KPRD, p. 105.

⁴¹⁵ Connell, KPRD, p. 105.

⁴¹⁶ Connell, KPRD, p. 102.

vision' that Connell defends, and he proposes a fuller incorporation of self-effacing humour that includes the antidote of a 'laid back' attitude to questions of ultimacy, taking them, 'with a grain of salt', and, 'in a manner that qualifies and moderates the sense of urgency that naturally attends to ultimate issues.'⁴¹⁷

Although Chapter 6 identifies humour is important, Connell's de-intensified reformulation of Kierkegaardian faith contradicts my elaboration of it as an absolute commitment in which the individual ventures everything. Connell's approach, as he admits, diverges from Kierkegaard on this key point. It also succumbs to the partial commitment that characterises some forms of pluralism. A partial or cool commitment is seen by Climacus as a quantitative calculation that has failed to make the qualitative movement of faith and is mired in the apportioning of subjective commitment to objective certainty (CUP, p. 21).

Connell's approach can also collapse into forms of exclusivism and fails to provide a basis for motivating the engagement with religious others that he advocates. His parallelism depicts a situation in which individuals tolerate outsiders because they view themselves with a self-distancing and cooling humour, but this provides no motive for engaging with others. Indeed, to retain the humour, all commitments must be seen as finite, human perspectives that fall short of the absolute, such that one can take the deep commitments of others with no more seriousness than one takes one's own. Connell's parallelism leads to quietism about religious others, with individuals occupying mutually exclusive paths, and the best it can hope for is 'coexistence' with and wry tolerance of the other when it presents itself.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Connell, KPRD, p. 100.

⁴¹⁸ Connell, KPRD, p. 182.

Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate that UC avoids Connell's errors, the pitfalls of pluralism and exclusivism, and inclusivism's 'logic of monotheism', while offering a more Kierkegaardian approach.⁴¹⁹ UC is a total commitment that requires and motivates full engagement with religious and non-religious others as integral to the emergence of authentic subjectivity itself; although singular, it is open and transcendent. It is a way of being that is open to the encounter with God in the other and involves boundary-crossing in which one's identity is endangered yet formed through the struggle. This enables a conception of faith as passionate, unbounded commitment that requires relationships with inassimilable others, rather than the passivity of inclusivism and parallelism.

⁴¹⁹ This is also grounded more firmly than Connell's parallelism on two points. Whereas Connell's position is forced to assume the normative value of tolerance as its basis, UC is grounded in an ontology and elaboration of the nature of subjectivity itself, which accounts for the value of openness, tolerance, and full engagement. It also achieves this not by moving away from the resources of Christianity but by specifically focusing on the central Christian symbol, Jesus, thereby providing a compelling case for Christians to engage with diversity. Connell agrees that Kierkegaard demonstrates the usefulness of the resources provided by the Christian faith for engaging with religious diversity (p. 182), but he does not make use of Kierkegaard's Christology, beyond a tantalizing comment about the tensions in the specificity/universality of Jesus' invitation in PiC. [Connell, KPRD, p. 6.]

(5.3) The Central Features of Unbounded Commitment as a Way of Being in Relation to Diversity

Chapter 2 identified three features of religious spheres of existence: they offer universal possibilities for responding to the human situation and constituting personhood; they are expressed in the finite situations and through the finite resources of individual lives; they can be lived out authentically or inauthentically. UC corresponds to the third feature, offering a way of being in which the universalised possibilities presented by religion are subjectively appropriated in the local, human situation to facilitate authentic religiousness. The resources provided by UC's existential situationism and the Christological challenge will be outlined in this chapter; the next chapter will outline how UC is a transcendent, transforming way of being, facilitated by deep engagement with alterity.

(5.3.a) Existential Situationism

(5.3.a.i) Religious diversity is a result of the diversity of specific existential situations and subjective responses within the wider human situation

Understanding religions as spheres of existence allows them to be seen as ways of expressing and navigating the conflicts of local and quasi-universal features and challenges of the human situation in relation to absolute religious demands, with a view to constituting authentic selfhood in response to these situations. This accounts for pervasive and deep RD in a number of ways.

Religions are autonomous, distinct ways of being that are bound up with and provide possibilities for the identities, choices, and experiences of those who inhabit them. They differ due to the variety of existential challenges and

situations in which they emerge and to which they are responding. The objects and commitments taken as ultimate by religions, and how these are interpreted, give rise to diversity. Even if they are responses to revelation, their expression will be inextricably contextual to the local situations in which they are encountered. The determinate social and cultural structures of their relative contexts will further shape these in diverse ways by how they shape and direct the existential situations. They also provide the resources through which existential responses are expressed and lived out. Diversity of religions is expected as part of the necessary, local socio-cultural contexts in which subjectivity emerges, both passively in what it receives and actively in what it uses, as Gupta observes, 'the social world provides the backdrop of the Kierkegaardian self. Necessity and possibility only make sense in a social context'.⁴²⁰

Most importantly, given UC's emphasis of subjectivity and agency, diversity emerges from free, subjective responses and appropriations in the unique existential situation of each person. This will further diversify forms of religiousness in the same context, such that intrareligious diversity is to be expected alongside interreligious diversity. Moreover, the diversity of religious expression is likely to be a marker of the authenticity of the commitment, because this indicates subjective appropriation, 'as existing in his thinking, as acquiring this in inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated' (CUP, p. 73).

⁴²⁰ Anoop Gupta, *Kierkegaard's Romantic Legacy: Two Theories of the Self* (University of Ottawa Press, 2005), p. 109.

In short, RD is a result of different ways of being, the different existential situations in which people find themselves, and personal, subjective appropriations in these situations. That such diversity is evident globally and historically, both between and within religions, provides strong support for this existential view of religions: pervasive RD is integral to human ways of being in the world, a phenomenon observed by Caputo, ‘the uncontainable diversity of “religion” is itself a great religious truth and a marker of what religion is all about.’⁴²¹

In contrast to cultural-linguistic models, which understand diversity as irrevocable because resulting from different, untranslatable cultural contexts, and cognitive-propositional models, which understand it as doxastic disagreement resulting from differing accounts of reality, this existential account explains it as resulting from different ways of being, incorporating cultural and cognitive elements as secondary to the agent’s choices. This also escapes the impasse generated by the other models’ assertion of the untranslatability or incompatibility of different religions: while differing accounts may be mutually exclusive, exclusivism is not entailed in the decision to commit oneself in a particular way of being in the world.

Significant intersection and correlation between religions is to be expected because they express various ways of being in response to existential struggles within the human situation. Hence Climacus regards religiousness as a universal potential, as it is a way of responding to and configuring features of human existence, and claims that all human beings have a capacity for faith, ‘the

⁴²¹ John D. Caputo, *On Religion*, p.1.

highest is common for all human beings' (CUP, p. 156; p. 294).⁴²² Religions are engaged in continual acts of meeting, collision, and intersection with one another in the lives of their adherents.

(5.3.a.ii) *Each religious sphere can facilitate authentic existence but cannot make exclusive claims to this*

Existential situationism asserts that persons lack the ability to extricate themselves from their situation to achieve a view that is not interpretative. The human situation lacks any knowable, objective conditions that resolve the existential challenges facing human persons.

⁴²² An error of interpretation could emerge from this distinction: viewing it as making substantive claims about religions or religious diversity. Hughes interprets Religiousness A as a variation of Schleiermacher's claim that religion is a universal, innate feeling that finds concrete expression in particular religions, 'The distinctiveness of a revealed religion such as Christianity...is derived from the particular concepts through which it gives expression to universal religious feeling.' [Carl S. Hughes, 'The Constructive Value of *The Book on Adler* for Christian Theology in the Age of Religious Pluralism'. In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Book on Adler* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), p. 212.] Evans interprets Religiousness A as 'natural' in the same way, though he sees it as annulled in Religiousness B, which is revealed over and against this nature. [C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Postscript and Fragments: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, pp. 46-47.] This interpretation suggests an underlying core of religiousness, as either an inauthentic response that must be rejected by Christianity (Evans) or that is universal and shaped by Christian revelation (Hughes). This imperialising view either supports Christian exclusivism or universalises Christian experience as the basis for pluralism and inclusivism. This interpretation is rejected. Religiousness A provides a particular way of configuring human subjectivity in the human situation of uncertainty, finitude, yet having to decide whether and what one will commit to as having ultimate importance for one's life. This is universal to the human situation, insofar as human beings are free, mortal, temporal and incapable of extricating themselves from this limited context and perspective; hence, Climacus is not arbitrarily imposing a universalised religious experience by claiming that it involves passion and renunciation because, instead, he sees these as sequiturs of the nature of the human condition: if one is going to respond to something as ultimate and decisive for one's existence, this will involve it being made more important than anything else and pursuing it passionately. Climacus offers a thin account of religion as maintaining an absolute relation to the absolute and a relative relation to the relative', but the identification of Religiousness A as immanent should not lead to a view of it as natural or innate. Rather than positing specific religions as derivations from an original religious essence that is a distinct and innate faculty, Climacus argues rather that structures of subjectivity, such as commitment and passion, are the only structures that predate specific forms of religiousness and that these are to be characterised as religious when they reach a particular threshold and type of commitment.

As a result, RD is insurmountable. Commitment is unbounded rather than total: it signifies a complete commitment to something as ultimate, but does not regard itself as having a total grasp of this ultimate beyond its limited perspective. Indeed, given the subjectivity of religious devotion, it is to be expected that the more religious devotion is found, the more diversity will abound. Religious perspectives are inescapably contextual, so one can only speak personally, from one's situation, about one's commitments, experiences, and encounters, and cannot make global pronouncements about God's presence, truth, or salvation,

'Nature, the totality of creation, is God's work, and yet God is not there....

Is it not as if an author wrote 166 folio volumes and the reader read and read, just as when someone observes and observes nature but does not discover the meaning of this enormous work lies in himself.'⁴²³

The criteria of legitimisation is itself dependent on these commitments such that there is no external perspective from which a global perspective can be achieved or competing narratives arbitrated, only local, micronarrative interpretations.

Christians can be transformed by an encounter with God in Jesus and can partly narrate this encounter, but they lack the epistemic perspective necessary to make global pronouncements about meaning, salvation, and truth in other religions. They can make absolute claims about their experience of Jesus but not exclusive claims. Even instances where other religions contradict their views do not allow them to assert the falsehood of other religions: these could be a result of the different interpretations generated by different existential contexts,

⁴²³ CUP, pp. 246-247. Shakespeare similarly interprets Kierkegaard as claiming, 'religious language is inextricably tied to existential possibilities which the believer is called to live out.' Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 141.

particularly given the agonistic, fractured nature of existence and the paradoxical incomprehensibility of the divine.

Assessing the truth of others is not only impossible, but is to be avoided because it reflects a hubristic attempt to secure certainty that is inimical to faith, 'The believer cares so little for probability that he fears it most of all, since he knows very well that with it he is beginning to lose his faith.' (CUP, p. 233)⁴²⁴ As an authentic way of being in the world, faith entails acknowledging the unbounded and insecure nature of the commitment as derived from the ambiguous human situation, 'Faith has, namely, two tasks: to watch for and at every moment to make the discovery of improbability, the paradox, in order then to hold it fast with the passion of inwardness.' (CUP, p. 233)

The lack of objective resolutions means that persons can only respond to the human situation by deploying the resources of their contexts, in this case various forms of religiousness, in order to create meaning and value. The measure of religious truth is whether it is appropriated and lived out authentically in relation to the human situation, 'Objectively, what is reflected upon is that this is the true God; subjectively, that the individual relates himself to a something *in such a way* that his relation is in truth a God-relation.' (CUP, p. 199) This is because, 'The passion of the infinite, not its content, is the deciding factor.' (CUP, p. 203) Climacus asserts that the core of a religious position is its subjective configuration of faith and draws the conclusion that a person can be said to be in the truth even if their beliefs are objectively false, as in the case of

⁴²⁴ McLeod-Harrison makes the similar point that Christian exclusivism is unchristian, 'seeking for (further) knowledge of which religion is the true one may be bad, once one is a Christian and from within the Christian point of view, because the attempt puts us in the role of epistemic judge over matters that we ought not (because we cannot) judge or know.' [Mark S. McLeod-Harrison, *Repairing Eden: Humility, Mysticism and the Existential Problem of Religious Diversity*, p.70.]

the authentic idol worshipper whose faith is a passionate commitment, *'If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth.'* (CUP, p. 199). The truth of the idol worshipper is explicitly contrasted with the untruth of the exclusivist Christian, *'The one prays in truth to God although he is worshipping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshipping an idol.'* (CUP, p. 201)

Authentic existence entails responding to these situations and living out human potential to its fullest by constituting selfhood through these resources with absolute commitment that remains open and anxious in relation to encounters about which they can know nothing with certainty. Each religion can have its own authentic expressions in a diverse range of identities, making authenticity pluralistic; whether an approach is authentic cannot be predetermined and only explored from the inside by those who attempt to live it out. The human situation may be intrinsically polyphonous and capable of authentic expression in numerous distinct structures.

(5.3.a.iii) Peer diversity and alterity are internal to every religious sphere; religious spheres are open and their boundaries permeable

The agonistic nature of all spheres entails that external alterity is prefigured in the agony and diversity of possibilities internal to every religious sphere. Identity is never secure or static, but is rather in process and open to a range of subjective appropriations. While the spheres are autonomous, their agonistic nature and dialectical openness means that there are numerous possibilities for intersection between them, particularly in pursuing authentic

selfhood. Indeed, as Westphal observes, Climacus' analysis shows how exploring a sphere leads one inevitably to its insufficiency and to an encounter with other spheres.⁴²⁵

Hence Climacus and the Kierkegaardian authorship explore liminal encounters between religious and non-religious ways of being: how they relate, collide or intersect in the struggle of an individual and how tensions, conflicts, and confrontations within and between them open up new possibilities or transform each other. For example, a sphere can throw fresh light on a struggle within another sphere or open up new possibilities, solutions, and struggles.⁴²⁶

This internal fragmentation and alterity is particularly evident in the pervasive peer diversity of religions and in the vacillation of individual religious persons. Piette reports a number of examples of such vacillation with regards to religiousness: incomprehension ("I don't understand [the resurrection]."); doubt and hope ("I think there's something, maybe. I hope so."); irony ('usually expressed through laughter'); rejection of past beliefs ("I used to believe in the physical resurrection,"); appeals to theological doctrines as a means of distancing oneself from the belief; and metaphorical interpretations.⁴²⁷ Religious spheres cannot provide a secure perspective from which to assess others.

⁴²⁵ Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B'. In, George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (eds.), *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics and Politics in Kierkegaard*, p. 111.

⁴²⁶ This is evident, for example, in his elaboration of the intersections between the spheres in, 'A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature' (CUP, pp. 251-300) and in his interest in boundary spheres, such as humour and irony. For example, 'irony' signifies a new possibility that emerges when one combines the universal demands of the ethical and the specific life of the individual (CUP, pp. 503-504) and 'comedy' signifies a disparity between the inner commitment and external expressions (CUP, p. 504).

⁴²⁷ Albert Piette, 'Existence, Minimality, and Believing'. In, Michael Jackson and Albert Piette (eds.), *What is Existential Anthropology?*, pp. 195-196.

(5.3.a.iv) *The authentic religiousness of UC is open to and engaged with religious others*

This could be taken as a tragic diagnosis of the human situation as perpetually destabilised and unable to achieve the security for which it longs. However, UC sees this situation as the condition for authentic, passionate selfhood in embracing the beauty and terror of the human situation. UC thrives on alterity and open encounter with and between the spheres in a number of ways, living out identities authentically by appropriating them uniquely and subjectively in response to existential challenges.

First, authentic Christian religiousness entails an absolute commitment, without limits, to an absolute. Far from achieving the illusory unity posited by exclusivism and thereby escaping existential struggles, Christian religiousness entails an active embrace of struggle. The central struggle of Christian religiousness is to sustain a passionate relationship to the eternal in the context of time, when such a relationship cannot be sustained due to sin; and to encounter the relationship to God as a gift that subverts attempts to control or legislate the encounter. This struggle is the source of the dialectical passion that makes UC an authentic response to the human situation. Furthermore, given that this entails a collision with the paradox and between one's relative life and the absolute commitment, living this out will entail a movement to the limits of the sphere and what is possible within it as well as encounter with liminal situations.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ For example, how one navigates this absolute commitment through their various relative commitments of being a son, a father, having a career and playing cricket will leave decisive marks and present unique struggles for the person.

Second, in Climacus' understanding of the spheres, the more one deepens oneself in a commitment, the more the inherent conflict and tensions will emerge and one will be led inexorably towards the permeable boundaries of the way of being and its openness to other possibilities.⁴²⁹ Deepening within religious identities does not provide a secure way of being but rather intensifies the struggles and conflicts within the sphere: the more one commits, the more the conflicts emerge and the more one is led to a specific, subjective expression of religiousness. Internal diversity is thus an inescapable and valuable reality of religious existence-possibilities, and the more fully a religious identity is appropriated, the more subjective, unique, and paradoxical this will be.

