

Essays/Aufsätze

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Two Ships Passing in the Night? A Historical Analysis of Nietzsche's Inauspicious 'Non-Engagement' with the Writings of Kierkegaard with Respect to Truth

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Abstract: Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) were two seminal 19th century thinkers, each of whom presented dramatically different theological and philosophical conceptions of Christianity and truth. Prior historical investigations into the relationship between these two individuals have problematised what was once a truism in Nietzsche (and Kierkegaard) studies whereby the younger Nietzsche was considered to have nil knowledge of the older Kierkegaard insofar as the former did not read the latter's writings. Focusing on the topic of truth, this study canvasses the historical literature on Nietzsche's reception of Kierkegaard to evidence the various ways in which Nietzsche indeed may be said to have 'known' Kierkegaard, or at least to have become conversant with Kierkegaard's thought at some level of awareness. However, despite evidence of Nietzsche having encountered the thought of Kierkegaard in general and Kierkegaard's theory of truth in particular, this study will contend that such evidence for Nietzsche's knowledge of Kierkegaard generates as many questions as answers for the historical inquirer. Of note, as Nietzsche inauspiciously did not, in unequivocal writing, address Kierkegaard, this study concludes by illustrating a central challenge confronting historians and historiographers intent on tracking these thinkers' influence on theological truth claims without recourse to a primary literature. That is, without recourse to a literature in which Nietzsche autonomously responded to Kierkegaard regarding the topic of truth.

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Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) und Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) waren zwei wegweisende Denker des 19. Jahrhunderts, von denen jeder grundlegend unterschiedliche theologische und philosophische Vorstellungen von Christentum und Wahrheit präsentierte. Frühere historische Untersuchungen der Beziehung zwischen diesen beiden Personen haben die einstige Binsenweisheit in Nietzsches- (und Kierkegaard-) Studien problematisiert, wonach der jüngere Nietzsche keine Kenntnis von dem älteren Kierkegaard hatte, insofern als ersterer dessen Schriften nicht gelesen hatte. Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf das Thema Wahrheit und untersucht die historische Literatur zu Nietzsches Rezeption von Kierkegaard, um die verschiedenen Arten zu belegen, in denen Nietzsche Kierkegaard tatsächlich „gekannt“ oder zumindest auf einer bestimmten Ebene mit Kierkegaards Gedanken vertraut war. Obwohl Indizien dafür vorliegen, dass Nietzsche auf die Gedanken von Kierkegaard im Allgemeinen und auf Kierkegaards Wahrheitstheorie im Besonderen gestoßen ist, zeigt diese Studie, dass solche Hinweise auf Nietzsches Wissen über Kierkegaard ebenso viele Fragen wie Antworten für den historischen Forscher aufwerfen. Da Nietzsche Kierkegaard bedauerlicherweise nicht eindeutig adressiert hat, illustriert diese Arbeit die zentrale Herausforderung, mit der Historiker und Historiographen konfrontiert sind, die den Einfluss dieser Denker auf theologische Wahrheitsansprüche ohne Rückgriff auf Primärliteratur verfolgen wollen. Das heißt, ohne auf Literatur zurückzugreifen, in der Nietzsche eigenständig auf das Thema Wahrheit bei Kierkegaard Bezug nimmt.

Keywords: Truth, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Historical Reception, Subjectivity, Perspectivism

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) lived exactly one generation apart as Kierkegaard was born in the same year as Nietzsche's father and died 11 November 1855, shortly after Nietzsche turned 11-years-old. Precocious as he was, then, Nietzsche still did not have the opportunity to correspond with Kierkegaard and the historical relation between these two seminal thinkers could only be unidirectional as Kierkegaard died more than 16 years before Nietzsche formally launched his literary career with the publication of his first manuscript, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.¹ Despite this generational divide, there are clear parallels to the contexts within which these thinkers lived and worked as well as the themes² around which their writings

¹ German: *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*. First published in January 1872.

² Relatively recent examples from what is an enormous literature comparing and contrasting the thought of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche include Tom P. S. Angier, *Either Kierkegaard/Or Nietzsche*:

revolved. Of note, both authors wrote against the backdrop of post-Kantian and -Hegelian 19th century continental Europe and, although ultimately developing dramatically different conceptions of Christianity, each critiqued theological ideas in formulating their respective theories of truth. Taken in this vein, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may be seen as focal to an analysis of alethic ideas which emerged during the specific historical epoch of the 19th century and, as such, Nietzsche's reception of Kierkegaard is of utmost concern. In this study, I aim to show that Nietzsche indeed encountered the work of Kierkegaard via several sources however, despite having done so, did not expressly address this work nor specifically engage Kierkegaard's particular conception of truth. This non-engagement, I aver, is inauspicious as it left, as it still does, consequent efforts to track these thinkers' influence on theological truth claims for scholars and interpreters largely without recourse to a primary literature. As well, I contend that, even if Nietzsche was not as ignorant of Kierkegaard as has been traditionally thought,³ the evidence that does exist for Nietzsche's knowledge of Kierkegaard generates as many questions as it does answers. First, I survey in outline Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's distinctive theories of truth. Second, I canvass the historical literature of these thinkers to enumerate the various ways in which Nietzsche encountered Kierkegaard's work and note the striking paucity of references to this work within Nietzsche's oeuvre. Rather than duplicate the enterprising research of Brobjer and Miles,⁴ I nuance the most robust historical evidences of Nietzsche's knowledge of Kierkegaard in order to distil a more detailed picture of the challenge confronting any historical investigator *qua* historian or historiographer such that, even with these evidences in hand, the additional (e. g., hermeneutical, ethical, philological, or otherwise theological and

Moral Philosophy in a New Key. London: Routledge, 2016; John Powell Clayton, "Zarathustra and the Stages on Life's Way: A Nietzschean Riposte to Kierkegaard?." *Nietzsche-Studien* 14, no. 1 (1985): 179–200, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110244335.179>; Alastair Hannay, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche." In *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. Maria DiBattista, Emily O. Wittman. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 119–132; Markus Kleinert, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche." in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt, George Pattison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 402–420; Thomas P. Miles, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Reconsidered." *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2007): 441–469, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192926.2.441>; and Thomas P. Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche: Rival Visions of the Best Way of Life." In *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, ed. Jon Stewart. London: Routledge, 2011, 263–298.

³ E. g., James Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche." In *Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: Faith and Eternal Acceptance*. Hounds mills: Macmillan Press, 1997, 116–129.

