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Transcendence in Kierkegaard and Barth

Andrew Myrick
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, hrq637@mocs.utc.edu

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Andrew Myrick

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Department of Philosophy and Religion

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Jonathan Yeager
LeRoy A. Martin Professor of Religious Studies
Thesis Director

Talia Welsh
UC Foundation Professor of Philosophy
Department Examiner

Brian Ribeiro
North Callahan Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
Department Examiner

Contents

1. Introduction

Karl Barth (1886-1968) was one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth centuries. Central to his theology was an emphasis on the transcendence of God. For Barth, knowledge of God can come only through revelation in Jesus Christ. He was critical of any attempts to ground knowledge of God in history or metaphysics. The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was one of the key influences on Barth's early work on the transcendence of God. Kierkegaard's use of categories such as paradox and the "infinite qualitative distinction" resonated with Barth. Scholars have published on the relationship between Barth and Kierkegaard as early as 1926.

Towards the end of his life, Karl Barth gave a speech critiquing the theology of Søren Kierkegaard. Scholars have argued whether Barth's critiques were valid. In 1967, Alastair McKinnon wrote an influential article entitled "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: A Striking out at Phantoms?" McKinnon argued that Barth was attacking a misinterpretation of Kierkegaard, and that Barth had much more in common with the Danish philosopher than he admitted.[1] Building from this argument, Alan J. Torrance and Andrew B. Torrance's 2023 book *Beyond Immanence* proposes that Kierkegaard and Barth share a theological trajectory. This trajectory stems from Kierkegaard's emphasis on the transcendence of God that influenced Barth.

Contrary to this reading, George Pattison argues that Kierkegaard's view of transcendence differs from that of Barth. In his 2012 book, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Twentieth Century,* Pattison argues that Kierkegaard shares more similarities with Rudolf

[1] Alistair McKinnon, "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light", *Canadian Journal of Theology,* vol. 8, no 1 (1967).

Bultmann, an early twentieth century existentialist theologian, than Barth.[2] In *Beyond Immanence,* Torrance and Torrance respond to Pattison's work only in a footnote as different from their perspective.[3] The trajectory that Torrance and Torrance proposed relies heavily on Barth and Kierkegaard's agreement on the issue of transcendence. Pattison's interpretation challenges Torrance and Torrance's proposed theological trajectory.

Contrary to Pattison, I argue that Kierkegaard and Barth agree on the transcendence of God, while at the same time Torrance and Torrance's proposed common trajectory between Barth and Kierkegaard does not appear entirely accurate either. Torrance and Torrance's *Beyond Immanence* failed to address hermeneutical questions that Pattison established. Torrance and Torrance hold Kierkegaard's second authorship, published under his name and explicitly Christian, as normative over his first authorship, published under pseudonyms from different perspectives. Their reading of Kierkegaard ignores the religious nature of his early work, especially *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (1844), that Pattison analyzes. My assessment is that the *Beyond Immanence* reading of Kierkegaard fails to understand his work wholistically.

In the following paper, we will first explore the theological context of Barth's world in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Second, we will trace Barth's relationship to Kierkegaard and emphasis on transcendence throughout his middle period. Finally, we will examine his mature statements on transcendence in the *Church Dogmatics* (1942). After analyzing Barth's 1963 speech on Kierkegaard's influence on him, we will explore some of the literature on Barth's critique and interpretation of Kierkegaard. Notably, we will

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[2] George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89-90.

[3] Alan J. Torrance and Andrew B. Torrance, *Beyond Immanence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 199.

investigate in depth Pattison's interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of transcendence as standing in disagreement with Barth's. Drawing on sections of *Church Dogmatics*, I argue that Barth accepts Kierkegaard's formulation of transcendence. However, I show that the work of Torrance and Torrance in *Beyond Immanence* fails to overcome the hermeneutical challenges that Pattison developed.

2. Background of Liberal Protestantism

German Theology in the century before Barth was dominated by Liberal protestant thinkers. Immanuel Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793) explored religion that is subsumed under the moral life of man. The German Theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* (1831) set new parameters for theology. For Schleiermacher, theology is not about special revelation. Rather, it is about communicating a religious community's "feeling" of piety towards God.[4] Theology can arise only where religious self-consciousness has emerged.[5] For Schleiermacher, theology, as the study of humanity communicating his religious self-consciousness, stood among the other sciences (*Wissenschaften).* In this setting, history and culture became informative to Christian thought as much as revelation.

History became a major source for the German Theologian Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). Ritschl's methodology allowed for history to enter into theological discussion in a decisive way. His influence lay more so in his historicocritical approach rather than his conclusions about specific theological doctrines. For Ritschl, as with Schleiermacher, religion is an expression of

[4] Christine Helmer, "Schleiermacher," *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth Century Theology* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 31.

[5] Friedrich Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 78.

the self-consciousness that humans have in their dependence on God.[6] Thus, to study religion involves the history of humanity's expression of this dependence. Christianity, compared to other religions historically, represents the highest form of this religious expression.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, German theology was dominated by the Ritshlian school. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) was representative of the more conservative Ritschlian school. For Harnack, Christianity should only be defined by "the methods of historical science, and the experience of life gained by studying the actual course of history." The Gospel changes under different historical situations and its development can be studied through history.[7] Harnack had a surety about a revealed Gospel throughout history that culminated in his time. Breaking with his Ritschlian background, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) critiqued this finality of Christianity. One cannot be sure that Christianity was the final stage of religion, the peak of humanity's self-consciousness of its own dependence. Rather, history presents Christianity as only one of many other religions.[8] Troeltsch claimed that Christianity is the highest religion *so far*, but left open religion's further development.

The theology of Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) attempted to overcome what he viewed as the overly liberal theology of Troeltsch. Herrmann found in Ritschl's theology a modern use of history while not going so far as to combine human sciences with theology, as Troeltsch had done. Herrmann's fundamental concern was with showing that religious knowledge is essentially different than that of any other science (*Wissenschaften*).[9] God must not be confused with what is

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[6] David L. Mueller, *An Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 16, 27.

[7] Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 6, 14.

[8] Enrst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 78-79.

[9] Bruce L. McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 54-57.

the object of human sciences. Rather, knowledge of God can come about only through supernatural self-revelation. In order to investigate the historical aspects of Christianity, one had to have faith in order that the spiritual causes behind history could be revealed. But how does one obtain that faith in order to investigate history? Herrmann believed that one had to have an experience of the divine that was self-authenticating.[10] Christianity was not something to be proved.

3. Karl Barth's Early Development

It was within this setting of liberal Protestantism that Karl Barth commenced his university education. Barth's theological development began in his childhood home in Bern, Switzerland. His father, Johann Friedrich Barth, was a professor of church history at Bern University.[11] Johann Barth was moderate Pietist and a somewhat conservative theologian for his time. This conservative pietism was common in Bern University as a whole. Bern remained steeped in the Hegelian theology of Ferdinand Christian Baur. Karl Barth completed four semesters at Bern, but he was not interested in staying there. He wished to study in Germany where the Ritschl school had become dominant. Despite concerns from his conservative father, Barth chose to study at the University of Berlin.

It was at Berlin that Barth was exposed to the influential German Liberal theology at the time. He listened to the lectures of Adolf von Harnack and read the early works of Friedrich Schleiermacher. What caught Barth's interest was the theology of Wilhelm Herrmann. After reading Herrmann's *Ethics* (1901), Barth was determined to study with him at the university of

[10] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 59.
[11] Ibid., 36-37.

Marburg. Barth's father, however, did his best to make sure Barth was exposed to conservative theologians as well. After another semester at Bern, Barth spent the winter of 1907 at Tübingen University. But Barth's determination remained, and he begin his last semester at Marburg in 1908.

It was at the University of Marburg that Barth developed not only his ability to think, but also found a platform to write and publish.[12] Martin Rade, the editor of the theological journal *Die Christliche Welt,* took a liking to Barth. Rade made Barth his editorial assistant for the journal, allowing Barth to stay in Marburg another year. *Die Christliche Welt* would later become the journal in which Barth would critique his former professors. This additional year at Marburg allowed Barth to develop a friendship with another student, Eduard Thurneysen. The two students continued to write letters even as Barth begin his pastorship in the industrial village Safenwil in 1911.

