Kierkegaard and Critical Theory

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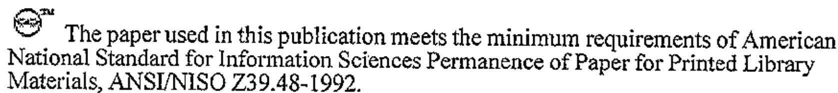
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Preface

Why Kierkegaard and Critical Theory Now?

This book is written for all levels of Kierkegaard readers who have a budding curiosity about Critical Theory but perhaps no substantive idea about what this intellectual movement entails, or why it is relevant to a deeper understanding of Kierkegaard. This text is likewise intended for all stages of Critical Theory research that seeks an explanation of the reception of Kierkegaard by the most prominent Critical Theorists over the last century, and desires to understand why the intersection of Kierkegaard and Critical Theory is significant today.

Ever since Theodor W. Adorno, one of the most influential academics involved in Critical Theory in the twentieth century, published his rejection of Kierkegaard in his book, *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* in 1933 in Germany (published in English as *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* in 1989), many scholars have presumed little or no positive connection between that movement and the writings of the nineteenth-century Danish existential thinker. Although there have been selected articles and book excerpts that have postulated a relationship, my goal is to expose the error of Adorno's dismissal through detailed methodological analysis, and to show the more intricate nexus between Kierkegaard and Critical Theory as it has existed historically. This approach is necessary because of presuppositions still made about Kierkegaard's writings as being antithetical to the aims and practice of Critical Theory. Through the presentation of my research I hope to enrich Kierkegaard studies and to foster development of two recent and important trends in global critical theory— postnationalism and postsecularism (chapters 5, 6, and 7).

In the present book I do not carry out any exegesis of the primary literature in Kierkegaard's collected works; nor do I provide an "Introduction" to

Kierkegaard or offer a grand narrative of his religious philosophy. All of that is beyond the scope of the present work, given the involvement of material on both Kierkegaard and Critical Theory. The reader learns about Kierkegaard's writings through the multitude of ways in which they were encountered by the various Critical Theorists, different as their approaches may have been and still are. I find this to be the most effective way to grasp what Kierkegaard means for this specific tradition, instead of attempting to construct a bird's-eye-view of Kierkegaard's writings and then superimpose it onto each of the Critical Theorists' interpretations. Any argument of cohesion in either Kierkegaard's body of writings or in the movement of Critical Theory is itself a book-length project. While I do not reject a possible holism in Kierkegaard's corpus, I am also not trying to embed my own through the chapters included here. I have tried to be true to each of the Critical Theorists as well as to the figures who influenced them, and the ways in which they grappled with Kierkegaard in their own times. Nonetheless, I find it crucial to debunk Adorno's *Kierkegaard* as an outlier beyond any possible congruence with Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*.

The present book is written as a history of ideas that begins in 1929 and ends in the first decade of the twenty-first century. My research has delved into the relationship between Kierkegaard and Critical Theory through multiple venues. I have gathered detailed analyses of the most conspicuous and also the less overt discussions that have affected this relationship. In the present work I have brought much of this investigation into a broad overview of the history of the intersection between Kierkegaard and Critical Theory, while providing philosophic portraits of the most impactful moments in that history through an involved focus on the scholarship. This has been done to present my thesis that Kierkegaard plays a very important role in the history of Critical Theory, as well as to open dialogue with others who have argued either similarly or in opposition to this thesis.

I came to write this book out of a deep reverence for and fascination with the philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno. I made his *Habilitationsschrift* (the second dissertation required for promotion to university professor in Germany) on Kierkegaard the topic of my own dissertation. Through my wrangling with Adorno's early work, to my own surprise, I soon found myself defending Kierkegaard against the onslaught of Critical Theory that opposed him, most emphatically initiated by Adorno in the 1930s and nurtured by several thinkers in that tradition until the 1960s. For the ways in which Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* (published posthumously in 1969) radically altered philosophic understanding in the late twentieth century, I believe the tradition will remain indebted for years to come, most especially in the domains of aesthetics and ethics after Auschwitz. But what disturbed me about Adorno's reading of Kierkegaard—so foundational to Adorno's own philosophic development, as I argue elsewhere—is the way in which he

extracts the social-political critique at the heart of Kierkegaard's notion of religious existence and postures the latter as a flighty individual who escapes social reality. Not only does Adorno's position engage in egregious errors as a *philosophical* interpretation of Kierkegaard, but it is also historically inaccurate on many levels. First, Adorno's claims disregard Kierkegaard's own life praxis as the Socratic gadfly of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. Second, Adorno's colleague of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, had already documented Kierkegaard as a critical-theoretical *provocateur* in Marcuse's early essay of 1929, "On Concrete Philosophy," the year in which Adorno began his book on Kierkegaard. Third, to the day of his death, Adorno never retracted his early rejection of Kierkegaard, although other figures in Critical Theory (Marcuse's students of "The Great Refusal" in the 1960s), or scholars related to the movement (Ernst Bloch in 1959, in his trilogy, *The Principle of Hope*, for example), were putting forth compelling interpretations of Kierkegaard for a critical-theoretical framework.

It was not until Jürgen Habermas, the leader of the second generation of Critical Theory in the 1970s and 1980s, that Kierkegaard was to be more firmly released from the anti-social pigeonhole in which Adorno placed him. But few people paid notice to the Kierkegaardian dimensions in Habermas's writings until recently, and therefore Adorno's Kierkegaard reading resonated ever still in circles of Critical Theory in the 1990s and 2000s in Europe, the United States, and globally, despite Habermas's transformation of the situation. For all of these reasons, I have written this book. Because I still hear scholars refer to Adorno's destruction of Kierkegaardian subjectivity as having put Kierkegaard away "once and for all" for the purposes of Critical Theory, I have engaged in so lengthy a dialogue about Adorno's *Kierkegaard* text in the present work. I subsequently turn to Habermas, and finally to Habermas's student, Martin Matuštík, who was equally inspired by his American professors, Merold Westphal and James Marsh—the latter three scholars thus creating what can be referred to as "The Fordham School" from Fordham University in New York—to show the significant ways in which Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity has been redeemed for an active role in a multiculture, postnational, and postsecular society today.

as "Adorno's comparative use of the sources he criticizes. After he has criticized Kierkegaard's existential philosophy he is nevertheless prepared to use it as a positive example compared to Heidegger's existential philosophy...," Mattias Martinson, *Perseverance Without Doctrine: Adorno, Self-Critique, and the Ends of Academic Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 165.

32. Jay cites, for example, Adorno's criticism of one of Benjamin's articles, namely "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in which Adorno argues against the notion of the collective unconscious by returning to certain features of his argument against the bourgeois individual and the bourgeois *intérieur*, which had been parts of his arguments against Kierkegaard. See Martin Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* (Boston/Toronto/London: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 207. Likewise, in regard to Adorno's article on Kafka ("Notes on Kafka" in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995], pp. 243–71/ GS 10-1, pp. 254–87), Jay writes: "Adorno returned to an argument he had used earlier in his critique of Kierkegaard." Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 177. This has been argued by other scholars as well, for example, in Schmidinger, p. 321.

33. Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 68.

34. My view is backed up by Heiko Schulz's categorization of Adorno's reception of Kierkegaard as a mixture of "productive reception" and "receptive production." See Heiko Schulz, "Die theologische Rezeption Kierkegaards in Deutschland und Dänemark," in *Kierkegaard Studies, Yearbook 1999*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 220–44. Schulz counts Adorno's *Kierkegaard* as having not only received the thought of Kierkegaard, but also of having utilized it to create a new version of Kierkegaard, which, following Deuser's claims in *Dialektische Theologie* bears much in common to Adorno's own thinking in his *Negative Dialectics*.

Chapter Five

Second-Generation Critical Theory: Habermas, Kierkegaard, Postnationalism

HABERMAS REDISCOVERS KIERKEGAARD

At the same time that various scholars in philosophy, theology, and political theory were making significant attempts to recuperate the writings of Kierkegaard for the aims of Critical Theory, most especially in regard to a suspected connection between Kierkegaard and Adorno—the history of which was outlined in chapters 3 and 4—the second-generation Frankfurt School was already developing a new relationship to the Danish religious thinker. Most significant in this next segment of the history is the work of Jürgen Habermas, who rediscovered Kierkegaard's writings for developments in his own philosophic undertakings.[1] Habermas belongs to the second wave of Critical Theory, and, as such, is recognized not only as the most prominent figure to have arisen from that generation of Frankfurt School academics, but is also one of the most influential philosophers globally today. Habermas's investigations extend into the realms of epistemology and ethics, political theory; philosophy of language, consciousness, and history; and most recently, philosophy of religion. Moreover, he serves as a leading public intellectual in Germany.