⁴ Thomas Brobjer, "Notes and Discussions: Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, no. 2 (April 2003): 251–263, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2003.0004>; Miles, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Reconsidered", 441–469; Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche", 263–298.

philosophical) challenges stemming from the historical Kierkegaard-Nietzsche relation are significant. Lastly, I elaborate this significance as I make perspicuous a foremost challenge incumbent on later commentators interested in the history and nature of these thinkers' inputs to theologies and philosophies of truth.

1 Kierkegaard on Truth

Throughout Kierkegaard's⁵ immense corpus of writings, but notably in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*,⁶ Kierkegaard developed a theory of truth summarized as 'subjectivity is truth'. Rather than an assertion that subjectivity is the ultimate ground or source of truth, however, this thesis may be taken to denote that that which one understands to be the case is to be appropriated by oneself in one's own existence.⁷ Moreover, this thesis may be concisely taken as a rebuttal of G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) systematizing philosophy wherein, for Kierkegaard, subjects are prompted to observe and implement, moment-by-moment, a logic of mediation which collapses important conceptual distinctions (e.g., time and eternity, being and becoming) to achieve an absolute view from nowhere or viewpoint of the world and history *in toto*.⁸ Writing as

⁵ A central tenant within Kierkegaard scholarship is to explicitly avoid conflation of the arguments presented in Kierkegaard's pseudonymously published texts with those of the signed works by Kierkegaard himself. Indeed, in an appendix to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard forthrightly disavowed personal endorsement of the content articulated by the pseudonymous authors of his creation: "Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me." Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Volume I, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 626. Accordingly, though an exhaustive excursus into the intricate relations between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms is outside the scope of the present effort, I dispense with analysing any implications of Kierkegaard's invocation of specific pseudonyms but hereafter cite these pseudonyms rather than 'Kierkegaard' alone with regard to direct quotations and discussion of the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis.

⁶ Danish: *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de philosophiske Smuler*. First published under the pseudonym 'Johannes Climacus' (with Kierkegaard listed as editor) in February 1846.

⁷ Cf. Clare Carlisle, "Climacus on the Task of Becoming a Christian." In *Kierkegaard's 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript': A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 170–189; Stephen C. Evans, "Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay, Gordon D. Marino. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 154–176; Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 101–124.

⁸ E.g., Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Despair in the *Sickness unto Death*." In

Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard notes Hegelianism's tendency to degrade participation in the world in favour of observation and correspondingly Hegelianism's promise to reveal the objective truth of the world and humankind's place in it or the necessary interconnectedness of all things. The key issue for Climacus is: How does one transcend their own particularistic point of view to attain the objective perspective promised by Hegelianism? For Climacus, such truth is unattainable for human subjects and therefore the founding premise of Hegelian idealism is illusory. Climacus instead offers that, "subjectivity, inwardness, is truth".⁹ Deriding this thesis as trading objectivism for an untenable subjectivism, myriad critics¹⁰ have accused Climacus of espousing a solipsism in that the locus of truth is presented as a subject's inwardness. Climacus does, it is noted, aver that, "inwardness in an existing subject is passion",¹¹ "passion cannot be understood by a third party",¹² and truth is found, "by seeking in silence the [alethic] criterion that is in one's innermost being".¹³ Hence, said critics contend that here 'truth' is regarded as that which is passionately endorsed in one's inward subjectivity, regardless of content, which is, on classical logic, invalid. For if passion, inwardness, or subjectivity begets truth, then two contradictory propositions endorsed *in mente* with equal passion would both be true.

Obviating this criticism, however, two rejoinders are offered. First, Climacus limits his thesis to "the truth that is related to existence",¹⁴ thereby avoiding its universality. Indeed, for Climacus, passion cannot establish the truth of, for example, $2 + 2 = 5$: "In a mathematical proposition the objectivity is given".¹⁵ What circumscribes 'subjectivity is truth', then, is that human subjects hold a privileged epistemological position vis-à-vis their own *existential* commitments (e.g., whether there is good and if one's action counts as such), which they do not hold beyond probabilistically as observers of other individual subjects. Conversely, the Hegelian attempt at existential objectivity through a disengaged model of the subject is, for Climacus, mistaken insofar as it abstracts and depreciates precisely that which constitutes or is related to existence (i.e., the

Idem, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 550–595.

⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 207.

¹⁰ For example, Paul Edwards, "Kierkegaard and the 'Truth' of Christianity." *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* XLVI, no. 176 (April 1971): 89–108, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3749442>.

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 196.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 509.

¹³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 548.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 198.

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 204.

dispositions upon which subjective identity is founded). Second, Climacus does not obliviously omit the content of truth as he, and Kierkegaard more generally, posits truth as transcendentally embodied in the paradoxical and offensive¹⁶ life of Jesus, whose unique charge it was to instantiate good in the world and concomitantly show love of God as the veritable aim and content of truth that is related to existence.

2 Nietzsche on Truth

It is a tenuous undertaking to relate Nietzsche's conception of truth as a 'theory'. That is, at least as 'theory' is understood in the commonplace sense of a definitive set of propositions which cohere as the explanans for given explananda or a given explanandum. Even if his recurrent denials of truth¹⁷ are seen as merely rhetorical, Nietzsche was broadly indifferent to a substantive notion of truth. Or, at least, he had no formal definition of truth.¹⁸ Nietzsche was, instead, pragmatically interested in those perspectives which promote certain ways of life or modes of existence. If his views do cohere into a specifiable thesis, then, as Angier contends,¹⁹ Nietzsche's theory may be cast as a four-stage progression culminating in a thorough-going perspectivism. That is, first, Nietzsche depicts the Western philosophical tradition's conception of human's place in the world

¹⁶ Paradoxical as, for example, Jesus represents eternal truth entering temporal existence (Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and offensive inasmuch as Jesus as the lowly, poor, suffering, and finally powerless servant offends human ideas of divine glory and thereby engenders a collision between the implacably different goals of Christianity and those of men (Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁷ For example, Nietzsche observes, "[...] it is senseless to want to posit anything as beautiful or ugly apart from [a relativism]. *The beautiful* exists just as little as does *the good*, or *the truth*." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1967, 423. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." In *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeals. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979, 79–91.

¹⁸ As elucidated by Gemes (Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche's Critique of Truth." *Philosophy and Phenomenology Research* 52, no. 1 (March 1992): 47–65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2107743>), Nietzsche's definition of truth is, *prima facie*, an unresolved paradox inasmuch as denying truth invites the question, "Is it true that there is no truth?" To wit, answering 'yes' to this query tacitly affirms at least one truth (viz., that there is no truth) whereas answering 'no' to the query, of course, contradicts the negation and affirms the existence of at least some truth.