Pastorship proved a difficult transition for Barth. He had not experienced the poor working-class conditions in Safenwil before. Barth's professors had been social conservatives, not particularly concerned with issues of social welfare, or at least it did not concern their theology. Thus, Barth was faced with the issue of pastoral concerns that the theology he studied in university was not prepared to address. The rising Christian socialist movement in Switzerland became an influence for Barth. This new social concern did not constitute a break from the theology of Barth's professors.[13] Even amidst Barth's changing pastoral concerns, he maintained a Hermann-influenced foundation to his theology.

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[12] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 37-38.
[13] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 89.

During Barth's time in Germany, a religious socialist movement had bloomed in Switzerland. Zurich pastor Herrmann Kutter (1863-1931) wrote that socialism represented a "parable" of the Kingdom of God.[14] Socialist movements acted in a way that bore witness to Jesus' view of the coming Kingdom. Kutter's ideas were taken up by Basel pastor Leonhard Ragaz (1868-1945), who helped organize a formal religious socialist meeting in 1906. Barth was given a movement which gave voice to the pastoral concerns that had arisen in Safenwil. Barth viewed the Kingdom of God as emerging from both Christian and secular sources. The work of the Kingdom was not exclusively a religious phenomenon but could also be found in the work of materialists, atheists, or socialists.

The beginning of Barth's break with his liberal professors began in August 1914. Following the outbreak of World War I, Barth received the newest issue of *Die Christliche Welt*, which he found to justify Germany's involvement in the war.[15] Barth regarded the use of God or eschatology as justification for the war as a scandal. Barth's letter that he sent to Martin Rade, the editor of *Die Christliche Welt*, was published in Ragaz's journal. Later in October, Barth saw the name of his former professor Wilhelm Herrmann on a document signed by ninety-three German intellectuals declaring Germany had no moral responsibility in the war. As a result, Barth became disenchanted with the theologies of Hermann and the religious socialists. The Swiss socialists Ragaz and Kutter failed at the outbreak of the war to present a unified movement. Barth had a "downright resentment" for the arguments between them.[16] Between his disillusion with his former professors and the failure of the socialist movement to respond, Barth began gravitating towards what would later be called dialectical theology.

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[14] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 83.
[15] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 111.
[16] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 122.

In 1915, Barth delivered an address to a socialist group entitled "Religion and Socialism." In this address, he made the distinction between religion and the object of theology.[17] Religion in itself is simply the piety of humanity. In being a human endeavor, it is open to failure and error. This is juxtaposed to the true object of theology, the Kingdom of God. Religion, as a man-made structure, cannot be identified with the Kingdom of God. It is a symptom of it, perhaps an exemplary one, but it isn't the only one. Socialism, history, nature are also symptoms that show the coming Kingdom. No effect of human striving can be confused with the object of theology. In this regard, Barth's theology began to focus on a single theme: the transcendence of God.[18]

4. The Middle Period of Barth's Theology

The emphasis on God's transcendence continued to develop in Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. The commentary was an attempt to overcome any attempt to ground theology in a human endeavor, whether it be neo-Kantian idealism, Pietism, historicism, or socialism.[19] Barth wanted to say that knowledge of God is beyond the reach of any human striving. Rather, knowledge of God comes from God himself. God is only known in his self-revelation. Barth's intention was to delineate between the fallen world and an eschatological Kingdom. Barth claimed that what was lost in the Fall was man's immediacy with God.[20] The original sin was humanity's self-consciousness that opened up a distance between God and humanity. Knowledge of God became mediated through human categories. Humans set up their

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[17] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 130-132.

[18] Eberhard Busch, *Barth* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1.

[19] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 182.

[20] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 64-66.

own understanding against God which creates a gap between knowledge mediated by human categories and immediate knowledge of the divine.

The primary goal of the commentary was to elucidate the eschatological development from the fallen world to the Kingdom of God. Barth utilized a metaphor of the Kingdom as an "organic" life planted in the world. The Kingdom of God was "planted" like a seed and grows as a unitary organism. Divine history is differentiated from worldly history.[21] The growth of the Kingdom from the side of divine history touches and interreacts with human history but cannot be identified with it. Barth's organic metaphor fell victim to misinterpretation by reviewers of his commentary as providing a "point of contact" between the growth of the Kingdom and human structures, as if it organically emerged within human history. It was this use of history as a point of contact between the knowledge of humanity and knowledge of God that Barth sought to critique. Barth found that his commentary did not strongly enough address his theological climate strongly enough.

In the preface to the second commentary on Romans, Barth mentions some of the factors that developed his theology between the publishing of the first edition in 1918 and the second in 1922. With the help of his brother Heinrich Barth and friend Eduard Thurneysen, Barth studied the letters of Paul the Apostle, nineteenth century theologian Franz Overbeck, Plato, Kant, Dostoyevsky, and Kierkegaard.[22] Barth continued to develop his view of a transcendent God in the second edition of his commentary on Romans. But in the second edition, Barth delivers that message in a more combative tone. During a time of increasing social unrest in Europe, the first

[21] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 144.
[22] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 3-4.

edition of the commentary did not sufficiently address the present situation. Barth and Thurneysen found inspiration in addressing the crisis from the work of Kierkegaard.

Besides mentioning him in letters to Thurneysen from 1919-1920, this is the first time Barth speaks of Kierkegaard. Barth seems to have been mainly exposed to Kierkegaard through Thurneysen and it is difficult to say for sure which of Kierkegaard's works that he actually read. It can only be certain that at this time Barth had read selections of his journals, *Practice in Christianity* (1850), *The Moment* (1855), and perhaps other selections curated by Thurneysen.[23] Importantly, Barth keyed into Kierkegaard's statement on the "infinite qualitative distinction."[24] But Kierkegaard was not the only, nor the primary influence on Barth at the time. What Barth appreciated most was the language Kierkegaard used for the theological concerns that the Swiss theologian had already developed. Barth already was concerned with a qualitative difference between human knowledge and God as self-revealed. What Kierkegaard provided was the way to express it in terms of paradox, indirect communication, and a critical attitude towards theology.[25]

The second edition of Barth's commentary on Romans was a scathing critique of what Barth referred to as "religion." For Barth, religion is "the creature's attempt 'to grab hold of the creator.'"[26] All of humanities' attempts to understand God or to make humanity analogous to him are idolatrous. Thus, religion in the negative sense that Barth uses it can take any form, even that of Christianity. Despite this tendency towards idolatry, Barth believed humanity must be religious. It is within this paradoxical distance that the "infinite qualitative difference" of Kierkegaard comes to light. God exists outside of human categories entirely, even negative ones.

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[23] Torrance and Torrance, *Beyond Immanence*, 8-9.
[24] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10.
[25] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 240.
[26] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 69.

The only way to know God is for God to make himself known to humanity. This knowledge can come only indirectly through a medium. If God revealed himself directly, he would be formed into something humanly comprehensible (this was the liberal protestant approach stemming from Schleiermacher and Ritschl).[27] The medium through which humanity knows God is by Jesus's incarnation. The incarnation is the point in which the eschatological Kingdom of God touches the boundary of human history. It touches the boundary but does not enter into history directly. Grace flows only in one direction from God to humanity. Thus, although it remains unhistorical, unintelligible, and paradoxical, humanity is nonetheless "grasped from the other side."[28]

Even though Barth admitted to Kierkegaard's influence and made use of the "infinite qualitative distinction," Barth had reservations about the Danish theologian in the second edition of the Commentary on Romans. Barth remarked that Kierkegaard had a "poison of a too intense pietism."[29] Barth perceived Kierkegaard's work as making Christianity too difficult and drowning out the grace of God. The time between the two editions of the Romans commentaries was the high point of Kierkegaard's influence on Barth. The charge of pietism would remain until Barth's final address on Kierkegaard in 1963. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard had a large influence on Barth's thought, tone, and language, especially in the second edition of the commentary on the Romans.