It must be noted that the topic of Habermas's relationship to religion is a very broad one, and many full-length books have already been filled with analyses of the nexus between Habermas's philosophy and his renewed sympathy for religion since the 1970s and 1980s, in contrast to his previously secular position embodied in his *Theory of Communicative Action*.[2] For these reasons, I will focus only on Habermas's relationship to Kierkegaard, as I

have done with each of the preceding Critical Theorists covered in the previous chapters. Although what I present here, for example, has broader ramifications for the larger discussions of the role of religion in Habermas's philosophic constructions, it is important to limit the discussion to the role that Kierkegaard plays therein, in order to hone the specific significance of Kierkegaard for the ends of Critical Theory.

Kierkegaard's importance for Habermas became most conspicuous for the first time during a public lecture in 1987 at the occasion of his acceptance of the Sonning Prize, in which he wrangles with the *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate) in Germany by taking a vocal position internal to the debate. In doing so Habermas looked to Kierkegaard as part of an ethical solution to the dilemma of how Germany should properly work through its past, both recent and viewed as a more extensive trajectory.[3] I understand this to be the moment in which Kierkegaard's relevance to the original aims of Critical Theory, as laid out in Horkheimer's essay "On Traditional and Critical Theory," becomes most clear. For Habermas's emphasis on the practical applicability of theory, as well as the concern to see theory itself as more pragmatically oriented, resonates genuously with Horkheimer's aims in the early years of the inception of Critical Theory, although Habermas and Horkheimer would not agree with each others' philosophical positions per se. With this spirit I am in agreement with Richard Wolin's comments in the Introduction to Habermas's *The New Conservatism*, a book of political and cultural writings from the 1980s in which the Sonning Prize speech appears. Wolin writes:

> Indeed, the relationship between "theory" and "practical life" has always been a paramount concern in Habermas's work. . . . That he has remained extremely faithful to this early insistence on the practical implications of all social inquiry is attested to by the political texts in this volume. In essence, they may be read as studies in applied critical theory. For despite his telling criticisms of the shortcomings of the first generation of critical theorists, Habermas has, throughout his work, remained faithful to one of the central insights of Marx Horkheimer: that what distinguishes "critical" from "traditional" theory is an active interested in advancing a more rational and just organization of social life. Or, as he observes in *Theory and Practice*, "We can, if need be, distinguish theories according to whether or not they are structurally related to possible emancipation."[4]

The Sonning Prize speech was published in English in 1989, with a few sections added to the live address delivered in 1987. The English version of the essay bears the title, "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity: The Federal Republic's Orientation to the West." In this piece Habermas grapples with problem of the historians' debate in Germany and exercises his own pointed judgment in regard to the dilemma. Habermas's review of the debate is prefaced with his description of a "consciousness of

having taken a *Sonderweg*, a special path that set Germany apart and gave it special privilege in relation to the West," which "was discredited only by Auschwitz."[5] The "dissociation" with which Germans set themselves apart from Western civilization instigated a "shock-wave," one which Habermas claims continued to bear influence as Germans "gradually abandoned their reservations about the political culture and social forms of the West."[6] He indicates this impact as causing a paradigm shift, to his judgment, in consciousness for middle-European German society in which the latter became more open to cooperation with the West, although Habermas indicates an evolving doubt in its regard.[7] Indeed, this emerging doubt on Habermas's part is corroborated by what he sees as an "ambivalence in every tradition."[8] He writes:

> In the public process of transmitting a culture we decide which of our traditions we want to continue and which we do not. The debate on this rages all the more intensely the less we can rely on a triumphal national history, on the unbroken normality of what has come to prevail, and the more clearly we become conscious of the ambivalence in every tradition.[9]

This ambivalence sets the backdrop for the identity issues at play in the historians' debate. While there was consensus among the historians in "defend[ing] the Federal Republic's orientation to the West," nonetheless a heated contest ensued with enormous political and ethical repercussions over the proper way in which to interpret the longer narrative of German national history, i.e., how far and through what means one can go back through the past—in a continuous manner deeply rooted in Western Enlightenment, or through a discontinuous and historiographic political *re*-interpretation. As Habermas recapitulates it, on one side there is a consciousness that seeks to redefine what it means to be German, precisely because of the precariousness of German identity after Auschwitz. This group strives to recapture selected junctures of certain salvageable pasts internal to German identity, a method that necessarily precludes recognition of other, problematic pasts internal to the greater history. Habermas classifies this effort as a "neohistoricist illumination of the continuities in German national history that exerted into and through the 1930s and 1940s,"[10] and it is critiqued vigorously by the other side, to which Habermas belongs. The latter group argues forcefully that "historical truth could get lost" in such politics. For Habermas, rightly so, there is a "leveling" process in the neohistoricist position, in which what comprises the exceptionality of the signifier, "Auschwitz," including the "events and circumstances that made Auschwitz possible," becomes "deflated."[11]

Habermas's argument in the historians' debate is now commonplace and, because of the compelling force with which Habermas articulated it, greatly

affected future discussions of how German society post–World War II can and should work out the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). However, there are broader ramifications to Habermas's position in the 1980s on this debate, which still ring true today. That is, despite the fact that this may seem endemic only to Germany national history and identity, in fact, as Habermas points out in the Sonnig Prize speech, the deeper texture of the *Historikerstreit* makes manifest issues far more general and encompassing than those involved in the debate might first consider, at least at the outset. For the developments in consciousness that were so troubling for German identity—on all sides of the disagreement—go to the core of a divide expounded also by many scholars working in the domain of remembering the Holocaust: indeed it is a universal divide. Habermas describes it thus:

> Some of us are the heirs of the victims and of those who helped the intended victims or offered resistance. Others are the heirs of the perpetrators or of those who kept quiet. For those born later, this *divided* legacy establishes neither personal merit nor personal guilt. Beyond guilt that can be ascribed to individuals, however, different contexts can mean different historical burdens. With the life forms into which we were born and which have stamped our identity we take on very different sorts of historical liability (in Jasper's sense). *For the way we continue the traditions in which we find ourselves is up to us* [my emphasis]. No hasty generalizations, then. And yet on another level Auschwitz has become the signature of an entire epoch—and it concerns all of us.[12]

How this is so is worked out further in regard to what Habermas calls "a deep layer of solidarity among all who have a human face."[13] No matter what side of the divide on which one is born, there exists an "intersubjective liability" for all—"a liability for distorted life circumstances that grant happiness, or even mere existence, to some only at the cost of destroying the happiness of others, denying them life and causing them suffering."[14]

For Habermas, Kierkegaard's early writings on individual self-choice will provide a significant model for how one fulfills the obligation in response to this "intersubjective liability." Noteworthy is that it will be a self-imposed obligation, according to Kierkegaard. In "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity" Habermas is clearly interested in elucidating the nascent trends toward postnational identity. He sees in the thrust away from the particularist dimensions of nationalist forms of consciousness the ability to grasp a robust ethicality of the self. This requires the ability to detect the aforementioned ambivalence internal to all cultural traditions, and it harkens back to the dialectic at play at the core of the Critical Theory program. Habermas conceives barriers to how far Kierkegaard's model can be taken in such a social-theoretical conception of the self. But he is writing before a time when the deeper social consciousness of Kierkegaard's notions of "subjectivity" and "inwardness" became evidenced, for example, in the work of philosophical analysis of Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark.[15] Nonetheless, Habermas had a very strong intuition about a socio-political understanding of Kierkegaard that many others had not yet seen, aside from the early Marcuse.