Inner deepening within a particular religious sphere also leads one inexorably toward boundary encounters. The more one deepens one's commitments, the more one will experience the defining conflict of the sphere and the more one will be impelled by this to the boundaries of the sphere as one seeks to resolve the existential struggle.⁴³⁰ Internal collisions drive the person towards the boundary of their sphere and to new possibilities and insights on their struggles; thus encounter with external, alternative possibilities will be an

⁴²⁹ A range of Kierkegaard's texts explore what happens when an existential commitment is pushed to its most extreme expressions and the 'existence-relationships' between the spheres in their internal conflicts, collisions, failures and facilitating of new possibilities provides the basis for Climacus' interpretation of the authorship (CUP, pp. 251-300). Examples from the Kierkegaardian corpus include the desperation of the Seducer who practices all the strategies honed throughout EOI and the encounter with the completely incomprehensible and inexpressible faith of de Silentio's Abraham in FaT.

⁴³⁰ For example, in Climacus' interpretation of the aesthetic sphere in EOI, the conflict is between the depression and the pursuit of enjoyment that it provokes: the more one flees depression in diversionary pleasure, the more one is disappointed by the pleasure and becomes detached from long-term commitments, leading to increasing depression. The aesthetic thereby leads to a confrontation with depression and a decision to live out long-term relationships, despite the threat of suffering and loss and this possibility is found in the ethical sphere and its 'openness' (CUP, pp. 253-254).

integral component of religiousness.⁴³¹ Hence the deepest religious commitment will be marked by passionate openness.

Climacus identifies the navigation of these existence-relations as facilitating 'upbuilding' (CUP, p. 256), which he uses to refer to a range of processes of existential development aimed at developing authentic selfhood, not just Christian religiousness (CUP, p. 256). This affirms that Christian engagements with alternative religions will provide fresh insight and be upbuilding for the Christian in achieving authentic selfhood; it also invites an exploration of the liminal encounters that are possible between religions and the boundary situations occasioned by such encounter.

(5.3.a.v) Engagement with religious diversity should prioritise personal encounter

Authenticity is defined by how it responds to the existential situations facing human persons. Pervasive diversity is a primary challenge and defining feature of the existential situation of many persons in the West, such that it demands an authentic, existential response. No comfortable resolution is to be expected of this, any more than there could be a comfortable resolution of the challenges posed by human mortality, but this does mean that diversity is an opportunity for existential action and authentic responsiveness in applying the resources of one's way of being to it.

The debate over diversity cannot be resolved through the production of general theories or with certainty, but only existentially, in the lives of individuals. On this model, interreligious encounter has the aim of illuminating

⁴³¹ In the same way, the ethical addresses and develops struggles within the aesthetic, and the religious emerges as an absolute demand that collides with the ethical (CUP, p. 262).

different ways of being, and facilitating authentic responses to these. This escapes the objection cited against the objective typology that it precludes genuine engagement by predetermining the meaning of other perspectives and entails that dialogue and personal interaction are integral to Christian engagements with diversity.⁴³²

The conclusion of this outline of existential situationism is that religions have parity with regards to authenticity and the human situation to which they respond, but must also be open to their internal alterity and place in the wider situation of diversity; this will be a marker of their authenticity.

(5.3.b) The Christological Horizon of Divine Activity: Beyond Boundaries

Christological commitments further incentivise Christian openness to religious others. The insight that identities negotiate central agonies generated by their situation and their commitments allows for a healthy appreciation of the inescapable conflict of responding to Jesus as having decisive religious significance alongside the diversity of human responses and religious alternatives. The Christian struggle with RD alongside the uniqueness and particularity of Jesus is a part of the paradoxical situation that the pseudonyms see as the occasion for genuine faith and authentic selfhood.

It will now be argued that, without annulling this tension, Christian UC entails an expectation to find God outside the boundaries of Christianity that incentivises encounter with religious others. Although existential situationism prohibits Christians from making global pronouncements, the pseudonyms offer reasons for Christians to expect that God is operative beyond the boundaries of

⁴³² The nature of such dialogue is explored in Chapter 6.

Christian religiousness and to seek God there. This is central to the Christological commitment of Christian faith as paradoxical rather than immanent: God is encountered outside one's boundaries and in opposition to one's expectations. The pseudonyms express and justify this position on the universality of divine activity and specificity of the human encounter with it in three ways.

(5.3.b.i) *Correlation Between the Human Situation and Divine Activity*

Religions are engagements with existential situations, so Christological themes correlate to existential struggles with personhood and the attempt to relate to an absolute through the quasi-universal potential and immanent features of Religiousness A.⁴³³ Climacus' central question of becoming a Christian identifies religious commitments as occurring in a shared temporal and human context that is dependent on the relative historical situations in which persons find themselves, 'The individual's...[evig salighed] is decided in time through a relation to something historical' (CUP, p. 385). Even outside of religions, persons have to commit to particular identities in a context of uncertainty about the future and their own inability to master the world, particularly in relation to an existential transformation that can seem impossible. All existential decisions are risky ventures analogous to subjective acts of faith, such that religion, which takes anxious faith as its central truth, has a deep affinity with the human condition and human activities. It is for this reason that Climacus asserts that faith is the highest truth and expression of the human condition, 'the highest truth there is for an *existing* person.' (CUP, p. 203) Climacus' description of

⁴³³ Correlation is here used in conformity with Tillich's definition as asserting, 'the independence and interdependence of existential questions and theological answers'. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company, 1968), p. 14.

Religiousness A also presents the idea that many non-Christians are engaged with such religious activities and have religious pathos (CUP, p. 560).

As a deep expression of this paradoxical, agonistic situation, the relationship to Jesus correlates to human struggles: Christians must commit absolutely without any certainty. Even though paradoxical-religiousness is a response to an external claim of revelation, it is pre-empted by and correlates with the paradoxes and collisions of the human situation, such as the paradox of love (PF, p. 39). Moreover, the Christian struggle correlates to other struggles in that they never possess a privileged ability to achieve security, 'each individual in quiet inwardness before God is to humble himself under what it means in the strictest sense to be a Christian, is to confess honestly before God where he is so that he still might worthily accept the grace that is offered to every imperfect person—that is, to everyone.' (PiC, p. 67)

(5.3.b.ii) *The Universality of Divine Activity*

Climacus offers a thin theological account of divine activity, in the universalisable terms of the 'god's poem', where God's kenosis or 'descent' in, 'the form of a servant' (PF, p. 33), is explained as motivated by God's desire to establish free, loving relationships with all people by being among them (PF, p. 55). This necessitates the religious ambiguity of the human situation, divine hiddenness, and the unknowability of God through exclusive structures.⁴³⁴ Anti-Climacus similarly asserts the universality of intent and grace in the salvific activity of Jesus, 'The only thing he is concerned about is that there might be one

⁴³⁴ Kierkegaard offers a similar description of religiousness, claiming, 'I cannot make my God-relationship public...since it is neither more nor less than the universally human inwardness, which every human being can have without any special call'. (PoV, p. 26)

single person...who does not hear his invitation', (PiC, p. 14) and it achieves this end, (PiC, p. 151) insofar as people allow themselves to be 'drawn' to it (PiC, p. 181). This is linked with God's omnipresence and omnipotence (PiC, p. 155) and is not confined to Christianity, as Jesus' contemporaneity is coterminous with human history. Anti-Climacus even sees reunification and the annulment of discriminating distinctions as part of the transformation achieved by grace, 'Separation forced its way in everywhere to bring pain and unrest; but here is rest...with him who eternally reunites the separated ones' (PiC, p. 18)

How divine activity in Christ is universal yet specific is problematic. It could endorse inclusivist thesis (I5): that Christ may be integral in religious encounter but not known as such, in the same way as an unknown person can rescue a drowning man.⁴³⁵ However, retaining a role for Jesus in these terms is problematic.

Jesus seems neither ontologically nor epistemologically necessary for the pseudonyms' religiousness. The pseudonyms do not see salvation as achieved through a change in the cosmos, the most likely explanation of how Jesus could save a person without that person knowing about him. Moreover, there is a disparity between the universality of Jesus' significance and its limited global effects in effecting religious transformation: not all people encounter religious realities. If Jesus' nature is such that he is contemporaneous with all people, contemporaneity seems vacuous because contentless; this is incompatible with

⁴³⁵ This could be interpreted as a strategy for establishing a hierarchy in which Christianity is superior: Pojman's proposal is that the primary existential work in liminal encounters is that of synthesis, fusion and appropriation until the highest, Christianity, incorporates all of the lower, 'Each stage incorporates the previous stage within itself.' [Louis Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 43.] As with the supersessionist interpretations rejected in Chapter 2, this fails to grasp the nature of the liminal encounter as driven by conflict and collision and of which no synthesis or 'mediation' is possible (CUP, p. 405).

the pseudonyms' emphasis on the relationship as being between two persons. Rae's solution is that Kierkegaard adheres to the universalist position that all will be saved in an eschatological reality because salvation is dependent upon God's initiative and grace.⁴³⁶ This is an implausible interpretation because the pseudonyms do not discuss post-mortem existence in relation to salvation. Climacus and Anti-Climacus do not solve the problem of how Jesus is unique in the process of salvation yet universally active in relation to other people and religions, being content to affirm this within the boundaries of existential situationism.

(5.3.b.iii) *The Specificity of the Christological Presence Beyond Boundaries*

UC proposes the solution that this tension between universality and particularity is itself the core agony of the Christian sphere and that the inability to locate the divine activity in Jesus is a result of his contemporaneity: its location cannot be determined in advance of the personal encounter and, additionally, the presence of divine activity in other ways of being, outside the boundaries of the awareness of Jesus, is itself the Christological presence. This is in conformity with the pseudonyms' claim that religious structures are incapable of objectifying the person of Jesus: he is operative outside of the Christian identification of God's presence itself.

The paradoxical collision with Jesus is generated by the person encountering God's presence in a site where his/her understanding indicates this

⁴³⁶ Rae claims this is how it differs from Hick's pluralism, which is still dependent on personal effort. Murray A. Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*, p. 241.

to be impossible.⁴³⁷ This interpretation is supported by Climacus' explanation of the paradox as entailing, 'two dialectical contradictions—the first, basing one's eternal happiness on the relation to something historical, and then that the historical is constituted contrary to all thinking'. (CUP, p. 579) It is for this reason that offence at the paradox is described as an 'acoustical illusion' (PF, p. 49): the understanding thinks it has generated the paradox by identifying a logical contradiction in the doctrine of the Incarnation but actually it is God's presence here that is paradoxical in that God chooses to be active in a site that subverts the expectations of the person, 'Everything it says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox'. (PF, p. 53)⁴³⁸ Anti-Climacus develops this point further by asserting that the location of the eternal itself is repelling, 'the sign of offence' (PiC, p. 139), because it is found in a location socially, intellectually, morally, and religiously opposed to one's own.

Climacus understands the immanence annihilated by the paradox as any relationship to the divine that is thought to be possessed without 'contradiction' or conflict, such as in Religiousness A's assertion of an, 'underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal' (CUP, p. 573), and Socratic recollection, wherein the individual is conceived of as already possessing the truth (PF, p. 9). Exclusivist closed commitment is a form of immanentism because it is reliant on the assertion that religious truth is possessed by a particular religious site, participation in which conveys it to its participants. God's presence in Jesus as

⁴³⁷ This is comparable to the idea in *Fear and Trembling* that faith contravenes or teleologically suspends rational, moral and social norms.

⁴³⁸ This resolves the problem identified by Walsh of how offence misrepresents the paradox without utilising her solution that the paradox is only apparent and that Christian faith is a higher rationality, a claim denied by the pseudonyms (CUP, pp. 580-581). Sylvia Walsh, 'Echoes of Absurdity: The Offended Consciousness and the absolute Paradox in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*'. In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, p. 39 and p. 45.

the absolute paradox or sign of offence subverts attempts to use it as the basis for the exclusive status of Christianity among religions. Similarly, pluralisms that assert the accessibility of the divine in multiple religions postulate an immanence of the divine that is incompatible with the specificity of the Incarnation, 'the eternal is *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere]...in the paradoxical-religious, the eternal is present at a specific point, and this is the break with immanence.' (CUP, p. 571) Pluralism thus cannot provide the occasion for the collision that elicits paradoxical-religiousness.

In contrast to immanence, Climacus understands the 'paradoxical-religious' as presenting an existence-possibility in which one is able to relate to the absolute only in a context of collision, 'the existing individual in time does not come to relate himself to the eternal or to collect himself in his relation (this is A) but *in time* comes to relate himself to the eternal *in time*.' (CUP, p. 570) The pseudonyms do not apply this to RD, but encounter with different religions can generate a conflict analogous to the encounter with the Absolute Paradox.

In the context of RD, UC seeks to encounter divine activity not in religious sites with which it has affinity but rather in places that subvert and offend the person's expectations, particularly their core existential and religious sensibilities. This necessitates a willingness to push to and beyond one's own religious boundaries and identities to encounter God in locations beyond their limits, including other religions and ways of being, particularly sites of opposition, where the presence of God seems impossible or offensive, and also in the act of boundary-crossing itself: God is encountered in the fear and trembling at the limits of what one considers possible and impossible. In response to Goodchild's 'logic of monotheism' objection, paradoxical-religiousness presents a

religiousness that is absolute without claiming to possess in any definitive form a relationship to the divine and which requires the subversion of closed identities.

To sum up, the pseudonyms' interpretation of the central relationship of Christian religiousness, the relationship to the divine presence in Jesus, is that it demands that the Christian seek God precisely where he believes he cannot be found: at and beyond the boundaries of Christianity in religious and non-religious others. This provides an alternative between the excesses of pluralism and exclusivism while energising Christian faith and its encounter with religious others by embracing the tension at its core between universality and specificity.

5.4. An Objection to Unbounded Commitment: The Religious Ambiguity of the Human Situation

An exclusivist riposte to UC is that the human situation it describes does not warrant the commitment that it advocates. Geivett and Phillips argue that certainty is necessary and desirable as a strong basis for religious commitment: the person needs a clear set of truths to inform their moral and religious actions; God, as a loving creator, has a duty to provide such clarity. Uncertainty, far from leading to passionate commitment, leads to an insipid faith that undermines the ability of the person to act morally and religiously with confidence, 'Particularism is not scandalous to the spiritually needy person who has been looking for God's precise remedy to the specific ills of humanity.'⁴³⁹

Basinger's rule, that one should not commit to an option in a context where there are competing options that have parity unless one can demonstrate the superiority of the chosen option, seems to obtain here and expresses the common view that a commitment in a context of uncertainty must be weak.⁴⁴⁰ This is supported by the evidence that the encounter with RD has an inimical effect on commitment and leads to disengagement from religion, 'because of the claims of other religions, some Christians find themselves believing the claims of the Christian faith less strongly...or...not believing Christian claims at all.'⁴⁴¹ Awareness of a range of options undermines the value of such options.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, 'A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach'. In, John Hick, Clark H. Pinnock, Alister McGrath, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 218.

⁴⁴⁰ David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*, p. 11.

⁴⁴¹ Mark S. McLeod-Harrison, *Repairing Eden: Humility, Mysticism and the Existential Problem of Religious Diversity*, p. 14.

⁴⁴² For evidence of the link between religious diversity and secularisation, see Davie's research and assertion that, 'If there is more than one sacred canopy present in society...they cannot both (or indeed all) be true.... The next question is unavoidable: could it be that there is no ultimate truth at all...? [P]luralism erodes the plausibility structures generated by monopolistic religious

This highlights a major existential problem of RD: whether one can remain committed in a context of diversity in the passionate and absolute way UC advocates. The pseudonyms admit that this is one of the struggles faced by faith: why one should choose Christian faith when faced with alternatives. There are more appealing options intellectually, due to the offence one encounters in Christian faith (PF, p. 49; CUP, p. 585), and pragmatically, as Christian faith leads to suffering and persecution (CUP, p. 433; PiC, p. 179).

McKim's conception of the religious ambiguity of the human situation offers a response in support of UC. McKim argues that religious commitment can be valid in a context defined by 'extremely rich ambiguity', as distinct from one that is 'uncertain'. A context has 'extremely rich ambiguity' if: no interpretation is overwhelmingly obvious, there is compelling evidence for a range of competing interpretations and there is so much evidence that no person can see all of it.⁴⁴³ If this condition obtains, it can be valid to commit to a particular interpretation, as it is likely that one of the interpretations is true but the issue is undecidable.⁴⁴⁴

A situation is not ambiguous if there is no compelling evidence; in this case, it is simply uncertain and an appropriate response is suspension of judgement. UC seems to be asserting this view: that the situation is uncertain; it thus warrants agnosticism. However, by focussing on subjective commitment, the position is able to overcome this problem.

institutions in so far as it offers alternatives.' Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 53. See also: Peter L. Berger, 'Secularization and De-Secularization'. In, Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami and David Smith (eds.), *Religions in the Modern World*, p. 296.

⁴⁴³ 'there being a significant...amount of evidence for more than one hypothesis and there not being a proof of any relevant hypothesis'. Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 134 and p. 138.

⁴⁴⁴ Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity*, p. 159.