As a result of Barth's influential commentary on Romans, he was offered a professorship at Göttingen University in Germany in 1921. Barth was appointed without earning a doctorate and felt unprepared to begin teaching on the Reformed tradition. As he studied more intensely the Reformed tradition, Barth moved away from those who influenced his second commentary

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[27] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 249.
[28] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 206-207.
[29] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 276.

on Romans. Between 1921 and 1924, Barth taught on John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Schleiermacher, and the Reformed confessions, notably the Heidelberg catechism.[30] Göttingen presented not only a new body of literature in which to immerse himself, but also challenged Barth with acclimating to the German faculty. Notably among the Göttingen faculty that Barth encountered was Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972). A German nationalist and later member of the Nazi party, Hirsch was appointed to his professorship the same year as Barth. Hirsch's drive and ability as a professor proved to be motivation for Barth, who did not wish to fall behind.

Hirsch is relevant not only as one of Barth's first exposures to Nazism, but also as one of the most influential scholars in Kierkegaard's reception in Germany. Hirsch learned Danish in order to read the complete works of Kierkegaard and to connect with Scandinavians researching Kierkegaard.[31] Between 1930 and 1933, Hirsch published a three volume *Kierkegaard-Studien*. Hirsch believed that the role of interpreter involved appropriating the text into the current situations of the interpreter. Hirsch interpreted Kierkegaard as approving of Nazism, a "leap of faith" required for the German *Volk*. Souring his perspective of Kierkegaard, Barth began to associate Kierkegaard with Hirsch and other German nationalist Lutherans such as Hirsch's teacher Karl Holl (1866-1926).

In the last two years of Barth's time as a professor at Göttingen, 1924-1925, he delivered lectures on Christian dogmatics that have become known as the *Göttingen Dogmatics.* Barth expanded his view of God's self-revelation that he held in the second edition of the commentary on Romans. He began to argue that revelation was no longer a mere point that touches the

[30] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 293-294.

[31] Thompson L. Curtis, "Other Lutheran Theologians Responding Contextually to Kierkegaard," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2015), 227-228.

boundary of human history in the incarnation, but rather was hidden within history.[32] It was accessible through the incarnation of Jesus within history. It is through subjectivity of Jesus that the objective truths of God are revealed. Barth quotes Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postcript*: "the subjective is the objective," which was interpreted to mean that only through the indirect communication of the incarnation can knowledge of God come about.[33] Notably, this is the only significant reference that Barth made about Kierkegaard during the period between the second commentary on Romans and the *Church Dogmatics* (1932).

In 1925, Barth became professor of dogmatics and New Testament exegesis at Münster University. While Göttingen was a bastion of Lutheranism, Münster was dominated by Catholic theologians, with Barth being one of the few Protestant faculty. Barth began to take Catholicism more seriously, saying that he found more in common with it than Liberal Protestants. Erich Przywara (1889-1972), a German-Polish Jesuit, became Barth's main Catholic debate partner. In 1929, Barth invited Przywara to deliver an address at Münster and to help lead his seminar on Thomas Aquinas.[34] Barth wrote of Przywara's brilliance in letters to Thurneysen. Evidently the Jesuit made quite the impression on Barth.

In a lecture delivered a month later entitled "Fate and Idea in Theology," Barth discusses Przywara's concept of the *analogia entis*- analogy of being. The term itself was not coined by Przywara; it dates back to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and has been used by various Thomistic thinkers. However, Barth certainly had Pryzwara's formulation of it in mind whenever he addresses it. Barth defined it as "the dissimilarity and similarity to God which I myself have

[32] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 363.
[33] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 360.
[34] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 383.

as knower and the thing outside me has as the known."[35] There is an analogy between our being as beings and God's being as the creator. Although there is dissimilarity between them, creatures participate in the being of the creator.

If, as Barth interpreted it, God is the creator in whose being all of creation participates, how are we to understand this God? Would it not be better for this God "to be called simply nature?" And if theology had God as its object, would it not be better to call it "demonology"? For Barth, the *analogia entis* leads not to the God of the bible, but merely an ontological creation of the human mind. Barth saw in it the same dangers that he saw in natural theology. If God becomes an object of human understanding, then God is merely a piece in philosophical and political systems, an instance of which Barth saw in the rise of the Nazis in the church in Weimar Germany. It was with this political situation in mind when Barth called the *analogia entis* "the invention of the anti-Christ" in the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* in 1932.[36]

At the same time as Barth began to take Catholicism more seriously, his relationship with other members of the dialectical theology movement began to deteriorate. The Lutheranism of dialectical theologians Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) conflicted with Barth's Reformed perspectives.[37] Barth's relationship with the Swiss Reformed theologian Emil Brunner (1889-1966) continued longer, in large part because Barth approved of Brunner's 1927 work, *The Mediator*. However, the tensions in their relationship reached a boiling point in a pamphlet war in 1934. Brunner published an article entitled "Nature and Grace: A Contribution to the Discussion with Karl Barth." Brunner had more apologetic concerns about

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[35] Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology" in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 33-42.

[36] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), preface xiii.

[37] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 392.

Christianity than Barth. “Nature and Grace” sought to connect theology to culture by developing a natural theology.

Brunner proposed that a point of contact between God and humanity can be found within the idea of the image of God. Humans are made in the image of God in two ways: formal and material. While sin has destroyed the material sense, the formal sense remains intact. Humanity, as formally made in the image of God, has a responsibility to God. If humanity was not receptive to God, they could not be sinners. Thus, sinful humans must be said to know *something* of God’s law, even if it is seen in imperfect ways. Through what Brunner called natural ordinances, such as the state and marriage, humans have an idea of its moral responsibility towards God. The Word of God “cannot reach a man who had lost his consciousness of God entirely.”[38]

Barth responded with an article entitled simply “Nein!”, in which he regarded Brunner’s article as an “alarm signal.”[39] He described Brunner’s project as a return to the compromise that caused the German church to align with the Nazi government. Barth defined natural theology as every attempt at a system that interprets revelation outside of revelation in Jesus Christ. Thus, Brunner’s position was one that proposed an “other” task of theology, that of returning to natural theology. Barth’s response was politically charged. He asked rhetorically if perhaps “the poor ‘German Christians’ may have been treated most unfairly” for their use of natural theology. Barth rejected Brunner’s desire for apologetic theology. To propose another task of theology outside of understanding the Word of God is to step outside of truth.

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[38] Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 23-25, 32.

[39] Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 69-75, 84.

5. Transcendence in *Church Dogmatics*

Barth found himself in the midst of the collapse of the Weimar Republic when he began teaching at the university of Bonn in 1930. He taught there only four years before was being dismissed in 1934 for not declaring loyalty to Adolf Hitler. One of the first seminars Barth offered at Bonn was one on St. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm captured Barth's attention during his time at Bonn, leading him to write a book on Anselm's *Proslogion* entitled *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* in 1931. There is debate about the significance of this book in Barth's work as a whole. Some, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, find in it a definitive turn to the use of analogy that began his work on *Church Dogmatics* in 1932.[40] Others, notably Bruce L. McCormack find it to be merely a continuation of Barth's method that he began in the 1920s.[41] Whether it was from his study of Anselm or the continuation of his previous method, Barth decided to begin writing his *Church Dogmatics.*

The second volume to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (volume two part one) was published in 1940. The first volume had dealt with the prolegomena to dogmatics and with revelation. In the second volume, Barth then moved on to the object of revelation, specifically the knowledge of God. This volume represents Barth's most mature explication of divine knowledge. In the wake of the First World War, the second commentary on Romans in 1921 communicated pessimism about humanity's ability to truly know God. Now, at the outbreak of World War II, Barth spoke clearly and definitively: humans may have true knowledge of God. Against any human attempts to know God (be it natural theology, Liberal Protestantism, or the *analogia entis*), Barth affirmed that the Church knows God through his self-revealing.

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[40] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 137-138.
[41] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* 441.