¹⁹ Tom P. S. Angier, "Truth." In *Idem, Either Kierkegaard/Or Nietzsche*, 75–102.

as namely understood through the interpretive systems of Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism, each of which share the basal assumption that humans occupy an 'apparent world' apart from a 'real world' (e.g., 'being' contra 'becoming,' this 'Vale of Tears' contra the 'Kingdom of Heaven', and 'phenomenal' contra 'noumenal' realms for Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism, respectively).²⁰ Nietzsche rebuts these metaphysical accounts as defunct insofar as he avers that each entails untenable epistemological paradoxes including the fact that one's life is situated within the 'apparent world' yet is enjoined to uncover his essence in the 'real world' and that this dichotomy of the apparent versus the real engenders an 'anti-natural' antithesis. He writes, for example, "does man not eternally create a fictitious world for himself because he wants a better world than reality? Above all: how do we arrive at the idea that our world is *not* the true world? – it could be that the other world is the 'apparent' one".²¹ Second, attempting to eclipse this ostensible epistemological paradox, Nietzsche proffers Dionysian art (namely as presented in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*) as the foremost means by which man can grasp the reality of appearances untethered to the unknowable realms of becoming, Heaven, or noumena. In this way, Nietzsche presents Dionysian art and aesthetic mysticism as the salve and replacement metaphysics to the vagaries that he sees as afflicting Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism: "Rescued by art, [one] is rescued, for its own purposes, by – life."²² However, third, diagnosing that this aesthetic mysticism inherently contains its own epistemic opacities inasmuch as it wants to preserve a notion of metaphysical truth²³ yet cannot establish a ground for this truth that is any less obscure than that which he estimates as afflicting Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism, Nietzsche adopts a scientism such that the truth about the world and humankind's place in it must become the exclusive bailiwick of science or, rather, *Wissenschaften*.²⁴ Nonetheless, fourth, Nietzsche

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable." In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, trans. Judith Norman. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 171.

²¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 321.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 46.

²³ E.g., "We encounter truly Dionysian music as such a universal mirror of the world-will: the vivid event refracted in this mirror immediately expands emotionally for us to become the copy of an eternal truth." Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 94.

²⁴ For example, "the question of how our conception of the world could differ so widely from the disclosed nature of the world will with perfect equanimity be relinquished to the physiology and history of the evolution of organisms and concepts." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 16.

further rejects scientism as, at best, incapable of generating values and, at worst, anathemic re-emergence of asceticism whereby faith in science has the potential to buttress such pious zeal to even inspire truth-motivated self-sacrifice.²⁵ Indeed, as Nietzsche notes in *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*,²⁶ faith in science “[...] is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the [...] most recent and noble manifestation [of it]”.²⁷ Unable to resolve the dissonance between scientism and his fluid axiology with appetites for certain undergirding values (e.g., the self’s capacity for value creation and, namely, accentuations of power, Dionysian *joie de vivre*, affirmation of ‘this-worldliness’, art and artistry, individuality, autonomy, and pluralism), Nietzsche, then, abrogates the notion of an overarching universal truth about the world and humankind’s place in it and ultimately opts for full-scale perspectivism: “There are many kinds of eyes [...] and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths’, and consequently there is no truth.”²⁸ Rather than crude relativism, however, Nietzsche’s thesis is namely concerned with locating the unique perspectives from which individuals as ‘free spirits’, including the Übermensch and ‘higher men’, may flourish in their self-development.

3 The Historical Evidence of Nietzsche’s Exposure to and Reception of Kierkegaard

Having selectively surveyed salient aspects of their respective theories of truth, the question remains to what extent Nietzsche was in any way conversant with Kierkegaard’s thought in general and his theory of truth in particular. Several prior investigations have indicated that Nietzsche was indeed familiar with Kierkegaard through multiple sources,²⁹ which are clustered and enumerated here.

²⁵ See, for example, aphorism 344 within Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 200 f.

²⁶ German: *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*. First published in November 1887.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 110.

²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 291.

²⁹ For full-scale investigations in English, see Brobjer, “Nietzsche’s Knowledge of Kierkegaard”, 251–263, as well as Miles, “Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Reconsidered”, 441–469, and “Friedrich Nietzsche”, 263–298. My primary focus herein is to detail the sources of Nietzsche’s exposure to Kierkegaard with the greatest evidential support and with the most plausible impact upon Nietzsche. I do not discuss minor and entirely conjectural sources. For example, Georg Brandes

1. First, in a 26 August 1888 letter to Carl Fuchs (1865–1951),³⁰ Nietzsche offers a glowing appraisal of Brandes' *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*³¹ and Brobjer clarifies that correspondences from Peter Gast (i. e., Johann Heinrich Köseltz, 1854–1918) indicate that Gast read parts of Strodtmann's German translation of this work to Nietzsche likely between 1876 and early 1878.³² Of significance, the second volume of Brandes' work,³³ which Brobjer contends Nietzsche likely re-read in 1887 or 1888, contains 23 pages on which Kierkegaard is discussed or quoted from, including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* wherein the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis is presented. Notably, in discussing Friedrich Schlegel's (1772–1829) *Lucinde*, Brandes posits "It is not merely in name that this irony bears a fundamental resemblance to Kierkegaard's, which also aristocratically 'chooses to be misunderstood.' The Ego of genius is the truth, if not in the sense in which Kierkegaard would have us understand his proposition, 'Subjectivity is the truth,' still in the sense that the Ego has every externally valid commandment and prohibition in its power; and, to the astonishment

(1842–1927) published his study of Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard*, in 1879 and the German translation by Adolf Strodtmann (1829–1879) appeared in the same year. This monograph was reviewed in periodicals to which, according to Brobjer ("Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 255), Nietzsche held subscriptions and drew upon in his own work. However, with nil evidence that Nietzsche actually read this piece, this is, maximally, a minor means by which he may have learned of Kierkegaard's thought. As well, Lou Salomé (1861–1937), with whom Nietzsche had an intense relationship in 1882, had studied Kierkegaard in St. Petersburg prior to meeting Nietzsche. Though Clayton ("Zarathustra and the Stages on Life's Way", 198 f.) conjectures that Kierkegaard may have been discussed during one of Salomé's and Nietzsche's many intensive religious deliberations, without evidence that Kierkegaard was ever mentioned, this too must be regarded as a minor means by which Nietzsche may have learned of Kierkegaard's thought.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche to Carl Fuchs, Sils im Engadin, 26 August 1888. In *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 24 March 2021, <http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1888,1016>.