Internal to a move away from particularist national identity is, ironically, a necessary *reflection* on the self. And such is the issue at the core of Kierkegaard's earliest of writings, the infamous *Either/Or* of which Habermas makes use in this essay. In regard to the need for reflection, Habermas writes implicitly, "Every identity that establishes membership in a collectivity and that defines the set of situations in which those belonging to the collectivity can say 'we' in the emphatic sense seems to be part of an unquestioned background that necessarily remains untouched by reflection."[16] Habermas notes rightly that Kierkegaard "distrusted . . . objective spirit as much as Marx did,"[17] and that "he spoke only of the identity of the individual person."[18] But Habermas qualifies this in the most significant way for a proper reading of Kierkegaard's multifarious writings on the self: "Yet Kierkegaard was completely aware of the fact that the personal self is at the same time a social self and a self that is a citizen."[19]

To my judgment, Habermas is neither particularistic nor clearly universalistic at this point in his thinking, if by universalism is meant a "view from nowhere" or a scientistic grasping that is not dialectical in nature. Rather, for Habermas, universalism must be "postnational" and confront the said ambiguities and ambivalences in any cultural tradition. Think back to the original aims of Critical Theory in the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers in which not only was there a critical stance toward late capitalism and the market, but also a vigorous critique of Soviet communism and its damaging effects to individuality and the necessarily idiosyncratic, ethical core of the self.[20] The dialectical nature of Critical Theory, following this history of the original aims, is substantiated by the way in which Habermas argues in regard to "an asynchronous variety of different, competing, and mutually exploitative forms of life." Ultimately, Habermas advocates for what he calls "an extension of moral consciousness in the direction of universalism."[21] But because he calls upon Kierkegaard to hone the individual existential texture of self-choosing of individuality, Habermas keeps open any linear or overly simplified rendering of "consent" at the universal level. Habermas is appropriating Kierkegaard to move away from universalistic guarantees of the self and toward more consideration of personal experiences. In this way Habermas's universalism here transcends "a" univeralism, and this frustration of a singular model is indebted to Kierkegaard's productive confusion of leveling identity relations. As Habermas emphasizes, group identity inspired by Kierkegaard's thinking does not equate to an inflation of ego-identity onto a large scale; it cannot be multiplied simply into the formation of a group.

It is in this way that Kierkegaard was appropriated by Habermas in an overtly political manner in 1987, albeit one that is both postnational and post-traditional in its nuanced understanding of identity relations. Kierkegaard's notion of personal identity lends itself for Habermas to a more post-traditional form of societal thinking, but in a way that does not yet present in itself a "rational world."[22] And it is for this reason that the Kierkegaardian model reaches certain limits in Habermas's thinking. One could describe Kierkegaard's conception of the self from *Either/Or* as providing a stimulus for Habermas's postconventional universalism, while dissipating at the borderline of any pragmatic translation of what this might comprise in extant social form. While this could be seen as a weakness, instead it should be regarded as an advantage; for it forestalls the ability of any model of identity to fall prey to essentializing any one self into a grand social scheme (and I mean this both in the sense of structure and manipulation).

In regard to the multiplicity of human nature and how one becomes an ethical being contingent upon this variety of choice of identity relations,[23] Habermas draws on the ethical view of life presented by the character Judge William in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*[24] and describes its relevance for his own project in the historians' debate: "[The] practical act of transformation has a cognitive side as well: with it the individual is converted to an 'ethical view of life': he 'discovers now that the self he chooses contains an endless multiplicity, inasmuch as it has a history, a history in which he acknowledges identity with himself.'"[25] This element in Kierkegaard's thinking has a strong confessional tone, similar to that of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, and the way in which the individual who conceives the leap to the ethical takes responsibility for herself in the process *as a historical being* is here most fundamental. For the pseudonymous author of volume II of *Either/Or*, one cannot pick and choose which parts of the history of one's self are to be deemed relevant; one *exists* as a self only to the extent that one *chooses* oneself as an inherently fallible and historically contingent being. If a person exists ethically, for Kierkegaard, she can never absolutize her own self; self-choice is a humbling act. As Habermas writes pointedly: "a life that is accepted with responsibility is revealed as being at the same time an irreversible series of lapses."[26]

While the model of self-choice as a prerequisite for ethical action is pursued by Kierkegaard again in his later pseudonymous writings and direct discourses, and this takes on an increasingly more religious content and tone, Habermas argues in "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity" that such a concept of ego-identity can likewise become translated into a more secular dialogue on Habermas's own terms, not Kierkegaard's. Habermas's more recent work in postsecularism comprises the content of the next chapter. But before I move to the work on postsecularism and how Kierkegaard continued to play a meaningful role for Habermas's thinking in that arena, I would like to situate the argument just outlined in the wider narrative of ethics after Auschwitz and the concomitant domain of political action, in order to more deeply ascertain the key functions that both Kierkegaard and Critical Theory have played therein.

It might seem as though Habermas's selection of Kierkegaard for the aims of his position in the *Historikerstreit*, and in his acceptance speech for the Sonning Prize, is arbitrary. In the sections that follow I argue the opposite: that Habermas made use of Kierkegaard's specifically religious and yet modern notion of subjectivity for many important reasons, and in consideration of many different facets in the history. These include the trajectory of Kierkegaard in theories of memory and remembrance after Auschwitz, the genealogical understanding of some of the earliest Critical Theory, and the role that Kierkegaard played in all of the above (for example, in the work of Marcuse from the late 1920s and early 1930s), and finally Habermas's most recent developments in postsecularism.

FURTHER CONTEXTUALIZATION OF KIERKEGAARD AND CRITICAL THEORY

To place Habermas's scholarship on this matter in the greater perspective of critical-theoretical approaches to remembering the Holocaust, and to add even more weight to the way in which Kierkegaard played a key role for Habermas, it is helpful to consider a more recent essay of Agnes Heller. While Habermas is incorporating Kierkegaard from within the constraints of German national history and identity, although he develops the discussion beyond the parameters of Germany and into a universal discourse on consciousness, Agnes Heller is writing internal to the perspective of one who lost her family and loved ones in Auschwitz. By looking now at Agnes Heller's work in the domain of remembering the Holocaust, going beyond the scope of the Frankfurt School into other work by other critical theorists (Heller is a former student of György Lukács and belongs rather to the Budapest School, with Lukács, however, as a key influence on the grounding ideas of Critical Theory, as articulated in chapter 3), one can see the prescience of Habermas's appropriation of Kierkegaard for post-World War II memory, which thus problematizes German national identity to fruitful ends. However, what is even more important, the universal quality of consciousness intimated by Habermas in the Sonning Prize speech is substantiated by Heller's work on the side of the heir of the victim. One sees through an analysis of Heller's essay in addition to reading Habermas's that both sides, the heir of the perpetrator and the heir of the victim—when conceived through postnational and existential grasping of the subjectivity—meet at an ethical center through Kierkegaardian self-choice. Hence the universal con-

sciousness of "intersubjective liability" strived for by both Habermas and Heller.

Heller's essay is titled in German, "Vergessen und Erinnern: Vom Sinn der Sinnlosigkeit" ("Forgetting and Remembering: On the Meaning of Meaninglessness") and it was published in *Sinn und Form* in 2001. In this work, she traces the path of forgetting and remembering events experienced during the time of the Holocaust according to her own "ethics of personality"[27]—that is, through a means devoted to one's idiosyncratic cohesion of the self. Heller's version of the subjective work necessary for a successful and convincing formulation for remembering such a trauma, which opposes the initially repressive forgetting, draws from a Kierkegaardian notion of the self that chooses itself as it is. Parallel to Nietzsche's famous statement, "One becomes what one is"[28] stands Kierkegaard's non-authoritarian urging to his readers to think for themselves through a process of self-examination.[29] Such self-examination incorporates a choice of oneself as one is, albeit an uncomfortable choice. The inbuilt irony in Kierkegaard's formula to choose oneself as one already is radically underlines the importance of internalization and what Heller refers to as "involvement," what Kierkegaard and Heller both mean by "subjectivity."

Heller undertakes her project of remembering the Holocaust first by reiterating the now well-accepted declaration that the Holocaust remains incomprehensible. By this Heller means "that the people affected by it [the victims] themselves experienced it as meaningless and also the memory of it in them in no way is capable of finding a meaning. Normally, people contemplate things and events in order to grasp them; the contemplation of the Holocaust however demands constantly only its emergent meaninglessness."[30] She continues by pointing out that when guilt and suffering have no point, any memory of what caused them is thereby unbearable. She writes further:

> A memory of the Holocaust, which is not unbearable, is in truth related to something else, possibly to a fiction of the Holocaust. Kierkegaard communicates through the pseudonymous monk Taciturn that religiosity is only authentic when it is bound to pain. Analogous to this one could say, the more painful the memory of the Holocaust, the more authentic it is. For this reason the memory is never speculative or theoretical, but above all practical. . . . The more unbearable the memory, the clearer the Holocaust overshadows the gleaming fiction.[31]

Heller hereby equates the victims and the perpetrators such that both "suffer when they remember, and this suffering is often also a suffering of the meaninglessness of the suffering."[32]

For Heller there is no connection between a speculative-theoretical memory and a practical one in regard to the Holocaust. With this move all individuals who engage in a remembering of the past, in this context, are placed in

the position of the "observer." But in fact there is no position of observer for Heller. There is no possible movement from the position of the affected (the victim, *die Betroffene*) to that of observer. She writes: "Vis-à-vis the Holocaust all generations have the same distanced relationship: they are and remain witnesses, a common characteristic of mystery."[33] For Heller this brings every individual onto the same level whereby the pain requisite for the authentic remembering evades no one. In the flattening out of the roles one can take in regard to the Holocaust after the fact of its trauma, all ultimately see themselves as victimized. On the part of the actual perpetrator, accomplice, or child of the perpetrator, the victim identity is conjured up through the false guilt of anti-Semitism: "Not I was the one who did that act; it was anti-Semitism which caused it." This explains how it could possibly be that all individuals after the brute fact of the horror and the crimes take on the perspective of witness.