In the first section of *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Barth began, not with the possibility of the knowledge of God, but with its reality. If the knowledge of God were not a reality within the church, then the life of the church would be merely a "semblance."[42] It is only once knowledge of God is established that its possibility can be realized. Humanity's "total positive relationship" to God is faith, the resounding "Yes!" that humanity says to God giving himself to humans as an object to be known. God, as an object of knowledge, is shown indirectly to humanity. God reveals himself through his activity as that "which is different from God." Faith is content with this indirect communication. It is because knowledge of God is grounded in the activity of God that one cannot begin with the possibility of knowledge of God, but its reality. To say that we can know God is to say that we already know God as active. God "is and remains the One whom we know only because He gives Himself to be known."[43]

Now that faith has affirmed and given its obedient affirmation to God's activity, it is possible to inquire about the possibility of the knowledge of God. The Church can only take a "backward look" at this possibility because to do otherwise would be to derive knowledge of God from "an untheological type of thinking…which derives from some other source than gratitude and obedience." Barth began the first section with the readiness of God for the possibility of human knowledge of God. God makes it possible to be known to us through his activity. This possibility lies solely in God's own possibility of making himself knowable. Any readiness on the side of humanity "can have only a borrowed, mediated, and subsequent independence."[44]

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[42] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 4, 17.
[43] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 41.
[44] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 63-67.

There is no possibility, Barth affirmed, for knowledge of God outside of this free choice by God to make himself knowable. Barth claimed that "we possess no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord can be accessible to us."[45] Our concepts of God that we may use to speak of him, such as "Lord," can point only to our human attempts to understand God. They point not to God, but to humanity. Nor can there be any analogy found in nature that makes God's essence knowable to us. Barth made his critique of natural theology in response to the Catholic *analogia entis.* If we begin theology with the being of humanity, theology arrives at knowledge of God as only a creator or a first cause. But Barth claimed that this leads to a division in the knowledge of God. For God is known not only as creator, but also as "God the Reconciler and Redeemer." The Catholic doctrine, according to Barth, is one that abstracts God away from his activity in grace towards us. To ground knowledge of God in an analogy within nature is to attempt to know God outside of his self-revealing and, therefore, becomes an idol.

The *analogia entis,* however, was not entirely written off by Barth. Gottlieb Söhngen, a German Catholic theologian also developing a doctrine of an *analogia entis,* wrote two essays to which Barth responded. Söhngen wrote that any *analogia entis* must come after an *analogia fidei*- an analogy of faith. It is only after God's activity of revealing himself as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer that God's being is known to us. To Söhngen's formulation of the *analogia entis,* Barth said that "if this is the Roman Catholic doctrine of *analogia entis,* then naturally I must withdraw my earlier statement that I regard the *analogia entis* as 'the invention of anti-Christ.'"[46] But Barth does not take this as the authentically Catholic formulation. Barth

[45] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 75-79.
[46] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 82.

perceived Söhngen's *analogia entis* as being on the fringe within Catholic doctrine, and therefore still rejected any notion of an *analogia entis.*

The second section deals with the readiness of humanity for the possibility for the knowledge of God. For if there is no "corresponding readiness of man, there can be no knowability of God."[47] The openness of humanity to God's grace is threefold: first, humans are open to God's grace, second, "there belongs to this openness a definite knowledge," third humans are willing to accept this grace. But this openness is still not readiness, it is equally "accompanied by man's complete closedness against the readiness of God." Humans in their openness nevertheless are permanently in a state of denying their need and living in disobedience. Therefore, Barth concludes that human openness "has brought us no nearer to the real readiness of man to know God." Natural theology represents a human attempt to reach up towards knowledge of God independent of God's self-revealing. Any such attempt is a "new expression (borrowed or even stolen) for the revelation which encounters man in his own reflection." To find humanity's readiness independent of God's grace is to do theology with knowledge of human self-reflection as its object and not the knowledge of God.

How, then, is it possible for humanity to have knowledge of God? The answer cannot begin with anthropology but with Christology.[48] The readiness of humanity that lies within the readiness of God (and therefore is independent of man) is Jesus Christ. The main emphasis here is that God has become human. God is knowable to himself and has made humanity in Jesus Christ known to himself. Christ took upon himself our enmity to divine grace and accepted God's grace on our behalf. Christ was obedient in the place of our disobedience. Thus,

[47] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 65, 129-139.
[48] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 148-158.

humanity's resistance to their need for grace is rendered null. Humans are no longer outside where God is unknowable but is within Jesus Christ where God is knowable to himself.

The only question that remained for Barth to answer was: how does this participation take place? How is humanity inside God's self-knowledge with Christ? The simple answer "by faith" is true, but not the complete truth. The answer cannot begin with a person's believing in faith but with Jesus Christ as the object of faith. As the object of faith, Christ eternally and effectually represents us. The church does not "appropriate" Christ, but rather he makes it available to us, we are brought up into it. The work of the Holy Spirit is the "temporal presence" of this eternal representation. Through the Holy Spirit humans are enabled to live the life of faith.

The last section of the chapter concerns the limits of the knowledge of God. Beginning again on the side of God, Barth began with the hiddenness of God. The knowledge of God is the event of God making himself known. Thus, the limits of the knowledge of God are the beginning and end of that event. The origin of the knowledge of God must be real and certain knowledge of God. Just as to ask about the possibility of knowledge of God must presuppose a Church that knows the reality of God, the beginning of the event is already the reality of the event. Here, Barth revealed the influence of Kantian epistemology. As humans know God, they understand and cognize him through the same mental faculties as everything else.[49] It is not a separate kind of knowledge. The fact that humans can speak of God shows that their concepts correspond to their object, namely God. If it were not so, humanity could not be said to know God.

Barth claimed that because of human understanding, there is a hiddenness of God. In our cognition of God "there stand the hiddenness of God, in which He is far from us and foreign to us except as He has of Himself ordained… [knowledge of God] does not happen in the

[49] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 181.

actualizing of our capacity, but in the miracle of His good-pleasure."[50] Our understanding grasps not God as such but "a reality distinct from God." This was Barth's final critique of natural theology. We cannot understand God in our own capacities. God "is not a being that we can spiritually appropriate" as we please into our systems of knowledge. We can only say that "God can be known only by God." In faith, knowledge of God begins with the hiddenness of God.

The hiddenness of God, as the beginning of knowledge of God, is *real* knowledge of God. While the Church affirms God's hiddenness, it nevertheless must begin the task of speaking about God as he has revealed himself in his hiddenness. Any word spoken about God- whether scientific, theological, or biblical- cannot correspond to its object. Rather, God gives us terms that he reveals in the event. The nature of the event is that "He makes Himself apprehensible to those who cannot apprehend Him of themselves."[51] God has done so in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God is made apprehensible indirectly. Therefore, the Church would be unfaithful if it fell into a skepticism and hesitation towards the knowledge of God. Rather, the Church must continually attempt to speak, correcting itself at every point against idolizing God into human categories.

The opposite limit of the knowledge of God is its end and goal. Barth described the limit as on a circular course: it begins and ends with the knowledge of God. In self-revelation God gave himself to be known, and now humanity, in faith, finds it true. By grace our words are words are adopted and we are permitted to make use of them.[52] Our concepts that we use to speak of God are partially analogous. Words used to speak of God may be true and not merely metaphors that attempt to correspond to God- only "as ifs" about God. However, we can have no claim over God, making Him an object for us. Our concepts, failing in-themselves, are claimed

[50] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 182-188.
[51] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 196-203.
[52] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 223-236.

by God. Though we use words improperly, God restores them to Himself as creator of all the concepts at our disposal. Thus, Barth rejected any simple analogy between human concepts and God. Rather, the analogy between them is an analogy of grace. God is gracious in his affirmation in the truth of our words, and "gracious in His No of judgement upon our work."

The mature exposition of the knowledge of God in the *Church Dogmatics* stands in stark contrast to the commentary of Romans. Whereas the early Barth spoke pessimistically about the possibility of the knowledge of God, *Church Dogmatics* emphasized that Christians have already obtained it. What remains of Kierkegaard's influence on Barth's work? While Barth spoke of Kierkegaard positively in his second preface in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, the second volume of *Church Dogmatics* is profoundly silent with regard to him. One can still hear the echoes of Kierkegaard in Barth's work. For instance, Barth spoke of God's indirect communication through Christ.[53] But importantly there are no explicit references to Kierkegaard in the second volume of *Church Dogmatics*. In fact, in the entirety of the *Church Dogmatics* one can find very few references to Kierkegaard. One of the only significant discussions of Kierkegaard's work is in volume four book two, where Barth is critical of the Dane's *Works of Love* (1847).