³¹ Georg Brandes, *Die Hauptströmungen der Literatur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Volumes 1–5, trans. Adolf Strodtmann, W. Rudow. Berlin: Merseburg, 1872–1887. The English translation of this work, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volumes 1–6, trans. Diana White, Mary Morison. London: William Heinemann, 1906, will be used for all references hereafter. Apart from this work, and although it is impossible to know the full scope of Nietzsche's knowledge, a letter to Brandes on 8 January 1888 (Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, Nice, 8 January 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921, 322–324) suggests that Nietzsche was well-versed with the writings of Brandes. As the leading 19th century literary critic of Denmark, an encounter with the Danish Kierkegaard more generalised than those incidences specified here is probable through Nietzsche's reading of Brandes.

³² Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 253.

³³ Kierkegaard is referenced on pages 11, 15 f., 27–29, 63 f. 70–76, 80, 123, 156–159, 179, and 189 in the second volume of *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*.

and scandal of the world, invariably expresses itself in paradoxes.”³⁴ Still, despite these references to Kierkegaard, it is impossible to know definitively how much of Brandes’ *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature* Nietzsche may have retained inasmuch as it is unclear which whole or part of the specific volumes Gast read to Nietzsche sometime between 1876 and 1878 (and the same goes for Nietzsche’s later re-encounter with the work(s) in 1887/1888). It is on this basis that I concur with Brobjer such that this evidence alone is not enough to assert that Nietzsche ‘knew’ Kierkegaard other than to say that he potentially encountered Kierkegaard’s name and thought in broad strokes within German-language literature as early as the second half of the 1870s.

2. Second, in a 27 March 1880 letter³⁵ to his mother, Franziska Nietzsche (1826–1897), Nietzsche requested that she send him a copy of the Danish theologian and eventual Bishop of the Diocese of Zealand, and Primate of the Church of Denmark, Hans Lassen Martensen’s (1808–1884) *Christian Ethics*.³⁶ Nietzsche’s journal entries from this period indicate that he read at least the first volume of this work during the spring and summer of 1880,³⁷ in which Kierkegaard is solely examined across 27 successive pages. Indeed, as it was at this time that Nietzsche was beginning his vitriolic attack on traditional conceptions of morality and Christianity (e. g., *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*³⁸), Brobjer³⁹ contends that it was his reading of Martensen that, at least in part, provided impetus and ammunition to Nietzsche’s invective. Importantly,

³⁴ Brandes, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volume 2, 72. From Brandes’ rather short description, it is not altogether certain precisely how he intends to construe the ‘subjectivity is truth’ thesis (e. g., to what extent he considers it to sanction a complete relativism). In any case, the key point is that herein Brandes notes the thesis and therefore Nietzsche may have been introduced to Kierkegaard’s (i. e., Climacus’s) theory of truth by way of the Danish literary critic.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche to Franziska Nietzsche, Venice, 27 March 1880. In *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 24 March 2021, <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1880>

³⁶ Hans Lassen Martensen, *Die Christliche Ethik*, 2nd ed., trans. Alexander Michelsen. Gotha: Besser, 1873. The English translation of this work, *Christian Ethics*, Volumes 1–2, trans. C. Spence. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873, will be used for all references hereafter.

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, note from 1880 (Group 3, note 67) published in *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 26 March 2021, [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,3\[67\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,3[67]); note from 1880 (Group 5, note 37) published in *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 26 March 2021, [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,5\[37\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,5[37]).

³⁸ German: *Morgenröthe: Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurtheile*. Nietzsche began compiling notes for this work in January 1880 and finished writing in May 1881. The book was first published later in 1881.

³⁹ Brobjer, “Nietzsche’s Knowledge of Kierkegaard”, 256.

in *Christian Ethics*, Martensen specifically references Kierkegaard's theory of truth such that he offers, “[Kierkegaard] considers it as the misfortune of the age to know too much, and with all of this knowledge to have forgotten what it is to exist [...] that the age, by becoming too objective, has forgotten that it is the business of every human to remain subjective [...] [Kierkegaard] has arrived at the perception that ‘subjectivity is the truth.’”⁴⁰ Martensen's somewhat sympathetic but also critical treatment of Kierkegaard comprises the longest and most detailed accounting of Kierkegaard's thought. Taken with the fact that Nietzsche owned at least this first volume of Martensen's work in his personal library, evidence within both Nietzsche's published work (e.g., Nietzsche quotes Martensen within § 210 of *Daybreak*⁴¹) and originally unpublished notes⁴² that *Christian Ethics* indeed informed and fuelled Nietzsche's critique of morality and Christianity, Nietzsche's exposure to Kierkegaard by way of Martensen appreciably supports the position that Nietzsche held at least some acquaintance with Kierkegaard in and around 1880.

3. Third, in late 1887, Nietzsche read Harald Höffding's (1843–1931) *Outlines of Psychology on the Foundation of Experience*.⁴³ Crucially, the copy drawn from Nietzsche's personal library⁴⁴ contains underscoring of Höffding's account of Kierkegaard's concept of 'repetition' (i.e., “Consequently for Kierkegaard the possibility of repetition is the fundamental ethical problem.”⁴⁵) and Nietzsche scored “NB” (*nota bene*) as well as a vertical line as marginalia to call out an accompanying footnote.⁴⁶ This footnote explicitly references three of Kierkegaard's texts:

⁴⁰ Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 219–222.

⁴¹ “Formerly we asked: what is the laughable? as though there were things external to us to which the laughable adhered as a quality, and we exhausted ourselves in suggestions (one theologian even opined that it was ‘the naivety of sin.’)” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark, Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 133. This allusion to ‘one theologian’ refers to Martensen, who notes that “[...] the comic is the *naïveté of sin*” (*Christian Ethics*, 184) some 30 pages prior to the sustained treatment of Kierkegaard partially quoted above.

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, note from 1880 (Group 3, note 67) published in *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 26 March 2021, [http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,3\[67\]](http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,3[67]); note from 1880 (Group 5, note 37) published in *Nietzsche Source – Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed 26 March 2021, [http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,5\[37\]](http://www.nietzsche-source.org/#eKGWB/NF-1880,5[37]).

⁴³ English translation: Harald Höffding, *Outlines of Psychology on the Foundation of Experience*, trans. Mary E. Lowndes. London: Macmillan, 1891.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche owned and read the German translation: Harald Höffding, *Psychologie in Umrissen auf Grundlage der Erfahrung*, trans. F. Bendixen. Leipzig: Fues, 1887.

⁴⁵ Höffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, 280.

⁴⁶ Brobjer, “Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard”, 259 f.

Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology,⁴⁷ *Practice in Christianity*,⁴⁸ and *The Moment*.⁴⁹ Accordingly, as Miles observes, in highlighting Höffding's description of Kierkegaard's notion of 'repetition' and the accompanying footnote in which Kierkegaard's polemic against established Christendom is noted, Nietzsche's attention would undoubtedly have been drawn to three of Kierkegaard's texts and concentrated on a palpable twofold convergence between both his own ethical considerations (viz., Nietzschean 'eternal recurrence' and Kierkegaardian 'repetition') and his distinct polemics against Christianity.⁵⁰

4. Finally, fourth, in a letter to Brandes dated 8 January 1888,⁵¹ Nietzsche commends Brandes on his psychological acumen in an essay entitled "Goethe and Denmark", published in the *Goethe Yearbook*.⁵² Of note, this essay contains a discussion of Kierkegaard with respect to his view of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). As well, in a 11 January 1888 letter, Brandes appended a copy of his work, *Moderne Geister*, and specifically recommended Nietzsche to read the inhering essay on Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906),⁵³ in which Kierkegaard is specifically mentioned on 11 pages. More importantly, later in this same letter, Brandes plainly recommends that Nietzsche read the work of Kierkegaard: "There is a Northern writer whose works would interest you, if they were but translated, Søren Kierkegaard. He lived 1813 to 1855, and is in my opinion one of the profoundest psychologists to be met with anywhere. A little book which I have written about him [i. e., the aforementioned *Søren Kierkegaard*] (the [German] translation published at Leipzig in 1879) gives no exhaustive idea of his genius, for the book is a kind of polemical tract written with the purpose of checking his influence."⁵⁴ Responding to Brandes' suggestion in a letter dated 19 February 1888, Nietzsche notes that "I intend on my next journey into Germany

⁴⁷ Danish: *Gentagelsen: Et Forsøg i den experimenterende Psychologi*. First published in October 1843.

⁴⁸ Danish: *Indøvelse i Christendom*. First published in September 1850.

⁴⁹ Danish: *Øjeblikket*. Originally published as a series of articles beginning in May 1855.

⁵⁰ Miles, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 270 f.

⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, Nice, 8 January 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 322–324

⁵² Georg Brandes, "Goethe und Dänemark." *Goethe Jahrbuch*, Volume 2. Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1882, 1–48.

⁵³ Georg Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen." In Idem, *Moderne Geister. Literarische Bildnisse aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1887, 413–465. Kierkegaard is referenced on pages 357 f., 359 f., 368, 372 f., 375, 379 f., and 382 in the English translation of this work: "Henrik Ibsen." In Idem, *Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Rasmus Anderson. New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1923, 349–396.

⁵⁴ Georg Brandes to Friedrich Nietzsche, Copenhagen, 11 January 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 325.

to tackle Kierkegaard's psychological problems, and to renew my acquaintance with your older literature. That will be of use to me in the best sense of the word, and will serve to cajole my own critical harshness and arrogance into a good temper.”⁵⁵ Despite Nietzsche's statement, however, and unfortunately, there is no evidence to indicate that his intention to engage with the work of Kierkegaard was ever fulfilled.

4 Taking Stock of the Historical Evidence

Taken together, without indisputable indication that Nietzsche read any of Kierkegaard's writings first-hand⁵⁶ and as each encounter was by way of no more than secondary source, until further evidence is brought to light, there is no absolute necessitation that Nietzsche definitively knew of and was influenced by any aspect of Kierkegaard's voluminous writings. Indeed, *pace* efforts⁵⁷ which speculate that Nietzsche *knew* Kierkegaard's work and alluded to it in certain of his writings, there is nothing to apodictically identify the degree of Nietzsche's knowledge of Kierkegaard's thought or validate these speculations. That said, however, to dismiss this evidence and relate to these encounters as merely incidental, transient, and thereby posit Nietzsche's full or principal ignorance is, I think, wantonly conservative. Taken together, Nietzsche's encounters (including, at some junctures, repeated ones) with the abovementioned commentaries of Kierkegaard's thought suggest that he would have been acquainted at some level with a panoply of Kierkegaardian ideas. For example, he would have been acquainted with Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and 'indirect communication';⁵⁸ his description of the aesthetic sphere of existence;⁵⁹ his exposition of

55 Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, Nice, 19 February 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 327.

56 That is, there is no evidence that Nietzsche read any of Kierkegaard's works first-hand despite the fact that a number of Kierkegaard's texts had already been translated into German prior to the date on which Nietzsche suffered a mental collapse, 3 January 1889. See Heiko Schulz, "Germany and Austria: A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard." In *Kierkegaard's International Reception, Tome I: Northern and Western Europe*, ed. Jon Stewart. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009, 307–419.

57 E. g., Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 258; Clayton, "Zarathustra and the Stages on Life's Way", 179–200; Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche", 274–278.

58 By way of Brandes' *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volume 1, 39, Volume 2, 156–159, 179.

59 Brandes, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volume 2, 63 f., 75.

individualism⁶⁰ and derision for a modern lack of passion;⁶¹ Kierkegaard's concept of 'leveling';⁶² his positing the ideals of faith and grasping such by virtue of the absurd;⁶³ Kierkegaard's endorsement of the this-worldly importance of Christianity and *imitatio Christi*;⁶⁴ Kierkegaard's attack upon Danish Christendom and institutionalised Christianity;⁶⁵ as well as, crucially, the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis.⁶⁶ Accordingly, even if one remains agnostic as to the value of these secondary readings for Nietzsche, I concur with both Miles⁶⁷ and Brobjer⁶⁸ that it is virtually beyond doubt that Nietzsche had *some* knowledge of Kierkegaard when he resolved to "tackle Kierkegaard's psychological problems".⁶⁹ At a minimum, for a time, Nietzsche knew Kierkegaard's name and a focal idea of his ethics and the fact that Kierkegaard had implemented an attack on established Christianity – e.g., highlighting as much in his copy of Höffding's text roughly contemporaneous with when he wrote *The Antichrist*⁷⁰ and *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*⁷¹ as well as planned his intended magnum opus, *The Will to Power*⁷². Indeed, Brobjer even estimates that, in his final years of literary productivity, Nietzsche knew of Kierkegaard's work on the order of approximately 50 pages of commentary and five pages of direct quotations. That is, he knew of Kierkegaard on a scale equivalent to the reception of a short monograph.⁷³ Moreover, as Nietzsche's knowledge of, for example, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), both of whom he recurrently critiqued and

60 By way of Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen", 357 f., 368, 372 f.; and Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 208, 217–236, 304.

