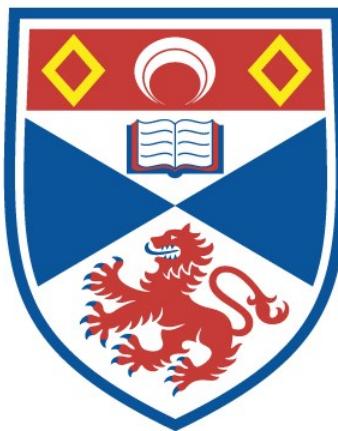


**ENCOUNTERING THE STATE
PROLEGOMENA TO A SUBJECTIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECT AND STATE**

Ruairidh J. Brown

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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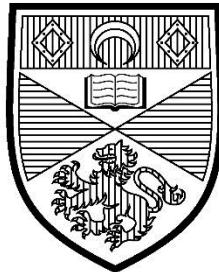
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Encountering the State

Prolegomena to a Subjective Approach to
Understanding the Relationship between Subject and
State

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

Date of Submission: 2nd of March 2017

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Abstract: *Demanding Taxation, disciplining, and even at times requiring the sacrifice of life, the State is undoubtable one of the most influential and important structures within a subject's existence. Nonetheless, despite these great demands, very few subjects actually choose or construct the State they inhabit. On the contrary subjects rather find themselves born into these great structures which transcend their existence. Consequently understanding how subjects come to learn about, and relate to, these great structures they are thrown into is vital for both an understanding of politics and the human condition generally.*

In this thesis I will explore an alternative approach to investigating the subject and State relationship: The 'Subjective approach'. Inspired by the thought of Danish Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, the aim of this approach will be to explore the encounters that the subject has with the State, what perception of the State is given to subjects in these encounters, and how the relationship between subject and State grows out of such encounters.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to provide prolegomena to such an approach. I shall aim to outline why such an approach should be considered for investigating subject and State relations, and explore how one may begin articulating such an approach.

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Introduction

"Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth?" (Job, 11:18).

Unable to understand the purpose or reason behind his suffering, Job called out the above address to God in search of answers. He needed to know why God had created him, why he was 'brought forth', why he existed.

Such an example is overtly theological in nature as it asks how one relates to God, and how one might understand oneself within his divine plans. Nonetheless, it also reveals something central to the human condition: the anxiety and the drive to discover why we exist and what our purpose and relations in the world are. We all find ourselves thrown into a world that transcends us and in which we must seek explanation for our life. Thomas Hobbes once compared such an anxiety to the plight of Prometheus who, chained to a rock by the gods, had his liver perpetually devoured by eagles (Hobbes, 2008:72). This search for meaning in the world is fundamental in our understanding of ourselves and our relations.

This is no truer than in the case of political existence. We all find ourselves born into a pre-existing political order which both wields great power over our lives and demands our loyalty and obedience. Thus, understanding how we relate to this order is a fundamental question to understanding ourselves and our place within the world.

The aim of this thesis is to try and further our understanding of how the subject may relate to the modern State. In particular it will explore the possibility of a 'subjective' approach to understanding this relationship.

In this introduction I will explain what I mean by a 'subjective approach', introduce why I believe this is an issue we should concern ourselves with, and explain how I will carry out this exploration in the following chapters.

The first sections of this introduction will be dedicated to clarifying what I intend to achieve in this thesis. Section one will clarify what I mean by 'subject' and 'State'. Section two will then outline what I understand by a 'subjective approach'. Section three will then explain what I intend when denoting this thesis 'prolegomena'. This clarified I will then proceed in section four to discuss the methodological issues I must consider when carrying out my investigation. Finally section five will give a chapter outline of the thesis.

1. Relationship between Subject and State

In *Economy and Society*, Max Weber defined the modern State as 'a compulsory organisation with a territorial basis' (Weber, 1963:56). Weber further characterises the State as an administrative and legal order which claims jurisdiction over its members and the territory in which it controls a monopoly of

force (Weber, 1963:56). Consequently, we can understand the modern State as an administrative and legal order which governs a territory. This order further demands obedience from subjects within the said territory and enforces this with the claim to be the only body which can legitimately use force.

Nonetheless, Quentin Skinner has advised caution in simply understanding the 'State' through such a compact definition. In his 'Genealogy of the Modern State', Skinner insists that concepts that have been the subject of ideological disputes over a long period of time, such as the 'State', are bound to resist such rigid definitions. Instead Skinner advocates a 'genealogical' approach which considers earlier conceptions of the State as to avoid a rigid, and impoverished, understanding (Skinner, 2009:326).

Now, an extensive genealogy of the modern State is admittedly outwith the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, what I do wish to establish here is a general understanding of what the 'modern State' is to ground the basis of my study. With this intention in mind it is worth considering the conclusions of Skinner's genealogical investigation.

Skinner comes to the conclusion that:

'we can scarcely hope to talk coherently about the nature of public power without making some reference to the idea of the state as a fictional or moral person distinct from both rulers and ruled' (Skinner, 2009:362).

Thus we may observe central to the understanding of ‘State’ is the idea of a ruling body conceived as something separate from both the subject and the particular ruler of a polity. Such an understanding is further demonstrated in Skinner’s seminal work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, one of the central aims of which is to indicate the process by which the modern understanding of the ‘State’ came to be formed¹. Skinner argues that, in the Middle Ages, the ‘State’ was largely seen as synonymous with the ruler who attempted to hold on to his position. A decisive shift in thought was however made in the early modern period. This ‘shift’ was from this idea of the ‘ruler maintaining his state’, which simply meant upholding his own position, to the idea that there is a separate legal and constitutional order, that of ‘the State’, which the ruler has a duty to maintain. It was this change in thought from the ruler maintaining his position, his ‘state’, to the idea that there was a separate entity, the ‘State’, that enabled the State to be conceptualised in its ‘distinctively modern terms’. That is, as Skinner phrases it, the State conceived ‘as the sole source of law and legitimate force within its own territory, and as the sole appropriate source of its citizens’ allegiances’ (Skinner, 2002:x)².

¹ The other aims Skinner lists are to outline an account of the principal works in late medieval and early modern political thought, and to exemplify a certain approach to the study and interpretation of historical texts (Skinner, 2008:ix-x).

² In *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Skinner discusses extensively the historical changes that allowed for this shift in understanding to come about, indicating such key factors as the loss of supreme authority by both the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor (Skinner, 2008:351). Skinner further draws attention to early modern thinkers who he argues were central in articulating the modern understanding of State, thinkers such as Walter Raleigh and Jean Bodin (Skinner, 2008:357).

What is important to recognise here is that, with the emergence by the end of the Sixteenth century of this idea that there was a distinct entity which was the sole and appropriate objects of subjects' allegiances, we arrive at the foundations of the modern understanding of 'State'. This is indeed an understanding which Skinner acknowledges is characterised by Weber's definition (Skinner, 2002:x).

In this thesis by 'State' I thus mean the disembodied legal entity which claims to be the sole source of legal authority and allegiance in the territory which the subject inhabits. How subjects relate to this authority is the central issue my thesis is concerned with.

With this identification of 'State' I am also further able to address the chronological boundaries of this thesis. Given that I have identified an understanding of State as it originates in the late Sixteenth Century, I will not discuss theories of the subject's relationship to the State prior to this period. This is of course not to say I will give no consideration to philosophical ideas prior to the Sixteenth Century, as this would be to completely ignore the influence such philosophies have had on the course of modern thought. However I will not use such thinkers to illustrate the different approaches to the 'State' which I will engage with. To clarify, use an example: I will consider the ideas of Plato in so far as they relate to the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, as not to do so would be to ignore a vital influence of Kierkegaard's philosophy³. However I will not address Plato's

³ The central importance of Kierkegaard to my study will be made evident in the next section.

own political theory, as may be found in say *The Statesman* or *The Laws*, as this falls outwith the time period in which discussion about the particular ‘modern’ understanding of the State was possible⁴.

Having thus clarified my understanding of State I wish to now clarify what I signify by ‘subject’. In particular I wish to use the term ‘subject’ in a conscious move to distance myself from the term ‘individual’. The reason for this is because ‘individual’ can be understood to be a term that originates in a specific historical period and carries loaded political meaning.

In his *A Short History of Ethics*, Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that the origins of this understanding of the ‘individual’ lie in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. He argues that its origins are owed chiefly to Martin Luther’s theology: which posited the subject as stripped and abstracted from his social attributes and placed directly before God, and the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli: which understood the subject as unconstrained by social bonds and with only the achievements of his own ends as criteria for action. The articulation of the

⁴ This also raises an issue of my use of terminology. As Skinner observes, although a ‘modern’ understanding of the State emerges in the late Sixteenth Century, it does not mean that this term is constantly deployed by thinkers from this period onward. Skinner for instance highlights that in the *Six Books of Commonwealth* Bodin often speaks of the *la République* rather than *l’État*, and further the 1606 English translation of his work more frequently uses the term ‘commonwealth’ than ‘State’ (Skinner, 2008:355). Consequently, when authors uses such words as ‘commonwealth’ rather than ‘State’ in their works, I will not attempt to change this. I will only use the word ‘State’ when the author explicitly does so, or in analysis pertaining to my own intentions of understanding the central issue of the relationship between subject and State. As for my own use of the term State: it appears to me most suitable to use, when formulating my own stance and arguments, the more recognisable modern term of ‘State’, as opposed to say ‘commonwealth’.

'individual' is however given its fullest treatment in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where Hobbes takes the universe to be composed only of concrete individuals who pursue their own interests (MacIntyre, 2002:126)⁵. Such an interpretation is complemented to a degree by Otto von Gierke's *Community In Historical Perspective*. Gierke argues that the origin of this idea of the 'individual' can be observed as the subject was slowly emancipated from feudal ties and fellowships in the later Middle Ages. This process of emancipation was complemented by a growth in the power of the State, a process which he claims was part of a universal tendency to achieve the condition of 'absolute State' and 'absolute individuality'. The ultimate goal of this process, Gierke argues, was to establish a condition in which 'apart from the State, there are only individuals' (Gierke, 2002:112).

Thus, we get this idea of the 'individual' to signify a concept emerging in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century. This 'individual' is in particular perceived to be a single being who is unencumbered by contextual relations. This conceptualisation brings with it troublesome political implications. It has in particular been strongly identified with political liberalism⁶.

⁵ For the entirety of MacIntyre's discussion about the origins of the 'individual', see in particular Chapter Ten of *Ethics: 'Luther, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza'* (2002).

⁶ To illustrate this consider for instance George Klosko's discussion of Hobbes and the 'individual'. Klosko highlights that Hobbes began from the premise of the individual, and argued vigorously that society is composed of nothing but individuals. He further contends that the individual's primary goal is self-preservation. This goal is derived from assumptions about the nature of 'man' considered apart from and prior to any contextual situation. In all these respects Klosko holds Hobbes is a liberal. Indeed he asserts Hobbes' approach is distinctively liberal, and indeed deserves credit for being the first to pioneer such an approach (Klosko, 2012:110).

Such an understanding of the ‘individual’ has unsurprisingly not come without controversy. Charles Taylor has for instance argued that this ‘individualism’ has resulted in a ‘narrowing’ of people’s lives and a loss of social meaning (Taylor, 2003:3). MacIntyre has similarly remarked that the ‘acids’ of individualism have ‘eaten into’ moral structures, thus creating a great confusion and difficulty for articulating a coherent account of ethics (MacIntyre, 2002:257).

By the choice of the term ‘subject’ I wish to therefore distance myself from this particular concept of ‘individual’ which is associated with the ‘liberal’ conception of an ‘unencumbered’ being⁷.

It should nonetheless be observed that the term ‘subject’ also has a history. In the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* the subject is defined as: ‘one who is under the dominion of a sovereign et.’ (Onions, 1966:880). We may see historical examples of this for instance in James VI and I’s discussion of how he desires his ‘subjects’ to make an open profession of their allegiance (1194:117). Consider also how Sir John Fortescue asserts how the King of England cannot change the laws without the ascent of ‘his subjects’ (1997:17) and that this is different to how the King of France rules over his subjects (1997:49).

⁷ I may add to this that Kierkegaard also has a particular understanding of the ‘individual’ which he perceives to be a ‘Christian category’ representing the subject as standing alone before God (Kierkegaard, 1998:123). I will thus again avoid the term ‘individual’ as not to create later confusion between Kierkegaard’s understanding of the subject and my own. Again the importance of Kierkegaard for this study will be made clear in the next section.

We may thus observe that the term ‘subject’ invokes the notion of a being who is obliged to a particular sovereign power. It thus can be understood to convey an understanding, not of a general disembodied being as does the term ‘individual’, but rather a particular historically bound being who is ‘subject’ to a particular political authority. It is thus due to this evocation of a particular being inhabiting a particular context, and being subject to a particular State, that I have opted to select the term ‘subject’ for use in my thesis⁸.

Thus, by subject I wish to understand he who exists within a particular historical period and is embedded within its cultural and political meaning. When understanding the relationship between the subject and State it is consequently how a particular subject may relate to the particular State he inhabits which I wish to consider⁹.

2. A ‘Subjective Approach’

I am using a particular understanding of ‘subjective’ as is inspired by the use of the term in the work of Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard’s most

⁸ It should be observed that the *Etymological Dictionary* also draws attention to the idea that the individual denotes a person or thing existing as ‘separate entities’ (Onions, 1966:470).

⁹ Although using the masculine pronoun I mean both female and male subjects. The adoption of only the masculine pronoun is used for the sake of brevity and consistency.

extensive explanation of what he means by ‘subjective’ comes in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Here, he associates ‘subjective’ with the sense of ‘inwardness’, arguing that the primary task for a ‘subjective thinker’ is to ‘understand himself in existence’ (Kierkegaard, 2012:294). Thus we may consider an understanding to be ‘subjective’ when it is related to a subject’s own perception of his existence.

This conception of subjectivity Kierkegaard relates to an understanding of ‘objectivity’ and ‘objective truth’. Kierkegaard argues something is perceived ‘objectively’ when reflection is directed at truth ‘as an object to which the knower relates’. This is importantly related to the idea of an ‘external observer’. Kierkegaard claims when someone tries to understand an ‘objective truth’ he stands back and tries to understand the phenomena in question from a removed position from which he may gain a holistic understanding (Kierkegaard, 2012:133). Thus for instance, when looking at historical events, such an ‘external observer’ might look for the ‘truth’ in the historical process, and not necessarily how the subject who lives through this history experienced and perceived these events. The ‘subject’s perception’ is consequently overlooked and lost in pursuit of understanding the ‘bigger picture’; ‘like a herring shoal in the ocean: the individual herrings are not worth much’ (Kierkegaard, 2012:133).

In contrast to this Kierkegaard asserts that, when truth is considered ‘subjectively’, reflection is not directed on the object of truth itself but rather how the subject

'relates to this truth' (Kierkegaard, 2012:167-8). Thus, we may interpret that 'subjective truth' is not the truth of the object under consideration, but rather how the subject perceives and relates to this object. Consequently the aim of a 'subjective approach' is to understand how the subject comes to perceive himself and his existence, and from this perception constructs his relationship with the world around him. Thus, Kierkegaard insists that a subjective approach must focus on the development of the particular subject. Therefore, instead of what is important for the 'age', a 'subjective approach' rather focuses on how the particular subject understands himself and his relations within this age. Such an approach consequently does not take the 'removed vantage point' of an external observer, but rather seeks to better understand the vantage point of the actual existing subject (Kierkegaard, 2012:179)¹⁰.

This understanding of 'subjective' also leads Kierkegaard to make some particular claims about 'truth'. Kierkegaard makes the claim in *Postscript* that 'if only the how of this relationship is in truth', a subject can still be 'considered to be 'in truth'',

¹⁰ To support my interpretation I may look to Marc Taylor's secondary commentary. As an example of an 'objective truth' Taylor discusses a physicist conducting a scientific experiment (Taylor, 1975:52-3). In such a case the subject, that is the physicist, is separate from the truth he wishes to establish, in Taylor's example the motion of an electron, which he achieves through observation. This is in contrast to the 'subjective truth' that the appropriate mode of life is that of the Christian. This latter truth does not concentrate on anything external but must rather focus on the subject himself and his relations to the world. Such a subject is consequently not an 'observer', as is the physicist, but is in fact himself the subject of investigation. Taylor draws attention of this difference primarily to explain Kierkegaard's method of authorship. He asserts that, unlike an objective truth which can be communicated directly, as the physicist may through a scientific equation, a subjective truth must be communicated indirectly as to 'bring the reader' to an awareness of it. It is for this reason Taylor asserts Kierkegaard opted for the method of pseudonymous writings (Taylor, 1975:54). I will discuss Kierkegaard's pseudonymous method in section four.

even if he ‘related in this way to untruth’ (Kierkegaard, 2012:168). We may interpret from this that, even if the subject believed in something that was ‘untrue’, as long as he himself genuinely believed it was the truth, it would be considered true from the ‘subjective perspective’. This is because what is being considered true is not the fact itself, but the way in which the subject relates to it.

We may consider this in light of a historical example. In the Seventeenth Century many subjects in the British Isles believed that their monarchs were appointed by God, a doctrine commonly known as the ‘Divine Right of Kings’. Now, we might assert that this can be considered untrue from an ‘objective perspective’, for one would struggle to find empirical evidence that the British monarch had been appointed by God. However this does not make it untrue from a subjective perspective. This is because a subjective perspective focuses not on the object, the King and his right to rule, but on the subject and his understanding of this claim. Now many subjects did believe that the King was appointed by God and understood their existence through this normative claim. Consequently, although the objective fact that the King is appointed by God may be dubious, it is true that the subject believes this fact and understands his existence by it. Consequently, as this relationship is true, the ‘Divine Right of Kings’ may be understood to be ‘subjectively true’.

Thus we may understand two approaches to understanding relationships. The first attempts to understand relations from a ‘removed vantage point’ in order to

observe the situation objectively; this style of approach often neglects the subject's perspective. I will call this approach a 'removed approach'. Of course one might argue that all academic works are to a degree 'removed', as one cannot actually step into the perspective of the subjects we are studying; such a movement is a biological impossibility. However, what I want to designate by referring to this approach as a 'removed approach' is the conscious effort to stand back and remove oneself from the subject's perception as to gain a perspective of the 'bigger picture'.

The second approach, on the contrary, makes a conscious effort to try understand how events may appear to the subject, and explores how his relations may be formed from this perception. This is what I shall understand as a 'subjective approach'.

It will be maintained in this thesis that the predominant approaches to understanding the relationship between the subject and State have been in the nature of the 'removed approach'. As a consequence, they have overlooked or neglected the experiences and perspective of the subject who actually inhabits the State in question. Thus, in order to address this oversight, this thesis will explore the possibility of a 'subjective approach' to understanding this relationship.

3. ‘Prolegomena’

I will now explain what I indicate by titling this thesis ‘prolegomena’. The word ‘prolegomena’ is the ancient Greek term for ‘prologue’ or ‘introduction’, particularly in regards to poetry. Thus, we find Aristotle in *The Art of Rhetoric* describing a ‘proem’ as the beginning of an ‘oration’; which in poetry is the ‘prologue’; and in ‘playing the pipe’ is the ‘prelude’ (Aristotle, 2002:171).

It may appear at first strange that I desire to describe my whole thesis as ‘prolegomena’. However I believe this term, especially in later use, captures something that is illustrative of my intentions in this thesis.

Consider for instance Immanuel Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. In the ‘preface’ to his work, Kant claims that these ‘prolegomena’ are intended not for pupils but for ‘future teachers’. He continues that such work is designed, not to help them give an exposition of an existing ‘science’, but for the ‘discovery of this science itself’ (Kant, 2004:63). He continues its purpose is to convince all those who are working on metaphysics to ‘suspend their work’ and consider ‘whether such a thing as metaphysics is possible at all’ (Kant, 2002:63).

We may thus see that what Kant intends by his *Prolegomena* is to introduce a new science and to make his readers consider if such a science is possible.

We may see similar ideas conveyed in T.H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. Green begins *Ethics* by questioning whether such a thing as a 'Moral Philosophy' exists in the first place (Green, 1906:1). He then proceeds by explaining why he holds that a metaphysics of morals to be both important and the proper foundations of every system of ethics (Green, 1906:3). Thus, we can see in Green, like Kant, the indication that his prolegomena are intended to introduce a new approach and explain why it is required.

Now, I do not dream of proposing a 'wholly new science which no one had previously even thought of', as does Kant (Kant, 2004:68), nor do I propose to introduce a doctrine that all other systems should be based upon, as does Green (Green, 1906:3). Nonetheless, what I do propose is to explore the possibility of a new approach to understanding the relationship between the subject and State, namely an approach formulated from the 'subjective perspective'. In this thesis I thus wish to outline why such an approach should be considered, and how one would begin conceptualising such an approach. I consequently believe the title 'prolegomena' as suitably indicative of these intentions.

Nonetheless, just as 'prolegomena' is indicative of the intentions of my thesis, it is also indicative of its limitations. I realise that the 'subjective approach' to the subject and State relationship could open up the possibility of a full 'subjective theory' of politics. However, the construction of such a theory is beyond the remit of this thesis. Similarly it is not the intention to deploy this approach so as to gain

a better appreciation of any particular ‘case’. This thesis rather intends to give an explanation of why the possibility of a ‘subjective approach’ should be considered, and to explore how one may begin to formulate such an approach. The title of ‘prolegomena’ is thus suitably indicative of my present work’s parameters.

Having thus explained what I mean by the terms used in my title, I can now clearly articulate what I mean by:

‘Prolegomena to a subjective approach to the relationship between subject and State’.

It is namely my intention to introduce and begin to explore how the subject understands and relates to this abstract legal body that claims authority over his existence.

4. Methodological Considerations

I will now proceed to consider the methodological concerns I must address when consulting the work of previous philosophers. To achieve this I will split this section into two further subsections. First 4.1 will consider how I will proceed to interpret

previous articulations of the subject and State relationship. Section 4.2 will then give particular attention to issues concerning the interpretation of Kierkegaard.

4.1 Approaches to the subject and State relationship

In order to address the dominant approaches to the subject and State relationship I will illustrate three approaches to this issue. I will define these three approaches as the ‘rational approach’, the ‘contextual approach’ and the ‘critical approach’. I will argue that each of these approaches, to a lesser or greater extent, outline what has been described as a ‘removed’ understanding of the relationship.

The discussion which will follow in these subsequent chapters will consequently focus on common arguments among thinkers which are illustrative of these different ‘approaches’. Such a method has both its advantages and disadvantages. As John Horton writes in his study *Political Obligation*, the benefits of this method include the ability to focus on distinct arguments without becoming diverted by periphery or secondary arguments. It also allows one to consider a broad type of argument, rather than focus on the complex arguments of particular political theorists whose nuances may coexist uneasily together (Horton, 2010:18-9). It will thus be evident that such a method is beneficial for my intentions as it allows me to illustrate these three approaches to the Subject

and State relationship, without becoming tied down in the nuanced arguments of particular theorists.

I would thus stress that I am not trying to argue that any of the theorists discussed represent definitively one ‘approach’. Indeed, one might observe that a thinker as complex and diverse as Jean-Jacques Rousseau for instance provides arguments that would fit into all three approaches¹¹. There is also amongst intellectuals a great degree of controversy over what ‘approach’ a historical thinker may have adopted. We might for instance observe scholars such as John Rawls interpreting G.W.F. Hegel as a ‘reform-minded liberal’, emphasising the role of Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit* as the important ensemble of rational institutions which make possible the subject’s exercise of freedom (Rawls, 2000:349). In contrast, Roger Scruton has argued that Hegel is primarily a conservative thinker; stressing the importance of morality and custom in the formation of the subject (Scruton, 1990:44). Again, however, I would stress that my purpose here is not to label or categorise thinkers such as Hegel as ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’, nor their approaches as primarily ‘rational’ and ‘contextual’. My purpose is simply to discuss their arguments so as to help illustrate different approaches to the issue of the subject and State relationship.

¹¹ In the *Social Contract* for instance we may observe Rousseau putting forward an argument fitting within the ‘rational approach’ (1968:64), in *The Government of Poland* Rousseau however provides a defence of culture and tradition more in line with the ‘contextual approach’ (1985:10-18), and finally in the ‘Discourse on Inequality’ Rousseau provides an argument so critical of the modern State it could be considered as part of the ‘critical approach’ (2010:185).

Similarly, I am not primarily concerned about the final conclusions the thinkers discussed come to in regards to the subject and State relationship, that is in as much as they go beyond my purpose of highlighting why a ‘subjective approach’ should be explored. Thus, for instance I am not overly concerned by the fact that Hobbes conceived the State as an all-powerful ‘Mortal God’ (Hobbes, 2008:114) whilst John Locke perceived it more as an ‘umpire’ (Locke, 1998:324), or that John Stuart Mill argued that the subject should be safeguarded against State power (Mill, 2008:8), whilst Rousseau contended that the needs of the community always take precedence over the needs of the individual subject (Rousseau, 1968:68). What I am rather concerned with is the fact that, as will be argued, all these thinkers display characteristics of what I shall call the ‘rational approach’ to the subject and State relationship.

It should be observed however that this method also has its disadvantages. The principal disadvantage Horton highlights is that it has the potential to drain the arguments of particular philosophers of their complexity and richness. This runs the particularly dangerous risk of setting up the proverbial ‘straw man’ (Horton, 2010:19).

Nonetheless, as I am only discussing the arguments of these philosophers as they illustrate different approaches, and not ‘assigning’ the thinkers discussed to the approaches, I will not be tempted to reduce their thought as to make them fit certain ‘philosophical camps’. I will thus be able to discuss particular arguments provided by each philosopher in adequate depth without marginalising other

arguments or nuances contained within their thought, a practice which would result in the creation of ‘straw men’.

4.2 Interpreting Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard is an exceedingly complex thinker, and his work is both incredibly varied and conceptually difficult. Indeed, Kierkegaard scholars have argued that his works can be classified into four very different types of writing: the nine pseudonymous texts written between 1841 and 1850, the religious works written under his own name, the collection of articles written as attacks on the Danish Church, and finally his journal¹². In light of this, it is important that I identify which body of work I will focus on, why I have selected this, and how I will approach it.

For this study I will focus primarily on Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship. The reason for this is that it is in this set of writings that Kierkegaard focuses upon the development of the self and lays the foundations for his subjective approach¹³.

¹² For more on this classification of Kierkegaard’s work see Taylor *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship* (1975:11-14).

¹³ It should be noted here that many Kierkegaard scholars would argue that such an approach to Kierkegaard’s thought cannot be achieved by focusing so selectively on the pseudonymous writings. For instance scholars have argued that an understanding of other bodies of his work, such as the journal entries or the religious writings, are necessary in order to fully appreciate the meaning and intention of the pseudonymous works. In response to this I would stress that the purpose of this work is not an exercise in ‘Kierkegaard Studies’; I am not attempting to render a new or ‘the true’ interpretation of Kierkegaard’s thought, although in saying this I would of course not wish to abuse his thought or render an interpretation that was not backed by textual evidence. The purpose of this study is to render an interpretation of Kierkegaard’s thought which can be serve as an inspiration for developing my own approach for exploring relationship between the subject and the State. Consequently Kierkegaard’s other writings, and the biographical and historical circumstances that informed his thought, will only be considered in as

It should also be made clear here that I am not concerned with excavating Kierkegaard's position in regards to philosophical stances such as idealism or existentialism, nor to specific writers such as Hegel. I will rather concentrate on providing an interpretation of Kierkegaard's works as can inform my overall intention of exploring a 'subjective approach'.

I now turn to consider the intention of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship, important as this will be to informing my approach to these works. In *The Point of View of my Work as an Author*, one of the few works Kierkegaard published under his own name, Kierkegaard claims to 'break his silence' and explain the intention of his pseudonymous writings¹⁴. He proceeds to explain that his whole authorship pertains to Christianity and addresses the issue of how one becomes a Christian (Kierkegaard, 1998:23).

The Point of View thus reveals that Kierkegaard's intention in the pseudonymous works was to instruct his readers on how to become Christian. Nonetheless, the question remains why Kierkegaard chose convey this message through the means of pseudonymous authorship. There are two related answers to this question. The first involves the nature of the information Kierkegaard was trying to convey. The

far as they help render this interpretation and thus contribute to the overall intention of this thesis. Once more a good account of the debates concerning the different approaches to Kierkegaard's thought is provided by Taylor (1975).

¹⁴It should be noted that before *Point of View* was written Kierkegaard had already openly admitted that he was the author of the pseudonymous works at the end of *Postscript* (2009:527).

second pertains to the historical context in which he was trying to convey this information.

First of all, the nature of the information. As we saw the question is ‘how’ one becomes a Christian. Information concerning ‘how’ one becomes a Christian, or indeed ‘how’ one becomes anything according to Kierkegaard, cannot be directly communicated in the same way as one may transmit that ‘two plus two is four’ or that ‘the speed of a passing car is sixty mile per hour’. Information, such as the latter examples, are ‘objective truths’ that are external to the subject and require no inward reflection to accept. Knowledge of ‘how’ one becomes something conversely requires that one not only accepts what one is being told, but also that one appropriates this knowledge and puts it into practice. Thus, one may only think objectively about the speed of a car, but in order to learn ‘how to drive’ one must not only receive the knowledge of how to drive but must also appropriate this knowledge and put it into practice. Thus, the knowledge is not just considered objectively but is considered in relation to oneself. Consequently, learning ‘how’ to do something requires an inward reflection that learning about purely objective information does not. Learning ‘how’ to be Christian is therefore not the consideration of God’s existence objectively, but is rather the acceptance of the idea that God loves us and the putting of this understanding into practice. It is, as Kierkegaard explains in *Postscript*, a question about the subject’s acceptance of truth (Kierkegaard, 2009:107). In order to answer this question the audience was consequently required to turn inwardly and consider their own selves, and it was

to provoke this inward reflection that Kierkegaard adopted the method of pseudo-authorship.

We must also consider here the context Kierkegaard wrote in. Mid-Eighteenth Denmark was a Christian country in what was a wider Christian Europe. Kierkegaard nonetheless believed this idea of ‘Christendom’ to be an illusion. This was because he perceived it as populated by people who believed themselves to be Christian but never went to Church or ever thought about God, in other words people who believed they were Christian but in fact were not (Kierkegaard, 1998:43). The task Kierkegaard thus faced was conveying an argument as to why one ought to be a proper Christian to an audience who were under the illusion that they already were Christians.

Kierkegaard did not believe such a task could be achieved directly, for instance by lambasting his audience from the vantage point of an extraordinary Christian. Such a ‘direct assault’ would only infuriate the audience and entrench the illusion. Kierkegaard thus instead took an indirect approach and attempted to catch his audience’s attention by presenting himself in the manner of life they themselves actually lived in: the aesthetic (Kierkegaard, 1998:43-4). His aim was not just to gain his audience’s attention but to also have them recognise themselves in the lifestyle presented and, as a consequence, think more deeply about themselves and the ‘truth’ of their existence. As argued by Mark Taylor, the pseudonymous works are a mirror which allowed the reader to recognise himself and locate his

place in existence (Taylor, 1975:57). Indeed a ‘mirror’ is the metaphor used in the preface to *Stages of Life’s Way*; ‘Such Works are Mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out’ (Kierkegaard, 1988:8).

I may return to the example of learning to drive a car to better illustrate this. One may consider trying to teach someone who cannot drive but is nevertheless convinced that he can. If one bluntly told him that he was not driving correctly he may become infuriated and refuse to listen further to your teachings. One would therefore seek a less direct way of revealing to the pupil that what he is doing cannot be considered driving. Kierkegaard would set out to do this by first describing someone who is unable to drive a car, and then getting the pupil to recognise themselves in this portrayal. Such recognition would thus reveal to the pupil the fact that what he is doing cannot be considered driving. This illusion lifted, one could then convey to the person how to correctly drive a car.

The purpose of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous aesthetic and ethical writings can thus be interpreted as a means of reflecting to the reader the nature of his existence in order to make him realise that this existence cannot be considered Christian. Thus, for instance, if someone read Kierkegaard’s aesthetic writings and recognised himself in what is portrayed, he would become aware that the life he led was ‘aesthetic’ as opposed to ‘Christian’. Having thus dispelled the ‘myth of Christendom’ Kierkegaard could then reveal in the ‘religious writings’ the possibility of a Christian existence. Thus, by revealing the truth about the reader’s

own mode of existence, and opening them to the possibility of an alternate Christian life, Kierkegaard sought to indirectly teach his audience how to become a Christian.

It will thus be clear from this discussion that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works can be interpreted as a unified body with one specific intention. Consequently a key assumption that will underpin my interpretation of Kierkegaard is that his pseudonymous works may be read as a coherent whole¹⁵.

My approach to Kierkegaard can thus be said to be one that is textual yet historically sensitive; I am trying to appreciate what Kierkegaard was trying to say and achieve within the framework of the historical context in which he lived. This is so that, although I intend in this thesis a 'political reinterpretation' of Kierkegaard's thought, I do not render a misinterpretation or abuse of his thought.

In this way my approach, although in many ways is different to the 'contextualism' of the Cambridge School, nonetheless shares one of its key concerns in being historically sensitive to philosophical texts. In regards to this it is worth briefly outlining the 'contextual approach' to intellectual history that Skinner lays out¹⁶.

¹⁵ It should perhaps be observed that what the interpretation of Kierkegaard we have given here is the 'conventional', or as Steven Shakespeare refers to it, the 'first story of Kierkegaard' (Shakespeare, 2015:1-2). There are of course Kierkegaard scholars, Shakespeare included, who offer an alternate interpretation. However once again it will be stressed that the purpose of this thesis is not an exercise in 'Kierkegaard studies' and thus it is not my intention to consider and analyse alternate interpretation of Kierkegaard. My intention is to derive an interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought from which I may construct a subjective approach to my own political question. In light of this following the conventional interpretation is both satisfactory and indeed most appropriate.

¹⁶ Here I am referring of course to Skinner's earlier work, in particular 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' (1969), as opposed to his later genealogical studies.

Firstly Skinner insists that works in political philosophy should not be regarded as ‘dateless wisdom’ or be said to contain ‘universal ideas’. Similarly, it must not be regarded that we may completely understand what an author is saying from only the text itself, and thus in absence of any consideration of the historical factors in which it was written (Skinner, 1969:3-5)¹⁷. On the contrary, the arguments of philosophical texts must be understood, not as answers to universal and timeless problems, but to particular problems as they arise in the particular historical and contextual circumstances in which the authors wrote (Skinner, 1969:50). We must therefore understand the historical context as a ‘framework’ by which we can interpret the author’s arguments (Skinner, 1969:49).

However, Skinner is keen to stress that this context must be considered as a ‘framework’ to the argument, not the ‘determinate’. It is thus important Skinner argues that we must not regard the authors’ arguments as determined by the historical circumstances in which they lived. Thus, Skinner argues, as well as the context, the force and the intention of argument must be understood. It must for instance be investigated whether a writer intended to support the historical norms he inhabits or whether he was satirically criticising them; a simple view that the

¹⁷ Skinner cites an incredibly vast range of examples of scholars who have attempted to engage with historical texts in such a way, and it would be implausible for me to recount all of his examples here. For a full account I would thus refer the reader again to ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’ (1969).

context caused the author to write his arguments would not reveal any of these intentions (Skinner, 1969:46)¹⁸.

Unlike Skinner, however, my intention here is to write ‘political philosophy’, not ‘intellectual history’. I am thus not so much interested in attaining a ‘true’ interpretation of texts, although I of course do not want to abuse them, but rather to gain an interpretation of them as will allow me to explore the possibility of a ‘subjective approach’. There are thus a few areas of argument and debate in regards to contextualism which I shall not be concerned with.

In ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, Skinner insists that an ‘appropriate methodology of the history of ideas’ must first be concerned with reconstructing the historical context in which a text was written. This involves such procedures as the need ‘delineate the whole range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion’ (Skinner, 1969:49). I will nonetheless not be attempting to reconstruct the linguistic and historical context of Nineteenth Century Denmark. Thus, whilst this thesis will contain a chapter discussing Kierkegaard’s ideas, with the utmost historical sensitivity, it will not attempt to reconstruct the historical context in which he wrote.

¹⁸ The criticisms Skinner levies against those who see context as a causal effect of an author’s ideas are discussed at length in ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’ (1969).

Secondly, I mention Skinner's claim that no argument that a past philosopher has given may directly address the problems of our present age (Skinner, 1969:52). It may consequently be derived from this that my intention to look to Kierkegaard in order to address a modern political problem is an exercise in futility. However, I would reply by insisting that I am not looking to Kierkegaard in order to answer any problem. On the contrary, I am looking to Kierkegaard in order to help formulate my own approach to the issue of the subject and State relationship. Thus in this way Kierkegaard is providing inspiration for my own exploration of a question relating to my particular context¹⁹. Consequently, although drawing inspiration from Kierkegaard, I can claim to be following Skinner's advice to contemporary philosophers: I am 'thinking for myself' (Skinner, 1969:52)²⁰.

¹⁹ One might here also draw attention to the methodological approach of Hans-George Gadamer. Gadamer explains that we should approach a historical text by understanding it within its own context, its 'horizon'. Nonetheless he insists we do this from the historical context we ourselves inhabit, our 'horizon'. As we become aware of this historical horizon we realise however that our own horizon is not isolated from the historical horizon but was formed by it. Consequently the historical horizon, after being projected, is superseded by our horizon as the two are 'fused together'. As a consequence the reconstructing of the past is only one movement in this process of interpretation, for full understanding is only achieved when we realise the past as part of our own horizon in the present (Gadamer, 2012:305-4). Gadamer's is primarily concerned with textual interpretation, and advocates an awareness of one's horizons as to be conscious of one's own prejudices which may colour our understanding of the text (Gadamer, 2012:272). In then talking about the 'fusion of horizons' Gadamer is consequently discussing how texts can be used to bring the subject to consciousness of the history and traditions which constitute his existence. It is similar to my approach in some ways as it represents how I do desire to understand the texts I am approaching within their context, and am doing so to address a problem that exists in my historical context. Nonetheless I do not intend here to use an understanding of these texts alone to address the issue, there will consequently be no 'fusion of horizons' in this work. The horizons will thus remain intact, and what I will instead do is take ideas from Kierkegaard's work, contained as they are in his horizon, to construct a theory to address the problems within my own horizon.

²⁰ It should be observed that Skinner's insistence that one must 'think for oneself' has incurred some controversy. As Melissa Lane highlights, this original instance implies a sharp distinction between the 'historian of ideas' and the 'political philosopher' (Lane, 2012:71). Nonetheless Robert Lamb and Lane have both highlighted that much of Skinner's work, especially his later

5. Plan of Thesis

When I labelled this thesis ‘prolegomena’ I claimed this encapsulated its central intentions. These were: to firstly illustrate why I believe a subjective approach should be considered, and secondly to begin an exploration in regards to how a ‘subjective approach’ may be formulated. Thus, in order to achieve these intentions, my thesis must answer two questions:

‘Why should one consider a ‘subjective approach’?

And:

‘How may one begin exploring the possibility of a ‘subjective approach’?

This thesis will consequently be divided into two parts as pertain to each of these two questions.

Part One will illustrate why I believe a ‘subjective approach’ to the subject and State relationship should be considered. It will do so by illustrating what I perceive are the three dominant approaches to this question and their limitations. These three approaches are namely the ‘rational approach’, the ‘contextual approach’, and the ‘critical approach’. Each approach will be discussed in turn in Chapters

‘genealogical writings’, appear to contradict this earlier assertion (Lamb, 2009:249, Lane, 2012:71-3). Nonetheless my purpose here is not to discuss the consistency in the thought of Skinner. What I rather wanted to draw attention to by the use of his phrase ‘thinking for ourselves’ is that I do not wish to simply transpose Kierkegaard’s thought to my own period to address issues central to it, but rather use Kierkegaard’s thought as inspiration to devise my own philosophical response to these issues.

One, Two, and Three respectively. This discussion in these three chapters will consequently constitute Part One of this thesis.

Chapter One will first seek to illustrate the ‘rational approach’. I will argue that this approach can be illustrated through two key arguments: that politics should be understood according to rational principles, and that the relationship between subject and State can be understood on the assumption that the subject in question is ‘rational’. I will argue that such an approach is characteristic of a ‘removed approach’ as it seeks to establish an understanding of the relationship between subject and State by consciously stepping back from the perceptions and experiences of existing subjects as it tries to conceptualise the relationship through the lens of ‘rationality’. The actual experiences and perceptions of the subject are consequently overlooked, and indeed any perspective which is in conflict with this understanding of ‘rationality’ is marginalised and dismissed.

Chapter Two will then illustrate the ‘contextual approach’. Three arguments will be outlined which can be understood as illustrative of this approach. These are: firstly that rationality alone is an inadequate means of understanding the State and subject relationship, secondly that in order to understand this relationship one must investigate the historical and cultural context the relationship is situated in, and finally that one must proceed with a ‘particularity of approach’ which seeks to understand, not how the subject and State relate generally, but rather how *particular* subjects relate to *particular* States.

It will be noted that here the ‘contextual approach’ appears very similar to the proposed ‘subjective approach’ which I wish to explore. This is particularly apparent in its focus on particular subjects inhabiting particular States, a focus that I have already noted is also central to the proposed ‘subjective approach’. Nonetheless I will argue that beyond this initial common ground the intentions of the ‘contextual approach’ diverge significantly from what I wish to achieve through exploration of the ‘subjective approach’. In particular, I will argue that, after identifying that the subject must be considered embedded in a particular context, the ‘contextual approach’ then typically seeks to use this context in order to try and explain the subject’s relationships. As a consequence, it ‘steps back’ from the subject’s experiences and perspectives as it attempts to gain a deeper and more expansive appreciation of the historical context the subject inhabits. This is then used as a ‘lens’ through which the relationship between subject and State is surveyed. This ‘stepping back’ and adoption of a ‘contextual lens’ I will argue also make the ‘contextual approach’ a ‘removed approach’. The proposed ‘subjective approach’ will therefore part ways with the ‘contextual approach’ here as it will not ‘stand back’ but rather ‘step forward’ as to identify and examine the particular encounters which occur within this context and which shape the subject and State relationship.

Chapter Three will then turn to the last approach I wish to illustrate: the ‘critical approach’. Like the ‘contextual approach’ the ‘critical approach’ is also concerned with the context which the subject inhabits. However, unlike the ‘contextual

approach', the 'critical approach' is highly critical of the phenomena that constitute this context, namely its historical traditions and cultural practices. According to the 'critical approach' such practices are used to mislead the subject in regards to his true relationship with the State, this true relationship being one of 'oppression'. This reveals the central assumption behind the 'critical approach' that the State is primarily a mechanism for oppression; States are typically conceived as tools utilised used by a dominant 'class' or 'caste' to suppress another. Thus the 'critical approach' assumes that, if a State is present, then the subject must exist in a condition of oppression. 'Oppression' subsequently become the lens through which the 'critical approach' attempts to survey the subject and State relationship; the 'critical approach' 'steps back' from the subject's situation as it attempts to gain a deeper appreciation of the means of State oppression. Thus, once more the subject's actual experiences and perceptions are overlooked and neglected. Indeed standpoints which do not correspond to this assumption that the subject is oppressed by the State, such as those of subjects who do not feel 'oppressed', are dismissed as cases of 'false consciousness'.

Thus, it will be argued that the limitations of the three approaches arise out of their nature as 'removed approaches'. In particular, by 'standing back' from the subject in order to develop and utilise their preferred lens, these approaches overlook and neglect the actual experiences and perception of the subject. Thus, I will argue we should explore the proposed 'subjective approach' in order to try

to gain a better appreciation of the particular experiences the subject has with the State and the perception of the State which derives from these.

In Part Two I will turn to consider the possibility of this proposed ‘subjective approach’. I will begin by making clear that the ‘subjective approach’ differs from the three approaches discussed in Part One in that it does not attempt to ‘step back’ from the subject’s experiences and perceptions but rather attempts to ‘step towards them’ in an attempt to gain a better understanding of these particular moments. I will argue that the intentions of the ‘subjective approach’ will be to examine the significant moments in which the subject encounters the State; exploring how these encounters unfold, what perception the subject gets from such encounters, and how the subject and State relationship grows out of and is effected by these moments. In this way I will propose that the ‘subjective approach’ is less a ‘lens’ for surveying the subject and State relationship as it is a sharp and delicate instrument, akin perhaps to a surgeon’s knife, which will be used to ‘cut in’ to the subject and State relationship and extract and isolate its key moments for analysis. Exploring the possibility of constructing and using this ‘sharp instrument’ will thus be the intention of Part Two.

In Chapter Four I will begin this exploration by investigating the thought of Kierkegaard. In this chapter I will in particular attempt to ascertain an interpretation of the philosophical concepts which will be key to exploring the

'subjective approach'. These will be in particular: the 'encounter', the 'self', and 'freedom'.

Chapter Five will then focus on reinterpreting these philosophical concepts from their theological understanding in Kierkegaard into a more secular and political understanding as will be used to explore the 'subjective approach'. This understanding I call the 'subjective understanding'. As well as providing a reinterpretation of the subject and his encounters I will also in this chapter introduce the concept of 'Horizons' which will take the place of Kierkegaard's theological understanding of God in my reinterpretation²¹.

Chapter Six will then build upon the 'subjective understanding' discussed in Chapter Five in order to explore the subject's encounters with the State. In this Chapter I will consequently explore how we might conceptualise and understand this 'encounter with the State', how the subject may react to it, and how the relationship between the two grows out of these moments. I will also in the chapter explore how one might use this approach to investigate particular encounters that the subject may have with the State. This Chapter will further outline the questions which the 'subjective approach' may ask about the subject and State relationship and what further avenues of exploration these questions may lead us upon in the future. Finally it will conclude by considering some

²¹ For the sake of clarity I will use the capitalised 'Horizons' when referring to my articulation of the concept as shall be developed in Chapter Five. This is to avoid confusing the concept I shall develop with the use of the term by other thinkers in western thought.

counter arguments which may be raised against my proposed ‘subjective approach’.

Finally, in the conclusion I will provide a summary of my explorations in this thesis. I will then consider specific areas of further exploration which I consider to be particular fruitful areas for future research.

Part One

Chapter One: The Rational Approach

In this chapter I will illustrate what I shall denote as the ‘rational approach’ to understanding the relationship between subject and State. I will argue that such an approach can be illustrated by two characteristic arguments.

The first argument is a broad normative argument in regards to how we ought to think about, and approach, politics. In particular, it argues that politics should be understood on the basis of ‘rationality’. I will call this argument the ‘rational conceptualisation of politics’.

The second argument pertains more specifically to how the subject and State relationship is articulated. In particular it begins from the assumption that the subject in question is a ‘rational actor’. It considers this ability to ‘rationalise’ as the chief means by which the subject relates to the State. Consequently, it hypothesises what the relationship shall be on the basis of what choices it assumes a ‘rational subject’ would make.

Having identified these two characteristic arguments, I will then proceed to demonstrate the limitations of this approach. The first issue I will take with the ‘rational approach’ is that, by putting such a premium on the subject’s faculty of

reason and the assumptions regarding what a ‘rational subject’ would select to do, it overlooks many of the historical and cultural factors which contribute to the subject and State relationship. Thus, one might say, the ‘rational approach’ does not consider subjects as they exist within historically bound space and time, but constructs its understanding from a ‘removed vantage point’ based on its assumption of the ‘rational actor’. This makes the ‘rational approach’ one of the clearest demonstration of what I have called a ‘removed approach’.