Heller writes:

> Just as there is no religious experience without ritual and ceremony, there is no authentic remembering of the Holocaust without empty, kitchy memory. . . . And one never knows which memory comes closest to the actual fact. In the end no completely authentic memory is possible. For unbearable suffering is just that: unbearable; one falls into the abyss.[34]

Here she cites the examples of Paul Celan, Primo Levi, Jean Amery. With Hegel one could say, "*Es geht zugrunde*"[35]: it goes to the bottom or to the ground of its being. For Hegel this means obliteration, the first part of the process of *Aufhebung*, a simultaneous negation and reaffirmation. But here, applied practically, it means suicide. There is no reaffirmation were one to recollect a purely authentic memory of Auschwitz. And it is precisely for this reason that Heller discounts, even emphatically rejects, any grand metaphysical structure in the possibility of the non-comprehensibility of Auschwitz.

Although no completely authentic memory is possible according Heller, this does not mean that we cannot live in abundant form with cautious or not cautious approximations of authentic remembering. From here Heller demarcates various stages of remembering, which begin with remembering in the form of forgetting and culminate with remembering in the most authentic form possible. After the initial stages, including forgetting and then remembering oneself (*sich errinnern*)—in which one returns to oneself albeit through a universal identification with the victim (on the parts of the perpetrators, this becomes a self-victimization)—comes the need for atonement.[36] In regard to atonement, Heller writes, "In the end there was little, for all had identified anyway with the victim. Indeed without atonement there can be no authentic remembering. In this phase there developed a general discourse about the Holocaust, which created investigations, analyses, theories, and so

on."[37] At this point the remembering of the Holocaust reaches a social-sociological and theoretical level; theories of how this could have happened define this stage. But for Heller, such theories have nothing to do with an authentic remembering. They create rather the basis for an abstract memory. They remain necessarily on the speculative-theoretical level and defy practical remembering. And this is precisely where Habermas's wrangling in the historians' debate finds resonance, predating Heller's essay, by his integration of both individual consciousness in reaction to the neohistorical developments and his conception of "intersubjective liability."

Indeed Heller has observed in the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century a move to the admission of guilt on the part of German society. Such an admission does not clarify the Holocaust but serves in the direction of an authentic remembering.[38] "Gestures of guilty consciousness and atonement" aid the process of authentic remembering.[39] "Such recognitions of guilt on one hand worsen the suffering and on the other hand enable an approximation to authentic remembering."[40] The two, remember, go hand in hand. As Heller writes:

> The absolute present, one could say, has no generations. In the play of mystery there is guilt and atonement only for the victims who forgive or do not forgive...One does not represent one's own person or generation, but embodies the roles of a not understandable or not understood primordial history which, if not complete, always happens anew. One gets closer to the meaninglessness in that one can reconstruct it.[41]

REVISITING THE EARLY MARCUSE

As I have tried to show that Habermas's favorable rendering of Kierkegaard certainly fits in with the scholarship on memory after Auschwitz that followed Habermas's role in the historians' debate, I likewise aim to demonstrate that it fits into what preceded it, despite Adorno's rejection, which remained influential for decades. I argue that the role of Kierkegaard in Habermas's thinking can be grasped accurately when viewed from within a more extensive lineage in which Kierkegaard belongs to the roots of Critical Theory. Martin Matuštík has articulated this thesis as well, although in a briefer format internal to Matuštík's helpful and thought-provoking philosophical-political biography of Habermas.[42] Matuštík has written:

> After Marcuse seemed to have abandoned his early project of *the existential variants of Critical Theory...*, and even after Sartre's lifelong search for and his unstable integration of Marxism with existentialism, *Habermas' unique version of witnessing ethics, which he develops more clearly since the 1980s, represents one of the most original attempts at a synthesis of existential philosophy with a communicative model of Critical Theory.*[43]

I would like to give more space to this thesis here, to develop what Matuštík has written in this context of Habermas's work, to allow more dimensions of the history to unfold. In order to do this, it is important to return to the early Marcuse, for he became the icon of the 1968 student protest movement precisely because of his early existential writing, which is grounded in Kierkegaardian notions of subjectivity and existence. This includes above all the work carried out in the essay, "On Concrete Philosophy," which was analyzed in chapter 2 of the present book. I reintroduce this early work here now in light of the backdrop it presented for Habermas's intellectual and practical developments.

In 1968 Habermas proffered advice to Marcuse scholars to revisit the latter's 1932 book on Hegel's Ontology in order to understand Marcuse's later work.[44] In an Introduction to an "Antifestschrift" in proper recognition of Marcuse, Habermas explains that the "relatively late and then very quick reception of Marcuse allowed for an image to arise that was trapped by something unhistorical."[45] For this reason Habermas asserts that "one cannot understand the Marcuse of today without properly coming to terms with what Marcuse meant at that time," namely, in his early 1932 work, in which he honored the influence of Heidegger.[46] Shortly after 1968, Alfred Schmidt published a collection of essays together with Marcuse in 1973 in German.[47] This collaborative effort includes two Marcuse essays from the 1928–1933 period, namely, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism" and "On Concrete Philosophy." The book also includes two essays by Schmidt himself, one that is not available in English and which prefaces Marcuse's articles with a *Zusammenfassung* titled, "Statt eines Vorworts: Geschichte als verändernde Praxis" [Instead of a Foreword: History as Transformed Praxis]. In this contextualizing introduction, Schmidt considers Marcuse's position internal to the 1968 student movement as well as the aftershocks experienced in the early 1970s in Germany. It is enlightening to recapitulate Schmidt's summary in its broadest strokes in order to clarify the significance of Marcuse's early existentialism and the role that Kierkegaard plays therein.

It becomes clear from Schmidt's outline that Marcuse belongs to the school of thought that disputes the structuralist rejection of concepts such as subjectivity, humanism, and history.[48] Schmidt writes, "Marcuse [and others] were not striving to combine Marxian teaching with *Denkelementen* [abstract, reified concepts, as Adorno claimed against the existentialists, for example]. Rather, they understood these *Denkelementen* in light of existential questions that had been evoked . . . about the *content* of Marxism itself." Existentialism proved itself to have "explosive political power [*politische Sprengkraft*]" which lay in its ability to "break the monopoly [held not only by the ruling governments, but also by the old communistic parties of West Europe]"; existentialism also "made evident the questionability of . . . bu-

reaucratic ideology."[49] Schmidt clarifies further, "Its uncontestable ability comprises the fact that it brought the critique of political economy back into the center of discussion and regarded its conceptual strength."[50]

In light of this history Schmidt engages in new existential interpretations that directly involve Marcuse and which claim adamantly that "the naïve linear concept of history of the inherited version of Marxism is not to be maintained."[51] Schmidt places Marcuse's position more clearly in the tradition of Lukács and Korsch, which emphasizes a strenuous dialectical understanding of the equally subjective and objective double character of dialectical categories.[52] The goal of this project for Marcuse and others in the existential domain is a "practically acting subject," yielded by drawing on the inner connections between economic categories and the accumulation of the societal being of the individual, while the target is the pseudo-concreteness of a scientistic understanding of both Marx and Hegel.