61 Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen", 359 f.; Brandes, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volume 2, 28 f., 75 f.; Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 228 f., 232–334.

62 Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 232 f.

63 Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 223 f.

64 Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 304.

65 Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen", 379; Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 223, 225, 228; Höffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, 280.

66 Brandes, *Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*, Volume 2, 72; Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, Volume 1, 222.

67 Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche", 274.

68 Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 263.

69 Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, Nice, 19 February 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 327.

70 German: *Der Antichrist*. First published in 1895 however written in 1888 after Nietzsche had read Höffding's *Outlines of Psychology* in late 1887.

71 German: *Ecce homo: Wie man wird, was man ist*. First published in 1908 however written in 1888.

72 German: *Der Wille zur Macht*. See discussion of the difficult composition and publication history of this work in Walter Kaufmann, Editor's Introduction to *The Will to Power*.

73 Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 262.

discussed and thereby influenced his thinking in significant ways, came largely by way of secondary literature,⁷⁴ the importance of this similar mode of exposure to the work of Kierkegaard should not be undervalued.

Nevertheless, as a matter of historical, documentational fact, Nietzsche did not, in writing, unequivocally, and non-elliptically cite Kierkegaard, address his (i. e., Climacus's) 'subjectivity is truth' thesis, nor tackle any of Kierkegaard's psychological problems, as he had stated his intention to do so in his 19 February 1888 letter to Brandes. That is, he did not do any of these things in the 319 days before suffering the collapse on 3 January 1889 from which he would sadly not recover, but not before first impressively producing in a flurry of literary creativity no less than six works in 1888: *Twilight of the Idols*,⁷⁵ *The Anti-Christ*, *The Case of Wagner*,⁷⁶ *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*,⁷⁷ and the collection of poems, *Dionysian Dithyrambs*⁷⁸. This is striking because, unlike Kierkegaard's habitually (and at times frustrating and obfuscating) cryptic style – e. g., referring, as Johannes Climacus does, to Jesus as "the god" in *Philosophical Fragments*⁷⁹ and to Socrates as "the simple wise man of old" in *Works of Love*⁸⁰ – Nietzsche, despite an otherwise basic proclivity for obscurantism, was not decidedly obscurantist in citing those of whom he was critiquing. This is not to say that Nietzsche did not allude to thinkers indirectly. After all, as noted, Nietzsche did just so with regard to Martensen.⁸¹ Still, unlike Martensen, who was still alive and a contem-

⁷⁴ E. g., Thomas Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Ethics of Character: A Study of Nietzsche's Ethics and Its Place in the History of Moral Thinking*. Uppsala: Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, 1995, 198–201; Idem, "Nietzsche's Reading and Private Library, 1885–1889." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 4 (October 1997): 663–693, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3653965>; Andreas Urs Sommer, "Nietzsche's Readings on Spinoza: A Contextualist Study, Particularly on the Reception of Kuno Fischer." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 156–184, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jnietstud.43.2.0156>.

⁷⁵ Full English title: *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*. German: *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder, Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*. First published in January 1889.

⁷⁶ German: *Der Fall Wagner*. Written in May-June 1888 and published in the autumn of the same year.

⁷⁷ German: *Nietzsche contra Wagner. Aktenstücke eines Psychologen*. Written in December 1888 and first published in 1889.

⁷⁸ German: *Dionysos-Dithyramben*. A collection of nine poems composed in the autumn of 1888, the first six of which were first published in 1891.

⁷⁹ Danish: *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophi*. First published 13 June 1844. e. g., *sic passim* in Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

⁸⁰ Danish: *Kjærlighedens Gjerninger*. First published September 1847. e. g., Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 175.

⁸¹ See Footnote 41 above.

porary of Nietzsche when the latter penned his sidelong identification of the former as 'one theologian' in *Daybreak* in 1880–1881, it is unclear why Nietzsche would class Kierkegaard with Martensen as warranting indirect reference only, especially when one considers that Brandes had singled Kierkegaard (but not Martensen) out and esteemed him as "one of the profoundest psychologists to be met with anywhere" in his 11 January 1888 letter to Nietzsche. Indeed, at least in the works authored *after* this 11 January 1888 letter, I do not think that it is unreasonable to expect that such acclaim from Brandes, the opinions of whom Nietzsche respected, would have prompted Nietzsche to avoid equivocation if he was in fact positively referring to Kierkegaard. Commentators may be inclined to interpret Nietzsche's affirmation to read Kierkegaard in his 19 February 1888 response as merely a nod of politeness to Brandes without being underpinned by any serious intention to follow through on his statement. However, if that is the case and Nietzsche was being more polite than earnest in responding to Brandes, then this would seem to undercut the credibility of any veiled allusion to Kierkegaard as much as it speaks to the matter of the lack of explicit reference to Kierkegaard in Nietzsche's writings. To continue to illustrate this point, then, across his writings, Nietzsche often unambiguously named names in treating the ideas of religious thinkers such as Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), St. Paul (c. 5–64 or 67), St. Augustine (354–430), Martin Luther (1483–1546), and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881). What is more, in the brief *Ecce Homo*, nearly 100 persons are individually cited by name. In this context, then, and assuming his at least cursory knowledge of Kierkegaard, it is curious and inauspicious that Nietzsche would specially demur citing Kierkegaard or any of his pseudonyms by name or, at most, opt for referencing Kierkegaard or his theory of truth obliquely. Of the instances of purportedly veiled allusions to Kierkegaard which have been offered,⁸² I focus on one most salient to the topic of truth. Miles suggests that Nietzsche may have had Climacus's 'subjectivity is truth' thesis in mind when he derisively excoriated the view of passionately believing in Christ as proof of the truth of Christianity as an embarrassing illogicality within § 50 of *The Anti-Christ*.⁸³ But if this is so, if Miles' suggestion is accurate and Nietzsche veritably did have Kierkegaard (or his pseudonym) in mind in writing this remark, then beyond

⁸² For example, Brobjer ("Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 258) speculates Kierkegaard as being included amongst the moralists Nietzsche holds *in mente* when he states: "Those moralists, on the other hand, who, following in the footsteps of Socrates, offer the *individual* a morality of self-control and temperance as a means to his own *advantage*, as his personal key to happiness, *are the exceptions*" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 11, emphasis original.

⁸³ Miles, "Friedrich Nietzsche", 276 f. See Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Other Writings*, 48 f.