The second issue I will raise is that, by looking exclusively through this ‘rational paradigm’, this approach excludes and marginalises many positions and forms of behaviour which do not fit with this paradigm. The ‘rational approach’ achieves this exclusion by attaching deprecatory labels to such modes of behaviour, such labels include ‘savagery’ or ‘barbarism’.

In order to achieve the aims set out for this chapter it will be split into three sections. Section one will outline the broader normative argument that politics ought to be conceptualised on a rational foundation. Section two will then investigate the argument concerning the premises of the ‘rational subject’. Section three will then address the issues and limitations I have raised in regards to this approach.

Before proceeding into the body of the chapter I make one last important point. As a result of my characterisation of the ‘rational approach’, I will discuss in this chapter a rich variety of philosophical arguments and positions which are at times

at odds with each other. I will for instance discuss such diverse political philosophies as ‘Social Contract Theory’, ‘Idealism’, and ‘Utilitarianism’. Such differing theories contain widely opposing lines of philosophical argumentation, such as teleology and deontology. Nonetheless, I will still understand them as illustrative of the ‘rational approach’ when they display either of the two key arguments illustrative of the approach as outlined above. Thus, for instance, although Immanuel Kant’s deontological arguments in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and Jeremy Bentham’s Utilitarian arguments differ widely in many ways, I will maintain they are both illustrative of a ‘rational approach’ as they share the assumption that political relationships should be constructed on a foundation of rationality, as opposed to say historical tradition. Again my intentions here are not to give a history of political thought, nor to give a categorisation of the philosophies discussed. Rather, I wish to provide an illustration of one particular approach to understanding the subject and State relationship. It is thus the similarities of these approaches, and not their fundamental differences, which I shall concentrate on as helps me make this illustration.

1. The Rational Conceptualisation of Politics

I may begin my discussion with the thought of Thomas Hobbes. This is not necessarily because Hobbes was the first to give a ‘rational’ conceptualisation of the subject and State relationship, but rather because I believe he provides one of the best illustrations of such an approach²².

In this section I am not overtly concerned with how Hobbes specifically articulated the subject’s relation to the State. This will be discussed in section two, when I come to consider the assumption of the subject as ‘rational actor’. On the contrary, given my intention here to illustrate the normative argument pertaining to why politics should be approached and understood through reason, I am more concerned with ‘why’ Hobbes adopts a rational approach to addressing the issue.

Hobbes asserts in *De Cive* that what he wishes to establish is an understanding of political philosophy which is in accordance with ‘science’, something he claims previous political philosophers have failed to do (2012:5). In *Leviathan* Hobbes defines a ‘science’ as the labour of reason which seeks to first find the correct definition of things, before proceeding to establish a good method of deducing the consequences from these assertions (Hobbes, 2008;31). Thus, we may understand

²² Although it should be acknowledged that, in *De Cive*, Hobbes does claim to be pioneering a rational ‘scientific’ approach to political philosophy (Hobbes, 2012:5-6).

Hobbes' project as an attempt to find a 'scientific' or 'rational' understanding of politics.

In Chapter Twelve of *Leviathan* Hobbes takes aim at civil and religious governments grounded on 'superstition', citing for instance the Laws of the Roman Republic as founded by Numa Pompilius and Islamic law as founded by Mohamed (Hobbes, 2008:77-8)²³. Hobbes criticises such political foundations as he believes they are inherently unstable. This is firstly because, as the authority of such polities rest in the subject's superstition, when he ceases to harbour these beliefs his relations to the State will become unclear and be brought into question. Secondly, as the subject cannot hope to understand these spiritual mysteries by himself, he becomes dependent on the authority of others such as priests. The power individuals such as priests consequently hold over the subject makes him vulnerable to manipulation. The priest has for instance the power to confuse and lead the subject away from his proper duties and responsibilities (Hobbes, 2008:79-2).

It was precisely this confusion about political relationships, and the abuse of this confusion by priests and agitators, which Hobbes believed had caused the English Civil War. In his study of the English Civil War, *Behemoth*, Hobbes argued that the

²³ Numa Pompilius claimed his laws were sacred because they were given to him through conversation with the nymph Egeria. Mohamed claimed that he established his holy laws through discussion with the Holy Ghost manifested in the form of a dove. In addition to this Hobbes also mentions the founder of the Kingdom of Peru who maintained both himself and his wife to be children of the sun (Hobbes, 2008:77-8).

clergy had used antiquated language and superstition in order to confuse the people as to where their true allegiance lay. Consequently, when disputes between the sovereign and the church occurred, loyalties were divided and civil war ensued (Hobbes, 1990:15-18). The Church is, nonetheless, just one example where Hobbes believed confusing language and superstition had made political relationships unclear. In *Leviathan* Hobbes also criticises the use of antique and emotive terms such as ‘Tyrant’ to confuse the people and encourage them to rebel (Hobbes, 2008:453).

Hobbes therefore believed that if one could remove the confusion and ignorance which plagued political discourse, and people were instead made aware of the proper principles of politics and justice, then subjects would be ‘much more fitted than they are to civil obedience’ (Hobbes, 2008:15). In both *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* Hobbes asserted that this could be achieved through education, particularly through schools and universities once they had been properly reformed (Hobbes, 2008:15; Hobbes, 1990:71). Interestingly, Hobbes also makes clear that his *Leviathan* is one of the very texts that should be used to educate the citizenry in these new reformed universities (Hobbes, 2008:474). In light of this we may understand Hobbes’ very project as an attempt to replace the religious and superstitious understanding of politics with one based on science and reason, and further educate the people in regards to this.

We might therefore clearly recognise this first key argument of the ‘rationalist approach’ illustrated by Hobbes’ arguments. Finding that ignorance and superstition in politics were misleading subjects and leading to disasters such as the Civil War, Hobbes sought to an alternative ‘rational’, or ‘scientific’, understanding of politics. He thus clearly illustrates to us the normative argument that politics should be conceptualised in a rational manner²⁴.

I may here also draw attention to the arguments put forth by Benedict de Spinoza in regards to the relation between philosophy and religion in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Given the dangerous absurdities which result when people confuse religious and philosophical questions, Spinoza advocates for a sharp division to be made between the concerns of philosophy and the concerns of theology so that ‘each has its own kingdom, and there is no conflict between them’ (Spinoza, 2008:194). As a consequence, Spinoza insists that the concerns of politics are a matter for philosophy, and thus furthermore should be directed by reason

²⁴ This interpretation of Hobbes as trying to explain political philosophy purely through reason is perhaps best represented by the ‘game theorist’ interpreters of Hobbes’ thought. See for instance David Gauthier (1969:79) and G.S. Kavka (1986:109-10). However, as Hobbes scholars such as Gabriella Slomp have highlighted, the ‘game theory’ approach is not an adequate means of understanding the entirety of Hobbes’ arguments. Instead she points towards a ‘geometrical’ approach to Hobbes’ thought which puts more emphasis on the subject being an external observer to the ‘state of nature’ as opposed to the participant within it (Slomp, 2000:141). As a result she advocates that one should interpret Hobbes, not as offering a rational way out of the ‘state of nature’, but rather explaining to his readers how to avoid the collapse of the political State into civil war (Slomp, 2000:7). Nonetheless, despite changes in considering ‘who’ Hobbes might be addressing, it should be observed that emphasis on rationality is still predominant. As Slomp articulates; ‘the collective rationality of citizens enlightened by his ‘political geometry’ can either save mankind forever from the occurrence of civil war (*De Cive*, 25-6) or at least can postpone it indefinitely (*Leviathan*, 221)’ (Slomp, 2000:172). I might further add that this ‘geometer approach’, with its emphasis on an ‘observer’, also furthers my own understanding of the ‘rational approach’ being a ‘removed approach’.

(Spinoza, 2008:198). Thus, similarly as with Hobbes, we may observe Spinoza contending that religion and superstition should be excluded from the realm of politics, which instead should be under the guidance of reason.

Another good illustration of this argument for a ‘rational conceptualisation of politics’ can be observed in the writings of Kant, and in particular the arguments given in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Admittedly Kant is not so much concerned here with politics, let alone the particular relationship between the subject and State, as he is with establishing the philosophical principles of morality. Nonetheless, the *Metaphysics of Morals* gives such an explicit account of human relations constructed solely on the premises of reason that I must give it due attention if I am to fully illustrate the ‘rational approach’.

Kant’s task in this text is to establish a principle of morality that can be ascertained prior to any empirical condition the subject might inhabit. This *a priori* principle must therefore be founded in humanity’s universal ‘rational’ nature. Furthermore, to be an *a priori* principle of morality, Kant insists that the principle must also not be limited to a particular circumstance, but rather must be able to be universalised into a general maxim or law which can hold for all rational beings across time and space. The consequent *a priori* principle that Kant finds for all subjects is to act in a way that you treat all rational beings, including your own person, as ‘an end’ and never as ‘a means’ (Kant, 2010:38).

Kant illustrates this with the example of suicide. He imagines a subject who is incredibly miserable. He insists however that, no matter how miserable, such a person cannot rightly commit suicide as it would be in violation of the ‘universal maxim’ that one must always treat human beings as ends rather than means.

This is because in committing suicide the subject would be treating a rational being, himself, not as an ‘end’ but as a ‘means’ to achieve another ‘end’, namely to ‘maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life’ (Kant, 2010:38).

Again, Kant’s arguments here are more about ‘morality’ than ‘politics’.

Nonetheless, what to recognise is that ‘rationality’ takes the central role in defining subjects’ relationships as it is the ‘rational universal law’, independent of contextual circumstance, which is taken as the basis of conduct.

The closest Kant comes to giving a ‘political’ articulation of this notion in the *Metaphysics of Morals* is in his hypothetical account of the ‘Kingdom of Ends’.

This ‘kingdom’ is described as a union of ‘rational beings’ united under an objective rational law which they participate in legislating (Kant, 2010:41). Again, it should be observed that Kant stresses such a ‘kingdom’ is ‘admittedly only an ideal’ (Kant, 2010:41), nonetheless it still makes evident the notion that political relationships, and thus by extension the subject and State relationship, ought to be based on rational laws and principles.

In Kant’s attempts to find a basis for human relationships in a universal understanding of reason which is prior to any particular situation we may

observe one of the clearest illustrations of this first key argument of what I have termed a ‘rational approach’. Thus, although Kant’s ‘moral’ understanding of reason may be different from the more ‘instrumental’ understanding of Hobbes, I maintain they both illustrate a ‘rational approach’ to the question of subject and State relationships as they attempt to ground their interpretation on a conception of reason, as opposed to a historical or contextual understanding.

This belief that politics, and in particular the State, must be understood rationally is further articulated by Hegel. In his ‘preface’ to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel maintains that the task of the ‘science of the State’, his work included, is to comprehend and present the State as something in accordance to reason (Hegel, 2008:14). Hegel holds this view because he maintains that the State has been produced by reason and is a manifestation of this ideal. This view is best illustrated by his statement ‘what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational’: reason is an active force in the world which realises human freedom, most notably through the creation of institutions such as the State (Hegel, 2008:14).

This idea is further developed in the *Philosophy of History*, where Hegel maintains that reason is ‘Sovereign of the World’ and history follows a rational process (Hegel, 1991:9). The western European State is in particular viewed as the culmination of this process: ‘the embodiment of rational freedom’ (Hegel, 1991:47). Thus, for Hegel, the western State is perceived as the product of reason, and must be understood as such.

Another clear illustration of this argument for a ‘rational conceptualisation of politics’ can be found in the arguments of utilitarianism. We may indeed find in the person of Bentham a particularly fervent advocate for the belief that political relations ought to be built on clear principles of reason.

As H.L.A. Hart argues, Bentham’s thought can be understood by his primary desire to ‘demystify’ the law. By ‘demystify’ is meant to remove the ‘veil of mystery’ which was used to protect unjust, anachronistic, inefficient, and generally harmful legal and social institutions. Such ‘forms of mystery’ included ‘glorification’ by pomp and ceremony, and the use of archaic dress and language which was unintelligible to the layman. In place of this ‘mystic practice’ Bentham sought to establish a clear, accessible and more rational legal code (Hart, 1973:2-4). Thus, we can see at the core of Bentham’s thought an attempt to place legal and political practices on a more rational footing.

We may observe Bentham’s enthusiasm for ‘reason’, and scientific progress generally, in *Fragment of Government* where he claimed that in the age he lived knowledge was ‘rapidly advancing towards perfection’ (Bentham, 2005:3). Bentham goes on to argue that the rapid discoveries taking place in natural science ought to be complimented with a reform of the moral world. In particular he advocates the development of the consequences of the moral axiom of utility: ‘it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong’ (Bentham, 2005:3). How this is in particular related to government is

further illustrated in an *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

Bentham here sets out that the ‘measure of government’ is dictated by the principle of utility when it promotes more happiness than it diminishes (Bentham, 2007:3).

At the core of his illustration we may observe this forceful argument that the customs and the traditions of the State must be replaced with a clear rational principle upon which the relationship between subject and State ought to be oriented, this ‘rational principle’ is of course Bentham’s own philosophy of utilitarianism²⁵.

This argument is further illustrated by J.S. Mill’s hostility towards custom. In *On Liberty* Mill warns of the effects that custom can have on subjects’ liberty and their ability to think for themselves. He thus insists that subjects must learn to think rationally and ‘intelligently’ for themselves, and not follow custom blindly or mechanically (Mill, 2008:66).

²⁵ Although I do not wish to enter into it in detail, it is worth noting how some more contemporary utilitarians share Bentham’s belief that politics and law ought to be established on a more rational footing. Consider for instance the arguments of Hart in his article on Bentham and the ‘demystification of the law’. Hart criticises elements of the legal system which he claims inspire ‘irrational’ or ‘undeserved respect’ and make law appear ‘anachronistic’. In particular, Hart attacks the dress and dictum of the courts claiming such practices dress the law up like a ‘ghost from the past’ and make the court appear like a ‘half-intimidating and half-comic historical pantomime’. This is an area of the law Hart thus contends Bentham’s reforms would be welcomed (Hart, 1973:12-3). Thus we may observe a continual strain in utilitarian thinking that the law, and by extension the subject and State relationship, needs to be stripped of damaging or unnecessary pageantry and placed on clearer more rational foundation. Nonetheless, despite sharing some beliefs with Bentham, it should be noted that Hart does not believe this ‘demystification’ should be carried to the same extent that Bentham advocates (Hart, 1973:15-7).

Thus, despite the differing philosophies between thinkers such as Hobbes, Kant, Bentham and Mill, we might observe a common argument that is illustrative of what I have termed the ‘rational approach’. This is that our understanding of politics ought to be based upon rational principles. This argument can be largely observed to stem from the claim that previous understandings of politics which were based on custom or tradition are inadequate means for understanding the subject and State relationship. Consequently, such contextual articulations must be replaced with an understanding of politics based on reason.

Having thus illustrated the normative argument that politics ought to be articulated through reason, I will now proceed to illustrate the means by which such an articulation could be made. This will be done in the next section through the discussion of the assumption of the ‘rational subject’.

2. The Assumption of the Rational Subject

It may be observed that the argument pertaining to the assumption of a ‘rational subject’ may take two forms. The first argument conceives of the subject abstracted from any particular context and stripped of all historical or cultural characteristics. Such a subject’s decision making process is thus unencumbered by any contextual influences and instead his choices are informed purely by his reason. How the subject relates to the State is thus conceived by hypothesising what choices such an abstract and unencumbered subject would make in regards to political affairs.

The second form of this argument does not consider the subject as an abstract unencumbered being. On the contrary, it views him as existing within a historical epoch. Nonetheless, the subject’s primary attribute and characteristic is still considered to be his ability to think rationally. Thus, despite recognition being given to the subject’s context, primacy is still given to reason and it is still maintained that the subject’s decisions and relations, most notably with the State, are directed by what it is considered ‘rational’ for him to do. Thus, it may be attested that what these arguments share in common is the belief that reason is the chief factor in informing the relationship between the subject and State.

This section will outline both forms of these arguments and illustrate the key assumption that they both share.

I begin with the assumption of the subject as an unencumbered rational actor. In Chapter Thirteen of *Leviathan* Hobbes gives his famous account of ‘man’ in the ‘state of nature’. This is described as a situation of equality in which there is no ruling authority and, as a consequence of this, there exists a constant ‘war’ between everyman and everyman. As a consequence of this ‘war of all against all’ Hobbes asserts that there can be no arts, or industry, or society, and instead life is infamously ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’ (Hobbes, 2008:84).

Nonetheless, in Chapter Fourteen, Hobbes asserts that man may discover through his reason the ‘laws of nature’, the fundamental law of which is to ‘seek peace, and follow it’ (Hobbes, 2008:87)²⁶. Thus, we may observe, for Hobbes, reason informs the subject that he ought to work towards the establishment of peace to escape the horrors of the ‘state of nature’. In Chapter Seventeen Hobbes reveals such peace can only be found through the transference of power from individuals to one ‘man’ or an ‘assembly of men’. This Hobbes claims amounts to the foundation of the ‘commonwealth’, and the generation of the ‘Leviathan’ or ‘mortal God’ (Hobbes, 2008:114).

This is admittedly a very brief account of Hobbes arguments pertaining to Book One and the beginning of Book Two of *Leviathan*. Nonetheless, it is sufficient to give an initial outline sketch of the ‘assumption of rational subject argument’. Hobbes imagines a subject who exists in a hypothetical situation devoid of any

²⁶ For Hobbes’s specific understanding of reason I would refer the reader back to the discussion of Hobbes in section one.

cultural or historical factors. It is his reason, found in the laws of nature, which informs this subject that he is better off in the ‘Commonwealth’, under the protection of the State, than he is in a condition of perfect liberty in the ‘state of nature’. Therefore, for Hobbes, the subject obeys the State because it is rational to do so; the State provides protection and security absent in the ‘state of nature’.

We might here also consult the arguments of John Locke as presented in his *Two Treatise of Government*. Locke’s argument is also built upon an understanding of an individual subject existing in a ‘state of nature’. Such a subject is understood to have a capacity for reason giving him knowledge of the ‘laws of nature’ which acts as his guide when making choices and decisions (Locke, 1998:271). This ultimately leads the subject to enter into the authority of the commonwealth, as it serves as a remedy to the ‘inconveniences’ of the ‘state of nature’. Thus again we see the basis of Locke’s argument as built upon the assumption of an abstract rational subject and the choices he makes when directed by his reason. The central function reason takes in Locke’s argument is indeed particularly betrayed when, in response to would be critics, Locke contends reason is ‘plain on our side’ (Locke, 1998:336).

We might also observe the line of argumentation employed in Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*. Like Hobbes and Locke, we find that Spinoza also stresses that it is through reason that the subject enters into the commonwealth, and consequently it is ‘reason’ that characterises the relationship between the

subject and State. In order to create a political union Spinoza claims that subjects must not be directed by their private appetite, which pulls them in different directions, but rather by the ‘dictate of reason’ (Spinoza, 2008:198). Similarly it is reason that ‘binds’ the subject to defend and obey his government (Spinoza, 2008:200). Thus, we may again see illustrated by Spinoza this notion that the State is formed by rational subjects, and their relationship to it is consequently perceived to be characterised chiefly by reason.

An important illustration of this argument is also given by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract*. Like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau discusses the formation of the polity and insists that it must be formed by contract or ‘social pact’ (1968:60). However, unlike both Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau does not believe that one can appoint a sovereign, whether it be a single monarch nor a representative parliament. On the contrary ‘free citizens’ must do everything ‘by their own hands’, including taking part in the polity’s legislative process (Rousseau, 1968:140-1). As a consequence, the polity is directed by the ‘General Will’ of the citizens. This ‘General Will’, Rousseau insists, is not a mere ‘will of all’ or a ‘will of the majority’ but is ‘general’ in that it aims for the ‘common good’ of the polity (Rousseau, 1968:72-3). If the polity is to survive Rousseau argues the subject must follow the dictates of this ‘General Will’ (Rousseau, 1968:63-4).

One of the effects of following the ‘General Will’ is that the subject is made ‘consult his reason, rather than study his inclinations’ (Rousseau, 1968:64). This

would be to associate the ‘General Will’ with ‘reason’ and thus again suggest the notion that political relations must be conducted on ‘rational grounds’.

In the Twentieth Century the assumption of an ‘unencumbered rational subject’ is most clearly illustrated by John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*. Here, Rawls argues that a society’s principles of justice ought to be constructed from what he calls the ‘Original Position’. This basically constitutes the construction of a polity’s principles from the position of the ‘rational individual’ abstracted from all his personal and social conditions. Thus, rationalism forms the very basis of Rawls’ conception of the State as he extracts all social and cultural factors from his theory and constructs it solely from the position of the disembodied rational actor (Rawls, 1999:118-30).

Similarly, Robert Nozick, although disagreeing with Rawls on many issues, nonetheless takes as his premises the idea of the unencumbered subject existing in a pre-political ‘state of nature’, drawing inspiration from the arguments of Locke in particular (Nozick, 1974:10-12). We consequently may see these arguments found in Nozick’s *Anarchy, State and Utopia* as another modern illustration of this understanding of politics which begins with the premises of an abstract rational subject.

I have thus illustrated the first manifestation of this argument concerning the assumption of a ‘rational subject’. We may firstly observe that its key premise is that of a subject abstracted from the context which he inhabits, and consequently

unencumbered by any historical or cultural understanding which may influence his decision making. It is subsequently perceived that the choices this imagined subject will make are a product of reason alone. It is then demonstrated how the subject from this premise will come to form a State with other subjects as they are directed by their reason. The nature of this State, and consequently the subject's relationship to it, are thus all understood to arise from an understanding of what such an abstract rational subject would choose to do. The content of these theories of course differs depending on what thinker is chosen to illustrate this understanding: from Hobbes' State as 'mortal God', to Locke's more limited 'neutral umpire' State, to Rousseau's participatory republic. However, what is centrally characteristic to them all is that the conclusions about what the nature of the subject's relationship to the State is are reached through an understanding of what a subject would do when led by reason.

I now return to the second argument which illustrates this 'assumption of the rational subject'. Unlike the previous articulation, it will be argued that this second form of argument does recognise that the subject exists within a particular context. Thinkers I will discuss as illustrative of this approach, such as Hegel, have for instance been interpreted as emphasising the significance of the historical period in which the subject inhabits²⁷. However, despite this increased sensitivity to context, I will argue that these theorists still understand the subject's relation to

²⁷ See Scruton's interpretation of Hegel mention in the introduction.

the State as predominantly shaped by his reason. Consequently, I will maintain that they share with the arguments concerning the ‘abstract unencumbered subject’ the central assumption that the subject in question is ‘rational’, and that it is his reason that above all else informs his relationship with the State.

I will begin my discussion here with the thought of Hegel and his seminal work in political philosophy: *The Philosophy of Right*. Here Hegel does not consider the subject as a disembodied being, but rather considers him as embedded within social and historical groups, groups such as the family. Indeed, Hegel puts particular emphasis on the family, claiming that it is within this societal unit that the subject ‘transcends his self-enclosed personality’ and ‘finds himself and is conscious of himself in a whole’ (Hegel, 2008:52).

Nonetheless, one must observe that such societal groups only serve as stepping stones in the development of Hegel’s subject, a development which is only complete when the subject becomes a rational bearer of rights in the State. Consequently, the State, and the subject’s obligation to it, take precedence, especially over groups such as the family (Hegel, 2008:52).

This relationship between subject and State is further perceived to be centred on reason. Hegel argues that the rational subject will obey the State as it is only as a member of this institution that he can fully realise his potential. This illustrated by Hegel’s definition of patriotism as: “the consciousness that my interest... is contained and preserved in another’s (i.e. the state’s) interest and end” (Hegel,

2008:240). Similarly Hegel claims the State's constitution is the foundation of the subject's sense of political obligation because it realises, and *makes rational*, the subject's freedom (Hegel, 2008:239)²⁸.

Indeed, one can observe a particular hostility Hegel holds for States which do not successfully attain to this desired relationship centred on reason. This is particularly evident in Hegel's essay 'The English Reform Bill', in which he discusses the politics of the British Isles. Hegel for instance remarks that the sectarian issues which complicate the politics of Ireland are 'unprecedented' in 'civilised nations' (Hegel, 198:307). Even more revealing he remarks that English national pride, and its attraction to pomp, ceremony and tradition, have caused reform in this State to 'fall asleep'. England has consequently failed to develop 'rational' institutions and laws as have other 'civilised' nations (Hegel, 1998:311). This distaste for the custom and tradition of the British Isles, when compared to 'rational institutions and laws', clearly illustrates Hegel's belief that reason is the proper means through which the subject relates to the State.

I now turn to consider the philosophy of Green, whose thought I wish to give particular attention to. This is not only because he is one of the first to explicitly use the term 'political obligation' (Horton, 2010:1,70)²⁹, but also because I believe

²⁸ My emphasise

²⁹ In 'lectures On political Obligation' Green defines 'political obligation' as: 'The obligations of the subjects to the sovereign, of the citizens towards the state, and the obligations of individuals to each other as enforced by a political superior.' (Green, 1986:13).

he gives one of the clearest illustrations of this argument that it is the subject's reason which informs and directs his relationship to the State.

We can best gain an appreciation of Green's political thought when we consider the synthesis he offers between the thought of Rousseau and John Austin.

In 'Lectures on Political Obligation' Green gives an interpretation of Rousseau which sees the relationship between subjects and the polity based on the idea of a 'common good', and the importance of subjects acquiring a higher 'moral being' through political life³⁰. This idea of political relationships founded on an idea of the 'common good' of the people Green approves of. Rousseau's mistake however, according to Green, is to believe that that this notion of the 'general will' can actually be at the same time the 'sovereign power'; Rousseau did not distinguish adequately between this notion of an 'impartial' and 'disinterested will' 'aimed at the common good' and the actual 'coercive power' that is the 'State' (Green, 1986:57).

³⁰ In the *Social Contract* Rousseau argues that by entering into the commonwealth the subject leaves behind his 'natural freedom' and gains a higher 'civil freedom'. This 'civil freedom' is superior to 'natural freedom' as, whilst the latter entailed a lack of restrictions on one's actions, it nonetheless did not consider the origin of one's actions. Thus, although one may be unrestricted, one's actions were nonetheless dictated to oneself by sources out with one's own will, such as instinct for instance. Conversely 'civil liberty' involved following laws that oneself took part in the legislation of. Thus, although one is not as unrestricted as one was when in possession of 'natural freedom', one is nonetheless more free when in possession of 'civil freedom' as one is following only one's own will as embodied in the laws one legislated for oneself. As Rousseau presented the argument in the *Social Contract*: 'to be governed by appetite alone is slavery, while obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself is freedom' (Rousseau, 1968:65). Green's full interpretation of this argument can be found in 'Political Obligation' (1986:56).

Green goes on to contrast Rousseau's conception of the 'General Will' with Austin's understanding of law. Austin's understanding, to summarise briefly, is that a positive law is a command given by a 'sovereign person' or a 'sovereign body of persons'. The 'sovereign', whether it be 'one person' or a 'body of persons', is a 'determinate human superior' whom society has a 'habit of obedience to' (Green, 1986:66-7). Green observes that at first Austin's doctrine appears wholly opposed to Rousseau's arguments. This is because Austin firstly recognises sovereignty to rest in a determinate 'person' or 'persons', in contrast to Rousseau's abstract conception of the people's 'General Will'. Secondly, Austin locates the 'essence of sovereignty' in power: the capability of the sovereign to issue laws, and thus in effect 'command' the people. This is of course in contrast to Rousseau's belief that sovereignty rested in the 'common will' of the people (Green, 1986:67).

Nonetheless, Green maintains that these two positions can be brought into synthesis, and it is furthermore in this synthesis that the grounds of political obligation can be found. Green observes that Austin conceded that, although sovereignty lay in power, this power could only be exercised if the sovereign had the 'habitual obedience' of the people. Green contends that this 'habitual obedience' is only given when the sovereign's commands are directed towards the ends that the people desire, and thus their 'common good'. In effect therefore Green synthesises Austin's notion of 'positive law' and Rousseau's notion of the 'general will' by arguing that the State will only be obeyed when its laws are seen

to be in accordance with the ‘common good’ as perceived by the people. Or as Green later puts it:

‘Let this sense of desire- which may be properly called general will- cease to operate or let it come into general conflict with the sovereign’s commands, and the habitual obedience will cease also’ (Green, 1986:68-9).

Thus, we can see how Green’s understanding of political obligation, and thus the relationship between the subject and State, is rooted in this idea of the ‘Common Good’; the subject will only obey the State so long as the State’s laws are in accordance with the ‘general will’, understood as the ‘common good’ of the people.

This nonetheless raises a serious concern with Green’s thought: what exactly is the ‘common good’? This has indeed been an issue of uneasiness for many Green scholars. In particular commentators have argued that the conception of the ‘common good’ is so vague that it can tell us nothing about correct action. Indeed criticisms have been levelled that Green’s argument is ultimately circular: ‘moral goodness consists in aiming at moral goodness’ (Nicholson, 1990:71). Horton identifies this as a particular problem for understanding political obligation. He asks for instance how we are to agree on what is the ‘common good’ of a society, and how are debates about this supposed to be adjudicated? (Horton, 2010:73).

A close look at Green’s arguments will however reveal something incredibly telling about his idea of the ‘common good’, namely that is frequently associated with

'reason'. Consider for instance Green's claim that the 'moral life' is the 'possession of will and reason' (Green, 1986:15). Similarly, Green claims the value of the institutions of civil life are that they allow one to exercise one's will and 'enable him to realise his reason i.e. his idea of self-perfection' (Green, 1986:16). We might also observe Green making a similar claim in regards to political rights: rights are derived from the possession of 'rational will' and are aimed at furthering the 'realisation of rational will' (Green, 1986:27). It is also of interest that when discussing the notion of the 'general will' Green links it to the notion of 'pure practical reason' as advocated by Kant (Green, 1986:57).

This link between the 'common good' and 'reason' is further evidenced when we look beyond 'Political Obligation'. The link is particularly well sustained in Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. Here Green describes reason as the 'parent of the law' (Green, 1906:233). He further claims that it is the subject's capability of reason 'alone' which makes him 'a possible author' and a 'self-submitting subject' of the law (Green, 1906:234). He argues that reason enjoys this foundational position because it is the faculty which allows us to recognise the best for both ourselves and others, and thus further enables us to recognise and subject ourselves to the laws which enable us to realise these possible bests. Reason is consequently perceived as the 'basis of society' (Green, 1906:236). He continues that it is reason which allows the subject to obey both the laws of his family and, most importantly for our discussion here, the State (Green, 1906:252). It is also reason which allows for one system of law to be extended over many communities (Green, 1906:252).

Finally, Green claims that it is to reason that the law of the State owes its existence (Green, 1906:252).

Thus, we can see the vital function reason has in Green's conception of the 'common good' and indeed political relationships generally; reason is for Green the basis of society and of politics. The end of the subject is to be a moral agent which is to be free and rational. It is through the State, and the rights and institutions it provides for individuals, that the subject is to attain this rational end. It is furthermore the rationality the subject possesses that makes him conscious that this is his proper end. It would thus not be too much of a simplification to say that the 'common good' is that which is rational, nor that the subject obeys the State because it is 'rational to do so'. Green's conception of politics, and in particular the relationship between subject and State, is firmly centred on the paradigm of rationality³¹.

We can clearly see from this discussion why I hold Green to be a particularly telling illustration of this argument concerning the 'assumption of a rational subject'; underneath Green's discussion of society is the central assumption that the subject in question is a rational being and furthermore it is this ability to reason

³¹ This relationship between 'common good' and 'rationality' does not however save Green from his critics. As Horton observes, disagreements over the 'common good' of society are rarely settled through appeals to purely 'rational arguments' (Horton, 2010:73-4). I would however stress that my intentions here are not to defend Green but rather to draw attention to the 'rational approach' as is evident in his arguments. The issue of rationality alone being an inadequate means of addressing the relationship between subject and State is an issue I will come to, and is indeed a sentiment that I share. Discussion of this will however need to be postponed to section three.

which directs his relations in the world and informs his relation to the State. This is particularly telling for his understanding of political obligation as it can be interpreted that the subject will feel obliged to the State as long as the State's actions and demands fall within this rational understanding.

We can observe an interesting development in this argument with the thought of R.G. Collingwood who, although still seeing the State as formed through a rational process, nonetheless acknowledges that certain events can turn subjects away from this progression. We may for instance observe that Collingwood accounts for the rejection of reason in Germany, by which he is referring to the course of German politics from the end of the Nineteenth Century to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, as a reaction to a 'peculiar situation' (Collingwood, 2005:375). However, by characterising such phenomenon as 'Barbarism', and accounting for it as rejection of reason in favour of emotions, it is evident that Collingwood still perceives that a 'rational' subject will obey the modern State (Collingwood, 2005:307)³².

To gain a better comprehension of Collingwood's arguments we may take a closer look at his understanding of reason. Collingwood draws a distinction between two types of reason: 'right' and 'duty'³³. Firstly, 'right' can be understood as universal

³² I will discuss this idea of 'barbarism', and the issues it raises for both Collingwood's thought and the 'rational' approach more widely, when I consider the limitations of the 'rational approach' in section three.

³³ Collingwood in fact identifies three types of rational thought: 'utility', 'right' and 'duty' (Collingwood, 2005:103). Utility is however considered the lowest form of rationality and need not be considered in detail here.

rational laws. Collingwood however dismisses 'right' as an appropriate guide for political conduct as it is too rigid for practical application, and furthermore may in practice come into conflict with another absolute 'right'. He for instance draws attention to the problem posed by Kant where an axe murderer appears at one's door demanding to know where his would-be-victim is hiding. This conundrum forces one to choose between two 'universal rational laws' or 'rights': 'always telling the truth' and 'preserving human life'. Such universal thinking cannot solve this conundrum Collingwood argues, it can only be solved by choosing which rule is more appropriate to uphold, and which more appropriate to break (Collingwood, 2005:116).

Collingwood thus argues what rule to follow, and thus what action to take, depends on one's situation. As he elucidates through the metaphor of fishing: there is a hook which is 'right for trout-fishing' but is however 'wrong for salmon-fishing'; the question is what fish does one wish to catch? (Collingwood, 2005:117). This consideration of what one must do in one's present circumstance is what Collingwood denotes by 'duty' (Collingwood, 2005:124).

Nonetheless, despite this dismissal of 'universal laws' and increased attention to context, it is fundamental that we recognise that duty is still conceived by Collingwood as a form of reason, and thus Collingwood still makes the central assumption that the subject in question is rational and this rationality is chiefly what ought to direct his actions. Indeed, how closely 'duty' is wedded to 'reason'

is evident by Collingwood's instance that an action is only to be considered a 'duty' if it is influenced by reason, and is not considered one if it is influenced by passion (Collingwood, 2005:220)³⁴. This again illustrates the core argument of the 'rational approach' that the subject is presumed as rational and that his conduct is directed by this ability to reason³⁵.

I have thus illustrated the second manifestation of the argument concerning the assumption of a rational subject which I sought to elucidate in this section. This argument can be understood as built on the premises that the subject in question is rational, and that it is this rationality that chiefly informs the relationship between subject and State. Thus, although this second argument may not conceive of the subject as abstracted from his contextual circumstance, it still proceeds from the same assumption that the subject is rational and that his political relations and choices are directed by this ability to reason. This assumption forms the basis of the second characteristic argument of the 'rational approach'.

³⁴ Collingwood's exclusion of certain actions, and the implications of this, will again be discussed in greater length in section three.

³⁵ I have so far concentrated primarily on arguments found in 'idealism' to illustrate my point here. Nonetheless it should be observed that such arguments are not exclusive to idealism, but are also found in other philosophical approaches. We may take for instance Mill's arguments in *On Liberty*. As we observed in section one Mill argued that the proper means by which one should consider one's political relations and dispositions was through one's reason. This leads Mill to stress that the relation between subject and State that he describes, his 'harm principle', is only applicable for subjects who are 'in the maturity of their faculties'. This therefore excludes children and, more controversially, those 'backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage' (Mill, 2008:14). Thus we see Mill's argument clearly illustrating this central assumption that the subject he is considering is rational, and it is this rationality that ought to inform his political conduct.

3. Summary and Limitations of the ‘Rational Approach’

I have thus completed my illustration of what I have termed the ‘rational approach’ to understanding the relationship between subject and State. This approach I have argued can be understood by two key characteristic arguments.

The first is that politics should be articulated and understood through reason. In this argument the ‘rational approach’ is particularly hostile to forms of political understanding such as superstition, religion, and tradition. In the place of such articulations it is argued clear principles of reason should be established which communicate the relationship between subject and State transparently.

The second key argument relates to the assumption about the subject and how he forms his relationship to the State. This argument can take a number of forms: some consider the subject as abstract and unencumbered by social and cultural influences, whilst others recognise the subject as located within a historical context. Nonetheless, what is common to both these forms of argument is firstly the assumption that the subject is rational, and secondly that it is this rationality which informs the subject’s decision making process and his consequent relationship with the State. This argument can therefore be articulated as the assumption that the subject is rational and the belief that he will obey the State as long as it is rational to do so.

There are obvious benefits to this ‘rational approach’. It for instance tries to give a clear articulation of how the relationship between subject and State is formed. Indeed particular credit ought to be given for trying to identify how the subject makes decisions which form this relationship. Furthermore, by creating an archetypical subject from which we may hypothesise subject choices, it enables us to form predictions about how subjects may behave.

Nonetheless, the major problem with this approach is that it is so firmly wedded to the idea of rationality that motivations and behaviour which is not perceived to conform to reason is either marginalised or excluded³⁶.

It should be observed that the key argument and characteristic of the ‘rational approach’ is the attempt to construct a paradigm for understanding the subject and State relationship which is prior to any contextual consideration of the actual world. Thus, by its very nature, this approach attempts to construct a paradigm which is independent of, or ‘outside’, the world as it exists. In this way the ‘rational approach’ is quintessentially illustrative of a ‘removed approach’ as it consciously attempts to step back from the existing subject’s perspective and hypothesise his relationship through a priori assumption about reason. As a consequence, the

³⁶ I do not want to go too far in depth here about other factors that inform the subject and State relationship which the rational approach overlooks. The reason for this is because such criticisms inform the key arguments of what I shall call the ‘contextual approach’ which will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. I therefore must delay a discussion of the limits of reason in accounting for the relation between subject and State, and the other contextual factors which inform this relationship, until the next chapter.

actual encounters, experiences, and perception of the subject are always overlooked in favour of understanding what would be considered ‘rational’.

As the ‘rational approach’ expects the subject to act according to its understanding of reason, when the subject fails to do so it cannot account for his behaviour. As a consequence, it is common for the approach to belittle and exclude such modes of behaviour with dismissive and deprecating labels.

To demonstrate this I will return to Collingwood’s concept of ‘barbarism’. In the *New Leviathan*, Collingwood denotes as ‘barbarians’ those who are ruled not by reason but by emotions and passions³⁷. It should be noted that Collingwood draws attention to the original Greek understanding of ‘barbarize’ as to ‘behave like a barbarian’, or more particularly ‘talk like a barbarian’ (Collingwood, 2005:342). Thus we may interpret the very use of the term barbarian as to give an impression of unintelligibility³⁸.

This idea of ‘unintelligibility’ is furthered when we consider Collingwood’s discussion of ‘German barbarism’. As I highlighted earlier, Collingwood does claim that German ‘barbarism’ was a result of a particular historical circumstance. He

³⁷ It should be observed that Collingwood makes a distinction between ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’, the former being only ‘uncivilised’ whilst the latter are particularly hostile towards civilisation. Thus, as well as being irrational, a key characteristic of ‘barbarism’ for Collingwood is being actively hostile to civilisation (Collingwood, 2005:342).

³⁸ Jonathan Hall, in his study of Classical Greek ethnicity, has highlighted that the word ‘barbaros’ seems to have carried a linguistic connotation and denoted those who could not speak Greek, or spoke it poorly (Hall, 1997:45). In general however the notion of the ‘barbarian’ denoted the stereotypical image of the ‘exotic, slavish and unintelligible other’ against which Greek identity was defined (Hall, 1997:47). Thus we may understand the origins of this term to indicate an ‘unintelligible’ ‘other’.

indeed goes on to highlight one of the important historical events that ‘turned’ the Germans towards ‘barbarism’ was the culture, ‘the age’, of Germany under Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck (Collingwood, 2005:376). Nonetheless, as the discussion progresses Collingwood ceases to try and develop any understanding of what led the German people to Nazism, instead becoming increasingly dismissive of their behaviour as irrational and unintelligible. Consider for instance, and just to cite a few examples: the Nazis ‘thought with blood’ which is faster than the ‘old-fashioned way of doing it with your brains’ (Collingwood, 2005:377); ‘I am not sure that the Nazis understand what logic is for’ (Collingwood, 2005:377); ‘therein lies the whole difference between thinking like a sane man and thinking like a Nazi’ (Collingwood, 2005:377); that the claims that land outwith Germany’s borders belonged to them was ‘childishly boastful’ and ‘a symptom of lunatic greed and envy’ (Collingwood, 2005:379); and finally that German nationalists of the Nineteenth Century were ‘muddle-headed’ and ‘addicted to self-deception’ (Collinwood, 2005:382). There is consequently little attempt to understand the circumstances that led to Nazism in Germany. Alternatively we find a systematic dismissal of their behaviour as irrational and unintelligible, indeed bordering on madness. Thus, we can see that Collingwood, although recognising that historical events may make subjects hostile to nation States, cannot account for such behaviour and thus must simply exclude it from his rational framework.

This ‘exclusion’ is indeed rather common across the arguments discussed. Indeed interestingly so is the use of the terms ‘barbarian’ or ‘savage’ to describe those

excluded. Consider for instance the language employed by Green on the subject of Temperance. In reply to the statement made by the Bishop of Peterborough that he would ‘rather have England free, than England sober’, Green attested that if one wanted the freedom to get drunk one ought ‘go back to the naked savage to find it’ (Green, 2003:255). We may observe here that that which is not in accordance with Green’s notion of the ‘common good’, and thus that which is deemed ‘irrational’, is dismissed through association with a more primitive state.

Hegel similarly argues that those nations who ‘lag behind’ the rational development of the State may be considered as ‘barbarians’ (Hegel, 2008:319). We have already observed that Hegel looked negatively upon ‘civilised’ States which were still attached to notions of tradition and had not yet fully developed a sense of political obligation centred on reason, political communities such as England. Hegel’s narrowness of perspective, and the subsequent scale of his dismissal, is however fully revealed when we consider his views on communities which lie outwith the Western European State system, those communities Hegel fully considers as ‘barbaric’.

His claim, for instance, that history passes from East to West, reaching its full development in Western Europe, in particular implies that Asian cultures are primitive and barbaric, their only importance lying in informing the development of more advanced European society (Hegel, 1991:103). Hegel is even more dismissive of Africa, claiming that it has no culture and that its religion is a ‘sorcery’.

He subsequently dismisses the continent of Africa from his inquiries, claiming it has ‘no historical part of the World’ (Hegel, 1991:99). Similarly the Native inhabitants of the Americas are dismissed as ‘inferiors’ ‘in all respects’ who existed, before the arrival of Europeans, in a state of ‘rudeness and barbarism’ (Hegel, 1991:81).

It should also be further observed that this perspective of other cultures does not only exclude many alternative articulations of politics and culture from Hegel’s consideration, but also justifies their subjugation. In *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel maintains that the rights of barbarians are unequal to those of ‘civilised nations’ (Hegel, 2008:319). In the *Philosophy of History*, he remarks that the English have taken up the responsibility of ‘emissaries’ of civilisation as they open up contacts with ‘barbarous peoples’ (Hegel, 1991:455).

Mill also excludes those who were not ‘rational’ from his account of the relationship between the subject and State. He insists in particular that his ‘harm principle’ was only suitable for those rational subjects who were in full possession of their mental faculties, and consequently not those ‘backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage’ (Mill, 2008:14). Particular attention should be drawn to the fact that Mill goes on to use the term ‘barbarian’ to refer to such ‘backward people’. In particular Mill states that despotism ‘is a legitimate mode of government when dealing with ‘barbarians’, provided the end be ‘their improvement’. He continues that, until they are capable of free and equal discussion, the principles of liberty do not apply to such people, and instead they

should be content in obedience to an ‘Akbar or a Charlemagne’ (Mill, 2008:14-5).

Again here those who are seen as ‘irrational’ are dismissed through association with the primitive and excluded from Mill’s entire conceptualisation of the subject and State relationship.

Similarly, we might observe Spinoza’s claims that many of the ‘common people’ are unable to understand the ‘laws of reason’, and consequently have to have their relationship towards the polity explained through superstition and myth (Spinoza, 2008:77). Indeed, Spinoza interestingly closes his preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise* by claiming that his work is only for the ‘philosophical reader’. He continues that the common people, whom he asserts cannot overcome superstition and be governed by reason, should not read his work lest they ‘make a nuisance of themselves by reading it perversely’ (Spinoza, 2008:12).

Finally, we might observe Hobbes’ comments in *Behemoth* that the English and Scottish subjects of Charles I were led into rebellion because they were largely ‘ignorant of their duty’ (Hobbes 1990:4). Again, here, actions against proper reasonable conduct, which for Hobbes is obedience to the monarch, are being labelled as ‘ignorant’. It might also be observed that in *De Cive* Hobbes declares that drunkenness is an ‘offence’ to natural law. This is because Hobbes insists one should make an effort to maintain one’s ability to reason properly and not partake in activities which may destroy or impair one’s rational faculties (Hobbes, 2012:53). Thus we observe Hobbes, in an interesting parallel to Green, dismissing the desire

for, and consumption of, alcohol as degenerate behaviour affecting the ability to reason.

Consequently, we can see that this approach centred on rationality fails to account for many forms of human behaviour. Indeed in the examples shown above we can observe a wide range of activity, from Nazism to the consumption of alcohol, falling outwith this framework of understanding. Such behaviour is instead belittled and excluded through labels such as ‘barbarianism’ and ‘savagery’ which allude to them being of a lower order or associated with a more primitive human state.

The two central limitations of the ‘rational approach’ are thus that it firstly expects subjects to behave in a certain ‘rational way’, and thus overlooks the experiences of subjects who actually inhabit the world and the States contained within it. Secondly it cannot account for modes of behaviour which fall outwith this concept of reason. It is these central problems that I hope the proposed ‘subjective approach’ will avoid.

Chapter Two: The Contextual Approach

I will now illustrate what I have termed the ‘contextual approach’ through a number of key arguments.

The first key argument is that abstract reason is an insufficient premises from which one can approach the study of politics. This is illustrated by a rejection of the idea that reason alone is capable of understanding the relationship between subject and State, or indeed reason alone can provide an adequate understanding of political relationships generally.

The second key argument is that the subject’s relationship with the State is formed through his experiences and participation in the practices of the community that he inhabits. It is consequently an understanding of this context the subject inhabits which is sought in order to explain his relationship with the State.