6. Barth's Copenhagen Address

It was not until Barth was invited to Copenhagen in 1963 to speak after receiving the Sonning Prize from the University of Copenhagen that he significantly addressed Kierkegaard again. Barth thought there was no better time to explain his relationship to Kierkegaard than in the Dane's hometown. After acknowledging the influence of Kierkegaard on his commentary on

[53] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 199.

the Epistle to the Romans, Barth explained why he distanced himself from Kierkegaard. First, Kierkegaard's work presents Christianity as a difficult labor that causes one to be "sour, gloomy, and sad." Secondly, Barth charges Kierkegaard with being individualistic. Lastly, Kierkegaard was "bound more closely to the nineteenth century than we at that time wanted to believe." [54]

Barth's first charge is that Kierkegaard's theology is one that causes bitterness. It makes it easy for Christians to get caught up in "the wheels of a law." The training required by Kierkegaard to be truly "Christian" is deadening and depressing. Was it permissible, Barth asked, to bring such theology into his *Commentary on Romans*? If the purpose of Barth's theological project was "to proclaim and to interpret the Gospel of God and thus the Gospel of his free grace," what space was there for such a pessimistic theology as Kierkegaard's?

Secondly, Kierkegaard seemed to center everything in the individual. Completely missing from Kierkegaard's work was any teaching on the church. Rather, Kierkegaard spoke of a "holy individualism." Barth found it strange that "we who were just coming from an intense preoccupation with the relation of Christianity to the social question did not immediately become suspicious." Kierkegaard's individualism created a silence on the church's role in political and social issues that plagued theologians in Barth's time.

Lastly, Barth found in Kierkegaard's theology a "new anthropocentric system." Kierkegaard's was an "experiment with subjectivity" which regarded the subject as truth. Faith became grounded in the subject and without any object. Thus, for Barth it was no wonder that existentialist philosophers in the twentieth century were able to grow out of Kierkegaard's work. This existentialism spread into theology to those who, according to Barth, had not taken the

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[54] Karl Barth, "A Thank You and a Bow," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11, no. 1 (1965), 3-7.

criticisms of Schleiermacher seriously. In the early 1920s, Barth had not realized that "Kierkegaard was bound more closely to the nineteenth century than we at that time wanted to believe." Theology could not use Kierkegaard to attack anthropocentric theology, because Kierkegaard himself had reinforced "man-centered Christianity."

These were the reasons Barth gave for distancing himself from Kierkegaard over the course of his work. Early assessors of Barth relationship to Kierkegaard included Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and Eberhard Jüngel (1934-2021). These authors represent an approach to the Kierkegaard-Barth relationship that takes Barth at his word.[55] This is largely due to Von Balthasar's claim that there is a decisive break between Barth's early "dialectical" period and his later "analogical" period. This framework was supported by Barth himself. Thus, Barth's movement away from Kierkegaard is a logical result of his move away from dialectical forms of theology.

A dissenting view was put forth by Alastair McKinnon in 1967, four years after Barth's address. The article was entitled "Barth's Relation to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light." McKinnon argued that given the problem of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship, we must distinguish between three different Kierkegaards: the pseudonyms, the real Kierkegaard, and "the phantom Kierkegaard."[56] McKinnon calls the phantom Kierkegaard "the product of his critics." Early critics of Kierkegaard regarded the pseudonym Johannes Climacus as an irrationalist. Thus, the early Barth, who emphasized the dialectical and logical contradiction of the incarnation, would have been much closer to the phantom Kierkegaard. However, the more

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[55] Lee C. Barrett, "The Dialectic of Attraction and Repulsion," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: German Protestant Theology* vol. 10, tome 1 (London: Routledge, 2012), 19-20.

[56] Alistair McKinnon, 32.

mature Barth of *Church Dogmatics* was concerned with real knowledge of God and thus rejected the phantom Kierkegaard.

Bruce L. McCormack's 1995 book *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* allowed for further insights into the relationship between Barth and Kierkegaard. In contrast to Von Balthasar, McCormack finds Barth's authorship as continuous, with no distinct dialectical and analogical periods.[57] This new understanding of Barth's authorship raised new questions for the Kierkegaard-Barth relationship. Using these new developments, Philip G. Ziegler revisited the relationship in his 2007 paper "Barth's Criticisms of Kierkegaard- A Striking out at Phantoms?" Given McCormack's work, we are able to discern more clearly how Barth encountered Kierkegaard. A major influence on Barth was his fellow faculty member at Göttingen University and Kierkegaard scholar Emmanuel Hirsch.[58] Hirsch and Barth had multiple exchanges over Kierkegaard. Ziegler finds that Hirsch to be a large part of the influence of the phantom Kierkegaard that Barth responded to.

In light of this understanding of Barth's reception of Kierkegaard, Ziegler investigated if Barth's three critiques in the Copenhagen address applied to the "real" Kierkegaard. Ziegler found Barth's first critique, that Kierkegaard makes Christianity "bitter," one difficult to retort. However, one must put Kierkegaard's work into the context of his project and nineteenth century Denmark. Kierkegaard is focused on emphasizing the difficulty of Christianity to a culture that finds itself Christian because it was baptized in the Lutheran church. Thus, Kierkegaard's emphasis of the "narrow way" is not to diminish the work of God's grace, but rather to pay

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[57] McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 1-28.

[58] Phillip G. Ziegler, "Barth's Criticisms of Kierkegaard," *International Journal of Systematic Theology,* vol. 9, no. 4 (2007), 436-437.

attention to what the Christian is called to- something that Kierkegaard found lacking in the Christian culture around him.[59]

The second of Barth's critiques, that Kierkegaard ignores the social aspects of Christianity, Ziegler admits, "can only be very partially met."[60] The church often faces critique from Kierkegaard as a community which makes people believe that their religious sophistry is faith. But Kierkegaard does praise the church when "true Christianity" can be found there. Kierkegaard, according to Ziegler, talks about what may become the church, analogous to how he may speak about becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard "may heighten the individual hunger for the communion of the saints, but neither can nor will sate it."

Ziegler addresses Barth's third critique, that Kierkegaard developed "a new anthropocentric system," with a reading of Kierkegaard's posthumously published *The Book on Adler*. Magister Adler was a contemporary of Kierkegaard that claimed to have private revelations from God. Kierkegaard argued that Adler had "confused the subjective with the objective."[61] Adler mistook Christian revelation as being analogous to an inwardness like love, where one may love another purely inwardly, without any reciprocation. External revelation precedes anyone becoming Christian. Christ's revelation has already revealed himself prior to anyone becoming aware of this revelation. Thus, Ziegler finds Kierkegaard would equally disagree with any Christianity that is "founded in and moved by itself and thus groundless and without object."

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[59] Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 15, 24-25.

[60] Ziegler, "Barth's Criticisms of Kierkegaard," 448-451.

[61] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 117.

Ziegler's article showed that Barth's understanding of Kierkegaard is, at the very least, a narrow one. Barth's encounter with Kierkegaard was in many cases mediated by other interpretations and did not encompass Kierkegaard's broader corpus. Ziegler concludes that Barth has much more in common with Kierkegaard than he is willing to admit. For Ziegler, Kierkegaard and Barth ultimately agree on the transcendence of God despite Barth's own evaluation of his work. Contrary to Ziegler's reading, some scholars, notably George Pattison, find that even though Barth misunderstood Kierkegaard's work, Kierkegaard and Barth differ in their views of the transcendence of God.

7. George Pattison's Interpretation of Kierkegaard

George Pattison's 2012 book *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* best represents the view that Kierkegaard and Barth disagree on the point of transcendence. This work provides an excellent study into the context of Kierkegaard's theological development. Pattison examines Kierkegaard's notes on Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* during a tutorial with Hans Lassen Martensen. Through these studies of Kierkegaard's early encounters with Schleiermacher and his early theological development, Pattison finds that Kierkegaard's views about the relationship between God and humanity "bears an essentially Schleiermacherian shape."[62] Part of this influence from Schleiermacher is an emphasis of the dependence of human consciousness on God. Pattison concludes that, for Kierkegaard, this structure of human consciousness is where revelation is necessary, in direct disagreement with Barth.

