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Kierkegaard's Objections to Natural Theology: Their Significance and Priority in his Development of Post-Kantian Philosophy of Religion

Abstract

As a philosopher, Kierkegaard is often either hailed or condemned for opposing reason to personal religious Christian faith and is probably most renowned for his declaration that 'faith begins where thought leaves off'; but Kierkegaard, as a man of intelligence, has to begin with and take on thought, in particular the thought that thinks that one can know that God exists, whether one is a religious believer or not. For Kierkegaard, therefore, the very thinking through of the philosophical implications of his own personal religious faith and of those who argue for the knowability of the existence of God are inextricably linked and integral to his conception of philosophy as rigorous unscientific religious thought. For his critics, such as Heidegger, and many like him, one can be either a thinker or a religious believer; but Kierkegaard is, *par excellence*, a religious thinker. This paper, therefore, examines Kierkegaard's religious thinking on its own terms, that is to say, as taking on and dealing with arguments for the existence of God which he found, before and after Kant, in the tradition of philosophical thinking, and which required him to develop new lines of thinking in philosophy in general and in post-Kantian philosophy of religion in particular.

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I Introduction

As a man of the Protestant Christian faith, Immanuel Kant tells his reader in the 1787 Preface to the Second Edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* that 'I had *therefore* to remove *knowledge* [of God's existence], in order to make room *for faith (Glaube)* [in God's existence].'[1] Besides Kant's religious grounds and his well-known analytical objections to all traditional metaphysical forms of argumentation (ontological, teleological, cosmological) for the existence of God in natural theology in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's own theory of knowledge (or epistemology), as

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. xxx, my emphasis.

advanced in this work, rules out, in principle, any argumentation for (or against) the existence of anything in-itself, God included.[2]

As a man of the same Protestant Christian faith, Søren Kierkegaard likewise found it necessary to refute argumentation purporting to demonstrate *knowledge* of the existence of God in Chapter III, 'The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Crotchet,' of his *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy* (1844) [better translated perhaps into English as *Philosophical Crumbs, or a Crumb of Philosophy*] in order to make room for his own personal religious faith in the absolute unknown and unknowable God.[3]

Unlike Kant before him, however, Kierkegaard, as a man of pure reason, had to contend with the dazzling philosophical influence and account of the historical march of reason in the dialectical unfolding of the concept of absolute spirt given by his contemporary Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)[4] and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* delivered at the University of Berlin in 1821, 1824, 1827 and 1831, with the first German edition published, a year after his death, in 1832.[5] Remarkably, this unfolding of absolute spirit in time and over time, in Hegel's estimation and explanation, extended to and included not only the fundamental intelligibility of the meaning of being to the powers of our human understanding and interpretation but also the fundamental intelligibility of the historical necessity and reality of the temporality and factual existence of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

We can thus understand why Kierkegaard, both as a man of faith *and* as a man of intelligence, cannot side-step or ignore any actual or alleged possible ways of proving the knowability of the existence of God in philosophy, whether such was elaborated before or after Kant. Furthermore, being indifferent to such argumentation for the existence of God is not an option for Kierkegaard. This, in fact, would be worse, since this would be tantamount to tolerating those arguments and the damage (and injustices) that that does and would do both to one's own personal faith and to philosophy. What is at stake for Kierkegaard is thus very high. It cannot be underestimated. The choice for him is not between philosophy or faith, but between

2. See, James P. Mackey, 'Making Room for Faith: The Gospel According to Kant', *The Maynooth Review*, 3 (1977), 20–37.

3. See, Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*, Chapter III, 'The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Crotch', trans. by David F. Swenson, revised by Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 46–60.

4. See, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

5. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Together with a Work on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, trans. by E. B. Spears and J. Burdon Sanderson in 1892 (New York: Humanities Press, 1962). Though Hegel modified these lectures each time he delivered them, the theme and his general philosophical standpoint never changed.

philosophy and faith or no faith and no philosophy.

Though coming after Kant and in agreement with the latter's objections to all forms of argumentation that purportedly demonstrate the knowability of the existence of God in natural theology, Kierkegaard's philosophical stance in 'The Absolute Paradox' (and in his other writings) is considerably different from Kant's for whom thinking about matters of personal religious faith, in a very important sense, lies outside of the bounds and business of 'thinking' and 'doing philosophy'. For Kierkegaard, by comparison, his faith cannot be separated from his thinking; nor can his thinking be separated from his faith. In fact, it seems to me that *it is only in and through engaging in actual refutation* of any possible or actual argumentation for the knowability of the existence of God that Kierkegaard can and does make his own case for his own particular way in philosophy and faith, for, as he famously puts it in *Fear and Trembling* (1843): 'Faith begins where thought leaves off.'[6]

Kierkegaard, in other words, has to begin with thought, and take on thought, in particular the thought that thinks that one can know that God exists, whether one is a religious believer (of any religious denomination) or not.

Far from it being a propaedeutic to any possible future conception and defence of philosophy as a strict science, as it was for Kant before him, for Kierkegaard the very thinking through of the philosophical implications of his own personal religious faith *and* of those who argue for the knowability of the existence of God are inextricably linked and integral to his conception of philosophy as rigorous unscientific religious thought. It also underpins his original philosophy of existence, where 'existence' is to be understood in the strong existentialist sense of concrete individual lived human existence. Thus in response to the sign of the times and issues of concern to him in philosophy, unlike Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard develops a radical and original philosophy of 'existence'.

Kierkegaard, then, cannot be a by-stander or an on-looker, as it were, to any possible or actual argumentation for the knowability of the existence of God. He has to stand rather *from within those arguments themselves*, looking through them and against them for his faith in philosophy and philosophy of faith to open up. Until this task is accomplished, no believing in God or thinking about our own actual individual human existence—whether it is lived at the aesthetic, ethical, or religious stage of existence—would be thinkable, or possible, or hold any substance for Kierkegaard; or, at least, so I would like to argue in this paper on 'Kierkegaard's Objections to Natural Theology: Their Significance and Priority in his Development of Post-Kantian Philosophy of Religion'.

In this paper, therefore, I would like to draw out the significance of Kierkegaard's objections to traditional metaphysics and natural theology in the name of a

6. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 82.

critical thinking that a Christian thinker, and only a Christian thinker, can shed not only on the nature of religious belief itself but also on what philosophy is and can be, after Kant. This is not to imply, however, that Kierkegaard's philosophy is to be construed as anti-philosophy or as anti-tradition in philosophy, in the way some post-modern 'philosophers' nowadays think *against* philosophy and *against* there being a tradition *in* philosophy and a tradition *to* philosophy. Far from it. Kierkegaard's philosophical stance presupposes and respects the tradition of philosophy and its central tenet that there can be no *a priori* limit set (or prescribed by anyone) to the content of what we are allowed and not allowed to entertain in philosophy and philosophical thought. Martin Heidegger's later (and highly influential) aprioristic accusation in *Being and Time* (1927) that Kierkegaard's philosophical thinking is untenable because it is founded on personal religious faith is itself untenable precisely because it is founded on personal religious faith;[7] or, at least so I would like to argue in the conclusion of this paper. But before that, I have a work of business to do, to present Kierkegaard the religious thinker, *par excellence*, in philosophy after Kant.