UC defines the situation as ambiguous in a different way to McKim: religious and non-religious commitments are forced choices because persons have to decide, in a context of uncertainty, how they will live and therefore commit to different structures, for example, whether they will live as if there is a God. The underlying existential commitments also entail that religions emerge from a situation that is richly ambiguous: human experience is shaped by existential commitments that cause the world to appear in a particular way; the commitments also gain existential and experiential traction and plausibility by facilitating responses to the situations humans encounter. Furthermore, persons live in complex situations, with a range of factors and experiences bearing on their decisions, and their commitments are processual and the result of long processes of existential development in relation to major life-events; they cannot adopt an external perspective or see all of the relevant information, but have to decide how to respond to these situations. Climacus also sees God as 'richly ambiguous': because the encounter is personal and paradoxical, there is no single way God can be described and local experiences of God will always be partial, elusive, and subvert attempts to describe or circumscribe God's nature and activity. (CUP, p. 156)

UC thrives on uncertainty and anxiousness because they destabilise secure grasps on reality in an area where one must still exercise agency. Climacus provides an explanation of why the encounter with diversity degrades inauthentic, exclusivist commitment, but causes the authentic religiousness of UC to thrive. For human valuation, the existence of a plurality of options evidently devalues each, as in a surfeit of a commodity, but this inheres in a deeper structure of valuation: persons value things that are deeply connected with

agency and are chosen; things that are obtained through effort rather than received passively or with ease. Hence de Silentio observes that the universalising of faith as a given, passively inherited condition has the result that, 'Everything can be had at such a bargain price that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will make a bid.' (FaT, p. 5) The value of a thing is that it has to be sought out, chosen, willed in strenuousness and that it makes existential demands: it is in these ways that meaning is generated because agency is at the core of the human person.⁴⁴⁵

Climacus makes this clear in the case of the man concerned about his salvation, 'Now, if someone were to say, plainly and simply, that he was concerned about himself, that it was not quite right for him to call himself a Christian...his wife would tell him, "Hubby darling.... How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish, aren't you?... You aren't a Jew, are you, or a Mohammedan? What else would you be then?"' (CUP, p. 50) In this case, religion is seen as a passive and inherited cultural identity: the individual does not have to passionately appropriate, choose, or even worry about it, because it is determined for him by external forces. In such a situation, exposure to other religious cultural identities emphasises that these are passively inherited and thereby devalues all of them. Closed religious commitment is often undermined by diversity because it is a closed commitment that relies on a conception of religion as supported by, for example, inherited cultural identities, institutions, and authoritative claims, and diversity undermines such supports.

⁴⁴⁵ This is reflected in Kierkegaard's advocacy of truth that is actively found and chosen by the individual and translates into existential activity, 'What I really need to be clear about is *what I am to do*...to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die.... That's what I lacked for leading a *completely human life* and not just a life of *knowledge*...something which is bound up with the deepest roots of my existence.' [Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks, Volume 1, AA-DD. AA:12, pp. 19-20*].

In contrast, understanding religious identity as a way of being that is passionately chosen and that expresses and navigates one's most important commitments and struggles prevents it from being imperilled in this way. Rather than devaluing religious perspectives, a religiously diverse situation can make persons aware of the possibility of relating themselves to an absolute and thus elicit creative appropriative responses. This is supported by the ability of person-centred religiousness to thrive in a context of RD. Heelas, for example, offers such an alternative interpretation of the relationship between RD and secularisation: that the process provoked by RD involves the decline of religious institutions and the emphasis of individual, agency-centred religiousness, focussed on personal faith, development, and commitment, 'The...spiritually-informed, personal, intimate, experiential, existential, psychological, self and relational-cum-self depths of what it is to be alive'.⁴⁴⁶

RD contributes to this person-centred transition as it demonstrates that there is no single religion that has a prima facie fit with human experience and, moreover, that many people exist within a range of different interpretations that emerge from their subjective responses to their situations, such that there is a need to decide, for the person, how they will creatively integrate the various insights provided by religions into a cohesive whole. UC has synergy with a context of RD and the fragmented, postmodern situation as well as going to the heart of what it is to be a person in any situation: an anxious person, struggling with the terrors of existence in passionate, agency driven ways that produce meaning and selfhood.

⁴⁴⁶ This is measured by the growth of the 'betwixt and the between' who do not define themselves as atheists or members of a religious institution. Paul Heelas, 'The spiritual revolution: from 'religion' to 'spirituality''. In, Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami and David Smith (eds.), *Religions in the Modern World*, pp. 358-359 and p. 358.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the features of UC as an authentic way of being in the situation of RD. UC was described as an unbounded faith: a passionate, total commitment in a context of anxiety and uncertainty, that embraces the precariousness of its human situation. It was also described as unbounded because it is a perpetual movement beyond boundaries: authentic, venturing faith is never identical with a religious structure but always finds revelation in encounters at its boundaries and beyond. It is a free and open, yet total commitment. The chapter also offered a minimalist, existential theology of religions in order to identify the key theological features of this approach. It advocated existential situationism, viewing religious options as having parity in relation to authenticity, and drew on Christological themes to argue for the openness of Christians to God's activity in others.

CHAPTER 6

PERFORMING TRANSCENDENCE: THE EXISTENTIAL DYNAMICS OF INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

(6.1) Argument in Brief

Previous chapters advocated an existential approach to interreligious encounter (IE), in which theory is bracketed or seen as minimal and secondary to the interpersonal relationships made possible in IE. For this reason, this chapter will prioritise the practical implementation of IE, providing a model (UCM) for applying unconditional commitment to IE. To do this, it draws on Climacus' and Kierkegaard's theories of communication, with a particular focus on how indirect communication can facilitate deep religious encounter.

UCM faces challenges from the dominant paradigm that underpins many models of interreligious dialogue. The problems posed by this paradigm are outlined and it is argued that UCM provides a superior approach to some dominant alternatives by incorporating their insights while avoiding their errors. My thesis is that UCM provides for genuine encounter and exchange, contrary to particularist views, and that, contrary to secularist views, this is best achieved by the authentic faith of UC. UCM is a good fit for IE because IE involves the encounter of participants with each other's fundamental and incommensurate commitments, in which alterity is already at play, in a shared existential context.

The chapter then explores two different models for communicating and facilitating encounter between religious spheres that are considered by the authorship. Indirect communication, which is embodied by the 'subjectively existing thinker', invites participants to empathic, experimental, appropriative performance of the ways of being encountered, underpinned by a humour that

subverts claims of authority without degrading the importance of the different ways of being. Direct communication, practised by the 'honourable gentleman', is argued to be objective and inauthentic on the grounds that it obstructs the relationships necessary for genuine communication. It is argued that the dominant models of IE favour direct communication and that indirect communication provides a superior approach for facilitating IE that is in conformity with the principles of UC.

Three central problems and questions are identified as facing models of IE and the positions are outlined in relation to these as a means of identifying their key features. It is argued that the indirect communication advocated by UCM differs from the alternative approaches on each point and provides a superior approach (See Table 6.2). (i) The aim of IE is to facilitate transcendence and authentic ways of being in response to the shared existential situation and other ways of being encountered. The method for achieving this is bringing together different people and their ways of being, particularly through encounter with the ultimate claims of religions. (ii) The space in which participants are brought together in IE is their shared, existential situations. To present a genuine encounter that addresses these situations and facilitates transcendence, IE must stress synergistically energized collisions and conflicts between the ultimate commitments of the participants. (iii) The attitudes and ways of being of the participants must facilitate IE through empathy and experimentation that nevertheless allows them to retain their fidelity to their commitments; for Christians, IE is motivated by this faithfulness in entrusting oneself to God.

(6.2) Table comparing the responses of indirect and direct communication to key questions facing interreligious encounter

Question/Problem	Interreligious encounter through indirect communication: The Subjectively Existing Thinker	Interreligious encounter through direct communication: The Honourable Gentleman
i. The Problem of Encounter and Communication: what are the aims of IE? Is such IE possible and what method should be used in order to achieve it?	<p><u>The aim</u> of encounter is to facilitate a transcendent way of being through encounters with ways of being.</p> <p><u>The method</u> is existential encounter between any people.</p>	<p><u>The aim</u> of encounter is to achieve conversion, theological understanding or ethical-practical goals.</p> <p><u>The method</u> is dialogue: the objective transfer of information in text, speech or practice by authorities or representatives of religious identities.</p>
ii. The Problem of the Liminal Space: How should the space of encounter be configured?	The space is the shared existential situation, in which encounter is existentially charged and synergistically energised.	There is no shared space (Lindbeck) or no shared religious space (Cheetham). The space of the dialogue is intended to deflect existential transformation and de-intensify confrontation.
iii. The Problem of Participants' Attitudes: What attitudes can and should participants adopt?	Participants' attitudes include openness, humour and humility; they are without authority. Fidelity animates the encounter.	The attitude of participants is constructed around protectionism. Fidelity as loyalty to one's religious tradition is prioritized (Lindbeck) or fidelity is bracketed because it is seen to be in conflict with openness (Cheetham). Dialogue occurs in spite of fidelity rather than because of it.

6.3. Unconditional Commitment as a Model for Interreligious Encounter

Chapter 5 argued that existential engagement with alterity is integral to authentic selfhood. IE is a fertile form of this because it engages with inassimilable others whose radical commitments equal and are irreducible to one's own. The Kierkegaardian corpus presents indirect communication as the primary means of facilitating such encounter between the different ways of being presented in the spheres of existence.⁴⁴⁷ Climacus (CUP, p. 252) and Kierkegaard (CUP, pp. 629-630) interpret the authorship as aiming to facilitate such communication for the purpose of deep existential reflection and exchange. Because religions are understood as distinct spheres, this theory of communication will be utilised as providing the theoretical basis for IE and strategies for implementing it.

⁴⁴⁷ For the sake of simplicity, the rest of this chapter will attribute this theory of communication to Kierkegaard, but this should not be taken as asserting that the views are his own or that his views do not change. The theory of communication presented in this chapter draws on several main sources: the Climacus and Anti-Climacus writings, particularly Climacus' interpretation of the authorship, in 'A Glance at A Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature' (CUP, pp. 251-300); his advocacy of Lessing's indirect style (CUP, pp. 61-125); and his discussion of subjective and objective approaches to Christianity (CUP, p. 587-616). Anti-Climacus also develops related ideas, incorporating Christological themes (PiC, pp. 123-144) and the concept of indirect communication through witnessing. It also draws on Kierkegaard's statements in his lectures on communication [Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 648-657, pp. 267-308], 'Forklaring' (CUP, pp. 625-630) and PoV. This should not be taken as suggesting that the corpus possesses only one view of communication. Turnbull, for example, notes that it develops in significant ways as well as varying in different texts. [Jamie Turnbull, 'Communication/Indirect Communication'. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm*, p. 17.] These texts have been utilised as their theories of communication present guidelines that can be expressed in a coherent way for implementing IE.

6.4. Interreligious Encounter (IE)

(6.4.a) Questions for IE

UCM will be located in relation to three questions posed by the literature on IE and two positions that take different approaches to these questions.⁴⁴⁸

(6.4.a.i) The Problem of Encounter and Communication.

What is the aim of IE and is IE achievable to the extent that the religious other can be encountered in the deep ways necessary for UCM? Cornille and Swidler identify this as a serious issue given the prevalent scepticism about the possibility of extricating oneself from one's context; it is a problem for UCM given that its perspectivism similarly prioritises existential context.⁴⁴⁹ Further obstacles include assertions of the incommensurability of religions, social-constructivist critiques of the category of religion, and criticisms of translation as serving the imperialist agenda of mastering otherness.⁴⁵⁰

(6.4.a.ii) The Problem of the Liminal Space.

How should the liminal space of the encounter be configured?⁴⁵¹ This connects with questions about whether and how religious structures aid or

⁴⁴⁸ Such questions are identified in: Catherine Cornille, 'Introduction: On Hermeneutics in Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (eds.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), ix-xxi. See also: David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.), UIR, pp. 15-36.

⁴⁴⁹ Leonard Swidler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 12. See also: Catherine Cornille, 'Introduction: On Hermeneutics in Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, xiii.

⁴⁵⁰ Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, p. 88. See also: Catherine Cornille, 'Introduction: On Hermeneutics in Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, xiii.

⁴⁵¹ David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.), UIR, p. 30.

hinder dialogue and whether a neutral space, which equalises participants and brackets beliefs, is possible and preferable.⁴⁵²

(6.4.a.iii) *The Problem of Participants' Attitudes.*

Who should be the participants in IE and what attitudes are possible for participants to approach each other so as to preserve openness to the other alongside fidelity to their commitments?⁴⁵³ For example, should they be religious authorities and are characteristics like empathy possible and desirable?⁴⁵⁴ Also, how should they navigate the tension between evangelism and dialogue?

(6.4.b) Typology of Approaches to IE

Hedges and Moyaert categorise approaches to IE into two main groups in relation to such questions.⁴⁵⁵ Social-practical approaches aim to facilitate

⁴⁵² The former is the contention of scriptural reasoning approaches to IE. See, for example: Marianne Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, pp. 64-86). The latter is the contention of Habermas and his liberal supporters. See, for example, Habermas' claim that meaningful public exchange can only occur between religious and secular citizens if all participants respect, 'the priority of secular reasons and the institutional translation proviso.' (Jurgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008) p. 139).

⁴⁵³ Catherine Cornille, 'Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, pp. 20-33.

⁴⁵⁴ Catherine Cornille, 'Introduction: On Hermeneutics in Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, xv.

⁴⁵⁵ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, pp. 60-61. Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 202. Their typologies incorporate earlier typologies, such as Sharpe's identification of 'discursive' (theological), 'secular' (social-practical) and 'interior' (religious/experiential) approaches. [Eric J. Sharpe, 'The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, John Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), pp. 77-95.] However, these typologies omit the 'human' approach identified by Sharpe. [Eric J. Sharpe, 'The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, John Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*, pp. 77-95.] This approach emphasises the interactions and relationships between human persons. It is absorbed or ignored in later typologies, demonstrating their movement away from person-centred approaches. While relationships are a concern of a range of the approaches identified in recent typologies, they are seen as secondary and dependent upon the primary objective of theological learning, ethical action, or participation in ritual. Netland rejects 'human' approaches on the grounds that they overlook the centrality of religious beliefs and worldviews for participants. [Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Vancouver: Regent College

dialogue through action and interaction, particularly in relation to shared social and ethical concerns. Such approaches are evident in secular models that utilise a neutral or public space as a place of encounter to circumvent the problem of translation; they focus on interpersonal encounter rather than knowledge. Theological-religious approaches are focussed on exposing participants to religious worldviews, beliefs, texts and practices through the exchange of knowledge or practice. Such approaches are advocated by particularist theologies that stress the necessity of emic understanding.

(6.4.c) Alternative Positions to UCM

In order to position UCM, an alternative will be considered as a representative of each group of approaches. The alternative positions considered understand the problem of IE as a problem of interreligious dialogue (ID) and exchange: how understanding is best achieved. This leads to an emphasis on problems of language and translation.⁴⁵⁶ The dominant approaches of both groups are also committed to context-dependent epistemologies, asserting the contextual nature of language to practice, as in many social-practical approaches, or to wider interpretations mediated by culturally bound worldviews, as in many theological-religious approaches. Swidler identifies this ‘perspectival’, ‘relational’ and ‘interpretative’ paradigm as the main theoretical commitment underpinning

Publishing, 1991), p. 287.] As will be shown below, religious commitments cannot be excluded from IE because these are central to the identities of their adherents. However, the existential view of religion has addressed Netland’s criticism by arguing that religiousness is fundamentally subjective and beliefs can only be understood as they are lived out subjectively in the shared human context. An objective of this chapter will be to reinstate the necessity of ‘human’ approaches that incorporate the subjective, relational nature without excluding religious commitment.

⁴⁵⁶ Thus Hedges, for example, even refers to practical approaches, which stress action over communication, as forms of dialogue. Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, pp. 59-61.

most models of dialogue and attributes it to the influence of Wittgenstein and Gadamer.⁴⁵⁷ These theoretical commitments lead the alternative approaches to give negative answers to the three questions: (i) translation, substantial communication, and deep encounter between religions is not possible; (ii) there is no benign, religious, liminal space for encounter; and (iii) a healthy balance of openness and fidelity cannot be easily maintained, such that one must choose between them with a strong preference for fidelity given the inextricably contextual nature of understanding.

(6.4.c.i) *Gadamer and Cultural-Linguistic Theological Approaches*

Gadamer's hermeneutics have been influential over theological views, particularly the cultural-linguistic approach.⁴⁵⁸ Gadamer identifies culturally bound language as the basis for understanding, experience and life; it is, 'the real medium of human being...the realm of human being-together, the realm of common understanding'.⁴⁵⁹ Central features of language are that it is, 'all-encompassing', and, 'I-less'.⁴⁶⁰ Language is not a tool used by autonomous subjects to express understanding and experience but rather is determinative of

⁴⁵⁷ Leonard Swidler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁵⁸ David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, p. 2. And: David Tracy, 'The Other of Dialectic and Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 109. Even those who look to Ricoeur rather than Gadamer encounter a similar approach, which aims to correct Gadamer's omission of a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than challenge it at a fundamental level. David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Man and Language'. In, Hans-Georg Gadamer, David E. Linge (ed., trans.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 68.