The fourth chapter of Pattison's *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* addresses immanence and transcendence in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, primarily

[62] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century,* 7.

Philosophical Fragments and *The Concept of Anxiety*. The opening three chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* are commonly read as showcasing Kierkegaard's views transcendence and critique of immanence. Pattison, however, finds Kierkegaard's position considerably more nuanced than many make it out to be. Building off Kierkegaard's early theological work, Pattison claims that Kierkegaard's transcendence is interwoven with his doctrines of creation and sin, influenced strongly by Schleiermacher.[63]

Philosophical Fragments was written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, the "humorist" who is not yet Christian. It begins with a thought experiment proposed to the reader: "can truth be learned?"[64] Climacus proposes a "Socratic" view in which all knowledge is a recollection. In a sense, every human already possesses the truth, they need only shed their ignorance. Climacus, then, proposes a second view contrary to the Socratic. For this view, one must have a decisive moment of learning the truth, they cannot even know beforehand that they do not yet know it. A teacher is necessary to bring the truth and "provide the condition for understanding it." The teacher shows that they are untruth. But only a god could provide the condition, to reform the learner to a state capable of receiving the truth. Thus, God must have given the learner the condition, only for them to have lost it. Climacus calls this state of losing the condition sin.

This teacher, God, then, may indeed be called a savior or deliverer, and the student becomes something else, a new person. We may even call this process rebirth, which follows from repentance. But who is to think of such an argument? Climacus says certainly not the unborn, for they do not have the condition for knowing it. In his conclusion to chapter one,

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[63] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 81.

[64] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 9-20.

Climacus addresses how the reader might respond. “Everyone has already heard this,” they might say. But if Climacus is not the author of this project, then who is? Anyone is equally close to having invented it, according to Climacus. The reader is angry because it was not invented by any human at all.

Chapter two of Climacus takes a turn away from a thought project to a poetical one. Socrates found himself as a teacher in a “reciprocal relation” to those he taught.[65] He is fulfilled as a teacher by his teaching. God, in contrast, stands in no such reciprocal relationship. God does not require a student in order to be a teacher. Why then did he reveal himself? Because of love, which “does not have the satisfaction of need outside itself but within.”[66] How might God go about loving those not equal to him? Climacus gives an analogy to “awaken the mind.” Imagine a king who has fallen in love with a maiden. If he simply makes her queen, then love cannot bloom. She would feel as if she owed a debt to the king. Nor could he go to her in his kingly glory, for she would not see the man beneath and there could be no love.

Rather Climacus proposes that the king must descend from his throne and become the lowest in the kingdom- a servant. He must not simply disguise himself but go through all the hardships that would entail. There God stands, “and yet he has no place where he can lay his head.” This is the poet’s account. The learner is always close to misunderstanding the teacher as a servant. Once again, the interlocutor finds it “the shabbiest plagiarism ever.” But Climacus again admits that the poem is, of course, not his. Perhaps this story, too, is dependent on the revelation from God. For how could a human ever imagine that “the blessed god could need him?”

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[65] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, 23.
[66] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, 24-36.

In chapter three, Climacus discussing what he terms "the paradox." Socrates, who tried his best to understand what humanity was, admittedly did not understand himself.[67] The paradox of thought is "to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think." Climacus proposes, for his proposition, that we assume that we know what a human is. Reason butts against what it does not know, the unknown. Let us call this unknown "the god." If it does not exist, we obviously cannot prove it. If it does exist, it is pointless to try and prove it, because it would then be the basis, because it would be presupposed as not doubted. The god is absolutely different from us.[68] To even know the difference between humanity and the god, the god would had to make this difference known. And what else is this difference but sin? Thus, humanity runs into the paradox and being absolutely different from this god and simultaneously wanting to negate this difference.

Philosophical Fragments opens with these three anthropological, poetic, and metaphysical/speculative exercises. All three are ironic in that they lead to what Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries already knew: Christianity. The *Fragments* then is an ironical critique of arriving at Christianity through speculation or Romanticism. The works of the pseudonym Johannes Climacus is cited by many as where Kierkegaard agreeing with Barth, emphasizing the idea that God must "provide a condition" for humanity to know him.

Murray Rae claims that the *Philosophical Fragments* anticipates Barth.[69] For Rae, Climacus is undermining even an apophatic theology. Negative theology still understands the difference between God and humanity. Climacus is proposing the theological question of how

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[67] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, 37-39.
[68] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, 46-47.
[69] Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60-61.

anything is to be said about a God who is transcendent. A transcendent God would have to first reveal himself in order for humanity to be able to speak about him. Rae finds connections in this thought experiment to the dialectical theologians in the early twentieth century. Whereas Bultmann "finally returns to the Socratic," Barth "resembles the alternative proposed by Climacus."

Contrary to this reading, Pattison argues that the first three chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* lead us to existentialist theologians like Bultmann or Karl Rahner rather than Barth. For Climacus, human consciousness is structurally self-transcending. It orients itself towards what Climacus called "the unknown" and "the god." It seeks out the radically other. Thus, even if knowledge of God is not immanent to reason, human thinking is "fundamentally oriented towards the truth that only the God can reveal."[70] Thus, there exists a point of contact in the structures of human consciousness. humanity is in some way independent of God prepared for revelation. This stands in opposition to Barth's absolute denial of any point of contact.

Pattison finds this self-transcendent structure of human consciousness not only in the works under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Pattison argues that Kierkegaard's 1844 work *The Concept of Anxiety,* written under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, also holds to this structure of human consciousness. Haufniensis investigates how a psychological investigation into hereditary sin may be useful for dogmatics. Sin, as a dogmatic concept, lies outside of the limits of psychology. Rather, psychology investigates anxiety, the condition that makes sin possible. Anxiety is a state of projecting oneself onto one's possibilities in freedom. It has no proper object because its object is nothing itself. For Pattison, Haufniensis thinks anxiety can

[70] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 89.

lead not only to sin, but to salvation.[71] Similar to Climacus's account then, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis holds a view of human consciousness as self-transcending, constantly reaching towards its possibilities and that which is other in anxiety.

Through a discussion of Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses* published just before *Philosophical Fragments,* Pattison clarifies Kierkegaard's point of contact between God and humanity. Published under his own name, Kierkegaard's discourse discussed the biblical saying that "every good and perfect gift is from above." It is not simply that God knows how to give good gifts, but that he *has given* good gifts.[72] Not only has he given good gifts, but he is giving and will continue to give good gifts. God does so because he is the source of the good. In fact, God *is* the good and therefore desire for the good is in the end desire for a God relationship. The impulse towards the good, towards a God relationship, is exactly God's good gift to us.[73] Pattison claims that this impulse, the condition of the God relationship, "is already present in creation and that the rebirth out of nothing in redemption is the repetition…of the creation out of nothing 'in the beginning.'" The gift, then, that Kierkegaard is describing is not a moment, but a continual renewal of the gift that God has already given. Thus, "the good" for Pattison represent a point of contact in which one realizes the "awakening of a more radical question concerning God."

Climacus's view of coming to know God in the *Fragments* presupposes the theology of creation in Kierkegaard's discourse. The rebirth that Climacus describes is dependent on a return to an original structure of our beings dependent upon God. But a theology of creation is

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[71] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century,* 91.

[72] Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 133.

[73] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century,* 97-99.

difference than a natural theology, which implies claims that are universally evident to those even outside of Christianity. The possibility of a God relationship in the good gift is not something that can be known "by those who are unconcerned as to whether the gifts of being, consciousness, and volition are for their ultimate good or not." Thus, the ability to accept the implicit call to a faithful God relationship implies openness to the content of Kierkegaard's discourse, that God is the giver of every good gift.