II What Kierkegaard is 'Up-against' and 'Facing'—Setting the Scene

In a section entitled 'The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Crotchet' of his *Philosophical Crumbs* Kierkegaard elaborates a series of objections to the attempt to argue for the knowability of the existence of God which are targeted at you (i) *before* you set out on that journey; (ii) *when* you are on that journey; and (iii) *after* you have thought that you have successfully completed that journey. Kierkegaard thus took, and had to take seriously argumentation for the existence of God for reasons that I have already outlined and indicated in my opening prefatory remarks. Before addressing these objections and drawing out their significances for his thinking,

7. In total, Heidegger has three footnote references to Kierkegaard's philosophy in *Being and Time*, that either damn his thinking with feint praise as 'theological' or denigrates its philosophical worth and originality. See, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, 2000), p. 492, n. iv: 'The man who has gone farthest in analysing the phenomenon of anxiety—and again in the theological context of a "psychological" exposition of the problem of original sin—is Søren Kierkegaard'; p. 494, n. vi: 'In the nineteenth century, Søren Kierkegaard explicitly seized upon the problem of existence as an existentiell problem, and thought it through in a penetrating fashion. But the existential problematic was so alien to him that, as regards his ontology, he remained completely dominated by Hegel and by the ancient philosophy as Hegel saw it.'; p. 495, n. iii, refers to Heidegger's elaboration in *Being and Time* of Kierkegaard's concept of 'the moment of vision' and its connection to 'time', which, Heidegger tells us 'were communicated as theses on the occasion of a public lecture on the concept of time, which was given in Marburg in July 1924'. See, Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. by William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), bilingual English-German edition, containing Martin Heidegger, *Der Begriff der Zeit: Vortrag vor der Marburger Theologenschaft Juli 1924*, ed. with postscript by Hartmut Tietjen (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989).

therefore, it is incumbent upon us *also* to take such argumentation for the existence of God seriously.

To do this, I will first begin by examining Saint Anselm's notable (and notorious for some) argument for the necessity in our knowing of the existence of God in the *Proslogion*, composed between 1077 and 1078 A.D.,[8] before turning to René Descartes's arguments for the knowability of the existence of God elaborated in his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*,[9] followed by a brief consideration of Hegel's argument for the necessity of the knowability of the revealed truth of the existence of Jesus Christ as the God-man which he expounded in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* throughout the 1820s. This is what Kierkegaard is 'really up against' and 'facing', as it were, in 'The Absolute Paradox'—those who both fervently and intelligently argue for the position that knowing the existence of God is possible (whether one is a religious believer or not). And all of these thinkers (Anselm, Descartes, Hegel) are religious believers, as is St Thomas Aquinas with his famous five ways of proving the existence of God,[10] who will not be left out of our or Kierkegaard's considerations either.[11] All of this is the resounding background philosophical noise, as it were, against which Kierkegaard's dialectical argumentation for faith alone *and* against all forms of rational argumentation for the knowability of the existence of God in 'The Absolute Paradox' is set and best appreciated.

So, without further ado, I would like to turn now to Anselm and to his philosophical conviction in the intelligibility of the necessity in the knowing of the existence of God in the *Proslogion*, for it is of importance to us and to Kierkegaard, for so many reasons, not to ignore but to take this conviction seriously.

8. Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of St Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. by Jaspers Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: Banning, 2000), pp. 88-112.

9. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in R. Descartes, *Key Philosophical Writings*, trans. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, ed. by Enrique Chávez-Arvio (Ware: Wordsworth, 1977), pp. 123–190. In the *Meditations*, Descartes presents two different arguments for the existence of God; one, relying on the causal adequacy principle in the 'Third Meditation'; another, using the definition of the properties of a concept, in the 'Fifth Meditation'. For a searchable trilingual (English/Latin/French) version of the *Meditations* allowing the reader to move between the various versions of the text, see the Internet site: Descartes' Meditations - Trilingual Edition - Wright State University - Research.

10. See, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Quaestio 2 'De Deo, an Deus sit', 'The Existence of God', Aquinas Institute, online: ST.I - Aquinas.

11. Since theodicies assume, rather than argue for, the existence of God, Kierkegaard's philosophical objections equally apply to them. For a comparison, however, between Kierkegaard's position and his near contemporary Franz Brentano's Leibnizian influenced philosophical theodicy, see, Cyril McDonnell and Susan Krantz Gabriel, 'Natural Theology and its Discontents: Brentano and Kierkegaard', in *Franz Brentano and the 19th Century Idea of Philosophy as a Science*, ed. by Susan Krantz Gabriel and Ion Tănăsescu (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025), forthcoming, pp. 217–245.

III Anselm on the Intelligibility of the Necessity in-the-Knowing-of-the-Existence-of-God

In his opening address to God, who is the silent partner of his dialogue in the *Proslogion*, Anslem expresses to us his intention in Chapter One for this meditation as follows:

> O Lord, I do not attempt to gain access to Your loftiness, because I do not at all consider my intellect to be equal to this [task]. But I yearn to understand some measure of Your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe even this: that unless I believe, I shall not understand.[12]

From the outset of this meditation, therefore, Anselm believes in his God's existence, for, as he unequivocally says (following the prophet Isaiah 7:9), that '*unless I will have believed* (*nisi credidero*) *I shall not understand (non intelligam)*'; but he also tells us, his reader, and God, that he wants to know something of the truth of his belief in his God's existence.[13]

In this starting-point, therefore, Anselm is clearly invoking and following in the footsteps of the Augustinian tradition of religious thinking in philosophy, of 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*); but in a few pages later on, in Chapter Four of the *Proslogion*, Anselm tells us that 'now […] [even] if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist] (*iam […] si te esse nolim credere non possim non intelligere*)'.[14] So, even if Anselm *did not believe* or *did not want to believe* in the existence of God at the outset of his meditation in the *Proslogion*, *now* he cannot not understand that God exists.

So, what has happened? What has happened to Anselm and to his (and the prophet Isiah's) starting-point, about which he is so adamant at the beginning in Chapter 1, that 'unless I will have believed, I shall not understand'? Clearly something has

12. Anselm, *Proslogion*, p. 93: 'Non tento, Domine, penetrare altitudinem tuam, quia nullatenus comparo illi intellectum meum; sed desidero aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam, quam credit et amat cor meum. Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia "nisi credidero, non intelligam" [Isiah 7, 9].'

13. From this point of view, we can thus understand why Kierkegaard has much more respect and preference for the 'eccentricity' and 'passion' of the medieval religious thinkers of the monasteries (like Anselm) to the passionless intellectualism and objectivism of 'the wretched middleman-wisdom of mediation', that is, Hegel and contemporary Hegelians. See, Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. and ed. by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 338.

14. *Proslogion*, p. 95: 'Gratias tibi, bone Domine, gratias tibi, quia quod prius credidi te donante, iam sic intelligo te illuminante, ut, si te esse nolim credere, non possim non intelligere.'

happened, and happened between Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. And what has happened of course is the 'argument' of the *Proslogion*, Anselm's famous *unum argumentum* for the necessity in knowing the existence of God.

What, then, leads Anselm to this personal conviction, to this personal intellectual-religious conversion? We need to follow his path of reasoning before endeavouring to assess it (or dismiss it).