The final argument I will use to illustrate the ‘contextual approach’ is that we should not talk of ‘subjects’ and ‘States’ generally, but rather only of ‘particular subjects’ who inhabit ‘particular States’. This argument stems from the belief that, as subjects are bound and shaped by the context they inhabit, there is little point in discussing political relations generally, as these will differ depending on the context which the subject inhabits. This focus on particularity may seem self-evident from the dismissal of the ‘abstract rational subject’ and the focus instead

on ‘subjects within context’. Nonetheless, as will be shown, theorists who are illustrative of this approach often take pains to emphasise this ‘particularity’ in their approach, and thus I have isolated it as a key argument on its own.

These three arguments will constitute sections one, two and three of this chapter.

Section four will then proceed to summarise this approach and highlight its limitations. This will be particularly important for the development of my thesis as it will be acknowledged that much of the arguments illustrative of the contextual approach are sympathetic to the assumptions of the proposed ‘subjective approach’. In particular, it will be observed that both approaches share the desire to study *particular* subjects in relation to *particular* States. However the main difference between the two approaches lies in the fact that the ‘contextual approach’ not only seeks to understand particular subjects within particular contexts, but typically further attempts to use an understanding of this context to explain the subject’s relationships. The ‘contextual approach’ thus gives priority of focus not to the subject’s encounters and perceptions but to this ‘context’; the ‘contextual approach’ steps back from the subject’s perspective to gain a greater and more in depth understanding of the historical and cultural context through which it seeks to understand subjects’ political relationships. In this way the context becomes the ‘lens’ through which the ‘contextual approach’ seeks to view the subject and State relationship.

The difference between this ‘contextual approach’ and the proposed ‘subjective approach’ will be that, whilst both identify the subject as one who exists within a particular context, the latter does not seek to comprehend the issue by using the context as a ‘lens’, but rather seeks to identify and comprehend the encounters the subject has within these contexts. The focus of the ‘subjective approach’ will thus be on what perception is attained through these moments of encounter and how the subject and State relationship grows from them.

I would again highlight that in illustrating this approaches I am drawing from a wide range of philosophies, from the arguments of the Scottish Enlightenment to ‘political conservatism’ and ‘communitarianism’. I thus do not in any way wish to reduce and conflate these complex ideas or ignore both the nuance and greater divergences in each philosopher’s views. Instead, I will focus on what I believe are the common arguments these philosophies share, and which I believe are common arguments illustrative of the ‘contextual approach’. What I believe is common to all the philosophies is the importance they attribute to the subject’s context, whether this be in the form of historical traditions or cultural practices. I would also similarly highlight that some of the issues and criticisms I will raise in this chapter are far more relevant to certain thinkers than others. Consequently, when stating the limitations I find in this chapter, it must be born in mind that these are conceived of as limitations of the illustrated approach generally, and not as limitations of each thinker and philosophy discussed.

1. Rejection of the Premise of Abstract Reason

This ‘rejection of the premise of abstract reason’ argument takes two recognisable forms. The first is that theoretical systems built of the assumption of a rational actor disembodied from historical context, such as the ‘Social Contract Theory’, provides an unsatisfactory account of the subject’s relationships. The explanation put forward for this is that conclusions derived from purely abstract premises bear no resemblance to the actual conditions of the political world. We might consequently perceive this criticism as predominantly levied against the ‘rational approach’s’ articulation of the subject and State relationship.

The second argument is that rational principles, devoid of any history or tradition, cannot form the foundations of the subject and State relationship. The explanation for this is that rational principles cannot cultivate in the subject any feeling of affection towards the State. This argument may consequently be understood as directed against the more normative claim that we should understand and approach politics from rational principles.

The common proposition contained within these arguments is that reason alone is an insufficient means of accounting for the subject and State relationship, thus consequently illustrating my first key characteristic of the ‘contextual approach’.

I will first begin from the rejection of the ‘rational actor’. A clear illustration of this rejection comes from the Scottish Enlightenment, and particularly in the thought of David Hume. In his *Treatise on Human Nature* Hume argued that one’s mental faculties are imperfect and prone to error, and consequently reason alone could not be considered a reliable guide for organising and understanding human affairs. On the contrary, Hume argued that most of our understanding is derived from custom and habit (Hume, 1985:231-4).

The importance of custom and habit will be considered in proper depth in section two, where I consider the argument that context shapes the subject’s relationship with the State. In the meantime I will rather illustrate from Hume the idea that reason alone is an inappropriate means for understanding political relationships, and that any understanding built on the assumptions of an ‘abstract rational actor’ is unsuitable for understanding real relationships.

Such an argument is prevalent in Hume’s essay ‘On the Original Contract’. In this essay Hume criticises the theory of an ‘original’ or ‘social contract’, as was speculated upon by philosophers such as Locke. The reason why Hume believes such ‘speculative’ theories are ‘a little unshapely’ is because there is nothing in the world that resembles or could warrant the political systems they propose (Hume, 2008:277-8). The conclusions of these ‘speculative’ theories furthermore are ‘paradoxes repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all ages’ (Hume, 2008:292). Hume continues that if you were to

venture such beliefs about politics in most parts of the world you would be imprisoned for sedition, that is if your friends did not first ‘shut you up as delirious, for advancing such absurdities’ (Hume, 2008:278). Consequently, we may observe in Hume the belief that such theoretical systems built purely on speculative reason are completely without basis as they bear no resemblance to human societies as they actually exist. To speak of them amongst fellow subjects would thus be to at worst invite trouble, and at best be considered an idiot.

Hume thus rejects the idea of the ‘Original’ or ‘Social Contract’ theory as its assumptions are devoid of any historical consideration, and consequently its conclusions are contrary and irrelevant to political conditions as they actually exist³⁹. This illustrates the key argument of the ‘contextual approach’ that one ought to reject theories which base their assumptions on pure reason rather than contextual consideration⁴⁰.

This rejection of abstract speculation can be viewed as characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment. We can for instance observe Adam Ferguson, in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, similarly dismissed speculation of ‘man’ as he existed

³⁹ Particular conclusions that Hume identifies as absurd towards the end of the essay is the argument that the civil government may not take away any property from the subject without his own consent or that of his representative (Hume, 2008:292). This would suggest that Locke is indeed the target of Hume’s criticism.

⁴⁰ Hume’s criticism of the ‘Social Contract Theory’ is the most explicit in his writings. We may also however observe criticisms of other arguments central to the ‘rational approach’. We can for instance observe in the *Treatise on Human Nature* a criticism of the notion of the ‘common good’ perceived on a rational basis. Hume argues that it would be easy to imagine two neighbours agreeing to drain a meadow they share as the benefits of the project would be easily apparent to them. However Hume thinks it unlikely that a thousand people would be able to deduce the good from such an action and agree to it. (Hume, 1985:590).

in the ‘State of Nature’ in favour of a more historical approach. Ferguson contended that the records of mankind, ‘from the earliest to the latest’, have always depicted him as ‘assembled in troops and companies’, and it is the membership of these groups that have shaped his relations (Ferguson, 1995:8). This remark by Ferguson again illustrates this rejection of rational speculation devoid of historical consideration when investigating subjects’ relations; insisting instead that we should always consider the subject as embedded within historically formed groups.⁴¹.

We may also see the rejection of the premise of abstract reason as present in the arguments of more contemporary thinkers, for instance in contemporary conservative philosopher Roger Scruton. In *The Meaning of Conservatism*, Scruton criticises the ‘liberal’ idea that imagines the individual as one abstracted from his cultural conditions who bases his decisions on pure reason alone, a position he associates chiefly with Kant⁴². Scruton argues that such an abstract position is unattainable as it ignores the social practices and institutions that shape and constitute the subject, and are consequently what the subject makes choices about (Scruton, 2002:112,188).

⁴¹ What is presented here is only the briefest possible account of the rejection of abstract reason as is present in the Scottish Enlightenment. Nonetheless it was sufficient as to illustrate my central point. An excellent account of the Scottish Enlightenment, and in particular its take on ‘reason’ and ‘history’, can be found in Alexander Broadie’s seminal work *The Scottish Enlightenment* (2011), particularly in the chapter on ‘History and Enlightenment’.

⁴² One may here recall the account of Kant’s attempts to establish an a priori account of morality in Chapter One.

This argument is also illustrated by what has come to be known as the ‘communitarian’ critique of liberalism⁴³. Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift have argued that what is common to the ‘communitarian’ position is the rejection of the notion that the subject is able to make rational decisions from a position removed from his cultural and historical context, and that the implications of such decisions can be used to make political maxims which can apply cross-culturally.

This criticism can be further regarded as a criticism of liberalism in general, as well

⁴³ What has been called the ‘communitarian approach’ is a philosophical approach associated with thinkers such as Amitai Etzioni, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer. It should be noted here that there is an initial difficulty when discussing ‘communitarianism’ as, with the exception of Etzioni (1996), none of the thinkers mentioned here actually self-identify as ‘communitarians’. MacIntyre has in particular rejected the title of ‘communitarian’, and indeed self-identifying communitarian Etzioni has even labelled MacIntyre a ‘conservative’ (Etzioni, 1996:15). There is also the division, made by commentators such as Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, between ‘philosophical communitarianism’, as is found in thinkers such as Sandel and Taylor, and the more explicitly ‘political communitarianism’ as advocated by Etzioni (Mulhall and Swift, 1996:xiv). Nonetheless Mulhall and Swift have argued that there is a set of core arguments around which we can understand the ‘communitarian approach’. This is firstly situated around a general criticism of liberalism, and ‘Rawlsian liberalism’ in particular. The second is the emphasis on cultural context and community in informing and structuring the subject’s decisions and the subsequent relationships built from these decisions (Mulhall and Swift, 1996:162-3). The presence of these arguments within MacIntyre’s work is why he is associated with ‘communitarianism’ by such commentators as Mulhall and Swift (1996:71). It should be noted that Mulhall and Swift are not alone in associating MacIntyre with ‘communitarianism’ in this way. See for instance Derek Phillips’ account of ‘communitarianism’ *Looking Backward; A Critical Appraisal of Communitarian Thought*, where he groups MacIntyre, along with Sandel and Taylor, as ‘communitarians’ because they hold the community as a ‘normative ideal’ (Phillips, 1993:10). In his assessment of the ‘communitarian critique of Liberalism’ Allen Buchanan similarly groups MacIntyre with Sandel and Taylor, arguing that in their work ‘communitarianism’ achieves its ‘most powerful expression’ (Buchanan, 1989:852). Also, in his discussion of the significance of the ‘communitarian-liberal’ debate for international relations, David Morrice also lists MacIntyre, along with Taylor, Sandel, and Walzer, as ‘leading communitarians’ (Morrice, 2000:234). Thus we may see that it is common practice to associate MacIntyre, along with Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer, with communitarianism. Nonetheless neither is it my purpose to here to try and give a full or extensive account of these thinkers’ arguments nor to try and define ‘what’ or ‘who’ is and is not a ‘communitarian’. My purpose, as always, is to discuss such arguments as illustrate what I have termed a ‘contextual approach’. Consequently when one of these thinkers displays an argument illustrative of this approach I will endeavour to address them by name and their particular work. I will only use the term ‘communitarian’ when discussing a general position characteristic of communitarianism which illustrates my argument.

as a specific criticism of the liberalism presented by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (Mulhall and Swift, 1996:158-60). In the interest of brevity I will concentrate primarily on these ‘communitarian’ thinkers critique of Rawls.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre first criticises Rawls on the account that the decisions his ‘rational’ subject comes to from ‘behind the veil of ignorance’ are decisions that only a rational agent behind the ‘veil of ignorance’ would make (MacIntyre, 2007:247). In other words, the principles and laws which Rawls prescribes from his ‘original position’ would only appear acceptable to such a disembodied agent removed from his cultural context. However MacIntyre insists such a position is unrealistic as subjects are never behind a ‘veil of ignorance’; they are in fact always imbedded in cultural and historical contexts (MacIntyre, 2007:249)⁴⁴.

In *Spheres of Justice*, Michael Walzer recognises that rational beings behind Rawl’s ‘veil of ignorance’ would likely agree to a political situation as Rawls describes. Nonetheless, Walzer insists that this helps little with understanding how actually existing subjects, who are aware of their culture and heritage, will make political choices. He continues that, in a world of diverse and competing cultures, there is

⁴⁴ It should be observed that Macintyre’s point here is a preliminary to a larger critique on the debate between Rawls and Nozick over the subject of ‘desert’. MacIntyre argues what is perceived as ‘good’ for both the subject, and the community as a whole, can only be formulated within the context of that community. Furthermore it is only by living in and participating in the practices of the community that subject’s come to recognise and identify with these goods. Consequently a purely abstract conception of politics cannot account for desert as it can neither account for what is desired nor who deserves what is desired. Such an understanding can be only achieved when we examine the issue from the context it is imbedded in and gives it value (MacIntyre, 2007:250). Nonetheless the brief outline of why MacIntyre initially rejects Rawls’ abstract rational position is sufficient to illustrate my argument.

no one understanding derived from an abstract ‘original position’ which would be applicable universally (Walzer, 1983:79).

We may also find a forceful criticism of Rawls in Michael Sandel’s *Limits of Liberalism*. Sandel rejects the idea that an individual reduced solely to a unencumbered rational actor could in fact make any choices at all because it is precisely factors such as culture that allow him to make life choices in the first place (Sandel, 1998:179).

There are thus two slightly different criticisms of Rawls that we might observe in these arguments. Firstly Sandel rejects the idea that subjects abstracted from their historical and cultural context would be able to make political decisions, for they would be deprived of a standard against which they could base their choices. MacIntyre and Walzer however do not necessarily challenge the ability of subjects behind the ‘veil of ignorance’ to make choices, but rather reject the notion that what choices they could make would have any relevance or bearing to reality. Nonetheless what they all share in common is a dismissal of Rawls’ method in attaining principles of justice from an abstract rational standpoint, and instead insist context must be given crucial significance when investigating such matters.

I now turn to the second form in which this argument against abstract reason may be observed. This is namely the belief that reason, or ‘rational principles’, cannot alone form the basis of the subject and State relationship. In order to illustrate this we may turn to the thought of Edmund Burke. We may first observe that Burke,

like Hume, was critical about the premises of such theories as the ‘Social Contract’.

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* for instance Burke remarks that the State is not like some trade agreement concerning tobacco, but was the great primeval contract linking one generation to the next. Thus, the State was no ahistorical edifice constructed from reason, but was an organic structure evolving from history and tradition (Burke, 2004:194-5).

Burke in particular levies his arguments against the activities of the French Revolutionary Government. He for instance draws attention to what he claims was an attempt to make the French State’s domestic structure more inherently rational, and citizenship more equal and universal, by dissolving France’s provinces and establishing an alternate system of localities based on geometrical design. However Burke argues that such a plan, instead of making all Frenchmen ‘universal citizens’, will deprive them of any country at all. He justifies this claim by arguing that nobody can feel any bond of affection or a sense of pride in a ‘square measurement’; ‘he never will glory in belonging to Chequer, No 71,’ (Burke, 2004:315). Key to Burke’s argument is that the relationship between subjects’ and their State is formed by an emotional attachment, an emotional attachment which cannot be cultivated by a purely rational articulation of the State.

We may observe similar sentiments expressed by French Counter-revolutionary thinker Joseph de Maistre. In *Considerations on France* Maistre is cynical about the use of abstract reason, describing it as ‘a deceptive shadow rather than the truth’

(Maistre, 2006:76). Unsurprisingly, Maistre finds the French revolutionaries' attempts to constitute a new State on rational principles a foolish enterprise. In particular, addressing the revolutionaries, he remarks; 'your republican institutions have no roots... they are simply sitting on the soil in regards to their predecessors... It took an axe to fell the latter; a breath will sweep away the other and leave no trace' (Maistre, 2006:87).

Thus we can observe that reason is an inadequate means of articulating the subject and State relationship as it cannot inspire the affection and sense of attachment that the older historical articulations could. This rational articulation just does not, to borrow from the language of Maistre, have the necessary 'roots'.

I have given two examples of this rejection of the premise of abstract reason which is characteristic of what I have called the 'contextual approach'. The first example argued that political approaches based on a 'rational subject' abstracted from his cultural and historical context was an unrealistic premise which resulted in arguments contrary and irrelevant to political realities. The second example argued that rational principles were insufficient grounds for founding the basis of the relationship between subject and State. What we can thus see as common to both these arguments is a rejection of the notion that abstract reason alone is a

sufficient means by which one may understand the subject and State relationship.⁴⁵

2. Focus on Context

In this section I will illustrate the second key argument of the ‘contextual approach’: that it is the historical and cultural context which constitutes the relationship between subject and State. Consequently, if one is to understand this relationship, it is this context which must become the focus of one’s study.

To understand the importance of context we may return to Hume. In the *Treatise* Hume remarks that, if you were to ask the ‘greater part of the nation’ if they consented to their government, they would ‘Be inclin’d to think very strangely of

⁴⁵ One might also draw attention to a third form of this rejection. This is namely a hostility to the belief that a statesman should, or is capable of, moulding society according to a ‘rational plan’. Examples of this would include Adam Smith’s criticism of the ‘man of systems’ in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Here Smith criticises such a figure for attempting to reform society according to a rational plan as to do so is to adopt an arrogance and overconfidence in regards to one’s own abilities, and neglect the greater stock of collective wisdom as is found in the traditions of society. Thus he asserts the good statesman ought to consult and work alongside the polity’s traditions, and not engineer society according to his own rational vision (Smith, 2009:275-6). Such an argument is also evident in Michael Oakeshott’s criticism of the rational politician in his essay ‘Rationalism in Politics’ (1991). Like Smith, Oakeshott insists that the politician must not try and engineer society according to rational plan or vision but rather must rely on the traditional practices and knowledge of politics to guide his conduct. Nonetheless, although both these arguments do provide illustrations of a rejection of abstract reason as an appropriate means through which to approach politics, they are however directed more towards the conduct of the statesman, as opposed to understanding the relationship between the subject and State. Consequently I have not given them extensive treatment in this thesis.

you: and wou'd certainly reply that the affair depend not on consent, but that they were born to such obedience' (Hume, 1985:599).

This remark first of all reveals Hume's contention that principles arrived at from abstract rational premises seem absurd when applied to the realities of political existence. However, it also reveals a second key argument in Hume's understanding of the relation between subject and State: that the former obeys the latter because he was 'born to'. In 'On the Original Contract' Hume makes another similar claim: 'Obedience of subjection become so familiar, that most men never make an enquiry into its origin or cause, more than about the principle of gravity' (Hume, 2008:218).

Underpinning this argument is the belief that in reality subjects do not make speculative enquiries into their relationship with the State, rather they are just born into a State which they are expected to obey and overtime become accustomed in doing so. Hume does give examples of institutions and practices that help accustomize the subject into obedience to the State, such as the succession of hereditary princes (Hume, 1985:610). We need not however concern ourselves with particular examples for the moment. What is key to recognise is the argument that it is the customs the subject is brought up and lives in which cultivates in him an obedience towards the State. Consequently, when

understanding the subject's relationship with the State, it is this context which we must consider⁴⁶.

This notion that the environment the subject inhabits is conducive to positive relationship to the State is further evident in the writings of Burke. We may indeed return to his discussion about affection to localities. In *Reflections*, Burke remarks it is a familiarity and love of the localities which we have been brought up in that cultivates in us a love of our country and its government. It is through its 'inns and resting places', Burke claims, that we come to love and have affection for the land we inhabit (Burke, 2004:315). Thus, Burke argues it is through experiences with the features of the locality one lives in which cultivates an affection for one's country and State. Scruton captures such a sentiment with his term *oikophilia*; the

⁴⁶ One might observe that Hume nonetheless often states that the origin of the State lies in utility. This is perhaps made nowhere clearer than in the *Treatise* where Hume maintains that the origins of civil duty lie in 'nothing but self-interest' (Hume, 1985:595). In light of this we might wonder if Hume, with this understanding of the State founded out of utility, does not share views in accordance to Bentham and thus by extension the 'rationalist approach'. To respond to this one might observe that Bentham not only believed that the State's origin lay in utility, but that this understanding could be composed into a rational principle which could convey more clearly to subjects the nature of their relationship with the State. As we have seen however, Hume was highly sceptical about the subject's capacity to reason, and thus insisted that it was rather through habit that the subject's relation to the State must be cultivated. The importance Hume attributed to such customs and traditions led him to the conservative view that these must be preserved (Hume, 2008:310). Bentham, having more confidence in the power of reason, conversely insisted they must be reformed, indeed abolished, as to be replaced with more rational principles. Thus to summarise, although Bentham and Hume may share the view of the State as founded by utility, on the question of how the subject relates to the State these two thinkers differ significantly. Bentham believed that this relationship ought to be constructed on a clear rational understanding whilst Hume, sceptical about the ability of the subject to reason, instead insisted this relationship needed to be founded on habitual obedience as is cultivated through traditions. This crucial difference makes each a position a clear illustration of the 'rational' and 'contextual' approach respectively.

belief that humans are animated by a ‘love of home’ and the peoples and features that give this ‘home’ significance (Scruton, 2015:24-5).

As well as this focus on context we might also observe in Burke and Scruton’s arguments a particular focus on passions. They for instance characterise the subject’s relationships here not through ‘reason’ but rather ‘love’. This passion is understood to derive from the subject’s experiences in his environment and context. We consequently may understand the subject’s relationship to the State to be based upon passions as are cultivated in the context that he inhabits.

I have thus illustrated how, on this contextual account, familiarity with one’s ‘home environment’ cultivates a positive bond between the subject and State. Nonetheless, to fully understand the importance of context, I must illustrate more clearly how actual practices and traditions help constitute this relationship. The authors we have discussed do provide plenty of examples of this. We have for instance already noted how Hume believed the succession of hereditary monarchs over time induced in the subject a habitual obedience to the State.

Nonetheless, Scruton’s discussion of the British Monarchy in *The Meaning of Conservatism* gives a particularly illustrative example of the role played by a tradition in informing the relationship between subject and State. Scruton argues that the British Monarch gives the State ‘ceremonial presence’. The ‘ceremony of the monarchy’ allows subjects to participate in the political customs and traditions of the State, consequently making them aware of their obligation to it (Scruton,

2002:29-30). Scruton latter clarifies that the particular genius of monarchy is that it manages to embody the State in the fragile body of a human person. This allows for the notion of obligation to be transformed into affection for a given person; this affection Scruton argues is a far better grounding for political obligation than an abstract notion or rational argument (Scruton, 2002:193).

What we may understand from this is that, by giving the State a ‘presence’, the British Monarchy allows it to take a concrete form which the subject can consequently relate to. Furthermore, its ‘presence’ as a particular person, a ‘fragile body’, allows for the possibility of subjects forming an affection for it, in a way that would be impossible if it was left only in the form of an abstract concept. The ‘ceremony’ of this monarchy further allows subjects to actively participate in the traditions of the State, and through this participation they are taught affection and allegiance to the monarch and, by extension, the State. Thus, to summarise concisely: the British State takes concrete form in the person of the Queen whom subjects are then trained to feel affection and obligation towards.

We might similarly observe here again a focus on ‘passions’: it is not because it is ‘rational’ to obey the State that the British subject feels obliged to his polity, but rather it is due to an emotional attachment he feels to the person of the Queen. This ‘emotional pull’ the subject feels is a product of his experiences within the traditions and culture of the British polity.

I have so far focused predominantly on the way in which the traditions and institutions of State inform its relationship with the subject. I must however also consider how the experience of the community and culture more generally inform this relationship. To understand this I again turn to what has been called the ‘communitarian argument’. In order to understand this we must briefly consider how such thinkers understand the ‘human self’, and how their understanding of political relationships stem from this.

A clear illustration is found in the thought of Charles Taylor. In *Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor asserts that ‘human life’ is fundamentally ‘dialogical in character’ (Taylor, 2003:32-3). What Taylor means by this is that human beings do not define their identity in isolation, but rather identity is shaped through conversation and in reference to significant others in a subject’s life, people such as the subject’s parents (Taylor, 2003:34-5)⁴⁷. In the same way Taylor also claims we define ourselves in dialogue with the cultural framework we inhabit. Such a framework gives a ‘background’ which represents ‘who we are’ and ‘where we have come from’, and thus makes our identities and decisions intelligible. Taylor later terms this ‘background of intelligibility’ the subject’s ‘horizon of significance’, which he claims subjects must refer to when understanding themselves and when making decisions (Taylor, 2003:37). We consequently must recognise the

⁴⁷ Indeed Taylor stresses that even a reclusive hermit or a solitary painter must have an interlocutor whom they identify their identity against: in the former Taylor argues the interlocutor is God and in the latter it is the audience to whom the painting is addressed (Taylor, 2003:34-5)

importance of cultural context in Taylor's work as it is precisely this context, or as Taylor labels it 'horizon of significance', which frames and makes intelligible the subject and his choices.

Taylor argues that this importance attributed to identity, and in particular identity shaped by a particular cultural 'horizon', leads to a political demand for 'recognition' of one's identity. This he claims has been an important driving force in modern politics, particular amongst nationalist movements (Taylor, 1994:25).

In the 'Politics of Recognition' Taylor argues that this political drive for recognition has manifested in two different ways. Firstly, there is the drive for universal 'equal recognition', which arises out of the need for every subject to be recognised as having equal worth and dignity. There is then the second drive for the recognition of particular cultures and communities, which entails a demand for the recognition of the 'difference' between subjects and groups. These two demands for recognition consequently find themselves in conflict with one another. This conflict arises from the fact that a politics of 'universal equal recognition' demands a certain homogeneity amongst subjects; it demands that all are treated the same. This however runs the danger of marginalising and suppressing the differences between subjects and communities which the second argument wishes to see recognised (Taylor, 1994:43).

A full discussion of this conflict between 'equal recognition' and the 'recognition for differences', and the solutions Taylor recommends, is beyond the remit of this

thesis⁴⁸. What is however important to acknowledge is how this understanding informs how political relations are conceptualised. We have seen how, for Taylor, culture is seen as of paramount importance in the informing of the subject's self-understanding. This in turn results in a demand for this distinctiveness of this cultural understanding to be given due political recognition. Problems however occur when political bodies such as the State fail to give proper recognition to these cultural identities, or even try and diffuse cultural distinctiveness in the pursuit of achieving equality amongst its citizens. The result of this would be a conflict between subject and State over the matter of cultural recognition. What one may observe from this is that cultural identity can be viewed as central to informing the subject and State relationship. This is because subjects will seek recognition of this identity from their polity, and the State risks the danger of alienating its subjects if it fails to recognise these demands.

Taylor gives an example of such a conflict in his discussion of the politics of Quebec. According to Taylor, being a Francophone Quebecker is central to many citizens of Quebec's self-understanding. They consequently look to the Canadian Government to grant political recognition of their distinctive cultural identity. This however often comes into conflict with the Canadian Government's attempt to give equal recognition and rights to all its citizens. What is important to recognise here is how this example illustrates the way in which context forms the basis of

⁴⁸ Extensive discussion of this problem can be found in Taylor's 'Politics of Recognition' (1994).

the relationship between subject and State; it is their cultural understanding, as derives from the contextual fact of inhabiting Quebec, which predominantly informs the citizens of Quebec's relationship with the Canadian State (Taylor, 1994:58-61).⁴⁹

It is worth also considering here a debate that has become prominent in the early Twenty-First Century. This is namely the debate concerning the idea of an 'Associative Theory of Political Obligation'. I wish to give particular focus to the arguments of 'Associative Political Theory' as have been articulated by Horton⁵⁰. Central to Horton's understanding of 'political obligation' is that it is 'non-voluntary' and 'particular'.

⁴⁹ I have here focused predominantly on Taylor as I believe he gives a clear illustration of how cultural context shapes the subject's understanding of self, and how this understanding then effects his political relations. I might however highlight that such an understanding can also be illustrated by other thinkers which have been associated with the 'communitarian argument'. One for instance might consider Walzer's understanding of justice as that which is faithful to the 'shared understanding' of the members of the community (Walzer, 1983:313).

⁵⁰ Like all the theories discussed in this chapter, 'Associative Political Obligation' is a rich and complex theory which is expressed by a number of thinker. I have selected to focus particularly on Horton's articulation as, according to Bas van der Vossen, it represents a 'thick membership view' of 'Associative Political Obligation'. Such a position comprehends obligation to the polity, not just through formal association of a group, but through a more complex and 'thicker' 'ethical' understanding deriving from the cultural and historical context the subject inhabits and how this defines both the subject and his relations with others (Vossen, 2011:481). I have thus chosen to focus on this particular strand of argument as it is most illustrative of what I have termed a 'contextual approach'. For other articulations of 'Associative Political Obligations' see Vossen's account in 'Associative Political Obligations' (2011) and 'Associative Political Obligations; Their Potential' (2011). It should be further noted that many scholars have highlighted the close relationship between theories of 'Associative Political Obligation' and 'Communitarianism', even going as far to describe the latter as 'communitarian theory'. Nonetheless, as Vossen argues, equating associative and communitarian theories is too simplistic (Vossen, 2011:478). I do not here wish to elaborate on the differences between the two theories. It will be sufficient to say that I did not conflate these two theories because it would be an injustice to the nuance and complexity of 'Associative Political Obligation' and to those scholars who have laboured to make explicit the distinctness of this theory (Horton, 2006; Horton, 2007; Horton and Windeknecht, 2014).

Horton gives an illustrative account of how subjects come to acknowledge these obligations which are non-voluntary, and how the subject consequently relates to the State. In ‘Defence of Associative Political Obligations: Part Two’ he gives particular attention to the nature and use of ‘shared narratives’. Such narratives have the effect of connecting the existence of the particular subject with the history, actions, and future, ‘in general... fate’, of the polity and its Government (Horton, 2007:13). Horton cites for instance how the narrative of Britain’s ‘Dunkirk Spirit’ is not only evoked in times of political crisis, but are also utilised in more familiar and routine situations. The effect of this is to relate the subject’s actions to the larger narrative of the polity as a whole, and thus cultivate a bond between the two (Horton, 2007:13-4). Thus, we may understand on this account the relationship between the subject and the State as cultivated through the cultural practices and stories which the subject is born into and brought up in.

I have given enough examples to clearly illustrate how the cultural context that the subject inhabits informs his relationship with the State. This argument is built largely on the premise that the subject never chooses to obey the State, but rather learns to do so as loyalty and affection is cultivated in him over time and he is habitually brought into a condition of obedience. We have seen examples of how such traditions and practices are interpreted as working to this effect. It was argued that institutions such as the monarchy allow the subject to feel affection towards the State, and how participation in this tradition trains him in obedience towards it. We have also seen the argument that cultural narratives further

influence the subject in feeling affection towards the State and help him identify with it. Finally we have also seen the claim that the community shapes the subject's identity, and that this cultural identity is a central background and drive in the subject's understanding of his political relationships. Common to all these arguments we may therefore recognise is the belief that it is the historical and cultural context the subject inhabits, and importantly the traditions and practices that constitute this context, that form the foundations of his political understanding. This clearly illustrates the second key argument I said was characteristic of a 'contextual approach': it is the context which the subject inhabits that informs his relationship with the State.

3. Particularity of Approach

What I mean by the 'particularity' of approach is the argument that one must not consider political problems generally, but rather must always examine them in a particular historical context. Thus, one should not consider 'the relation between the subject and State', but the relation between *particular* subjects and the *particular* State they inhabit.

This argument for particularity is perhaps made nowhere clearer than by Maistre in his *Considerations on France*. In response to the concept of the 'universal subject' Maistre writes:

'there is no such thing as man in the world. In my lifetime I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that *one can be Persian*. But as for *man*, I declare that I have never in my life met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me' (Maistre, 2006:53)⁵¹.

Evidently contained in Maistre's statement is his rejection of the 'abstract subject', whose existence he denies. However, also contained in this statement is the belief that subjects exist only as found embedded in their particular communities. He thus proceeds, not only to reject hypothetical abstract accounts of politics, but to insist that politics must be conducted with an eye to the particular circumstances in which subjects dwell. He continues to argue in particular that a 'real constitution' is one that addresses and considers the specific circumstances in which the subjects one wishes to address are situated (Maistre, 2006:53).

Therefore, in Maistre's statement we do again see illustrated the rejection of the abstract subject and the insistence that we must consider the historical and cultural context the subject inhabits, and therefore the first two key characteristics of a 'contextual approach'. However, we also can observe particular emphasis on the belief that, if one is to address or consider politics, one must focus on a particular group of subjects in a particular context. This clearly illustrates the third key characteristic of the 'contextual approach' that one must consider particular subjects who inhabit a particular State.

⁵¹ Emphasis in original.

We may also observe this ‘particularity’ as evident in Scruton’s articulation of conservatism. In *The Meaning of Conservatism* for instance Scruton remarks there can be no ‘universal’ conservative policy (Scruton, 2002:1). Similarly, in *How to be a Conservative*, he highlights that his own arguments are addressed to an ‘English-speaking world’ and to a readership which share his own understanding of civil society (Scruton, 2015:viii). We may consequently observe in this a self-conscious awareness by Scruton of the particular nature of his own of approach to politics, thus illustrating very well this particularity of focus characteristic of the ‘contextual approach’.

Such particularity in approach is also illustrated in the thought of the so called ‘communitarian thinkers’, especially in Walzer’s reference to the idea of the ‘philosopher and the cave’. In the ‘preface’ to *Spheres of Justice*, Walzer remarks that the original way of beginning a philosophical enterprise was to ‘walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain’, so that one may fashion an objective universal standpoint. On the contrary, Walzer states that he intends to ‘stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground’ (Walzer, 1983:xiv). In this remark we once again may observe a criticism of the ‘abstract position’ favoured by such thinkers as would wish to base their political understanding on the assumption of an abstract unencumbered agent. Nonetheless, in signifying his intentions to do philosophy ‘in the cave’, Walzer also lays emphasises on this ‘particularity of

approach'⁵². This is illustrated further by the understanding of justice Walzer presents in the text. ‘Justice’, Walzer claims, is always relevant to the ‘social meanings’ of the particular community under discussion (Walzer, 1983:312). Consequently he asserts ‘every substantive account of redistributive justice is a local account’ (Walzer, 1983:314). This focus on relevance to specific social practices and meanings, and the insistence that justice must be done at a ‘local level’, again illustrates this argument that we must always focus on a *particular* community and the *particular* relations of its *particular* subjects.

It must also be observed that this need to be particular in one’s approach to political relations is also a claim made explicitly by ‘associative theorists’ such as Horton. As I mentioned previously, one of the key characteristics of ‘associative political obligations’ Horton identifies is that it is ‘particular’ in its approach. We may for instance observe in ‘In Defence of Associative Political Obligations: Part One’, Horton puts particular emphasis on the need to understand the particular bond ‘we have with *our* polity’ (Horton, 2007:10)⁵³. This requirement Horton lays out thus emphatically illustrates this focus on particularity which is illustrative of a contextual approach.

I have thus identified the third key argument to what I have called the ‘contextual approach’. This argument holds that, given that there can be no general abstract

⁵² Walzer is likely parodying here Plato’s ‘Simile of the Cave’ from the *Republic*, in which it is argued that the philosopher must ascend from the ‘shadows’ of the cave as to see things as they truly exist under the ‘true light’ of the sun (Plato, 2007:241-8).

⁵³ Emphasis in original.

understanding of political relations and that the relation between subject and State is informed by the context the subject inhabits, we cannot discuss the issue generally but must focus on its particular manifestations within particular contexts.

4. Summary and Limitations of Contextual Approach

I have thus completed my illustration of what I have termed the 'contextual approach'. This approach I have argued can be understood through three closely related arguments.

The first argument was that abstract reason is an insufficient means of understanding political relations. This took the form both of the rejection of the 'unencumbered rational actor model', and of the belief that rationality or 'rational principles' could form a sound basis for the relationship between subject and State.

This first argument was made on the basis that the 'unencumbered rational actor' was a false premise which derived conclusions inapplicable to real life situations.

The second argument was based on the claim that reason could not inspire in the subject an affection or loyalty for the State. What we may therefore identify as common in these arguments is the belief that abstract reason is not a sufficient basis for understanding the relationship between subject and State.

Having rejected the use of abstract reason, the second key argument illustrated how the ‘contextual approach’ did understand the relation between subject and State. Again, we may identify two arguments here. The first is that the subject is cultivated in obedience and affection for the State through participation in its ceremonies and traditions. Secondly, it was argued that the subject’s understanding is shaped by the cultural context he is born into and inhabits, and consequently it is this cultural understanding that informs his relationship with the State. We may therefore understand common to these arguments is the assertion that it is the context the subject inhabits, as constituted by its traditions and cultural practices, which informs the relationship between subject and State.

Finally, I drew attention to the third argument that investigations into political relationships must focus, not on general questions, but on particular issues relevant to particular circumstances. Thus, when we address the question of the relationship between subject and State we must not ask ‘how the subject relates to the State’ but ‘how *particular* subjects relate to a *particular* State’.

We may thus summarise the ‘contextual approach’ as an approach which rejects universal or general questions of political relationships and instead seeks to understand how a particular context informs the relationship between subject and State.

The ‘contextual approach’ has clear strengths in comprehending the subject and State relationship. In particular it gives considerable attention to the historical

traditions and cultural practices that shape the subject's relationships. It also consequently avoids the generalities of the 'rational approach' and offers a more detailed and contextually sensitive appreciation of how different subjects may relate to different States within different contexts.

It has also been acknowledged that this particularity of focus and historical sensitivity is something that the 'contextual approach' shares with the proposed 'subjective approach'; both approaches recognise the subject not as an abstract being but as a person who is embedded within a particular context and wish to consider how such particular subjects relate to a particular States within these particular contexts.

Nonetheless, beyond this recognition of the subject as one 'historically and culturally embedded', the 'subjective' and the 'contextual' approaches must part ways. This is because the 'contextual approach' seeks to understand the subject *through* an appreciation of this context he is embedded in. 'Context' consequently become the 'lens' through which the subject and State relationship is surveyed. Thus, it is the context the subject inhabits, and not the subject and his encounters and perceptions, which become the primary focus of this approach; it steps back from the subject's position as to gain a more expansive and detailed appreciation of his history and culture in order to better fashion this 'contextual lens'. In this way the 'contextual approach' takes the position of a 'removed' lens based approach.

This focus on better understanding of the ‘context’ is illustrated in many of the thinkers we have discussed. Horton and Windenknecht for instance argue ‘Associative Political Obligation’ is less concerned with how the subject gets into relationships than ‘the nature of these relationships themselves’ (Horton and Windenknecht, 2014:911). This is made further apparent when Horton and Windikenecht quote at length the feminist Nancy Hirschmann, whose approach they claim to share: ‘[This] orientation requires inquiry into the contextual conditions surrounding an obligation and obligated person as to understand the context of an obligation’ (Horton and Windiknecht, 2014:911). This focus is considerably illustrative of the ‘removed nature’ of the approach as a conscious decision is made to stand back from the subject’s perspective as to gain a greater appreciation of his context.

This ‘removed nature’ is further encapsulated in Roger Scruton’s depiction of the ‘conservative thinker’. In the *Meaning of Conservatism*, Scruton remarks that ‘conservatives resemble functionalist anthropologists, in their concern for the long-term effects of social customs and political institutions’ (Scruton, 2002:186). Thus again we find illustrated this idea that the ‘contextual approach’ stands back as to gain a wider and deeper appreciation of the context, its ‘long-term effects’, as opposed to exploring the particular encounters that subjects have within this context.

This committed focus on historical and cultural context can indeed cause problems and result in limitations in the ability of the ‘contextual approach’ to properly account for the subject and State relationship. It for instance can give the expectation that subjects’ behaviour and beliefs are normally orientated by the culture they happen to inhabit, and is furthermore not always very accommodating or understanding when they do not. To illustrate this let us return to the example of Taylor and Quebec. Taylor assumes that the political orientation of Francophile Quebecers will be shaped by this culture they inhabit, and does not give much consideration to those subjects who might feel otherwise. Commentators such as K. Anthony Appiah have consequently argued that Taylor’s arguments here ‘cross a line’. In particular Appiah argues that expecting one to orientate one’s life around one’s ‘culture’ is equivalent to expecting one to orientate one’s life around one’s ‘sexuality’ or ‘race’ (Appiah, 1994:163)⁵⁴.

Thus after identifying the importance of the historical and cultural context that Quebecer subjects inhabit, the ‘contextual approach’ then retreats from the subject’s perspective in order to gain a deeper and more expansive appreciation of this context, in order to use it as a ‘lens’ for surveying their relationships. The danger this poses is that it assumes that subjects’ political standpoints and

⁵⁴ This is indeed of particular concern when we consider Taylor also gives a nominative argument that ‘group rights’, taking the form of laws hindering the freedom of trade and determining which schools certain subjects can attend, should be established in order to preserve this culture (Taylor, 1994:52-3,61).

behaviours will be orientated by this history and culture. It also further marginalises subjects who are not chiefly orientated by this cultural context.

This also can make the ‘contextual approach’ overtly hostile and unappreciative to views which oppose the current historical situation. We may here consider the arguments of Hume. We may recall in ‘On the Original Contract’ Hume dismissed the notion of the ‘Social Contract’ as ‘absurd’ because it did not correspond to historical realities, and further claimed that anybody who expressed these views in public would be perceived as mad. The first limitation with this view is that it refuses to consider perspectives which differ or offer alternatives from conditions as they currently exist. This consequently would limit the horizons of political discussion and opportunities to question, challenge, or change the political status quo.

It also fails to understand any perspective which would seek to offer an alternative to political conditions as they historically exists, or indeed why subjects may be attracted to arguments that challenge current historical conditions. We have for instance observed how Hume dismissed ‘Social Contract’ arguments, such as Locke’s, as absurd on the basis that they are contrary to historical reality. He thus does not make any effort to actually consider the merits of Locke’s argument. Hume, furthermore, does not make a conscious attempt to try and understand why Locke’s arguments may be attractive to certain subjects. Indeed this is no small oversight considering that, despite Hume’s claims that one would be

perceived as mad for expressing such views, Locke's arguments have proved hugely influential and were embraced by a great many subjects. Why this was the case is something Hume's approach fails to consider or appreciate.

We might observe similar limitations in Burke's thought. As we saw, Burke believed historical traditions were vital in cultivating a positive relationship between subject and State. It is thus unsurprising that Burke did not comprehend why French subjects had chosen to reject these traditions in the Revolution. In *Letters to A Member of the National Assembly* for instance Burke expresses his bewilderment that the French people would abandon the traditions of their ancestors. He in particular declares himself perplexed as to why they would forsake these traditions for the arguments of a man such as Rousseau (Burke 1791:309-10). Indeed, Burke exhorts venomous criticism against Rousseau in particular; he dubs him the 'insane Socrates' of the National Assembly who he claims has bewitched the French public, not through thoughts and arguments, but by the example of his 'perverse lifestyle' (Burke, 1791:306-7). Thus, we find Burke unable to appreciate why subjects would chose to reject the traditions and historical culture of their polity and embrace an alternative understanding as is offered by thinkers like Rousseau. He also illustrates a particular unwillingness to understand the standpoint of these 'alternative' thinkers, instead dismissing them as 'insane' or 'perverse'.

It should however not be read here that I am arguing that the ‘contextual approach’ is denying the subject the possibility of free choice. On the contrary, I am taking issue with the particular way in which this approach uses ‘context’. I am arguing that this approach takes the ‘context’ as something which can be used as a tool to better understand the subject’s behaviour; it treats it as a background one can relate the subject’s action to, or a ‘lens’ through which it may be appreciated. In this way the ‘subjective approach’ uses context to examine these issues from a largely ‘removed’ or ‘objective’ standpoint.

This, I argue, is fundamentally different from how the proposed ‘subjective approach’ will tackle the issue. In particular I intend the ‘subjective approach’, not to use context as a ‘lens’, but to examine how the institutions and traditions that make up this ‘context’ appear to the subject at the existential level, and consequently how, and in what way, he may encounter them. The difference between my proposed approach and the ‘contextual approach’ is thus primarily of positionality: I do not stand from a removed position and use ‘context’ as a ‘lens’, but rather attempt to uncover how the contents of this context manifest before the subject in a manner in which he may encounter them. I wish to understand how such traditions and institutions appear before the subject; what message they present to him in such an encounter; and how such encounters shape his understanding of self and environment.

I may make this clear with one final example from MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

MacIntyre asks us to imagine a man digging a hole in his back garden. On this information alone what the man is doing is unintelligible, and he could indeed be interpreted to be partaking in a vast variety of activities: he could be 'gardening'; 'taking exercise'; 'pleasing his wife'; or indeed he may be 'preparing for the German invasion'. To truly understand his actions we must locate this behaviour within the social context he is acting in. If we, for instance, relate his behaviour to his marital history, we may understand that he wishes to keep his spouse happy, and that she has recently been dismayed by the condition that the garden has fallen into. Thus, when located in this context, we can understand how the man's actions are directed by his desire to please his wife. If we relate it against the history of his health we may uncover that the doctor has warned him about his weight, and advised him to take more exercise. Thus we may understand this task, not just to be 'pleasing his wife', but also to be 'taking exercise'. Indeed, if we similarly discovered that the subject had a history of psychotic breakdowns in which he believed he was living in 1942 his actions would also become intelligible as 'preparing for a German invasion'; his actions are made intelligible when related to the historical context of his poor mental health. What is however important here is that the subject's actions only become intelligible when related to context, or rather the context is used as a lens by which the man's actions become intelligible to we who are observing them (MacIntyre, 2007:206).

What is important to draw attention to here is how context is used. Context is used as a lens to make the actions clear to the external observer: the context of the subject's marital history makes clear to the observer how his actions can be understood to be 'pleasing his wife', or the context of his poor mental health makes clear how his actions may be understood as 'preparing for the Germans'. The 'contextual approach' is thus firmly taking the position of a removed observer trying to understand the actions of the subject it observes from a removed position. What it does not however consider is how these issues appear at the subject's level; it does not consider the encounters which made him aware of his situation and informed his choices.

The 'subjective approach', rather than taking the context as a whole and attempting to understand the subject through it, will instead seek to identify and understand the particular encounters which informed the subject of his situation and shaped his decisions, the encounter for instance with his wife or with his doctor. It would ask how these people appeared to the subject; what message they communicated to him and in what type of language; and would consider how these messages resonated with the subject's understanding of existence. It thus does not attempt to gain a deeper understanding of context through which one may examine the subject's relations, as does the 'contextual approach', but rather identifies and analyses the particular encounters which made the subject aware of his situation and informed his choices.

This I believe will help address some of the issues I raised with the contextual approach above. As I stated, I do not argue that the ‘contextual approach’ denies the subject freedom to act in a contrary fashion to what is expected in his particular context, rather I argue that it is not best placed to understand why a subject might make such a decision. This is because the approach seeks to understand the subject by gaining a deeper understanding of his context, and thus when the subject acts in a way contrary to this he falls outwith this paradigm of understanding. On the contrary, the ‘subjective approach’ will not seek to gain a deeper understanding of context as to form a ‘lens’, but rather it will seek to examine and dissect the encounters the subject had with the State within this context. In this way, if a subject acts contrary to how the traditions of the State sought to encourage, the ‘subjective approach’ will seek to examine what encounters may have led to this; what encounters with the State’s traditions may have offended the subject rather than cultivate a feeling of affection and obligation, and why this may have occurred. This approach will thus seek a more intricate understanding of how the subject and State relation is constructed and functions, as opposed to one that seeks to understand it by removed observation using a particular lens.