⁴⁶⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Man and Language'. In, Hans-Georg Gadamer, David E. Linge (ed., trans.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 66-67.

subjects, their understanding, and interface with reality, constructing the 'enclosed', 'linguistic world in which we live'.⁴⁶¹

Moreover, language emerges from a communal situation, further ensuring the determinative nature of language for the subject.⁴⁶² The result is that persons are unable to extricate themselves from this context; the pre-history of the language for the historically located subject provides the 'motivational background' for all questions asked and the answers, concepts and ideas given; prejudice is the basis for all understanding and meaning, *'That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.'*⁴⁶³ Gadamer argues that the romantic focus on subjectivity and empathy is a 'distorting mirror' because the subject is not an autonomous agent. Subjectivity is merely a, 'flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.'⁴⁶⁴ Instead, he demands a focus on the determinative exteriority of language as fixing the possible moves, experiences, and their meaning.⁴⁶⁵

While Gadamer views translation as possible, Lindbeck's and MacIntyre's theological appropriations deny it, leading them to answer negatively to the three questions for IE. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model conceives of religions as, 'comprehensive interpretative schemes...which structure human experience and understanding of self and world'.⁴⁶⁶ Since they are producers of experience,

⁴⁶¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Man and Language'. In, Hans-Georg Gadamer, David E. Linge (ed., trans.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 63.

⁴⁶² Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Man and Language'. In, Hans-Georg Gadamer, David E. Linge (ed., trans.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 66.

⁴⁶³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989 [Second, Revised Edition]), pp. 276-277. See also: Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Man and Language'. In, Hans-Georg Gadamer, David E. Linge (ed., trans.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 67.

⁴⁶⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 276.

⁴⁶⁵ David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁶ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p. 32.

intelligibility and value, no liminal space exists between them where dialogue can take place: outside and between such structures there are no shared values, experiences, models of rationality or rules for discourse because these emerge only from within the hermeneutical regimes.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, as ‘comprehensive’ interpretative structures, religions are understandable only as part of the whole by insiders of the community; meanings and values are also unique to each cultural location.⁴⁶⁸ Religions are uninterpretable because all-interpreting and the other is insurmountably incomprehensible because incommensurate with one’s own location.⁴⁶⁹ MacIntyre argues that this is particularly true of religions, because their language is belief/value-laden and only those who share the values will understand the meaning. Translation out of this context will fundamentally alter the meaning in that the beliefs into which the language is translated will be incompatible, incommensurate or simply different to the source language, ‘To understand the translation-plus-explanation into B will entail for those whose language is B rejecting the beliefs so explained.’⁴⁷⁰

On this view, ID cannot involve translation or exchange: there can be no cross-cultural understanding; attempts to achieve this will result in misunderstanding or the imposition of one set of beliefs on another.⁴⁷¹ The

⁴⁶⁷ George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.’ In George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.) *The Church in a Postliberal Age*. MacIntyre concurs that meaning is relative to each ‘linguistic community’, ‘as it is used in and by a particular community living at a particular time and place, with particular shared beliefs, institutions and practices.’ [Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 372-373.]

⁴⁶⁸ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p. 34.

⁴⁶⁹ George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.’ In George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.) *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 231. Cornille asserts the, ‘incomprehensibility of the other’ for this model. [Catherine Cornille, ‘Introduction: On Hermeneutics in Dialogue’. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, xiii.]

⁴⁷⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 380.

⁴⁷¹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, pp. 30-32. Lindbeck claims this is evident in the focus of ID on the Christian concept of salvation. George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.’ In George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.) *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 227.

'tradition-constituted' nature of understanding also denies the possibility of ID occurring in a neutral space: this will be in denial about its own culturally bound understanding, which it will impose on participants, 'in a way that neutralizes the conceptions of truth and rationality', because it denies the cultural context that is necessary for the perception of truth and value.⁴⁷²

The model of ID proposed by Lindbeck is intratextual. It seeks to facilitate ID through maintaining the differences, integrity, scriptures and traditions of religions.⁴⁷³ He claims this enables dialogue because it acknowledges the necessity of immersing oneself and coming to the dialogue from an established worldview, with its own wealth of resources and meaning.⁴⁷⁴ This allows participants to retain fidelity to their religion, which is the only basis for openness, MacIntyre argues, because it preserves the faith of all participants and their unique viewpoints rather than striving to appropriate and translate, 'only those traditions whose adherents recognize the possibility of untranslatability

⁴⁷² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 384. According to Gadamer, this is part of the Enlightenment 'prejudice against prejudice'. He concurs with MacIntyre that this prevents all understanding, which is dependent on a historical context as its horizon of meaning. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 272.

⁴⁷³ As an example, 'scriptural reasoning' approaches attempt to facilitate ID through the close reading of scriptures from within a tradition alongside members of other traditions. This is seen as facilitating 'thick description' through immersion in the worldview expressed in them, combined with highlighting the participants' shared reverence for scriptures. [Marianne Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 66; 77.] Although disagreement and misunderstanding are inevitable, they are prepared for and protected from being destructive through the relationships established by the participants. [Cheetham, WMTR, p. 179.] Moreover, disagreement is seen as a creative possibility that produces opportunities for new meanings from the different worldviews that are brought into dialogue with the texts; this is to be expected if religions are producers of experience, 'after thorough study, the texts from the various scriptural traditions begin to affect one another, leading to astonishing, powerful, and sometimes very surprising new insights.' [Marianne Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 68.]

⁴⁷⁴ Each religion can provide its own resources for encounter because of its centrality in world construction, 'its assimilative powers...[and] its ability to provide an intelligible interpretation in its own terms of the varied situations and realities adherents encounter.' George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p. 131.

into their own language-in-use are able to reckon adequately with that possibility.⁴⁷⁵

This approach to ID thus sees exchange as impossible, denies a liminal space, and prioritises fidelity. Understanding and empathy, if possible at all, require an intractable grounding in one's own tradition rather than a transforming engagement with other traditions. It focuses on retaining what is unique to each religion through intramural dialogue, inviting the other inside one's religious space and vice versa through an approach of 'faithful witness'.⁴⁷⁶

(6.4.c.ii) *Wittgenstein, Cheetham and Social-Practical Approaches*

In opposition to this prioritisation of language, many social-practical approaches appropriate Wittgenstein's subordination of language to practice. Wittgenstein stresses that language is contextual to specific activities and 'forms of life', that determine the rules of the language game and in turn the meaning of the specific expressions, 'the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking*...is part of an activity, or of a form of a life form.'⁴⁷⁷ Because the meaning of the words is dependent on the contextual activity and expresses certain commitments, for example, of prescribing or prohibiting an action, this cannot be translated out of its active context.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 388.

⁴⁷⁶ George A. Lindbeck, 'The Gospel's Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.' In George A. Lindbeck, James J. Buckley (ed.) *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, pp. 228-229.

⁴⁷⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 [Third Edition]), 23, p. 10. See, for examples of this interpretation: Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (London: SPCK, 1997 [Second Edition]), p. 149; Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (London: Epworth, 1976), p. 32; Genia Schoenbaumsfeld, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein'. In Graham Oppy and N. N. Trakakis (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Religion* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p. 163.

⁴⁷⁸ Hence Wittgenstein claims that attempts to understand anyone in different forms of life inevitably fail, 'We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not

Religions provide prime cases of this, because they are seen as essentially expressing commitments and values, 'Faith, like hope and much else, is embedded in human life, 'in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life.'⁴⁷⁹

The implication for social-practical approaches is that practical cooperation between religious adherents is achievable and understanding is only possible in this context. ID must focus on a practical understanding of the demands and commitments expressed by religions, achieved through practical interaction and cooperation in the situations that provide the meaning for religious language. Liberal social-practical approaches may also seek to identify a shared social, neutral space in which participants in ID can meet and that foster social action and cooperation. Deeply held religious convictions, because they appeal to purportedly metaphysical realities that are inaccessible and uncontestable, are likely to be seen as obstacles to dialogue that need to be bracketed in a transition to a postmetaphysical dialogue focused on this-worldly issues and activities: meaningful public exchange can only occur if participants respect, 'the priority of secular reasons and the institutional translation proviso.'⁴⁸⁰

understand the people.... We cannot find our feet with them.... If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.' [Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 190.] This is true particularly of religions, where, 'Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons'. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p. 56. This interpretation of Wittgenstein as leading to the impossibility of such exchange is offered, for example, by: Genia Schoenbaumsfeld, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein'. In, Graham Oppy and N. N. Trakakis (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Religion*, p. 169.

⁴⁷⁹ Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, p. 150. See also: Genia Schoenbaumsfeld, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein'. In, Graham Oppy and N. N. Trakakis (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 167-168.

⁴⁸⁰ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, p. 139.

Building on this conviction, Cheetham argues that the focus on ultimate, theological questions, such as whether outsiders have truth and salvation, has impeded ID by occluding the numerous, smaller points of intersection and by making participants fearful of their positions being undermined.⁴⁸¹ Instead, the space of ID is best constructed as a, 'neutral territory', or, 'exteriority', 'to de-intensify the debate...and lower the stakes'.⁴⁸² Meeting in a de-intensified space with bracketed commitments can achieve a meeting in which what divides and disrupts meeting is, 'suspended or bracketed out.'⁴⁸³ This may involve mundane daily meetings or the shared context of having to address global issues.⁴⁸⁴ In these cases, ID facilitates deep meeting, in conformity with the importance and depth of religion for people's identities, but through non-religious activities and issues that bracket the divisive commitments, 'finite profundities', 'that are...not obviously religious but are nonetheless deep.'⁴⁸⁵ To facilitate this, Cheetham argues that participants should adopt an, 'aesthetic attitude', which includes 'imaginative playfulness', 'disinterestedness', empathy, and humour, which facilitate respect and understanding.⁴⁸⁶ In relation to the three questions, such approaches (i) focus on practical cooperation; (ii) deny shared religious spaces, though arguing for the possibility of a neutral, secular liminal space; and (iii) affirm the possibility of deep emotional connection between participants.

⁴⁸¹ 'only *ultimate* theological reference points are placed onto the horizon of the meeting between religions.' Cheetham, WMTR, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁸² David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 30. Cheetham, WMTR, p. 64 and p. 2.

⁴⁸³ David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁴ David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 30. Cheetham, WMTR, p. 80. Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 200-206.

⁴⁸⁵ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 91; p. 5.

⁴⁸⁶ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 6; p. 64.

6.5 The Question of Deep Encounter and Translation: Direct and Indirect Communication

UCM will now be developed in relation to these alternative positions. It will be shown that Kierkegaard's theory of communication provides resources for facilitating existential encounter in IE and provides a superior approach to the alternative models, incorporating their insights, particularly on the context-dependence of rationality, and necessity of a liminal space and faith, but overcoming their limitations to offer a fuller conception of what is possible in IE. It will address the three questions facing IE: (i) how encounter with existential possibilities and the inwardness of religiousness can be facilitated, (ii) how the liminal space is best configured, and (iii) what attitudes participants should adopt. In relation to these, UCM avoids the objectivism in the method and aims of the alternatives, posits a shared existential situation in which meeting is possible while accepting the contextual nature of understanding, and strikes a balance between fidelity and openness.

Furthermore, UCM sees the irresolvable tensions and conflicts of IE not as precluding deep encounter, as in the alternative approaches, but rather as valuable in motivating and energising full, personal engagement. The alternative approaches see dialogue as extraneous to religious identity: it is something one is forced to engage in and has to adopt strategies to protect certain parts of the identity as sacred, whether this is in a neutral space or one's own tradition. In contrast, for UCM, fidelity and openness in encountering others are integral to the passionate, unbounded venture of religiousness.

Kierkegaard's theory of communication advocates a policy of communicative praxis focused on the form of the communication rather than the content (CUP, p. 76). A central contention is that communication is performative, that is, it is performed through the character traits and ways in which communicators live out their own identities and relate to others. This acknowledges the contextuality asserted by both alternative models: communication occurs within the embodied, cultural, practical, and existential situation of the person, which are key to facilitating it. Climacus depicts it in relation to two characters: the honourable gentleman (CUP, p. 610-616) and the subjectively existing thinker (CUP, pp. 72-126); Anti-Climacus adds a third: the witness who communicates existentially by imitating Christ (PiC, p. 254). These characters correspond to Kierkegaard's distinction between, '*the communication of knowledge*', which is direct communication, and '*the communication of capability*', which is indirect communication⁴⁸⁷

(6.5.a) Direct Communication in the Alternative Approaches

Direct communication aims for the endowment of understanding through an accurate, direct transmission of factual knowledge, such as a set of facts about the afterlife (CUP, pp. 165-171), 'If it is the object which is reflected upon, then we have the communication of knowledge.'⁴⁸⁸ Its focus is on correspondence between the content of the communication and its object, the 'what', in order to enable its reduplication in the mind of the recipient. It takes an objective

⁴⁸⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 657, p. 308.

⁴⁸⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 657, p. 306.

approach to the content of the communication and to recipients, who are regarded as passive recipients who learn it by rote (CUP, p. 74).

The 'honourable gentleman' (CUP, pp. 610-616) depicts this way of communicating religion as a set of doctrines or beliefs: declaring his religious position in language, 'loudly and solemnly', imparting a set of facts, doctrines and behaviours in a one-way dissemination (CUP, p. 614). He need not be dispassionate, 'An orthodox defends Christianity with the most terrible passion; with perspiring face and the most worried gestures, he maintains that he accepts Christianity pure and unadulterated; he will live and die in it' (CUP, p. 613), but he fails to appreciate the irony that in expressing his religiousness objectively and with passionate certainty, he demonstrates his lack of religiousness and misrepresents it by focusing on the 'what' of Christianity rather than ensuring his subjective, agonistic way of being is encountered by others,

'He does everything in the name of Jesus and uses Christ's name on every occasion as a sure sign that he is a Christian and is called to defend Christendom in our day—and he has no intimation of the little ironic secret that a person, just by describing the "how" of his inwardness, can indirectly indicate that he is a Christian without mentioning Christ's name.' (CUP, p. 613)

The alternative approaches conceptualise IE as occurring in this direct way. Theological models focus on spoken or written information exchange as the primary vehicle of encounter, with the aim being the communication of knowledge. Gadamer's prioritisation of language as the basis for all understanding and experience is objectifying because it entails that the world must be represented in linguistic structures that make it intelligible and an

object of knowledge; no aspect of reality escapes this, 'man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal in nature, and hence intelligible'.⁴⁸⁹ Even cultural-linguistic models, which attempt thick description and exposure to the worldviews or structures underlying the specific claims, understand it as involving linguistic and hermeneutical interaction between different sets of descriptions and hermeneutical regimes. Hence the primary problem considered by Lindbeck and MacIntyre is the translation of meaning across different linguistic contexts and a method proposed for addressing this, scriptural reasoning, involves reading and discussing texts.⁴⁹⁰

Ethical-practical approaches are less objective. As an example, Maraldo argues that a focus on practice provides a fuller alternative to direct communication.⁴⁹¹ Despite affinities between this approach and UCM, Maraldo fails to address the underlying objectivism of social-practical approaches. The practices he identifies, such as prayer and meditation, remain direct in that they aim to make the objects of religious devotion directly accessible through episodic involvement in the assigned activities. For Climacus, these are direct because they do not convey the whole way of being of religious adherents and fall comically short of the absolute, inward commitment at the core of religiousness. First, participating in a practice is occasional and short-term, with the encounter

⁴⁸⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 475-476.

⁴⁹⁰ Moyaert identifies learning through reading as an influential model for dialogue. [Marianne Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'. In, Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 64.] Clooney similarly sees reading religious scriptures as a significant component of learning about the religious other. [Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, pp. 57-64.] For a similar emphasis on verbal exchange, see: Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), p. 12. Maraldo argues that this is a weakness of a range of approaches to IE. [John C. Maraldo, 'A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, p. 89.]

⁴⁹¹ On the grounds that there are, 'aspects of religion that have nothing to do with texts and little to do with language'. [John C. Maraldo, 'A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, p. 89.]

ending with the end of the activity, in contrast to which Climacus asks, ‘Does “always to thank God” mean that once a year, on the second Sunday in Lent at Vespers, I bear in mind that I am always to thank God...? Consequently, thanking God, this simple matter, suddenly assigns me one of the most strenuous tasks, one that will be sufficient for my entire life.’ (CUP, pp. 178-179) Furthermore, this does not require emotional connection in relation to deep religious commitments and thus fails to communicate the core of religious commitment as a long-lasting, inward reality with implications for the full range of life and experience of the adherent. Climacus compares it to a ‘Herculean man’, who, ‘while praying and, in order to indicate the inwardness of prayer, twisted and turned in forceful poses that would be instructive.... The inwardness and the unutterable sighs of prayer are incommensurate with the muscular.’ (CUP, p. 91)

UCM’s contention is that people’s most important religious experiences and commitments are inward and subjective; they are thus inexpressible by direct communication, ‘Objective thinking is completely indifferent to subjectivity and thereby to inwardness and appropriation’ (CUP, p. 75; see also: CUP, pp. 409-410). Climacus argues that direct communication is inadequate to facilitate IE for three reasons, ‘direct communication is a fraud toward God (which possibly defrauds him of the worship of another person in truth), a fraud toward himself (as if he had ceased to be an existing person), a fraud toward another human being (who possibly obtains only a relative God-relationship)’ (CUP, p. 75).⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² Turnbull sees indirect communication as necessitated by a fourth factor: the impossibility of a direct relation with God, which can be mediated only by Christ, such that a person communicates it indirectly by communicating facts about Christ, which then communicates it. [Jamie Turnbull, ‘Communication/Indirect Communication’. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William

First, it is described as, 'a fraud toward another human being', because it effaces the inwardness that is the core of religiousness. The inwardness of religiousness includes its experiential and excessive nature: it is compared to erotic love, which can be felt but not expressed without losing its reality as an inward, overwhelming state (CUP, pp. 73-74). Hence, Climacus and Kierkegaard contrast it with various assertions that contradict themselves by virtue of being made (CUP, p. 78), in the same way that Mars cannot be painted in the armour that made him invisible, because it is an, 'essential secret' (CUP, pp. 79-80).⁴⁹³

This is more than the assertion that an affective state can only be understood when experienced: it can only be apprehended existentially because understanding it and responding to it are synonymous. Because religious knowing is subjective and appropriative the most important things to communicate in IE are things that pertain to human existence in such a way that they elicit existential transformation and appropriative responses, 'All essential knowing pertains to existence, or only the knowing whose relation to existence is essential is essential knowing.' (CUP, p. 197) In particular, encounter requires a 'second reflection' in which the core religious commitment is internalised and lived out in the life of the person (CUP, p. 76) either in sympathetic or antipathetic responses.