Firstly, Anselm begins with faith in God, and because he wants to talk to God about God, he needs an adequate working-definition for this object of his attention and worship, one that is worthy of his absolute devotion and love; and so, his belief in God is followed by a definition of God that is worthy of this partner in his meditation, and which he found in the Psalms, as 'oh Lord, you are that-*than-which*-nothing-greater-can-be-thought'; that is to say, he begins in faith in God *and with a thought about the reality of God* that contains a negation, a comparison and a superlative. Compared to *thinking about the reality* of anything else, you, oh Lord, are that *that-which*-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. So, Anselm can tell us, his reader and co-meditator, God, that he can think of God, of 'You, oh Lord', as 'something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*). This, then, puts God's existence as thinkable, albeit at a distance and beyond comparison to anything that is actually known or knowable in existence to human beings.

At *this point* in his enquiry and in his thinking, then, neither Anselm nor his argument is committed to the existence of God, or indeed, to the existence of anything—definitions of concepts do not commit one to the existence of the defined, 'for my thought', as Descartes later and succinctly puts it in the 'Fifth Meditation', 'does not impose any necessity upon things.'[15]

In both his belief *and* his thought that God *is* that that-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, Anselm, therefore, does not in his starting-point beg the question of proof of God's existence.

Yet once this thought is made, it follows that '*that which* nothing greater can be thought' cannot exist only in the understanding, 'for if it exists only in the understanding it is possible to think of it also existing in reality and that is greater';[16] '*hence*', as Anselm can now conclude, by the end of Chapter 2, 'there can be *no doubt at all* that that which nothing greater can be thought [God], exists not only in

15. Descartes, 'Fifth Meditation', p. 172.

16. My emphasis, and English translation modified, taking both of these sentences together as one sentence, and not as separate [unconnected] sentences: 'Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re; quod maius est.' I am indebted to James McEvoy for this reading of Anselm's argument and to G. E. M. Anscombe's, 'Why Anselm's Proof in the *Proslogion* is not an Ontological Argument', *Thoreau Quarterly* 17 (1985), 32–40.

the understanding but also in reality (*et in intellectu et in re*).'[17]

The initial thought about God as that that-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, thus contains not only a negation, a comparison, and a superlative, but also a propulsion of one's own mind to the conclusion that such a being, God, exists outside of one's own mind, and outside of that thought that thinks it. In this meditation, therefore, *thinking* leads Anselm, and anyone else who follows him here, to *knowledge* of the (extra-mental) existence of God.

What is remarkable about this line of reasoning and thought, and about this line of reasoning and thought alone, therefore, is that it does bring Anselm (and us) to an ontological conclusion about the knowability of the existence of God. It thus contains not only a valid logical conclusion but also a valid ontological conclusion and epistemic commitment to the extra-mental existence of that defined God, the God that exists.

This path of thinking, nevertheless, *can only be* and *is only* a product or a produce of the activity and power of one's own actual human capacity for reasoning. Yet this argument of Anselm's does not, it seems to me, commit any of the fallacious reasoning that Kant was wont to point out that is involved in what he terms 'ontological argument' for the existence of God, since it does not treat of existence as a real predicate, or as a predicate of any kind at all.[18] Anselm is not saying that God is the most real being that I could possibly imagine, intellectually, and so, this idea of an *ens realissimum* would have to have, at least implicitly, reality as one of its predicates in its very concept (in the way Kant configures this in his *Critique of Pure Reason*). This is not what Anselm argues. Anselm does not say that we can think of God as the most perfect of all beings in being and that this thought about God's being would not be the most perfect of all beings in being, if it did not also contain existence as part of its concept, i.e., Anselm's argument (of Chapter 2 in the *Proslogion*) is not Descartes's argument for the existence of God of the 'Fifth Meditation', which is, notwithstanding, the real target of Kant's critique.

Where Anselm's argument, nonetheless, does join Descartes's argument of the 'Fifth Meditation' for the existence of God is in its declaration of the fundamental intelligibility of the very existence of God, of existence itself and in particular of the necessary existence of God that occurs in the second movement of Anselm's argument, in Chapter 3 of his *Proslogion*. There Anselm entertains another thought, an additional thought, *after he knows that God exists* in Chapter 2. And that thought (of Chapter 3) compares thinking about things in existence that could possibly exist to thinking about anything in existence that *cannot not exist*, if such were to

17. *Proslogion*, p. 94, my emphasis, trans. mod.: 'Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re.'
18. See, Anscombe.

exist at all, that is to say, to necessary existence. And it is precisely because of this second additional thought—the thought that since that *that-which-cannot-not-be-thought-not-to-be* (*nec cogitari possit non esse*) is greater than *that-which-that-can-be-thought-possibly-not-to-be* (*potest cogitari non esse*)—God *here* in Chapter 4 not only possibly and really exists but also cannot not be thought of as non-existing (*nequit eum non esse cogitare*). That is to say, God, and God alone, necessarily exists *per se* and *a se*.[19]

Anselm's mind has thus been propelled *further* into this (second) conclusion about not merely God's actual, and therefore possible existence, but about God's necessary existence, about God's inability to be otherwise than be.

We can thus readily understand why *after this thought has been entertained*, *Anselm himself* is left with no other option but to conclude, and to conclude in all honesty and with all certainty, at the end of Chapter 4, but in a radically-different and diametrically-opposite fashion to his initial starting point on this journey that 'unless I will have believed I will not understand,' that '*now* […][even] if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist].'[20]

The upshot of this entire meditation for Anselm in the *Proslogion*, therefore, is that, notwithstanding the starting point in faith, the thought-about-reality of God and of that being's *actual* existence (albeit necessary) is knowable to human cognition as it is also later declared to be by Descartes in his *first argument* for the existence of God in the 'Third Meditation'. This argument, however, relies on 'the causal adequacy principle' of a cause and *its* effect as containing at least as much formal reality (actual reality) as the effect alone (the thought about the idea of an all-perfect God).[21] To this argument of Descartes's we need to briefly turn.

IV Descartes's Two Arguments for the Existence of God

Re-call Descartes's first argument for the existence of God in the 'Third Meditation'.[22]

19. 'Nullus quippe intelligens id quod Deus est, potest cogitare quia Deus non est [...]. Deus enim est id quo maius cogitari non potest. Quod qui bene intelligit, utique intelligit id ipsum sic esse, ut nec cogitatione queat non esse. Qui ergo intelligit sic esse Deum, nequit eum non esse cogitare.' 'Indeed, no one who understands that which God is can think that God does not exist […]. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who rightly understands this, surely understands that that [than which a greater cannot be thought] exists in such way that it cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such [a being] cannot think that He does not exist.' *Proslogion*, p. 95.

20. Ibid.

21. 'Quod autem haec idea realitatem objectivam hanc vel illam contineat potius quàm aliam, hoc profectò habere debet ab aliquâ causâ in quâ tantumdem sit ad minimum realitatis formalis quantum ipsa continet objectivae.' 'But in order that an idea should contain some one certain objective reality rather than another, it must without doubt derive it from some cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as this idea contains of objective reality'. Descartes, 'Third Meditation', p. 153.