We might therefore understand the ‘subjective approach’ to primarily be a different *kind* of approach to the ‘contextual’: rather than using an objective and broad lens based approach, the ‘subjective approach’ seeks to examine particular encounters the subject may have with the State, and, by scrutinising the message

and image conveyed in these particular encounters, seeks to build a more detailed appreciation of how the subject relates to the State. It will seek to do so by focusing, not on getting a greater appreciation of the context as a whole, but on the particular encounters the subject has with the State within these contexts, and the effect these encounters have in informing and shaping the subject and State relationship. This is not to say that context is not important to my exploration, and indeed a consideration of context will be vital for understanding the subject's encounters. However, context will not be used as a 'lens'. Indeed, in contrast to a lens based approach, I have proposed my 'subjective approach' as more akin to a sharp instrument which explores the possibility of 'cutting into' the relationship to excavate and analyse its key components, most notably the 'encounter'. In light of this one may maintain that, despite a similar attention to the subject as embedded in context, the proposed 'subjective approach' does not wish to gain a better understanding of this context but rather will explore the encounters the subject has within this context and the perspective he gains of the State from these. In this way it can be said to be a different approach *in kind* to the 'contextual approach'.

Chapter Three: The Critical Approach

In this chapter I intend to illustrate what I shall term the ‘critical approach’ to understanding the relationship between subject and State. Nonetheless, in illustrating this approach and terming it critical, it will be observed that I will come across two difficulties. The first is in regards to the ambiguity of the title ‘critical’. The second is in regards to how distinctively different the approach offered is from the ‘contextual approach’ outlined in the previous chapter.

Firstly, let me turn to the difficulty in regards to title. It may be observed that the title ‘critical’ is rather ambiguous as it could involve a wide range of differing approaches and philosophies. It could for instance refer specifically to the ‘Critical Theory’ of the Frankfurt School, or it could refer more broadly to a wide range of theories that may be described of as ‘critical’ such as Marxism, Poststructuralism, and Feminism. This ambiguity is increased by the fact it is not instantly clear what I mean by ‘critical’; what is it that I am saying these approaches are critical of? And why?

The second difficulty pertains to the content of this argument. Many of the thinkers discussed in this chapter (predominantly Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels) focus on the contextual circumstances in which the subject and State relationship is embedded. As a consequence, we may find that the arguments offered by a

'critical approach' often share common ground with those offered by the 'contextual approach'. It therefore may not be immediately apparent what makes a 'critical approach' distinctive from a 'contextual approach'.

I would first argue that what is distinctive about the 'critical approach' is that it is critical of the traditions and cultural practices that constitute the subject's context.

In particular this approach argues that traditions and culture do not inform the subject about his relationship with the State; traditions and cultural practices on the contrary misled him and veil the true nature of this relationship.

Consequently, what I shall argue to be the first distinctive characteristic of the 'critical approach' is a critical view towards the traditions and culture which constitute the context the subject inhabits. In particular it believes such practices manipulate the subject and veil from him the true nature of his relationship with the State.

This leads to a second key argument which I will contend is illustrative of the 'critical approach'. This is that the true nature of the subject and State relationship is one of 'oppression'. It is in particular typically argued that the State is used as a mechanism to oppress and 'hold down' the majority of its subjects, usually in the interests of a dominant 'class' or 'caste'. This approach consequently assumes that, if a subject exists within the modern State, then he is in a condition of 'oppression'.

This notion of 'oppression' consequently become the 'lens' through which the 'critical approach' surveys the subject and State relationship.

One may thus contend that, by making an assumption about the subject's condition and using this as a lens to survey his relationship, the 'critical approach' becomes another instance of a 'removed approach'. As a consequence, it makes the same mistakes other 'removed vantage point' approaches are typically guilty of making; it overlooks the subject's actual experiences and perception. In particular I will argue that, by using this 'lens of oppression' to survey the subject and State relationship, the 'critical approach' obscures and dismisses many perspectives and behaviours that do not correspond with this understanding, subjects for instance who do not believe they are being 'oppressed' by the State. Such perspectives are typically dismissed by attributing to them the deprecatory label of 'false consciousness'⁵⁵. This notion of 'false consciousness' indeed discredits alternative understandings in the same manner as 'barbarism' and 'savagery' did in the 'rational approach'⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ The term 'false consciousness' can be understood to denote the historically embedded subject's inability to recognise the true nature of the institutions he inhabits and is a part of. Nonetheless it should be observed that this term has its controversies. As Terry Eagleton observes, although the term is associated with Marx, the phrase 'false consciousness' is never used by him. Rather the first articulation of the concept must be attributed to Marx's long-term collaborator Friedrich Engels. The idea of 'false consciousness' is also heavily related to the Marxist notion of ideology, that is ideology understood as a body of thought used to conceal the 'truth' of class society (Eagleton, 2007:88-9). It is beyond the remit of this thesis to explore the debates pertaining 'false consciousness', or to try and come to a proper definition of the concept. Good discussions are provided in both Eagleton's work *Ideology: An Introduction* (2007), and Michael Rosen's *On Voluntary Servitude* (1996). For my purposes I will use the term 'false consciousness' firstly when it is explicitly used by the author under discussion. Secondly I will use it generally as a means of encapsulating the central idea of the 'critical approach' that the subject has been misled by culture and tradition and is consequently unaware of the true nature of his relationship with the State.

⁵⁶ Interestingly Rosen has highlighted that the idea of 'false consciousness' predates the Marxist usage. In particular it had previously been associated with ideas such as 'rationalism', where the one with 'false consciousness' was the one perceived as 'irrational'. In particular Rosen demonstrates that in Ancient Greece 'false consciousness' was associated with the inability of the

The aim of this chapter is therefore to illustrate what I have termed the ‘critical approach’ and demonstrate its limitations in understanding the relationship between subject and State. In order to achieve this aim I will split this chapter into three sections. Section one will outline the first key characteristic argument of the ‘critical approach’: tradition and culture are used to mislead and manipulate the subject and veil the true nature of his relationship with the State. The second section will then illustrate the second key argument: the true nature of the subject and State relationship must be understood through the notion of ‘oppression’. Section three will then introduce my criticism of the ‘critical approach’ pertaining to its nature as a ‘removed approach’⁵⁷.

1. Criticism of Tradition and Culture

I begin by examining the arguments of Marx⁵⁸. In the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’, Marx argues that the subject is ‘no abstract being squatting

subject to live up to the standards of ‘rationality’ (1996:10). The origins of the idea of ‘false consciousness’ are beyond the remit of this thesis, however this is worth highlighting in that it furthers the similarity between the ‘rational’ and ‘critical’ approaches.

⁵⁷ Before beginning my illustration of the ‘critical approach’, I might again highlight that there are a wide range of diverse theories and philosophies to whom the term ‘critical’ may be justly attributed. Nonetheless the purpose here is not to give an extensive history of political thought. Consequently in what follows I will not analyse all the approaches which could be described as ‘critical’, but rather shall focus attention on those arguments that most clearly illustrate what I have outlined as the ‘critical approach’ above.

⁵⁸ This is of course not to say Marx was the ‘first’ to give a ‘critical account’ of political traditions and cultures. Thomas Paine had for instance argued in the Eighteenth Century that the traditions of the British State were designed to mask and maintain a system of domination and oppression that had been established by the Norman Conquest. Thus the State’s traditions he argued were

outside the world', and consequently we must always consider him embedded within a particular historical context (Marx, 1992:244). This argument initially sounds very similar to the arguments of the 'contextual approach' as discussed in Chapter Two. However, what I contend is different in Marx's approach is that this argument is not advanced in order to support those traditions and cultures that make up the subject's historical context, but rather as a basis to launch a criticism of them.

Marx's arguments in the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' must be understood as part of a critique of religion, indeed as a critique of 'German Philosophy's' preoccupation with religion. To elaborate, Marx acknowledged and agreed with the arguments of certain contemporary German philosophers, most notably the 'Young Hegelians', that 'man' makes religion and God⁵⁹. However this argument did not go far enough for Marx. This is primarily because it did not pay due attention to the fact that man does not construct religion from an abstract position, from a position 'squatting outside the world', but from a historical position 'within the world'. The influence and impact of the subject's historical and

designed to maintain 'the authority of the dead over the rights and freedoms of the living' (Paine, 1985:42). During the English Civil War we may also observe similar arguments being articulated. 'A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens', a text which appeared in London bookshops in 1646, for instance maintained that the English Monarchy had been established through the Norman Conquest, and that ideas such as 'kingship' had been designed to 'charm' subjects into obedience to this oppressive regime (2007:3). Nonetheless my intention here is not to provide an exercise in intellectual history, but rather to provide an illustration of certain approaches. I have thus chosen to begin with Marx, not because I believe him to be the first to give what can be interpreted as a 'critical approach', but because he gives one of the clearest illustrations of such an approach.

⁵⁹ That Marx's criticism of 'German philosophy' was aimed predominantly at the 'Young Hegelians' is made explicitly clear in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 2007:35).

material conditions had on his religious beliefs, and indeed his thoughts and ideas generally, had consequently not been properly examined. To continue the critique of religion, Marx argued, one must consequently examine the historical and social context which caused ‘man’ to produce it (Marx, 1992:243-4).

Following this line of investigation, Marx proposed that religion is only an illusion used to veil and ease the suffering caused by the material and economic conditions that the subject inhabits, in particular the capitalist means of production. Religion was thus the ‘opium of the people’; the release subjects sought from the miseries of their historical and economic situation (Marx, 1992:244). Thus, Marx insisted that one should not criticise the idea of religion but rather attack the material conditions that forced subjects to alleviate their pain by inventing this imaginary future bliss; in order to ‘abolish religion’ one has to abolish the ‘condition that requires illusions’ (Marx, 1992:244). As a result, the criticism of religion gave way to a larger criticism of the political, social, and economic conditions of society; ‘the criticism of heaven turns into a criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*’ (Marx, 1992:245)⁶⁰. We may thus interpret Marx’s focus on the context as a prerequisite for a critique of existing historical and material conditions.

What we can also however see displayed clearly in this argument is the belief that institutions, such as religion, are used as a means to alleviate and veil the real

⁶⁰ Emphasis in original.

structural problems inherent in the context that the subject inhabits. Consequently behind this ‘veil’ lies the true means of oppression and exploitation which Marx wishes to expose and put to criticism. This illustrates the first key argument of the ‘critical approach’ that traditions and cultural practices veil the true nature of the subject’s relations.

This line of argument is further illustrated in *The German Ideology*, which Marx wrote in collaboration with Engels. Here again it is stressed that we must understand the subject as embedded within a historical context. In particular, Marx and Engels argue that the relations and ideas of subjects originate out of the historical and material conditions which they inhabit; ‘Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life’ (Marx and Engels, 2007:47).

Nonetheless, once more Marx and Engels not only establish the importance of context but also stress that this context misguides subjects in regards to the truth about their situation; once more the focus on historical context leads to a critique of historical context. This is most clearly illustrated in the chapter ‘Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas’. Here Marx and Engels stress that the ideas and understanding of the community are determined by the ideas of the class who hold power; ‘the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time the ruling *intellectual force*’ (Marx, 2007:64)⁶¹.

⁶¹ Emphasis in original.

To elucidate, Marx and Engels understood that this class who had control over the material means of production would also have control over the mental means of production. This ‘dominant class’ could enforce their ideas and values on those who lacked the means of producing their own ideas, namely the ‘subservient class’. As a consequence one finds that the value system of the ‘dominant class’ is the one that pertains to the ‘epoch’ they control. Thus, during the ascendency of feudal aristocracy, ideas such as ‘loyalty’ and ‘honour’ were those which characterised relations, and during the dominance of the ‘bourgeoisie capitalist’ it was those of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ (Marx and Engels, 2007:65).

What is important to recognise is that the effect of this ‘hegemony’ of ideas is to make the lower class conform to the rules of the class which is in control. To explain, as the lower class are led to believe that they share the same values as their masters they do not recognise the distinction between their existence and their ‘masters’. Consequently, they view the rulers of the polity, not as the representatives of just the ruling class, but the representatives of them all. This further means that they do not recognise that the order the ruling class establishes is a means of maintaining class oppression, but rather are fooled into believing this order is in the interest of all. Thus, the overall effect of this is to create a hegemony of values which blurs the awareness of class distinctions and veils the fact that political institutions are established to serve the interests of a ruling elite (Marx and Engels, Marx, 2007:60-8).

Thus, despite its claims to be in the universal interests of all, Marx and Engels argue that the State's function is to serve and maintain the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. As they emphatically state in the *Communist Manifesto*; 'The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels, 2002:221).

Marx and Engels thus maintain that traditions and values inherent in the world originate in the interests of the ruling class. As a consequence, the nature of institutions of the State are distorted, and instead the subject is led to believe that such institutions uphold and maintain his interests and values. We may observe this as illustrative of the 'critical approach' as it argues that the tradition and culture that the subject inhabits mislead and deceive him in regards to the true nature of his relationship with the State⁶².

⁶² It should be noted that Marx often considers the idea of the 'individual subject' who is 'free' and has the capacity of choice is an illusion. Instead Marx argues that the reality of the subject is rather expressed in his class. In the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels explain that, although one in a bourgeoisie society may consider himself to be a free individual, in reality his behaviour and actions are predetermined by the 'class' he was assigned to at birth (Marx and Engels, 2007:82). The State, being the political manifestation of bourgeoisie superiority, thus upholds this illusion through its institutions. This predetermining of subjects by class can only be addressed when the current system is overthrown and replaced with an order in which there are no class antagonisms, such as in the post-bourgeoisie society where private property has been abolished and the means of production are shared by all. This is why Marx insists that subjects should not resist the State and seek freedoms as 'individuals' or through pursuits of 'individual rights', which are again perceived as a bourgeoisie illusion, but as a 'group' or 'class' (Marx and Engels, 2007:83). This interpretation must also be understood against Marx's understanding of 'alienation' as advanced in the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts'. Here Marx argues that 'man' is alienated from 'man' and from his 'species being'. To elucidate, Marx claims that what separates man from other animals is that he will continue to produce beyond the compulsion of physical need. As a result man is able to refashion nature and recognise himself objectively in his creation. It is as such a producer that man may realise his 'species-being' and such work is considered 'species life' (Marx, 1992:329). However, in the current economic system nearly all of man's work is taken up in providing for his subsistence and is not employed in this creative activity. As a consequence he does not live a 'human life', that is according to his 'species being',

It should also be drawn to attention here that Marx and Engels' belief that tradition and culture mislead the subject lead them to the normative claim that the aim of critique should be to overthrow these illusions and reveal the true nature of the subject's relationships. In the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' Marx insists the purpose of his critique is to cast off the subject's illusions and reveal to him the true nature of his existence (Marx, 1992:244). Similarly, Marx and Engels, in the 'Preface' to *The German Ideology*, make clear the text's intentions of 'debunking myths'. More precisely, they intend to reveal that the ideas of their age are not 'universal' but are rather a product of the German middle class (Marx and Engels, 2007:37). Thus, as an accompaniment to this argument that contextual circumstances mislead the subject in regards to his true relations,

but rather an animal life of mere survival. He is consequently alienated from his 'species being' (Marx, 1992:329). Furthermore as a consequence of this the subject does not observe other men as in accordance to the 'species being' either. On the contrary, being trapped in the current economic system, the subject will recognise the 'other' as is determined by the economic situation. Consequently the 'worker' will see the other as a 'capitalist'. Thus Marx asserts that man is also alienated 'from man' as when seeing another person he does not recognise him as a 'human' who shares his 'universal species being' but as an antagonist set against him. The only way to overcome this antagonism and alienation is to abolish the system that propagates it, namely private property and the State (Marx, 1992:330-2). What is clear here is that for Marx the idea of a 'free individual' within the contemporary State is an illusion. One can only be free with the abolishment of the capitalist system and the reconciliation with of man with his 'species being'. This further illustrates both characteristics of the 'critical approach'. Firstly that present culture is an illusion that masks the true nature of the subject and State relationship in his criticism of the bourgeoisie ideas of 'individual freedom'. Second that the true nature of the State is to oppress the subject, as it manifests from the alienation caused by the present economic system. Finally it also reveals the limitations of the Marxist approach as a 'removed approach'. This is as a result of the fact Marx approaches the problem from what he understands as the 'universal species being of man'. His inquiries are consequently directed by this assumption of what is essential to man, dismissing forms of behaviour which do not correspond to this model as 'alienation'.

so comes the normative instance that such illusions need to be criticised and exposed. I will return to this normative idea in section two.

Subsequent forms of ‘Marxism’ similarly draw attention to how tradition and culture mislead and manipulate the subject. This is evident in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Scholars such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer demonstrated how mass culture, or ‘the culture industry’, could be used by governments to control their subjects (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997:165). Indeed, Adorno’s study on Fascist propaganda and Freudian Psychoanalysis draws specific attention to how the Nazi regime used mass culture to suppress subjects and turn them into an ‘irrational mass’, a conversion which made governing them more straightforward (Adorno, 2001:135).

In *One Dimensional Man* Herbert Marcuse similarly discusses how the Nazi State veiled its true purpose to its subjects. In particular, he highlights how the highly rational and efficient technical apparatus of the Nazi State made its actions appear rational and justified, thus concealing the repugnant and irrational philosophy it truly served; the rationality of the system ‘served to make individuals incapable of seeing “behind” the machinery those who used it, those who profited from it, and those who bought it’ (Marcuse, 2002:194). However, Marcuse argues it is not just the subjects of the Nazi State who are deceived in such a manner but also the subjects of the industrial capitalist State. In particular, he argues that the capitalist system creates ‘false needs’ which deceive subjects into believing they need the

system and must obey its institutions. In *One Dimensional Man* Marcuse cites numerous examples of such dependency on ‘false needs’, such as the ‘typist’ who requires make up to feel as beautiful as her boss’s daughter and the man who feels he can ‘find his soul’ in an automobile, but nonetheless the purpose of these ‘false needs’ is always to veil the true nature of capitalist society and trick subjects into dependency and feelings of obligation towards capitalist society (Marcuse, 2002:10-11).

Similarly, when conceptualising the relationship between subject and State, Antonio Gramsci claimed the State educated the subject to a point where he could be put to productive use in order to benefit the hegemonic class (Gramsci, 1971:258). Gramsci, in particular, built upon the notion that the Bourgeoisie State maintains its power by creating hegemony of values. As Richard Bellamy and Darrow Schecter explain, Gramsci argued that the modern State diffused its values through institutions ranging from local government and schools to mass media and trade unions. This ‘diffusion of values’ had the effect of socialising subjects into obedience to the State (Bellamy and Schecter, 1993:129-30).

Common to all these arguments can be seen the view that contextual practices are used to manipulate the subject into obedience towards the State, thus illustrating the core argument that tradition and culture are used to veil the relationship between subject and State whilst manipulating the former into obedience to the latter.

We may see the argument that tradition and culture manipulate, or ‘condition’, the subject towards obedience illustrated also by Friedrich Nietzsche. Like Marx and Engels, Nietzsche also stressed that we should not take the values we currently have as ‘given’, and rather argues they veil the true nature of our relations. A ‘critique’ of these values is the particular task Nietzsche sets himself in the *Genealogy of Morality*.

In the ‘Second Essay’ of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche argues that ‘culture’ has been used to shape the subject into an ‘individual’ suitable for life in society. ‘Man’ had to be transformed from an impulsive ‘wild animal’ into something more predictable and easily manged. This, Nietzsche assures us, was achieved through the use of ‘custom’. Traditional and cultural practices were used to mould the subject by establishing in him the habits and behaviour that would render him suitable for life in society. This was not achieved without cruelty. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche gives graphic depictions of methods of punishments and enforcement which were used to breed a docile creature which could be easily managed (Nietzsche, 2007:35-7).

The most important features culture ‘bred’ into the subject was, firstly, an ability to keep promises, and secondly an idea of debt. The ability to keep promises was conditioned through severe tortures and punishments which used fear to teach the subject the consequence of breaking them (Nietzsche, 2007:36-7). This, secondly, installed in the subject the idea of the ‘creditor and debtor’ relationship,

for knowing that he ‘promised’ something to the other the subject is aware he is in his debt. Acts of torture used to ‘punish’ the subject when he fails to fulfil his debts further cultivate in him the belief that to not give what is owed is wrong. This breeds a sense of ‘guilt’ into the subject along with the notion of debt (Nietzsche, 2007:39-40).

This is particularly important when it comes to the relationship between the subject and the State. Nietzsche argues that the subject is taught to believe that he owes the community for the sheltered and peaceful life he enjoys. Consequently, the subject also feels a debt to the community and supposes himself obliged to obey it (Nietzsche, 2007:46-7). The main orchestrator and beneficiary of this ‘breeding’ process was none other than the State. Thus, we may understand that the subject is led to believe he ‘owes’ the State for his security and protection, and subsequently the notions of guilt and fear of punishment ensure that the subject remains obedient to the State as to fulfil this debt.

We can thus see that Nietzsche held that the State used culture and tradition to mould its subjects into obedience. Thus, Nietzsche subsequently contends that any feeling of obligation the subject may feel toward the State is an illusion cultivated through this sense of debt and guilt. This illustrates the first key argument of the ‘critical approach’ that traditions and culture cultivate in the subject a false perception of his relationship to the State.

Nietzsche's account of how culture 'shaped' the subject into obedience is both graphic and cryptic. It is also a deal more 'imaginative' and 'abstract' than the historical analysis of Marx and Engels. Nonetheless, it still illustrates this characteristic argument of the 'critical approach': tradition and culture are used to manipulate the subject in order to make him obedient to the State. As Nietzsche claims: custom is the subject's 'social straightjacket' (Nietzsche, 2007:36).

A more historically focused account of how obligation is 'bred' into the subject may be found in the works of Poststructuralist thinkers⁶³. Michel Foucault, for instance, has explored the history of State institutions, and in particular the effect these institutions have in cultivating subjects in political obedience. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault focused his attention on the evolution of the prison and

⁶³ It is worth here outlining the self-conscious distancing of themselves from Marxism that Poststructuralists often make. Gilles Deleuze has claimed that poststructuralism differs from Marxism in that it does not look for one area of contestation with dominant structures, such as 'class', but rather highlights the 'innumerable' points of contestation in such power-relations' (Deleuze, 1988:22-3). Michel Foucault similarly distances himself from Marxism. Foucault critiques the central Marxist assumption that all forms of domination have at their basis an economic explanation, thus denouncing the notion of a 'superstructure' which can explain all political relations (Foucault, 2004:14). This criticism is also linked to Foucault's larger criticism of 'science'. 'Science' Foucault understands as a particular power practice in the West which empowers certain discourses and those who speak them, and subsequently excludes those which fall outside the 'scientific paradigm'. Thus when criticising Marxism for trying to be 'scientific', Foucault is accusing Marxism for attempting to assert one interpretation of political relationships is correct, 'to put it on the throne', and exclude and devalue all forms of knowledge and discourse which fall outside its paradigm (Foucault, 2004:10). Consequently we observe Foucault criticising Marxism for constructing one 'meta-theory' about political relationships, and its subsequent subjugation and exclusion of other understandings. Thus Foucault sees the task of much of his work to 'reactivate local knowledge' against the 'scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge' (Foucault, 2004:10). Specifically in regards to political relationships Foucault attempts to examine the 'multiple subjugations that take place and function within the social body' (Foucault, 2004:27). We may observe here Foucault highlighting the same key difference between his approach and Marxism that Deleuze identifies; whilst the former focuses on one form of subjugation, the latter seeks to identify and examine multiple.

discussed how its disciplinary techniques fashion subjects into an ‘automatic docility’ and make them more suitable for political control (Foucault, 1977:169)⁶⁴.

To summarise: the first key argument of what I have denoted the ‘critical approach’: it is contended that subjects are misled in regard to their relationship with the State by the culture and traditions of the context which they inhabit.

Examples of this include fooling the subject into thinking that the ruling class serves the interests of all and not just themselves, the creation of ‘false needs’, and techniques of domination which cultivate and mould the subject into political obedience.

I have also highlighted in this approach a normative argument that, given that the relationship the subject believes he has to the State is a delusion, philosophical critique ought to concern itself with removing this illusion. This critique consequently leads me to the second key argument of the ‘critical approach’: what is perceived as the ‘true nature’ of the subject and State relationship.

⁶⁴ Across Foucault’s thought he offers many examples in which the culture and institutions the subject inhabits fashion him towards a certain way of being. It is not however necessary to describe each of these in detail as what I am rather attempting to provide is ‘snapshots’ of these arguments as aid me in illustrating the ‘critical approach’.

2. ‘Oppression’ as the True relationship between Subject and State

To illustrate this second key argument I again turn to Marx and Engels. As we saw in section one, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels claimed that the State was tasked with managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie (Marx and Engels, 2002:221). We may infer from this that the State is predominantly a tool used to maintain the hegemon of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the true nature between the subject and State, or at least of the proletariat subject, was that of oppression; the State serves to oppress and ‘hold down’ the subject in order to maintain the hegemony of the dominant ‘class’. Thus, it follows that if the subject exists within a ‘State’ it can be assumed he exists in a condition of ‘oppression’; it is this notion of ‘oppression’ which consequently must constitute the lens through which we must consider his relations.

This can be further illustrated when we consider Engels’ investigation into the origins of the State in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*. Engels argues that the State has its historical origins in antagonisms that arise between two classes. He maintains that the State was initially intended to keep such antagonisms in check. Nonetheless, except in certain ‘special circumstances’, the State more often than not falls under the control of the

most dominant class (Engels, 2010:210)⁶⁵. As a consequence it serves to hold

down and exploit the oppressed class. Thus Engels asserts, in history;

'The ancient State was, above all, the state of the slave owners for holding

down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for

holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern

representative state is an instrument for exploiting wage labour by capital'

(Engels, 2010:210).

Thus what we may see illustrated here is the belief that the 'true' nature of the

relationship between subject, or at 'least the proletariat subject', and State is

one in which the latter holds down and exploits the former in the interest of a

dominant class. Thus, understanding of the relationship between subject and

State is centred upon an understanding of the State as a mechanism of

oppression.

This understanding of the State as a mechanism of class oppression is also

notable in the writings of later 'Marxist' revolutionaries. Vladimir Lenin, in *The*

State and Revolution, describes the State as 'a special machine for suppression'.

This also leads Lenin to insist that, if man is to be emancipated, then a violent

revolution is required to 'smash', 'break' and 'shatter' the 'machine' (Lenin,

⁶⁵ Engels asserts that these 'special circumstances' arise when the strength between the two classes is so equal that the State gains an independent existence as mediator between the two. Such historical instances he cites as examples of this are the French Absolute Monarchy in the Seventeenth Century, the 'Bonapartism' of the First and Second French Empire, and the German Empire under the governance of Otto Von Bismarck (Engels, 2010:210).

1992:81, 96). Thus, we may observe the argument that the State is a mechanism for class oppression leading to an argument that the State must be destroyed if oppression is to be ended.

I should also draw attention to other arguments which, although they do not maintain the economic class analysis of Marx and Engels, nonetheless still claim that the subject and State relationship is characterised by oppression.

We may recall for instance in section one I highlighted Nietzsche's argument that the State used culture to condition the subject for obedience. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche proceeds to state that, although he uses the word 'State', it is obvious he in fact means 'some pack of blond beasts of prey; a conqueror and master race' (Nietzsche, 2007:58). Nietzsche goes on to claim that these 'beasts' were able to subject the people to their rule and then mould them into obedience. 'States' thus originate from conquest and the creation of a 'structure of domination' to maintain the conquering caste's rule (Nietzsche, 2007:58-9). Again, this argument illustrates the assumption that the relationship between subject and State is primarily one of oppression. Consequently, it is again assumed that if a State exists then a class of subjects must be under the conditions of oppression, and it is consequently through this lens of oppression that we must consider subjects' relationships⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ In my illustration here I have focused predominantly on oppression as takes the form of 'class'. However it should be observed that 'class' is far from the only form that 'oppression' has been identified in. Increasingly there has been a focus on 'gender oppression'. In her seminal work in feminist theory Simone de Beauvoir for instance drew attention to the relation of oppression

3. Summary and Limitations of the ‘Critical Approach’

I shall now summarise my account of the ‘critical approach’. The first key argument of this approach is that the traditions and cultural practices which constitute the subject’s context misdirect him and veil the true nature of his relationship with the State. Furthermore, such practices not only mislead him, but in fact actively manipulate him and ‘shape’ him for political obedience. Perceiving such misdirection and manipulation in political practices and institutions, the ‘critical approach’ consequently insists that these illusions must be lifted so that the ‘true’ nature of the subject and State relationship is revealed.

This leads to the second key argument of the ‘critical approach’: the true nature of the relationship between subject and State is one of ‘oppression’. It is argued that the State attempts to repress and ‘hold down’ the subject, typically in order to maintain the dominance of one ‘political elite’ or ‘class’. Thus, it is assumed that if a State exists then subjects must be in a condition of

between ‘man’ and ‘women’ (Beauvoir, 2009:9). Out of such thought has come the argument that institutions such as the State do not just oppress a certain class but also a certain gender. Ann Tickner has for instance highlighted how feminist scholars maintain that States ‘promote and support policy practices primarily in the interest of men’ (Tickner, 2001:21). Nonetheless it will be recalled that the purpose of this chapter is to give an illustration of the ‘critical approach’, and not to give all-encompassing comprehensive survey or history of such an approach. I therefore chose to focus on the cases where oppression by ‘class’ was featured most predominantly purely because I found it most illustrative of this approach.

oppression, and subsequently it is this understanding of oppression that must be used as a lens to survey the subject and State relationship.

The use of this lens nonetheless results in the ‘critical approach’ adopting a ‘removed vantage point’. In particular, the approach comes to the question of the subject’s relationship with the State from its assumption that the State ‘oppresses the subject’. It consequently sets itself the task of ‘unmasking’ this system of oppression. Thus this approach does not focus primarily on the subject, but rather attempts to demonstrate the ‘truths’ of his situation which transcend him. Consequently, this approach must step back from the perspective of the subject where tradition and culture are taken as they appear, and consequently their ‘underlying truths’ are hidden, and instead take a ‘removed vantage point’ from which these ‘underlying truths’ may be observed and identified. This is perhaps best illustrated by Marx and his attempts to explain the relationship between subject and State using economic metatheory and historical materialism⁶⁷.

This ‘removed perspective’ in Marx’s thought is particularly evident in ‘On the Jewish Question’, where Marx turns his attention towards the particular political issue of Jewish Emancipation. As we saw earlier, religious belief for

⁶⁷ Nonetheless we may observe even approaches such as Foucault’s, which claim to examine ‘localised power’ and study power at its ‘external face’, nonetheless still focus not on the subject but on the ‘techniques and tactics’ of domination. It is consequently a removed historical perspective, one from which he may observe the different forms of subjugation: how they function, and the connections between them, that Foucault takes (Foucault, 2004:34).

Marx was a result of the material conditions which the subject inhabited. Consequently, solving such issues for Marx became a matter of exploring the material and historical conditions of oppression and seeking means to emancipate the subject from them. Marx therefore argues that the answer to this question cannot be found by giving the Jewish population certain rights. On the contrary, as political relationships and religious beliefs are a consequence of the oppression inherent in the capitalist economic system, one must look to emancipate all mankind from this system as a whole. Once such emancipation is achieved these other forms of oppression will subsequently disappear. Thus, Marx argues, using the term 'Judaism' as a symbol for capitalism as a whole: 'Jews should not seek emancipation, but the world must seek emancipation from Judaism' (Marx, 1992:241).

What is clear here is that Marx never attempts to understand what it means for the subject to 'be a Jew'; he never considers the experiences that led to the subject's faith, nor how the subject understands this faith himself and how it informs his relations with others. On the contrary, Marx asserts that the subject's religion is the consequence of a meta-economic structure and insists that this problem can only be elevated by addressing this superstructure. Thus Marx can be said to view the problem from a 'removed vantage' point where the subject's relationships are explained through superstructures. He does not take into consideration the subject's experiences or consider his perspective.

Consequently, whatever the subject himself may understand or feel about his faith, Marx holds that the ‘truth’ behind it is always oppression⁶⁸.

The consequence of this ‘removed approach’ is that the subject’s actual encounters, and the perspective he gains from these, are overlooked as the ‘critical approach’ attempts to explore and ‘unmask’ the forms of oppression which it contends constitutes the ‘truth’ of this relationship. In this way it has similar limitations to the ‘rational approach’; as it bases its approach on a prior assumption made about the subject the ‘critical approach’ overlooks the actual experiences and perception of subjects who inhabit the State.

The comparisons between the ‘rational’ and ‘critical’ approaches do not however end with the making of prior assumptions. It will be recalled in Chapter One I contended that when a subject’s perspective or behaviour did not correspond with the ‘rational approach’s’ assumption of the subject as rational it was dismissed as ‘ignorant’, and often had depreciatory labels attached to it such as ‘barbarism’ or ‘savagery’. In the same way, when the

⁶⁸ There of course other examples of such thinking. We might for instance observe Gramsci, especially in his ‘pre-prison’ writings, accounts for such behaviour as paying football and taking cocaine as particular by-products of the capitalist economic system. He for instance argues that popularity of cocaine is a result of the capitalist system creating ‘people’ who have no worries or scruples (Gramsci, 1994:72). Football he argues is also a product of ‘capitalist individualism’ which seeks to accompany its ‘economic and political freedom’ with a sense of ‘freedom of spirit’ and ‘tolerance of the opposition’ (Gramsci, 1994:74). This is in contrast the Italian card game *Scopone*, whose opaque rules often result in confusion and violence, which originates in countries which are economically, politically and spiritually ‘backward’ (Gramsci, 1994:73-4). What we can observe here is that Gramsci seeks to explain such behaviour by relating it to underlying economic and political orders that lie beyond the subject’s consciousness. Thus the subject’s encounters and experiences with say drug addiction or sport are overlooked as explanation for them is sought in greater forces which subjects are themselves unaware of.

subject does not behave or perceive himself as ‘oppressed’, the ‘critical approach’ claims this is because he has been deceived by the culture and institutions which veil the true nature of the State. Subsequently those who do not share the ‘critical approach’s’ central assumption that the subject is being oppressed are said to be suffering from a ‘false consciousness’.

Thus, for Marx, the person who believes in the possibility of Jewish emancipation within the State is ignorant to the ‘truth’ of the problem. The subject who does not believe that his ‘social superiors’ oppress him is similarly deluded. We may for instance observe Marx lamenting at the deluded nature of British subjects who cannot recognise that ‘aristocrats’ such as the Duchess of Sutherland oppress and abuse their tenants in exactly the same way as the American slave owner oppresses his slaves (Marx, 2007:119)⁶⁹. We have also observed how, for Marcuse, behaviour ranging from Nazism to the desire for cars and make-up was perceived as a ‘false consciousness’ cultivated in order to ensure the dependency of the subject on society. We might similarly observe Nietzsche dismissing political obligation towards the State as ‘idol worship’ and a symptom of ‘herd-mentality’ (Nietzsche 2003:75-7)⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Marx is commenting on what he believed was the hypocrisy of the ‘Stafford house assembly of Ladies’ commentating on the issue of slavery in the Southern States of America. Marx finds this hypocritical as the president of the assembly was the Duchess of Sutherland who he claims made her fortune from exploiting her Scottish tenants before forcefully evicting them from her land. Such exploitation is the same for Marx as the direct exploitation of the slave owner. However the traditions and culture of Britain veil this fact (Marx, 2007).

⁷⁰ Another particularly interesting illustration of this comes from the philosophical anarchist A.J. Simmons. Simmons in particular contends that the feeling of belonging we have for one’s country of birth can be understood as a form of ‘false consciousness’ (Simmons, 1996:264).

Thus I contend that the limitations of the ‘critical approach’ stem from its assumption that the subject who exists within a State must be oppressed, and that we must use ‘oppression’ as the lens through which to survey his relationship with the State. The actual experiences and perspective of the subject are subsequently overlooked as primacy is given to understanding and unveiling systems of oppression. Furthermore, those subjects who do not believe themselves to be oppressed are dismissed on the basis that they have been deceived; beliefs that do not share the ‘critical approach’s’ central assumption that a subject existing within a State is oppressed are explained away as instances of ‘false consciousness’.

Part II

Chapter Four: Interpreting Kierkegaard - Encounters and Choice

I have now completed my survey of the three predominate approaches to the question of the subject and State relationship and highlighted their limitations. I will now proceed in part two of this thesis to explore the proposed ‘subjective approach’.

Nonetheless, before I proceed I will need to summarise what I argued in Part One as to identify what, in particular, I will need to investigate in Part Two in order to explore the ‘subjective approach’.

I argued that the limitations of the three approaches discussed arose from their nature as ‘removed approaches’. A removed approach I denoted as an approach which steps back from the subject’s experiences and perception in order to gain a perspective from which it might survey the subject and State through its preferred lens.

The approach that was perhaps most illustrative of a ‘removed approach’ was the ‘rational approach’. I contended that this approach considered the question of the subject and State relationship, not from how it was formulated ‘within the world’,

but on the basis of a priori conception of reason. As a consequence, it was not the subject who actually inhabited and experienced the State who was given priority of focus, but rather this assumed ‘rational being’. One of the further troubling limitations which resulted from this was the ‘rational approach’s’ failure to conceptualise behaviour and orientations which fell outwith the lens of ‘rationality’. Such orientations and positions were consequently marginalised and dismissed as ‘unintelligible’ and ‘ignorant’, and depreciative term such as ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarianism’ were used to describe them.

The second approach I illustrated was the ‘contextual approach’. In Chapter Two I argued that the ‘contextual approach’ did share some common ground with the ‘subjective approach’ I intend to explore. This common ground was the focus on particular subjects as they relate to particular States within a particular context. However, beyond this point my aspirations for the ‘subjective approach’ diverge with the ‘contextual’. This is because, having identified the subject as one who exists within a particular context, the ‘contextual approach’ then proceeds to try and use this context as a lens to explain the subject’s relationship. It subsequently steps back from the subject and his particular experiences as to gain a more expansive and in depth understanding of the context from which it may develop its ‘contextual lens’. As a consequence of this, the subject, his encounters, and the perception he gains from these encounters, is overlooked. Thus my proposed ‘subjective approach’ must here part ways from the ‘contextual’ as I do not wish to step back from the subject to gain a better perspective on his historical context,

but rather move in towards the subject as to explore the particular encounters he has with the State, and to further explore how these encounters shape and inform their relationship.

The third approach I examined was the ‘critical approach’. I contended that, like the ‘rational approach’, the ‘critical approach’s’ limitation derived from the priori assumption it carried forth into its examination of the subject and State relationship. In particular it maintained that culture and traditions were used as veils to deceive the subject as to the ‘true nature’ of his relationship with the State. The ‘true nature’ of this relationship was contended to be one of oppression; it was maintained that the State was primarily a mechanism used to oppress subjects and maintain the hegemony of a dominant ‘class’ or ‘caste’. Consequently, it was assumed that if the subject inhabits a State he exists in a condition of ‘oppression’, and thus this notion of ‘oppression’ became the lens through which the subject and State relationship was surveyed. The consequential limitations of this approach were firstly that the subject’s experiences and perceptions were overlooked as this approach focused on the mechanisms of oppression. Secondly, perspectives that did not correlate with this assumption of ‘oppression’, that is subjects who did not believe they were oppressed, were dismissed as ‘false consciousness’.

To summarise: my investigation of these three approaches I may say that, although each is unique and brings something different to the investigation, a

central limitation of each approach lies in the fact that they take a 'removed approach' to understanding the subject and State relationship. They make certain assumptions about the subject and the State: that the subject is rational; can be understood to act according to the context he exists in; or is oppressed by the State, and from this construct a lens with which to examine the relationship between the two. The first problem inherent in such an approach is that it overlooks the subject's actual experiences and perception as attention is concentrated on developing and using the preferred lens. The second problem is that, whilst these lenses may bring into focus certain aspects of the relationship, they fail to recognise others. Subject orientations or behaviour which consequently fall outwith this lens are dismissed through the attribution of labels such as 'barbarism' or 'false consciousness'.

It follows from this that a recommendation in devising an alternate approach to the subject and State relationship would be to avoid making a priori assumptions about the subject, State, or the relationship between the two. However, a criticism could be levied against such a suggestion that, if one was to make no assumptions at all about the nature of the subject, one would have a very intangible and ambiguous notion of the issue one was exploring. If for instance one proceeded to argue that one cannot assume that the subject is rational, informed by his cultural context, nor 'oppressed', what can one assume about the subject? Such a lens which made no assumptions might not exclude any orientations or forms of behaviour, but nevertheless would shed very little light on the relationship.

This is however to mistake my intention in exploring a ‘subjective approach’. I do not intend for instance to explore a ‘subjective approach’ with the hope of introducing a ‘fourth lens’. On the contrary with the ‘subjective approach’ I want to explore a different method with which one may investigate the subject and State relationship; an approach which does not focus on the selection of lenses. Instead, what I want to explore with the ‘subjective approach’ is a particular moment shared between the subject and State. I want to explore what this moment entails and how the relationship between subject and State is effected by this moment. This particular moment I wish to explore is the moment of ‘the encounter’: the moment in time in which the subject encounters the State that he inhabits.

This is what I mean by the desire to ‘step into’ the relationship, for I do not literally mean to ‘step into’ a particular existing subject’s perspective as such a feat is physically impossible. Rather, I wish to isolate and examine this moment of the encounter. I wish to ‘step in’ in the sense that I want to explore how the State manifests itself existentially in a manner which the subject may encounter it. I wish to ask ‘what does the State convey to the subject in this encounter?’ I want to further explore how the subject receives this message, how does he respond, and ultimately how does the relationship between himself and the State grow out of this encounter.

Indeed, rather than a ‘broad lens’ through which one may stand back and observe this relationship, one might imagine the ‘subjective approach’ as a sharp and delicate instrument, like a surgeon’s knife, with which one may cut into this relationship and excavate this key moment of the encounter. By then investigating the nature of this ‘encounter’, I subsequently hope to open up the exploration of an alternate way of understanding the subject and State relationship.

Exploring the possibility of ‘subjective approach’ is thus the intention of Part Two of this thesis. Chapter Four will begin by providing an interpretation of the key concepts which will be used in this exploration from the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Chapter Five will then provide a reinterpretation of these concepts so as to render them more suitable for the more ‘political’ nature of my investigation. Chapter Six will finally build upon this reinterpretation to begin an exploration of the subject’s encounters with the State.

I will thus in this chapter begin gathering and investigating the concepts which will guide me through the exploration of a ‘subjective approach’. In the introduction I explained that my understanding of ‘subjective’ was inspired by the thought of Kierkegaard. It will consequently be to Kierkegaard’s though that I shall turn to gather my materials. I will in particular seek to render an interpretation of his ‘encounter’, as it is the particular moment the subject ‘encounters’ the State which will be at the centre of my exploration of the ‘subjective approach’. I will

however not only need to consider the ‘encounter’ but also the effects this encounter has on the subject. I will also need to consider Kierkegaard’s conceptualisation of the ‘self’. Thus, it is to gain an interpretation of these concepts from Kierkegaard which will be the main focus of this chapter.

This chapter will be split into five sections. Section one will begin with a short intellectual biography of Kierkegaard, as to introduce the figure and provide some background.

Section Two will then examine Kierkegaard’s criticisms of the theory of recollection. The reason for this is that the attention Kierkegaard gives to the ‘external encounter’ appears to arise from what he saw as the inability of Platonic recollection to account for external factors and experiences in the development of the human self. As much of Kierkegaard’s thought in regards to the ‘encounter’ stems from this criticism, it is consequently the best debarking point for my investigation.

I will then proceed in section three to investigate Kierkegaard’s alternative theory of human understanding and development as is found in his concept of ‘repetition’. Due to the obscurity of ‘repetition’, and its close relationship to Kierkegaard’s understanding of the ‘self’, I will carry out my investigation by primarily focusing on Kierkegaard’s understanding of ‘self-development’. This investigation of ‘repetition’ and ‘self’ will be the focus of section two.

Section four will then turn to address a tension in Kierkegaard's thought. This tension it will be argued exists between his concepts of the 'encounter' and of 'self' in regards to the subject's capacity to make free choices. Consequently, section three will primarily focus on Kierkegaard's understanding of freedom and attempt to reconcile this tension.

Having thus explored Kierkegaard's concepts of the 'encounter' and 'self', and further addressed the tensions between the two, I will then turn to consider a 'failed encounter'. Thus section five will explore the 'failed encounter' as is found in Kierkegaard's concept of 'offence'.

Finally, in the 'Summary and Conclusion', I will bring these aspects together to provide an interpretation of Kierkegaard and his concept of the encounter which I will be able to carry forward into Chapter Five, where I will begin to construct my own concept of 'subjective understanding'⁷¹.

⁷¹ My approach to interpreting Kierkegaard will be textual. Nonetheless in the following chapter a number of secondary commentators will also be drawn upon. This reason for this is to firstly aid in achieving clear interpretation of some of Kierkegaard's more obscure passages. Secondly it will show that my interpretation of Kierkegaard has strong support in the secondary literature.

1. Kierkegaard: A Short Biography

Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in the spring of 1813. He would spend the majority of his life in the city and would die there in 1855. After a sheltered childhood, Kierkegaard enrolled at the University of Copenhagen at the age of seventeen to study theology. During his university years Kierkegaard lived a rowdy existence, something which would cause tension between himself and his deeply religious father. Nonetheless, despite this wild face he presented to the world, in his journal Kierkegaard would record a deep sense of depression. This melancholy he claimed had existed since his early childhood, and would haunt him until his death (Lowrie, 1943:3; Anderson, 2000:4).

Kierkegaard passed his theological examinations in 1840 and finished his doctoral dissertation the next year. At the same time he became engaged to Regine Olsen, whom he professed was the love of his life. Nonetheless, just after winning her hand, Kierkegaard suddenly broke off the engagement. Why he chose to do so is unclear: it has been interpreted from his journals that he believed he could only be committed to Olsen or God, and decided on the latter (Anderson, 2000:7-8). However he also reported that he felt it would be unfair to subject her to his crippling depression, and had subsequently felt guilt over his involvement with her (Lowrie, 1943:137).

The breaking of his engagement to Olsen caused a scandal in Copenhagen, and Kierkegaard subsequently left the city. He went to Berlin where he attended the

anti-Hegelian lectures of Friedrich Schelling, along with other notable future intellectuals such as Mikhail Bakunin and Friedrich Engels. Kierkegaard however found these lectures hugely disappointing. It was also during this time he began work on his first pseudonymous work *Either/or*. He returned to Copenhagen four months later (Lowrie, 1943:144; Anderson, 2000:9).

Either/or was published in early 1843. Six more major pseudonymous works would follow in rapid succession: *Repetition* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1844), *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *Stages on Life's Way* (1845) and finally the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) (Anderson, 2000:11). In the posthumously published *Perspective on Authorship*, Kierkegaard claimed that the intention of these works was to indirectly communicate to his contemporaries how to truly become a Christian (Kierkegaard, 1998:43).

To understand this intention one must consider the intellectual context in which Kierkegaard wrote. Denmark, and indeed much of Europe, was dominated by the philosophy of German Idealism generally, and Hegelianism particularly. Idealism maintained that God could be understood rationally, and Christianity was subsequently brought into the philosophical system. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel argued that God could be reconciled with humanity through philosophy and reason (Hegel, 2007:347). This argument however is largely in conflict with the fundamental teachings of Christianity: that one cannot comprehend one's relations to God by one's own efforts and reason, instead one is dependent on the revelation of Christ.