In achieving the sought after subjective-objective *double* character of Marxian categories, Marcuse's existentialism "enable[s] the transition from present to future" but "allow[s] an understanding of the problem of the present as an historical problem in the emphatic sense."[53] Otherwise, the end product is a "powerless ethic" merely attached to the system of Marxism as an afterthought.[54] The historical method is "to transcend the given immediacy of societal being without leaving its immanence."[55] "The immediate present is to be grasped as history *taking place* [*happening* history (*geschehende Geschichte*)] as well as a practical task."[56] Schmidt writes further, "all mediated moments of the immediate remain bound to history (whether past or future)."[57]

Marcuse's early writing therefore agitates against an "archivistic" access to history[58] and claims the latter no longer as a contemplative science, but rather as a vigorous being of the individual. However, Schmidt points to the downfalls of the Heideggerian philosophical context in which history unfolds precisely into its opposite—the ahistorical. By focusing on Kierkegaard's concept of the "moment," positioned polemically against Hegel's "*Idee*," Schmidt claims that both Heidegger and Marcuse fall into what Adorno described in *Negative Dialectics* as a historicity that places history [*Geschichte*] in the *Ungeschichtliche*, the ahistorical, "unconcerned with the historical conditions whose inner connections and constellations undergird subject and object."[59] Hence, according to Adorno and his followers, the goal of existentialism becomes what it does not achieve (following Adorno's logic of negative dialectics).

The philosophical segment of Schmidt's analysis ends by pointing to such burdens in the young Marcuse's existentialism. But Schmidt uses these difficulties to reiterate the claim made by Kosík that the value of the experienced failure of the philosophical categories lies in that these thrust the individual attempting to grasp them necessarily back into the domain of activism.

Schmidt writes that because the Heideggerian concept of *Geschichtlichkeit* proves to be indefensible, we are left with a question, following Lukács, of how the immediate present can be grasped adequately as history to be transformed [*zu gestaltende Geschichte*]. However, the intellectuals of the late '60s in Germany seized this philosophical-political juncture in Marcuse's thinking in order to confirm that "this question can only be overcome through political organization when it has been sufficiently philosophically clarified."[60]

We also still find ourselves today attempting to interpret what really is to be taken from Marcuse's existentially inspired position and how we can move forward with it *philosophically* in order to achieve a more powerful frame to act *politically*. This appears to me what Habermas is doing when he rediscovers Kierkegaard in 1987 in Denmark at his acceptance of the Sonning Prize.

NOTES

1. For a helpful overview of Habermas's relationship to Kierkegaard, see J. Michael Tilley, "Jürgen Habermas: Social Selfhood, Religion, and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp. 73–88.
2. See, for example, Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011); Eduardo Mendieta (ed.), *The Frankfurt School on Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). The secular position is embodied in Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), originally published in Germany in 1981. For a critique of Habermas's former position from *Theory of Communicative Action* in dialogue with Kierkegaard's notion of the commandment of love, see Merold Westphal, "Commanded Love and Moral Autonomy: The Kierkegaard-Habermas Debate," *Ethical Perspectives* 5 (1998) 2, pp. 263–76.
3. I am grateful to J. Michael Tilley, who called my attention to the 1987 Sonning Prize speech and engaged with me in a very productive and insightful conversation about Kierkegaard and Critical Theory, at the International Kierkegaard Conference at St. Olaf College, 2010. See Tilley's articles, "Jürgen Habermas: Social Selfhood, Religion, and Kierkegaard" and "Herbert Marcuse: Social Critique, Haecker and Kierkegaardian Individualism," published in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Social-Political Thought*, vol. 14, ed. Jon Stewart (Ashgate UK, 2011), pp. 73–88 and pp. 137–46, respectively.
4. Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. viii–ix.
5. Ibid., p. 250.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 263
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 250
11. Ibid., p. 251.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 252.
15. See, for example, Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common*

Man, trans. Bruce Kirmmse (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2001), originally published in Danish in 1961.

16. Ibid., p. 259.
17. Ibid., p. 260.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 261.
20. See Agnes Heller, *Ethics of Personality* (Oxford UK and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996).
21. Ibid., pp. 258–59.
22. Ibid., p. 261.
23. See Habermas's recent position in dialogue with Chrisoph Menke in "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism," Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 271–311.
24. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, volume II, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
25. Ibid., p. 260.
26. Ibid.
27. Heller, *Ethics of Personality*, ibid.
28. See Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1967).
29. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination: Judge for Yourself!*, trans. Hong and Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
30. Agnes Heller. "Vergessen und Erinnern: Vom Sinn der Sinnlosigkeit." In *Sinn und Form*, March/April 2001, Volume 2, p. 149. The English provided in this paper is my translation.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 150.
34. Ibid.
35. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1969).
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 157.
38. Ibid., p. 158.
39. Ibid., p. 158.
40. Ibid., p. 158.
41. Ibid., p. 158.
42. See Matuštík, *Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), especially pp. 150–55.
43. Ibid., p. 152.
44. Jürgen Habermas, "Herbert Marcuse: Einleitung zu einer Antifestschrift," in Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 254. See also, e.g. Richard Wolin's introduction in *Heideggerian Marxism*, ibid.
45. Habermas, "Marcuse," ibid., p. 254.
46. Ibid.
47. Marcuse and Alfred Schmidt, *Existentialistische Marx-Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), pp. 7–39. Three of the four essays in this book have since been translated into English, namely, the two Marcuse essays and Schmidt's "Existential Ontology and Historical Materialism in Herbert Marcuse," published in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, eds. Pippin, Feenberg, Webel (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), pp. 47–67, and in *The Frankfurt School: Critical Assessments*, ed. Jay Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 175–93. But Schmidt's introduction is not available in any published English translation. Therefore, what is included here in quotation in my paper is my own translation of Schmidt's German.
48. Alfred Schmidt, "Statt eines Vorworts: Geschichte als verändernde Praxis" in Marcuse and Schmidt, ibid., p. 8. This is my translation.
49. Ibid., p. 9

50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 12.
52. Ibid., p. 14.
53. Ibid., p. 14.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p. 15.
56. Ibid., p. 15.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p. 18.
59. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, quoted in Schmidt, ibid., p. 21.
60. Schmidt, ibid.

Chapter Six

Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Postsecularism

HABERMAS'S CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP TO KIERKEGAARD

As I have aimed to establish that Habermas's selection of Kierkegaard for the ethical model of resistance against nationalist identity in the *Historikerstreit* was neither unwarranted nor, in a nuanced view of the historical contextualization, unprecedented, it is now important to consider additional Kierkegaardian dimensions in Habermas's writings and the ways in which they have evolved internal to Habermas's development as a public intellectual and political philosopher. As Habermas continued to be inspired by Kierkegaard, not only Kierkegaard's impetus for postnationalism becomes clear, but also for the most recent dialogues on postsecularism.

In the Sonning Prize speech Habermas notes that Kierkegaard's model of individual choice "can also be read in a somewhat more secular way." It is important to quote Habermas here in full:

> This concept of an ego-identity produced through the reconstruction of one's own life history in the light of an absolute responsibility for oneself can also be read in a somewhat more secular way. Then one sees that in the middle of the nineteenth century Kierkegaard had to think under the presupposition of Kantian ethics and wanted to offer an alternative to Hegel's attempt at a dubious "concretization" of Kant's universalist morality. Kierkegaard, who distrusted this objective spirit as much as Marx did, anchored both instead in a radicalized inwardness. In this way he arrived at a concept of personal identity that is clearly more suited to our posttraditional, but not yet in itself rational world.[1]

Here we see the beginnings of Habermas's segue into postsecularism via post-metaphysical identity constructions because of having been impressed

upon by Kierkegaard. But before the more pronounced move to postsecularism, Habermas utilized Kierkegaard as an important stepping stone to clarify the historical-intellectual development of philosophy of consciousness in Western metaphysics. This stepping stone is not only indirectly related, since it provides a key component in Habermas's positioning of the West as a postsecular society.