22. I am indebted to Harry McCauley's reconstruction of this argument. See, Harry McCauley, '*Circling*

As Harry McCauley points out, there Descartes begins with an appeal to the principle that 'it is evident by the light of nature (i.e. clear and distinct) that, at the very least, there must be as much (reality) in the total efficient cause as there is in the effect of that same cause'; 'a principle Descartes claims,' as this commentator also reminds us, 'applies as much to the causal account of ideas as it does to items like stones—see *Principles 1,17.*'[23] Thus in talking about 'the causes of ideas', as McCauley also remarks, 'he [Descartes] tends to say that there must be as much "formal" (i.e. actual) reality in the cause of the idea as there is "objective" reality (i.e. reality as represented) in the idea.'[24]

Applying this distinction (between 'objective' or 'intentional' [meaning 'mental'] and 'formal' or 'actual' reality)[25] and the causal adequacy principle that a cause must have at least as much actual (or 'formal') reality as *its* effect alone, Descartes can now argue in 'Meditation 3' that because (1.) I do not possess sufficient 'formal' or actual reality to cause the 'objective reality' (thought about reality) of an all-perfect God as represented in my idea of God since I simply am an imperfect being (I doubt, I err, I make mistakes, and so forth); and (2.) since neither can any chain of imperfect causes be the cause of the idea of God (as an all-perfect being); it thus follows (3.) that my idea of God as an all-perfect being must have as its cause a perfect being (God) that has actual or 'formal' (extra-mental) existence: so, God must exist.[26] And *after this has been established and granted in the 'Third Meditation'*, Descartes can go on in his 'Fifth Meditation' and compare the properties that are necessarily true of a triangle (e.g., as necessarily having three-sides) or of a mountain and valley to the properties of the idea of an all-perfect being having existence as one of its properties or perfections; hence, Descartes's well-known conclusion and analogy of the 'Fifth Meditation': 'I cannot conceive a God without existence any more than a mountain without a valley.'[27] It thus follows for Descartes, that if he pays sufficient attention to his thoughts and thinks hard enough he cannot but arrive at this conclusion about the extra-mental existence of God, because even though it

Descartes', Maynooth Philosophical Papers, 2 (2004), pp. 70-83 (p. 79).

23. Ibid., p. 79.

24. Ibid.

25. This Scholastic distinction deployed by Descartes is also, later, deployed by Franz Brentano—albeit in a different context and for a different purpose—in his famous 1874 passage where he appeals to 'what the Scholastics of the middle-ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object […] which is not to be understood as meaning a thing [that actually exists outside of the mind] or immanent objectivity' to describe 'our own psychical phenomena' or 'psychical-act experiences' in comparison to 'physical phenomena'. See, Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. by Antos. C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell & Linda L. McAlister (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973; Routledge, 1995), p. 88.

26. There are, of course, more than three main steps in this intricate argument that Descartes unfolds. McCauley identifies five (on p. 79); but these three steps are the most pertinent ones for our purposes here.

27. Descartes, 'Fifth Meditation', p. 172.

is the case that,

> For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence, I easily persuade myself that the existence can be separated from the essence of God, and that we can thus conceive God as not actually existing. But, nevertheless, when I think it with more attention, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having its three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a [rectilinear] triangle, or the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley; and so there is not any less repugnance to our conceiving a God (that is, a Being supremely perfect) to whom existence is lacking (that is to say, to whom a certain perfection is lacking), than to conceive of a mountain which has no valley.[28]

Notwithstanding the many objections and counter-objections that were to follow and plague Descartes's and Anselm's arguments, both Anselm and Descartes present cogent arguments that, at least to their satisfaction, demonstrate that the existence of God is capable of being grasped by, in and through the activity of human intellectual effort (for those of us who wish and are able to follow and understand such intricate intellectual arguments and lines of reasoning to their ends).

Hegel, however, goes one step further than Anselm and Descartes. For Hegel, the existence of God, and of Jesus, the Son of God, in particular, is not only capable of being grasped by, in and through acts of human cognition but also by, in and through human sensibility.

So, I will now turn, briefly, to Hegel's argument for the knowability and intelligibility of the historical necessity of the actual existence of God in human form in general and Jesus Christ in particular.

V Hegel on the Knowability and Intelligibility of the Historical Necessity of the Existence of God in Human Form in General and in Jesus Christ in Particular

From a dialectical-coherent holism point of view that he had already established in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* at Berlin University in the 1820s, elaborates an argument for the knowability of the historical necessity of the existence of God in human form in general and the direct knowledge of the temporality of Jesus Christ as Son of God in particular, remarking to his students that,

28. Descartes, 'Fifth Meditation', p. 172.

> If Man is to get a consciousness of the unity of the divine and human nature, and of this characteristic of Man as belonging to Man in general; or if this knowledge is to force its way wholly into the consciousness of his finitude as the beam of eternal light which reveals itself to him in the finite, then it must reach him in his character as Man in general […]; it must come to him as representing Man in his immediate state, and it must be universal for immediate consciousness.
>
> The consciousness of the absolute Idea, which we have in thought, must therefore not be put forward as belonging to the standpoint of philosophical speculation, of speculative thought, but must, on the contrary, appear in the form of certainty for men in general [...]. This *unity [of divine and human natures] must accordingly show itself t*o consciousness *in a purely temporal, absolutely ordinary manifestation of reality*, *in one particular man, in a finite individual* who is *at the same time known to be* the Divine Idea, not merely *a Being* of a higher kind in general, but rather the highest, the absolute Idea, *the Son of God*.[29]

Thus in these lectures Hegel can also be confident in telling his students then (and us now) about the reality of Jesus Christ that,

> This is the extraordinary combination which directly contradicts the understanding; both the unity of the divine and human *natures* has been here brought into human consciousness and has *become a certainty for it*, implying that otherness, or, as it is also expressed, the finitude, the weakness, the fragility of human nature *is not incompatible* with this unity, just as the eternal Idea, otherness in a way detracts from the unity which God is […]. This is the extraordinary combination *the necessity of which* we have seen. It involves the truth that the divine and human nature*s are not implicitly different*.[30]

In Hegel's estimation, therefore, *this God*, that is, the factual existence of Jesus Christ, as son of God necessarily raises the concept of God up to its highest and fullest expression precisely because 'by thus *coming down* [from its eternal simplicity] it has in fact attained for the first time its own highest essence'.[31] Here, then, as Hegel explains in a note added in 1831 to the 'Introduction' of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1927 for his reader, 'there is *no longer* anything *secret* in

29. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, pp. 72-73, my emphases.
30. Ibid., pp. 76–77, my emphases.
31. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 460.