Consider for instance the teachings of St Paul. Paul warned the Greeks: ‘Beware less any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ’ (Colossians, 2:8).

Nonetheless, he acknowledged that these Greeks were hesitant in accepting this message as they stubbornly believed in their own philosophy and human wisdom.

Nonetheless, Paul insisted, it was only ‘Christ Crucified’, and not any intellectual exercise on their own part, which could reveal to them the ‘foolishness’ of this standpoint and bring them to salvation in Christ (Corinthians 1, 1:20-3).

Thus the Bible can be interpreted to argue that one must abandon one’s worldly wisdom and accept the revelation of Christ. Hegelianism however, in its belief that humanity could be reconciled with God through philosophy and the human intellect, subverts such Christian teachings. Indeed it may be interpreted as moving away from traditional Christian teachings towards an alternative standpoint, one which champions the human intellect and philosophy, a position similar to that of the Greeks before conversion by Paul.

Kierkegaard consequently interpreted this rational religion as an attempt to ‘go further’ than faith and transform religion into a rational philosophical system. Such a movement would however remove the dependency on Christ, a dependency which was central to Christian belief, and return them ‘back’ to the Greek position.

To illustrate this, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard compares the Hegelian philosophers to the pupil of Heraclitus. Heraclitus famously argued that one cannot cross the same river twice, an argument intended to disprove the Eleatic

denial of motion. Heraclitus' pupil however, in an attempt to 'go beyond' his teacher, insisted that one cannot even cross the same river once. However, rather than improve Heraclitus' argument, the pupil's statement once again denies motion, and thus, instead of 'going beyond', takes him back to the position of the Eleatics. Similarly, Kierkegaard maintains, when the Hegelians attempted to 'go beyond' Christianity by attempting to render it rational, they in fact fell back to the previous 'Greek position' before the teachings of Paul (Kierkegaard, 2003:146-7).

It should however be observed that this interpretation was not only held by Kierkegaard, but also many of his contemporaries. In particular the 'Young Hegelians' maintained that the idealist attempt to give a rational articulation of God was an important step towards undermining Christianity. This would lead to the realisation that religion was but the invention of 'man', and subsequently the abolishment of religion and triumph of atheism. As Bruno Bauer remarked, in his satirical work *Hegel the Antichrist*, Hegel had 'became Grecian, and so became human once again', and consequently 'the Greeks are victorious, the Church collapses' (Bauer, 1989:157-9). The issue of atheism and the Young Hegelians would indeed prove a considerable concern for Kierkegaard when writing his pseudonymous works. His close friend, Hans Brøchner, later recalled that Kierkegaard frequently discussed and referenced Ludwig Feuerbach, one of the most influential of the Young Hegelian group, during the period in which he wrote his pseudonymous works (Brøchner, 1996:233).

Kierkegaard's concerns about Hegelianism appear more poignant when we consider its influence of the Danish Church. In particular Hegelian philosophy had been gradually introduced into the Danish Church as a means to bridge the gap between traditional Christian practices and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. This was pioneered in particular by Hans Martensen, the dominant figure in Danish theological circles (Elrod, 1981:33). It would certainly appear that Kierkegaard saw Martensen as responsible for introducing Hegelianism into Germany; in his journal he claims that Martensen 'returned from his foreign travels' brining back to Denmark with him 'the newest German philosophy'. (Kierkegaard, 1985:226). It should also be observed that Kierkegaard had a personal relationship with Martensen. Martensen had been Kierkegaard's tutor when the latter was a theology student and would later sit on the examining board of Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis, actually casting the deciding vote which would see it passed (Thompson, 2009:230,233). Kierkegaard would continue to follow Martensen's career closely and attentively when writing his pseudonymous works. Scholars such as Curtis Thompson have subsequently argued it was primarily in response, and to combat, Martensen's Hegelianism that Kierkegaard wrote his pseudonymous works (Thompson, 2009:257).

One might consequently conclude that there were three contextual factors which influenced Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous authorship: the dominance of Hegelian philosophy, which Kierkegaard believed undermined traditional Christian beliefs; the arguments of the Young Hegelians, who sought to bring Hegelianism

to what they believed where its logical atheist conclusions; and finally the introduction of Hegelian philosophy into the Danish church.

After finishing *Postscript* it would seem Kierkegaard planned to retire from writing and had ambitions to become a parish minister. However retirement would escape him as, at the close of 1845, he entered into a public feud with the satirical magazine *Corsair*. Kierkegaard would come off worse from this feud, being reduced by the summer of 1846 to a figure of public ridicule (Hannay, 1982:6-7). He would however continue to write. The most significant of works written in this period, and perhaps Kierkegaard's most influential work of all, was the pseudonymous *Sickness Unto Death* written in 1848 (Anderson, 2000:13).

In 1854 Kierkegaard launched a direct attack on the Danish church and Martensen, who had succeeded Jacob Mynster as primate of the Church. Kierkegaard would receive a particular personal blow in this struggle when his elder brother Peter, an ordained minister and theologian in his own right, openly defended Martensen and the church against his brother's attacks (Lyby, 2009:202-3). On the 11 November 1855, a stressed and overworked Kierkegaard collapsed in the street. He died in hospital on the 11th of November (Hannay, 1982:8).

Murray Rae has argued that Kierkegaard's greatest contribution to theology was to urge Christian theology and practice back to its traditional roots and to the bible (Rae, 2010:171). Although this did not make much impact on his contemporaries, Kierkegaard would receive more attention in the Twentieth century, as a result of

its more sceptical and sombre mood resulting from the catastrophe and horror of the First World War (Rae, 2010:177-6).

Arguably Kierkegaard's most influential legacy would however be in philosophy, in particular 'continental philosophy' where he is frequently perceived as the 'father' of the philosophical tradition of existentialism. This is particularly as a consequence of his rejection of all-encompassing philosophical systems and focus on freedom and lived experience. Kierkegaard's notion of freedom would for instance be particularly influential on Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of 'angst', a founding idea of his own existentialist philosophy (Sartre, 1993:119-20). I will discuss the relationship between Kierkegaard and the existentialist notion of freedom more in section four of this chapter.

2. Recollection

In the dialogue *Meno*, Socrates answered Meno's controversial claim that it is impossible for a man to search for either what he knows or what he does not know. Socrates explains the claim as follows: a man could not search for what he knows, as he already knows it, and he could not search for what he does not know, as he would have no idea what he was searching for. Socrates' answer to this claim is that all learning is in fact recollection; we perpetually contain within us the 'truth' about the world around us but, through existing within the world, we have forgotten it. Consequently when we 'learn' information we are not in fact

acquiring any new knowledge but rather are recalling these innate truths (Plato, 2009:113-4).

However, if all learning is ‘recollection’, it raises the issue of what exactly is the role of a teacher? If all the student is doing is recalling information he is not learning anything new, and thus the teacher is not in fact ‘teaching’ him anything.

Interestingly, Socrates strongly rejected the label of a ‘teacher’, indeed when Meno asks him to ‘teach’ something about recollection Socrates takes great offence and perceives it as a trick (Plato, 2009:114). Instead of the mantel of a teacher, in the *Theaetetus*, we find Socrates describing himself as a ‘midwife’ in that he supervises the ‘labour of men’s minds’ (Plato, 2004:27). We may understand this as Socrates’ questioning prompted the subject to recall the forgotten information, and thus help ‘deliver’ ideas from the recesses of the subject’s mind out into the open. Consequently, Socrates attested that he did not teach his students anything but was rather responsible for the delivery of their ideas which came from within students themselves (Plato, 2004:28).

It is this image of the ‘Socratic midwife’ that Kierkegaard finds problematic. In *Philosophical Crumbs*, Kierkegaard argues that if a teacher was only a midwife who ‘delivered’ ideas he would lose all significance; the teacher would be reduced to nothing more than a memory prompt. It would thus not matter if it was Socrates or Prodicus, or indeed if it was ‘the parlour-maid’, who prompted this recollection

as long as the pupil remembered what he had forgotten⁷². Similarly, just as the teacher becomes irrelevant, so does his teachings; it would not matter what the teacher was communicating to the student as long as it was cause for him to remember the innate ‘truth’ (Kierkegaard, 2009:90-1). Consequently, Kierkegaard highlighted that the theory of recollection deprived both the teacher and his teachings of any real significance. This also culminated in what Kierkegaard called the ‘vanishing’ of the ‘temporal point’. To explain, as the moment in which we encountered our teacher has only significance in so far as it caused us to remember innate truths, it can be discarded or forgotten about as soon as the information is recalled, thus our significant life moments and events are stripped of meaning and ‘vanish’ as time goes on (Kierkegaard, 2009:89).

It should be observed here that Kierkegaard was primarily concerned with how the subject could gain knowledge of God and become a Christian. The theory of recollection was thus highly problematic for Kierkegaard as, if it was applied to Christianity, then Christ himself would be stripped of all significance; for if knowledge of God could simply be ‘recalled’ then Christ would become a mere ‘Socratic midwife’ and the incarnation an unimportant ‘vanishing’ moment (Kierkegaard, 2009:90-6).

⁷² Prodicus was a contemporary of Socrates and a Sophist who charged money for philosophy lessons. Prodicus and his lessons were the object of one of Socrates’ ironic remarks in *Cratylus* (Plato, 1998:1-2). Socrates’ opponent Prodicus and the figure of the ‘parlour-maid’ are examples chosen by Kierkegaard in *Crumbs* to dramatically draw attention to the insignificance the teacher has in the theory of recollection (Kierkegaard, 2009:90).

Consequently, in order to comprehend how one could become a Christian, the theory of recollection had to be replaced with a theory which could account for the significance of the subject's encounters with external actors and events. To achieve this Kierkegaard had to discard the idea that all truths were contained within the subject and instead contend with the idea that encounters were able to bestow knowledge upon the subject, knowledge which he previously lacked. Indeed, in the case of the 'truth' of God, Kierkegaard insisted the subject would have to owe his external teacher 'everything' (Kierkegaard, 2009:96).

By this Kierkegaard means that the truth must be something that the student could not get on his own, for if he could then there would have been no need for the teacher and we would consequently fall back into recollection. Thus the pupil must be dependent on the teacher, not only for the truth, but for the 'condition for understanding the truth'. In this way Kierkegaard insists that such an experience changes the subject's very 'mode of being' as it gives him the condition for understanding truth. Indeed Kierkegaard compares this change to a transition from 'non-being' to 'being' and calls it a 'rebirth' (Kierkegaard, 2009:92-6). As a consequence of this, Kierkegaard insists that the temporal moment in which one gains the truth must be incredibly significant, indeed it must mark a vital point in the development of the subject's life which is never forgotten (Kierkegaard, 2009:91,95).

Kierkegaard's terminology and argumentation here may at first sound confusing, for instance his claim that upon receiving the conditions of truth the subject is fundamentally 'changed'. I will however have to leave an explanation of this for later in the chapter. What is important to recognise at present is that, in order to overcome the problems of recollection, Kierkegaard laid the basis for an alternative epistemological approach. In this new approach the subject had to be able to attain new knowledge from the teacher, and thus a source outside of himself, and that the moment he received this knowledge had to be one of crucial significance in his life.

It may be worth pausing here to note that, although Kierkegaard's problem is overtly theological, his observations have much broader implications. In particular, they demonstrate that, if we are to base our epistemological understanding on a theory of 'recollection', then temporal events lose all significance. To recover the importance of temporal and external events a new epistemological basis is required in which knowledge does not come from within but is bestowed upon the subject through an encounter with something external. Thus we must understand knowledge to be transferred to the subject through these encounters.

It is also worth considering how Kierkegaard's rejection of Socratic recollection positions him in regards to the tradition of western thought. Certain scholars, such as T.H. Sprigge, have argued that Kierkegaard's critique of 'recollection' must be read as a critique of Hegel (Sprigge, 2006:169). T.H. Croxall also reads the passage

on ‘recollection’ as a criticism of both Plato and Hegel, as both hold that ‘truth dwells internally within man’ (Croxall, 1956:167). Merold Westphal has gone further, claiming Kierkegaard’s discussion of recollection sets up the critique of Hegelian Speculation found in *Postscript*, and therefore, despite the Platonic reference, must be read as directed against Hegel (Westphal, 2014:111). James Collins similarly attests that much of the argument contained both in ‘Crumbs’ and *Postscript* have little interest to the modern reader beyond the historical, as they focus on primarily the fine points of the ‘post-Hegelian’ controversy (Collins, 1954:119).

Alasdair Hannay however insists that, although Hegel is Kierkegaard’s main target, he only is so in that he is an exemplar of the wider tradition of ‘science’. Key to understanding this is to recognise in what manner Kierkegaard claims works such as *Postscript* are ‘unscientific’. ‘Science’ crucially did not denote the more restricted practice based on rigorous method and procedure that we associate with the term today; the term ‘science’ was rather understood as scholarly work presented as ‘a whole’ or as a ‘system’ (Hannay, 2012:xix-xx).

We can appreciate this more through the German term for science: ‘Wissenschaft’. The term Wissenschaft originates from the German for knowledge: ‘Wissen’. By the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries onwards Wissenschaft was commonly being used in place of the Latin term ‘scientia’, which denoted an organised cohesive body of knowledge. This term was applied not just to the ‘natural world’,

but also to any systematic study, whether it be of religion, art, history, or ethics. Hence it was natural to regard any body of knowledge, as long as it was systematic, as ‘Wissenschaft’ (Inwood, 1992:265). Kierkegaard can thus be understood to be attacking ‘human science’, and indeed quite generally any systematic or objective approach to the ‘truth’ of the human being (Hannay, 2012:xx). Thus Kierkegaard’s criticism may be interpreted not just as an attack on ‘Socratic recollection’ or ‘Hegelian speculation’, but on the objective approach to the study of the human being in the Western philosophical tradition.

Throughout his pseudonymous writings Kierkegaard insists that the new philosophical category required to replace recollection can be understood as ‘repetition’. In the next section I will proceed to examine this concept and its relation to Kierkegaard’s understanding of the human self.

3. Repetition and The Self

Kierkegaard scholars have been apt to point out that ‘repetition’ is one of the most difficult concepts in Kierkegaard’s thought, indeed it is legendary for being almost completely unintelligible. Pat Bigelow for instance has gone as far as to argue that

the concept is incomprehensible by design, a representation of the unintelligibility of existence (Bigelow, 1987:167). Nonetheless, despite the concept's incredibly complex and opaque nature, it is vital to Kierkegaard's philosophy. It is thus crucially important that I render here an interpretation of this concept.

The concept of 'repetition' gets its fullest attention in the small text *Repetition* which, despite its pseudo author Constantine Constantius' ultimate failure to comprehend the concept, gives a series of insights into the nature of this 'new category'. Through the guise of Constantius, Kierkegaard describes 'repetition' as the same movement as recollection, but directed forwards instead of back. He also associates it with the 'new', using such similes as 'discarding old clothes for new' (Kierkegaard, 2009:3). This idea of 'repetition' being a 'progression forward to new things' can also be found in *Postscript*, in which Kierkegaard describes 'repetition' as central to the concept of motion (Kierkegaard, 2009:61). In *Repetition* Constantius also remarks that for 'repetition' to be successful it requires an 'act of will' (Kierkegaard, 2009:4). We may also observe in *The Concept of Anxiety* it is remarked that 'repetition' is not a 'simple consequence' but a 'new leap', again suggesting that it is not a product of necessary continuation but of a free decision or act of will (Kierkegaard, 1980:113). We also find it stressed in *Anxiety* that genuine 'repetition' must also contain 'the eternal' (Kierkegaard, 1980:149). From this we may gain an initial sketch of what Kierkegaard meant by 'repetition'. First of all it is a forward movement towards something new. Secondly this movement

requires an act of will by the subject. Thirdly this movement must contain an element called the ‘eternal’.

Nonetheless, if we are to gain a full appreciation of ‘repetition’, we first need a better understanding of Kierkegaard’s conception of the human ‘self’. In *The Concept of Anxiety* it is stated that the ‘self’ is a synthesis of body and psyche which is sustained in ‘spirit’ (Kierkegaard, 1980:43). However, it is not until the later *Sickness Unto Death* that Kierkegaard fully fleshes out this understanding of what it means to be a ‘self’. In the opening of the text Kierkegaard tells us that to be a ‘spirit’ is to be ‘a self’, before proceeding to give the infamously cryptic definition of a self as ‘a relation which relates to itself’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:43). Kierkegaard also states in the text that the ‘self’ is said to equate with ‘freedom’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:59). As well as this, *Sickness Unto Death* also expands the simple synthesis of ‘psyche and body’ into a triumvirate of syntheses; ‘infinite and finite’, ‘possibility and necessity’ and ‘eternal and temporal’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:43).

I begin my interpretation of Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘self’ with these syntheses. *Sickness Unto Death* first posits the synthesis of ‘infinite and finite’. The term ‘infinite’ is associated with the ‘fantastic’ and ultimately with the imagination. Imagination is further defined as the ‘infinitizing reflection’, and the means by which the subject ‘presents himself to himself’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:60-1). Thus we may understand the ‘infinite’ pole of the synthesis as the imagination which in particular is responsible for how the subject conceives of himself within his mind.

In other words, it is the part of the subject which imagines how, or how he would like, himself to be. Consequently, a subject who leans too heavily towards the ‘infinite’ pole gains a ‘fantastic’ image of himself which is far removed and inflated from the person he actually is (Kierkegaard, 2004:61-2). Conversely, we may understand ‘finite’ as the facticity of the subject’s existence, or how he actually does exist in the material world. Consequently, when the synthesis leans overly towards ‘finitude’, the subject is characterised by ‘confinement’, ‘narrowness’, and an inability to imagine his life in any other way than it currently is (Kierkegaard, 2004:63-4). The healthy balance of this synthesis is thus a subject who is aware of the realities of his current existence, but still has enough imagination to conceive of alternative possibilities to this situation.

This leads us directly to the second synthesis of ‘possibility and necessity’. Kierkegaard states that once the synthesis of ‘infinitude and finitude’ has been posited so comes the ‘possibility’ to ‘become’ as is reflected through the ‘medium of imagination’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:65). We may interpret that, once the subject has imagined he can be different to how he currently is, he becomes aware that he could actually realise this alternative. Consequently, we may understand ‘possibility’ as the subject’s ability to realise or ‘become’ the alternative person he has imagined. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard insists that ‘becoming’ is a movement which must take place from ‘where one is’. This ‘where one is’ is what is called ‘necessity’ (Kierkegaard, 2004:66). We understand that the subject may be able to become something different to what he presently is, but nonetheless can only do

so from the limitations of the position he currently holds. This synthesis is therefore out of balance in favour of ‘possibility’ when the subject desires to become something which is impossible from his current situation, for instance a subject who believes he will become a pilot despite lacking the intellectual ability or sharp eyesight required for such an occupation. Conversely, the synthesis is out of balance in favour of ‘necessity’ when the subject believes that his life is so restricted, or that existence is so pre-determined, that there is no possibility to become anything other than what he currently is, for instance a subject who believes he is so restricted by his inner-city working-class background that he turns down any opportunity to change this. The synthesis is balanced when the subject realises he has the ability to change his life, but is aware that he must do so from within the restrictions imposed by his current circumstance.

From this analysis of the first two syntheses we may concur with Marc Taylor that the terms ‘infinity’ and ‘possibility’ represent the subject’s ability to act and change his being, whilst ‘finitude’ and ‘necessity’ convey that he can only do so from the position of his factual determination and the restrictions this imposes. As Taylor articulates it: the subject always exists within a historically bound period which restricts his possibilities, nonetheless these conditions do not completely determine the subject’s existence and he always maintains the ability to act and to choose his life path (Taylor, 1975:111). We may therefore understand Kierkegaard’s understanding of ‘self’ in the opening of *Sickness Unto Death*, which is ‘a relation that relates to itself’, as: the subject who relates the ‘person he

imagines' or 'wishes to be' with the 'self he actually is in facticity' and brings these together through the free act which realises his possibility to become this alternative self. In the same way, the 'self is freedom' in the sense that this synthesis is realised when the subject freely acts and realises his possibilities.

I now turn to the more conceptually difficult synthesis of the 'eternal' and 'temporal'. Admittedly the term 'temporal' does not at first seem to raise any immediate difficulties. Following from our definitions of 'finite' and 'necessity' we are able to logically deduce that 'temporal' would once again represent the subject's finite existence. However, interpreting what Kierkegaard designates by 'eternal' is a far more challenging prospect. Difficulty arises mainly due to the fact that Kierkegaard uses the term 'eternal' in a vast variety of ways. Confusion is further caused by the fact he also uses the term in discussion of both God and human beings, this is despite adamantly insisting that the two are infinitely different. It is therefore first worth making clear that the nature of God does not concern us here, so when talking of the eternal we are speaking only of humans. Now, when talking of humans there is a consistency in Kierkegaard's usage, namely it is always used in relation to two attributes: 'unchangeability' and 'possibility' (Taylor, 1975:91). By unpacking these two attributes we can therefore deduce what Kierkegaard denotes by the 'eternal' in the self-synthesis.

We begin with unchangeability. In order to understand the importance of this attribute we must look back to the ancient Greek tradition from which Kierkegaard

derives the terms ‘temporal’ and ‘eternal’. In the Greek philosophical framework ‘temporal’ was often associated with worldly phenomena. This world of phenomena was furthermore believed to be a realm of continual change or ‘flux’ (Taylor, 1975:91-4). This definition is therefore in line with our understanding of ‘temporal’ as the conditions of the subject’s finite existence, only we may add to this that such conditions are conceived to be constantly changing. In contrast, the ‘eternal’ was believed to be that which is stable and ‘unchanging’, or rather that which remains self-identical; that which remains the same throughout the process of change. Furthermore, these two terms were considered to be dialectically opposed to each, it was held that in order to understand one of these terms we must comprehend both; we can only understand how something has changed if we have an ‘unchanged’ or ‘self-identical’ concept of that which undergoes change in order to measure change against (Taylor, 1975:91-4).

We may therefore concur with Taylor that, when talking about the ‘eternal’ in the self, Kierkegaard is referring to that which remains unchanged and self-identical within the subject, and thus furthermore that standard by which we may understand the ‘temporal’ changes in his existence (Taylor, 1975:94). We can indeed find Kierkegaard arguing as much in the *Postscript* when he proposes that, if existence is motion, then there must be something ‘continuous’ which is ‘holding it together’. He goes on to argue that the problem for one who exists is being able to give his life this sense of continuity (Kierkegaard, 2012:61). The question thus becomes what precisely is it in the ‘eternal’ which can be said to be unchangeable?

To help explore this question we may once again consider Plato. In the *Phaedo* Socrates identifies the human soul as ‘immortal’, ‘uniform’, ‘unvarying’ and ‘constant in relation to itself’. Conversely, the body is ‘mortal’, ‘multiform’, and ‘never constant in relation to itself’. Thus, we may say that the soul is understood to be the eternal substratum of the subject that stays constant whilst the body goes through change in the temporal world. Indeed Socrates argues that, after the body dies, decays and decomposes, the soul still remains constant and unchanged, thus giving a point of continual existence to the subject even beyond death (Plato, 2009:31-2).

Kierkegaard however takes issue with this conceptualisation, arguing that it places the eternal ‘behind the subject’ and forces him to ‘enter it backwards’. He compares it to a man walking down the road without positing his steps, so that his journey only appears as the ground he has traversed (Kierkegaard, 1980:90).

To appreciate Kierkegaard’s objection to Plato we must again consider this argument in light of Kierkegaard’s criticism of Platonic recollection⁷³. It will be recalled that according to the theory of ‘recollection’ the student could not learn anything new but could only recall things he had forgotten. Thus attention to external experiences were given little importance beyond serving as mere prompts to remember what one knew in the past but has since forgotten. Equally,

⁷³ It should be observed that the theory of recollection plays a vital role in Plato’s argument for the existence, and immortality, of the soul. As Socrates states in the *Phaedo*: ‘that [recollection] would be impossible, unless our souls existed somewhere before being born in this human form; so this way too, it appears that the soul is something immortal (Plato, 2009:21).

as the subject is presumed by this theory to know everything implicitly, it negates the possibility to learn anything new. Thus, the student of Platonic recollection resembles Kierkegaard's walking man; neither give attention to current or future experiences as all concentration is focused on what has come before.

When such an understanding is used to identify what is continuous in the self it consequently locates it 'behind the subject' as it searches in the past; it tries to 'recall' the eternal substratum which the subject has forgotten exists. It similarly 'enters it backwards' as one looks back to one's past history rather than considering how one might project oneself into the future. Again, like the walking man the subject thinks only of himself as he 'has been' and not where he is, what he currently experiences, and what he might become in the future. This is problematic for Kierkegaard as he wishes to precisely conceptualise the significance of one's current experiences, notably the encounter with Christ, and what one may become in the future, namely a Christian. Thus Kierkegaard requires an alternative conception of what is continuous that does not 'look only to the past' but rather gives priority to current encounters which can reveal possible future selves, and thus project the subject continuously into the future.

Thus what Kierkegaard proposed was 'eternal' in the subject was not a substratum which could be recalled but rather the future possibilities which the subject could realise. We may here be reminded of what I said earlier in regards to the subject's possibilities: despite being restricted by historical conditions the subject always

retained the ability to make choices. We also may recall that the ‘temporal’ is associated with these historical conditions, denoted by ‘finitude’ and ‘necessity’. From this we may consequently interpret that the ‘eternal’ is associated with the ability to act, as denoted by ‘infinity’ and ‘possibility’. Thus, we may see that, although the subject exists in the continual flux of the temporal world, what remains constant overtime is his ability to make choices; what is ‘eternal’ and ‘unchangeable’ is his ability to freely choose. Crucially, such an understanding ‘looks forward’ rather than ‘backwards’ as it considers what the subject may become in the future rather than trying to recall what he knew in the past, as Kierkegaard believes Plato’s epistemology and philosophy of self does. In summary we may say the temporal/eternal synthesis represents the subject’s continually changing existence within the flux of time and his constant unchanging ability to always act freely and make choices within it.

Before proceeding it is worth once again considering Kierkegaard’s relation to Hegel. As was observed in the previous section, Kierkegaard’s critique of recollection can be read as aimed at Hegel, as the latter is seen as an exemplar of an ‘objective approach’. However, this does not mean that Hegel had no positive influence on Kierkegaard, and indeed, in this identification of the continuous factor in the subject as the ability to act, we must observe that Kierkegaard owes a huge debt to Hegel. It was Hegel who, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, challenged the concept of God as static substance, instead offering the alternate notion of God as ‘subject’ or as a ‘free actor’; God was thus not perceived as a substance

'behind time' but an active agent operating freely within it (Hegel, 1977:9-10). The significance of this for Kierkegaard's concept of self is evident as it is the free act that gives unity to his individual subject, just as in Hegel's account of God. There is indeed a striking similarity between Hegel's understanding of self in the *Phenomenology*, described as 'the sameness and simplicity that relates itself to itself', and Kierkegaard's depiction of the self as a 'a relation that relates to itself' (Hegel, 1977:12; Kierkegaard, 2004:43).

I have now given an interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept of 'self'. The self represents a synthesis of physical and psychical. The 'physical' is the subject's necessary finite existence which limits him and constitutes the situation from which he must make decisions. The psychical is the subject's continuous ability to always imagine alternatives to this situation and make choices based on these alternative possibilities. We may consequently understand the subject as a being who exists within and is limited by his historical material conditions, but nonetheless always retains his ability to act and make choices within this.

I here consider how this understanding of 'self' helps clarify Kierkegaard's cryptic account of 'repetition'. First of all we saw that 'repetition' involved moving forward and becoming something new, such as in the simile with new clothes. This corresponds to our understanding of the self who actualises his possibilities and moves towards the alternate self he imagines. We also saw the concept of 'repetition' involved an act of will to move forwards. This again corresponds with

my interpretation of Kierkegaard's 'self' as the subject can only move forward and actualise his possibilities by making the choice to realise a possibility. 'Repetition' can also be said to contain the 'eternal' when we consider that the 'eternal' denotes this act of choice. Thus 'repetition' corresponds with the concept of self in that the subject moves forward and changes his being through the actualisation of his imagined possibilities. 'Repetition' can thus be interpreted as the means by which the individual relates 'himself to himself' and moves through existence by the process of making free choices⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ It may be observe that this understanding of the 'self' also gives Kierkegaard a unique understanding of time. Kierkegaard believed that the understanding of time presented throughout the tradition of western philosophy was inadequate for comprehending human existence. The theory of time Kierkegaard was criticising here may be understood as 'spatialized time' (Taylor, 1975:82). We may turn to Aristotle's *Physics* to better comprehend this. Aristotle declares that time is a certain number which is furthermore a measurement of 'motion' (Aristotle, 2000:86-7). We can interpret that central to this understanding of time is the perception of an object which travels through space. By this standard the 'past' is understood as what is behind the object, the future that which is in front, and the present where the object currently is. This theory also gives a primarily quantitative understanding of time, perhaps unsurprising as Aristotle does define time as a certain 'number' (Aristotle, 2000:87). We may understand 'time past' as the number of moments that the object has passed through in its forward motion. As Taylor elucidates, we could imagine time as a visualised graph divided into successive points, each of which represents successive 'presents'. Time is thus measured by how many of these points the object has passed as it traverses the graph (Taylor, 1975:83).

Kierkegaard criticises this notion of time claiming that it can only be understood if the moment is 'spatialized'; if we 'stop' time and make a visual representation of the procession of the object (Kierkegaard, 1980:85). The problem with this is firstly that we are removing ourselves from time in order to gain a position where we can view both the present position of the object and the successive points of past and future. We are further 'pausing' time as we need the object to remain in the 'present' as we count the points behind in order to calculate 'time past'. This is for Kierkegaard an abstract conception which does not correspond to reality.

Nonetheless, what makes 'spatialized time' most unsuitable for measuring the development of the subject is its quantitative nature. Examining time as a successive series of equal points to be calculated strips each of these moments of any qualitative value. This is not a concern when measuring the progress of an inanimate object traversing a graph but is problematic when considering the life progression of a human being, for the moments which influenced a subject's life decisions will clearly have more qualitative worth than those which did not. In *Anxiety* Kierkegaard alludes to this problem by citing the example of the Hindu line of kings stretching back seventy thousand years. Although this number gives a quantitative knowledge of the Hindu Kingdom, Kierkegaard insists that, as nothing is known about any of these kings, it does not actually

We may also observe here how this interpretation of the self and ‘repetition’ answers many of the issues Kierkegaard raised with recollection. First of all we can understand how the subject goes through change or ‘is changed’ as he realises the possible existences he imagined; by choosing to become a Christian the subject is changed as his decision has transformed him from ‘non-Christian’ to ‘Christian’. It also ‘looks forward instead of back’ as it focuses on the possibility of realising different options in the future as opposed to trying to remember what one has forgotten in the past.

Nonetheless, there is still tension in this interpretation of Kierkegaard’s thought. This tension primarily centres on the dependence the subject has on external actors and experiences. We saw in section one that Kierkegaard insisted that it is external experiences that are most significant in the subject’s development, and in particular it was to the external teacher to whom he must owe everything. Conversely, in this section far greater prominence was given to the subject’s

tell us anything about the kingdom or its development (Kierkegaard, 1980:86). To interpret this in regards to the subject we may say that the quantitative measurement of time since his birth may tell us his age, but it tells us nothing about who he is or anything about his personal development. In *Anxiety* Kierkegaard regards that if the ‘present moment’ in time is to be properly understood we must find a ‘foothold’ in the continuous succession. This ‘foothold’ he further insists must be the ‘reflection of the eternal’ (Kierkegaard, 1980:85-9). Now, as we have discussed, the ‘eternal’ can be understood as the subject’s continuous ability to freely act. Thus the ‘foothold’ can be interpreted as the moment of free decision. Consequently what interrupts the continual flow of time is the moment in which the subject makes a free choice.

Kierkegaard’s notion of time can also be observed here to be in line with his self-synthesis; we may understand the ‘past’ as the finite and necessary existence the subject has come from, the ‘future’ is the imagined ‘possible’ self that the subject can become, and finally the present is the moment in which he makes a free decision to move from one stage to the other. This present moment furthermore has not quantitative but qualitative significance as it signifies the subject making a choice and defining what he wants his existence to be.

freedom and his own ability to realise the possibilities he imagines. Addressing this tension is also highly important as an understanding of it is required in order to grasp how Kierkegaard addressed his main concern with Platonic recollection: its neglect of the importance of external encounters.

There therefore appears to be a tension in my interpretation between the subject's dependency on external influences and his own freedom to act and make choices. It is to address this tension that I will now turn to in section three.

4. Freedom and the Encounter

We here return to Kierkegaard's definition of the 'self' in *Sickness Unto Death*: 'a relation which relates to itself'. We have understood this to mean that the subject relates his existing self with the possible self he imagines and, through a free choice, realises this possibility. However, we should observe that Kierkegaard proceeds to add that, when 'relating to itself', the subject also 'relates to something else' (Kierkegaard, 2004:43). We may interpret from this that, in the process of acting and realising one's possibilities, the subject is dependent on a third external relationship. Later in the text Kierkegaard indeed warns against the subject who ignores this dependence on the external and, seeing 'no power over itself', desires to construct a self entirely of his own choosing. First he warns that such an enterprise is akin to 'building castles in the air', for the desired self is not

based on anything ‘firm’. Secondly, he attests that a subject who attempts this can have no further development as, by considering nothing outside of his self, he cannot do more than duplicate what he already is (Kierkegaard, 2004:100-1).

What we may infer from this is that, for the subject to make choices about who he wishes to become, he must first have some knowledge or understanding on which to base this decision; in order to make a choice he must have options from which he may choose. Furthermore, such options he cannot provide himself but must rather come from an external source. This is firstly because if he was to ‘dream up’ possibilities which did not conform to reality he would be unable to actually realise them. Secondly, without external experiences the subject would not be made aware of alternate possibilities which he may choose from. Consequently we may understand that in both cases the lack of external experiences closes the opportunity for change.

In *Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard proceeds to argue that this ‘something else’ must be that which ‘established the whole relation’, alas God (Kierkegaard, 2004:44). In *Crumbs* Kierkegaard insists knowledge or the ‘truth’ of God can only come from the encounter with Christ (Kierkegaard, 2009:96-7). Thus, this external ‘something else’ that the subject must relate to is his encounter with Christ. One may therefore argue that for Kierkegaard the subject is completely dependent on the encounter with Christ in order to receive this ‘truth’.

Nonetheless, despite this, in *Crumbs* Kierkegaard also appears to stress the powers of human agency in attaining ‘truth’, for instance stressing that in order to attain ‘truth’ the subject must ‘will it’ (Kierkegaard, 2009:94). Consequently, it is not yet clear what precisely the relationship is between this dependency on external encounters and the subject’s capacity for free action; whether he is dependent on the encounter to attain truth or if he attains this by an act of his own will.

To understand this fully we must recall what exactly Kierkegaard meant by ‘truth’.

As we observed in the introduction, the ‘truth’ Kierkegaard was primarily concerned with was not ‘objective truth’, that is the empirical truth of phenomena as they exist, but rather a ‘subjective truth’, that is ‘how’ one may become something. Thus when Christ brought the ‘truth of God’ to the subject he was not bringing the objective truth of God’s existence, but rather the ‘true form of Christian life’, or an understanding of how one may possibly become a Christian.

As Benjamin Daise observes, the ‘truth’ which Christ brings to the subject is the model of life according to the teachings of Christ which allows the subject to live in proper relation to God (Daisie, 1992:3-4). Thus, we may understand this ‘truth’ that is brought to the subject is knowledge concerning how one might become a Christian, and thus a possible way of life that the subject may choose to adopt.

From this we may therefore interpret that what the subject is dependent on is the encounter which reveals to him the ‘true’ ‘Christian life model’. Nonetheless, although our subject has received knowledge of this ‘life model’, it is still not yet

the ‘truth’ for him, it has not become his ‘subjective truth’. Rather, he still must adopt this way of life and choose it as a model for his existence. Thus, he must also ‘will the truth’; he must make the decision to live the true Christian life as was revealed in his encounter with Christ. Thus, in order to attain to the ‘truth’ the subject is reliant on this life model being revealed to him by Christ in the encounter. However, if he is to ‘realise’ this truth he must also make the choice to adopt the Christian existence as his own.

We may consequently understand the subject’s self-development as a two-step process: first, the subject must have encounters in order to be able to conceive of alternative existences to the one he is currently living. However, once this information has been received, it is up to the subject to act and make choices in order to realise the alternative mode of existence which are revealed. In this way dependency and freedom exist in a symbiotic relationship: in order to act and realise our possibilities we are dependent on an external encounter to reveal such options; however the knowledge we gain through our encounters further requires our ability to freely act in order to bring such possibilities into existence. In Kierkegaard’s example of Christianity the subject is dependent on the encounter with Christ in order to gain knowledge of a true Christian existence and to be able to imagine himself living such a life; nonetheless in order for such a possibility to be realised the subject must freely act upon such knowledge and choose to adopt the Christian life.

This process is further illustrated when we consider Kierkegaard's concept of the 'moment', that is the significant point in the subject's existence when he 'relates himself to himself' and makes a choice. The actual Danish word Kierkegaard uses for 'moment' is *Øjeblikket*, which means literally 'in the blink of an eye'. Victoria Harrison nonetheless observes that this concept becomes troublesome because Kierkegaard uses *Øjeblikket* to denote a variety of things. At times the term is used to signify the Incarnation, however at other times the term is used to symbolise the acceptance of Christ's 'truth' by the subject, and thus the moment which he decides to become a Christian. Also confusingly *Øjeblikket*, when italicised, is used to refer to both of the above events taken together (Harrison, 1997:458).

Harrison however observes there is a system in the English translations of Kierkegaard that allow us to comprehend this⁷⁵. First, we can understand the 'Moment', in uppercase, as the Incarnation. We can then understand 'moment', in lowercase, as the subject's appropriation of the truth of the Incarnation. Finally, *Moment* italicised can be understood as the two former terms taken together. (Harrison, 1997:459)⁷⁶. What is fundamental to recognise here is the symbiotic relationship between the 'Moment' and 'moment' in Kierkegaard's argument. The Incarnation is required for the individual to grasp the truth, and thus there is a relationship of dependence of the 'moment' on the 'Moment'. However, the

⁷⁵ Harrison acknowledges that this system was developed by the D F. Swenson translation (Harrison, 1997:458).

⁷⁶ Harrison supports this interpretation by highlighting that *Moment* is first introduced in *Crumbs* as unitary term, Kierkegaard then moves on to account for 'Moment' and 'moment' as the comprising parts of this initial concept *Moment* (Harrison, 1997:461).

significance of the Incarnation can only be fully comprehended when the truth is appropriated by the subject, so the ‘Moment’ also becomes dependent of the ‘moment’ (Harrison, 1997:461). Thus, the *Moment* can be understood as the interdependent relationship between the receiving of the ‘truth’ of Christ and the subject’s decision to appropriate and act upon this truth in his becoming a Christian. This is of course reminiscent of my interpretation of the interdependency between the subject’s external encounters and his life choices: the subject is dependent on encounters with external influences in order to be able to conceive of alternative possible existences; but these existences can only be actualised by the subject’s own free will and choice. Thus, the subject’s self-development can be understood as a two-step process by which he has encounters with the external world before making life choices based on these experiences.

We may clarify this understanding by giving a more ‘secular’ example of this process, as opposed to Kierkegaard’s overtly theological arguments about Christian ‘truth’. Take for instance a subject who wished to be a farmer. This subject cannot become, or indeed wish to be, a farmer before he has any knowledge in regards to what a ‘farming existence’ entails. Consequently, he must have external experiences, or ‘encounters’, with farmers and farming before he can imagine himself as a farmer. Nonetheless, although he now has a conception of himself as a farmer, such knowledge does not yet make the subject a farmer. He can only become a farmer by acting upon this conception and choosing this

existence for himself. Crucially, we may acknowledge the two step process and symbiotic relationship between freedom and dependency: the subject is dependent on encounters with the external world to give him knowledge upon which he may base his decisions; it is then up to the subject to make these decisions and realise the possible modes of existence which were revealed by his encounters.

To further link this back to Kierkegaard's objections to recollection in sections two and three, we may observe that this gives both the subject's external experiences and his life choices crucial significance. We can see that in the moment the subject chooses to be a farmer his existence is changed as he goes from 'non-farmer' to 'farmer'. In this way this moment of decision has qualitative value within the subject's life as it marks the significant point in which he chose to make this transition. Furthermore, as the encounter with farming is what this process is centred upon, this external encounter gains central significance as it bestowed upon the subject the knowledge required for him to make this life choice. He can thus never forget his encounters on the farm as it was these experiences which revealed to him the possibility of a farming existence. Consequently, this understanding allows us to appreciate the significance of the external encounter in the development of the self which recollection, Kierkegaard maintained, failed to achieve.

I will now consider how this understanding of freedom, and its relation to the external ‘encounter’, compares to the Existentialist philosophy it is claimed Kierkegaard inspired. We must primarily observe that this dependence on external encounters makes Kierkegaard’s theory of freedom rather different from that of thinkers such as Sartre. Sartre argued that human beings are ‘radically free’ and unconditioned by their situation and history (Taylor, 1975: 112-3). He consequently holds the first principle of Existentialism to be that ‘man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself’ (Sartre, 2013:30). However, as has become evident, for Kierkegaard the subject is not able to construct his identity as he sees fit, but is rather dependent on the external world and the historical reality that conditions his existence. In his *Papers and Journals*, Kierkegaard makes clear that, for him, ‘abstract free will’ is a complete fantasy as no subject has a continual abstract possibility outwith a historical state of affairs; a subject’s ability to act is always dependent upon, and conditioned by, his historical surroundings, the actual world he encounters (Kierkegaard, 1996:524-5).

One will observe that this understanding of freedom appears much closer to the thought of Hegel than it does to Existentialism. As Hegel argued in *The Philosophy of Right*: all humans have freedom in their ability to ‘freely choose’, however this freedom is dependent on the existence of an external object ‘to choose’. In this way our radical freedom negates into complete dependency (Hegel, 2008:37-8).

To illustrate this one might imagine a subject who is completely free to drink a cup of coffee. However, in order for him to be able to drink a cup of coffee, there must be a cup of coffee that exists. His freedom to drink coffee can therefore be understood to be completely dependent on an external world where the cup of coffee exists.

The difference between Hegel and Kierkegaard is in how they address this issue. Hegel looks for something implicit in the subject that can become an object of the subject's will, and thus avoid the dependency on something external. This he finds in the subject's will itself. Thus to overcome his dependence on the external objects, Hegel insists the subject must not will something external to himself, but rather will his own 'free will'. The subject thus becomes free as he is no longer willing something which requires external dependency, but rather something internal (Hegel, 2008:46). To return to the coffee: to overcome his dependence on its external existence, Hegel changes the object of the subject's will from the coffee to the desire for free will.

The first objection Kierkegaard might raise is that, by overcoming his external dependence by relating to his idea of free will, Hegel is falling back on Socratic recollection: he is no longer relating himself to himself in regards to 'something else', but is just 'relating himself to himself'. Secondly Hegel, although advancing dialectically in his mind, is making no movement in actual existence. As Collins explains: Kierkegaard's problem with speculative Idealism was that, although it

allowed subjects to proceed towards a more ‘enlightened frame of mind’, it did not cause any actual physical movement: it did not prompt the subject to take any action or make any choices in existence, he instead remains statically speculating about the predicament (Collins, 1954:118-9). In the coffee example, Hegel’s speculating about freedom in his mind may make him more enlightened about the ‘idea of freedom’, but it does not help him make any movement towards attaining his goals in existence: he remains thinking about the coffee rather than actually drinking it.

Kierkegaard would rather posit that we must recognise this dependence on the external world which we encounter, and then act upon it. To put it into Kierkegaardian terminology: my ideal self may picture me drinking coffee whilst my actual self does not possess the coffee. This conundrum cannot be resolved by abstract speculation but only through existential action; to actualise the possibility of drinking coffee one must make the choice to physically pick up the coffee and drink it.

What may be gleamed from this is that Kierkegaard maintained that one must recognise the symbiotic relationship between our freedom and dependency on the world. To speculate on a way to circumnavigate this would be futile, as such a path does not generate any existential action. However to simply assert one’s freedom unconditionally is to create a false conception of the human being and his capacity for choice; no human makes choices completely freely and is rather

always conditioned to a degree by contextual factors. It will consequently be vital to my task of reinterpreting Kierkegaard, if I am to give a faithful political reinterpretation of his philosophy, that I maintain this symbiotic balance between the subject's ability to make choices and his dependency on encounters with the external world.

I have thus explored Kierkegaard's concept of the 'encounter' and how it relates to his notion of 'self', and given an interpretation of his thought on this matter. Nonetheless, before I conclude and summarise, there is one small aspect I have yet to consider. This aspect is one of a 'failed encounter'; when a subject, rather than accepting the mode of existence he encounters, is affronted by it and promptly rejects it. This notion can be found in Kierkegaard's argument concerning 'offence'⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ It should be observed that Kierkegaard does not believe that the subject makes choices nonchalantly but rather does so with great difficulty. In particular Kierkegaard argues that this possibility of having a choice in regards to the future induces in the subject a condition of 'anxiety'. This is due to the fact that the subject recognises he may make a choice over his future, but as a consequence may choose poorly and make his situation worse than it currently is. This is made evident in Kierkegaard's retelling of the 'fall' in *Anxiety* (Kierkegaard, 1980:45). Now Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety is intrinsically tied with the Christian idea of sin, for what Adam is made aware of is the possibility of disobeying God and his anxiety is caused over what could result from such a choice. Anxiety is thus understood in this way as being anxious that our choices may sin against God. Nonetheless what is important to realise is that anxiety originates in the subject's capacity to make choices, and the realisation that some choices may end up worsening the situation he currently is in. As Kierkegaard makes clear: it is the 'anxious possibility of *being able*' (Kierkegaard, 1990:44.)

5. Offence

I have so far considered how the subject may have encounters, and further base his life choices upon what he learns from his encounters. However, to give a full understanding of this process I must not only explore how the subject accepts what he discovers, but also the possibility that he may reject it. This rejection of the knowledge given in the encounter Kierkegaard denotes as ‘offence’. The purpose of this section will thus be to understand how the subject may reject what is presented in the encounter, and on what grounds he does so.

We may interpret two ways in which Kierkegaard perceives the ‘truth’ of Christ may cause ‘offence’. The first is in regards to Christianity being inherently paradoxical, and thus ‘offensive’ to human reason⁷⁸. The second is that, because Christianity is a difficult and demanding form of life, it is ‘offensive’ to the ethical norms of the society the subject inhabits.