In *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, published in 1988, one year after the Sonning Prize speech, Habermas describes Kierkegaard's model of existential self-choice as an important breach, together with Marx's focus on materialism, in the mirroring processes of consciousness endemic to the overly objective and falsely rationalized idealism of Kant and Hegel—according to the judgment of many who came after the great idealists—as well as the philosophic movements to derive from idealism. This corroborates Habermas's appreciation for Kierkegaard as one who caused a rupture also in the ethical models of identity inherited from Kant and Hegel. In *Postmetaphysical Thinking* Habermas writes that, similar to Feuerbach and Marx, "Kierkegaard counterposed the facticity of one's own existence and the inwardness of the radical will to be oneself against a chimerical reason within history. All of these arguments seek to recover the finite character of mind from the self-referential, totalizing thinking of the dialectic[...]."[2] But it is clear in Habermas's analysis that Kierkegaard provides only an impetus to a way out of the mimetic entrenchment of objective consciousness, without fully delivering the means to do so. In this text Kierkegaard appears repeatedly in Habermas's reconstruction of the trajectory of the philosophy of consciousness as a beginning solution to the pitfalls of arch-idealistic models of consciousness. As Habermas made clear in "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity," he feels, however, that Kierkegaard's thinking reaches certain limits. For Habermas these limits are drawn where Kierkegaard's ethical sphere gives way to the creation of a lone individual who lives only in the face of God. Habermas explains this move by situating it within Fichtean reflective self-consciousness and certain theories that followed it:

> The subject that relates itself to itself *cognitively* comes across the self, which it grasps as an object, under this category as something already derived, and not as it-itself in its originality, as the author of spontaneous self-relation. Kierkegaard adopted this problem from Fichte by way of Schelling and made it into the starting point for a meditation that propels whoever existentially reflects upon himself into the "Sickness unto Death"...The self of the existing human is this sort of derived, posited relation and therewith one that, by relating itself to itself, relates itself to something other. This other that precedes the self of self-consciousness is, for Kierkegaard, the Christian God of Redemption [...].[3]

He furthers this elsewhere in the text where he writes:

> Kierkegaard's Either/Or poses itself ineluctably in the conversation of the lone soul with God. The ethical stage of life is only the gateway to the religious stage, where the dialogue with oneself proves to be a mask behind which has been concealed the prayer, the dialogue with God. The Christian consciousness of sin and the Protestant hunger for grace therefore form the real spur for the return to a life that takes on form and coherence only in relation to the justification, due at the Last Judgment, of an irreplaceable and unique existence.[4]

Habermas's claim that the religious sphere in Kierkegaard's writings overtakes the ethical one belongs to a *partially* outmoded interpretation of Kierkegaard internal to the discipline of philosophy. I emphasize "partially" because this is not to eliminate the possibility of a viable reading of Kierkegaard in which religious subjectivity prevails over the other options that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms present. On the contrary, I believe that such an interpretation is possible, but only while countenancing every irreducible dimension of Kierkegaard's entire body of writings, including the aesthetic and ethical creations and what they evoke. The way in which Habermas interprets Kierkegaard to claim that the ethical "is only" a gateway to the religious downplays the significance of the ethical for Kierkegaard in a sense. This dimension of Habermas's Kierkegaard—at this point in Habermas's philosophic thinking—reveals a certain boundary of Kierkegaard reception that will be overcome by later interpretations in critical theory, for example in the work of Martin Matuštík (discussed in chapter 7). But it also makes manifest a specific hindrance in the integration of Kierkegaardian subjectivity into Habermas's postsecular philosophical model, because Habermas seeks to bracket out the stronger impulses of religiosity—those which cannot be "translated" or fitted through rational prerequisites into Habermas's model of postconventional and yet consensual, communicative discourse ethics. It is for this reason that Maureen Junker-Kenny in *Habermas and Theology* has questioned whether Habermas would have been better suited with an appropriation of Schleiermacher instead of Kierkegaard. Schleiermacher's writings work more congruously with Habermas's melding of philosophy (metaphysics) and theology (faith) in regard to Habermas's thesis of a necessary genealogical intertwining of the two. However, Junker-Kenny concludes, to my interpretation rightly, that Schleiermacher's construal of a reason that relates to religion as a "feeling" is "not of interest" to Habermas.[5]

It is nonetheless indisputable that for Habermas Kierkegaard's influence on a positive solution to the problem of the philosophy of consciousness cannot be underestimated. In the specific domain of a postmetaphysical conception of history, Kierkegaard resonates provocatively for Habermas:

> To bring it to a simple point that had already irritated Hegel's contemporaries: a history with an established past, a predecided future, and a condemned present, is no longer *history*. Marx and Kierkegaard drew the moral from this. . . . Since their day [Marx's and Kierkegaard's], it has become ever harder to ignore the way in which history intrudes into the structures of unifying reason with the contingencies of what is unforeseeably new and other, and these contingencies belie all rash syntheses and limiting constructions.[6]

As evidenced above, it was this element in Kierkegaard's critique of objective spirit—to use the Hegelian discourse—that interested Habermas most. But this will continue into Habermas's need of Kierkegaard for his theory of postsecularism.

HABERMAS AND THEUNISSEN'S NEGATIVE THEOLOGY OF TIME

Habermas's thinking itself verges on the theological, albeit one of negative theology, when he evaluates Michael Theunissen's philosophic project from Theunissen's *Negative Theology of Time*[7] in his essay, "Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology."[8] This essay has been published in a volume of Habermas's writings on reason, God, and modernity, under the umbrella title *Religion and Rationality*. This essay was also published in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, edited by Matuštík and Merold Westphal, and importantly shows Habermas's post-traditional developments of Kierkegaard, now more pointedly in the light of postsecularism. In this essay Habermas poses questions to Theunissen that make manifest Habermas's intrigue by negative theological notions of time, accented by Theunissen in specifically Kierkegaardian directions. This material evokes Habermas's concern for proper historical grasping of the self against the particularist notions of nationalist identity. It also shows, as Alistair Hannay has recently pointed out, the ever renewed and continuous need for Kierkegaard in the modernity that has allegedly embraced the death of God. Hannay captures this phenomenon well, and could be depicting Habermas's own trajectory, when Hannay writes:

> How is it that while the more recent and ostensibly more modern Nietzsche has become an established icon of the age, the writings of his earlier colleague [Kierkegaard] seem increasingly to engage us?...Are we clutching at Kierkegaard in a desperate attempt to retrieve faith? Or, however comfortably attuned to the death of God, are people turning to the Danish thinker as a source of spiritual renewal in a secular world? . . . Philosophers, especially those schooled in existentialism, are more likely to refer us to the peculiar nature of human consciousness, exposing us as it does to questions of personal moment to which, in quite common circumstances, the only satisfying if not always satisfactory answers are of a kind that call for religion.[9]

Both Theunissen and Habermas fall into this description, I would argue, in a positive light, as they see the need for a Kierkegaardian-inspired revival of faith in the "paths of philosophical thought which are still viable today."[10] The phrase "still viable today" indicates Habermas's disenchantment with other forms of emancipation that have failed in the second half of the twentieth century. Habermas wrote this essay at the cusp of the twenty-first century, and its spirit bespeaks his yearning for a model of faith that can be fused with his discourse ethic of communicative action in the form of freedom.

In "Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology," Habermas describes Theunissen's position as a preference for "the proleptic appearance of an eschaton which can instill confidence into the present to a rationally fortified transcendence from within."[11] This is precisely the claim that Habermas would like to examine in his own analysis, and he is interested in Theunissen because the latter finds the grounding for original eschatological content of Christianity in the writings of Kierkegaard. Habermas explains, "The kernel thus retrieved is a radically historical mode of thought which is incompatible with essentialist conceptions. It is the domination of what is past over what is to come which results in the compulsive character of a reality in need of salvation."[12]

The diagnosed element of compulsion harkens back to Adorno's and Horkheimer's thesis from their collective project, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which argues that Enlightenment rationality morphs back into the mythical content it strives to overcome through its compulsion to evade the past *but through a domination over the past*. The dialectic evolves such that the past overtakes the future, or as Habermas puts it, "the future is constantly overwhelmed by the past," in the form of a sublation that forbids any subjective freedom. Both Habermas and Theunissen advocate for a form of freedom based on a de-metaphysicalized version of Christian salvation. Because of this they turn to facets of Jewish and Christian mysticism. Adorno's and Horkheimer's formative and influential groundstone of first-generation Critical Theory comes through at this juncture in Habermas's work, since Habermas embraces here a philosophic model in which the remembrance of time includes and equals a future projection of time and thereby remedies—indeed "saves" in the form of mystical redemption reminiscent of Walter Benjamin—the forgetfulness of time characteristic of metaphysical thought.

Habermas quotes Theunissen to say, "Existence within time, which the metaphysical tradition deriving from Plato viewed under the regular aspect of the mutable, acquires the positive shape of the alterable."[13] Changing the texture of time from "mutable"—with its association of "mutation" from the norm, or in Plato's sense, from the Pure Form or Absolute—to "alterable"

through a de-Hellenized Christian doctrine of salvation, radically transforms the individual's grasping of her own temporal constitution. For Habermas this entails political potential in the form of a freedom that can be expressed through actions in the public sphere, that is, through human *existence*—existing in the robust Kierkegaardian sense—in time.