One important aspect about Climacus to consider is that the pseudonym is written from the perspective of one who understands Christianity but does not believe in it. Climacus cannot decide if it is true or false.[74] Thus, Climacus is not writing from the perspective of Christianity as transcendent religion. In Kierkegaard's existential modes of living, Climacus in not in the "religiousness B" sphere. Climacus cannot make "the leap" to the paradoxical. He is in the position of the humorist, who has knowledge of God but cannot act in the world because for him all is in eternity.[75]

Kierkegaard's evaluation of his own writing adds to the hermeneutical difficulty of finding the "real" Kierkegaard in the pseudonymous works. The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) by Johannes Climacus is the culmination of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. In the conclusion to the *Postscript*, Climacus states that the entire book was "superfluous" and not to be taken seriously.[76] Is this merely the final joke of a humorist, who finds that nothing matters besides the eternal? Is Kierkegaard himself talking behind a mask of the humorist, the disguise of paradoxical religiousness?[77] In an interlude after the conclusion,

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[74] C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanity Books, 1999), 21.

[75] Evans, 202-204.

[76] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 618.

[77] Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and* Postscript, 202-205.

Kierkegaard, under his own name, revealed that he is the author of all the pseudonymous works.[78] He asked that anyone referencing his work quote the pseudonym and not himself, because he cannot be regarded as the author. In all the pseudonymous works "there is not a single word by me."

This ambiguity tempts us to consider the second authorship, the works after *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as more normative than the pseudonymous authorship. This hermeneutical approach seems reasonable given Kierkegaard's own evaluation of the pseudonyms and their non-Christian perspective. While the second authorship may be more explicitly Christian, the first cannot be written off as disconnected from the "real" Kierkegaard. Within the pseudonymous authorship, Kierkegaard does write from his own perspectives in his *Upbuilding Discourses* published throughout his authorship. Pattison's work shows that Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, read in conjunction with his *Discourses,* can shed light on Kierkegaard's religious beliefs.

Pattison, in his book *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses,* examines the *Upbuilding Discourses* that Kierkegaard published under his own name, often on the same day as his pseudonymous works.[79] The *Discourses* show an early religious concern that often parallels or compliments the pseudonymous works. Pattison implements this into his approach to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. Recall the way in which the discourse on "every good and perfect gift" compliments Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments.* The hermeneutic with which Pattison approaches Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works prevents any clean divide between Christian and non-Christian works.

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[78] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 625-630.

[79] George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

8. Agreement Between Kierkegaard and Barth on Transcendence

Pattison's account of the point of contact is compelling. He shows an understanding and familiarity with Kierkegaard's work as a whole that is difficult to find. In *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century,* Pattison is not very concerned with whether Barth agrees or disagrees with Kierkegaard's view of transcendence. Rather, Pattison's statements are often about which twentieth century theologian Kierkegaard can be described as closest too. Whether it is more adequate to describe Kierkegaard as closer to Bultmann than Barth is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, given Pattison's reading of Kierkegaard, I am investigating whether Kierkegaard would disagree with Barth on transcendence.

If Kierkegaard, through his pseudonyms, believes that human consciousness is structurally self-transcending, does this mean that he disagrees with Barth? At first glance it seems yes. Barth repeatedly throughout his work denies any possibility of knowing God independent of God making himself knowable. Certainly, at the time Barth wrote his *No!* to Emil Brunner, he was unwilling to entertain such a notion. But Barth's hostility to any notion of natural theology was just as political as it was theological. Barth was concerned about natural theology as he saw its use to support the ideologies of German Christians and the Nazis. After World War II, when the political threat of the Nazis was over, Barth himself wrote a natural theology in *Church Dogmatics* volume four.[80] In a letter to Emil Brunner near the end of his life in 1966, Barth writes that "the time when I thought I should say No to him is long since past."[81] I argue that after the political threats subsided, Barth is willing to accept a self-transcending consciousness.

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[80] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* VI/3.1, 38-165.

[81] Karl Barth, *Karl Barth Letters: 1961-1968* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), letter #207.

In *Church Dogmatics* volume three, Barth's discusses existentialist Christian's work, specifically regarding their anthropology. For Barth, philosophical examination of what he terms "the phenomena of the human" can never lead to real knowledge of humanity. From the standpoint of dogmatics, this endeavor "must be regarded as a vicious circle in which we can never attain to real man."[82] This is not to say that psychological or phenomenological attempts to understand human consciousness is fruitless or unproductive. Emblematic of such an approach is the German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers.[83] One reason Jaspers catches the attention of Barth is because his philosophy parallels many concerns of theology. In describing existential philosophy, it is to Jaspers existential philosophy that Barth is primarily referring to.

Jaspers' examination of the phenomena of the human claimed that human consciousness is always in the act of self-transcendence.[84] Only in this way does humanity exist concretely. Human existence exists in relation to this other which transcends. Consciousness continually runs up against and questions this other that it encounters. This other must be a subject because as a transcendent other it cannot be an object for us. The answers to our questions of thus other leave us only with an unthinkable and inexpressible origin of being.

Barth is critical of Jaspers' philosophy because this other that consciousness encounters at the limits of reason is devoid of any content. As an investigation into human phenomena, Barth can affirm Jaspers' work. However, Barth would exclude any attempt to ground knowledge of God in such a system. The door that self-transcendence find is "nowhere

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[82] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 75.
[83] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 113.
[84] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 110-114.

revealed…to be an open door."[85] In showing the limits of human reason, human consciousness can only find that the source of knowledge of God lies outside itself.

While Bart affirms a self-transcendent structure of consciousness, he nonetheless disagrees that it constitutes a point of contact between humanity and God. Human consciousness might reach out towards what is other to it, but this does not make humanity ready to have knowledge of God. It is liking reaching out to hold something without hands to grab it. I may reach for it, but that does not mean I could ever hold it. Climacus, however, speaks of human consciousness finding this other as "the god." Pattison claims that, for Climacus, revelation in some way fits into the structure of human consciousness. Does Climacus find a point of contact outside God's making himself known?

In his discussion of Kierkegaard's point of contact within the impulse towards good, Pattison remarks that Kierkegaard's view has something in common with the Catholic *analogia entis*. But whereas the *analogia entis* of Thomas Aquinas focuses on the ontological determination of humanity, Kierkegaard describes it in terms of our dependence on God that becomes actualized in concern for the good. Thus, the analogy is rooted, not in creation, but in humanity's temporal dependence on God. Humanity is still fundamentally dependent on being addressed from outside of human possibilities.[86]

The point of contact does not come from creation but by God's continual maintaining of creation through His giving good gifts. The possibility of redemption is "nothing other than the condition by which creation is maintained in being." Thus, rather than the condition for salvation being inherent in creation, it is dependent upon God continual giving of the condition. The point

[85] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 120-122.
[86] Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 100.

of contact in the impulse for the good is preceded by God's grace in giving this impulse. Even if Kierkegaard goes against what Pattison refers to as "radical Augustinianism" and affirms a point of contact, it is still nested within God's gracious giving of the condition to be awaken to a God relationship.

In his disagreement with Erich Przywara, Barth found problematic what he saw as a disordering of grace and creation. For Barth, God's divine covenant towards humanity precedes creation.[87] On this point Barth finds agreement with Gottlieb Söhngen, who claimed an *analogia entis* can come only after an *analogia fidei.* Similarly, Kierkegaard's point of contact lies within God's giving of the condition (the impulse for the good) and is still dependent upon the external revelation that God is the origin and end of this good.

In later works, Kierkegaard speaks more to the role Christ plays in the relationship between God and humanity. *Practice in Christianity* (1850) contains some of Kierkegaard's most influential theological ideas: offense and the infinite qualitative distinction. Here, Kierkegaard speaks of knowledge of God as fundamentally Christocentric. Christ, as fully God and fully human, is the object of faith. If faith is placed in any other object, then that God cannot said to be the true God. Indeed, Christ *is* the truth.[88] For Kierkegaard, knowledge of God is in faith through Christ.

Given his ordering of creation and grace, I conclude that Kierkegaard's position is not in disagreement with Barth. However, it is difficult to say to what extent Barth would affirm this himself. The Barth that wrote *No!* to Brunner would perhaps reject, not wanting to cede any ground to what he viewed as a dangerous possibility for theological justification of Nazi

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[87] See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1.

[88] Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 137-138, 142-143, 206.

ideologies. Later in his life, however, Barth affirmed what he called "secular parables of the kingdom." These lights in the world reflect the revelation of Christ but are not separate from God's self-revealing in Christ.[89] The good can be affirmed as a good gift apart insofar as it still proceeds from God's grace in Christ.