Nietzsche potentially begging the question of Kierkegaard's (e. g., Climacus's) depiction of the conative nature of religious truth,⁸⁴ what reason(s) would he have had for specially masking or concealing this allusion? As a useful analogy, in a 20 November 1888 letter to Brandes, Nietzsche remarked on both Dostoevsky and Pascal that "I am grateful to him [i. e., Dostoevsky] in a quite remarkable fashion, however much he may stand in contradiction to my deepest-lying instincts. As for my attitude to Pascal, I almost love him, because he has taught me an infinite amount. He is the one logical Christian."⁸⁵ As noted, Nietzsche often did not appear to routinely refrain from naming names when discussing others' ideas, especially concerning ones with which he disagreed, and he did not do so in discussing Dostoevsky and Pascal (e. g., whether with regards to his more univocally positive appraisal of the former⁸⁶ or his more debateable *ad hominem* of the latter⁸⁷). It would seem that whatever complex intermingling of concomitant appetitive and repelling sentiments, whatever ambivalent gaze

84 Cf. Evans, "Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript", 171–174. That is, this would entail Nietzsche potentially 'begging the question' in his understanding Kierkegaard and/or Climacus as necessarily endorsing fideism in the absolutist sense wherein religious truth is seen as exempted from the demands of logical support or evidence of any kind. To be sure, this latter reproach is a common (and dismissing) understanding of Kierkegaard to which, if Miles's speculation is accurate, Nietzsche may have subscribed, as Edwards did later (see Footnote 10), though it is not one that is in any way uncontested, nor is it an obligatory interpretation of Climacus (e. g., C. Stephen Evans, "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith." In *Idem, Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006, 117–132). Alternatively, Nietzsche may be seen as potentially 'begging the question' in the sense of one-sidedly evaluating the prospect disclosed by the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis that finding truth is necessarily dependent on truthful living (e. g., that evidence of the truth of God is disclosed only to those conatively receptive to such evidence). This point gets at the issue that it simply is not clear whether Nietzsche's famous pronouncement of the death of God (aphorism 125 of Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119 f.) implies agnosticism, atheism, or depth-theism (e. g., Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine." Trans. M. Gendre, in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Phillip Blond. London: Routledge, 1998, 157–176). For elaboration of this issue and the broader application of the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis, see, for example, Paul K. Moser, *The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

85 Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, Torino, 20 November 1888. In *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 359.

86 "Dostoevsky, by the way, the only psychologist who had anything to teach me: he is one of the best strokes of luck in my life". Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 219.

87 "[...] I do not read Pascal, I love him as Christianity's most instructive victim, massacred slowly, first physically then psychologically, the whole logic of this most horrible form of inhuman cruelty". Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 90 (emphasis original).

Nietzsche happened to cast upon the personage targeted by his critique, he did not habitually demonstrate a clear preference for circumlocution when it came to identifying the referent individual under discussion. Philosophical and theological similarities between Pascal/Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard aside,⁸⁸ then, the question conspicuously remains as to why Nietzsche would, as it were, pull his denominating punches when it came to his discussion of the thought of Kierkegaard in particular? It is to this challenge that I now turn.

5 The Salient Challenge of Nietzsche's Non-Engagement with the Writings of Kierkegaard

There is plainly more to Kierkegaard's writings than Climacus's 'subjectivity is truth' dictum, and the same goes for the scope of the Nietzschean corpus in full. However, the ontology of truth is paramount insofar as truth holds superordinate status in relation to other propositions (e. g., "Is it true that X?"). On one hand, that Nietzsche did not unequivocally engage Kierkegaard's work in general nor Climacus's alethic thesis in particular is unsurprising in that, as aforementioned, Nietzsche was largely uninterested in truth as such. On the other hand, this non-engagement is surprising in that Kierkegaard's authorial method of dialoguing pseudonyms and discourses engendered multiple perspectives reminiscent of perspectivism and, thus, one might reasonably expect Nietzsche to have been at least piqued by ideas enveloped in this strategy.⁸⁹ Further, perhaps underlying Miles's nomination of § 50 of *The Anti-Christ* as a veiled reference to Kierkegaard, this non-engagement is especially surprising given Nietzsche's consummate interest in promulgating what he considered his avant-garde message by way of vitiating and capsizing the very content of Kierkegaardian truth.⁹⁰

88 E. g., Søren Landkildehus, "Blaise Pascal: Kierkegaard and Pascal as Kindred Spirits in the Fight Against Christendom." In *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions, Tome I: Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart. Surrey: Ashgate, 2009, 130–146; George Pattison, "Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue: Reading Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard Together." In *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison, Diane Oenning Thompson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 237–256.

89 To this end, Nietzsche was greatly interested in pseudonymity as an authorial strategy such that he nearly published *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (German: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*) under a nom de guerre in 1878. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard", 255.

90 Indeed, just a Nietzsche's philosophy can be taken to understand Kierkegaard's work as a manifestation of nihilism (e. g., Miles, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Reconsidered", 441–469; Idem, "Friedrich Nietzsche", 278–287), Nietzsche's oeuvre may be considered a paragon of offense at

Where, consistent with the Christian worldview personified in the divinity of Jesus, Kierkegaard's truth was the subjective appropriation of the transcendent God, Nietzsche, in diagnosing God's death,⁹¹ concurrently negated the Godhead and truth: "Indeed, only if we assume a God who is morally our like can 'truth' and the search for truth be at all something meaningful and promising of success. This God left aside, the question is permitted whether being deceived is not one of the conditions of life."⁹² As Stone⁹³ notes, Nietzsche herewith identified as a legacy of the Christian worldview that truth has absolute value and that this assumption pervaded 19th century thinking insofar as it is fundamental to efforts to seek truth including, of note, science and scientific scholarship. As Nietzsche further contends, "We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science. The question whether *truth* is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer 'yes', and moreover this answer must be so firm that it takes the form of the statement, the belief, the conviction: 'Nothing is *more* necessary than truth; and in relation to it, everything else has only secondary value.'"⁹⁴ More specifically, building on the Platonic view that ideal forms and, ultimately, the form of the Good, reside in the spiritual world standing behind the mundane physical world which undergirds and is therefore *more* real than this changeable physical world, for Nietzsche, Christianity (as a merely temporal and not eternal phenomenon) epistemically and morally impelled seeking the truth about this ultimate spiritual reality.⁹⁵ According to Nietzsche, science largely stripped the moral impetus of the Christian worldview but retained the epistemic idea that things appear one way to our senses but that there is also an underlying real structure to the world about which scientists should know the truth.⁹⁶ Indeed, in Nietzsche's move from scientism to perspectivism in his developmental conception of truth detailed above, he

Jesus and despair from the perspective of Kierkegaard (see Footnote 16). The extent to and manner in which, in Kierkegaardian parlance, Nietzsche's work comprises the work of an aesthete (of greater or lesser reflection), an ethicist refusing to acknowledge the limits of ethical existence and offended by the guilt and repentance which demarcates the ethical and religious spheres of existence, or a religious individuality with a heterodox or uncertain relation to Judeo-Christian monotheism remains a matter of debate (e. g., Angier, *Either Kierkegaard/Or Nietzsche*).