God' precisely because 'the revealed religion is the revelatory or manifest religion because God has become wholly manifest in it'.[32]

> Far from being the-thought-about-abstract (ahistorical, atemporal, acosmic) God, or the God that appears in history as a product of human imagination or labour in religions in the form of the work of art (or spiritual individuality), '*this God,*' as Hegel had argued in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, '*on the contrary*, is sensuously and directly beheld as a Self, as an actual individual man; only so *is* this God a self-consciousness.'[33]

From this point of view, therefore, the conventional way of viewing the relation between God the Father and God the Son as descending from the heavens above to earth in the Judeo-Christian religious belief system needs to be re-assessed and reversed, since, in the reality of this appearing of God to human interpretative consciousness,

> the lowest is at the same time the highest; the revealed which has come forth wholly on to the *surface* is precisely therein the most *profound*. That the supreme Being is seen, heard, etc. as an immediately present self-consciousness, this therefore is indeed the consummation of its Notion; and through this consummation that Being is immediately *present qua* supreme Being.[34]

In this way, therefore, Hegel feels confident that he can both explain and make his case for the knowability and evident intelligibility of the historical necessity *of the factual existence of the God-man in time*, even if this requires, in turn, him to re-write and correct the meaning of religious expressions characteristic of religious belief in general and of the Christian religion in particular regarding alienation and the possibility of reconciliation with God in the next life, with his own account, enunciated in all (intellectual) sincerity:

32. Hegel, 'Introduction', *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I, *Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, trans. by R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 149–184, (p. 184, n. 85). This is why Peter Hodgson is correct to remark and distinguish that, for Hegel, 'while the object or content of religion is the absolute, religion itself does not entail absolute knowledge of the absolute: that is the role of philosophy. The representational forms of religious expressions, even of the Christian religion, must be "sublated" (annulled *and* preserved) in philosophical concepts. Thus in Hegel's scheme of things there is an *absolute knowledge* (the science of speculative philosophy) but a *consummate religion*.' P. Hodgson, 'Editorial Introduction', in G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* vol. 3, *The Consummate Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 1–57 (p. 4).
33. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 459, my emphases.
34. Ibid., p. 460.

> All that we mean by reconciliation, truth, freedom, represents a universal process, and cannot therefore be expressed in a single proposition without becoming one-sided. The main idea which in a popular form expresses the truth, is that of the unity of the divine and human natures; God has become Man. This unity is at first *potential* only, but being such it has to be eternally produced or brought into actual existence; and this act of production is the freeing process, the reconciliation which in fact is possible only by means of the potentiality.[35]

VI Kierkegaard on the Absurd Existence of Jesus Christ in Time

Unlike Hegel, for Kierkegaard, the unique existence of 'the God-man', this 'most superb feature of the Christian religion',[36] as Raymond Williamson describes it, *is not* an extraordinary combination which *contradicts* our human understanding of the concepts of God and man, and so, something that stands in need of rational resolution in human thought and historical-factual instantiation in time, as Hegel had so magnificently argued and demonstrated in and through his exhaustive and encyclopaedic system of speculative philosophy. It is, rather, for Kierkegaard, as he calls it in his *Philosophical Crumbs* (1844), an 'absolute paradox'; that is to say, something about which the truth or falsity *cannot, in principle, be reasoned out at all*.[37] The notion that God existed in a human being in time is, rather, something that can only be described as 'absurd'**.** Yet this is what any Christian, worth his or her salt, is called upon to accept. In Kierkegaard's definition of absurdity, therefore,

> The absurd is that the eternal truth has come about in time, that God has come about, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come about just as the single human being, indistinguishable from any other.[38]

Furthermore, this truth, for a Christian, is naturally both 'scandalous' and 'idolatrous' to the Jewish religion and 'foolishness' to pagan pre-Socratic Greek religions.[39] It is nonsense.

For Kierkegaard, nonetheless, no amount of reasoned analysis of the concept of God or physical contact with the existence of Jesus—seeing, hearing, touching,

35. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, trans. by Spears and Sanderson, p. 347.
36. Raymond Keith Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 170.
37. See, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 182–185.
38. Ibid., p. 177.
39. Ibid., pp. 177–79.

talking with Jesus—can or would lead one to believe or know, or declare the truth, that God exists, that Jesus *is* God, that the Son of God, *the Messiah* (Hebrew, 'the anointed one') is here, *the God* among us. For a Christian, instead, this unique and ungraspable truth of either reason or the senses is singularly and solitarily a matter of individual personal faith. There is no other way of explaining it (without explaining it away).

From this point of view, therefore, we can thus appreciate why it is unavoidable for Kierkegaard, both as a man of faith and as a man of intelligence, to demonstrate just how at odds it is both to faith and to reason to prove that we can have or do have knowledge of the existence of God. And we can also understand why, from this point of view, for Kierkegaard, 'the speculator [here Kierkegaard has Hegel and contemporary Hegelians in mind, but not just him and them] is perhaps at the furthest remove from Christianity.'[40]

We could put Kierkegaard's point this way. Becoming a Christian is challenging in itself, but it is more challenging for the scientist, the scholar, and the refined theologian than it is for the simple believer, and for the latter it is infinitely challenging.[41] Thus, in Kierkegaard's estimation, he can conclude that, 'The refined have thus only a somewhat ironic advantage over the simple-minded with regard to becoming and continuing to be Christians: the advantage that it is more difficult.'[42]

It hardly goes without saying, but it still needs to be said, that this 'absurdity' and 'absolute paradox' of Christianity cannot be explained or illuminated by recourse to Hegelian dialectical '*Aufhebung*'. Nor can it be measured against it for its understanding and assessed accordingly. Irrespective, therefore, of the various meanings with which Hegel operates (and gives to) this term '*aufheben*' (to remove, preserve, reduce) in his logic, this cannot be used to explain 'The Absolute Paradox' without misunderstanding and cancelling it altogether.[43] It can only be understood on its own terms. In his final Summer Semester lecture-course at Freiburg University in 1923, before departing to take up a full time lectureship post in philosophy at Marburg University, Heidegger, therefore, is incorrect to inform and advise his students that, '(I)n the properly philosophical aspect of his thought, he [Kierkegaard] did not break free from Hegel. [...] His reading the Paradox into the New Testament and things Christian was simply negative Hegelianism.'[44] Furthermore, although

40. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 181.

41. Kierkegaard's main problem, therefore, is not with Christianity (and Christian morality in particular) as is his contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche's, but with the task of *how to become a Christian in Christendom*, amidst fellow atheistic and theistic believers alike: 'The difficulty is to become a Christian.' Ibid., p. 485.

42. Ibid., p. 510.

43. Ibid., pp. 186–187.

44. Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. by John van Buren (Bloomington

Kierkegaard agrees with Kant's objections to transcendental arguments in metaphysics for the existence of God in natural theology, there are important differences here too that need to be noted. So, before considering Kierkegaard's objections to arguments for the existence of God in the 'Absolute Paradox', I will begin by first comparing both Kant and Kierkgaard's objections to arguments for the existence of God in natural theology.