As examples, Climacus cites attempts to directly communicate information about death and the afterlife that misunderstand their existential reality as having profound, transforming implications for human persons, and replace this with factual description (CUP, pp. 165-171). Direct communication

McDonald and Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm*, p. 19.] This is partly true of Anti-Climacus' position (PiC, p. 125).

⁴⁹³ See also: Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 649, p. 272.

fails to convey existential relevance and facilitate response. The existential reality of death has not been communicated if it has not had an effect on the recipient's way of being, 'when dying is to be placed in relation to the subject's whole life' (CUP, pp. 169-170). Comparably, a religious other has only been encountered insofar as it elicits transforming responses like appropriation or offence.⁴⁹⁴

Direct communication is also inattentive to the agency of recipients. Climacus lists a number of examples in which relationships to others are damaged because of a direct, objective approach that aims for conversion, persuasion, or mastery (CUP, pp. 77-78). This is exacerbated by the centrality attributed by Gadamer and Lindbeck to cultural-linguistic structures and their marginalising of agency: their equation of context with culture omits the context of local, relative, subjective appropriation. Focusing on a canonical text further perpetuates the idea that there is an authoritative essence of each religion, located in a fixed repository of knowledge, a claim rejected by Climacus on the grounds that subjective appropriation, not 'the bible theory', has priority (CUP, p. 23). The use of images of spaces and tents in the discourses of ID focuses on an external, objectively fixed environment rather than on the transcendent, subjective, malleable interactions between people with porously configured identities and possible ways of being. Rather than aiming for dissemination through dialogue, IE must facilitate a personal, subjective appropriation, 'the subjective individuals must be held devoutly apart from one another and must not run coagulatingly together in objectivity.' (CUP, p. 79).

⁴⁹⁴ This is why Climacus praises the critics who take offence at Christianity as having a fuller understanding of it than its objective defenders (CUP, p. 65).

Second, it is a, 'fraud toward God', because it reduces God's revelatory presence to a set of doctrinal propositions or cultural structures. Direct communication is misguided by focusing on the 'what' rather than the 'how' (CUP, p. 610). It removes the eventful, 'miracle' through which God is experienced as a subject of worship rather than an object of intellectual assent (CUP, p. 605). Anti-Climacus further emphasises this in conformity with his focus on imitating Jesus as the primary way of witnessing (PiC, p. 86).

Third, direct communication is, 'a fraud toward himself', because it fails to acknowledge that the communicator himself is in a process of appropriative development. His religiousness could never be stated in a clear form even for himself; as soon as it was, it would become fixed and represent, at best, a version of his prior religious convictions, not those as they are developing in the anxious and uncertain medium of actuality. This would also preclude the possibility of being transformed in the encounter, 'Just because he himself is continually in the process of becoming in an inward direction...he can never communicate himself directly, since the movement here is the very opposite.' (CUP, pp. 73-74). Hence, the 'honourable gentleman' is undermined by his unwitting variation of explanations (CUP, p. 615).

To sum up, the alternative approaches focus on direct communication. They are objective, descriptive, and occasional exercises, focused on the 'what' and content of belief and practice (CUP, p. 601). This is incompatible with the existential nature of religiousness as inward and appropriative commitment that occurs in an embodied context of existential activity alongside others and in a process of subjective appropriation.

(6.5.b) Indirect Communication

Climacus' figure for indirect communication is the subjectively existing thinker (SET) (CUP, pp. 72-126). The SET is sensitive to the fact that he is trying to communicate a way of being that cannot be reduced to factual descriptions or practices; he aims to communicate its inwardness, pathos, and uncertainty so as to elicit existential responses. The SET communicates indirectly in several main ways. Specific strategies for applying this to IE are discussed in the final section.

The SET aims to facilitate existential encounter with ways of being through ways of being (Lessing's first thesis).

The SET aims to facilitate existential encounter between people and their ways of being.⁴⁹⁵ This encounter must occur in ways that are sensitive to their inward nature (CUP, p. 77) as total commitments and also facilitate leaps (CUP, p. 93), transformations, and appropriative responses from participants, engaging participants 'non-discursively' rather than providing information or material for debate.⁴⁹⁶ In conformity with the two elements of the spheres of existence, possibility and necessity, the communication aims to communicate a general religious identity, such as Christianity, in a way that makes it a possibility for the person to subjectively appropriate it and live it out in their subjective situation, moving from universality to being, 'more and more existentially isolated', as it is appropriated and responded to in specificity (CUP, p. 73). Hence it is described

⁴⁹⁵ Following Levinas, Tracy suggests the term 'exposure to the other' rather than 'encounter with the other', as the meeting is destabilising of the participants. This is avoided because 'exposure' suggests a laying bare that is impossible for UCM, given the inward and inexpressible nature of the commitments that are at stake in the encounter. [David Tracy, 'The Other of Dialectic and Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond (eds.), *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 113.]

⁴⁹⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 649, p. 272.

as communicating ethical capability rather than knowledge, 'In regard to the ethical and the ethical-religious, the genuine communication and instruction is *training or upbringing*.'⁴⁹⁷

The SET has pathos and the comic in equal proportions (Lessing's Second Thesis).

The religious situation, shared by all participants in IE, is defined by a comic disparity between their absolute passionate commitment to an excessive revelation and total lack of certainty (CUP, pp. 81-82), 'The perpetual process of becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain.' (CUP, p. 86) The SET must acknowledge this comic disparity by avoiding authoritarian claims; he, 'always keeps open the wound of negativity' (CUP, p. 85). This requires that all participants, including the SET are, 'never a teacher, but a learner' (CUP, p. 85). At the same time, the absolute nature of the passionate commitment must not be seen as irrational or to be abandoned for the sake of dialogue, such that the participants must foster a situation of passionate openness, 'The truly comic is that the infinite can be at work in a human being, and no one, no one discovers it by looking at him.' (CUP, p. 91)

The SET sees communication as always unfinished because it is a part of the process of becoming that is coterminous with life (Lessing's third and fourth theses)

In IE, communication is an activity of people who are involved in on going existential development coterminous with their lives as subjective beings in the,

⁴⁹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 650, p. 279. Turnbull notes that this is in conformity with the Danish verb 'meddele', communicate, which signifies 'sharing with' and can also refer to, 'the process whereby a particular property...is transferred from one person...to another.' Jamie Turnbull, 'Communication/Indirect Communication'. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm*, p. 17.

'ever-striving drive for truth' (CUP, p. 106). No decisive resolutions are expected from such communications, though they can be understood as punctuations, significant moments, or 'leaps' (CUP, p. 93) in the perpetual process of subjective formation and striving to live out an authentic life.

Such a communication opens a new type of existence for the recipient; even if they reject it and are repelled by offence, it alters or transforms their subjectivity by touching it and becoming a part of their life-history. A primary way of communicating this is in living out the way of being (CUP, p. 73). Because subjectivity is essentially relational, interpersonal relationships and interactions overcome the problem of translation: people are transformed in relating to one another and this is the communication of their ways of being. This also requires openness on the part of the communicator, as the transformation is dependent on full participation and interaction between the participants, who must recognise the excessive eventfulness and importance of the encounter. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this requires the prioritisation of the agency of the other and of the destabilising effects of encounter on all participants.

Application to IE: The Possibility of Indirect Communication

Applied to IE, indirect communication presents the possibility of deep encounter, defeating the cultural-linguistic denial of communication on two points. UCM accepts the impossibility of translation asserted by the cultural-linguistic model because religions are whole ways of being that cannot be

extricated from their existential contexts to be directly communicated.⁴⁹⁸ However, the error of the cultural-linguistic approach is to rule out encounter because of its equation of encounter with direct communication and translation. In contrast, indirect communication aims to facilitate existential encounter rather than translation. This is likely to involve an experience of the excessiveness of the other, as impossible, paradoxical, or offensive. This impossibility does not indicate a failure but rather an achievement of IE, because it indicates that one is in the presence of an inassimilable other that one cannot understand but only respond to; it signifies the saturation of intuition beyond intentionality in revelatory and epiphanic ways.

The cultural-linguistic model's argument against encounter on the basis of linguistic determinism is also based on a faulty conception of agency. Gadamer recognises that persons are not, like animals, confined to a single habitat but are capable of learning new languages and thus adapting and broadening their horizon through agency. He refers to this adaptive capability as, 'the infinity of beings.'⁴⁹⁹ This is incoherent given his assertion of linguistic determinism.⁵⁰⁰ The reason for this incoherence is a result of a binary conception of agency: it is either 'infinite' because endlessly adaptable, with priority given to the autonomous agent who exercises it through negation, or completely determined and thus incapable of extricating itself from subordination to the cultural

⁴⁹⁸ Tracy notes that Kierkegaard's concept of God as 'the Impossible' serves to provide a fundamental reason for untranslatability and the impossibility of direct communication. David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 453.

⁵⁰⁰ This incoherence is noted by: David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, p. 8.

context. Cultural-linguistic approaches deny the possibility of encounter because they affirm the latter.

Indirect communication posits agency, in the ability to respond to and appropriate the communication, as necessary for and central to IE.⁵⁰¹ UCM provides a superior model of agency to the binary conception. As outlined in the spheres of existence, agency is a dialectical, relational process that incorporates both autonomy and the deterministic context. Subjectivity emerges because of the agonistic relation between the freedom of the subject and their situation (SuD, pp. 13-14) or, as mapped out by Climacus, as a 'synthesis' (CUP, p. 82) brought about by the instantiation of the infinite possibilities (CUP, p. 82) in the specificity of finite existence.

This provides a porous conception of the person and affirms the possibility of agential encounter.⁵⁰² Agency is involved in shaping, inhabiting, rejecting, and interpreting cultural structures through its commitments and activities. The socio-cultural context, particularly as provided by the network of relationships with others, presents the horizon of options and existential possibilities for the person, though not in a deterministic way, 'Agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms'.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Pattison claims that the core feature of indirect communication that unifies its various methods is its aim to retain the freedom of the recipient to respond in unique, subjective ways, 'it honours, affirms and in the process of communication itself ensures and nurtures the freedom of the recipient of the message, or, more precisely the mutual freedom of all participants in the process.' George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: SCM, 1999 [Second Edition]), p. 93.

⁵⁰² I owe the terms 'porous' to: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London: The Belknap Press, 2007), p. 539.

⁵⁰³ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005 [Revised Edition]), p. 15.

6.6. The Question of the Liminal Space: Deep Collisions in Shared Situations

(6.6.a) The Alternative Approaches on the Liminal Space

The two alternative approaches to IE conceive of the liminal space differently but with the same consequences for religiousness. Lindbeck denies that there is a liminal space between religions. The space of IE is a temporary space or 'tent' created within a religion when outsiders are invited in to participate in the prescribed activities. Cheetham's approach is more open, positing a shared social space in which participants can connect and cooperate, but to achieve this the deepest religious commitments of participants must be bracketed. For both, the space is inert, designed to negate the destabilizing effects of encounter in order to prevent religious collision, conflict, and transformation by denying any possibility of intersection or bracketing anything that could shock and destabilize. They conceive of fidelity and openness as binary opposites that can coexist only in these de-intensified situations.

UCM accepts the impossibility of extricating meaning from the existential context but, with Cheetham, affirms that IE can occur in the lived interaction between people. However, for UCM, the centrality of religiousness in the participants' identities and absolute commitments cannot be bracketed.⁵⁰⁴ The neutral space advocated by Cheetham facilitates meeting and friendship, but this is not a religious meeting because it omits what is decisive to the religious identities of the participants.

UCM posits a shared yet destabilising liminal space that is transforming and provocative yet nevertheless energises the participants' deep encounters.

⁵⁰⁴ Moyaert identifies the same feature of IE, particularly because religions posit certain of the commitments as more important than anything else. Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 211.

From this perspective, the alternative approaches preclude deep transformation and true dialogue by neutralising the encounter or shoring up the distinct perspectives, whereas, “*dia-logue*’ signifies worldviews being argued *through* to significant and potentially transformative conclusions’.⁵⁰⁵

(6.6.b) UCM on the Liminal Space: Deep Collisions

Religions revolve around core commitments and struggles that make absolute claims on the lives and identities of their adherents; persons living out religious identities may be deeply committed and passionate about their commitments. Because religions make ultimate and transforming demands on the person, the religious other is only encountered if the engagement with it includes ‘immediacy and ultimacy’: the immediacy of being confronted by it and ultimacy in that it makes absolute, transforming demands.⁵⁰⁶ One has only encountered the other insofar as one has encountered the ultimate commitments of the other in a destabilising collision.

Climacus describes such a ‘moment’ in the encounter (PF, p. 19) as a ‘collision’, ‘what is this unknown against which the understanding collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown.’ (PF, p. 39) This is a collision in which the core commitment of the other cannot be assimilated or translated into one’s own sphere, such that it is experienced as an excessive or offensive paradox, which can only be responded to in passionate ways, such as by an existential transformation of faith or offence (PF, p. 49). This

⁵⁰⁵ Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁶ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (London: SCM, 2009), p. 174. Schmidt-Leukel also cites: Joseph Cahill, *Mended Speech: The Crisis of Religious Studies and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

is experienced as a shock so radically disturbing and destabilising of identity (PF, p. 39) that is it compared to being born (PF, p. 20).

IE must seek to facilitate such collisions between participants. This may seem to set a high and dangerous task for IE, but this acknowledges that every meeting is potentially dangerous and transforming in this way, and a religious encounter, by providing an encounter with an ultimate should be more so,

‘There must be no bargaining, no wanting to change Christianity; there must neither be any going out of bounds by exercising a restraining influence at the wrong place, but only a watchfulness so that it remains what it was, an offense to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, and not some fatuous something that offends neither Greeks nor Jews—they smile at it instead’. (CUP, p. 605)

This should not take the form of an authoritarian direct communication in which doctrines are communicated and the decision forced upon recipients of whether to believe or reject them. Rather, participants should aim at painful self-revelatory activity in which the excessive depth of their commitments and the precariousness, internal fragmentation and agony of their positions are unveiled. They should communicate so as to subvert and challenge the ways of being of recipients and communicators alike, unveiling the tensions and struggles within the identities, both internal to them and in the tensions exposed when seen from the perspective of other identities.

IE should not shy away from the core, contentious aspects of religious conviction.⁵⁰⁷ Cheetham is right that one should not construct theological structures that predetermine the encounter, but it is vital that, for Christians,

⁵⁰⁷ This view is shared by: Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, p. 84.

their commitment to Christ is stressed and explored in their encounter with the other. Participants should stress the struggles they face themselves in their religious commitment.

Such IE is frightening, because it threatens the security of religious identity and unveils its fragility. However, fleeing from this fails to address the real depths made possible in the encounter: that an entire life and 'evig salighed' is at stake. Indeed, as a feature of unbounded commitment, this insecurity is a deeply religious insight that unveils the fundamental conditions of identity and religiousness: a fragile, anxious construction in the face of our finitude. Humans commit to structures as having ultimate importance that can be lost in a moment. The faith of unbounded commitment is able to risk its destruction in the encounter, and thus to engage in it fully and authentically, because it relies on divine grace. Engagement in IE is itself an act of faith with the potential to reveal a deeper understanding of faith and every such encounter is potentially anxious, strenuous, vitally important, decisive and world-shattering.