First, we may consider the problem of the ‘Christian paradox’. As the ‘truth’ of Christianity is regarded as paradoxical it can be considered to be ‘offensive’ to

⁷⁸ The idea that Christianity is a paradox and requires one to suspend one’s own reason can be dated back to St Paul’s criticism of the Greeks’ love of reason and philosophy (Colossians, 2:8). It should be acknowledged however that there is debate as to what exactly is so paradoxical about Christianity that it requires a suspension of reason, at least in Kierkegaard’s understanding. Alastair Hannay provides what can be understood as the ‘conventional’ interpretation that for God, who is eternal, to become simultaneously ‘temporal’, is a logical paradox (Hannay, 1982:107). Tim Rose has however argued that the paradox is more one of moral understanding than strict logic. He argues that it is the idea that God would forgive sin that is paradoxical to humanity, as humanity could not conceive of doing the same thing if roles were reversed (Rose, 2001:63). This is however a debate whose answer does not concern us. It is enough to understand that for Kierkegaard Christianity is a paradox which requires one to surrender one’s reason, and that such a request may cause offence.

human reason. Consequently, for a subject to adopt the Christian life, he must suspend his ability to reason. However, the subject may be hesitant to simply suspend his reason and accept such paradoxes; he might indeed choose to trust in his own mental capacities rather than the seemingly paradoxical claims of Christianity. In such a case the subject can be said to have rejected Christianity because it ‘offended’ him, or more precisely, ‘offended’ his ability to think rationality (Kierkegaard, 2009:123).

To illustrate this we may consider the example of the Young Hegelian, and Kierkegaard’s contemporary, Ludwig Feuerbach. Indeed, it seems Kierkegaard likely had Feuerbach in mind when contemplating ‘offence’. We may observe that in his Journals Kierkegaard does refer to Feuerbach as an ‘offended individuality’ (Kierkegaard, 1985:217). To this evidence we may also add Kierkegaard’s friend Hans Brøchner’s recollection that Kierkegaard often discussed Feuerbach and referred to him as one who was ‘offended’ by Christianity (Brøchner, 1996:233)⁷⁹.

In his *Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach’s arguments do interestingly bear some resemblance to those put forward by Kierkegaard. He argues that to accept Christianity one must accept paradoxes and surrender one’s reason to faith (Feuerbach, 1989:211). However, Feuerbach is clearly ‘offended’ by such a proposition as he rejects the idea of revelation precisely because it is contrary to

⁷⁹ A comprehensive discussion of Kierkegaard’s relationship to Feuerbach is provided by Jonathan Malesic in ‘Illusion and Offence in *Philosophical Fragments*; Kierkegaard’s Inversion of Feuerbach’s Critique of Christianity’ (2007).

reason, dismissing it as ‘childlike’ (Feuerbach, 1989:208). Thus, we may say that Feuerbach realised that one must surrender one’s reason in order to accept the Christian life. Nonetheless, rather than accept this, Feuerbach was ‘offended’ by it.

The second reason that the encounter may cause ‘offence’ is that it asks the subject to adopt a lifestyle which is very different to the social and ethical norms in which he currently exist. In ‘Crumbs’ Kierkegaard acknowledges that to accept the Christian life is incredibly demanding and a real ‘challenge’ (Kierkegaard, 2009:126-7). In *Postscript* Kierkegaard similarly remarks that one of the reasons becoming a Christian is so difficult is that it requires one to accept a view of existence that contradicts the ethical norms of society. Indeed, to become a Christian one must ‘suspend’ the ethical norms of society, just as one must ‘suspend’ one’s ability to think rationally (Kierkegaard, 2009:224)⁸⁰. However, we might imagine that a subject chooses not to ‘suspend’ the ethical norms of the society he inhabits but rather chooses to reject the Christian life which contradicts these norms. In such a case the subject was ‘offended’ by the Christian life as it contradicted the ethical norms of his society.

To illustrate this I may consider two examples. The first example I wish to consider is the conversion of St Paul. Before his conversion on the road to Damascus Paul

⁸⁰ This need to suspend the ethical norms in order to follow the religious Christian existence gives rise to the famous Kierkegaardian term the ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ (Kierkegaard, 2009:224).

had persecuted Christians for the Jewish authorities. He carried out this persecution because he believed it was demanded by the customs and norms of the Jewish community he inhabited; Paul claimed he had sought to destroy the Christian church because he was ‘zealous of the traditions of my fathers’ (Galatians, 1:14). However, when God revealed to him his son Jesus Christ, Paul converted from Judaism to Christianity (Galatians, 1:16). What we infer here is that upon encountering Christ on the road to Damascus Paul discarded the norms of Jewish society in order to adopt a Christian life. Nonetheless, for the sake of example, we may imagine that Paul rejected what Christ revealed to him in the encounter. We might imagine he did so for the same reasons he was persecuting the Christians in the first place; he rejects Christianity because it conflicts with the traditions and beliefs of his community. Thus, one might interpret Paul rejecting the possibility of becoming a Christian because it was ‘offensive’ to the ethical norms and beliefs of his community⁸¹.

The second example I consider is from the Old Testament rather than the New, but is nonetheless still illustrative because it is an example which Kierkegaard himself discusses at great length. The example is namely that of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac which Kierkegaard discusses in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard discusses how God’s commands to sacrifice Isaac were contrary to Abraham’s

⁸¹ Paul’s name before his conversion was Saul. Thus in ‘Acts’ the encounter on the road to Damascus is described as happening to Saul (Acts, 9:3-5). Consequently, if he had rejected Christianity in this encounter, it would have been ‘Saul’ and not ‘Paul’ who would have rejected Christ and continued persecuting Christians. Nonetheless I have referred to him as ‘Paul’ for the sake of familiarity and clarity.

normative understanding. It first contradicted with Abraham's role as a father, as fathers are expected to care for their sons and not kill them. It was also however contrary Abraham's normative understanding of justice: Isaac has done nothing wrong and thus to kill him would be considered unjustified. Thus, as Kierkegaard makes clear in *Fear and Trembling*, the 'ethical expression' of Abraham's actions is 'murder' (Kierkegaard, 2003:60). Now, in the story Abraham of course 'suspends' his ethical understanding and accepts God's commands. We may nonetheless again imagine that Abraham rejected God's wishes because they conflict with his normative understanding of justice and fatherhood. In this case we might thus understand Abraham to have rejected God because what he learned in the encounter with him was 'offensive' to his ethical norms.

We may thus understand that the subject may reject what is proposed in the encounter because it is either 'offensive' to his reason or to his 'ethical norms'. What is common to both these instances however is that what is proposed in the encounter is contrary to the subject's own understanding of existence. Thus, 'offence' occurs when knowledge gained in the encounter conflicts with the subject's own understanding and is thus subsequently rejected. When this occurs it can be said that the encounter has failed.

To say the encounter has 'failed' of course begs the question of 'who exactly is responsible for this failure?' Is the failure God's, or more specifically Christ's, for being an unconvincing advocate for the Christian life? Or is the failure that of the

subject's for failing to recognise that the proper mode of existence for him is that of the Christian? If the answer is the latter then it implies that there is a certain mode of existence that the subject is expected to adopt; a 'telos' which he is expected to fulfil. This would of course signify a teleology in Kierkegaard's work and would question exactly how 'free' the subject is to choose the life he wishes to live; for although it is claimed the subject may choose the life he wishes to live, if there is in fact only once choice that is acceptable, is this really a free choice at all?

I will return to this presence of teleology in Kierkegaard's work, and the issues this raises, in the next chapter. In this section it has been sufficient to explore how 'offence' at the encounter may occur.

6. Summary and Conclusion

We have understood the subject to be a synthesis of temporal physicality and eternal psyche. The 'physical' is representative of the subject's finite actual existence and the restrictions this imposes. The 'psyche' conversely represents the subject's ability to imagine himself differently from his current existence and the possibility to realise these alternatives. This synthesis is brought together by the subject in his free choice to realise a possibility. Thus, we may understand the

subject to be historically bound in finite existence, but with the freedom to always make choices which shape his existence and life path.

Nonetheless, it was observed that the subject could not progress this way autonomously. Rather, the subject required external experiences, 'encounters', which allowed him to imagine alternative forms of existence. The crucial function the encounter takes in the subject's self-development is to bestow upon him the knowledge, knowledge which he did not have before and could not attain for himself, which is required in order to make life choices.

It should also be recalled that, just as the subject could accept the life model discovered through the encounter, he could also reject it. This occurred when the life proposed was so contrary to the subject's understanding of existence that he was 'offended' by it.

Thus, in conclusion, Kierkegaard's theory of self-development may be understood as a two-step process. First of all the subject must have an external encounter which bestows upon him the knowledge by which he may imagine a possible alternative mode of existence. The subject then realises this possibility by his choice to adopt it as a model for his own life. We may thus crucially understand the 'encounter' itself as the external experience which bestows upon the subject knowledge which he previously lacked and upon which he may base his life choices.

It is this interpretation of self-development which I want to take forward to explore how the subject encounters and relates to the State. I will now proceed to

Chapter Five where I will begin reinterpreting Kierkegaard's theological understanding as to develop an interpretation more suitable for exploring such 'political' encounters.

Chapter Five: The ‘Subjective Understanding’

“[A] relation which relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to something else”

(Kierkegaard, 2004:43).

In the previous chapter we discovered that the above remark formed the basis of Kierkegaard’s understanding of selfhood. In this chapter I will attempt to reinterpret this understanding of ‘self’ as to construct what I will call the subject’s ‘subjective understanding’ of his existence. This concept will then be used in Chapter Six as the basis of my ‘subjective approach’ to exploring the relationship between subject and State.

I here draw attention to the fact that the above statement may be broken down into two parts: the ‘relations that relates to itself’, and the ‘something else’ which the subject also relates to. In order to achieve the aim of this chapter I will reinterpret these two components of selfhood and the manner in which they relate to one and other.

Firstly, I consider the ‘relation that relates to itself’. We may understand this as the subject’s relating of his ‘actual existing self’ with the ‘future self he desires to become’ and his capacity to realise this desire through making choices. It thus

primarily denotes the subject as a historically bound agent, an ‘existing self’, who nonetheless maintains the ability to make choices about his life from within this context; his ability to imagine and become the ‘future self’.

In section one I will reinterpret and defend this notion of the subject as one who exists within the limitations of a historical context but nonetheless retains the ability to make life choices.

Secondly, the ‘something else’ we may understand as something external to the subject that he may encounter. When encountering this ‘something else’ the subject is made aware of life options, or ‘possibilities’, which are available to him. In this way we may conceive that the ‘something else’ makes the subject aware of the different person he can become and thus inspires the ‘imagined future self’. It was the encounter with Christ for instance that made the subject aware of the possibility of a Christian life and subsequently ‘inspired’ him to become a Christian.

In section two I will provide a reinterpretation of this ‘something else’ that the subject may encounter. This is where my articulation will differ significantly from Kierkegaard’s. This is primarily because I will here need to replace God, or ‘Christ’, as the ‘something else’ which the subject relates to with something that is more suitable for a ‘political understanding’. In order to achieve this I will progress in four steps.

In subsection 2.1 I will consider why Kierkegaard identifies God as, not only the ‘something else’ in his theory, but furthermore the *only* ‘something else’ which is

a valid base from which the subject may make choices. I will aim to criticise and show the limitations that this insistence on God places on Kierkegaard's understanding as to justify my movement away from it. This will involve a revisiting of the problem of 'teleology' I raised at the end of the previous chapter.

In section 2.2 I will then consider a second problem found when trying to reinterpret Kierkegaard's theory in a more political light. This problem is to do with how knowledge is transferred in the encounter with the 'something else'. To explain: when the subject encountered Christ the whole 'truth' of God was bestowed upon him; he only needed to accept this truth. However encounters with phenomena in the political world cannot bestow upon the subject a complete knowledge of this world in the same way as the encounter with Christ did. Therefore, I will not be talking about 'one' encounter, but rather 'multiple encounters'. This shift from a 'single encounter' to 'multiple encounters' will thus be the second step I will have to make when reinterpreting the 'something else'.

In section 2.3 I will then provide my conceptualisation of what this 'something else' is. This I will call the 'Horizon' which I shall understand to be a perception of the world that surrounds the subject constructed from his multiple encounters.

In section 2.4 I will then further illustrate this understanding of 'something else' through my simile of the 'dark room'.

It can finally be understood that these two components are brought together by the subject's 'choice'; the moment in which he chooses to realise and become one

of the possibilities revealed to him by the ‘something else’. This choice further shapes both the subject and his relations to the world around him. We might for instance consider the choice to realise the possibility of a ‘Christian life’ defined the subject, as he became a ‘Christian’, and shaped his relationship with the world around him, as to ‘become a Christian’ he had to adopt a Christian mode of existence.

In section three I will consequently explore how my two reinterpreted concepts of the ‘relation that relates to itself’ and the ‘something else’ relate to one another and come together. Similar to Kierkegaard’s understanding, I will argue that these two components come together in the moment of choice; when the subject chooses to realise a life possibility that was revealed to him in his Horizon. Also, similar again to Kierkegaard’s account, I will argue that this choice shapes the subject’s identity and orientates his relations with the world around him. This understanding and orientation of his existence he receives through his choice is what I shall call his ‘subjective understanding’. It is this notion of the ‘subjective understanding’ which I will use as a bases to consider how a ‘subjective approach’ may explore the subject and State relationship in Chapter Six.

In the conclusion and summary of this chapter I will provide a summary of this ‘subjective understanding’ and identify any problems with my presentation of this concept which will have to be addressed in Chapter Six.

1. Imagining and Choosing Alternatives: The ‘Relation which Relates to Itself’

In this section I will outline my understanding of the subject as having the ability to make life choices from within a historical context. This understanding holds that the subject has the ability to make choices about how he wishes to lead his life. Nonetheless, this freedom is not absolute, but rather is restricted and conditioned by the external world the subject is situated in. The subject is restricted because the external world puts certain limitations upon what he may realistically choose to do. It conditions the subject as it is only through knowledge of the external world that the subject may come to know the options he may choose from, thus facilitating his very capacity to make free decisions.

It may be observed here that there is a great body of literature pertaining to debates about the ‘freedom of the will’. Nonetheless, my intention here is not to enter into such debates. What I primarily wish to achieve in this section is to give a specifically Kierkegaardian account of choice which I use to explore the ‘subjective approach’.

Nonetheless, one alternative theory about freedom that I shall consider is the argument put forward by Arthur Schopenhauer in his essay ‘Freedom of the Will’. The reason for this is to defend my interpretation against a specific argument concerning determinism which I believe proves particularly illuminating as to why

this Kierkegaardian understanding of freedom complements the ‘subjective approach’. Why I have chosen to consider Schopenhauer’s argument in particular is because I believe it draws out the differing ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ interpretations of human freedom which will be important for the proposed approach⁸².

To begin, we may once more consider our subject who wishes to become a pilot. Now, our subject may be able to decide that he wants to become a pilot, nonetheless his ability to realise this ambition is limited by the situation he finds himself in. He may for instance come from a poor background and consequently may struggle to raise the money for the pilot exams. Furthermore, he may lack the intelligence and mathematical skills that a pilot requires. Thus, although he may desire to be a pilot, the subject may be restricted and even prevented from realising this goal by the circumstances of his situation. Therefore, he is not completely free to define his life, but is rather restricted by the circumstances of his situation.

We can thus see how the subject’s circumstances restrict his choice. I would argue that his circumstance is also what facilitates his ability to choose. In order to choose to become a pilot our subject must have a conception of ‘what it is to be a pilot’. Now, the subject was not born with this understanding, the function of a

⁸² I may therefore also make clear here that I am not attempting to give a compressive account of Schopenhauer nor his philosophy of the will. I am rather only making an illustration of an argument that will help explain my own approach

pilot cannot be considered innate knowledge. Nor can the subject simply invent what it is to be a pilot or choose for himself what being a pilot consists of, he cannot for instance decide that 'being a pilot' consists of 'riding a bicycle'. Rather, he must learn from the external world about such things as 'airplanes' and 'air travel' before he can form in his mind an understanding of what exactly 'being a pilot' entails. It is only once he has formed a rough conception of 'a pilot' that a subject can then choose to become one. Indeed, we might say the subject is dependent on his existence in a world where 'pilots' exist. He could not for instance choose to become an airplane pilot in First Century B.C. Rome. Therefore, we may assert the subject cannot simply 'invent' himself as he pleases, rather he is dependent on the external world in order to become aware of the possible pathways in life that he may choose from. It is in this way that the subject's situation not only restricts his freedom but also facilitates it.

Thus, I have argued that the subject is not completely free but is restricted by his circumstances in two important ways. Firstly, the subject's situation may restrict and even prevent him from achieving the life he desires. Secondly, the subject is dependent on his external world to reveal the possible life options from which he may choose. Consequently, we may say the subject's environment both restricts and facilitates his capacity for free choice.

Nonetheless, I would argue that, despite these restrictions, the subject always maintains the ability to make free choices. Upon learning about what becoming a

pilot entails, and further weighing up the restrictions of his own situation, the subject is always free to make that choice to try and become a pilot. I may also argue that such choices are not final or eternally binding; the subject may decide to try and become a pilot, but later change his mind after finding the study involved to be overly taxing. Thus, our subject is not only always free to make choices but is also always free to change his mind. This interpretation of free choice therefore holds that, although the subject is restricted and conditioned by the world around him, whatever his situation may be he always retains the capacity to make decisions about the direction of his life⁸³.

I may now turn to consider the objection to this understanding of the subject and his capacity for choice which comes from those philosophical positions which hold that the subject's actions are completely determined. On such an understanding the subject's capacity for choice would be dismissed as an illusion.

To illustrate this argument I will turn to the thought of Schopenhauer, and in particular to his essay on the 'Freedom of the Will'. Schopenhauer argues that when we consider human behaviour from an objective perspective it becomes clear that freedom is an illusion, and in fact all our decisions and choices are predetermined. Viewed in this way human action, like all other worldly

⁸³ It should be highlighted here that this interpretation of the subject's capacity for choice is similar to the understanding Kierkegaard gives, particularly in *Sickness Unto Death*, and which has been discussed in Chapter Four. The reason I have proceeded with an example rather than a discussion of Kierkegaard's more abstract and philosophical articulation is because this has been discussed at length in Chapter Four. Therefore, the use of an example was intended to put across this understanding as clearly as possible without repeating what has already been said.

phenomena, is subjected to the rule of cause and effect. Consequently, all our actions and choices must have had a prior cause which brought them into being, and it is this cause which further determines and makes necessary these choices and actions. Understood in this way, free choice becomes something akin to a miracle; a spontaneous effect which occurred without any cause (Schopenhauer, 2010:71). To avoid this absurdity we must therefore understand that all actions and choices are a result of prior causes, which Schopenhauer calls motives. We may therefore understand that our decisions are not a product of free choice but were the result of the strongest motive which acted upon us and determined our actions. Thus, Schopenhauer argues, just as the movement of the billiard ball is determined by the strike of the cue and cannot begin before this has occurred, so our decisions are determined by external motives and we cannot act before these motives have compelled us to do so (Schopenhauer, 2010:70).

However, difficulty arises from the fact that human motives are complex and difficult to identify. For instance, the motive that compels a subject to buy a sandwich, and in particular why to buy a certain type of sandwich, or indeed a sandwich and not a burger, and further why he chooses to eat now and not wait for his dinner at home, is far less tangible than the cause of the billiard ball moving across the table. This difficulty in identifying motives makes it appear as if there are none, thus creating the illusion that the action was the product of a spontaneous free decision. Nonetheless, Schopenhauer insists that, despite the complexity of the cause or the multiplicity of its possible results, the decision was

still a result of causation, and thus is no less determined than was the movement of the billiard ball (Schopenhauer, 2010:65).

We may further clarify this argument by considering it in comparison to the phenomena of the natural world. We may for instance consider the erupting of a volcano. To the people of antiquity, who did not have the scientific knowledge to identify the cause of the erupting, this phenomenon appeared spontaneous. Consequently, they would often claim it erupted due to the will of an angry god, and thus to a degree attribute to nature a freedom of will. However, this is of course not the case: volcanic eruptions are caused by the building of pressure often due to the movements of tectonic plates. Thus, the eruption is caused and determined by the movement of these plates; not by the free will of nature or of an angry God. This is similar to our understanding of freedom: our actions and choices are caused by powerful motives that act upon us and compel us to make certain decisions. However, as these causes are often unclear to us, we instead explain them as the result of a free choices, just as the ancients did with the volcano.

However, Schopenhauer insists that the biggest contributor to the ‘illusion of freedom’ is not the intangibility of causes, on the contrary the ‘illusion’ is primarily caused by the fact that we rarely consider the issue of freedom from an objective position. Instead, we often look at the problem of freedom from ‘the perspective of self-consciousness’, or what we might call the ‘subjective perspective’.

From this ‘subjective perspective’ we do not consider why an external object acts in the way it does, as for instance with the erupting volcano. Rather, in this perspective we consider ourselves and our capacity to make choices. One, for instance, is not concerned with an external object and its movements but rather one’s own ability to move; one does not ask ‘why *that object* moved left’ but rather ‘do I have to go left?’, or ‘do I have the capacity to decide to go right instead?’. The answer to this, from a subjective perspective, will of course be ‘yes’; ‘if I don’t want to go left, I can indeed choose to go right instead’. In this thought process it will be noted that attention is given almost exclusively to the self and external factors are excluded; thought revolves around whether I can choose to go right and what factors may cause me to go right are not given proper consideration. This is very different to how we contemplate natural phenomena. We do not for instance consider whether the volcano can choose to erupt or not erupt, but rather look to the external causes that necessitated the eruption. The ‘subjective perspective’ thus overlooks external influences and focuses primarily on the self. This makes it appear as if one is free to choose one’s own actions and thus gives the illusion of freedom of choice (Schopenhauer, 2010:48-9).

The reasons why Schopenhauer maintains this freedom of choice is an illusion are twofold. Firstly: as I have discussed, by focusing on the self as subject, and not as a phenomenon immersed in the natural world, it excludes the external causes or motives which will ultimately determine the decision over which direction to go. Thus, although it may appear to me I can choose between left and right, in reality

this decision will be determined by which direction has stronger motivations for me.

Secondly, it confuses ‘wishing’ with ‘willing’, the former denoting the desire to do something, and the latter the actual doing of the action. Now, although I may ‘wish’ to go left or right, I cannot physically do both. What will cause me to choose one direction over the other will ultimately be which direction has the stronger motivation, and until this motivation has acted upon me I will remain ‘wishing both’ but actually ‘willing neither’. Thus, Schopenhauer would insist we cannot act or make a decision until a strong enough motive has compelled us to do so, and consequently the action was determined by a prior cause. Freedom of choice is thus an illusion; we are as much necessitated by causation as is the billiard ball and the volcano (Schopenhauer, 2010:68-9).

What I wish to highlight here is the focus on perspective Schopenhauer takes when arguing for determinism. As he makes very clear, it is only when one takes the ‘objective’ vantage point that the subject’s dependency on causation becomes clear. On the contrary, from the subjective position, it appears that the subject does have a free decision over what he wishes to do. Thus, Schopenhauer’s arguments requires one to take an ‘objective’ approach to human action in a similar way as do scientists in regards to natural phenomena.

However, the intention of this thesis is to resist ‘stepping back’ from the subject’s perspective. Indeed, it is the desire of this thesis to better explore the subject’s

situation, in particular the moment in which he encounters the State. Thus, given this intention, it would seem most appropriate to take a ‘subjective perspective’. In light of this it would seem appropriate to hold the view that the subject does have a choice in what actions he wishes to partake in. To try and understand his decisions as determined by causation would be to move away from this perspective into the objective ‘removed’ vantage point. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I will maintain that the subject has a capacity for free choice, regardless if it can be argued to be an illusion from an objective perspective or not.

Nonetheless, it may be worth briefly contemplating whether, if we were to follow Schopenhauer into the realms of his ‘objective’ philosophy, if such a deterministic view of human behaviour would enrich our understanding of political relationships. We have already alluded to the fact that understanding the causes of human actions is far more opaque than understanding causation in the natural world. This is further complicated by the fact, which Schopenhauer acknowledges, that humans often try and conceal their motives and we can never know truly what is going on in their minds (Schopenhauer, 2010:67). Thus, although such arguments provide interesting speculation, such an objective and deterministic account would not appear as the best approach to investigating the human world, especially not in such a complex area as political relationships. Such an attempt would be unlikely to be able to identify the true causes of political actions and decisions, if such ‘true causes’ do indeed exist, and any conclusions would likely

be reductive and assumptive. This is in line with my criticisms of such ‘outside approaches’ in Chapters One to Three, which maintained that such approaches overlook the experiences and perspective of the subject.

To conclude this argument, it is worth drawing attention to a comparison Nietzsche made between human will and waterfalls in *Human, All Too Human*. The passage is both complex and profound, and therefore it is worth quoting at length;

“When we see a waterfall, we think we see freedom of will and choice in the innumerable turnings, windings, breaking of the waves; but everything is necessary; each movement can be calculated mathematically. Thus it is with human actions; if one were omniscient, one would be able to calculate each individual action in advance... To be sure the acting man is caught up in his illusion of volition; if the wheel of the world were to stand still for a moment and an omniscient, calculating mind were to take advantage of this interruption, he would be able to tell the farthest future of each being and describe every rut the wheel will roll upon” (Nietzsche, 2004:74).

We may of course observe here that Nietzsche is arguing for determinism, perhaps unsurprising given the influence of Schopenhauer on his thought. Nonetheless, I want to focus on his use of the term ‘omniscient’. It is only a calculating ‘omniscient being’, Nietzsche claimed, who could identify the necessary causes of human behaviour. He further observes that even such an omniscient being could only identify these causes if the world stopped turning. However, we are not

omniscient, and the world will continue turning. We can therefore only take the vantage point of the ‘acting man’, the person who is ‘caught up in this illusion’. This is however not something my thesis shies away from, but is something it embraces. It is my aim to construct a paradigm for understanding political relationships which better appreciates the experiences and perspective of the existing subject. It is for this reason primarily that I shall embrace the view the subject has the freedom to make decisions and is not completely determined.

I am therefore arguing for what may be called a ‘limited’ understanding of freedom; I am perceiving the subject as neither entirely free nor as entirely predetermined. I am acknowledging that the subject’s freedom is restricted by his the circumstances of his situation, and furthermore that this situation facilitates his capacity for free decisions. Nonetheless, despite the situation the subject finds himself in, he always maintains the capacity to freely choose between the options the situation presents to him. This theory of the subject and his ‘limited freedom’ is in line with Kierkegaard’s understanding as outlined in Chapter Four.

2. The ‘Something Else’

2.1 God as ‘something else’

It will be observed that Kierkegaard was highly critical of the idea that the subject could base his life on any political concept or institution. Instead, he insisted the

only truly valid ‘something else’ that the subject should relate to was God, as is revealed through the person of Christ. All other possibilities could only lead to despair (2004:76).

Therefore, before I begin outlining the change from a religious to a political ‘something else’, I must defend myself against Kierkegaard’s objection. I will argue that by making God the only valid ‘something else’ the subject may relate to, and subsequently Christianity the only true form of existence that the subject ought to adopt, Kierkegaard makes his argument overtly teleological. This is problematic as such a teleology marginalises and excludes many forms of existence and undermines the subject’s capacity for choice.

That, for Kierkegaard, Christianity is the only valid life form of life is unsurprising when we consider Kierkegaard’s overall intentions. As Kierkegaard states in *Point of View*, the entirety of his pseudonymous work was concerned with the task of how one becomes a Christian and to direct his readers towards the Christian way of life (Kierkegaard, 1998:44). In this way we may understand that the ‘Christian life’ is the overarching end or ‘telos’ to Kierkegaard’s account of human existence⁸⁴.

The teleological nature of Kierkegaard’s thought is a subject fervently debated amongst Kierkegaard scholars. Some have taken a biographical approach to understanding this structure which interprets the progression of the ‘stages’ as

⁸⁴ Indeed ‘telos’ is the word used by commentators such as Taylor to describe Kierkegaard’s understanding of the Christian existence (Taylor, 1975:77).

symbolic for Kierkegaard's own life journey; we would thus understand the 'aesthetic stage' as representative of Kierkegaard's university years, the 'ethical' as his engagement to Olsen, and the 'religious' to his later Christian beliefs and commitments. Others have nonetheless taken a more 'universally applicable' understanding of Kierkegaard's thought; they have interpreted the development through the spheres as a model for understanding how the human self-progresses from infancy to mature personhood. Such interpretations have consequently drawn comparisons between Kierkegaard's thought and other self-development theories such as Hegel's account of the progression of human consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Mind* and Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual life stages. Nonetheless, neither the questions of 'how exactly we account for Kierkegaard's implicit teleology?', nor 'what interpretation of his thought's structure is more correct?', are of central importance to my thesis. What is crucial is that Kierkegaard's account of human existence is teleological, and that it is because of this that he holds there is only one valid possible life for the human self⁸⁵.

To further illustrate this I will thus focus on one particular interpretation of Kierkegaard that exemplifies the teleological nature of his thought. This is the interpretation that maintains Kierkegaard's arguments bear close resemblance to

⁸⁵ Examples of a biographical account of Kierkegaard's thought include Walter Lowrie's biography of Kierkegaard *Kierkegaard* (1938); 'psychological' interpretations include I.B. Ostenfeld's *Søren Kierkegaard's Psychology* (1978); there are a number of works discussing the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel, one of the most prominent being Stephen Crites' *In the Twilight of Christendom* (Crites, 1972:66). A good summary and analysis of the differing approaches can be found in Taylor's *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship* (1975), in particular Chapters One and Two.

Hegel's philosophical system. Such a view is most strongly advocated by Stephen Crites in *The Twilight of Christendom*. Crites argues that Kierkegaard's thought forms a dialectical skeleton with the 'stages of existence' taking a definite order as they lead from the lowest form of existence, found in the aesthetic, to the highest, found in the religious life according to Christ. Thus, Crites assert that what Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings amount to is in effect a new 'phenomenology of spirit', alternative to Hegel's (Crites, 1972:66)⁸⁶. This is of interest to us because it opens Kierkegaard to exactly the same criticism I levied against Hegel and the idealists, and indeed the 'rational approach' more generally, in Chapter One: by taking such a narrow and linear approach to understanding human existence they excludes and fail to account for a great variety of human behaviour. Indeed, just as we saw Green and Collingwood degrade behaviour which fell out with their rational paradigm as 'savage' and 'barbaric', so Kierkegaard degrades behaviour that lies out with a Christian existence as 'in despair' and as 'in sin'. The effect of this teleological character to Kierkegaard's philosophy is therefore to make only one mode of existence valid for the subject, and in the process exclude all other possibilities.

From what has been said, an argument could be put that Kierkegaard's veiled teleology renders his work incapable of understanding human existence. An

⁸⁶ It should be observed that such a comparison between Kierkegaard and Hegel is not limited to Crites. John Elrod similarly concludes that Kierkegaard's thought can be understood as a 'Christian Phenomenology of Spirit' (1975:250).

argument could also be advanced that Kierkegaard ultimately ends up providing a dialectical account of existence which is extremely similar to the Hegelian system he criticised. We may even level a similar criticism against Kierkegaard which is often cited against Marx: despite attempting to overturn the Hegelian system Kierkegaard ends up providing an account of existence which is far less changed from the Hegelian original than he would like to realise⁸⁷. Indeed, from what has been said, there would appear good grounds upon which to raise the hypothesis that Kierkegaard's thought is overtly Hegelian.

That said, there are fundamental differences between Hegel and Kierkegaard's thought that should be acknowledged. As Crites himself emphasises, unlike Hegel's levels of consciousness, Kierkegaard's 'stages of existence' do not logically follow one another nor can they be mediated by thought. On the contrary each stage is allowed to argue its case in completely its own terms and is embodied poetically in its own pseudo-author. As a consequence the subject, or indeed the reader, cannot move through these spheres by way of thought alone but rather must make a decision about which life he wishes to lead (Crites, 1972:66-7). This interpretation is also in accordance with George B. Arbaugh and George E. Arbaugh's claim that the central difference between Kierkegaard's account and Hegel's is that movement through the former's system is by decision and action,

⁸⁷ For such an interpretation of Marx see Hannah Arendt's essay on 'What is Existential Philosophy'. Interestingly Arendt compares Marx in this passage to Kierkegaard but does not acknowledge the same return to Hegel in the latter's thought (Arendt, 1994:175).

rather than speculative thought and mediation (1967:74-5). This however does not take away from the fact that Kierkegaard's stages are ranked from lowest to highest, consequently rendering a teleological account of existence similar to Hegel's. We may observe that, as has been stated, Kierkegaard shared a very similar understanding of the self to Hegel and, like Hegel, believed there was an end or 'telos' which the subject ought to reach. The crucial significance between Kierkegaard and Hegel however is that, whilst the latter believed the subject could advance intellectually to this telos through speculative thought, the former believed he could only reach his 'end' by making choices and undertaking action in existence.

Nonetheless, as interesting as this is, my primary task is not to discuss the debt Kierkegaard owed to Hegelian thought. We must always bear in mind the focus of this thesis is to render an interpretation of Kierkegaard, an interpretation which can be developed into a paradigm for understanding my political question of how the subject relates to the modern State. I have shown that, by holding only one religious option as valid, Kierkegaard's understanding of existence becomes overtly teleological and reductive.

With this in mind I revisit the issue I raised in Chapter Four in regards to the relation between teleology and Kierkegaard's concept of 'offence'. In particular, I raised the question at the end of Chapter Four: where does fault lie for 'offence' and the failure of the encounter? In light of the above discussion the answer is

clearly that fault for ‘offence’ lies with the subject. It is clear that the telos or proper end of the subject is perceived to be the Christian life. Thus, the subject is expected to abandon his ‘worldly understanding’ because this is necessary as to attain to his telos. When the subject takes ‘offence’ it is thus he that is failing to ascend to his proper and true end.

This Christian teleology puts severe limitations on Kierkegaard’s theory. As we have seen this view of human existence is extremely reductive and excludes many other forms of life. It also undermines much of Kierkegaard’s understanding of freedom. This is because, although Kierkegaard maintains the subject may choose to become a Christian or not, for Kierkegaard only the Christian choice is valid whilst the alternative is to remain in sin. Consequently, as only one choice and one way of life is truly valid, it undermines how free the subject really is to choose between these alternatives.

I have thus shown the limitations of Kierkegaard’s insistence on there being only one valid form of existence and the teleological implications of this assertions. I now consider how my own reinterpretation avoids this danger.

My reinterpretation will have no political ‘end’, ‘goal’, or ‘telos’ which I shall advocate. On the contrary, my aim will be to explore how the subject becomes aware of his possibilities, and how, by making choices based on these possibilities, he defines both himself and his relations to the world around him. Thus, my approach does not wish to recommend one possibility, but rather explore how the

subject chooses from many possibilities, and what the consequence of these choices are for his political relations.

Nonetheless, I am not here advocating that the notion of ‘telos’ should be banished from political discourse. As theorists such as MacIntyre have insisted, teleology can be a vital concept for understanding subjects’ aims and behaviours⁸⁸.

Indeed, it might be acknowledged that some of my previous discussion may be interpreted as alluding to an understanding of telos. Consider my example of the pilot from section one: he could not ‘invent’ what being a pilot was, but rather chose to try and be something that already existed in the world. This something, namely the pilot, is thus an ‘end’ which the subject wishes to ascend to. To do so he must become capable in a number of practices which are necessary to become a ‘pilot’, for instance mathematics. Thus, we may observe that such a subject has indeed a telos which he wishes to ascend to, and there is a number of choices he must make, and practices he must adopt, if he is to achieve this.

However, the difference between my use of telos and Kierkegaard’s is that I am not ascribing a telos to the subject. This does not mean that subjects will not structure their life on a teleological basis, as did our pilot. However it was not me who ascribed this telos, rather the subject selects it for himself. He similarly may choose to later take a different path in life, say as a farmer. Through this choice he

⁸⁸ For MacIntyre’s arguments see *After Virtue* (2007), in particular the chapters on ‘The nature of the Virtues’ and ‘The Virtues, the Unity of Human Life, and the Concept of Tradition’.

would thus change the goal or end he perceives for his life, and with this its teleological understanding.

Also, I do not prescribe what practice the subject must adopt in order to become a pilot. On the contrary, it is imagined that these practices are revealed to the subject through his encounters. My intentions as the theorist are rather to understand how encounters make subjects aware of their options, and how choices based on these revealed options affect their understanding of self and subsequent relations.

My difference from Kierkegaard in approach here can thus be summarised briefly as follows: in order to avoid giving a reductive understanding of human existence I shall not insert in my approach an assumption about what is the proper end for the subject. On the contrary, I shall seek to understand how the subject may become aware of certain possibilities in his life through encounters, and how his choices in regards to these possibilities shape his relationship to the world around him.

This has immediate implications for how I conceptualise the ‘something else’. In particular, I must not conceive of it as a single phenomenon which prescribes one valid choice to the subject. Rather, I must interpret it as a broader understanding of the world which posits multiple possible life choices which the subject may choose from. How I am to conceive of such a ‘something else’ will become clearer

as I proceed with shifting my understanding away from Kierkegaard's concept of God.

Nonetheless, before I develop such an understanding, I may conclude this section by considering the potential criticism that, by removing the Christian 'end' to Kierkegaard's theory, I corrupt his understanding of the 'self' and the 'encounter'.

The first consideration in faithfully interpreting Kierkegaard, as was made clear in the previous chapter, was the need to recognise the dependence of the subject's freedom of choice on his having encounters; to maintain this symbiotic mutually dependent relationship between 'freedom' and the 'dependency on the external world'. I would argue that I am maintaining the emphasis on the 'encounter' as the means by which the life choices are revealed to the subject, and thus both restrict and facilitate his ability to make free choices. Thus I am maintaining the equilibrium between choice and encounter, and am faithfully reinterpreting Kierkegaard's conception of the self.

A greater challenge appears however in removing Kierkegaard's concept from its religious background, and in particular removing the specifically 'Christian encounter'. We might recall that Kierkegaard did not believe one should relate one's life to a political concept or institution. Consequently Kierkegaard would appear sceptical in regards to the importance of a political encounter, and how fulfilling a choice based on this would be. It would instead appear that the only 'proper encounter' is the religious encounter, such as the encounter with Christ.

It might therefore be argued that, by removing the religious element of Kierkegaard's concept, I am losing something central to the 'encounter'.

To answer this objection I must outline what in particular is significant about the specifically 'Christian encounter'. We may identify two things: first a complete understanding of oneself and one's place in existence; and secondly the possibility of eternal salvation.

Kierkegaard believes it is the encounter with God which allows the subject to come to a complete understanding of his existence. This is because it is only by encountering God that the subject can realise the nature of his existence as having been created by a God who is qualitatively different from himself (Taylor, 1975:242). Thus the encounter with God allows the subject to 'truly know' who he is. As Kierkegaard states, in such an encounter, the subject becomes 'grounded transparently in the power which established it' (Kierkegaard, 2004:165).

Secondly, the encounter with God incarnate reveals to him the possibility that, if he chooses a life of faith, there is the possibility of 'eternal blessedness' (Taylor, 1975:323-5). It is thus only through an encounter with God that relief from the tribulations of life can be reached. As Kierkegaard concludes *Anxiety*, one can only rest from the anxious struggles of the world when one finds the possibility of Atonement, and realises this possibility through faith in God (Kierkegaard, 1980:160-2).

Thus we may understand the significance of the religious encounter is that it reveals to the subject the true nature of his existence and the possibility of eternal salvation. This point is illustrated in the discussion of Socrates in *Crumbs*. Kierkegaard refers to the quest Socrates was issued by the oracle at Delphi to 'know himself'. However, despite his many journeys and experiences, Socrates is never able to truly know his own nature; he did not truly know if he was a 'mild' being or a 'monster like Typhon'. The reason for this is that, being unable to encounter God Incarnate, Socrates lacks that encounter which reveals the true nature of human existence, and the subsequent possibility of salvation through faith in Christ (Kierkegaard, 2009:112). Thus, despite the many encounters Socrates may have, he can never know the truth of his existence nor find salvation.

Nonetheless, what is clear is that Socrates can have encounters which inform him about himself and open up life choices, the encounter at Delphi for instance led to Socrates choosing a life of philosophical enquiry. Such encounters just do not reveal 'the truth' about his existence nor offer salvation. Similarly, in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard speaks of encounters of an aesthetic nature, such as theatrics and music (Kierkegaard, 1992:123). Indeed, when we consider that *Either/Or* was written to make readers aware of the possibility of an aesthetical and ethical life, and to prompt a choice between them, we might understand the reading of *Either/Or* itself as an encounter: it reveals to the reader knowledge of possible life paths and prompts him to choose between them. Nonetheless, none of these encounters are specifically religious; they may not offer complete understanding

or salvation, but they are still encounters which reveal to the subject something about the world and the life possibilities contained within it. Thus, although the 'Christian encounter' is needed to gain true knowledge of existence and find salvation, it is not necessary for one to have encounters and make choices.

I would argue that neither of these two particularly qualities, 'truth of existence' or 'salvation', would be necessarily useful for a concept used to study politics. 'Truth' about oneself and existence would claim that there is a final and absolute end condition for politics, a certainty about what politics is and the subject's place within it. This would be however to exclude change from our study. This would be incredibly limiting as politics is by its nature volatile and subject to change. Secondly, the idea of a certain salvation the subject ought to attain implies a teleology to his existence, and I have already spoke at length as to why I do not want to assume a teleological structure to the subject.

Thus, to answer potential critics, I am interpreting Kierkegaard's understanding of the self and the encounter faithfully as I am maintaining the symbiotic relationship between freedom of choice and encounter. In removing the religious element I am not removing the ability of the subject to have encounters, but only encounters which can reveal two possibilities: the 'truth' about one's existence; and the possibility of eternal salvation, neither of which would be suitable for a study of politics.

2.2 From ‘One’ to ‘Multiple’ Encounters

In order to gain an understanding of the possibility of the Christian existence, for Kierkegaard, all the subject needed was an encounter with Christ. This was crucially a one-time incident through which the subject gained all the knowledge he required to make the decision of whether to become a Christian or not⁸⁹.

It is inconceivable however that one encounter could bestow upon the subject a complete knowledge of the political world he inhabits and all its possibilities. I must rather contend that such knowledge can only be built up over time. Indeed, this knowledge can never be understood as ‘complete’ as it will be constantly added to as the subject’s life progresses and he has more experiences. We may for instance imagine our subject first gained an understanding of the political world from his parents, then learnt more from his school, before having his own experiences with politics more directly in adult life. It may thus be conceived that his understanding of the political world will not remain uniform but may change as he progresses through life.

I therefore argue that it is unfeasible to imagine that our subject has one understanding of his political environment which is attained through one

⁸⁹ It should be noted that Kierkegaard makes no distinction between a disciple of ‘first hand’ and one of ‘second hand’; both the encounter of the life of Christ by physically meeting Jesus, and the encounter of the life of Christ through hearing about him from those who did, are equally valid (Kierkegaard, 2009:168).

encounter. Rather, I contend that he has a fluid conception of the political world which evolves as he continues to have encounters throughout his existence. Consequently, I will have to consider not just one singular encounter, but rather multiple encounters which occur over time and constantly add to, and potentially change, the subject's understanding.

This change from one to multiple encounters also changes how I perceive the subject, and in particular how I understand his role in gaining knowledge from his encounters. In Kierkegaard's religious account the subject was completely dependent on his encounter with Christ, and consequently upon God, for his understanding of the religious life (Kierkegaard, 2009:96-7). In receiving knowledge Kierkegaard's subject is completely passive; all knowledge of the Christian life is bestowed by God through one encounter and the subject simply receives this information in its entirety⁹⁰.

However, such a concept is impossible in my reinterpretation. As we saw, the subject cannot receive all the information about the polity he inhabits in one encounter, but rather he receives this gradually through multiple encounters across time. As a consequence, what he is receiving is not a complete readymade understanding of the world, but rather only fragments of knowledge. Thus, my

⁹⁰It will be recalled that freedom was a central concept for Kierkegaard and in his thought the subject was certainly active in his ability to choose which standard of existence he was going to base his life choices upon. Nonetheless the subject is passive in the reception of the Christian life model; he simply receives this readymade model and takes no role in the construction or assembly of the knowledge it contains.

subject must take upon himself the additional responsibility of assembling these fragments into an intelligible whole.

This need to assemble fragments of knowledge results in a shift in my understanding of the subject. He is no longer a passive recipient but rather must take on the additional task of sorting and assembling the knowledge he receives. Consequently, the subject must be perceived as an active agent who receives fragmented knowledge and constructs this into his own intelligible conception of the world around him.

The subject can thus be understood to build an understanding from the fragmented knowledge he receives through his encounters. Consequently the ‘something else’ the subject relates to is an understanding he has constructed through these encounters.

I have already stated that the name I will give this ‘something else’ is the ‘Horizon’. It is therefore now time to investigate this concept in proper detail.

2.3 The Horizon

I may draw attention to two functions the concept of ‘horizons’ has served in western thought. Firstly, it marks the limitations of the subject’s own understanding of existence. Secondly, it informs the subject’s understanding of self, providing a

framework of knowledge which he can use to orientate himself in the world and further develop his identity. I will investigate both these functions in turn⁹¹.

I begin with Hans-George Gadamer's understanding of 'horizons' as outlined in *Truth and Method*. In this text Gadamer defines a 'horizon' as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 2012:301).

From this we can infer firstly that a 'horizon' is a limitation on the understanding, and secondly that this limitation comes from the certain position or 'vantage point' that the subject currently occupies. This makes understanding the subject's positionality or 'situation' crucial to our understanding of horizons; if the horizon is a perspective from a certain vantage point, to fully understand what it includes we must investigate the vantage point it was taken from.

Gadamer accredits the formulation of the concept of 'situation' chiefly to Karl Jaspers⁹². In *Way to Wisdom* Jaspers identifies the 'human state' as 'always in situations'. Among the situations which the subject finds himself in there are, according to Jaspers, certain ones that are fundamental to existence which he

⁹¹ I must once again draw the reader's attention to the fact that I am not here intending to give a history of the notion of the 'horizon' in western thought nor an extensive account of the particular interpretations of 'horizons' mentioned. My intention in discussing the use of 'horizons' in western thought here is rather to draw out particular characteristics which shall inform my own fashioning of the concept of 'Horizon' which shall take the place of the 'something else' in my approach. I am therefore only engaging with these other articulations of the concept as far as they help fashion and illuminate my own.

⁹² Gadamer accredits Jaspers in a footnote to his discussion of 'horizons' in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 2012:301).

denotes ‘ultimate situations’. Such situations are ‘ultimate’ because they cannot be changed or escaped. Examples of these include ‘death’ or ‘chance’ (Jaspers, 1954:19-20).

Jaspers is here clearly concerned with the fundamental conditions of human existence. Nonetheless, what we may elicit from this is that we can understand existence as always located within situations, situations which the subject cannot remove himself from. This is indeed how Gadamer utilises the concept, arguing that the idea of a situation implies that we are always ‘inside of it’ and are unable to ‘remove ourselves from it’. The consequence of this inability to remove ourselves is that we can never gain objective knowledge of our existence. On the contrary, trapped as we always are within the ‘situations of life’, our understanding of existence is always a limited and imperfect subjective one (Gadamer, 2012:301).

It should be observed that Gadamer does not see such horizons as fixed or static. He, on the contrary, argues that a subject’s horizons may be expanded, and indeed even that a subject may open up new ‘horizons’. Nonetheless, what horizons may never become is objective; understanding is always limited by the position of the subject within existence. The ‘horizon’ is thus fundamentally a body of subjective knowledge; it is the subject’s own perspective of his existence gained from inside of it (Gadamer, 2012:301-2).