VII Kant and Kierkegaard's Philosophical Objections to Knowledge of the Existence of God Compared

Kant's objections to all forms of argumentation for the existence of God—whether such arguments take the form of what Kant calls 'ontological argument', 'cosmological argument', or 'physico-theological [teleological] argument'—are well known. And we can readily understand why the kind of argumentation that is involved in the ontological argument for the existence of God is, of all of these, for Kant, the most important form of argumentation; for, in Kant's estimation, at some stage in the process of the argumentation from either the existence of the cosmos or the purpose and design of the cosmos to the existence of God we will be lead back to *the idea of a necessarily existing God* as the posited creator or designer of that cosmos, we still will have to prove that such a being exists. So, to do this, we will need to pay attention *to this idea of a necessary being*, and argue that, once grasped, this concept of an ideally existing necessary being, God, entails the existence of that God, which adds to our understanding of God, and so, we can know that such a being exists. In other words, at some stage in the cosmological and teleological argumentation for the existence of God, we will have to recourse to the 'ontological argument' for the existence of God. Yet this 'ontological argument for the existence of God' is blatantly invalid, for, if we deny the existence of whatever it is we may conceive of, in this case, our idea of a necessarily existing being (God), then there will be nothing left over for us to discuss any further or for us to understand any better or further whether elaborated from an ontological, cosmological or teleological point of view. So, as Kant famously puts it, when 'the fool in his heart' says 'there is no God', we are denying whatever we may think of what God may be and any properties of *that* being:

> If I say of something that 'it is a triangle and doesn't have three angles' I contradict myself; but there's nothing contradictory about cancelling both the subject and the predicate. This holds true of the concept of an absolutely necessary being x. If you cancel x's existence you cancel x itself with all its

& Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 33.

predicates—and how could *that* involve a contradiction?[45]

For Kant, then, if the existence of God is rejected or denied, the thing itself [God] with all its conceivable predicates are all rejected, lock, stock and barrel; hence, there can be no self-contradiction in asserting the proposition 'God does not exist', even if we can produce, in our thinking, by way of our transcendental (and not sense) imagination, the idea of a necessarily existing being upon which either the existence or order of the cosmos depends for its existence.[46]

For Kant, therefore, there is nothing logically self-referentially inconsistent in saying 'there is no God' or 'God does not exist', even if this is not true, that God exists, that God is provident, that God is all-powerful, all-good and so forth—but this, Kierkegaard notes, evades exactly the issue of what it is that is required by faith in God and Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, after all, may not have *actually* existed at all or cannot *possibly* exist at all. *Yet despite this*, my faith requires me to believe in this, *knowingly*; that is to say, *that I could be believing in something that simply does not exist at all*. *This real possibility* that God does not exist, and not just the mere *logical* possibility that God may not exist, is required by faith.

The intelligibility of faith (for Kierkegaard) thus calls into question the faith in intelligibility that even Kant has not dared to doubt. And that stalwart follower of Kantian rationality in the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl, does not dare to doubt this either, even if he distinguishes, correctly, between propositions that are senseless (*Unsinn*, nonsense) from those that are logically absurd (*Widersinn*, against sense). As Husserl puts it, a senseless proposition, such as, for instance, 'if is green' is devoid of sense (*un-Sinn*), defies sense, defies grammatical articulation, hence, as such, is not open to being either meaningfully (or meaninglessly) true or false: it is rather simple (and utter) nonsense.[47] By comparison, logically absurd propositions, such as, for instance, the proposition 'All A's are B, but some are not', are intelligently senseless.[48] They, rather, defy intelligibility by virtue of the meanings deployed (uttered, articulated). They are evidently senseless (absurd), and we can see this. Kierkegaardian religious absurdity is neither of these; it is neither logically senseless nor devoid of sense; it is, rather, an existential absurdity and a very real absurdity at that, for, 'The absurd is that the eternal truth has come about in time, that God has come about, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come about just as

45. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 595/ B 623.

46. See, Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, esp., Bk II The Dialectical Inferences of Pure Reason, Ch. 3 The Ideal of Pure Reason.

47. Edmund Husserl, *The Logical Investigations*, trans. by John N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 521–22, and ff. pp. 526–27. See, also, Theodore De Boer, *The Development of Husserl Thought*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 276-277.

48. Husserl, *The Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, pp. 824–25. See, de Boer, p. 277.

the single human being, indistinguishable from any other.'[49] *This* 'existential absurdity' is unfathomable to human reason and, why Kierkegaard is also correct to point out, 'a stumbling-block to the Jews and [appear as] foolishness to the Greeks'.[50] Kierkegaard's position, therefore, stands outside of the limits of what is deemed or prescribable as either nonsensical utterance or logical absurdity.[51] It nonetheless requires a thinking adequate to this.

With this in mind, therefore, I will now turn to assess Kierkegaard's arguments against any purported knowledge of the existence of God which he elaborates in a few pages of his chapter on 'The Absolute Paradox'.[52] He has arguments that strike before, during and after any argumentation for the existence of God is either attempted or (allegedly) successfully accomplished by its author. This should suffice, for present purposes, to indicate their philosophical significance and priority for this religious thinker in his development of post-Kantian philosophy of religion.

VIII On the Significance and Priority of Kierkegaard's Objections to Knowledge of the Existence of God in his Elaboration of Post-Kantian Philosophy of Religion

The first point that Kierkegaard would like to make concerns the starting point in any such argumentation, or, perhaps more accurately stated, *before* anyone sets about the task of proving the existence of God. It is this. He remarks, that if, at the outset, *I* do not know whether God exists or not, I will *never therefore* be able to subsequently prove it, and for two main reasons: firstly, 'for if God does not exist, it would of course be impossible to prove it';[53] i.e., if God does not exist, then one *cannot prove that*, that God exists. In other words, if you accept the proposition that *God does not exist*, then no argument *for* the existence of God will be entertained. Secondly, if, at the outset, you accept the proposition that *God might exist*, then *in that assumption* you must assume God's existence in the (attempted) proof of God's existence 'since otherwise I would not begin, readily understanding that the whole would be impossible if he did not exist'.[54] In other words, in the very setting out to prove the existence of God in the attempted proof *for* the existence of God, you have

49. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 177.
50. Ibid., p. 179.
51. If we try to fit Kierkegaard's thinking on the 'truth' of this 'paradox' at the centre of being a Christian into a real or logically self-evident representational-propositional frame of reference, we will invariably decontextualize it and distort the intelligibility of his position out of all recognition. For such an approach, nevertheless, see Paul Edwards, especially his remarks on 'the verbal fog' and '(T)hese weird ways of talking', in 'Kierkegaard and the "Truth" of Christianity', *Philosophy* 46 (1971), 89–108 (p. 102).
52. See, Kierkegaard, 'The Absolute Paradox', pp. 46–60, esp., pp. 49–55.
53. Ibid., p. 49.
54. Ibid.

begged the question *of* the existence of God. So, if 'the fool says in his heart there is no God', and if, in response to that, a person (such as Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes or Hegel) says to the fool 'wait just a little and I will prove it [that God exists]', would this, Kierkegaard retorts, not be a very odd way of proceeding because 'if in the moment of beginning his proof it is not absolutely undetermined whether the God exists or not, he does not prove it; and if it is thus undetermined in the beginning he will never come to begin, partly from fear of failure, since the God perhaps does not exist, and partly because he has nothing with which to begin [his proof of the existence of God].'[55]

It thus follows for Kierkegaard that there are here only two options available to the person who wishes to set out to demonstrate the existence of God: for that person (1) any intelligent attempt to (successfully) prove *the existence* of God, cannot begin with or from *an idea* of an existing God, that is, from an idea of (an unknown) God that may or may not exist, from thinking about the concept of God since it can only proceed from something that actually exists; in this case, for this person, (2) any demonstration of God's existence that begins from an existent thing, in this instance, from the existence of God, will actually beg the question of proving the existence of such a being (God). In either event, therefore, 'I do not prove anything, least of all existence, but merely develop the content of a conception.'[56]