UCM provides a realistic view of RD as frightening, but it also facilitates deeper IE for two reasons. First, it removes some of the obstacles to IE. It unveils the anxious nature of all religious commitments, precluding exclusivism, and it also identifies comparable features in the ways of being of participants: that they are committed to something that makes absolute claims on their existence in a situation of uncertainty, rather than demanding that they bracket what they take to be most important.⁵⁰⁸ Focus on the core commitments also prevents the ephemera of religion, such as protectionist and divisive ideas of sacred spaces,

⁵⁰⁸ Hence Forward claims that another's faith is most easily understood by those who have faith. [Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, p. 57.]

objects and activities, from providing obstacles to IE. Hence the pseudonyms' rejection of the importance of phenomena associated with Christianity, such as the sacraments and Church practice, 'because the most decisive outward expression is only relative', ensures that these do not provide obstacles to non-Christians (CUP, pp. 90-91). Whether participants have adopted respectful attire or postures is inconsequential when viewed from the perspective of the absolute commitments of participants. Second, deeper and more energised encounters are offered by recognising the radical differences and collisions in the encounter and the new light shed on the identities of participants by these new perspectives. Such meeting can be dangerous, costly and involve a lifetime of struggle with the other in substitutionary and loving acts, but this is the nature of human existence itself as fragile and mortal. Moreover, since identities themselves revolve around core conflicts, collision is an opportunity rather than a threat, as it opens one up to the tensions, struggles, and new possibilities that religions represent. IE is made possible through passionate commitments, not in spite of them.

(6.6.c) UCM on the Liminal Space: Shared Situations

While the liminal space created by UCM is existentially charged and agonistic, it is also shared and open in ways that provide fertile points of intersection and meeting between participants. Davidson identifies two prerequisites for a situation to provide for meaningful exchange.⁵⁰⁹ First, it requires a shared world or features of experience, as one learns the meaning of

⁵⁰⁹ Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [Second Edition]). For a summary of Davidson's position, see: Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, 'The Question of Theological Truth in a Multireligious World: Reflections at the Interface of Continental Philosophy and Interreligious Studies'. In, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin (eds.), *The Question of Theological Truth*, pp. 290-293.

words by exposure to their referents: one learns the meaning of the word 'rain' by hearing it frequently used by others when it is raining. Second, it requires an assumption of some validity in the discourse of the other: if completely meaningless statements are being made, there will be nothing to translate, 'It is only by assuming that the other is trying to say something about the world as it is and generally succeeding in doing so that we are able to discover what he or she means.'⁵¹⁰ Although UCM does not see religions as sets of claims to be translated, it fulfils both of these prerequisites in aiming to engage with the other in a shared existential situation that religions interpret in subjectively meaningful ways.

The Shared Situation of the Encounter

First, the encounter itself is a shared situation for all participants in which existential possibilities are made available. This is in conformity with Wittgenstein's identification of meaning as arising from specific activities such as promising, hoping, feeling certain, measuring, and giving orders.⁵¹¹ All participants will be involved in such activities suggesting that, at least in the encounter, they will share some common experiences and deep questions about fidelity and openness, as well as the encounter occurring at a point in each of the participants' lives, in which they will be involved in activities of striving to live

⁵¹⁰ Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin, 'The Question of Theological Truth in a Multireligious World: Reflections at the Interface of Continental Philosophy and Interreligious Studies'. In, Frederiek Depoortere and Magdalen Lambkin (eds.), *The Question of Theological Truth*, p. 291.

⁵¹¹ These passages indicate that Wittgenstein does not identify 'forms of life' with reified cultural entities, in the way the cultural-linguistic approach does. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23, p. 10. See also: Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God*, p. 33. Even individual words operate in specific contexts that vary depending on individual activities; a person may participate in numerous such contexts on a daily basis. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23, p. 11 and p. 127.

out their religiousness authentically, constituting their identity, making choices, and having relationships. Goodchild makes this point, observing that, 'Encounter involves mutual attention during time spent together', in which, 'events happen to us. Our attention is demanded. Where we differ...we may share a common experience that attracts our attention.'⁵¹² However, while Goodchild identifies contingent ethical concerns, such as environmental and economic catastrophes, UCM's interpretation of religiousness as emerging in the human situation proposes a more fundamental shared space.

The Shared Existential Situation

UCM asserts that religions are responding to shared existential situations and the human condition itself. While not all may be asking the same deep existential questions, those seeking to reflect deeply on their human situation are likely to raise similar questions, for example, about suffering, mortality, emotions, choices, values, and relationships, as these are posed by the human situation itself.⁵¹³ This is a minimalist claim that does not assert universalised experiences or questions underpinning the different religions. On the contrary, the other may present questions and responses that one's own religiousness has

⁵¹² Philip Goodchild, 'Politics, Pluralism and the Philosophy of Religion: an Essay on Exteriority'. In, Philip Goodchild (ed.), *Difference in Philosophy of Religion*, p. 202.

⁵¹³ As was pointed out in Chapter 2, this is why the role of world-shattering experiences, such as death and suffering are important as they disrupt worldly immersion and raise such ultimate questions. While this may appear reductive, Cheetham observes that religions themselves often aspire to speak in more universal terms about religion and religiousness and that the idea that they are in dialogue about something that exists beyond their relative linguistic structures is a component of their realist view of their objects. [David Cheetham, 'Religion and the Religious Other'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) *UIR*, p. 15.] In contrast, there is an antirealist strand in cultural-linguistic theologies that is opposed to religious views of their own realities. Hence Lindbeck admits that, 'intratextuality seems wholly relativistic', religions being, 'self-enclosed and incommensurable intellectual ghettos' with choice between religions, if possible at all, being, 'purely arbitrary, a matter of blind faith.' [George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, p.128].

overlooked or is incapable of expressing; it is because others present radically different visions that engaging with them is valuable. Nevertheless, religious boundaries meet and are blurred in the shared human situations of their adherents.⁵¹⁴ Indeed, because religions are human ways of being, it is natural that humans should be able to engage with them. Even a revelation will be affected by the human situation when people respond to it.

Misunderstanding this point could lead to obstacles in IE or an advocacy of direct communication. Participants could accept such shared questions, but present their religious position as the exclusive, authoritative answer. UCM avoids this in two ways. First, the uncertainty of the human situation and excessive nature of revelation precludes any decisive answers; individuals simply have to work with the resources provided by religions in deciding how to respond authentically to the challenges they face and this task is always incomplete.

More importantly, the 'essential knowing' about which existential questions ask is qualitatively different from factual, doctrinal answers. These are not discrete puzzles to be solved piecemeal, as is evident in Climacus' rejection of objective answers being given to questions about death and the afterlife (CUP, pp. 165-171). Dealing with specific problems is a way of evading the more fundamental need to live out authentic selfhood in the human situation.⁵¹⁵ The human situation is excessive in that it raises absolute questions about how one is

⁵¹⁴ This supported by a large body of evidence in the cognitive science of religion. Atran and Norenzayan, for example, observe that exposure to extreme situations, such as death and intense suffering, produce comparable existential and religious responses, even after filtering for cultural and religious difference. [Scott Atran and Aran Norenzayan, 'Religion's evolutionary landscape: Counterintuition, commitment, compassion, communion'. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 27, (2004), p. 723.]

⁵¹⁵ This argument is inspired by: Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth (1930)'. In, Martin Heidegger, William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 148-149.

to respond to the situation as a whole, which cannot be answered because they relate to the whole and can only be responded to subjectively in how one lives out one's situations. While different answers may be given to the questions, the focus in IE should be on the ways of being that produce these answers.

These shared situations satisfy Davidson's first criterion and in a way that allows dialogue to move beyond dealing with the conflicting truth-claims of religions to address more fundamental, existential issues, providing a fertile, shared space for exploratory IE.

The Validity of the Other

Chapter 5 argued that engagement with the other as a site of divine revelation is a central Christological commitment. This satisfies Davidson's second criterion, because it asserts that there is meaning and value to be encountered in the other. Indeed, by asserting that IE is integral to transcendence, UCM incentivizes IE where the alternative models view dialogue as a necessary evil imposed by a pluralistic context.

These features of the liminal space of IE show it to be a shared space that is existentially charged yet synergistically energized in a way that facilitates deep, transforming encounter with religious others.

6.7. The Performance of Indirect Communication in the Character of Participants

Given existential situationism and the need to prioritise subjective relationships, the strategies for implementing IE vary depending on the needs, capabilities, and situations of the recipients, requiring creative, 'art and self-control' (CUP, p. 77). There are no clear rules for indirect communication in IE, but a number of transferrable principles emerge from the authorship's practice of it. Its devices disrupt a direct exchange while facilitating personal encounter and appropriation in the lives of participants. Speech and writing play a role in the communication, but these must be used to facilitate personal interaction.

(6.7.a) Praxis One: Participants facilitate IE in their ways of being.

Indirect communication facilitates encounter through how participants relate to one another. Although the term communication is used, it is understood as involving the whole being of participants, 'The communication is to be understood as a whole made up of the participation from both sides contributing to and reflecting a set of consequences.'⁵¹⁶ Since subjectivity is shaped by relationships, this will involve how participants' personalities, attitudes, and interactions are configured.⁵¹⁷ This approach is subject-centred, situational, and improvisational, in relation to the participants and their contexts, but some

⁵¹⁶ Ronald J. Manheimer, *Kierkegaard as Educator*, p. 163.

⁵¹⁷ This is in conformity with Mooney's interpretation of CUP: that it, 'maps out and embodies the drama of *realising personality*'; its aim is to depict various aspects of personality and stages in its development. [Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*, p. 179.] Mooney argues that this is why CUP has the form it takes: its aim is to present personality and continually remind the reader that it is a drama of personality being acted out, 'Climacus is like a comic who doesn't just *tell* the funny story. He constantly reminds you that *he's* telling it, and that nothing would be happening is *he* weren't happening'. [Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*, p. 188.] This is also the strategy used by Connell, who discusses the 'moods' of participants in IE [Connell, KPRD]. My approach will be distinguished from his in what moods are incorporated and how these are understood.

general features are evident and are described below.⁵¹⁸ It incorporates artistic, creative elements in how one lives out and interacts with others (CUP, p. 277).⁵¹⁹

A feature of the theory is that encounter is not guaranteed and must be produced by its participants. Authentic ways of being will facilitate this and inauthentic ways of being will obstruct it. There is a perpetual threat that religious identities can become closed or authoritarian as persons seek to insulate themselves against the anxiety of the human situation and perpetrate acts of domination and exclusion (CUP, p. 85). Approaches that deny the possibility of communication, such as the cultural-linguistic approach, will prevent it through the ways of being they inculcate and are likely to be motivated by despair.⁵²⁰ Even if meaningful, deep encounter is an ideal never fully achieved and only aspired to, the commitment to trying will enable participants to progress toward openness: unachievable ideals can provide hope that is a basis for authentic action, whereas denial results most readily in hopeless despair.

(6.7.b) Praxis Two: Fidelity and Openness

A central problem for IE is how participants orient themselves in relation to fidelity and openness. The concern for many commentators is that openness will destroy the fidelity. Forward, for example, sees 'rootedness' as being as

⁵¹⁸ Pattison points out that it is based on a theory of communication that provides a number of such features and prevents it from being relativistic. [George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, p. 65.] Even Poole, who stresses the total fragmentation of the corpus and interprets it as deconstructing itself identifies a coherent strategies of indirect communication that underpin this. [Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*.]

⁵¹⁹ Hence Walsh see it as incorporating features of aesthetic and poetic existence, though this is embodied in actuality in a way that the aesthetic evades. [Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 223-242.

⁵²⁰ Tracy claims this is evident in approaches that close borders to evade encounter. [David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), *IH*, p. 19.]

important as 'empathy'.⁵²¹ Knitter and Moyaert similarly assert the necessity of navigating the extremes of, 'total commitment', to one's religion and, 'complete openness', to the other.⁵²² Cheetham speculates that these may be irreconcilable because passionate commitments obstruct openness and receptivity.⁵²³

UCM accepts that deep fidelity to religious commitments and unbounded openness to a transforming encounter with others' commitments are in tension. It acknowledges this more fully than alternative models, seeing such struggles as inherent to religiousness and subjectivity, rather than minimizing the role of openness, as in cultural-linguistic models, or minimizing the role of fidelity, as in Cheetham's model. The success of indirect communication requires maintaining this dialectic and navigating its tensions in IE.

Fidelity and openness cannot be brought into a balance, but they are both incorporated in the dialectical passion described by Climacus: faith is the highest type of passion (CUP, p. 132) and passion is essentially open (PF, p. 39); indeed, both are mutually enriching.⁵²⁴ Furthermore, passion is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the event that is taking place and of the deep commitments being shared in IE. Passion is not to be equated with emotion, but rather the deep existential interest and commitment of UC. Passion is thus a central characteristic required of participants in IE.

Passion is not expressed in closed commitment and 'fervent' authoritarian communication (CUP, p. 255). Climacus sees the passion of the 'honorable

⁵²¹ Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, p. 76.

⁵²² Paul F Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 103; 110. Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas (eds.) UIR, p. 193.

⁵²³ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 83.

⁵²⁴ The term itself signifies its agonistic nature, passion, 'Lidenskab', being linked with suffering, 'Lidelse'. [Jacobo Zabalo, 'Passion/Pathos'. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome V: Objectivity to Sacrifice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 55.]

gentleman' as an example of 'officiousness', 'noisiness', and 'flatulence', 'because the good man has concentrated on bellowing it out, less on having it within.' (CUP, p. 615) Anti-Climacus similarly rejects 'earnestness' (PiC, p. 140). Climacus links it with defending (CUP, p. 604) and preaching (CUP, p. 605). This forced expression of religiousness serves as an obstacle to encounter and may mistranslate a position into authoritarian objective speech and beliefs (CUP, pp. 614-615). This equates passion with closed religious fervour and security.

In contrast, Climacus likens passion to erotic love because it wills its own downfall (PF, p. 48). That is, it is drawn to the other and fulfilled in a commitment that destroys the expectations of the person and their secure grasp themselves. It is a willingness to be surprised, undermined, opened up by the event of encounter with the excessive other, 'A person lives undisturbed in himself, and then awakens the paradox of self-love as love for another, for one missing.' (PF, p. 39) Passion is itself a transcendent commitment that is the opposite of the secure self-satisfaction of the honourable gentleman's fervour. The constitution of the subject, as emerging in a fundamental desire for the inassimilable other (6.2), indicates that the highest passion emerges in contexts of self-transcendence and insecurity.⁵²⁵

Passion also involves openness and imperilment.⁵²⁶ Tracy notes that an implication of Gadamer's hermeneutics, in which the dialogue of the encounter

⁵²⁵ Westphal interprets it as transcendent in a similar way. [Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, p. 150.]

⁵²⁶ Openness should not be equated with passive obedience in accepting all claims of others. On the basis of H. H.'s position in 'Two Ethical and Religious Essays' and the argument of BA, that revelations cannot be confirmed but only responded to in obedience as authorities, Hughes claims that a revelation has to be, 'assumed to be authentic' and that the reason for this is because there is no, 'neutral vantage point from which to evaluate claims to religious truth'. [Carl S. Hughes, 'The Constructive Value of *The Book on Adler* for Christian Theology in the Age of Religious Pluralism'. In, Robert L. Perkins (ed.), *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Book on Adler*, p. 206.] However, Hughes fails to see that openness-as-acceptance fails to challenge

itself is determinative of the subjects, is that subjects must accept their imperilment in the dialogue.⁵²⁷ The fear of particularists, that this openness may impair fidelity, is addressed by UCM. UCM agrees that deepening in a tradition is the most fecund way of facilitating dialogue but this is because deepening leads one to an increasing appreciation of the excessive, uncontainable revelation to which it is responding. Furthermore, this openness provides a basis for distinguishing between, 'the true prejudices, by which we understand', and, 'the false one's, by which we misunderstand,' in a way that allows for critical, self-reflexive dialogue rather than passive obedience to received religious structures.⁵²⁸

The Absolute Paradox ensures this for Christianity: it precludes passion as closed commitment because it eludes the Christian's grasp and provokes existential responses of faith or offence to its absolute claim, while maintaining the freedom for persons to decide which of these they choose and how they subjectively appropriate their choice (CUP, p. 611). Moreover, the passion is also directed at finding revelation in the encounter with the other; its fidelity is aimed beyond its own borders. The defining characteristic of Christian fidelity is thus that it is open and venturing across boundaries. This Christological component of

individuals at the fundamental level necessary for transformation. BA emphasises that the recipient of a revelation is always in collision with the 'universal' and the 'established order' (BA, p. 29), such that a revelation is offensive (BA, p. 33), just as UCM has argued from that willingness to collide with the absurd is necessary in IE: although 'frightful', offence is necessary to allow for 'choice' (PiC, p. 14). Something that could simply be assumed to be true would not be a revelation, such that openness-as-acceptance is incompatible with unbounded commitment, which involves, rather, a more agonistic encounter with the other as making radical and often offensive demands that are nevertheless, in some way, possibilities for transcendence and revelation.

⁵²⁷ David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, pp. 4-5.

⁵²⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 298-299. Sinnott interprets Kierkegaard and Gadamer as being in agreement on the need to distinguish true and false prejudices. [Sinnott, M.W. *Restoring the Conversation: Socratic Dialectic in the Authorship of Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 32.

UCM incorporates the movements of fidelity and openness in the dialectical passion of unbounded commitment and fulfils Forward's assertion of the need, 'for exponents of dialogue to be rooted within their traditions, where they can find resources for their openness towards others.'⁵²⁹

(6.7.c) Praxis Three: Passivity Without Authority

IE requires that participants be open and passive, prioritising the freedom and agency of the other. To preserve the freedom and openness of participants in IE, it is requisite that they are given equality.⁵³⁰ This is achieved in various ways.