This limited subjective appreciation of his existence is what I shall understand as the subject's 'Horizon'. Therefore, when talking of the 'Horizon', I am denoting the limited subjective understanding of the particular world the subject inhabits from his position within it.

I may now further synthesise my concept of 'Horizons' with that of the encounters. I have said that the subject gains an understanding of the world around him from piecing together the fragments of knowledge which he gained through multiple encounters. Such knowledge, having been gained by the subject from his situation within the world he inhabits, is therefore the subject's own perspective, or his subjective appreciation of the world he inhabits. We may consequently understand the 'Horizon' to be the subjective knowledge of the world constructed from the fragments of knowledge gained in the subject's encounters. Furthermore, just as I understood Gadamer's 'horizons' to be fluid, so I may also understand my 'Horizon' as fluid as it changes and evolves as the subject has more encounters.

I now consider the second function of 'horizons' that I identified at the beginning of this subsection: its ability to inform the subject of his identity and orientate him in the world. To understand this I turn to the arguments contained in Taylor's *Ethics of Authenticity*, a work which is more focused on the development of the human self than Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, which is primarily concerned with methods in historical and textual analysis.

We may recall from Chapter Two that for Taylor human existence is perceived as fundamentally ‘dialogical’ in character; the subject cannot define himself alone in isolation but can only come to understand who he is through interaction with others, in particular ‘significant others’, such as parents (Taylor, 2003:33-5). Thus, Taylor insists we must understand human self-development as constructed in a dialogical nature between the subject and an ‘other’. Taylor insists these ‘others’ are not just restricted to persons, but also includes the cultural framework the subject inhabits. Taylor argues that such cultural contexts indeed provide a ‘background’ which the subject relates to and defines his identity against. Such cultural backgrounds are what Taylor denotes as ‘horizons of significance’ (Taylor, 2003:35-6).

To make this argument clearer I consider Taylor’s examples. Taylor describes a person who defines his identity by the fact that he has exactly 3,732 hairs on their head. However such a fact does not tell us anything about the subject’s identity, indeed the fact that he defines himself in such a way appears completely arbitrary and has no intelligible significance. However, this will change if we consider that the society the subject is part of is a cultural community that holds the number 3,732 to be sacred. Now, the subject’s decision to define himself by the number of hairs on his head gains significance as it identifies him as special amongst his community. Crucially, this significance can only be realised when we relate the subject’s features to the beliefs of his community. It is thus that the beliefs of the

community form a ‘horizon’ against which his identity is significant and intelligible (Taylor, 2003:36).

It is the same with the subject’s actions. Again, Taylor asks us to imagine a subject who decides to identify himself by doing something seemingly arbitrary: wriggling his toes in mud. Once more, if we try and comprehend this action in isolation, that is in abstraction from the ‘horizon of significance’, it cannot reveal anything that is significant about the subject. However, if we then realise that the subject’s community believe that mud is the element of the world spirit, and by dipping one’s toes in the mud one can contact this spirit, we suddenly understand why this action is significant for the subject; he is participating in the communities sacred practices and thus identifying himself as part of this social and religious belief system. Again, what is fundamental is that the subject’s actions can only be understood as significant when we relate it back to his horizon (Taylor, 2003:36).

We may therefore understand that horizons form for Taylor a vital ‘reference point’ for the subject’s development of self-identity; it is by relating to this meaningful background that the subject develops his identity and can give his features and actions significance.

It will be evident as to why such an account is appealing for the formulation of my own understanding of ‘Horizon’: like with my ‘something else’ the ‘horizon of significance’ is something that the subject is able to relate to when trying to develop his self-identity. Indeed, in light of this we can understand how the

'horizon' allows the subject to orientate himself in the world: it is by relating back to the horizon, and the understanding reflected in it, that he is able to comprehend what type of community he currently inhabits. In a similar way, I will therefore propose that the 'Horizon' allows the subject to comprehend what sort of society he inhabits and orientate himself within existence.

Nonetheless, it may be observed that in many ways what Taylor is describing as a 'horizon' is rather different from my conception. In a sense, Taylor's understanding can be understood as simply the background or context that the subject inhabits; it is not the subject's own perception of this environment as has been constructed through his encounters. This is indeed quite evident from Taylor's assertion that horizons are independent of the subject and 'given' (Taylor, 2003:39). My concept however is clearly neither 'independent of the subject' nor 'given' as it is constructed by the subject from the encounters he has within the situation of existence. Indeed, referring back to Chapter Two, it is this appreciation of 'horizon' as basically the context, as opposed to a subjective perception of context derived from particular encounters, which makes Taylor's understanding particularly illustrative of the 'contextual approach'.

Thus, although I want to draw from Taylor this notion that subjects form their understanding in relation to these 'horizons', I do not share with him the belief that horizons exist independently of the subject and are given. On the contrary, I am asserting that 'Horizons' are constructed from the knowledge gained from

encounters, and are thus dependent on, and to a degree relative to, the subject.

It is thus this ‘Horizon’, understood as a ‘constructed perception’ and not a ‘pre-given’, that subjects relate to. In other words my concept of ‘Horizon’ is not simply the cultural context the subject inhabits; it is rather the mental perception of this context constructed by the subject from knowledge gained in his encounters. This indeed again reveals the central difference between my approach and the ‘contextual approach’: the latter attempted to examine context as it informed the subject’s relationship; I wish to explore the encounters which give the subject a perception of the political world he inhabits.

Taylor could respond to my articulation of the ‘Horizon’ with the accusation that it is a form of ‘soft relativism’: if one does not have a framework of meaning which is independent of the subject, then one will lose the common point of reference that made the subject’s identity intelligible. Without a common point of reference the subject’s choices and actions will become simply results of his own preference or caprice, thus causing my account to slide into ‘soft-relativism’ (Taylor, 2003:38).

In response I would argue that, as my account of the ‘Horizon’ perceives it as constructed by the subject from the fragments of knowledge gained through his encounters, it is undoubtedly subjective. This is unsurprising as the aim of this thesis is to lay the foundations for a subjective approach to the relationship between subject and State: one constructed from the subject’s limited perspective within his historically bound context.

However, I would adamantly insist that this subjective nature of ‘Horizons’ does not cause my understanding to slide into ‘soft relativism’. To explain we must consider again how the ‘Horizon’ is constructed. I said that it was constructed by the subject’s assembly of fragmented knowledge he obtained through multiple encounters with the external political world. Crucially, this world does exist independent of and prior to the subject. Thus we may say that, although the ‘Horizon’ is subjective and particular to the subject, it is not formed out of pure caprice as it is constructed from the common source of the world we all share.

From this discussion of ‘horizons’ I am now able to give a sketch of what I understand by the ‘Horizon’. First of all, it is an understanding constructed by the subject. It is constructed over time as the subject gains fragments of knowledge through his encounters and assembles these into an intelligible whole. In this way, it represents the limited subjective appreciation of the world from the subject’s position within it. It is this limited subjective perception that he then relates to in order to understand both himself and his relations within this world. In this way the ‘Horizon’ forms the ‘something else’ that the subject relates to.

2.4 The Simile of the Dark Room

I wish to make the above outline of the ‘Horizon’ clearer by using my simile of the ‘dark room’. I wish to illustrate in particular with this simile how the subject constructs his perception of his situation from the knowledge gained from

encounters with it, and how he relates to this perception in order to understand and orientate himself within this situation. I also wish to further explore here how, by relating to this perception, the subject also becomes aware of the possibilities contained for him within this situation.

We may imagine our subject finds himself in a dark room. The only light in the room is coming from a small portable lamp. The light emanating from the lamp is, however, insufficient to illuminate the room entirely. In order to discover his surroundings and orientate himself the subject must therefore take the lamp and investigate the room.

As the subject traverses the room the lamp is able to illuminate small parts of it. He may for instance cast light on one part of the room and find a door. As he moves away from the door to discover more, darkness will again fall on the door and obscure it from his vision. He continues like this for some time revealing the size and shape of the room as well as its features: a television at its centre and a closed window at the opposite side to the door. Again, each of these features is revealed to the subject when he casts the lamp's light upon them. However, when he moves on, darkness once more descends on these features obscuring them from his view. Nonetheless, although he can no longer see them, the subject knows the features of the room exist around him as he has consigned the knowledge of them gained through his encounters to his memory.

From these visual fragments our subject is thus able to gain an understanding of what the room looks like. He does this by taking from his memory the fragmented visions and constructing them into a visual representation of the room in his mind. Consequently, our subject is able to orientate himself within the room; he has a vague understanding of what the room consists of and, by relating himself to this understanding, is able to gain an appreciation of where he is located in regards to its features. We will notice however that, when orientating himself, he is not relating himself to the room as it immediately exists before him, this is impossible as it is shrouded in darkness. The subject on the contrary is relating himself to the mental perception of the room he has constructed. Thus, we may say, when orientating himself, the subject does not relate to the room itself as it physically exists before him, but rather to the mental perception of the room he has constructed from memory. We may understand this mental perception he relates to as his 'Horizon'.

This 'Horizon' has, however, not only revealed to the subject the nature of this room, but also the possibilities contained for him within it. The existence of the television informs the subject the possibility of him watching television. The existence of a window informs him of the possibility to escape. Again, we might observe that it is his 'Horizon' that informs the subject about his options. He cannot relate directly to the objects like the television and the window as, standing in the darkness, he can no longer see them. It is rather the knowledge that they are there, gained from his encounters and integrated into his 'Horizon', that he

relates to when considering his options. Similarly, the fragmented knowledge of such phenomena as the window alone cannot inform him of the possibility of escape. It is rather only when this knowledge is embedded in the ‘Horizon’, and thus complemented with the knowledge that he is trapped in a dark room, that the possibility of escape becomes intelligible to him. Thus, again, I contend it is the ‘Horizon’ which he consults in order to comprehend his situation and the possibilities contained within it.

It is worth stressing here that, although I allow that the ‘Horizon’ is clearly a subjective understanding of the subject’s situation, this does not result in a form of ‘soft-relativism’⁹³. The subject has not constructed his understanding of the room through his own fancy or caprice, but rather from his own experiences inside the room. Therefore, it is possible that different subjects may gain slightly differing perceptions of the room; a subject who is afraid of the dark for instance may overlook certain features which a calmer person will take note of. Nonetheless, both subjects have the same common basis for their understanding: the physical room they find themselves in. Thus, this understanding is subjective but it is not a form of ‘soft-relativism’ as it is constructed as result of encounters with an independent and pre-existing physical space.

Thus, I may say that the ‘Horizon’ of the room is the mental perception of this room as has been constructed by the subject’s encounters with its features. In the

⁹³ I am here again referring to Taylor’s objection to ‘constructed horizons’ in *Ethics of Authenticity* (Taylor, 2003:38-9).

same way I understand the ‘Horizon’ of the subject’s existence as the mental perception of the world the subject inhabits as has been constructed through encounters with features of this environment. The subject cannot step outside this mental perception as to observe his situation objectively, but rather is always limited to this subjective mental perception of his environment. This mental perception both makes the subject aware of the nature of this world he finds himself in, and thus helps him orientate himself within it, and further reveals to him the possibilities this world contains for him. This ‘Horizon’ therefore forms the ‘something else’ the subject relates to when making his choices.

3. Choice

In order to explain how the subject’s choice bring the two components discussed in this chapter together I will have to briefly recount what I have argued so far. I have argued that the subject has the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities to the life he currently lives and further has the ability to realise these choices. This capacity is however dependent on the subject being made aware of the alternative possibilities which are available for him within the world he inhabits. The subject is made aware of these possibilities through his ‘Horizon’. This is the mental perception of the subject’s world constructed from the knowledge gained from encounters within it. Consequently, in order to realise a possibility, the subject

must select a life option revealed in his ‘Horizon’. In this way the subject and the Horizon are brought together as the subject chooses from the ‘Horizon’ something he wishes to become himself.

In this way I may understand the ‘subject with his capacity for choice’ and his ‘Horizon’ as existing in a symbiotic relationship; the subject requires the ‘Horizon’ in order to become aware of the options that he may choose from, and the possibilities the ‘Horizon’ reveals to the subject require his choice in order for them to be released. This symbiotic relationship is thus held together in the subject’s choice; the moment in which he chooses to realise one of the possibilities revealed in his ‘Horizon’.

The relationship between these two concepts explained, I now turn to consider how this choice shapes and defines the subject and his relations with the world around him.

We may here consider that when the subject chooses to realise a possibility that has been revealed in his ‘Horizon’ he appropriates knowledge of this to himself, and in this process thus further defines who he is. One might for instance consider that when one chooses to become a Christian one appropriates the knowledge of ‘what a Christian is’ and defines oneself by it. Thus, similarly, when the subject chooses to be ‘a farmer’ he adopts a ‘farmer’s way of life’ and thus appropriates this understanding of ‘farming’ as to identify himself⁹⁴.

⁹⁴ The importance of ‘appropriation’ in defining the subject’s understanding of himself and his relations to the world for Kierkegaard is clearly evident in his understanding of the appropriation

It should however be observed that to simply ‘call oneself something’ is not the same as to ‘become something’. We might for instance recall that for Kierkegaard many of his fellow Danes, despite calling themselves Christians, could not actually be truly considered Christians as they did not behave in a Christian way⁹⁵. Similarly we might for instance imagine that our subject chooses to become a farmer but nonetheless never leaves his job in an inner city office. In such a case, although the subject chose to try realise the possibility of farming, he can never be considered to have successfully become a farmer. This is because being a farmer involves partaking in certain practices associated with farming. We may for instance imagine that during his ‘encounters with farming’ the subject realised that ‘farming’ involved ‘growing and selling crops’. Consequently, if the subject wishes to become a farmer he must adopt this practice of ‘growing and selling crops’, which may involve him leaving his office job and moving to the countryside. Thus in order to realise these possibilities contained within his horizon, the subject must adopt certain practices which effect how he lives his life and relates to others. Consequently, the subject must not just appropriate this knowledge from the Horizon in order to realise a possibility; he must also adopt the practices

the Christian life. It is worth however noting that this idea of ‘appropriation’ is also considerably stressed in the *Postscript*. Consider for instance Kierkegaard’s claim ‘the subjective truth’ is ‘the truth of appropriation’ (Kierkegaard, 2009:19).

⁹⁵ In ‘Point of View’ for instance Kierkegaard complains about his contemporaries who declare themselves Christian but never think about God or say his name unless it is to curse (Kierkegaard, 1998:41). Also consider in *Postscript* where Kierkegaard argues that just inhabiting a State where the prevailing religion is Christianity, such as Nineteenth Century Denmark, does not make one a Christian (Kierkegaard, 2012:45).

associated with it. The adoption of these practices will consequently shape his relationship to the world around him.

Thus, to summarise: the subject brings together his capacity to make choices and his ‘Horizon’ when he selects possibilities from the latter which he wishes to become. This choice defines the subject as he appropriates knowledge from the Horizon and attributes to himself. This further shapes his understanding of, and relationship with, the world around him as he must also adopt certain practices if he is to realise the desired possibilities. It is this understanding of himself and his relationship with the world constructed through encounters and choices which I call the subject’s ‘subjective understanding’. It is this ‘subjective understanding’ I take as the basis to forming a ‘subjective approach’ to the subject and State relationship in the next chapter.

4. Summary and Conclusion

I will now proceed to the summary and conclusion of this chapter. Here, I aim to summarise how I progressed in reinterpreting Kierkegaard’s religious theory into the grounds for a more political approach.

Nonetheless, before doing so, I wish to address a potential misunderstanding that could arise from how I have depicted the construction of this ‘subjective understanding’. In order to provide a clear articulation of this concept, it was

necessary to isolate the key components of Kierkegaard's understanding of self and reinterpret them in turn. However, this may have given a false impression that the 'subjective understanding' always follows a linear pattern: from encounter, to construction of 'Horizon', to choice. Such an interpretation would of course render an incredibly abstract and false understanding of how subjects come to understand themselves in the world. In particular, it would lend to the idea that the subject could sit back and construct an understanding of the world from his encounters as if he was constructing a picture from jigsaw pieces. Once he had proceeded to construct a coherent enough picture of the world he could then simply make a choice about which possibility he wished to realise, as if selecting off a menu. This would render the false impression that the subject firstly enjoys a privileged position where he can gain knowledge of the world prior to making any commitments, and secondly that he has no commitments or contextual factors that influence this choice. Such an interpretation of the subject and his relations would consequently be as abstract and removed as Rawls' 'Original Position', however rather than making choices from 'outside the world' the subject would be making them from a 'bubble within it'.

This is however not as I intend it to be understood, and as I have stressed it was only necessary to present the concepts in linear fashion as to give a clear account

of them⁹⁶. On the contrary, I imagine the subject's 'subjective understanding' to be a fluid perception which changes and evolves as the subject has new encounters and makes new decisions throughout his life. Indeed, we might imagine that ever since the subject first had encounters, and made choices in regards to these, he has had this 'subjective understanding' of himself and his relations. Consequently, to try and pinpoint a time when the subject was not involved in this conception of himself would be a fruitless exercise. Instead, I therefore maintain we can imagine this 'subjective understanding' to be a fluid concept which informs the subject's understanding of his existence from birth until death. Consequently, we must always perceive encounters, the construction of 'Horizons' and the making of choices, to occur within and be informed by this constantly changing 'subjective understanding'.

This of course effects how we understand the subject's encounters. He will for instance not only be gaining from these encounters knowledge of his environment, but also assessing this knowledge and the possibilities it entails against this 'subjective understanding'. This will of course be vital for understanding the subject's encounter with the State, as it suggests that the former will assess the later on the basis of this 'subjective understanding'. Nonetheless, the 'encounter with the State' is the subject for Chapter Six, and therefore I will leave this

⁹⁶ It might also be observed that Kierkegaard's conceptualisation, which saw the subject having one encounter which revealed one option, an option which by selecting the subject could ascend to the highest sphere of existence, also contributes to this linear perception.

reconsidering of the encounter for the next chapter. I will instead now finish this present chapter with a summary of how I reinterpreted Kierkegaard's theological understanding as to form the basis of my 'subjective approach'.

I began this chapter by addressing the issue of the subject. I gave an interpretation of the subject which saw him as embedded within a historical context, but nonetheless with the ability to still make choices within this context. This was seen to be in line with Kierkegaard's understanding presented in Chapter Four.

I then proceeded to reinterpret Kierkegaard's 'something else'. I dismissed Kierkegaard's concept of God as the only 'something else' which a subject could relate to as it resulted in an overtly teleological theory which excluded many forms of human existence. I further argued from this that my 'something else' could not be as rigid as Kierkegaard's and must provide more valid possibilities than one. I then began addressing the problem of knowledge received in the encounter. I argued that knowledge of the subject's political environment and possibilities could not be gained through one encounter but must be gathered from many. Thus I asserted the subject must construct this 'something else' from the knowledge gained across his encounters. This 'something else' I proceeded to denote as the 'Horizon'. I further articulated this 'Horizon' as a mental perception the subject constructed from the knowledge gained in his encounters.

I then finally considered how the subject related to this 'Horizon'. I argued that this was achieved when the subject chose what possibilities displayed in the

'Horizon' he wanted to realise. In making this choice the subject further defined himself, as he appropriated knowledge from his Horizon to attribute to himself, and the world around him, as he adopted certain practices and dispositions according to this adopted life model. In this way the subject constructed a 'subjective understanding' of his existence. It is this 'subjective understanding' which I will now take as the foundation for my 'subjective approach' to understanding the subject and State relationship.

Chapter Six: Encountering the State

In the previous chapter I reinterpreted Kierkegaard's theological understanding of the self into what I termed the 'subjective understanding'. This last chapter will now investigate how this approach may be used to better understand the relationship between subject and State.

In section one I will first reconsider the 'encounter'. The issue was raised in the previous Chapter that the construction of the 'subjective understanding' did not follow a linear progression, but was rather a constantly evolving fluid process. I will thus explore in this section how encounters occur within this process, and in particular how the knowledge gained in an encounter is evaluated against the existing 'subjective understanding'.

I will then in section two consider how one might approach the encounter between subject and State. It will be explored how the subject may encounter, and evaluate his encounters, with the State. It will also further reflect on the ethical implications of this discussion.

In section three I will explore the 'subjective approach' at work. To do so I will seek to use this approach to investigate a particular encounter which the subject may have with the State: namely the encounter a subject may have with the Courts in

Scotland. The purpose of this investigation will be to identify what in particular the ‘subjective approach’ would focus on, and how this focus differs from the other approaches discussed in this thesis.

In section four I will consider what questions the ‘subjective approach’ asks about the nature of the encounters which the subject has with the State, what bearing these have on their relationship, and the further areas of exploration which this approach could venture into.

Finally, in section five, I will conclude by considering potential objections which may be made against the proposed ‘subjective approach’.

1. The Encounter

When the subject has encounters we must consider that he not only receives knowledge which is assimilated into his ‘Horizon’, but also evaluates what is presented against his ‘subjective understanding’. Thus, to understand the encounter fully, we must comprehend how such evaluation occurs.

To illustrate this I might again turn to Kierkegaard’s account of the subject being ‘offended’ by the encounter with Christ. We will recall Kierkegaard suggested that the Christian life was very hard to adopt as the expectations given by Christ were very different from the understanding subjects held about their own existence. It

was this incompatibility between their own understanding and what was being conveyed to them by Christ which subsequently caused subjects to be ‘offended’.

We might therefore perceive that the knowledge and possibilities received in the encounter are judged against the subject’s own understanding of his existence. It should be observed that Kierkegaard argues that the subject should choose to abandon his understanding and accept the absurdities which are conveyed to him. This is justified because it was deemed as necessary if one was to become a Christian, and thus attain to the proper telos of human existence. Thus, Kierkegaard’s term for this choice as the ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’; the subject’s postponement of human norms and understanding in order to carry out tasks necessary to achieve one’s proper ‘end’ as directed by God (Kierkegaard, 2012:24). However, given that my approach does not prescribe a telos to the subject, I need not consider here the suspension of understanding in order to achieve teleological ends.

What is more important to recognise here is that the knowledge the subject is presented with in the encounter is evaluated against the subject’s own understanding of existence. The more it corresponds to this understanding the more likely the subject is to accept it and consider choosing the possibilities presented; the more at odds it is with his understanding however the more likely he is to reject it and dismiss the possibilities it reveals. To interpret this into the

terminology developed in Chapter Five: the encounter is always judged against the 'subjective understanding'.

The example of the subject who is considering the possibility of becoming a farmer will help illustrate this. We must consider here that the subject is not deliberating this choice from a removed position where she has no pre-existing commitments or obligations. On the contrary, she is evaluating this possibility from a position where she has already made choices and has ascribed to practices and obligations as a result of these. It is this process of encounters and choices which has shaped her understanding of existence, what I have termed her 'subjective understanding'. It will consequently be this perception of her existence which she consults when making the choice of whether to realise the possibility of becoming a farmer or not.

Let us imagine for instance that the subject has had encounters which have made her aware of the possibility of having children and becoming a mother. We might also further imagine that this subject has chosen to realise this possibility and elected to have a child. As has been previously discussed however it is not enough to simply say one 'is something', but one must also adopt the practices as are associated with this role. Thus, the subject has not only decided to be a mother but has also subsequently adopted the practices and obligations associated with 'motherhood', such as say feeding and caring for her child. This role, along with its practices and obligations, are consequently incorporated into her understanding

of existence. Thus, we might say the subject in question has a 'subjective understanding' which incorporates both her awareness of the 'existence of motherhood' as well as an understanding of herself as a 'mother' along with the practices and responsibilities associated with this appropriated role.

It is this 'subjective understanding' that the subject will now relate to the option of becoming a farmer against. Let us imagine for instance that the subject realises that the profit she may make from farming will allow her to provide better food and clothes for her child. In this case the knowledge of farming complements her 'subjective understanding' and as a result she may be more likely to select to realise this possibility. On the contrary, we might imagine that the long hours associated with 'farming' will conflict with the understanding of her responsibility to care for her child. In this case the knowledge of what farming entails is in conflict with her 'subjective understanding'. In such a case she will likely be 'offended' by it and subsequently reject the possibility of becoming a farmer.

Of course, the fact that the subject's 'subjective understanding' is in conflict with the knowledge received in the encounter does not necessarily mean the subject will reject it. We might for instance imagine that our subject realises that the possibility of farming is at odds with her understanding of herself as a mother but nonetheless chooses to realise this possibility anyway, neglecting or abandoning her child in the process. In this case we might say that the subject rejected this part of her 'subjective understanding' and chose to adopt the new possibilities

revealed by the encounter instead⁹⁷. Nevertheless, despite the outcome of her choice, what we must recognise is that the information received in the encounter is evaluated against the subject's current understanding of her existence; the encounter is always evaluated against the 'subjective understanding'.

2. Encountering the State

Chapter Five argued that the subject can never in one encounter be presented with the entirety of his environment. On the contrary, it was proposed that his perception of this environment was constructed from the many fragments of knowledge he had received across multiple encounters. Similarly, I claim that the subject never encounters the State in its totality, especially given its nature as a 'disembodied order', but rather builds a perception of this through multiple encounters with its different manifestations and representations. Such encounters could for instance be with the police force, social services, the court system, figureheads such as the Queen or president, or it could be through how the State's laws regulate and impact upon the life of the subject: laws for instance restricting the sale of alcohol or cigarettes.

Now, we may perceive that when a fragment of knowledge is received in the encounter it is subsequently evaluated against the 'subjective understanding'.

⁹⁷ This 'rejection' of the 'subjective understanding' would be in line with what Kierkegaard expects the subject to do when presented by the possibility of the Christian life.

Thus, when encountering the State the subject is both learning more about this institution and assessing it against how he understands his own existence. Thus, as the subject builds his perception of the State from these encounters he is not constructing this as a something of neutral worth or as something with no immediate bearing on his life. He does not for instance regard this institution he is learning about as something ‘objective’, as say a scientist would treat the discovery of a new bacteria or the construction of a new form of plastic. He is rather constructing this understanding always as it relates to his own existence and considering how this institution affects him.

I consequently would propose that the subject’s relationship to the State is formulated through the construction of this perception. The relationship can thus be understood to grow out of and be a product of the subject’s encounters with the State’s manifestations. The State is furthermore not something that is considered as separate to the subject’s existence, but is rather always considered in relation to it. I might therefore say that the encounters with the State are part of the subject’s self-development; his ever evolving perception of the State is intertwined with his own becoming.

Now, I have suggested that the subject is likely to look favourably on what is encountered if it corresponds to his ‘subjective understanding’. Thus, we may perceive that the more encounters the subject has had with the State which correlate with his ‘subjective understanding’ the more likely the subject will have

a positive appreciation of the State he inhabits. On the contrary, the more encounters the subject has had which have conflicted with this perception, and thus the more times he has been ‘offended’ by what he has encountered, the more likely he is to form a negative relationship with the State. Thus, the subject’s perception and relationship to the State is always rooted in the nature of these encounters, and in particular to how the information the subject receives correlates to his own understanding of existence.

In order to clarify this argument I shall relate it to the thought of Green, and in particular his framework for understanding ‘political obligation’. We will recall how, in Chapter One, I identified the way in which Green combined the political thought of Rousseau and Austin. To recollect, Green imagined the State as Austin described it: a sovereign power which issues commands to its subjects in the form of laws. However, the subject’s obedience to these laws was dependent on the Sovereign and his commands being in accordance with the ‘general will’ or ‘common good’ of its people. Thus Green synthesised Rousseau’s notion of ‘the general will’ and Austin’s understanding of law as the positive commands of the sovereign. The result of this was that the grounds of ‘political obligation’ rested in the State’s actions being within the parameters of what was perceived as the common good of the subjects it sought to rule over. When the ‘general will’ and the State’s commands ceased to be in harmony, so political obedience would also cease (Green, 1986:69).

Nonetheless, it was argued that Green's understanding of the 'general will' or 'common good' was largely based on what was perceived as 'rational'. Thus, we could interpret the State's commands as 'being in accordance with the 'general will'' as equivalent to the State's commands 'being in accordance to reason'. The result of this was that reason became the central pivot upon which relations between subject and State were understood. It furthermore excluded many actions and forms of behaviour which were contrary to Green's understanding of reason from consideration. This was demonstrated by Green's association of such forms of behaviour with primitivism and their subsequent dismissal as forms of 'savagery'.

In contrast to this understanding of reason I have explored an alternative understanding of what it is that the subject uses to determine the validity of the State. This is his 'subjective understanding', with which he evaluates the manifestations of the State that he encounters. On this understanding, it would be subsequently proposed that the subject will obey the State and feel obliged towards it if his encounters with it correspond to his 'subjective understanding'. When they conflict however he will be 'offended'. If the subject is offended by the State it is likely he will build a negative perception of it and relationship with it. In such a situation it is unlikely that the subject will feel any form of loyalty or obligation towards the State.

I again illustrate this with reference to Green. In 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' Green remarks that laws which restrict the sale of alcohol or make schooling compulsory will not cause any offence to a subject who provides for his household, saves his wife from overwork, and sends his children to school. This is because such laws support, rather than interfere, with his way of life. The State consequently appears to such a subject as 'a powerful friend' (Green, 1986:203). It is rather to the drunkard, or the negligent husband and father, that such laws, and by extension the State, would appear offensive and the State an interfering nuisance. This is because such laws inhibit and restrict how he wishes to lead his life.

Of course, Green would undoubtedly conceive that the former subject is able to perceive the State as a 'friend' because of his superior rationality and consciousness of his proper ends. The latter subject in contrast would not recognise that the State is trying to help him, and instead regard it as a nuisance, because of his depraved reasoning and ignorance, or indeed Green might suggest his primitivism.

My 'subjective understanding' however provides an alternative way of considering this. I might propose that the first man, through his encounters and the knowledge gained from them, has come to an awareness of the possibilities of being a 'good husband' and a 'good father'. He has further chosen to realise these possibilities, thus appropriating to himself these notions of 'good husband and father'. These

identities have further prescribed to the subject certain behaviours and practices which shape his relations to the world. His intention to be a ‘good husband’ has for instance prescribed to him the practices of ‘providing for his wife’, ‘not getting too drunk’ and ‘sending his kids to school’. This understanding of himself, and the practices he ought to prescribe to and follow, are subsequently incorporated into his ‘subjective understanding’.

Now, let’s imagine this subject encounters the State in the form of the law restricting the sale of alcohol. Assessing this against his ‘subjective understanding’ the subject would find this law favourable to him. This is because it complements his understanding that one should not drink too much in order to be a ‘good husband’ or ‘good father’. Consequently, he views the State favourably and a positive relationship is formed. The subject is indeed more likely to feel loyalty and obligation to such a State whose intentions are so in accordance with his own understanding.

When what is encountered is however in conflict with the ‘subjective understanding’, and the subject is subsequently ‘offended’ by the State, the relationship sours. We may for instance imagine that the subject likes to drink alcohol, and indeed furthermore shares the view of the Bishop of Peterborough that to drink alcohol is his right as an Englishman⁹⁸. In this case it is perceived in the subject’s ‘subjective understanding’ that he has a right to freely buy alcohol

⁹⁸ See discussion of Green in Chapter One for the debate between himself and the Bishop.

and get intoxicated if he so chooses. Consequently, when he encounters this law prohibiting the sale of alcohol it conflicts with his ‘subjective understanding’ as it appears to be curtailing what he perceives as his right. He is consequently offended by this encounter. It is furthermore unlikely that a subject who perceives his State as one which infringes upon his rights will feel any particular affection or obligation towards it. Thus, from this ‘offensive encounter’ the subject’s relation towards the State sours⁹⁹.

The more encounters the subject has with the State that ‘offend him’ the more negative the subject’s perception of the State will be, and consequently the poorer the relationship will be that develops between them. In particular, we might imagine that, if the subject builds such a negative perception of the State, the less likely he is to feel any loyalty towards it or any sense of obligation¹⁰⁰.

It thus follows that it is in the State’s interest that its encounters with its subjects ought to be conducted in a manner as correspondent to the subjects’ ‘subjective

⁹⁹ Interestingly such arguments were utilised in recent political debates in Scotland. The view that restrictions in the sale of alcohol is a breach of rights and the law is an argument that was made against the Scottish Government’s plans to introduce minimum pricing on alcoholic beverages. The Scottish Whiskey Association for instance applied for a Judicial Review of the legislation claiming it broke free trade laws. The Scottish Whiskey Association’s argument can be viewed on their website, <http://www.scotch-whisky.org.uk/news-publications/news/scotch-whisky-industry-challenges-minimum-pricing-of-alcohol#.V7xDR2fwuM8>, accessed 23/08/2016

¹⁰⁰ The question may consequently be asked whether there is a quantitative point which might be discovered where the number of ‘offensive encounters’ results in the subject rebelling against the State. Or conversely it may be asked if offence alone is enough to cause a rebellion, or if this needs to be complimented by other factors. The nature of rebellion is however beyond the remits of this thesis.

understanding' as possible. This is the best way for the State to cultivate affection amongst its subjects, and strengthen the sense of political obligation in the polity.

This brings me to one final difference between my understanding of the 'encounter with the State' and Kierkegaard's 'encounter with God'. We may recall that for Kierkegaard 'offence' in the encounter was perceived as a 'failed encounter'. This was because the encounter failed to convince the subject to accept the Christian life. Nonetheless, the failure of this encounter was perceived as a failure on the part of the subject. The justification for this was found in Kierkegaard's teleological understanding where failing to accept the Christian life was failing to ascend to one's proper telos.

However, as my approach abandons the notion of a pre-prescribed telos for the subject, I cannot assert that an encounter with the State that causes 'offence' may be interpreted as a failure on the subject's part. Without an overriding telos there is no reason why the subject ought to abandon his understanding when it conflicts with the State. One could of course argue that the subject should accept the State's authority because it provides protection. Nonetheless, there is no a priori reason why he should desire this protection. There is also no reason why he should seek protection from this particular State, and not join or form another. Rather, it follows that if the State wishes to convince its subjects to be obedient it must convince them through encounters. Consequently, it follows that it is the responsibility of the State to 'come down' to the subject's level, to speak to him in

a manner as corresponds with his ‘subjective understanding’, if it is to be successful in getting the subject to accept its authority.

It should be further acknowledged that this argument also has ethical implications. It in particular contends that if a State asks its subjects to do something contrary, or indeed repugnant, to their understanding then they do not have an obligation to carry this order out. Subjects are thus not expected to simply follow the State’s command because they have a ‘duty to obey’, but rather always have a choice in such matters.

To illustrate this one may consider the case of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann took a leading role in the Nazi Holocaust, in particular facilitating the transport of Europe’s Jewish population to ‘Extermination Camps’ such as Auschwitz. This was despite the fact that Eichmann insisted that he was not an anti-Semite and held nothing ‘personally’ against the Jews. Rather, he helped facilitate the holocaust because he was following the laws of the Nazi State; his role in the Holocaust was his ‘duty’ as a ‘law-abiding citizen’ (Arendt, 2006:135-7)¹⁰¹. We might consequently interpret that Eichmann was ‘offended’ by the actions of the Nazi State, as he himself did not share its views on the Jews, but nonetheless still felt obliged to obey it and followed its commands out of a sense of a ‘higher duty’.

¹⁰¹ In illustrating this example I am drawing from Arendt’s account of Eichmann given in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (2006). As Arendt scholars such as Susan Neiman have acknowledged, Arendt’s portrayal of Eichmann is highly controversial. It has indeed been suggested that she ‘excused the criminals and blamed the victims’ (Neiman, 2010:305). Nonetheless my intention here is only to give a brief illustration to support my argument. Arendt’s portrayal is sufficient to meet this purpose, and I need not consider the controversy surrounding Eichmann or Arendt further.

Indeed, the idea of ‘offence’ is encapsulated in how Eichmann claims he felt upon encountering the ‘Final Solution’. Consider for instance: that upon encountering a gas chamber Eichmann described it as ‘monstrous’ and claimed that the experience left him ‘physically weak’ and ‘left behind a certain inner trembling’ (Eichmann quoted in Arendt (2006:87)); upon seeing a ‘mobile gas van’ at work Eichmann claimed ‘I hardly looked. I could not... I was much too upset’ (Eichmann quoted in Arendt (2006:87)); that after seeing the aftermath of a shooting in Minsk he felt ‘weak at the knees’ (Eichmann quoted in Arendt (2006:88)); and that he told an S.S. commander that ‘it is horrible what is being done around here; I said young people are being made into sadists’ (Eichmann quoted in Arendt (2006:88)). Yet, despite this professed deep feeling of ‘offence’ at these encounters, Eichmann still felt an obligation to the Nazi State and carried out its orders to aid in the ‘liquidation’ of Europe’s Jewish population.

The ethical implications of the ‘subjective approach’ would however maintain that a subject such as Eichmann would not be under any obligation to carry out or obey the State’s commands. Equally, it would maintain that the claim one was ‘only following the law’ would not be an adequate defence for partaking in such actions that are repugnant to one’s own understanding. It would rather maintain that the subject always retains the choice whether to obey the State or not.

Beyond the ethical dimension I might add that this stance by the ‘subjective approach’ also increases one’s ability to explore cases such as Eichmann’s. For

instance, having dismissed the idea that Eichmann ‘ought’ to unquestionably obey the State, it raises the question of why he chose to obey the State, and felt obliged to it, despite its demands being so repugnant to his understanding? The ‘subjective approach’ therefore turns to ask the question: ‘what encounters left such a significant impression on Eichmann that he felt he must obey its laws against his own moral beliefs?’ It would subsequently proceed to explore what encounters subjects may have had with the Nazi State which convinced them that they ought to obey it unquestionably. Exploring this would allow us a greater appreciation of how authoritarian States, such as the Nazi State, relate to, and attempt to establish a hold over, their subjects.

However, to conduct such investigations one needs to first understand how the ‘subjective approach’ might proceed in interpreting encounters. In order to explore this I now turn to my example of the encounter with the Scottish courts.

3. The Encounter in the Court

In this section I wish to examine one encounter which the subject may have with the State he inhabits. Now, it might be observed that there are a number of encounters that the subject could have with the State which would be good candidates for examination. One might for instance consider that paying taxation is an appropriate encounter to consider given that it is a universal experience

which every member of the polity usually undergoes, for it is expected that most people who inhabit a particular State will pay taxes to it. One might also advocate that the experience of casting a vote in an election as an encounter which should be explored, for this is often perceived as a democratic right and indeed is something that subjects have often fought to attain.

Nonetheless, the particular encounter I wish to examine is the one which the subject has when attending Court in Scotland.

I find this example particularly illustrative for two reasons. The first is to do with the intentions behind the establishment of Courts. We may firstly observe that royal officers, most notably the Sheriff, were considered to be a direct representation of the Crown, and thus when encountering such an officer the subject could be considered to be encountering the Crown directly. In the medieval period we may further observe the establishment of courts, and in particular the Sheriff Courts, as a means of extending royal power into the localities and, more importantly, giving the Crown representation in these areas¹⁰².

We may thus understand the intention behind the establishment of these Courts

¹⁰² For further general discussion of the establishment of Sheriff Courts see the work Scottish Medievalists such as A.D.M. Barrell, in particular *Medieval Scotland* (2000), and Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland 1214-1371* (2004). In his study of the 'Sheriff Court Book of Fife', William Dickinson has also described how certain privileges granted to Sheriff's were intended to convey to the subject the fact that he was a representative of the Crown (19268:xxx). In assessing the intention behind the establishment of courts, and sheriff courts in particular, one might also consider how these were established, not only as a means to give direct royal representation, but also to combat the power local magnates held over the localities. In his biography of David I of Scotland, Richard Oram for instance discusses how the establishment of the first Sheriffs in Moray were used to counterbalance the power of the local rebellious Earls (2008:102-4).

as an attempt to give the Crown an authority and presence that subjects may encounter and relate to. This link between the court and the central power is also maintained today. We may for instance observe that the Sheriff in particular is still appointed by the 'Sovereign' on the recommendation of the First Minister of Scotland (Manson-Smith, 2008:63).

The second reason relates to the nature of this particular encounter. When a subject is summoned before the court he stands accused of breaking the State's laws, and is punished for this if found guilty. We consequently may understand that in this encounter the subject is being presented with the State's claim to authority; the State is in effect demonstrating its legitimacy to give commands and further displaying its ability to punish those who fail to obey them. The court thus provides a particularly interesting instance for study as it is an encounter in which the knowledge the State attempts to convey to the subject is that of its authority over the subject's existence.

Thus I find the encounter with the court illustrative as one might understand it as a direct encounter with the State in which the State attempts to assert its authority over the subject. It is for these reasons I believe it is more interesting encounter to explore than that of taxation or voting.

Nonetheless, a full examination of the evolution of the legal system and courts is beyond the remit of this thesis. Instead, I shall here focus on one particular historical example of the 'encounter' in the Scottish courts. This particular

historical encounter is the trial of John MacLean on the accusation of sedition in 1918.

On the Ninth of April 1918 MacLean was brought to trial in Edinburgh on eleven charges of sedition. These included addressing audiences across Scotland's central belt with statements that were likely to both disrupt the recruiting and discipline of H.M. Forces and incite mutiny, sedition, and dissatisfaction amongst the civilian population. This was contrary to the Defense of the Realm Acts (1914). MacLean was found guilty of all charges (Broom, 1973:103-5).

What is of particular interest in analyzing this encounter is the language used by both subject and State when expressing their respective positions. Firstly, we may observe the Lord Advocate, Scotland's chief legal officer and thus a representative of the State, insisting that in Britain no person is prevented from publicly discussing politics, or even advocating socialism. However, MacLean he claims has gone beyond this as he has attempted to incite disloyalty, sedition and mutiny. This is something 'no society can afford'. Interestingly the Lord Advocate goes on to further insist that no person 'this side of Eternity' could understand why MacLean would carry out such actions which risks the destruction of the very liberty and safety which he enjoys, and which 'we' were defending abroad (Broom, 1973:105).

We might therefore observe that Lord the Advocate is claiming that the State is there to protect the liberty and safety of its subjects. We can also further

understand that, in the Lord Advocate's view, to oppose the State is consequently irrational and unintelligible because it risks the subject's freedom and safety. This is made evident by his claim that no person 'this side of Eternity' would understand Maclean's motives. MacLean is thus portrayed as an irrational and unintelligible troublemaker.

MacLean, speaking in his own defense, however argued that his actions were clearly intelligible and indeed justified¹⁰³. He insisted that, unlike the Lord Advocate, he himself represented the cause of freedom and justice and represented the position of society against its oppressor.

To support his claims MacLean mentions several cases in which the British State has, he insists, acted to the detriment of its subjects¹⁰⁴. This includes the millions of men that were sacrificed during the Great War, as well as atrocities MacLean claims were inflicted upon himself and other objectors to the war whilst incarcerated in Peterhead prison. He also proceeds to sight the 'Defense of the Realm Act', passed at the outbreak of the war, as a breach of Britain's constitution. The effect of this Act he subsequently claims was to 'throw aside every law' in the county and permit the State to override the rights and interest of its individual subjects. Although MacLean focuses primarily on the 'atrocities' that the State has

¹⁰³ MacLean's entire speech is reproduced as Appendix II of Broom's *John MacLean* (1973).

¹⁰⁴ It should be observed that MacLean also makes reference to atrocities he claims the British State made against foreign nations. MacLean for instance accuses the British State of deliberately attempting to starve Russian women and children in a bid to topple the Bolshevik regime. However, as I am primarily concerned with the State's relationship with its own subjects and not those of other States, I will focus on the atrocities MacLean claims the British State committed against its own subjects.

committed since the outbreak of war, it should also be observed that he alludes to previous injustices such as the ‘sweeping’ of the people from the Scottish Highlands. MacLean thus portrays the State as an oppressor who willingly overrides the welfare of its subjects in order to pursue its own ends. This is an image which contrasts sharply with the picture of the State providing for the security and liberty of its subjects, as presented by the Lord Advocate.

These accusations allow MacLean to insist that he is not a ‘traitor’ to his country, as the Lord Advocate claims, but rather its defender. He argues that, as the war has no benefit for the ‘working people’, and, considering that these ‘working people’ make up the majority of the State’s subjects, the war is consequently not in the interest of the country at all. Rather, he insists it is being waged in the interest of a dominant class, who he claims are in control of the State, and who seek personal gain at the expense of their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, MacLean predicts that the conclusions of the Great War, coupled with the nature of capitalism, will result in an even greater war in the near future. Consequently he declares that those in control of the State are taking it down a road which will only lead to its destruction. Therefore, by calling for a revolution and re-organization of society, MacLean insists he is not endangering his country but is rather attempting to save it from future catastrophe. In light of this Maclean insists that it is he who should be considered the true patriot.

What we may initially observe here is that both subject and State make conflicting claims about the nature of their relationship. The State claimed it has authority over the subject as it provides him with security and liberty. Why a subject would wish to challenge or undermine this authority is consequently incomprehensible to the State, as such behavior jeopardizes what security and liberty he enjoys. Consequently, the subject's actions are dismissed as unintelligible and irrational. In the Lord Advocate's words: nobody 'this side of eternity' could comprehend why one would undertake such a position.

The subject however puts across a different view. MacLean claims that it is in fact the State which has transgressed against its subjects. He claims that rather than protecting their lives and liberties, the State has abused its subjects and used their lives to meet its own ends. It is thus not the subject who has transgressed against the State; but rather the State that has transgressed against its subjects.

We thus have a situation where the subject and the State are refusing to recognize the other's political claims. This can be seen to result from the fact that both have different and conflicting perspectives of their relationship which appear irreconcilable. The result is this conflict between subject and State which we have observed playing out in this encounter.

I will in this section explore how my 'subjective approach' interprets this encounter, and what light such an exploration sheds on the relation between

subject and State. However, before doing so I wish to first consider how the other three approaches outlined in this thesis might interpret this example.

I will begin with the ‘rational approach’. We may consider that the ‘rational approach’ would agree largely with the position of the State. We can for instance imagine theorists like Hobbes agreeing with the Lord Advocate that the subject ought to obey the State as it provides him with security. Equally we can imagine Hobbes, and other thinkers illustrative of the ‘rational approach’, dismissing MacLean’s position as irrational in the same manner as the Lord Advocate did.

The problem with the ‘rational approach’ is that it views the situation from a removed vantage point, and in particular judges MacLean against its assumption of what a hypothetical ‘rational actor’ would do. It is for instance presumed that such a ‘rational actor’ would not undermine the authority of the State as to do so risks the security and liberty he enjoys. Thus, by virtue of ‘obedience to the State’ being perceived as ‘rational’, Maclean’s position of disobedience is perceived as ‘irrational’. The main concern here is that this approach makes no attempt to understand Maclean’s position or the encounter he has had. Furthermore, as a consequence of this failure to consider the subject’s perspective, it does not allow any opportunity to reconcile the positions of the subject and State. It simply posits that rational subjects will obey the State’s laws, and dismisses those who object as irrational.