9. Torrance and Torrance's interpretation of Kierkegaard and Barth

The hermeneutical problems regarding Kierkegaard's authorship make it treacherous to say that Barth and Kierkegaard clearly agree on God's transcendence. The nature of Kierkegaard's work avoids any dogmatic claims about what the "real" Kierkegaard believed. Evidence can be found for both agreement and disagreement between the two authors. Nevertheless, many theologians still argue that Barth is the rightful theological descendent of Kierkegaard. Andrew B. Torrance, in his article "Beyond Existentialism: Kierkegaard on the Human Relationship with the God Who is Wholly Other," argues that Barth's ultimate rejection of Kierkegaard lies in Barth's hermeneutical errors. These errors stemmed from Emmanuel Hirsch, who disregarded Kierkegaard's religious turn after the *Postscripts.* Had Barth not been led astray by Hirsch's misreading, he would have greater appreciated Kierkegaard's later concern with putting "the God revealed in Christ at the centre of the Christian faith."[90]

Torrance's claim that Kierkegaard's later authorship makes the infinite qualitative distinction more prominent is developed in response to Pattison's book *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century.* Torrance admits that there is much to be said for Pattison's argument that Kierkegaard does not deny a point of contact as Barth does. But these are

[89] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.1 114-115, 133

[90] Andrew B. Torrance "Beyond Existentialism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology,* vol. 16, no. 3 (2014), 299.

contrasted with the dimension of Kierkegaard in the second authorship that stresses the infinite qualitative distinction established in Christ. Torrance's hermeneutic favoring the second authorship is productive for examining Kierkegaard's views from within Christianity. Kierkegaard's later work shows the place of Christ's atonement in the reconciliation and how the life of faith is in and through Christ.[91].

Torrance's argument sheds light upon an essential element that Kierkegaard and Barth agree on. For both authors, God remains wholly other from humanity even after atonement. Reconciliation is mediated through Christ. Humanity does not gain an independent knowledge of God outside of this mediation. However, Torrance does not adequately address the ways in which Kierkegaard's early works appeal to a point of contact between God and humanity in the good. Torrance interprets Kierkegaard's emphasis on the infinite qualitative distinction in his later works as more normative than Kierkegaard's earlier works.

This hermeneutical move comes at the cost of writing off the first authorship as somehow less religious than the second. Pattison's work in *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* is precisely to situate Kierkegaard's early work as religious. The dynamics between Kierkegaard's *Discourses* and the pseudonymous works that Pattison shows rules out any simple favoring of the second authorship as more authoritatively religious. The second authorship cannot be said to represent the "real" Kierkegaard better than the pseudonymous without justification for such a claim. Torrance shows elements of the second authorship that support his appeal to a Barthian Kierkegaard without supporting the claim that the second authorship is more normative than the first.

[91] Torrance, "Beyond Existentialism," 300-303

These hermeneutical difficulties underly Andrew B. Torrance and Alan J. Torrance's book *Beyond Immanence: The Theological Vision of Kierkegaard and Barth.* The aim of *Beyond Immanence* is to examine the "shared theological vision" of Kierkegaard and Barth. Emphasis is given to the ideas that "Barth developed (directly or indirectly) under the influence of Kierkegaard." Torrance and Torrance find within the "Kierkegaard-Barth Trajectory" a radical otherness of God mediated only by Christ. Through the incarnation, Christ mediates not only true knowledge of God, but also "what it means to be human in truth." The Kierkegaard-Barth Trajectory is important because "the challenges they confronted are the very same ones that the church must once again confront today."[92]

Torrance and Torrance believe Kierkegaard-Barth Trajectory has direct socio-economic implications. They argue that this trajectory enables theology to "challenge the religious constructions and projections of our culture." Barth's belief in the complete otherness of God was what formed the basis for the Barmen Declaration against the pro-Nazi German Church. Similarly for Kierkegaard, following Christ leads to challenging the cultural status quo. Torrance and Torrance argue that the trajectory that they set challenges the "theological immanentism" that subverts Christianity to support the cultural status quo.[93]

Beyond Immanence operates with the same hermeneutical approach to Kierkegaard as Andrew B. Torrance's article "Beyond Existentialism." The authors focus on the elements of Barth's theology influenced by Kierkegaard. The result is that the "Kierkegaard-Barth Trajectory" could just as appropriately be the "Barth Trajectory." Torrance and Torrance draw from Kierkegaard's work the parts that influenced and support Barth's theological project. These

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[92] Torrance and Torrance, *Beyond Immanence*, 1, 295, 357-358.
[93] Torrance and Torrance, *Beyond Immanence*, 149.

elements of Kierkegaard undoubtedly exist, but this comes at the cost of ignoring the rest of Kierkegaard's works. Kierkegaard's project of indirectly upbuilding and edifying Christians towards real and true faith falls away in favor of a Kierkegaard whose primary concern was a dogmatic statement about the knowledge of God.

I believe that weakness of the proposed Kierkegaard-Barth Trajectory lies in its narrowing of the full breadth of Kierkegaard's and Barth's projects. They had fundamentally different concerns in their respective theological projects. These differences can complement each other without restricting them to only where they agree. Kierkegaard's concern for the individual Christian can provide insights for ideological critique that Barth's dogmatic approach misses. Similarly, Barth's investigation of social structures and theology can provide insight into the communal aspects of Christianity that Kierkegaard was not concerned with.

The works of both Kierkegaard and Barth contain different stages of their own theological development. These stages differ in their tone, maturity, and concerns. There is much to be said for similarity in critiques between the two authors. Both authors share a concern for Christian nationalism, for instance. But the nationalism they responded to were not the same forms of nationalism. Trying to make Kierkegaard and Barth say the same thing is a futile exercise. Rather, their differences can be beneficial in that they both address similar issues from radically different perspectives. Rather than presenting a difficulty, the differences between Kierkegaard and Barth have the possibility to complement each other.

10. Conclusion

The relationship between Barth and Kierkegaard is a much-debated issue. Evaluating Kierkegaard's influence on Barth and the extent to which they agree involves critiquing their

own statements about their work. My argument is that both Barth and Kierkegaard believe knowledge of God is possible only by God granting this possibility to humanity. For Barth, this takes the form of an analogy of faith by which humans know God through participation in Christ. For Kierkegaard, God draws humanity towards himself through every good and perfect gift. The nature of the Danish philosopher's work, however, makes it difficult to draw out a definitive dogmatic statement by the "real" Kierkegaard. Thus, I believe it is more production to speak of moments of congruence between Kierkegaard and Barth rather than agreement in their theology as a whole.

Returning to Barth's speech on Kierkegaard in Copenhagen, was Barth right in moving away from Kierkegaard? From the perspective of Barth's political concerns, I believe he was. Barth's critique that Kierkegaard's theology is "objectless" is mistaken. However, Barth's critiques still hint at an understanding of something that is true of the difference between them. The works of Kierkegaard and Barth have fundamentally different goals. Kierkegaard's goal of upbuilding true faith is radically different from Barth's project of speaking of God as wholly other. From the perspective of Barth's political concerns, Kierkegaard's existentialism was inappropriate to address Barth's historical moment.

A similar political concern caused Barth to distance himself from his friend Rudolf Bultmann. It was a decision based on Bultmann's associations and interests in historical criticism rather than his theology. In his later work, we can see Barth move away from drawing such political lines. Perhaps had Barth reexamined Kierkegaard, he would have found that the time to say no to him had passed, as it had for Emil Brunner.

George Pattison's work *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth century* seeks to show that Kierkegaard's work, from his time as a student until his final pamphlets, had a

fundamentally religious concern. His authorship produced a multiplicity of characters and perspectives that share themes, but ultimately cannot be confined to a singular voice. These voices have had a wide influence, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger to Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Everyone that Kierkegaard influenced approached him with different concerns and ways of interpretation. Barth certainly had debts he owed to Kierkegaard. But each of them is relevant to the twenty first century in their own way. Perhaps the time has passed to try to find the proper inheritor of Kierkegaard in the twentieth century.

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