⁹¹ See aphorism 125 of Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119 f.

⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 26.

⁹³ Alison Stone, "Existentialism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant, Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 279–281.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 200 (emphasis original).

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 201. See also aphorisms 34 and 35 of *The Anti-Christ (The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 31 f.).

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 201. See also aphorism 370 of *Daybreak*, 169.

noted that, because of the absolute value science places on truth, scientists aim and will even ascetically sacrifice themselves to discover the truth of the real structure of the world beyond the physical and perceptible for its own sake, even if illusions may well serve human beings better than truth.⁹⁷ As noted, unable to square scientism's absolute valuation of truth with both his preferred fluid axiology and his scepticism regarding notions of universal truth, Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God was tantamount to the pluralization of 'truths' in his perspectivism.

Nietzsche's identification of the importance of absolute truth coupled with his putatively perspectival dismissal of the same can be intelligibly taken as indication that Nietzsche did not engage the countervailing theory of truth by Kierkegaard *qua* Climacus, preserving as the latter does both objective (e. g., as with mathematical propositions) and subjective, inward existential truth. Here the desire to see Nietzsche in conversation with Kierkegaard is at its most acute and, though it is understandable that studies have accordingly been undertaken to (historically or otherwise) place Nietzsche in the position of commentator on Kierkegaard, again, the documentational record indicates that Nietzsche did not, in writing, overtly critique or otherwise engage with Kierkegaard. From an investigative standpoint, this nullity is inauspiciously uninformative as, even setting aside the tautology of attempting to ascertain the historical truth of the matter and settling for a historiographical simulacrum, the absence of a primary literature in which Nietzsche autonomously and unambiguously addressed the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis offers historiographers only grist for conjecture as to why Nietzsche had, at least for a time, and as the historical evidences presented herein attest, at least *some* knowledge of Kierkegaard's thought, even specific knowledge of Climacus's alethic thesis, but ostensibly 'chose' silence. But is 'chose' the right word? Visibly, a key challenge to the historiographer intent on studying the interrelated history and nature of these thinkers' inputs to the philosophies and theologies of truth and any matters stemming therefrom is that this nullity precludes elucidation of whether Nietzsche's silence was unintended and therefore not 'chosen' insofar as his career was abruptly, and sadly, truncated before he could formulate an explicit response to Kierkegaard. Alternately, it is possible that, the historical evidence presented herein (as well as prospective other which comes to light in future investigations) are sound however Nietzsche simply did not meaningfully retain Kierkegaard's contributions enough to expressly remark on them. Or, differently, Nietzsche did retain *in mente* Kierkegaard's contributions however did not deign them worthy of response. Further still, this nullity leaves as insoluble an *argumentum ex silentio*

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 201. See also *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 110.

whereby Nietzsche indeed retained and venerated Kierkegaard's work, including the 'subjectivity is truth' thesis, however, like Euthyphro before him, Nietzsche was wrought, by means of Kierkegaard's irony and maieutic method in a manner befitting Socrates after whom Kierkegaard modelled his writings,⁹⁸ into aporia out of which he could not, and thus did not, respond. Of course, when not a logical fallacy, an *argumentum ex silentio* is in itself tenuous. However, insofar as, for example, Brobjer suggests that Nietzsche considered Kierkegaard to be "following in the footsteps of Socrates",⁹⁹ one would expect Kierkegaard to induce Socratic effects on his interpreters, Nietzsche or else. Kierkegaard's capacity to emulate Socrates, too, is not altogether remote considering that, for example, Brandes remarkably likened Kierkegaard to the great pupil and expositor of Socrates, Plato, in the same book-length study of Kierkegaard to which he had drawn Nietzsche's attention in his 11 January 1888 letter: "[...] if one places '*In Vino Veritas*' alongside Plato's *Symposium*, to which it was ostensibly a companion piece, one must acknowledge with amazement that it sustains the comparison as well as any modern composition could. Greater praise can hardly be given."¹⁰⁰

In any case, reflecting the overall opacity of Nietzsche's 'non-engagement' with Kierkegaard (that is, at least, an engagement that is not more than covert in its particulars), whatever the cause, it is notable that one of Nietzsche's valedictory statements on truth is consistent with each of the above alternatives: "I don't want to be a saint, I would rather be a buffoon [...] Perhaps I am a buffoon [...]. And yet in spite of this or rather *not* in spite of this – because nothing to date has been more hypocritical than saints – the truth speaks from out of me."¹⁰¹ Still, in attempting to provide a more definitive answer as to which of these alternatives is the truth, historians and historiographer swayed by Nietzschean perspectivism may dismiss the question of *the* truth of the matter as inherently nonsensical as such investigators are disposed to assert that the truth is, perforce, relative to a perspective. Indeed, such investigators may hermeneu-

⁹⁸ E.g., Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Paul Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Point of View." *Kierkegaardiana* 24 (2007): 132–162.

⁹⁹ See Footnote 82.

¹⁰⁰ "Og tager man *In vino veritas* og holder den op imod Platons *Symposion*, som hvis Modstykke den fremstræder, da maa man med Beundring sande, at den taaler Sammenligningen saa godt som overhovedet en moderne Composition kunde gjøre det. Der gives neppe en større Ros." Georg Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard*. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels, 1877, 157 (translation given in the Historical Introduction to Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, xviii).

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 144.

tically cycle back, ouroboros-like, on each and every invocation of ‘truth’ in the present study and assert that the whole endeavour to establish a fixed referent for these tokens is misplaced insofar as there are as many (or more) interpretations of such tokens as there are hermeneuts. Conversely, historians and historiographers under the suasion of Kierkegaard are disposed to assert that *the truth of the matter* is largely irrelevant to individual human subjects (e.g., is only for God’s cognizance) and that the subjective truth, the highest truth there is for an existing subject situated in time, is that to which the subject as a single individual¹⁰² relates in passionate inwardness, whether the content of that truth to which one relates is discordant (e.g., what Climacus denominates as ‘truthfully relating to untruth’)¹⁰³ or consonant with Jesus¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰² Søren Kierkegaard, “For the Dedication to ‘That Single Individual’.” In *Idem, The Point of View*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 105–112.

¹⁰³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ John 14:6.