More consideration for the subject's perspective might be found in the 'contextual approach'. This is because this approach gives greater attention to the historical and cultural context in which this encounter occurs. Historian T.C. Smout for instance locates MacLean's trial within the context of the social and economic changes which occurred in Scotland over the previous hundred years. In particular, he relates Maclean's position to the greater sense of alienation between the British State and its subjects which had resulted from the Great War. This alienation he argues originated from what was perceived as the State's inept management of the war, which saw the Government sacrifice an estimated ten per cent of Scotland's adult population for purposes the populace could not entirely sympathize with. This ultimately gave the perception that the State was willing to sacrifice its subjects in order to achieve its own aims (Smout, 1997:267-9). Smout also highlights that the particular language of 'class' had currency due to social and economic changes which had occurred over the previous century. He highlights in particular that the weakening of Church influence, and the breaking down of old communal and kinship ties by industrialization, had resulted in 'class' becoming the dominate structure within which subjects developed their self-understanding (Smout, 1997:204). Thus, we might understand that a 'contextual approach' would seek to understand the subject's position by reflecting it back into the cultural and economic changes which had shaped the context in which the encounter occurs.

This examination of the historical context behind the encounter certainly does make the example more intelligible to the observer, especially an observer who views events long after they have occurred. It for instance makes clear that MacLean's position has its origins in the economic and social changes which occurred throughout the Nineteenth Century. What the 'contextual approach' can thus be understood to be doing is stepping back from the moment of the encounter in an attempt to gain a more expansive and deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context which MacLean inhabits. This context is then used as a 'lens' through which one may survey and explain MacLean's actions. This process of 'stepping back' is what I have argued makes the 'contextual approach' a 'removed approach'. What it consequently does not do is try and step in towards the moment of the encounter and understand what is occurring in this particular moment: what is the State conveying to the subject in this encounter, and how is this message being received? As a result the significance of this moment, and the perception of the State that the subject receives in it, are overlooked as the 'contextual approach' retreats back from the encounter in order to survey the 'greater historical picture'.

I finally consider the 'critical approach'. Out of all the approaches it would seem the 'critical approach' is most likely to sympathize with MacLean's perspective, especially considering his claims that the British State is sacrificing the bulk of its subject's in the interest of a 'dominant class'. This sympathy however does not

make the ‘critical approach’ more suited to understanding the encounter than the other approaches.

We might first observe that the ‘critical approach’ sympathizes with Maclean as he resembles its assumption of the State as ‘oppressor’ and the subject as ‘oppressed’. Nonetheless, one should bear in mind here that, as I outlined in Chapter Three, these concepts were assumptions that the ‘critical approach’ made prior to its investigation. This assumption in regards to the subject then became the lens through which this approach sought to understand his relationship with the State. Subsequently, it was able to understand behavior that corresponded with this assumption, but nonetheless was forced to exclude positions which conflicted with it. It was in this way I said the ‘critical approach’ shared much in common with the ‘rational approach’; both enter the investigation with a prior conception about the subject and seek to understand his relations as correspond to this archetypical model.

This means that, although the ‘critical approach’ may sympathize with MacLean’s position, it does not really make any conscious effort to understand this encounter or seek to see the State from the subject’s perspective. Rather, its explanatory power lies in the fact that Maclean’s position happens to correlate with its archetypical view of the subject and his relations.

The weakness of the ‘critical approach’ becomes evident if we imagine that MacLean was not a Marxist agitator but was rather conservatively or

nationalistically orientated. In such a case the ‘critical approach’ would not be able to understand the subject’s perspective as it does not correspond with its archetypical subject. In such a situation MacLean and his position would instead be dismissed as a form of ‘false consciousness’.

To elaborate this point we may consider the trial of Adolf Hitler in Munich in 1923. Hitler, in a remarkably similar manner as MacLean, rejected the accusation of treason which was levied against him. Instead, he insisted that it was the State, in this case the Weimar Government, who had committed treason against its German subjects. Labeling the Government the ‘November Criminals’ for their signing of the 1918 Armistice and the subsequent treaty of Versailles, Hitler insisted that it was not he that should be on trial for treason but rather the authorities themselves (Kershaw, 2000:214). Thus, we may observe a similar case where the subject rejects the claims of the State and instead insists that it was the State which had transgressed against its subjects. However this time the claim comes not from a Marxist perspective but from a nationalist one.

If the ‘critical approach’ was to attempt to understand the position of Hitler, as it did MacLean, it would fail. Although it may agree that the State has betrayed its people, and indeed many Marxists did believe that Versailles was a capitalist plot which should be resisted¹⁰⁵, it would perceive Hitler’s nationalistic articulation of

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that Versailles not only caused offence to the nationalistic and conservative minded sections of the German population, but also the communists as well. As historian Michael Burleigh notes many communist believed Versailles to be part of a larger ‘intra-imperialist’ plot’ (Burleigh, 2000:49).

the problem as a 'false consciousness'. It would be viewed that Hitler only saw matters in such terms as he was deluded and manipulated by German traditions and culture, and thus was ignorant to the true nature of oppression which existed between subject and State. As a consequence, the approach would dismiss Hitler from its paradigm of understanding in the same manner as the 'rationalist approach' dismissed and excluded the perspective of MacLean. The point I am trying to make here is that, although it may claim to understand the perspective of Maclean, the critical approach here only explains its archetypical oppressed subject which MacLean happens to resemble to a degree. However, in reality the 'critical approach' offers no understanding of McLean's particular situation, cannot help us understand the State from his perspective, and is of little worth when applied to other cases where its archetypical subject does not apply.

Having thus outlined the weaknesses of the three approaches discussed, I turn to consider how the 'subjective approach' would interpret this encounter.

To interpret this 'encounter' through my 'subjective approach' I return to what was said at the trial. We will recall that the Lord Advocate, representing the State, claimed that the subject ought to obey the State because the latter secured the former's security and liberty. We may thus understand the State is conveying to the subject that it expects his obedience in return for providing this security and liberty. This is consequently the knowledge the State wishes to convey to the subject through this particular encounter.

The State further expects the subject to accept this claim. It expects this because it believes that a rational subject desires security and liberty, and will consequently accept the State's claims of authority. It is thus by extension only an irrational subject who would refuse this. Indeed the State's bewilderment that a subject would challenge this claim is evident in the Lord Advocate's phrasing that no one 'this side of eternity' would understand MacLean's position.

Thus, the 'subjective approach' focuses on and draws attention to the particular message that the State conveys to the subject in the encounter and the language in which it seeks to express this message. In the MacLean example this is the message of 'protection for obedience' which is expressed through the language of rationality.

Having received this message in his encounter, we might imagine that MacLean then evaluates it against his 'subjective understanding'. However, this information does not correlate to his own understanding, indeed it conflicts with it. This is because Maclean's previous encounters have conveyed to him the notion that the State does not protect its subjects, but rather exploits them for its own ends. Such encounters which, judging from Maclean's speech, have in particular conveyed this understanding are the State's conduct during the war and his treatment in Peterhead prison. What is however important to recognize here is that the perception of the State and his relationship with it that MacLean has developed is a highly negative one which is at odds with the Advocate's claims. What we

consequently have here is an instance of ‘offence’: the claims put across in the encounter do not resonate with the subject, and he consequently is offended by them and rejects them.

Thus what the ‘subjective approach’ has interpreted here is that neither the message nor the language used by the State has been successful in convincing MacLean of its legitimate authority. Indeed, given MacLean’s previous encounters and his subsequent ‘subjective understanding’, the message of ‘protection for obedience’ has caused him ‘offence’. This ‘offence’ has further soured the relationship between this particular subject and the State he inhabits and entrenched his views that it only serves the interests of a minority of its subjects.

What it can therefore be claimed that the ‘subjective approach’ does is to make a conscious attempt to understand the encounter which the subject has: what is conveyed to the subject in this moment, how this message is conveyed, how it has been received by the subject, and the result of this for the subject and State relationship.

I may argue that this is what makes the ‘subjective approach’ a different approach in kind to the three ‘removed approaches’. Each of these approaches attempted to understand the example by stepping back, by retreating from the moment of the encounter, in an attempt to understand this moment as part of a ‘bigger picture’. They then selected their preferred ‘lens’: whether this be an understanding of ‘rationality’; a deeper and more expansive understanding of

historical context; or the belief that the subject was oppressed, to survey the case.

The problem with such approaches are; firstly, the selection of these lenses, whilst bringing certain aspects into focus, obscure a great deal. This leads to the exclusion of behavior and perspectives which are obscured through the attribution of labels such as ‘barbarism’ and ‘false consciousness’. Secondly, by the retreating back from the moment of the encounter, they overlook significant specifics of the encounter and the perception of the State the subject receives from it. Thus, in their pursuit of the ‘bigger more comprehensive picture’, these approaches overlook the significance of these specific moments of encounter, and how the subject and State relationship is informed and built from them.

The ‘subjective account’ on the contrary does not retreat from the encounter but rather attempts to step into it. It seeks to understand what is occurring in this moment: what is being conveyed by the State to the subject, what means and what language is being used to convey this message, and how the subject perceives and evaluates this. It can therefore explore how the relationship between subject and State is effected and grows out of such encounters. It thus opens the possibility to, by examining, analyzing, and piecing together these intricate moments, gain a far more detailed picture of the subject and State relationship than would be possible by only adopting a broad removed ‘lens based’ approach. It is in this way I described the subjective approach as ‘sharp and delicate instrument’ which is similar to a ‘surgeon’s knife’; it does not seek a broad means of standing back to survey the body before it but rather cuts into it, selecting and

examining its key moments in order to gain a more intricate understanding of what has occurred.

Having thus explored a particular encounter with the ‘subjective approach’, and having further explained its key differences from the other three approaches, I now consider what questions this approach asks and what further explorations it may take us on.

4. Further Exploration

In order to discuss how one might further explore the ‘subjective approach’, how it might investigate further the subject and State relationship and what particular questions it may ask in regards to this, I must first reiterate what I understood the ‘encounter’ to be.

I understood the encounter to be an experience which bestows knowledge upon the subject. Thus the ‘encounter with the State’ is an experience in which the State conveys to the subject knowledge of its existence in his life. It thus makes the subject aware of its actions which effect his existence, and conveys why the subject should accept these actions.

Thus, the first question the ‘subjective approach’ can therefore explore is: what message does the State conveys to the subject in the encounter? In the example

of Maclean the message was for instance that the subject ought to obey the State for protection¹⁰⁶. Nonetheless, this idea of ‘protection’ may not always be the message which the State wishes to convey. We might for instance consider that it was less a message of ‘protection’ that the Nazi State conveyed to its subjects as one pertaining to the purity of the ‘race’. As Hitler made evident in *Mein Kampf*, one of the key purposes the Nazi State, and one of the key reasons why Germans should obey it, was to preserve the health and purity of the ‘German race’ (Hitler, 2007:367)¹⁰⁷. We might also observe that the Soviet State’s message was related more to the idea of ‘class’ as opposed to the protection of the individual subject. Leon Trotsky for instance, when addressing Moscow workers in his position as ‘Commissar of War’, informed subjects that they must rally behind the Soviet Republic to prevent the return to power of the bourgeoisie (Trotsky, 1972:103-4). What precisely the message the State conveys to subjects in the encounter is thus a key area that the ‘subjective approach’ can explore.

¹⁰⁶ We might observe that this message that the State provides security for its subject is a message which was tied very much to the original creation of courts, particularly the Sheriff Courts which were established in localities. Consider for instance John I of Scotland asserting that his establishment of Sheriff Courts in the Western Isles was intended to bring ‘peace and security’ to that region. We may thus again interpret the message that the Crown was attempting to convey to its subjects was that its authority should be recognised and its laws obeyed if the subject wished to live ‘securely’ and in ‘peace’. This particular Act is from John I’s parliament at Scone on the Ninth of February 1293. It is available at the ‘Records of the Parliament of Scotland’, <http://www.rps.ac.uk/>, accessed 14/08/16

¹⁰⁷ As Richard Evans explains, *Mein Kampf* was a book that every subject in the Nazi State was expected to have on their bookshelves (Evans, 2006:402). Indeed Z.A.B. Zeman notes that copies were even presented to newly married couples (1973:63). In this way reading and receiving *Mein Kampf* can be understood as an encounter through which the Nazi State intended to communicate with its subjects.

The ‘subjective approach’ may then further explore what language is used by the State in conveying this message. If we return again to the example of MacLean we will see that the language the State’s message was conveyed in was that of ‘rationality’¹⁰⁸. However, once more we may observe that ‘rationality’ need not necessarily be the language that States chooses to communicate in. We may find an interesting contrast to the language of ‘rationality’ in the Nazi State’s use of the language of ‘honour’. This is particularly evident in the trial of military generals accused of the attempted assassination of Hitler. In particular, the judge preceding over the trial, Roland Freisler, labelled the crime ‘the most shameful deed ever committed in our history’ (Freisler quoted in Koch, 1997:213). This ‘shamefulness’ Freisler sought to attribute to the act was indeed further reinforced by his judgement that the accused should be hung rather than shot, a punishment reserved for particularly ‘shameful crimes’ (Freisler quoted in Koch, 1997:212).

¹⁰⁸ We might indeed consider that the language of rationality is a language particularly prevalent in the expression of the law. Let us consider again the Scottish example. A trend may be observed developing from the late Seventeenth Century in which the State has sought to present its laws as in accordance with the ‘laws of reason’. I may in particular draw attention to the ‘institutional writings’ composed in Scotland at the end of the Seventeenth Century. In particular we may consider *The Institutions of The Law of Scotland* written by Viscount Stair, a text which is often recognized to mark the creation of modern Scots law (Marshall, 1981:101). In this text Stair defines law as ‘the dictate of reason, determining every rational being to that which is congruous and convenient for the nature and condition thereof’ (Stair, 1981:73). We might similarly observe the basis of reason, and indeed the assumption of the ‘reasonable man’, as central to modern law. In a case of ‘negligence’ for instance in Scots law the standard of care that is expected be given to an employee is that ‘expected of the hypothetical or notional “reasonable man”’ (Marshall, 1987:422). Similarly, in the Criminal Justice and Licensing Act (Scotland) 2010, we may find the definitions of ‘threatening and abusive behavior’ and ‘stalking’ to include actions which would cause a ‘reasonable person’ to suffer alarm (Criminal Justice and Licensing Act (Scotland) 2010). Thus in encounters with the legal system the subject is perhaps most likely to find the State’s message conveyed through the language of rationality. If this is the case, and if so what effect this has on subject and State relationship, are questions the ‘subjective approach’ could explore.

Thus, rather than being portrayed as ‘irrational’ or ‘unintelligible’ like MacLean, we find the defendants here are being portrayed as ‘shameful’. It is thus conveyed to the subject, not that it is ‘rational’ to obey the State, but rather that it is ‘honourable’. This displays an interesting difference in the use of language to convey the State’s message. This is something the ‘subjective approach’ could explore further.

The ‘subjective approach’ may then consider how subjects evaluate and respond to this message. Do they for instance accept this message and the States’ claims? Does the message and the language it is conveyed in inspire a feeling of obligation or even a sense of loyalty towards the State? On the contrary, does this message fail to resonate with the subject? Is the message for instance not an entirely convincing one? Or is the language used not effective means in which to communicate with its subjects? Furthermore, does either the message or the language cause ‘offence’ to subjects? If so the ‘subjective approach’ can explore why this is the case, and thus further investigate how the State may address the manner of its encounters so as to better communicate with its subjects in future.

This focus on a specific encounter can also progress to an overall exploration of how the subject encounters the State. One might for instance survey a broad range of encounters as to establish ‘what is the most predominant message which the State wishes to convey to its subjects?’, and ‘what language is most frequently used to express this message?’ From this one might explore what the overall

perception of the State that subjects who inhabits it receives, and how they respond to it. If the State is failing to give a positive overall impression to its subjects, and is thus inspiring more ‘offence’ than a sense of political obligation, the ‘subjective approach’ may further look to how the State may address this problem.

Such an exploration may raise further questions not only about the message and the language the State uses in relating to its subjects, but also what means it uses to communicate. We might for instance observe that, in Scotland, the Sheriff Court has in the past taken on a far greater significance for subjects than simply to prosecute those accused of crimes. The court for instance previously served as a focal point for the local community where subjects could gather to hear recent political news. As William Dickenson has shown in his study of the Sheriff Courts in Fife in the Sixteenth Century: the Sheriff Court was where subjects in this period would gather in order to receive such information as what Acts had recently been passed by parliament. (Dickinson, 1928:cv). Also, being the main source of political news in the locality, one might find in attendance at the court representatives from all classes of local society. Dickinson for instance highlights that at some court sessions in Fife there is recorded in attendance such diverse figures as the provost of St Andrews and the local shepherds from Craighall (Dickinson, 1928:cv). Thus, one might understand that the Sheriff Court was in the past much more than a judicial assembly where criminals are prosecuted, and as a consequence the

'encounter' with the court was a much more universal and richer experience in the Sixteenth Century than it is in the Twenty-First.

Now, however, such knowledge as the proceedings of parliament is more often conveyed to subjects indirectly through the media. Thus, rather than receiving the State's message through a direct encounter with it, modern subjects are more likely to receive this information from media outlets through their television screens or on their smart phones. The 'subjective approach' can explore what the effect of this changing nature of the encounter with the State is; it can ask for instance whether the subject is more likely to react positively or negatively to the State when he encounters it indirectly through the media on an iPhone than if he was to encounter a direct manifestation of the State.

The 'subjective approach' can also explore the effect of the number of encounters the subject may have with the State. One might for instance imagine that a State orientated towards totalitarianism, in which the subject encounters the State in nearly every action he undertakes, might be more likely to irritate a subject and cause him offence. However, one might imagine a minimalistic State may also cause the subject great 'offence'; one might for instance suppose that if the subject encountered the State only in negative experiences, such as the enforcement of laws and taxation, he would hardly come to see such a State as a 'friend'. It thus raises the question: is more or less encounters more conducive in fostering a positive relation between subject and State? Is there perhaps an

equilibrium between totalitarianism and minimalism where the quantity of encounters is right in order to cultivate political obligation?

Of course, previous political philosophers would have an opinion on this debate. We might for instance imagine Locke, with his vision of the ‘umpire State’, would argue that the minimalistic State, and thus less encounters, would be the best approach (Locke, 2009:324). Rousseau, at least in the *Government of Poland*, would however argue that the State needs to be present in every moment of the subject’s life if it is to inspire loyalty in him; the subject must have ‘imbibed love of the fatherland... with his mother’s milk’ (Rousseau, 1985:19). Nonetheless, both these suggestions come from the wearing of different ‘lenses’, in this case a ‘rational’ and ‘contextual’ lens respectively, when looking at the problem, and thus are naturally incredibly broad and exclusionary. Also, given their differing assumptions about the subject, there would be little common ground from which they may discuss and evaluate this. We can indeed imagine Rousseau dismissing Locke as unrealistic, and Locke Rousseau as ‘Irrational’. The ‘subjective approach’ however offers a more delicate and precise way of exploring this question through examining and piecing together the nature and effects of these encounters.

The ‘subjective approach’ also further opens up the possibility of exploring how encounters effect issues in contemporary politics. Take for instance the British State’s failure to convey to its subject’s that its membership in the European Union (hereafter EU) was beneficial. The subjective approach here can explore why

certain encounters the subject had failed to convey strongly enough that EU membership was beneficial. Was it for instance the language used in conveying this message which failed to convince? Was it on the contrary the fact that the most numerical, or the most significant encounters, that subjects had with Britain's membership of the EU were negative, such as restrictions of the sale of fruit or on fishing quotas?

We might for instance consider one encounter which subjects may have had which was intended to convey the benefits of European Union membership: the sign displayed on projects that were completed with the aid of EU funding. On the sign is typically an EU flag and the message that this project was completed with the aid of the EU. We might here consider for instance such a sign being attached to a bus shelter advising of EU funding in providing public transport. The message conveyed when the subject encounters this is clear: your ability to move quickly and efficiently around the area has been made possible by the British State's decision to be a member of the EU. The language is understated, there is no appeal to culture or class. It simply states the fact. It is a message that is conveyed directly in the form of a sign.

However, it would seem that such direct and clear communication was not sufficient for the State to convince its subjects that being a member of the EU was in their interests. The 'subjective approach' can explore why this message failed to penetrate the publics' consciousness significantly. Was the message about

greater mobility not one subjects were particularly concerned about? Or, rather, was it that the means and language deployed in communicating this message were so understated that it failed to resonate with subjects who encountered it?

On the contrary, we might consider an encounter with the State's membership in the EU which did resonate strongly with British subjects. Consider for instance the European Commission Regulation on the quality standards for bananas¹⁰⁹. This regulation seemed to have had such an impact on the British subjects' understanding of Europe that it can be found referenced in the speech of politicians. Boris Johnson for instance in 2016 claimed it was 'absolutely crazy that the EU is telling us... how bendy our bananas have got to be' (Johnson quoted in *The Guardian Newspaper*, (Henley, 2016)). Indeed, the regulation of bananas became such a contentious issue that the European Parliament Information Office even published information clarifying the issue in 2016¹¹⁰.

Why did this encounter with banana regulation appear to resonate so much more with subjects than that with funds for public transport? Why did the regulation of bananas cause such offence? These are the questions that a 'subjective approach' can explore. In investigating such encounters this approach can build an intricate and detailed understanding of how subjects came to oppose the State's actions,

¹⁰⁹ This is in particular Commission Regulation (EC) 2257/94 of 16 September 1994 laying down the quality standards for bananas, available at EUR-Lex, Access to European Union Law; <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31994R2257:EN:HTML>, accessed 19/08/2016

¹¹⁰ This information can be found on the European Parliament Information Office in the United Kingdom website; <http://www.europarl.org.uk/en/media/euromyths/bendybananas.html>, accessed 19/08/2016

such as in the case where the majority of British subjects voted against EU membership.

Nonetheless, as alluded to with the example of Eichmann, the ‘subjective approach’ is not limited to exploring ‘liberal States’ but also authoritarian ones. It could for instance explore what encounters convinced subjects like Eichmann that they ought to obey the Nazi State. What message did such encounters convey that was so successful? What language resonated so effectively? It was for instance suggested during his trial that Eichmann had great admiration for Hitler (Arendt, 2006:149). The ‘subjective approach’ thus might ask: ‘how did the German subject encounter Hitler?’; ‘what message was conveyed in these encounters?’; ‘what language did these encounters use to convey this message?’ This would be of use not only in exploring historical cases such as the Nazi regime but also modern forms of authoritarianism. Furthermore, by comparing encounters subjects have with authoritarian States with those they have with liberal States we may gain a sharper understanding of both.

Thus, we have observed the difference in approach the proposed ‘subjective approach’ offers, and what avenues of exploration it may continue down. With this discussion I have gradually been moving beyond an initial exploration of the ‘subjective approach’, and towards particular areas in which it may be applied. I am consequently coming towards the end of the remit of this ‘prolegomena’, and thus may now proceed to bring my thesis to a close. Before doing so however, I

will consider potential objections and counter points that may be raised against the proposed ‘subjective approach’.

5. Potential Objection to the ‘Subjective Approach’

I will now conclude this chapter by considering potential objections which may be raised against the ‘subjective approach’ proposed in this thesis.

It may be argued that, by taking the perspective of the subject as the primary basis for the subject and State relationship, my approach incurs the problem of setting this perspective as the ultimate standard of political discourse. It would consequently appear as if the ‘subjective approach’ provides an argument that political discourse ought always be conducted according to the subject’s perspective, regardless of whether such a perspective is moral, or indeed, factually accurate. It would equally provide a mandate for the State to convey whatever message to the subject it chooses, as long as such a discourse complemented its subjects’ beliefs and fostered political obedience.

In order to avoid this problem, it could be suggested that I ought to support my approach with a previously established normative framework, as such a framework would allow me the means to evaluate and reject discourses which are morally questionable or false.

In this section I will consider these two criticisms before giving initial reply. I will then consider the merit of a normative framework for my thesis, before explaining why I do not believe adopting such a framework would be the best course of action for this thesis.

Let me begin with criticisms stemming from my taking the ‘subject’s perspective’ as the basis of the relationship between subject and State. To illustrate this problem let me return to section two of this chapter, where I compared my understanding of political obligation to that of Green’s. Green, I argued, maintained that the subject would be obliged to the State as long as the State’s commands corresponded to the ‘common good’, which I argued was equitable to ‘what is rational’. I criticised this understanding as I maintained it made the assumption that the subject was ‘rational’ and that his relations to the State would be based on his ‘reason’, consequently excluding any perspective or behaviour which conflicted with this understanding.

In place of this I maintained that the subject would feel obliged to the State as long as his encounters with it corresponded to his ‘subjective understanding’; when encounters corresponded with this understanding a positive relationship would develop, when they conflicted the subject would be ‘offended’ and a rift would develop between himself and the State.

The problem with this, it could be argued, is that it centres the relationship between the two entities on the ‘subjective understanding’, regardless of whether such an understanding is moral, or indeed, if it corresponds to reality.

To illustrate this problem we might imagine that the subjects in question are racist. From the portrayal of my argument it could be maintained that, if it wished to encourage a sense of political obligation, the State ought to embrace this racist perspective. It certainly would appear unadvisable for the State to question this understanding, or promote an alternative discourse such as that of equal human dignity, as such an alternative perspective may cause the racist subjects ‘offence’.

I might here revisit the case of Eichmann. I maintained that Eichmann’s position was untenable as I rejected the notion that a subject ought to accept the State’s position, or carry out its commands, when these were contrary to his own ‘subjective understanding’. However, my thesis would not appear to cast any criticism on a subject whose ‘subjective understanding’ did correspond to the perspective of the Nazi State, for instance a zealous Nazi who wholeheartedly believed that the Jews ought to be exterminated. My theses would thus appear to condemn the reluctant Eichmann, yet seemingly pass no criticism of the zealous Nazi who was happy to exterminate millions.

This issue becomes equally troubling when we consider it in relation to factual truth. As was stated, this presentation of my argument would maintain that the State ought to accept the subject’s perspective, even if it did not correspond to

reality. Thus we might for instance imagine a considerable portion of the State's subjects believe the world was flat. It would be argued that the State should not hold the position that the world was round as this may cause offence. On the contrary, if the State was to win the obligation of its subjects, it ought to embrace this subjective belief that the world was flat. This could lead to the absurd situation where State schools are instructed to teach students that the world was flat out of fear that, if they did not, such encounters would cause offence and weaken the sense of obligation among the polity.

Such an argument secondly give a dangerous mandate to the State. It would in particular suggest that the State may convey to the subject whatever message it pleases, as long as this message resonated with its subjects and encouraged obligation. It would in effect give the State the mandate to lie, as long as such lies won it the obligation of its citizens. I would thus appear to be embracing the argument of Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince*: a ruler should deceive his subjects if necessary in order to hold on to power (Machiavelli, 2009:70-1). Such a position would see nothing wrong with the Nazi State propagating Jewish conspiracy theories, and subsequently persecuting its Jewish populace, as long as such a discourse was successful in maintaining the obligation of the majority of its citizens.

I recognise that these are indeed potential dangers and valid counter arguments to my approach. Nonetheless, I would argue that the potential uses, and misuses, of this thesis, and the evaluation of political systems and discourses it may reveal,

are beyond the scope of these prolegomena. The intention of this thesis is rather primarily interpretive and hermeneutical: it sought to develop a concept through which one may interpret how the subject experiences the State, and how the relationship between the two grows out of this. An evaluation of what is revealed through this concept is however another step, a step which lies beyond the interpretive intentions of this thesis. Of course such ethical issues, and potential uses of my concept, would be important for a full development of a 'subjective approach' to politics, nonetheless, as I have stressed, this thesis does not intended to present a comprehensive account of such an approach, but rather only a prolegomena to it; the concept of the encounter was used to open the door to this approach, such ethical and evaluatory questions require substantial work which must be conducted beyond the threshold.

Nonetheless, critics may still argue that I ought to adopt a normative moral framework to support my thesis. Such a framework would provide a standard with which I could judge and asses subjective positions. This would consequently prevent it from lending itself to arguments whose ethical implications, or factual truth, were dubious or dangerous.

To illustrate, I may consider adopting a liberal normative framework for my thesis. Such an approach would assert the principles of liberalism as a prior ethical standard with which I could asses the finding of my hermeneutical inquiry. Let us,

for arguments sake, say the primary value of this liberalism is the autonomy of the individual.

By adopting such a framework, I could now asses the findings of a 'subjective approach' to the relationship between particular subjects and the State they inhabit. I could in particular evaluate the perspectives of subjects my approach uncovered. I could, for instance, after uncovering that subjects in a State are particularly hostile and racists towards a minority group within that polity, reject the idea that the State should embrace such a discourse as it contradicts the principles of my liberal framework; adopting a racist dialogue would infringe upon the individual autonomy of those subjects who are members of the minority group in question.

This would also allow me to be more critical about questionable discourses the State might be promoting in its quest to establish a sense of political obligation. This normative framework would, for instance, allow me to reject messages and arguments which were factually untrue as these violate the value of subject autonomy; deliberately misleading discourses undermine the subject's ability to evaluate autonomously the nature of his relationship with the State. Similarly it would allow me to reject ethically questionable discourses. The Nazi State's discourse in regards to its Jewish subjects could for instance be criticised, and rejected as an appropriate basis for subject and State relations, as it infringes upon the autonomy of individual Jewish subjects.

Such a background of norms would thus provide a means by which to evaluate perspectives and discourses, and thus avoid the trap of endorsing ethically questionable or false arguments. It would consequently seem advisable for me to adopt such a background.

Nonetheless, I would still resist the need for me to adopt such a set of norms, at least as far as the aims of this thesis are concerned. This is because the adoption of a set of previously established norms would inhibit my approach's ability to understand the subject and State relationship, and, as an interpretive and hermeneutical concept, it is the ability to understand which is of primary concern to this thesis.

If for instance I was to adopt the priori standard of liberalism for my thesis, I would exclude the encounters, and perspectives that result from such encounters, which run contrary to the established liberal principles. I would for instance reject anti-liberal beliefs as unethical, regardless if these beliefs affected the nature of the subject and State relationship. This would however severely limit my approach's ability to understand the relationships it investigated; a racist or sectarian discourse can, of course, still be important to a particular subject and State relationship, whether we believe such discourses are morally repugnant or not. The task, in order to understand such a relationship, is therefore not to judge such values but rather to try and understand them: what encounters led to the

construction of such perspectives; what bearing does such perspectives have on the encounters between subject and State.

I would similarly argue that such an approach is necessary, not just in regards to perspectives that may be ethically questionable, but also in regards to perspectives that may be factually incorrect; for a belief may be false, but this does not prevent its ability to effect the subject and State relationship. Therefore, in order to understand this relationship, we must consider such false perspectives and how they arise and effect the relationship between subject and State: what encounters created this belief, and how does this belief influence the subject's subsequent encounters with the State.

I may thus argue that a background of normative values is not only unnecessary for the intentions of this thesis but, as a hermeneutical concept aimed at interpreting and understanding the subject and State relationship, such a priori assumption would be detrimental to the project.

Indeed I might go further and argue that the adoption of a normative framework prior to hermeneutical investigation could corrupt our own understanding of moral norms. In particular it would give such principles an air of 'objective facticity', when in reality they are the product of our own encounters and choices. If I was for instance to take my own liberal or Christian principles as a framework to my study it would create the impression that these values are objectively true, and consequently mask the fact that they are rather a product of my own encounters

and choices which other people, who have had different experiences, may not share. Thus I believe the avoidance of adopting such principles is not only necessary to allow my approach to understand the subject and State relationship as best it can, but is also important for our own ethical awareness.

Nonetheless, I may concede that, if I was to advance this approach beyond a conceptual investigation, and towards a full 'subjective theory of politics', I would need to consider an ethical dimension, as such a project would not just be concerned with interpreting a particular phenomenon, but also evaluating them as to give a comprehensive consideration of politics. Such a project would however involve investigation into other organisations that make up and shape the subject's existence, organisations such as the family; religious institutions; and private companies. It would also raise additional questions, such as how the subject is, or ought to be, educated, and who would be primarily responsible for such education. Such a work would be imperative in future research into the 'subjective approach'. However such work is beyond the scope of this primarily interpretive and hermeneutic prolegomena.

Conclusion

Kierkegaard described the earliest of his major works, *Either/Or*, as a ‘double-edged little dagger’ (Hannay, 1992:2). I have also elected to convey the nature of my approach through allusion to sharp and intricate instrument; the surgeon’s knife. I chose to do so to express how my approach differed from what I perceived as the three major approaches to the question of the subject and State relationship. In particular, I wished to convey that, whilst the other approaches attempted to step back from the relationship and survey it from a ‘removed vantage point’ through their preferred lens, my approach wished to step in towards this relationship; it desired to cut into it and identify the moment in which the subject encountered the State. It sought to explore how this encounter occurred, what was conveyed in this encounter, how this message was received, and how the relationship between subject and State was informed and grew out of such moments. In this manner of exploration I believed my proposed ‘subjective approach’ differed *in kind* from the other approaches in the way in which it seeks to address the subject and State relationship. In this conclusion I shall summarise the exploration of the possibility of this ‘subjective approach’ which I carried out in this thesis.

Part One of this thesis sought to answer the question: 'Why should one consider a 'subjective approach'? I thus attempted to answer this question by outlining what I perceive to be the three predominate approaches to the subject and State relationship, and what I perceived their limitations to be.

In Chapter One I considered the 'rational approach'. I argued that this approach could be understood through two key arguments. The first was that 'rationality' ought to be the means by which political relationships are understood. This argument was normally levied against accounts which believed the subject and State relationship was based on understandings of religion or custom. Thus, this argument maintained such customary understanding ought to be replaced by clear rational principles.

The second key argument was that the relationship between subject and State could be understood from the premise that the subject was 'rational'. I demonstrated that this argument could be articulated in two forms. The first was based on the hypothesis of a rational actor abstracted from his social context, and the choices such a subject unencumbered by historical or cultural context would make. This second form perceived the subject as part of a historical context, but nonetheless still presumed his primary characteristic was that he was 'rational'. This subject was therefore once more expected to base his choices on this understanding of 'rationality'. Consequently, what both these manifestations of this argument shared was the assumption that the subject was rational and that

this rationality would direct his actions and choices. This argument thus maintained that the subject would obey the State as it was ‘rational’ to do so.

The ‘rational approach’ thus attempted to survey the subject and State relationship through this understanding of ‘rationality’, which consequently became the ‘lens’ through which this approach understood the relationship. As a consequence, the subject’s experiences and perception were overlooked in favour of this understanding of ‘rationality’. Furthermore this overt focus on ‘rationality’ rendered the ‘rational approach’ unable to appreciate standpoints and behaviour which did not correspond to this understanding. Such positions were consequently degraded and excluded, typically by the attribution of derogatory labels such as ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’ which associated them with a more primitive state. This neglect of the existing subject’s experiences and perception, and the exclusion of orientations which did not correspond with ‘rationality’, were consequently the limitations I identified in the ‘rational approach’.

Chapter Two sought to illustrate the ‘contextual approach’ to the subject and State relationship. It argued that this second approach could be illustrated through three key arguments. The first was a belief that ‘reason alone’, or ‘reason abstracted from context’, was an inadequate means of understanding the relationship between subject and State. I further argued that this argument could be recognised in two forms. The first was a criticism of the premise of the abstract rational actor. The second was the argument that reason alone was insufficient in

cultivating a strong enough bond between subject and State. What I said was the common denominator in this argument, and thus that which illustrated this first key argument, was its rejection of abstract reason as a suitable premise from which to approach the relationship between subject and State.

This led to the second key argument: that in order to properly understand the relationship between subject and State one must examine the context that the subject inhabits. This argument could again be observed to manifest in different forms and with differing emphasis depending on what contextual phenomena is given focus. Thus, we observed certain illustrations of this argument laying emphasis of the role of historical traditions in informing the subject on his relationship towards the State, whilst others emphasised the importance of the cultural framework the subject inhabited in informing his political orientations. However, the common denominator to these arguments was that, in order to understand the subject's political relations and his relation to the State in particular, one must study the context in which the subject is situated.

The third key argument of this approach I illustrated was the 'particularity of focus'. This argument maintained that one must not consider the relationship between subject and State generally, but rather one must focus on the particular relationship between a particular subject and the particular State he inhabits.

I observed that this 'contextual approach' shared common ground with my proposed 'subjective approach'. In particular both approaches wished to consider

particular subjects as they relate to the particular States they inhabit. Nonetheless, I maintained that beyond this common ground the two approaches parted ways. This was as a result of the ‘contextual approach’, having identified the subject as one who inhabits a particular context, sought to use this context in order to understand and explain his relationship to the State. The ‘contextual approach’ thus retreated back from the subject’s experiences and perspective in order to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the historical context. This subsequently became the ‘lens’ through which the ‘contextual approach’ sought to survey the relationship between subject and State. As a result of this, focus was shifted from the subject, his encounters and the perception gained from these, and was instead turned on the context. As a subsequent consequence of this, the ‘contextual approach’ often made the assumption that subjects will orientate their lives to the historical and cultural conditions in which they inhabit, and overlooked, and even became dismissive of, perspectives and behaviour which went against this context.

In Chapter Three I illustrated the third and final approach: the ‘critical approach’. I observed that, like the ‘contextual approach’, the ‘critical approach’ also dismissed the notion of the subject as an abstract unencumbered being and instead insisted he must be considered as he exists imbedded within a particular historical context. However, where the ‘critical approach’ differed significantly from the ‘contextual approach’ was that the former was highly critical of the

phenomena which constituted this context believing it did not inform but misled the subject about his relations with the State.

I argued that the ‘critical approach’ could be illustrated through two key arguments. The first argument concerned how the traditions and cultural practices mislead the subject in regards to his relation with the State. It was maintained that these phenomena veil the true nature of the State and manipulate the subject into a being more suitable to be governed. From this followed the normative claim that these illusions must be unmasked and the true nature of the subject and State relationship revealed.

This led to the second key argument of the ‘critical approach’: that the ‘true nature’ of the subject and State relationship was one of oppression. It was maintained that the State primarily attempts to ‘hold down’ the majority of its subject’s and exploit them, typically as to serve the interests of a ‘ruling class’ or ‘elite’.

I argued that it could subsequently be interpreted that the central assumption of the ‘critical approach’ was that, if a State existed, then subjects must be being oppressed. This idea of ‘oppression’ consequently became the ‘lens’ through which the ‘critical approach’ surveyed the subject and State relationship. As a consequence, the subject, his encounters and perspective, were again overlooked as focus turned to forms and systems of oppression. Furthermore, orientations that did not correspond with this assumption about ‘oppression’, those for

instance of subjects who did not believe they were oppressed, were dismissed as ‘false consciousness’.

Thus, one might understand the limitations of these three approaches all to a degree stemmed from their nature as ‘removed approaches’; they attempted to step back from the subject’s experiences and perceptions to fashion ‘lenses’ through which they would survey the subject and State relationship. The result of this was that the experiences and perceptions of existing subjects were overlooked, and indeed perceptions which did not correlate with the preferred lens were excluded. It was consequently to address this limitation that I argued a ‘subjective approach’ should be considered’; it would consciously aim to focus in on the particular experiences the subject has with the State and the perception that is gained from these. The particular experiences I desired to explore were the moments in which the subject encountered the State; the perceptions I wished to consider those which arose from these encounters. It is this desire to ‘step in’ and explore these particular encounters, as opposed to retreating back to survey the relationship, which I believe makes the ‘subjective approach’ a different *kind* of approach to the other three approaches; a ‘sharp instrument’ as opposed to a ‘lens’.

In Part Two of this thesis I began exploring this alternative approach. It was thus concerned with the question: ‘How may one begin exploring the possibility of a ‘subjective approach’?

I began this task in Chapter Four with an exploration of the philosophy of Kierkegaard. In particular I sought to gain an interpretation of the concept of the 'encounter' in his thought. In order to gain an interpretation of this concept, and appreciate the significance it held for his philosophy, I also had to consider his understanding of the 'self' and 'freedom'.

I argued that for Kierkegaard the subject was understood to be a being who was restricted by his historical situation but nonetheless retained the ability to imagine and choose alternatives to this situation. It was by imagining and realising these alternative possibilities that the subject could proceed through a process of self-development. Nonetheless, in order to choose alternative possibilities the subject needed to discover what possible options were available to him which he could choose from. These possibilities were revealed to the subject through his encounters with the external world. To use Kierkegaard's primary concern of how one may become a Christian to illustrate: in order to become a Christian one had to have an encounter with Christ which would reveal the possibility of a Christian existence.

Thus, the 'encounter' could be interpreted as the external experience which bestowed upon the subject new knowledge, and in particular informed him about alternative life forms which he may choose to realise.

It was also observed that this concept of the encounter existed in a symbiotic relationship with the subject's ability to make choices: the subject required

encounters in order to make him aware of the possibilities he may choose from; nonetheless, the possibilities revealed in the encounter required the subject to choose them if they were to be realised. This was again illustrated by Kierkegaard's concern with how one might become a Christian: the subject required the encounter with Christ to become aware of the possibility of a Christian existence; nonetheless he must also choose to appropriate this Christian life for himself if he was to truly become a Christian. This relationship was encapsulated by Kierkegaard's definition of 'self' as: 'a relation which relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to something else'.

Chapter Four also finally highlighted that, just as the subject could choose to realise a possible existence, he could also choose to reject it. This rejection could occur when the knowledge bestowed upon the subject contrasted significantly with the subject's own understanding of existence, thus causing him 'offence'.

In Chapter Five I began my reinterpretation of Kierkegaard as to fit a more political understanding. I did so by reinterpreting the components of his definition of self and the relationship which held them together.

I began reinterpreting the 'relation that relates to itself'; the subject understood as existing within a particular historical context who nonetheless maintained the capability to imagine and realise possible alternatives to his current existence. I argued that one may understand the subject as having the ability to make choices in regards to his life pathway, although such choices were understood to be

restricted and facilitated by his historical situation. I further defended this interpretation against an understanding of determinism as illustrated by Schopenhauer in order to explain why I believed such an understanding was suitable for my exploration of the ‘subjective approach’.

I next reinterpreted the ‘something else’ which the subject must encounter in order to become aware of the possibilities he can choose from. Here, I developed my concept of the ‘Horizon’. This was understood to be a mental perception of the subject’s environment constructed from the fragments of knowledge the subject receives from his encounters. It was argued that this ‘Horizon’ both made the subject aware of the world around him and revealed to him the possibilities this world contained for him. By revealing to the subject the possibilities he may choose to realise, the ‘Horizon’ thus became the ‘something else’ in my reinterpretation.

‘The subject with his capacity to realise possible alternatives’ and the ‘Horizon’ were thus brought together by the subject’s choice: that is his choice to realise one of the possibilities revealed in the Horizon. In this way these two components were brought together in a symbiotic relationship: the subject required the Horizon to make him aware of the life options he may select from; the possibilities contained in the Horizon required the subject to choose them in order to be realised.

I also argued that through this choice the subject defined himself and his relations to the world around him. He defined himself as he appropriated knowledge from his Horizon as to attribute to himself. He shaped his relations with the world around him as this act of appropriation also involved the adoption of certain roles and practices associated with this knowledge. This understanding of the subject's existence formed through encounters and choices I denoted the subject's 'subjective understanding'.

In Chapter Six I used this 'subjective understanding' as basis from which to explore the subject's encounters with the State. Before I could do so however I had to reconsider how I had presented the encounter. In order to fully articulate the 'subjective understanding' in Chapter Five I presented its components as if they followed a linear pattern: from encounter, to Horizon, to choice. However, I contended that in reality the subjects 'subjective understanding' would be more fluid and continually evolving as he would continue to have new encounters and make more choices up until his death. The consequence of this was that one must always consider that the subject already has a 'subjective understanding' when he has encounters, and that he evaluated the knowledge received in his encounters against this perception. It was thus contended that the subject does not only receive knowledge about the world he inhabits when he has encounters, but also evaluated this knowledge against his subjective understanding.

This was vital in understanding his encounters with the State. It was in particular argued that these encounters did not just reveal to the subject knowledge about the State he inhabited but were also judged against his ‘subjective understanding’. Thus, if the encounter, and what it informed the subject about the State, corresponded with this perception of existence he would be more likely to feel positive about the State, but if it conflicted then he may become ‘offended’ by it.

The relationship between subject and State could thus be interpreted to grow out of these encounters: if the subject has many encounters which correspond with his ‘subjective understanding’ he is more likely to form a positive relationship and even feel obliged towards the State; many instances of ‘offence’ would however sour the relationship and the subject would become less likely to feel any sense of political obligation. It was also from this discussion further contended that the subject does not discover and relate to the State as something ‘objective’ but always considers it as it relates it to his ‘subjective understanding’; the encounters with the State are thus entwined with the subject’s own becoming.

I also considered in Chapter Six the ethical implications of the ‘subjective approach’. In particular I argued, as this approach does not attribute a telos to the subject’s existence, it cannot be expected of him to unquestionably obey the State. Consequently, the emphasis is put on the State to convince its subjects to obey its rule and remain loyal; the State must come down to the subject and communicate in a manner intelligible to him during encounters.

I proceeded to explore the particular example of the Scottish Court system as to illustrate what the ‘subjective approach’ may investigate in such particular encounters. It was here argued that the subjective approach would explore: what message is conveyed in the encounter with the State? What language is furthermore used to convey this message? It was also contended one can explore how the subject may respond to this message and the language used, and how the State may seek to alter the encounter if it fails to resonate.

Before acknowledging potential objections to the ‘subjective approach’, I raised further questions the approach could ask and the areas of exploration it could lead us upon. I will not here repeat all these questions and avenues of exploration. I will instead end this thesis by identifying two specific projects which could further our exploration of the ‘subjective approach’ and the relationship between subject and State.

The first project would be a comprehensive study of the encounter the subject has when attending court. The reason why I consider this to be a particularly fruitful study is because, as I stated in Chapter Six, in this encounter we may understand the subject to be having a direct encounter with the State in which the latter expresses its claims of authority over the subject. I thus believe this avenue of research would be illuminating as it could explore how the State has sought to express its claims of authority over its subjects’ lives across history: what messages it has used; what language this has been articulated in; what means have been

used to express this message; how the subject has responded to such encounters.

Such a study would thus be imperative in exploring how the State presents itself, and conveys its claims of legitimate authority over its subjects' existence, to the subject and what perception of the State the subject receives from this.

The second area of research I perceive as fruitful would be an exploration of a particular development in contemporary politics. The development I have in mind is Britain's, or rather the 'British subject's', encounter with his State's involvement in the EU. Such research would focus on what encounters the subject had with his State's involvement with the EU: where he had these encounters; what means were used to express why the State was a member of the EU; what was the message that was conveyed about EU membership; what language was these messages conveyed in. I believe this would be a fruitful exploration as it would illuminate how a State attempts to convey the reasons for its actions to its subjects, in this case why it was a member of the EU. It would also be able to explore why certain encounters which one would at first deem to be important, such as freedom of trade and funding for scientific research, failed to resonate with subjects as strongly as seemingly insignificant issues did, such as the regulations on the shape of bananas. Such research would also have impact as it could enlighten as to why sometimes the State fails to communicate with its subjects in certain encounters, and how it could address this in the future. It could also immediately impact on the politics of the EU as, following the Brexit vote, it could

explore how other EU member States might communicate the reasons for their membership to their subjects effectively.

I have thus argued why we should consider a ‘subjective approach’ when investigating the subject and State relationship, I have explored how such an approach may be formulated, and have finally looked beyond the horizon towards future journeys of exploration that the ‘subjective approach’ may take us upon. I have thus reached the limits of my prolegomena and subsequently also the end of this thesis.

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