First, the participants must be individuals engaging with individuals in the context of their lives, lacking religious authority. Climacus argues that a focus on groups and institutions is a 'demoralising', 'world-historical' approach that diminishes the value and agency of the participants (CUP, pp. 142-143). IE is thus likely to be more fruitful the more local and less global and institutional it is. This focus on personal meeting addresses Hedges' concern that interreligious dialogue can serve hegemonic purposes, often being conducted by institutionally appointed male authorities who represent world religions; Climacus is similarly sceptical of the hegemonic motives behind direct, authoritative communication (CUP, p. 76).⁵³¹ For UCM, IE can occur in a meeting between any people, anywhere; it is about religiousness, not between religions.

Second, the recipient's own agency must be prioritised, 'the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free' (CUP, p. 74); Anti-

⁵²⁹ Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, p. 46.

⁵³⁰ In support of this claim, Tracy notes various examples in which the superiority of one voice overwhelms the others, thereby negating the dialogue. David Tracy, 'The Other of Dialectic and Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanron, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, pp. 108-109.

⁵³¹ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, p. 65.

Climacus similarly asserts, 'the art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody' (PiC, p. 133). This involves the communicator viewing him/herself as a learner, 'he must always express that he himself is not a master-teacher but an apprentice'.⁵³² To prioritise the agency of the other, the communicator must learn where they are in order to know how to facilitate appropriation. The aim is to facilitate full subjective appropriation but not determine what the nature of this will be.

These points fit the subjective and specific yet received and normative nature of religious identities for adherents. Religious identities are not timeless essences invested in groups but are subjective and relative to specific persons, yet they are also more than any individual's expression of them because each individual is measured by their religion as an external, normative ideal to which they commit. Religion thus has a dialectical relationship to its adherents as only expressed in their lives, but as transcending any such local expression. While IE involves personal encounter, there is thus an impersonal element to it: the communicator must distance him/herself so as to not predetermine the response of the recipient and so that a religiousness is not equated with a person mimicking the communicator (PiC, pp. 142-143). This function is served by revocation: by revoking the communication, the communicator emphasizes that this is simply his perspective, thereby inviting recipients to take up their own.⁵³³

Third, because one is always, 'in the process of becoming' (CUP, p. 73), no exclusivist or authoritarian claims can be made, even about the meaning of one's own religion. The nature of faith entails an admission that one's own religious

⁵³² Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers I* 649, p. 273.

⁵³³ Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*, p. 190.

identity is anxious, provisional, and falls short of one's ideals. Participants are 'without authority' in that they lack the ability to make decisive pronouncements about the value and truth of alternative perspectives as well as their own. They remain human and lack the vantage point that would make this possible, such that IE cannot take the form of evangelism, 'Thereupon they [the apostles] turn their attention outward to converting others, but here again there is a lack of analogy to a poor individual human being, who has only the task of existing as a Christian.' (CUP, p. 605)⁵³⁴

The idea that equality can be achieved in IE seems naïve and to veil over rather than circumvent inequalities: complex power relations will be present, bound up with the backgrounds of participants and the situation of IE, including, for example, the abilities and status of participants or geo-political and economic factors. Indeed, UCM admits that participants bring their irrevocable, prior existential situations to the dialogue. The encounter is a powerful opportunity for domination, because one is addressing the fundamental commitments of people's lives.

⁵³⁴ This presents a dilemma for those who feel they should use IE as an opportunity for evangelism and how they are fulfil the call to evangelise in such fertile moments of intersection. [See, for example, Netland's discussion of their relationship. Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, p. 282.] Emmanuel notes this tension in Kierkegaard's view of communication, arguing that there are two levels of communication in the authorship: indirect, maieutic communication and direct Christian witnessing. [Steven M. Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, pp. 141-142.] Anti-Climacus seems to differ from Climacus' prescription against evangelism, asserting that failure to provoke appropriation through witnessing fails to be a genuine Christian communication. (PiC, p. 257) However, his concept of witnessing is comparable to Climacus' approach in that both aim to retain the agency of the recipient, to facilitate subjective response and appropriation and to be without authority in this: Christ is the prototype for Christian religiousness, not the Christian witnessing. Hence, both reject the idea of evangelism as a direct communication akin to the honourable gentleman's approach. The most that both will allow is that the communicator serve as an occasion for an event of encounter with the recipient.

Indirect communication could be seen as an attempt to control the other because it aims to elicit responses in a propagandic way.⁵³⁵ However, Daise notes that propagandic strategies, 'aim at shaping the world in a way chosen by the communicator.'⁵³⁶ In contrast, he notes that indirect communication aims at the opposite, 'shaping the world in such a way that each recipient of the communication is fundamentally free to choose to shape the world as one sees fit. In fact...the receiver comes to see that one *must* choose'.⁵³⁷ In propaganda, the person assumes mastery of the object, the other, and himself: that he knows what is best and can shape the other into that model. Contrastingly, UCM acknowledges the incapability of the communicator: they do not have mastery.

In order to address the problem of power, it is necessary that participants aim to identify and disarm all power structures that are present in IE, including the drive to control, gain security, and exert influence over self and other. For Christians, the Christological conception of divine power as suffering and present in the victim demands that they engage in self-critique of their own power and potential to exclude or control.⁵³⁸

Tracy argues for the necessity of deep critique, not focused on critiquing the manifest claims but rather on unveiling underlying obstacles to the dialogue, 'If we suspect some deadly unconscious systematic "distortions," ...are disrupting the conversation, we must stop the conversation and use some appropriate

⁵³⁵ Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), p. 21.

⁵³⁶ Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art*, p. 25.

⁵³⁷ Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art*, pp. 25-26.

⁵³⁸ A comparable argument on the need for a deconstruction of ecclesiological power in the light of the crucified other is made by: Anne-Louise Eriksson, 'The Other on the Cross'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond (eds.), *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 178.

critical theory to determine whether the suspicion is justified or not.⁵³⁹ UCM concurs with this scepticism about the commitments of persons: Climacus' understanding of the spheres' interactions includes an appreciation of the veiled omissions and repressions that they expose in one another, such as the aesthete's aversion to responsibility and relationships, as well as how inauthentic relationships provide a primary way of harming others and oneself. Its view on the centrality of agency does not posit a naïve view of it as incorrigible and benign. For UCM, such critique is not accidental to IE: it is integral to it as it aims to open up new possibilities and lead participants to their boundaries and beyond; indeed, it is to be expected that the participants will be clinging to their identities in despairing and anxious ways and authenticity entails facing up to this. IE also requires ethical integrity, humility and sensitivity, such that participants will be focused on unveiling these weaknesses in themselves rather than others; participants will also have an ironic and humorous view of themselves, as outlined below. Participants in IE should prefer personal confession over evangelism.

(6.7.d) Praxis Four: Participants are Funny; Humour is Serious

Sigurdson observes that humour has often been seen as hostile to Christianity, as in the blasphemous mockery of Jesus, particularly the 'superiority theory' that views the humourist as superior to the person being

⁵³⁹ David Tracy, 'Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Cornille and Conway (eds.), IH, p. 13. As examples, he includes secular, liberal distortions, such as, 'sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, repressed hostile feelings, elitism, classism, homophobia, Eurocentrism, *ressentiment*, Islamophobia, colonialism,' (p. 13) as well as blockages and violence within religions themselves (p. 17).

laughed at.⁵⁴⁰ This is evident in exclusionary and objectifying stereotyping and in some secular uses of humour to bond and mobilise groups against religion.⁵⁴¹ For Climacus, humour can be a non-religious way of being, which fixes on 'jest' rather than faith and may be a nihilistic humour that has despaired of its possibility of achieving selfhood.⁵⁴² Such humour is inimical to encounter as it devalues and objectifies others.

However, humour can also be an attitude adopted within an authentic religious way of being. Climacus defines humour as a response to contradiction (CUP, p. 514) and the 'incongruity' between expectation and reality.⁵⁴³ This is evident in authentic religiousness, which sees faith as an absolute commitment in a situation of irrevocable insecurity. In Christian life, Evans claims, it perceives the incongruity of its own sin and failure alongside the forgiveness found in grace.⁵⁴⁴ It is also found in the disparity between its striving for and failure to achieve the ideal of Christ, which involves, 'a unity of jest and earnestness' (PiC, p. 125).⁵⁴⁵ As in religiousness itself, all participation in IE must involve as much humour as passion (CUP, p. 87).

⁵⁴⁰ Ola Sigurdson, 'Laughing at the Other'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 147.

⁵⁴¹ Ola Sigurdson, 'Laughing at the Other'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 147.

⁵⁴² Evans refers to it as nihilistic. [C. Stephen Evans, 'Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?' In, C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, p. 90.] For this distinction, see also: Alejandro Gonzalez, 'Humor'. In, Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome III: Envy to Incognito* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 180.

⁵⁴³ C. Stephen Evans, 'Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?' In, C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, p. 83.

⁵⁴⁴ C. Stephen Evans, 'Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?' In, C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁴⁵ All of these sources of humour relate to disparities in the human situation. While it may be an act of despair aimed at dismissing revelation, God and his revelation can also be sources of humour, as similar disparities are encountered here. This line is not pursued further as the pseudonyms do not consider it except in relation to despair.

A positive use of humour in IE, identified by Lippitt, is that, since humour is rooted in the contradictions and tensions of life itself (CUP, pp. 513-514), it acts as a '*confinium*', a liminal perspective that can perceive and open up new and creative possibilities in the existential situation (CUP, p. 462). For example, the humorous perception of incongruities allows one to imagine oneself in a different or ideal way of being, rather than one's present way of being.⁵⁴⁶

Negatively, the use of humour disrupts claims of authority and enables encounter by reminding participants that their knowledge and lives fall short of the divine, 'The pathos that is not safeguarded by the comic is an illusion' (CUP, p. 87). This prevents the communicator from serving as a teaching authority and as a religious paradigm and thus helps to prevent objective and direct communication. Thus, self-effacing humour is a way of preserving the equality and shared, subjective human context of the participants.

Humour should be primarily self-directed, as it is aimed to undermine one's own claims to mastery, but it can also be used to challenge the authoritarian claims of others, as in Climacus' critiques of Christendom and Hegelianism.⁵⁴⁷ A benefit of the latter is that it can enter into critical dialogue with the other despite the lack of shared criteria of legitimisation or rationality, by identifying internal incongruities or comical clashes with the human situation.⁵⁴⁸ It must be destabilising of the identities and authorities of all participants in IE: self and others.

⁵⁴⁶ John Lippitt, 'Humour and irony in the *Postscript*'. In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, pp. 162-163.

⁵⁴⁷ Hence Climacus praises Lessing's 'polemical tone' as a feature of indirect communication (CUP, p. 69).

⁵⁴⁸ John Lippitt, 'Humour and irony in the *Postscript*'. In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p. 164.

While humour prevents the dialogue from turning into a struggle for domination of the other, it should not devalue the importance attributed to irreconcilable commitments. Hence Climacus warns that it should not supplant commitment and passion 'the comic that is not safeguarded by pathos is immaturity.' (CUP, p. 87) On the contrary, humour is a response to the disparity of the human person in the situation as having to decide about ultimate questions in a mundane and uncertain worldly context. Humour should not be seen as degrading the seriousness of religious matters: they are humorous because of their seriousness, not in spite of it.

Connell's interpretation of Kierkegaardian humour misunderstands this. Connell sees humour as cooling the seriousness of religious commitment, such that it is made safer by achieving a distanced perspective from which the commitment can be taken, 'with a grain of salt.'⁵⁴⁹ He claims that this is the meaning of Climacus' claim that, 'humour involves not just contradiction but, as Climacus puts it, a "way out," a resolution of or escape from the contradiction (CUP 1:520).'⁵⁵⁰ In contrast to this interpretation, Climacus claims that the absolute commitment cannot be reconciled with the humour but rather must be lived out in tension with it, heightening rather than cooling both. When humour is not dialectical in this way, it offers a 'way out' from commitment that makes the person unable to perceive religious commitment: authentic religiousness posits such commitments as permanent, absolute tasks that can never be brought to an end, even as it acknowledges that they fall short,

⁵⁴⁹ Connell, KPRD, p. 100.

⁵⁵⁰ Connell, KPRD, p. 100.

‘This is why the religious, even when it interprets the esthetic suffering with a certain touch of the comic, nevertheless does it gently because it is recognised that the suffering will have its day. Repentance, however, viewed religiously, will not have its day and then be over; the uncertainty of faith will not have its day and then be over’ (CUP, p. 524).

(6.7.e) Praxis Five: Agency, Empathy, and Theatricality

Agency

A central feature of indirect communication is that it is maieutic, aiming to facilitate the recipient’s own development rather than impose ideas or a particular direction on this development. Pattison notes this is problematic because it does not fit with the specificity of information required to engage with a religion. To overcome this difficulty, Pattison interprets the maieutic method as aiming simply to remind the individual of their responsibility to become a unique self, ‘to make them take note of their responsibility for their own comportment towards the truth’.⁵⁵¹ Climacus makes this clear by comparing it to, ‘having to say something to a passerby in passing, without standing still oneself or delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way’ (CUP, p. 277). The maieutic strategy is intended to awaken recipients to their ability and responsibility to respond.

Maieutics is stressed because of the subjective nature of religious identity:

IE is not achieved in the production of copies of the religious identity but in

⁵⁵¹ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, p. 79. Similarly, Strawser claims, ‘the point of Kierkegaard’s Socratic maieutics is to show readers their responsibility with regard to the truth. In this way readers are deceived, teased and perplexed into seeking a relationship with the truth.’ [Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard From Irony to Edification*, p.153.]

diverse, subjective, local appropriation.⁵⁵² It is the process of engagement itself, not the end result, that is the marker of a successful encounter,

‘that of inwardness, of possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else. Whereas objective thinking invests everything in the result and assists all humankind to cheat by copying and reeling off the results and answers, subjective thinking invests everything in the process of becoming and omits the result’. (CUP, p. 73)

Inwardness signifies that a meeting with another only becomes real when it is allowed to penetrate to the core of one’s being and affect one’s personhood.

However, the maieutic strategy can play a fuller role in IE when the agonistic nature of religious identity is acknowledged. Deeper engagement with one’s own personhood unveils its deeper tensions as well as the fuller range of possibilities for human subjectivity and thus the permeability and openness of selfhood to others and other ways of being.⁵⁵³ IE entails developing oneself as well as others.

Empathy and Imagination

UCM requires that participants in IE must encounter the inward quality of religiousness, which is closely linked to experience, and this suggests the need for empathy.⁵⁵⁴ The possibility of empathy has been strongly challenged by the

⁵⁵² It is for this reason that it is compared to the Socratic maieutic approach despite Climacus’ contention that the human being does not possess the truth: the way of being of the recipient is a matter of his/her subjective appropriation and agency; it is between him/her and God. The communicator cannot play any role in shaping this beyond presenting the provocation.

⁵⁵³ Ronald J. Manheimer, *Kierkegaard as Educator*, p. 163.

⁵⁵⁴ Catherine Cornille, ‘Empathy and Otherness in Interreligious Dialogue’. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanron, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 223.

dominant paradigm of IE, because experience is culturally bound.⁵⁵⁵ There is insufficient space to refute this position fully, but I follow Cornille identifying the possibility of empathy as dependent on sympathy, experience, and imagination.⁵⁵⁶

The description of subjectivity in previous chapters affirms the possibility of all three. The shared existential situation provides the basis for sympathy as human persons can see themselves as engaged in comparable existential struggles; the internal alterity of identity, relational nature of subjectivity, and dependence of consciousness on the other also opens up the possibility of sympathy and experience.⁵⁵⁷ The two poles of consciousness highlighted in SuD also assert the capacity for experience and imagination. Imagination is one pole that possesses the capability of conceiving of idealised ways of being.⁵⁵⁸ The other pole lives them out through appropriation that facilitates experience.⁵⁵⁹ IE thus requires hospitality at the deepest levels of identity: being sympathetic to and willing to experience the world from another's perspective and to be affected by the claims of the other. This requires sensitivity, creativity and imagination in conceiving of the ways of being encountered.

⁵⁵⁵ Moreover, as Cornille puts it, 'it risks projecting one's own inner life onto the other, thereby erasing the challenges and the possibilities of genuine otherness.' [Catherine Cornille, 'Empathy and Otherness in Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 222.] See also: Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 250. Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 162.

⁵⁵⁶ Catherine Cornille, 'Empathy and Otherness in Interreligious Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 225.

⁵⁵⁷ As Zahavi puts it, 'my encounter with the other, my ability to interact with and recognise another embodied subject as a foreign subjectivity, is pre-empted by and made possible through the very structure of my own embodied subjectivity.' [Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*, p. 156.]

⁵⁵⁸ I follow Jothan on this view of imagination. Peder Jothan, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity*, p. 134.

⁵⁵⁹ Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics*, pp. 228-229.

Theatricality: Experimentation and Appropriation

The Kierkegaardian authorship explores ways of being in a literary format. Other ways of being are imagined and depicted through their embodiment in fictional characters as a means of entering into empathic and appropriative relationships with them and their commitments.⁵⁶⁰ Climacus' term for this is, 'imaginary psychological construction', in which one is invited to imagine the other in a wide range of activities and in relation to their core struggles in order to encounter their way of being (CUP, p. 263). Placing their life-views against the backdrop of a range of existential contexts provides points of contact and intersection with readers who may be struggling in similar existential situations.