Here one sees many of the influences that have become suffused into Habermas's thinking and placed into a consonant form: the early Marcuse with his notion of "concrete philosophy" that promotes political action in a factical "now" moment, Habermas's position in the *Historikerstreit* against those who sought a regressive form of ego-identity internal to national-historical relations of the self, and Walter Benjamin's urging to late modernity to rupture the "bad continuity" of history and to incorporate mystical notions of redemption internal to the domains of philosophical knowledge, political freedom, and hence action.[14] In light of Benjaminian motivated notions of redemption and political action, Habermas distinguishes between "the *hope* that 'everything within time will be different,'" and "the *faith* that 'time itself will be different.'"[15] He elaborates: "The ambiguous formula of a 'becoming other of time' conceals this difference between trust in an eschatological turning of the world, and the profane expectation that our praxis in the world, despite everything, may help to bring about a shift towards a better state of things." Where Habermas would end with the *hope* that "everything within time will be different," Theunissen "would [nonetheless] hold fast to the task of showing philosophy why profane hope must be anchored in eschatological hope."[16]

But, moreover, Habermas sympathizes with Theunissen's proclivity for negative theological conceptions of time. Habermas declares that Theunissen has "an eye on a proleptic future of a Christian promise of salvation which reaches into the present. . . . The task of this theology [Theunissen's] is to recall a disintegrated modernity from its dispersal, re-sensitizing it to a message of salvation which has become unintelligible."[17] However, in this explanation Habermas points out that Theunissen "can achieve this [theological promise] through his own theological means" by borrowing metaphysical concepts from the very Platonism he intends to overcome. Habermas explains: "He seems confident that he can close the gap between the appeal to a reality expressed in faith, and the power to convince of philosophical reasons," and he thinks he can do so with arguments.[18]

While Habermas is intrigued by Theunissen's model of a negative theology of time, and derives components of it for his own version of postsecularism, Habermas does clarify at the closing of his article on Theunissen that such a framework can only be used as a *mode* of philosophy, and not as a content-driven or substantiated norm. Habermas worries about any evasion of philosophical strictures in a flight to theological promises of salvation, but does not discount the redemptive capacity of thinking through an operational mode of understanding that includes negative theological dimensions. Referring to Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*,[19] Habermas announces that "reflections from damaged life are equally the concern of both [philosophy and theology]."[20] But we would not want to privilege a renewed theological "rhetoric of fate" over and against the disciplining measures of philosophic, rational deliberation. For Habermas, both a negative theological hope for the future to be projected into the present and a philosophically grounded faith in consensual discursive freedom are necessary for postmetaphysical subjectivity.

BETWEEN NATURALISM AND RELIGION: DEVELOPMENTS IN POSTSECULARISM

In the last ten years Habermas has lectured and written prodigiously on power of religion in the public sphere. This has culminated in many ways in Habermas's most recent publications, *Ach, Europa,* published in 2008 (published in English as *Europe: The Faltering Project* one year later) and in a roundtable discussion with Judith Butler, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West in 2009, published by the Social Science Research Council under the title, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*.[21] Needless to say, Habermas's participation in the debates on postsecularism has been formative of the discussion globally. In this section I consider his most important writings in this context, bearing in mind a core value that Kierkegaard served for Habermas's philosophic constructions in this specific framework. The key text for my analysis is *The Future of Human Nature* (published for the first time in 2001). In this work Habermas embraces his responsibility as a public intellectual, much as he did through his intervention in the historians' debate, and speaks out on the topic of a liberal eugenics in Germany and Europe more broadly. Interesting here is the way in which Habermas takes his argument on Kierkegaard from the Sonning Prize speech and reappropriates it in the argument against a liberal eugenics. But, by the same token, the idea of limiting Kierkegaard's model—as Habermas described it in 1987, that it can only provide a *mode* of thinking as a subject without delivering the normative content sought by Habermas—is likewise retained; and this is substantiated through Habermas's critique of Kierkegaard by a Kantian philosophy of religion in the essay, "The Boundary Between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion," published in *Between Naturalism and Religion* in 2005. These limits prove to be both an advantage and weakness. On one hand they foster the possibility of achieving a strong, albeit idiosyncratically grounded ethical form of subjectivity that staves off any fall into the leveling processes of a non- or even anti-multiculture democracy. This links to what Habermas de-

scribes as the "thin" framework of Kierkegaardian subjectivity. One exists as a self to the extent that one has chosen oneself *as an ethical being*. Such constitutes the form of life or the *mode* of existing as an ethical individual, while allowing for innumerable and multifarious content-based contingencies of what the human individual comprises. This seems to Habermas to fit best into his ideal of a global institutional network fleshed out by transnational legal and political institutions, which permit robust differences in complex forms of multiculture societies. It serves as the backbone, for example, in his argument against a liberal eugenics, as will become clear. However, on the other side, this thinness is problematized by Kierkegaard's continuation of it into what Kierkegaard calls the domain of the absurd—the strong notion of religious existence for Kierkegaard that has no ability to "translate" itself into cultural or communicative norms. That is, the foundation of the mode of existing as an ethical individual for Kierkegaard, expressed pseudonymously in volume II of *Either/Or*, of which Habermas repeatedly makes use, must for Habermas stop precisely there. Religiousness can and will only become enacted in Habermas's model of the public sphere to the extent that religious beliefs satisfy cognitive, rational prerequisites. The latter are not possible in Kierkegaard's musings on the religious. In fact, both his fictional musings as well as his direct discourses on the topic repeatedly evade rational predeterminations.

Merold Westphal has captured the exact tension between Habermas's thinking and Kierkegaard's religiosity in his article, "Commanded Love and Moral Autonomy: The Kierkegaard-Habermas Debate," published in 1998. Although Westphal was writing in response to Habermas's earlier, secular theory of communicative action (from *Theory of Communicative Action*, published in 1981), which predates the Sonning Prize Speech, Westphal's argument is suggestive for the upcoming confrontation internal to Habermas's employment of Kierkegaard. Westphal claims that Habermas's position, although it was only secular at the time of his 1981 text, embraces transparent moral autonomy guided by reasons in a way that can never mesh with Kierkegaard's understanding of religious conviction and the individual's singular relationship to God. Westphal evaluates Habermas's framework as perhaps the easier solution to existing in postmetaphysical modernity, but just as well elicits the shortcomings of that ease through Kierkegaard's notion of love. Westphal writes:

> It is as if Kierkegaard has read Habermas [of the 1981 text] and recognized the linguistification of the sacred as the temptation to which every Established Order has already succumbed, as the self-love by which every society treats its own conversation, however democratic or undemocratic, as the final word on the True and the Right. In the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, he senses that the divine command gets through to us, if ever it does, only by breaking through the defences with which society has sought to protect itself and its members from its awesome and infinite demand.[22]

Not without humor (to be true the tradition of Kierkegaard), Westphal proceeds by showing the continued disjunction between Habermas and Kierkegaard by reiterating an important catchphrase from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work, *Fear and Trembling* and contrasting it to Habermas's notion of moral autonomy:

> It is because Abraham is "forsaken by language and people's understanding" that he cannot explain to Sarah and to Isaac what he is doing. No doubt the command to love one's neighbor is easier to swallow than the command to sacrifice one's son. But the logic is the same. In one case a father loves a son; in the other a lover loves a beloved. But in both cases the lover has a higher allegiance. Either the mere fact that this is the case, or the action called for in particular circumstances, can make the lover's love look like hate to the beloved. This is why Silentio [the fictional author of *Fear and Trembling*] finds it necessary to quote one of Jesus' hardest sayings as a key to the Abraham story. "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." And it is why Kierkegaard introduces the idea of the true lover being "forsaken by language and people's understanding" by saying, "But the inwardness of Christian love is to be willing, as reward for its love, to be hated by the beloved. . . . This shows that this inwardness is an unalloyed God-relationship." No wonder autonomy looks so attractive![23]

Westphal makes clear the question of the extent to which Kierkegaard's model of religious existence can be adapted into a postsecular society through Habermas's rephrasing of it into ethical, normative subjectivity. Habermas expresses his interpretation of Kierkegaard as being both post-metaphysical *and* theological. But in light of the dilution of the religious content of Kierkegaard's "knight of faith"—or even forbidding it in the postsecular public sphere—one is left to wonder how much of the original Kierkegaardian religious subjectivity can really play a role in our postnational conventions and constellations when seen through Habermas's lens. This question will be answered by the work of Martin Matuštík, presented as the Conclusion in chapter 7. Matuštík contends that "Habermas has lost some important aspects of the transgressive role of Kierkegaard's individual," and these will be retained by what Matuštík recaptures of the religious strength in Kierkegaardian subjectivity.[24] On the flip side, one sees Habermas's worry about any reason that disclaims itself, for example, in the philosophy of the "event" or in the problematic Heideggerian inspiration from Kierkegaard, against reason. In *The Future of Human Nature* Habermas captures this concern in the closing section titled "Faith and Knowledge":

> Reason which disclaims itself is easily tempted to merely borrow the authority, and the air, of a sacred that has been deprived of its core and become anonymous. With Heidegger, devotion [*Andacht*] mutates to become remembrance [*Andenken*]. But there is no new insight to be gained by having the day of the Last Judgment evaporate to an undetermined event in the history of being. If posthumanism is to be fulfilled in the return to the archaic beginnings *before* Christ and *before* Socrates, the hour of religious kitsch has come.[25]

In regard to recent atheistic developments in postsecularism, to my mind, Habermas is justified with this concern.