Equally, cosmological arguments for the existence of God fair no better, for, *if* we begin an argument from actual existent things (from nature, as Aquinas and many others do) to demonstrate the existence of God, we have, as Kierkegaard points out, only the choice of beginning with either God or the World. If we begin with the existence of God, we beg the question of proof. And, if we begin with the world, 'I observe nature in order to find God, and indeed I also see omnipotence and wisdom, but I see much else too that troubles and disturbs. The *summa summarum* of this is the objective uncertainty [in the existence of God].'[57]

If, then, we begin, with Aquinas, by looking at nature and reflecting on familiar things around us, much here leads us to believe *and* not to believe in the existence of God. In this respect, Kierkegaard agrees with David Hume, that whilst '(T)here may well be a suspicion or thin conviction that something must be responsible for the order of the universe […] (T)his belief will not stand up to criticism, but it *stays*.'[58] Yet, as Matthew O'Donnell also points out, for Hume (and Kierkegaard), 'such a

55. Kierkegaard, 'The Absolute Paradox', p. 54.
56. Ibid., p. 52.
57. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 177.
58. Matthew O'Donnell, 'St David and the Dragons', M. O'Donnell, *Moral Concern for Society. Mgr Matthew O'Donnell, President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth 1994–1996: A Tribute*, ed. by James McEvoy (Maynooth: St Patrick's College, 2006), pp. 48-63 (p. 52).

belief, however, does not attribute to God any interest in men (human beings).'[59] In sum, for Hume 'God survives as a suspected organiser of the world. [But] Even that, one feels, was a close run thing.'[60] From such order in the universe we simply do not (and cannot) know that any such being exists. Arguing from *the fact* the universe exists, as in the cosmological argument, will not improve matters here either. There is no justification for our belief in the existence of God (or the Gods), even if, as O'Donnell correctly notes, the belief or divine designer (or creator) *still stays* for us and Hume.

And even if we begin with the world of our experiences and of the kind of order and happenings that occur in nature and in and among the behaviour of our own fellow human beings to each other (and the animal kingdom and planet), would we really, Kierkegaard asks, like to trace the cause of such activity back to 'God' and to 'God's handiwork'? Philosophical theodicies dissolve rather than resolve the problem of evil (of natural evil); whilst political theodicies on earth legitimize man's inhumanity to man (moral evil). The gap, rather, that exists between the world and God, between God and man, between God's actions and man's actions, between justification by faith and justification by reason or fact, is insurmountable and unbridgeable for both Hume and Kierkegaard.[61] From this point of view, we can thus readily understand why, as O'Donnell concludes, whereas 'Kierkegaard wanted to destroy Christendom in order to preserve Christianity […] Hume wanted to abolish both Christianity and Christendom along with alternative creeds and organisations.'[62]

It may well be the case, then, for someone like Aquinas, that from observation and critical metaphysical reflection on familiar things around us, we may well be lead back to the conclusion that 'the heavens declare the Glory of God', but this, Kierkegaard points out, will only appear *'true'* to someone *who already accepts in faith the existence of God*; and that is to say, 'from the works as apprehended through an ideal interpretation, i.e., such as they do not immediately reveal themselves'. Thus, as Kierkegaard argues, '*in that case* it is not from the works that make the proof [of God's existence]; I merely develop the ideality I have presupposed, and because of my confidence in *this* I make so bold as to defy all objections, even those that have not yet been made.'[63] So, we are still left with the question of God's

59. Matthew O'Donnell, 'St David and the Dragons', M. O'Donnell, *Moral Concern for Society. Mgr Matthew O'Donnell, President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth 1994–1996: A Tribute*, ed. by James McEvoy (Maynooth: St Patrick's College, 2006), pp. 48-63 (p. 52).
60. Ibid. According to O'Donnell, Hume was battling against 'Three dragons. Nervous disease, the received religion, and finally, the received philosophy' (ibid.). Arguably, Kierkegaard was battling against the same dragons.
61. See, Richard H. Popkin, 'Hume and Kierkegaard', *The Journal of Religion*, 31 (1951), 274-281.
62. O'Donnell, p. 52.
63. Kierkegaard, 'The Absolute Paradox', p. 52, my emphasis.

existence. 'How does the existence of the God emerge from the demonstration?', Kierkegaard asks. And he replies:

> Does it happen straightway? [Or,] Is it not here as it is with the Cartesian dolls? As soon as I let go of the doll, it stands on its head. As soon as I let go of it—consequently, I have to let go of it. So also with the demonstration [of the existence of God]—so long as I am holding on to the demonstration (that is, continue to be one who is demonstrating), the existence does not emerge, if for no other reason than that I am in the process of demonstrating it, but when I let go of the demonstration, the existence [of God] is there. Yet this letting go, even *that is surely something*; it is, after all, *my contribution* [*meine Zuthat*, my doing]. Does *it* not have to be taken into account, this diminutive moment, *however brief it is*—it does not have to be long, because it is *a leap*. However diminutive this moment, even if it is this very instant, this very instant must be taken into account.[64]

In other words, is not this 'letting go' of 'the proof' the only (critical) thing that needs to be taken into account, that should be taken into account, that is to be taken into account in any thinking about God? This very leap of faith in the moment (*der Sprung im Augenblick*) is, after all, arguably the only thing worthwhile to consider. *Therefore*, 'faith begins, where thought leaves off.'[65]

IX Some Preliminary Conclusions

For Kierkegaard, then, the following conclusions may be summarised: (i) For any serious thinker, if, at the outset, I don't know whether God exists or not, I can never subsequently prove it; so, *in thinking this,* 'faith begins, where thought leaves off…'; (ii) for any serious thinker, if, at the outset, I begin with the thought of a necessarily existing all-perfect God—whose *essentia [ipso facto] involvit existentiam*—reflecting on this concept will not bring about God's actual existence; so, *in thinking this,* 'faith begins, where thought leaves off…'; (iii) for any serious thinker, if, at the outset, I begin from reflecting on familiar things around me, I will never be lead back to the existence of God as we find much that leads us to the conclusion that God does not exist; so, *in thinking this*, 'faith begins, where thought leaves off…'. Yet, this, nonetheless, is the only place from where I can start, that is to say, with the world in which I actually exist, and so, if we begin with the world,

64. Kierkegaard, 'The Absolute Paradox', p. 52, my emphases.
65. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 82.