These imagined characters are often engaged in attempting to imagine a further possibility that they cannot grasp themselves, such as de Silentio struggling to express an inexpressible faith he does not have (CUP, p. 262) and the non-Christian Climacus attempting to understand how he can become a Christian (CUP, p. 617), with the result that they mirror the reader's situation in encountering the possibility they themselves present and also open up a range of existential possibilities. As a whole, the authorship itself presents the situation of IE, placing competing perspectives in dialogue about dilemmas, agonies, transcendent and liminal questions without any conclusion on what position they should adopt and in the absence of any criteria beyond their own subjective experimentation.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶⁰ Kierkegaard explains that this necessitated the creation of the pseudonyms as actual persons (CUP, p. 625). For example, 'to have such a doubter come into existence in existence-inwardness so that one could see down to the slightest detail how he goes about doing it' (CUP, p. 255).

⁵⁶¹ The role of the pseudonyms and their multiple perspectives in facilitating indirect communication is noted in: Nerina Jansen, 'Deception in Service of Truth: Magister Kierkegaard

Experimentation is similarly emphasised in the form of the communication. The playfulness, irony, supplement, 'oscillation of terms', and variation of meaning gives the texts a polyphonic, perspectival, and fragmented form that mirrors the situation of IE, lacking an authoritative perspective or resolution and thereby presenting a wide range of different perspectives that draw readers into creative participation in the dialogue.⁵⁶² Furthermore, this variation-in-repetition of themes facilitates experimentation with interpreting them through recontextualisation in different discussions and also invites a fuller comprehension of the ways of being by seeing them at work in a range of situations.⁵⁶³ A string of possible meanings is set up, such that the free, subjective participation of the reader is enabled in creating their own meaning. It is the refusal of the text to communicate this, while still sketching around the personalities, ways of being and their existential struggles, that provides the creative space of a writable text that draws the reader in by allowing them to fill in the blanks and imagine it for themselves.

Modelled on Kierkegaard's authorial strategies, IE can be understood as a type of hermeneutical performance that builds from one's irrevocable existential context but uses empathetic, imaginative, and experimental resources to engage with religious others. Communication in IE can also model itself on a fractal engagement to encourage unique and subjective expression, appropriation and participation; rather than positing a specific liminal space, it will require

and the Problem of Communication'. In R.L.Perkins (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*, p. 121.

⁵⁶² Tracy sees such fragmentation, as in Bakhtin's hermeneutics, as motivated by the aim of making dialogue open-ended. David Tracy, 'The Other of Dialectic and Dialogue'. In, Ulrich Schmiedel and James G. Jeanrond, *Dynamics of Difference: Christianity and Alterity*, p. 106.

⁵⁶³ Jacob Howland, 'Lessing and Socrates in Kierkegaard's *Postscript*'. In, Rick Anthony Furtak (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p. 113.

interaction with a range of very different people living out religious identities in a wide range of situations, such that a religious identity is not presented as fixed but as infinitely adaptable.

This invites a comparison with theatre.⁵⁶⁴ Like the pseudonyms, IE should enable participants to experiment with a range of ways of being, seeing how they would interact and configure their identities in relation to various features and crises of the human situation. IE could incorporate the use of storytelling, personal narrative, and experimentation with other ways of being, with a particular focus on stimulating imagination. Participants in IE may also engage in imagining, roleplaying, and acting out each other's roles as a means of facilitating engagement, considering how others live out the central conflicts and obligations in different scenarios. This use of fiction, as in the pseudonymous texts, allows for imagination and participation without requiring of participants that they distance themselves from their own existential history in ways that are impossible for persons. Acting a part need not be inauthentic: identities themselves are narratives one acts out; even a fictional identity can be transforming, just as a person who has played Hamlet will always carry something of Hamlet with him.

Theatrical performance also occurs at a specific moment in time; each performance is a unique performance. Participants should not approach IE with a plan, but rather it should be sensitive to the unique situation and eventfulness of each encounter. This involves creativity, improvisation, and spontaneity; protracted monologues and planned addresses are unlikely to be helpful.

⁵⁶⁴ Mooney similarly advocates a theatrical reading of IC as acting out the drama of the personalities. Edward F. Mooney, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*, p. 188.

Cheetham advocates a similar 'aesthetic attitude' that emphasises 'imaginative playfulness' as a means of encountering other identities.⁵⁶⁵ However, UCM goes further in that it also incorporates the necessity of appropriation. For UCM, theatre is a serious matter and its figures present existential possibilities that are whole ways of being; they are not simply characters one can imagine and discard. Similarly, one can only understand the religious other at the deepest level insofar as one subjectively appropriates and expresses a relationship to his/her commitments. The aesthete, for all his imagination, cannot understand the religious until he has committed in religious ways. Imagining what one's life would be like as a Buddhist is different from the existential struggle to embody and live it out in the medium of actuality. Priority in the performance must thus be given to encountering the whole ways of being that the participants possess, and ensuring that it is closely related to the existential situations of the participants. Thus, the interaction must also include emic, existential participation, appropriation, and life-application. This will also require long-term engagement, extending far beyond IE.

While IE uses aesthetic and theatrical devices to facilitate encounter, these have a serious aim and require passion. IE is the passionate encounter with deep commitments in a serious existential context. If one is able to meet the other in a dispassionate or merely playful way, one has misunderstood the challenges and opportunities IE presents.

⁵⁶⁵ Cheetham, WMTR, p. 6.

6.8. Conclusion

This chapter has argued for an approach to IE that is person-centred and aims to facilitate deep encounter with religious commitments in a shared existential situation. In conformity with the agonistic nature of all identities, it is dialectical in that it incorporates passionate fidelity and venturing openness, humour and seriousness, active participation and imaginative experimentation. It places particular demands on the communicators to act without authority and avoid domination. UCM thus incorporates features of the alternative approaches while avoiding their weaknesses, such that it allows for fidelity and openness, meeting and difference. A further feature demanded of participants in their practice of IE but not expounded in the chapter is love. Kierkegaard's exposition of its practical implementation in WoL and the full details of the practical implementation of IE are beyond the remit of this thesis. Nevertheless, the necessity of substitutionary love, in which the other is prioritised and the agent imperilled, is part of the ethics of IE and it is expressed in many of the features demanded of participants by this chapter, such as preserving the agency of the other, avoiding domination, and acting with good humour. The motivation behind all of these features for participants is to express and keep alive the love of others.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: UNCERTAIN FUTURES

7.1 Summary of Thesis

This thesis aimed to achieve four primary objectives. (a) First, it aimed to critique the dominant way in which RD is conceptualised in philosophy of religion (CV) and the positions on diversity developed within this typology. These were criticised for taking an objective approach to diversity, and viewing it through a Christian-philosophical lens as a set of metaphysical accounts, truth-claims, and practices grounded in the authority of specific institutional bodies. They view diversity as presenting an intellectual problem requiring an explanatory solution that determines the location of truth and salvation in relation to these. This blunt approach misrepresents the phenomenon of RD, occluding the important challenges and opportunities it presents and precluding full engagement with it. The positions within CV were also accused of harbouring an exclusivist ontology that skewed the debate in favour of exclusivism and omitted the subjective and existential features of religion that are vital in understanding religion, particularly in relation to RD. The conclusion reached was that different approaches must be developed within philosophy of religion that are more sensitive to the realities and challenges of diversity, particularly the existential dimensions most consistently overlooked by extant approaches.

(b) Second, it aimed to provide an alternative, existential approach and typology of commitment, informed by a Kierkegaardian interpretation of religions as spheres of existence and ways of configuring identity around fundamental commitments that negotiate central struggles of the human

condition. This focused on how religious commitment is configured in a context of diversity. The ways in which commitments are appropriated and lived out by people can be authentic or inauthentic, judged primarily by how they respond to the struggles of the human situation in constructing selfhood and responding to despair. Types of inauthentic commitment, expressing forms of despair, were identified and extant positions on diversity were interpreted in the light of this existential typology. Christian pluralism and exclusivism were critiqued on this basis, with these positions identified as forms of despairing, inauthentic commitment that fail to acknowledge the realities of the human situation.

(c) Third, having opened up possibilities for different positions to those offered by CV, the thesis aimed to develop an authentic, Kierkegaardian position on diversity: unbounded commitment. This type of commitment is unbounded in that it has an absolute commitment and deep fidelity to seeking and relying on divine revelation and grace, yet also entails a venturing, boundary-crossing, radical openness to religious others. This made two theological claims, offering a minimalist theology of religion: the shared, existential situation of human persons was posited as providing common ground that did not negate religious difference; Christological themes developed by the pseudonyms were drawn on to argue that the Christological horizon of divine activity posits the presence of the divine in the inassimilable and offensive other, necessitating deep engagement with others in living out Christian faith. UC entails a dialectic of radical, unbounded fidelity with radical, unbounded openness.

The struggles experienced by Christians in a religiously diverse situation exist in a dialectical tension that never finds resolution. Far from hampering the engagement with diversity, which virtually all positions within CV see as a

necessary evil forced upon the believer, this tension energises the passion of the commitment: committed faith is expressed in risky acts of substitutionary love and openness, in which one's own identity is imperilled, motivated by the hope to find God's revelation where one least expects it. Simultaneously, this opening up to others is the means through which agency is awoken and selfhood found.

(d) Finally, my thesis offered practical resources for implementing this position so as to facilitate interreligious encounter. In conformity with the dialectical tension of UC, this involves strategies of communication that respect fidelity and radical openness. To respect the seriousness of their commitments, it was argued that participants in encounter must be honest about their deep, often radically different, religious commitments. Yet this is counter-balanced by the need to admit one's own uncertainties and to develop characteristics including empathy and humour. Interreligious encounter requires artful communication and the development of characteristics that embrace the tensions of the situation, including passionate fidelity and venturing openness, humour and seriousness, active participation and imaginative experimentation.

I have justified my position by demonstrating its superiority over competing approaches to RD, particularly by prioritising the existential and subjective dimensions of religious commitment. This fits with the experience of those engaged in deep reflection about their religion and how they navigate their commitments in a context of diversity. I have further aimed to convince Christians by drawing on Christological themes, particularly the site and experience of revelation, and values of love and respect. I grounded these values in an ontology that posits relationships to others as integral to the emergence of authentic selfhood. I showed the value of my approach in facilitating and

motivating deep encounter with religious others. In relation to the Kierkegaardian sources, I have aimed to provide a recognisably Kierkegaardian approach to RD that is informed by their central themes and insights, without being slavishly obedient to any theological system that is discernable in them. This is in the spirit of Kierkegaard's desire to provoke subjective engagement with vitally important existential questions (CUP, pp. 629-630).

7.2 Limitations of My Argument and Future Developments

My existential conception of religion identified religiousness as irrevocably subjective and bound up with human responses to existential challenges. This approach is rejected by some of the dominant interpretations of religion, such as the cultural-linguistic view. It might also conflict with how adherents view their own religions, as sacred, divinely revealed bodies, for example, rather than human responses. This is problematic as my approach could be viewed as imposing an outsider perspective that claims superior knowledge of the meaning of religions over those within.

I have tried to pre-empt such criticisms by viewing religion as referring to particular ways of being in the world and making minimal pronouncements about what else might be involved. I have aimed to be non-reductive by focusing on description over explanation and by making minimal metaphysical claims. I have also tried to respect the centrality of religions to the identities of their adherents by viewing them as absolute, defining commitments. Religions may be divinely revealed, involve social bodies, or simply be a way of grouping certain human activities, but it cannot be denied that human beings make absolute commitments and respond to various claims of revelation or transcendent experiences in how they appropriate such claims. Future research could build upon and defend this conception of religion as grounded in ways of being, re-appropriating the approaches of existential theology to better understand the existential dimensions of religions overlooked by the dominant views of religion.

The ontology of personhood that grounds my approach, particularly its claim that relationships to others are integral to the emergence of subjectivity and selfhood, also needs further justification. I have tried to avoid theologising

consciousness, presenting the engagement with religious others as simply one way in which such relationships can occur. Nevertheless, the prioritisation of alterity could be seen as a theological gesture and needs further support.⁵⁶⁶ Further research could explore this ontology, seeking to support and expound it more fully as well as considering whether consciousness has theological dimensions and to what extent religions can present the fullest expression of authentic selfhood. In particular, the role of love and desire in constituting personhood and the wealth of theological literature exploring these needs to be considered.

My approach entails a different conception of philosophy of religion to that which dominates analytical philosophy. Swinburne, for example, argues that religious claims are philosophically significant only if they are claims about reality and that the philosophical task, particularly when faced with different options, is to verify or falsify these.⁵⁶⁷ By rejecting the value and possibility of approaching religion and RD in this way, my approach suggests more fruitful lines of inquiry for the philosopher of religion.

More important are existential explorations of the ways in which religiousness shapes and is shaped by subjectivity and how it relates to issues of selfhood in the real-world context. Indeed, religions are to be expected to be repositories of existential insights and responses to the struggles facing human

⁵⁶⁶ Janicaud criticises the emphasis on alterity as having a theological origin, contrasting the purity of phenomenological method with this imposition of metaphysical and theological concepts, 'the directly dispossessing aplomb of alterity supposes a nonphenomenological, metaphysical desire; it comes from "a land not of our birth." It supposes a metaphysico-theological montage, prior to philosophical writing.... All is acquired and imposed from the outset, and this all is no little thing: nothing less than the God of the biblical tradition.... Must philosophy let itself be thus intimidated?' [Dominique Janicaud, 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology'. In, Dominique Janicaud et al. (ed.), *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 27.

⁵⁶⁷ Richard Swinburne, 'The Value and Christian Routes of Analytical Philosophy of Religion.' In Harriet Harris and Christopher Insole (eds.) *Faith and Philosophical Analysis*, p. 34.

beings. Conceiving of religions as responses to meaning, finitude, mortality, and transcendence justifies philosophical interest in them: religions might offer unique insights on the human situation and ways of responding to it. Critique remains an important part of this philosophical enterprise: positions can be evaluated by how they respond to the human situation and constitute personhood; they may offer more authentic responses to this or they may be expressions of despair, attempting to insulate the person and secure their identity through repression and denial.

My position has only considered IE at a theoretical level and in relation to religions, but it calls for a real engagement with religious people and for an expansion of IE to include non-religious others. UCM indicates the need to enter into encounter with radical others, and there is no *prima facie* reason to exclude non-religious or anti-religious positions such as atheism. Indeed, as radically other to religions, these may provide deep possibilities for encounter. Like religions, they may be responding to shared existential situations, making overriding commitments, and may be participating in this-worldly acts of faith as they exercise agency and open themselves up to mundane acts of transcendence.

The engagement with diversity advocated by my thesis asks much of participants. They are required to admit the anxiety, uncertainty, provisionality, and groundlessness of their religious commitments. They are asked to admit the paradoxes, conflicts, and agonies they face in navigating the human situation and their religious identities, particularly in how they fail and are led to the boundaries of possibility. They are asked to embrace the conviction that what they seek most is present outside of the boundaries with which they are comfortable and to find the divine in the places they find most offensive. They

are asked to embrace others in acts of substitutionary love that imperil their identity and everything they value most. And they are asked to do all of this in hope and exuberant, passionate faith; to be excited and empowered by what terrifies them. It is not certain that anyone would want to engage with others in these ways.

However, the desire for relationships, for an authentic response to the human situation, and to become a self through these is present at the birth of consciousness and provides its animus, even alongside the despair that drives people to insulate themselves against others. While UCM asks much of participants, it is only through such relationships that human persons achieve their highest potential for selfhood and can become what they are.⁵⁶⁸ Their deepest desire and greatest fulfilment is for and in such encounter. If the despair is faced, as it is in faith, there can be no stronger incentive to IE.

Regarding the threat of such encounter, this is what Christian faith demands: in faith one risks one's life and sacrifices everything to commit absolutely to something without guarantees. UCM requires a costly commitment, coterminous with the life of the person and never completed. This makes it a transcendent, passionate activity. While fear can be paralysing, Kierkegaard claims that risky, venturing faith has its own certainty that empowers passionate engagement. People face existential terrors like death and conflict regardless of whether they engage deeply with other people, but since the venture of faith is coterminous with life, it can never be disappointed in the way other ventures can and, moreover, as a transforming act that opens one up to finding oneself in the

⁵⁶⁸ This point is indebted to Söderquist's view of learning as innately desirable in Kierkegaard's account, 'An often overlooked premise for human development is that people love learning.... [The] desire to learn can be seen as arising from within'. [Anna Strelis Söderquist, *Kierkegaard on Dialogical Education: Vulnerable Freedom* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 1.]

relationship to the other, it heightens the life of the person into a meaningful narrative, even as it is perpetually groundless and incomplete. Hence Kierkegaard compares being enervated, 'with multifarious expectancy', to the 'victory' achieved through the, 'expectancy of faith', which can never disappoint, since it has no end, and which can satisfy to the deepest core of the person, 'Many an expectancy will be disappointed—experience has taught me this. But there is one expectancy that will not disappoint—experience has not taught me this, but neither has it ever had the authority to deny it—this is the expectancy of faith, and this is victory.' (EUD, p. 28)

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