The aim of the preceding discussion has been to foreshadow the way in which both dimensions of the original 1987 position come through Habermas's writings on postsecularism in the last decade. Somewhat less interesting is Habermas's repetition of both of these facets of his Kierkegaard reading in later writings, for example, in his *rapprochement* of Derrida in *Europe: The Faltering Project*, on one hand, and the positive Kierkegaardian spirit in his argument on *An Awareness of What Is Missing*, on the other hand. Because of this, I will focus now only on *The Future of Human Nature*. Specific selections from this text serve as examplars of the subsequent repetitions of same or very similar Kierkegaardian components in Habermas's later writings, as iterated above.

In the essay, "Are There Postmetaphysical Answers to the Question: What is the 'Good Life'?" Habermas provides the opening argument to his stance on *The Future of Human Nature*, which serves as the foundation block for the Kierkegaardian basis in his position against liberal eugenics and other infringements on individual subjectivity. He is working in conversation both with and against John Rawls's liberal philosophy of justice. Habermas in this text fights against the growing trend in Germany at the turn of the twenty-first century, in which prominent conservatives in the nation sought to preserve one specific "German" culture ("*Leitkultur*") over others assimilating into posttraditional Germany. Habermas writes against the proposal of defending a *Leitkultur*:

> It is certainly true that individual life-projects do not emerge independently of intersubjectively share life contexts. However, in complex societies one culture can assert itself against other cultures only by convincing its succeeding generations—who can also say no—of the advantages of its world-disclosive semantic and action-orienting power. "Nature reserves" for cultures are neither possible nor desirable. In a constitutional democracy the majority may also not prescribe for minorities aspects of its own cultural form of life (beyond the common political culture of the country) by claiming for its culture an authoritative guiding function (as "*Leitkultur*"].[26]

While practical (moral) philosophy does not eliminate its normative function, it should, according to Habermas, circumscribe its efforts "by and large, to

questions of justice. In particular, its aim is to clarify the moral point of view from which we judge norms and actions whenever we must determine what lies in the equal interest of everyone and what is equally good for all." Habermas furthermore distinguishes the question "What ought we to do?" from that which asks, "What ought I to do?" and points out that the meaning of the "ought" changes with the transformation of the question, because "[s]uch ethical questions regarding our own weal and woe arise in the context of a *particular* life history or a *unique* form of life."[27] The latter are "wedded to questions of identity" and therefore "take their own separate path" from questions of justice, in the Rawlsian sense. Habermas continues: "The moral point of view obliges us to abstract from those exemplary pictures of a successful or undamaged life that have been handed on in the grand narratives of metaphysics and religion."[28] And in this sense we now see why Habermas is ardently concerned with the combination of postmetaphysics and postsecularism. He wants to retrieve and revive the facets from metaphysics and theology that can aid the construction and preservation of additional "unmisspent" lives, as he puts it. These two philosophic-religious dimensions—both a de-Hellenized Christianity and a re-theologized public sphere—are required to grasp the posttraditional ethicality of the self and the role that religion plays in that ethicality, interesting enough, as a critique of metaphysics.

In regard to a liberal eugenics, argument has been made against the proposal for the relief from future human suffering—both somatic and psychic, and as psychosomatic—through genetic manipulation. The psychotherapeutic theory of Alexander Mitscherlich has impacted Habermas's thinking. Habermas paraphrases the crux of Mitscherlich's thesis as follows:

> [...] Mitscherlich understands psychological illness as the impairment of a specifically human mode of existence. Such illness signifies a self-inflicted loss of freedom, because the patient is simply compensating for an unconscious suffering with his symptom—a suffering he escapes by self-deceptioin. The goal of therapy is a self-knowledge that "is often nothing more than the transformation of illness into suffering, albeit a suffering that raises *Homo sapiens* to a higher level because it does not negate his freedom."[29]

Habermas is greatly influenced by Mitscherlich's therapeutic thesis of a transformation of illness into suffering, "albeit a suffering that raises [the individual] to a higher level" because it allows for freedom. But Habermas feels strongly that this should not be the privileged domain of psychoanalysis. In fact, Mitscherlich is indebted to Kierkegaard's such notion of the transformation of human suffering into freedom, in no other work than *Either/Or*, which has been most significant for Habermas's postsecular developments throughout all of his writings on Kierkegaard.

In this essay Habermas calls out the Kierkegaardian roots of Mitscherlich's position and seizes this opportunity internal to the debate on liberal eugenics to hone the Kierkegaardian core of his own ethical position. Habermas writes further: "Kierkegaard was the first philosopher who answered the basic ethical question regarding the success or failure of one's own life with a postmetaphysical concept of 'being-able-to-be-oneself.'"[30] He continues by articulating that while Kierkegaard's successors pursued their own atheism, they "recognized Kierkegaard as the thinker who revived the ethical question in the most innovative manner and provided an answer that was not only substantive but also sufficiently formal—sufficiently formal, that is, in view of a legitimate pluralism of world-views that prohibits any form of paternalism in the area of genuinely ethical advice."[31] Here we see clearly the "thin" Kierkegaard that Habermas continually seeks to incorporate into his model of multiculture postnational democracy. But Habermas locates this formalistic Kierkegaard—and I would argue limits it thereby—by privileging yet again the position of the self-editor of volume II of *Either/Or*. While this certainly proves helpful for Habermas's arguments against a surging tendency toward *Leitkultur*, also evidenced against the nationalistic strains of the *Historikerstreit*, it must be made conspicuous that Habermas is using a very small portion of Kierkegaard's corpus and blocking any inclusion of more dynamic religious elements in Kierkegaard's thinking. The ability of "being-able-to-be-oneself" (*selbstseinkönnen*) is certainly crucial to Kierkegaard's own narrative, nonlinear as it may be. And perhaps the most vivid depiction of this is indeed handed to the reader through Judge William, the fictional character of the ethical sphere in Kierekgaard's *Either/Or*. But there is a sense in which Habermas's Kierkegaard reading could and arguably should move on, to allow even more of what Kierkegaard conceived of postmetaphysical subjectivity in our now late, late modernity. The potential for such development of Kierkegaard in Critical Theory is investigated in the conclusion presented in chapter 7.

NOTES

1. Habermas, *The New Conversativism*, pp. 260–61.
2. Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 39. In German, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).
3. Ibid., pp. 24–25.
4. Ibid., pp. 165–66.
5. Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 157.
6. Ibid., pp. 130–31.
7. See Michael Theunissen, *Negative Theologie der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

8. In Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 110–28.
9. Alistair Hannay, "Kierkegaard: Past or Present?" in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, 2011.
10. Habermas, "Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology," p. 111.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 112.
13. Ibid.
14. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), "Theses on the Philosophy of History," pp. 253–64.
15. Ibid., p. 113.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 114.
18. Ibid., p. 112.
19. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso Books, 2006).
20. Habermas, ibid.
21. See Habermas et al., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Medieta and Jonathan Verantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), and Habermas, *Europe: The Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), originally published in German in 2008.
22. Merold Westphal, "Commanded Love and Moral Autonomy: The Kierkegaard-Habermas Debate," *Ethical Perspectives* 5 (1998) 2, p. 273.
23. Ibid., pp. 273–74.
24. Matuštík, "Kierkegaard's Radical Existential Praxis, or: Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian, and Postmodern Categories," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Matuštík and Westphal (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 249.
25. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), p. 113. In German: *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).
26. Ibid., p. 3.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 5. Quoted by Habermas in this passage: Alexander Mitscherlich, *Freiheit und Unfreiheit in der Krankheit, Studien zur psychosomatischen Medizin* 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 128.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., pp. 5–6.