> I observe nature in order to find God, and indeed I also see omnipotence and wisdom, but I see much else too that troubles and disturbs. The *summa summarum* of this is the objective uncertainty [of the existence of God], but the inwardness [of faith in God] becomes so great *just because it embrace*s the objective uncertainty [of the existence of God] *with all the passion of the infinite*.[66]

Here, then, is where, 'the existence' of God, emerges from 'the proof', but no such certainty or justification for that belief can emerge with that or can (or should) be entertained. And so, Kierkegaard can quite consistently arrive at the conclusion of his thinking that this, '*the objective uncertainty maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness is truth*, the highest truth there is for someone existing.'[67]

So, *when* I let go of the proofs, the leap (of faith) is there. Letting go and leaping are part and parcel of the same thing itself, *since faith is not without thought but where thought leaves off.*

Anselm's or anybody else's project of faith seeking understanding, therefore, cannot be undertaken or accomplished without giving up on faith. And if—failing this resort to faith alone—I think that my proof of God's existence is successful, whether as 'that that which nothing greater can be thought', or as the realised absolute historical instantiation in time of the concept of God in Jesus Christ, or as the unmoved mover(s) of the universe that is (are) responsible for the divine intelligence that lies behind all the order and design of the universe in all its diversity and multiplicity, such a find will lead only to a God that has no interest in any actual currently living-existing-thinking individual human being. At the end of the enquiry, therefore, I have not found the living God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, but the God of the philosophers. And this, we can only conclude, with Kierkgaard, is, at best, for any Christian religious thinker, misplaced reverence, or, at worse, idolatry.[68]

X Conclusion: Kierkegaard the Philosopher and his Critics

In December 1953 Heidegger intimates that were he to be called by faith, he would have to 'shut up shop' (i.e., stop questioning and doing philosophy).[69]

66. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 171, my emphases.
67. Ibid., Kierkegaard's emphasis.
68. Ibid., p. 177.
69. Quoted by Jacques Derrida in, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 115, n. Taken from the 'Report of a Session of the Evangelical Academy in Hofgeismar, December 1953,' in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, ed. by Richard Kearney & Joseph O'Leary (Paris: Grasset, 1980), p. 335.

In Heidegger's estimation, therefore, one can be *either* a thinker (a philosopher) *or* a religious believer because 'questioning is the piety of thinking' (*Das Fragen ist die Frömmigkeit des Denkens*), and questioning is opposed to the certainty of faith.[70] For Kierkegaard, however, 'certainty and passion *do not go together*.'[71] There is, in other words, another possibility for thought, one that is open to the religious thinker, and only to the religious thinker who is motivated by the passion of faith and thinking that is equally opposed to the certainty of knowledge and the certainty of faith; but this possibility is one that Heidegger both *aprioristically* and *constructivistically* excludes from philosophy. In this, however, Heidegger is following Kant and also in agreement with his contemporary fatherly philosophical figure Husserl.[72] Yet, this is a path and a possibility for thought that is opened up and only opened to a man of faith and a man of intelligence.

This path and possibility that Kierkegaard set for himself in philosophy after Kant, therefore, requires no less a radical questioning commensurate with its task for thought than the task that Heidegger was later to set for himself in his a-theistic way of thinking (*der Denkweg*) about the question of the meaning of being in his development of a post-Kantian philosophy, or the task that Husserl had set for himself in his conception of phenomenology as an eidetics of our intentional consciousness, after consciousness has been purified of all naturalistic interpretations via the intellectually therapeutic act of transcendental reduction, or the task that Kant had set for himself to legitimate exclusively the modern natural-scientific spirit of his day and his own ideal of moral science.[73] Yet, Kierkegaard, as much as anyone of us, is well aware of the fact that to begin to engage in thinking about anything 'I [we] always argue from existence, not towards existence, whether I move in the sphere of pal-

70. Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by D. F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), pp. 284–317 (p. 317).

71. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 26, my emphasis.

72. See, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), '§58. The Transcendency, God, Excluded,' pp. 133–134. As Husserl acutely notes, in line with Kant, '(T)he idea of God is a necessary limiting concept in epistemological considerations, and an indispensable index to the construction of certain limiting concepts which not even the [post-Kantian] philosophizing atheist [or theist] can do without'. *Ideas I* (1913), p. 187, n. 17. That Kant's position supports *atheistic* conceptions of philosophy, however, cannot be denied either. See, Gordon E. Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999).

73. See, Martin Heidegger, 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', in M. Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, ed. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 55–73, esp. pp. 63–64. All of the essays written by Heidegger in the early 1960s for *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 'Zeit und Sein' (1962), 'Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie' (1963)' and 'Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens' (1964), address this same issue, in one way or another, with both Hegel and Husserl's respective philosophical conceptions of phenomenology in mind.

pable sensible fact or in the realm of thought.'[74] For Kierkegaard, however, both the objective existence of things, including my fellow human I encounter in the world about me, and the subjective existence of my own individual existence are radically different forms of existences; they must not and cannot be identified without being '*levelled-off*,' that is to say, without annihilation. Individual human existence, in other words, is the only form of existence that one experiences from within.

In any philosophy purporting to be a system or systematic way of thinking, such individual existence is left out and has to be left out; hence, it follows for Kierkegaard that any science of existence or of being, however such is understood, before or after Kant, as a natural science or metaphysical science, is impossible. If 'general metaphysics' crumbles, then *a fortiori* any alleged 'special metaphysics' of God (natural theology), human existence (philosophical anthropology), or the world (rational cosmology) also crumbles. Kierkegaard's critique of both general and special metaphysics, therefore, is more radical than Kant's as it extends to and includes the sciences that are dear to Kant, that is, modern natural science and transcendental philosophy as the possible new science (and possible new metaphysics) of the future. For Kierkegaard, nonetheless, there can be no science of the human being or of 'beings as beings' without annihilation of the individual. Your experiencing of your own existence and my experience of mine, rather, are inaccessible to each other. Existence keeps things apart, ensures individuality, separate identities, plurality.[75]

Kierkegaard's 'ontology—an existential approach', therefore, can never be undertaken or become part of any universal or historical-epochal science of the meaning of being in general, without in that very enterprise devaluing and diminishing the significance of an existing individual, which, alas, we know is borne out in the entire torso of Heidegger's unfinished project of 'fundamental ontology' in *Being and Time* and in his subsequent *Denkweg* about *die Seinsfrage*, as it has been equally overlooked and undervalued by Hegel in his majestic story of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Unlike Hegel and Heidegger, nevertheless, for Kierkegaard existence means concrete, individual human existence, and if it loses its concreteness through abstraction (in '*Dasein*' or in the unfolding process of *Geist* or in the historical-epochal sendings of the meaning of being), it fails to be 'existence'.

It is thus correct to conclude with that notable historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston, that 'while the term existence has a wide field of application, it tends to

74. Kierkegaard, 'The Absolute Paradox', p. 50.

75. 'There can be no system for life itself. So, is there no such thing? Not at all, nor does what was said imply that. Life itself is a system for God, but cannot be that for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to each other, but life is just the opposite. From an abstract point of view, system and existing cannot be thought together; because systematic thought in order to think life must think of it as annulled and hence not as life. Existence is the spacing that holds things apart; the systematic is the finality that joins them together.' Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 100.

take on a specifically religious connotation [in Kierkegaard's philosophy].'[76] And this is because, for Kierkegaard, it is at the religious stage of existence, and only in this stage of existence—which requires a commitment to 'the absurd,' a blind leap of faith in the unknown and unknowable God as an act of the will, and the 'teleological suspension of the ethical'—that one can possibly (if at all) achieve authentic individual concrete human existence. In other words, Heidegger misinforms his students in his lecture-courses and miscategorises Kierkegaard's philosophy in his published work as untenable because it is reliant on personal religious faith when it is the case that Kierkegaard is 'first and foremost a religious thinker', *par excellence*, in philosophy after Kant.[77]

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76. See, Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7. *18th and 19th Century German Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum, 1963; 2003), p. 348.

77. Ibid., p. 350.

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